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Jessica: Welcome to Tangible: Theology Learned and Lived.

We're exploring the ways in which theology permeates all aspects of life.

Through conversations with faculty at Concordia Seminary St. Louis, we will challenge you to deepen your theology and live out your faith in Christ.

I'm your producer and host, Jessica Bordeleau.

I'll talk with a variety of professors on a variety of topics, something different every episode, but all pointing to the intersection of faith and daily life, when it's tangible, theology learned and lived.

Today we're talking about the difficulties of leaving one community and joining another, the grief that comes during times of transitions, and how it can be used for good.

To tackle this issue, I have two new guests in the studio, Deaconess Dorothy Glenn and the Reverend Micah Glenn.

Dorothy is a Deaconess who's worked with Lutheran schools in the St. Louis area for six years. She now runs her own business, writing devotional support materials.

Dorothy, thanks for being here.

Dorothy: Absolutely.

Jessica: Micah is the Director of Recruitment and Enrollment here at Concordia Seminary St. Louis.

Previous to that, he was a domestic missionary in Ferguson, Missouri, and a regional ministry facilitator at Lutheran Hour Ministries.

Micah, welcome to the show.

Micah: Thank you.

It's great to be here.

Jessica: All right.

I want to know how grief during times of transition became an area of interest for you, because this is something that when I was asking you about being on the show, this was an area that you specifically wanted to address, and I want to know why.

I'm not necessarily an expert on grief.

Micah: I would say it's just something that we're going through at the moment, because Dorothy and I have recently accepted new calls across the country.

So we're leaving the Concordia Seminary St. Louis, and so for the both of us, for our children, for our coworkers, for our fellow churchgoers at the congregation we're members of, you begin to go through that process of there is a deep excitement for us to go and fulfill the new calls that we're being called to out in Carson City, Nevada.

But a new call means that you're leaving, and leaving a community includes a certain level of loss.

One thing that we've been trying to, or at least maybe I should say I've been trying to get better at recently, is not ignoring feelings.

At least go through the experience of the emotion that God has given you.

And so just allowing ourselves to go through that process, because then it leads to the other things, the joy, the healing, and the understanding.

Jessica: I appreciate that both of you as a married couple would come and talk together about this, because really you experience this as a family.

Right?

And it affects not just you individually, but probably individually, and as a couple, and as a family in different ways, because you have three children as well.

Dorothy: So, I mean, grief manifests in all kinds of different ways for each of us.

And so being able to recognize that it exists, and that it is happening whether it is the way we think it should look, or if it's the way that it's just coming out.

Like our daughter, Talitha, she's just today, I think she cried for about 20 minutes.

And it wasn't about moving.

Sometimes little things happen, and we have a big reaction because of the big thing that's going on in the background.

Jessica: So it's a part of that dealing with the emotion that Micah was talking about.

Dorothy:

And, you know, I think often, especially because of kind of the historic background, theologically, and what people discussed about emotions, whether or not passion is sinful, and what should be repressed, what should be joyfully expressed.

Sometimes we think, oh, well, there's good emotions and bad emotions, and somehow God didn't create us to be these emotional beings, but He did.

And so sometimes, you know, it's difficult to remember that and to recognize that and to say, okay, you know, this is how I'm feeling, and be able to express that in ways that are appropriate.

I think that's kind of the difference there, is often we think that how we express an emotion and having the emotion are synonymous with each other, but they're not.

You know, we can feel a certain way and then make a choice on how we react or channel that emotion.

And I think that's kind of the key in helping as a family and recognizing as a family that we're going through the grief process, because we can help our children direct that grief in a way that is appropriate for them.

Micah: Yeah.

You know, as you were talking, you know, the suppression of our feelings, I think some of that, again, theologically in practice, gets misunderstood with self-control.

Right.

And I think that's what you were talking about a little bit, Dorothy, is like, I'm having these feelings.

How are they going to be expressed?

And so over the last month and a half, almost two months when we first announced to the family, they knew we had calls, they knew we were being interviewed.

We kept them in that process and we tried to explain what it would mean if we accepted them or if we declined the calls.

But ever since we accepted them, now the expression of these emotions have come out in a variety of different ways.

Sometimes it's outbursts, a little bit of infighting amongst the kids and just, you know, then as a parent, you know, your self-control, you can't lash out at your children for expressing their emotions.

You can't even lash out if they're doing it in potentially harmful ways to each other.

You have to bring some calm to the scenario.

