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SAYING GOODBYE

Richard Fox

Saying goodbye, it's one of the hardest things we may ever have to do. I'm Richard Fox, and you're listening to Messages of Hope. Saying goodbye to someone we love is heartbreaking and can cause deep grief, but grief can also occur from other types of goodbyes. Have you ever moved house, changed jobs, or moved away from family and friends? When we go through any of these, we often say a lot of goodbyes. Moving away from someone or something can often be just as hard as grieving the death of someone we love. I moved house four times in the space of two years. There was a lot of moving away and a lot of goodbyes. The first move was from my wife and I's first home where we watched our two children grow up and take their first steps. There were a lot of memories in that place, like celebrating birthdays.

It was very difficult to say goodbye. A few years earlier, I changed jobs. I was comfortable working as a business manager in a community service organization. I felt it was important work and I enjoyed the friendships I had there as well. However, my desire to be a pastor meant giving that up, saying goodbye and moving to a new occupation. One that had lots of uncertainty, less income and years of study before I could even start working as a pastor. Through these and other life-changing moments, I've had to say goodbye to family and friends. Sure, I can keep in touch over social media or over the phone, but there's nothing like living in the same community as them and seeing them in person or down the street. All of this change can cause grief and it can be difficult to deal with. So how can we cope with grief that comes from change and transition in life from saying goodbye?

I find hope in the stories of Jesus and his disciples. Jesus' disciples went through a huge amount of change and often had to deal with saying goodbye. Jesus met most of his disciples by the Sea of Galilee, so most of them were fishermen, which was actually a good trade to have at the time. Jesus called them to leave all of that and just follow him, follow him in his travels. That meant leaving their fishing nets and their way of life to travel with Jesus. It took a lot of trust to do that. The disciples wouldn't only have to leave their jobs, but also their houses and their community, including their families and their friends to follow Jesus. It's like someone knocking on your door, inviting you to leave everything and come for a trip around Australia. Not just for a few weeks, but for a few years. Would you just pack up and leave? It might sound great as a holiday, but as a new life, there'd be a lot of goodbyes.

Jesus took the disciples on an incredible journey. They went through many highs and lows. They met many sick people, even dead people. And even people who wanted to kill them. Through it all, Jesus taught them about life, about who he was and about God. He also showed his compassion, his mercy and his love for people. He healed and restored people. He brought people back to life and he fed them. Through this journey, Jesus and his disciples became better than best friends. They shared many experiences that blew their minds and in three years formed bonds that would last beyond their lifetime. So how would the disciples have felt when they saw Jesus being crucified on the cross? Did they wonder if they backed the wrong person? The person who'd called them to leave their jobs, their houses, family and friends was now dying on a cross. They must have felt incredible sadness and loss. Their best friend was being killed. However, three days later, Jesus came back to life.

Their best friend was with them once again. Now, that's a reunion which would have been amazing to witness. But only a short time later, Jesus left them again, or did he? What an amazing roller coaster of emotions they would've gone through, the tears, the fears and doubt. They would have been overwhelming at times. Grief is like that, a roller coaster of emotions. At one moment, you might feel sad, another time angry. And yet another time guilty for feeling so sad or angry. All the while, working through the conflict of denying the experience or accepting it for what it was and feeling at peace. Saying goodbye to someone or something is not easy and can make us feel a wide range of emotions. They aren't wrong. They are what they are, and it's okay to have a good cry or even a laugh about the situation. It's okay to grieve. Even God says it's okay to grieve. Grief was given to us by God to deal with saying goodbye. There are numerous examples in the Bible of people, not just shedding a tear, but wailing loudly and in public. So go ahead and cry. It's okay.

The amount of change and transition that the disciples had gone through was incredible, an emotional and life impacting rollercoaster, but it was a ride that changed their lives for the better. I don't think they would have ever imagined where they would have ended up when Jesus called them from being fishermen. They saw amazing things in their three short years traveling with Jesus and then went on to do more amazing things for the rest of their lives. Despite all of the change and transition, all of the goodbyes, Jesus was with them. Jesus was caring for them and guiding them through everything they faced, including death threats, wild storms, and potential starvation. Jesus reminded them that he'd always be with them, that he'd be watching out for them and guiding them through whatever transition, change, or goodbye they faced.

Jesus says the same to us today. No matter what change, transition, or goodbyes we're experiencing, Jesus is here to remind us that we're not alone and he can help us through it all. He says to you, "I'm not done with you or with your circumstances yet. I have plans to give you a hope, a future, to bring a new life out of loss or death. I'll give you a reason to rejoice. Place your hope in me." So whether we're moving house or changing jobs, saying goodbye to family and friends or any other type of goodbye or grief, we can trust in God that he'll see us through. Jesus showed us this through his relationship with the disciples. This doesn't mean that we won't feel any grief or sadness, that's to be expected, especially when we say goodbye to people and places we love and felt safe and secure.

When we feel grief and sadness, it shows the depth and closeness of the relationship. God understands that. He gave up his only son Jesus on the cross and knows what that feels like. He knows grief and sadness, and he's here to help you through your grief, so much so that God never says goodbye to us. Even though we say goodbye throughout our lives, we never have to say goodbye to God because he never says goodbye to us. Regardless of who we are and what we've done, he's always giving us a big hello. So we can always share our goodbyes with him and all the grief and sadness that results. We can chat with the same best friend that the disciples spoke with. We can share our goodbyes with Jesus and ask him to carry us through with the full assurance that he's always with us.

This is Messages of Hope. For more information on coping with grief, go to messagesofhope.org.au where you can order a free booklet about grief. It provides comfort for times of change and loss and remind us of the hope we have in Jesus Christ. For your free booklet on coping with grief, go to messagesofhope.org.au or call 1800 353 350.

I'm Richard Fox, a pastor of the Lutheran church where love comes to life. I hope you can join us again next week for another message of hope, real hope to cope with life's challenges.

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