

Let Us Pod

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'Bereavement' with Peter Hobbs

Peter Hobbs

Peter Hobbs is a management consultant and lives near Reading. He has three children. In October 2004 his wife Caroline died having been diagnosed with breast cancer two years previously. Peter's podcast reflects on his journey from that time to the present.

Full text of podcast

My name is Peter Hobbs. I am 46 years old and have three children Alice - 12, Richard - 10 and Georgina - 5. In October 2002 my wife Caroline was diagnosed with breast cancer. After two years of treatment she died in October 2004.

These are my reflections on the journey from that time to the present. I offer them in the hope that they are useful for those who have been affected by a similar crisis of having lost someone close to them. They are my personal journey and I make no attempt to generalise from them, as the one thing I have decided with clarity is that no two journeys through this wilderness can be alike. Each relationship is unique and everyone will experience and react to their loss in a different way.

While I never for a moment expected that I would be on the receiving end of this kind of trauma I look back now and see many small ways in which God seems to have prepared me for the burden I now bear. Importantly these have not only helped with practicalities, but taken collectively, they have also nurtured the faith that has been my greatest source of comfort: I know that I am not alone and the chaos which is now my life makes sense as part of the Almighty's plan.

As well as being the most selfless, courageous and honest person I have ever met Caroline was a committed Christian. For this reason there was nothing hollow about her approach to death. She made no frenetic attempts to fulfil herself, to do something to leave her mark or to put on a brave face for anyone else's sake. Nor was there any self pity at the thought that she would soon be leaving the children and me to travel on through life without her. She simply lived each day as it came, enjoying any pleasures on offer or bearing the increasing indignities and pain of her illness with courage.

While thinking about that whole period of my life recently I received a picture of Caroline in a small boat with the children and me. I watched the boat come in to a rocky shore and as soon as the water was shallow enough she jumped out and held the prow to allow us time to shift around and rebalance the load. The water was calm and there was no danger, but now we had to leave. She smiled and pushed us gently back into deep water, waved and was gone. While we were sad that she was no longer with us, we knew that the landfall she had made was one we would also make in the future, and on that day she would be there to hold our boat and help us ashore.

And what of our journey since then?

Well, there have been good times and bad for all of us. Grief has sapped my energy and scrambled my decision making so that I have made more mistakes than usual. However, we have been hugely blessed with my friends and family who have obviously been watching us all more closely than we realise as they always seem to have known exactly when to give me space and when to be around.

I feel as though my every trait has been accentuated:

I have always been a copper and my drive to cope has sometimes stopped me from asking for help when I should have.

I am a romantic and have thrown myself with reckless abandon into new relationships.

I am impatient and there are times when my desire to hurry God's plan has pushed me towards Hagar not Sarah.

My children and I have all taken turns in rocking the boat. There have been times when the enormity of the task facing me has felt overwhelming:

As a fairly conventional Anglo-Saxon male I was never prone to tears but now I frequently find that an act of kindness or an emotional situation, particularly one involving children, cracks the mask of adulthood behind which I hide and exposes me as the child I still am underneath ó thank God!

There has been humour ó I think of Caroline fainting in shock at the fact that I now know how to make gravy and am worrying about the children's diet.

There has been loneliness at not having anyone to share the joys and challenges of parenthood with and driving home from friends' parties to a cold bed.

There has been guilt at my envy of those same happily married friends.

There has been the excitement of new relationships that have reminded me of my youth (there's no fool like an old fool!) and the despair as early promise has been replaced by the realisation that real life is not that simple.

There has been fear that I no longer fit, that my thoughts and behaviours are no longer normal.

And underneath it all there has been God. Two years ago He spoke to me in the darkness of devastation about the nature of Joy. I offer His words in the hope that they comfort others in situations similar to my own and encourage them to embrace God in their uncertainty knowing that He has a special place in His heart for widows and orphans like us.

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