I think eventually in conversation as church workers, you know, when you look at this in a parish setting, you know, people go through this as well.
And I think one conversation I had with Dorothy a long time ago.
So when we met, we were at different stages of theological education and training.
Dorothy had a couple of years on me already.
And we were talking about the grieving process and what people grieve and what is loss.
And you know, when we talk about these things, not only do we usually mitigate loss to the point where when you talk about loss and grief, we usually talk about it in a way like this person's just died or something along those natures, right?
We don't think when somebody loses something that I think is not a big deal, right?
You can minimize that and be like, oh, it's not that big of a deal.
Get over it.

Trying to take time to understand, and I'm a little bit all over the place right now, but just taking the time to understand where somebody is coming from.
And sometimes being a sound shield or sound barrier or sound recipient for somebody to maybe express it and not a great way to you personally, so that moving forward, you can be that person of trust so that they can maybe begin to demonstrate some self-control with the expression of their feeling moving forward.
We've, well, we've had a lot of that over the last month in our home.
Just because, again, I work at the seminary, but this has been our home for the last four years.
And even from that process of moving onto campus from our home in St. Louis was a big deal.
And now we're leaving a lot behind to gain a lot where we're going.
And we are truly excited about the move, the call, the new experience.
But man, people ask, one question people ask is, was it an easy decision to make?
And I don't know if, I can't recall the last time I made a decision this difficult to accept this call.

In the best and the most tragic way possible, all at the same time.

Jessica: I hear you saying that at home with your kids, you're trying to encourage them to express those feelings and then after they're expressed to help channel them.
So it's like you're observing them.
Does observing your children deal with grief impact the way that you are dealing with it yourself?

Dorothy: Yeah, that's a really, that's a really interesting question.

Micah spoke about some earlier conversations that we had before we even had kids when we're looking at what does it mean to grieve?
What does it mean to go through a mourning process?

And I think it's really important to recognize that any time that there's a change to something that you are emotionally attached to, you go through a process of mourning, whether it's a teeny tiny process, like you lose your keys and now you're going to be late to this thing that you're emotionally attached to, or you have the death of someone who is significant in your life.

And so the extent of the mourning process of the grief that you go through differs depending

on the extent of emotional attachment.

And then you can picture a web in which this one change happens and you have so many different things connected to other emotional attachments.

And so that whole web is fractured when you have something like moving across the country. And so, you know, in observing how my kids are processing through this grief, you know, sometimes part of it is talking to them and saying, you know what, I feel the same way. I'm just not expressing it in that way.

Because it's true.

I mean, if you're in Target and you see a kid melting down and you've had a really rough day, I know I've thought, man, I wish I could do that.

I'm like, that is exactly how I feel.

And, but, you know, why?

So why don't we?

Because we've learned different tools, sometimes good, sometimes bad, to be equipped to process

through that grief or that stress.

And, you know, you can break it down to say, okay, you've had a supposedly bad day.

You can break it down to all of the things that went not according to how you were emotionally attached to your desire for that day.

Micah:

When you know, going through it with kids, so just this morning, I was on my way to the office and I saw Talitha.

You know, her eyes were starting to get a little red.

Talitha is pretty good at telling you how she feels.

And she's always been that way.

And it's very impressive.

And I think as a parent who hasn't always been that way, I've learned some things from her that, you know, I think sometimes when people ask you how you're feeling, you're

afraid to tell them exactly how you're feeling because of their potential response or reaction.

But if you love and care for somebody, you should be able to tell them exactly how they're feel, how you're feeling.

And even if they react in a particular way, there's some reciprocity to where you can work through it.

Right.

But just seeing her and not forcing her to tell me because at first she didn't want to say, then I gave her a hug and she hugged me so tight.

And then she eventually told me what was going on.

And again, right.

It might seem like a little thing, but she's carrying around this weight.

And you know, I'm a military brat.

And so until I was 11, we moved a lot.

And then even at home when people move away, that's just life.

Right.

That's just the way things go.

And for I'm nearly 40 and for most of my life, that's been my attitude to transition periods.

It's just it just happens.

But as I've worked at the seminary for the past little over four years and as we moved here and this became our home and things like that, we had begun to resolve ourselves that maybe this is just where God wants us for the entirety of our career.

And we really mentally, emotionally and physically settled.

And I have been very committed to this work.

I love what I do in recruiting.

And I wasn't looking for anything differently.

This just came to us.

And you know, you pray, you think about it, you look at it.

And again, you go through that whole process and then you make a decision.

You say, OK, we're going to accept this call.

And I don't think you consider the grief per se, because you can't really I don't think

you can try to anticipate some of the challenges and some of the things that are going through it.

But I don't think you can really anticipate exactly what you're going to feel until it becomes real and tangible.

And it's like, OK, we're moving.

And then, right, you start.

A healthy way of going about it, I mean, again, when I was a kid.

One day a friend is there and you play on Friday and their family moves on Saturday, you never say goodbye. There's there's a at least in the near future, there's a real finality there and not shying away from it so that when we see people, perhaps for the last time before we move of actually saying goodbye, which isn't like goodbye forever, but.

Dorothy: Who knows.

Micah: But I might not see you until Jesus comes again, and so that's it.

It's been interesting, again, to lean into.

The grief of our family, because it is a relatively new experience for me of going through the grief this way.

Dorothy: I think one thing to keep in mind as people prepare themselves, you know, they they're deliberating a call or they've just accepted a call or they have just peripherally deliberated and considered going to seminary and have said, yes, OK, we are uprooting our whole family and moving is that there is no.

Mathematical equation, there is no easy solution.

You know, as we talk about this, we're talking about, you know, working through it with our kids, you know, doing it, looking at grieving and.

We are looking at how to to help ourselves grieve appropriately, that doesn't make it easy.

These this grieving of the things that are changing.

Is sometimes our idols can also come out, and I think those can also be really difficult challenges because we can realize, you know, we're looking in the mirror and seeing, oh, I actually am really heavily invested emotionally in something that I really shouldn't be like.

You know, financial stability is is a really great thing in that God is providing us care, but I'm you know, it really shouldn't be what I'm wholly focusing on.

You know, it might be that I am for honing in on we have a house that's twenty three hundred square feet right now and we're looking at paring down to what is it like, eleven hundred or twelve hundred square feet.

And that is going to be its own type of mourning process of, OK, what do we really

actually need?

But in terms of identifying an idol there, you know, the sense of materialism, you can. You could come across the fact that maybe I am holding on to too much, I want to keep my two thousand square feet worth of things, as if that is more important than the reason why you this change is happening.

Micah: To some extent there, when I think about, again, leaving here and going there. The grief and the joy feel very close.

And so, again, with the idols and things again, that that loss and attaching it to stuff. I mean, we wouldn't typically think about it this way, but there's some sort of emotion that comes with security.

You know, when Jesus was calling the disciples, they were fulfilling their earthly vocations by fishing, he said, drop your nets and follow me.

And I even wrote a little booklet about that, of trying to encourage people to think about church work as a career.

What's the name of the booklet?

Drop Your Nets and Follow Me, raising up the next generation of church workers.

While St. Concordia Seminary is this great place, the house is a great space for us.

The community provides a lot of things for our family, and those things are all really good. But when you get to attach to them, they can become idolatrous.

Dorothy: We can start to realize what those idols might be within our life when we look at the things that we fear over the fear of God.

Because really, if there's in all the things that we have in life.

There is nothing that we need to fear.

Because the only one that we need to fear, fear, love and trust is God.

Above all things.

And so when we go about our lives, whether it's in the grief process or just in general, we make decisions, we make them out of the understanding that we have, you know, post death and resurrection, that we have this love and this salvation by grace through faith.

And where does God's love meet us in that fear?

Because he is the one, as we kind of discussed before, that we look to in the midst of all things.

Jessica: So as a married couple, how do you support each other in that way?

Dorothy: Yeah, so I'm going to get super cheesy for just a second.

Because you asked.

So we have these tattoos on our ring fingers.

It's a it's actually the crown of thorns wrapped around our ring finger with the understanding that we are bound together in our marriage, by our marriage vows before God, but also bound together in this broken world and in our faith.

You know, Christ bore our sin and suffering on the cross as represented by the crown of thorns. And so as we together as a married couple go through life, we are bound together not to look longingly into one another's eyes, but to help each other look to the cross where Christ bore our sins.

Micah: Dorothy and I go through grief differently.

It's taking the time to be there for the other when they need that moment.

Listening, trying to key on and say, hey, like you're a little off or you OK?

Recognizing each other's postures, allowing the other person to speak and not feeling like you have to have an answer.

I think that's something a mistake, especially for church workers.

When somebody comes into your office and you're grieving, they want to pour their grief out onto you, thinking you have to have the right thing to say.

And usually I don't.

So I point to scripture, as Dorothy was talking about.

And just listening and letting the person say their piece, that's something I've had to really learn.

Dorothy: So looking at, you know, what were the importance of whatever it is that we're feeling and taking those to God and laying those at the foot of the cross so that ultimately the direction that we have ended up in is at the foot of the cross.

Recognizing his love and his provision for us.

Micah: When I can give an example of how this growth happens.

My dad was a Marine when I was born.

And before I say more, I would love to say that me and my dad today have a great relationship. I love my parents.

I've never not loved my parents.

But when your dad is a Marine and a drill instructor and deployed, I can't speak for everybody's life in those circumstances, but it's hard for everybody, including my father when he because we've had these conversations.

And fast forward, Dorothy and I are getting married.

You know, trauma does what it does.

One of the things that I was most afraid of was becoming a dad when Dorothy got pregnant with our oldest Jonathan.

There was this incredible delight that God had brought this shared life between the two of us out of our mutual love for each other.

Followed by extreme dread and fear and a little bit of anger.

And I wrote a paper about this and I this is where the growth is coming from.

I had a class with Dr. Kolb on sin and evil, and he asked us to write a tangible, applicable paper of how sin and evil work somewhere in our lives or in ministry.

And so I mine was how sin and evil can impact becoming a father from my personal experience. And it wasn't until I wrote that paper.

That I ever told Dorothy the dread that I felt when she got pregnant with Jonathan.

And I had internalized it, I had had the emotion in my mind, kind of that whole thing with to lead the walking down the street, trying to give her the space to express herself. I had not trusted Dorothy to understand my fear.

Because all the anger and all that, that's where it was stemming from fear that God had given me a child and I was destined to be a bad father.

It wasn't until, you know, after the birth, they're attending to Dorothy, they're attending to Johnny. I fell asleep.

I wake up, Dorothy's asleep in the bed.

Jonathan is asleep in the the cradle.

And when I picked him up for the first time, all of that fear and all that tension and all that anger melted away.

I cried for about 30 minutes because it's like one of those things where it's like as I'm holding him. You know, there's this I'll figure it out.

I read some books.

If you're becoming a father and you're like me and you're wondering how to be a good dad and you read a book, read another book and you'll realize that some of the the advice they give is mutually exclusive, that they're only talking from their experience.

And my point is, is that your children are going to teach you how to be a father and a mother. Your new place of work, whether it's the seminary or congregation. You have a desirable skill set and character and personality. I'm going to be the head of a school, of a Lutheran high school. I've never been a principal before. I've never directly worked for a Lutheran high school before I work with high schoolers. I love that age. I love to teach. I love the educational process. I highly value Lutheran education. And so there was a period during the call process of why do they want me? And then you accept the call because you're excited about it. And it's a little bit like becoming a dad. It's like, what am I doing? But the reality is, is that Sierra Lutheran High School, the students, the faculty members, the surrounding community, the parents, they're going to teach me how to be their head of school. So even if I had been a principal before, it would be different there anyway. Right. And so, again, that that kind of tie where joy of becoming a father for the first time immediately being followed by what we can call grief, whether it's being expressed in anger, internally or whatever else. But don't run away from it, experience it so that you can understand what life is handing to you and also realize that in all of this, God is leading you through it. You know. Jesus has gone into heaven to prepare our way eternally, right, to prepare the place that he is making for us, but he also, through the Holy Spirit, prepares our way in life. Not to say that, you know, we can't make mistakes and things of that nature. But as we get ready to head out to Carson City here in a couple of weeks, well, God is working there to help them receive us because good or bad, they're also going. And this is true for anybody except in the new call, moving into a new community. By the act of you going to that place, you're changing that place forever. Right. And so when you get there and you're as you're grieving, you're changing a place and whether they can recognize it or receive it or not, there's going to be a change in grief process for them as well, that I'm going to be a different head of school than they've had. I won't be exactly like the previous ones before. And so there will be this adjustment process. And so by leaning into it on my end, on our end of it, when we get there, we can go through it together. And that's the beautiful thing about when you're talking about marriage, friendship, parenthood. God has created us for a community. Sometimes grief is isolating and it feels like you're the only person going through it. Sometimes that isolation can drive you into different places. But the beautiful thing about all of life is that we weren't created to do it by ourselves.

Jessica: Yes, speaking of community, you guys are part of my community. I mean, we just we work on campus, but you guys go to my church. You're in my Bible study. Our kids go to Sunday school together. I mean, we're going to miss you. When you leave, part of my church family will be gone.

So as your friend, what can I do to support you?

Micah: When somebody's experience lost, what's one of the first things you do?
And I'm not saying that you have to do this, but if you did do it, send them food.
So you do the simple things for people.

Sometimes in my mind, the more simple the gesture, the the bigger impact it has.

Dorothy: I was on the phone with someone the other day about a conference that I'm helping put together. And she was just like, do you mind if I pray for you right now?
And I didn't realize how impactful that was going to be for me.
She prayed on the phone about some various different things that we have been discussing and just there was a sense of relief.
I almost felt like crying right on the phone.

That just kind of washed over.

Micah: When also you did something that's been very beneficial and I talked about something I didn't used to do before, but now that.

You know, you grow and you mature, you know, you were saying that, yeah, we're colleagues, of course, but we're also members of the same congregation and something that people there have already begun to do is I'll miss you.

I've left places and not heard that.

But when you hear somebody who, you know, really cares about you say, I'll miss you.

Yeah, it's a kick starts the grief process.

But, you know, you feel that sadness, right?

And and again.

I think there's a tendency to think sadness is bad because of how it makes me feel and all that, you know, you get tight in your chest, you get that little frog in your throat, you struggle to find the right words.

But man, this time around, when people have been saying, you know, I'll miss you, you feel all of that, but you also feel a love in the midst of it.

If there's no other example of.

What a good process of going through grief looks like, it's it's Jesus allowing himself to cry at the death of his friend.

Just just think about that process again.

Jesus, God in the flesh.

Experiences grief from the death of his friend.

It's just, again.

And like you said, there's there's no timing for it, right?

You obviously don't want to let it drive you into despair.

And that's that's what people around you are there for.

Hopefully talking about being members, we're going through drove together.

Jessica: Yeah. And you're not going to get to the end of Job with us in the Bible.

Micah: I'm grieving that a little bit because the conversation has been so dynamic and so great.

But we talked about Job's friends and how they try to kind of push him through the grieving process, you know, and that's and that's the other thing people try to do in like the mitigation.

They try to give you a timeline based upon what they think the level of grief is.

And it could be very easy to say, OK, Talitha, that's not a big deal.

We're going to get there. You can cry now.

But once we get to Carson City, the grieving period is over.

Well, of course not.

And again, Jesus weeping for Lazarus, the whole question of where is God in all of this?
Well, he's grieving with you.

Jessica: So when we're talking about the grief of transition and of loss and the way we can support our friends, when should we express support by saying, I would like to help you get professional help?

Micah: You know, I've personally in different moments in my life chosen to to seek a therapist. Sometimes it's because I'm not feeling great. But I also go to therapy when I am feeling great. Therapy has helped me through so many scenarios in life. And including accepting the call to Nevada. And it's such a healthy process.

Dorothy: You know, when you are a friend, it is important to refer and to encourage when that line goes in from friend to counselor, because you're called to be that person's friend, not their counselor.

Jessica: Thank you for your honesty in that, because I think there's definitely a stigma about counseling and for people to hear their church workers say this is healthy. I do it, too. The attitude of all you need is Jesus. It's expanded to Jesus has given you tools to be healthy. Thank you. Our closing question is always, what do you want our listeners to remember? Micah, what do you want our listeners to remember?

Micah: The confidence doesn't come from myself. It comes from faith that, you know, the finality of things like death, the finality of things like a move, our final in this life. But our hope, our trust, our confidence isn't limited to this life because it's not tied to something bound simply to this life. But it's tied and secured in the person who's given and created this life that is promised an eternal life. One of my favorite lines, where all tears will be wiped away by the hand of Jesus.

Jessica: Dorothy, what do you want our listeners to remember?

Dorothy: It's OK to grieve. Grief continues, but so does grace. I think of Romans 8, neither life nor death, nor angels, nor demons, nor anything else, then all creation can separate us from the love that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Jessica: Thanks, both of you, for this really raw conversation and for being so open about your experience. Micah, thanks for being on the show.

Micah: Absolutely.

Jessica: Dorothy, thank you for being here.

Dorothy: Thank you for having us.

Jessica: And thank you for listening. You can find more episodes of Tangible and all the major hosting apps or on our website, ConcordiaTheology.org. We've got a lot more resources there. Check it out. I'm your host and producer, Jessica Bordeleau. Join me next time when we talk about the intersection of theology and daily life when it's Tangible: Theology Learned and Lived.