Hensley, Drew. *Invisible Grief: An Honest Conversation on the Pain and Loss of Unrealized Hopes, Dreams, and Good Desires.* Geanies House, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2026. 187pp. + 12pp. (front matter) + 9pp. (back matter).

As Drew Hensley and his wife experienced the pain of childlessness, Drew began to envision a book that would address human sorrow in one of its overlooked dimensions—*invisible grief.* By *invisible grief* he means "a deep-seated reminder of what has never been and may never be" (1) and "the death of hopes, dreams, and desires" (3). Hensley's work speaks to a specific niche: good desires that God has not met. Many sorrows stem from the loss of something or someone already existing (health, family, friends, job), and many unrealized hopes, dreams, and wishes are indistinguishable from what the Scriptures call *lusts.* That is, the reason for our grief is that we want something God has not given, and we are upset that our wishes remain unfulfilled. Hensley would have us navigate away from these to consider how we ought to respond to God-given desires that remain unfulfilled.

Hensley weaves a plausible narrative of three acts: "what we lay down" (chs. 1–3), "what we pick up" (chs. 4–7) and "how we move forward" (chs. 8–9). The author describes first how he attempted to outrun his grief via alcohol, denial, and laughter (deflection), but he found these merely postponed, complicated, and exaggerated the grief that he felt. Next, he answers four lies that society (or Satan) uses to confuse believers about their sorrow. These include: "Bad things don't happen to good Christians" (31), "I'm being punished" (33), "Time heals all wounds" (36), and "the fallacy of relative privation" (42), in which one denies the significance of one form of suffering in light of more severe suffering elsewhere. As he develops how these lies have taken hold in our culture, Hensley exposes and rejects the prosperity gospel as false doctrine, and he calls it predatorial, selfish, humanistic, and cruel. He also properly differentiates punishment and discipline (35)—observing that God does use discipline frequently with his children, but he does not punish them because of Christ's suffering on their behalf. Hensley concludes this section by addressing one of the most destructive thoughts that we must set aside: *God doesn't care.* Hensley shows just how easily a good desire can become a demand—dethroning God by insisting on the supreme and necessary worth of someone or something other than God's own person. The human mind transmutes *God did not give me what I wanted* into *God does not care* with astonishing ease.

In the second section of *Invisible Grief,* Hensley assures the reader that "it's okay to not be okay." This is one of the more scripturally laden sections in which the experiences of David (Pss 10, 13, 22, 31) and Jesus exhibit the sorrows of the soul that can attend a faithful life. Chapter 5 argues that grief is a gift that leads us to new understanding (82), "new appreciation" (83), and even "new abilities" (84). Grasping the identity-shaping effect of specific griefs, Hensley focuses chapter 6 on the necessity of having our identity grounded on and shaped by the Scriptures generally and the gospel specifically. Because sorrow can occupy so much of people's conscious thoughts, they may adopt a false identity.

> In a world marred by the unexpected, where dreams can slip through our fingers like sand and good desires seem to wither on the vine, it's easy to let our pain and losses become the lens through which we see our entire lives. These experiences, while deeply formative, threaten to redefine us if we let them take center stage. We take on new primary names: "barren, single, disabled, orphan,

> broken, helpless, hopeless." Even though these names are liars (and they definitely are), with chronic grief these false identifiers can grow larger and larger. (94)

The final chapter in this section addresses the reality that God can use pain to bring about a constructive end, but the chapter disappoints in its truncated theology. Hensley distances God from suffering, sorrow, pain, and loss to such an extent that he merely "allows" the curse and "allows" the misery, pain, and deformity in this world (113). But this theological stance both personifies the curse and fails to solve what Hensley feels it does. A God who "allows" all this calamity (when he has the power to stop it if he wished to do so) is no more absolved than the God who intended calamity and misery to exist under the curse and who actively ordered it to be so (alternately, there is an active force in the universe that is powerful enough to override the divine will). Thus, one who follows Hensley's logic must resort either to Rabbi Kushiner's powerless deity or a cruel one (since Hensley has defined agency in calamity as cruel). In this respect, Hensley's formulation in this chapter is doctrinally weak. A better solution stems from Scripture. Amos 3:6 demonstrates that God explicitly takes credit for calamity while rejecting that his agency in doing so is cruel. Sinners deserve nothing but misery and judgment; so, there is no cruelty in God to ordain and establish the curse in all of its effects.

Section three proposes two primary mechanisms by which to carry invisible grief without faltering—community and joy. Hensley wisely does not promise resolution in this life. Pain does not always go away. Sorrows do not always dim. But those who withdraw from community are cutting themselves off from one of God's means of care. People don't always say "the right thing at the right time." They sometimes offer poor, careless, or hurtful advice. But God ordained that other believers should be a "conduit of grace" when we are hurting (149). Finally, the last chapter entertains the fact that since we are complex beings, we can retain both grief and joy at the same time. That is, the fact that we sorrow is not adequate cause to give up hope and joy.

There are several points at which *Invisible Grief* could offer the reader a clearer presentation. First, although it claims to address a unique kind of grief that attends unmet expectations, hopes, and dreams, the book's counsel applies equally to other forms of grief. In other words, it is difficult to differentiate a thoughtful Christian response to visible as opposed to invisible griefs. If recognition of the *existence* of invisible griefs is the goal, this outcome was achieved. If a distinct plan of action stemming from such recognition is the goal, *Invisible Grief* falls short. Second, as noted previously, it is hard to distinguish these "invisible griefs" from simple desires, lusts, demands, and wants. The Scriptures show us how to deal with our desires—especially those that conflict with God's apparent will for our lives. The reader might expect Hensley to address more extensively the fact that a high proportion of our unmet desires are simply sinful—either in the object sought or in the devotion of the heart to that object. Third, the author's extensive referencing of CCM and secular psychotherapies exhibits an integrationist approach to life that seems to accept the world's opinions on matters of the soul. This blunts the value of *Invisible Griefs* as a blueprint for a distinctly Christian response to soul care. Finally, the author occasionally over-realizes his applications. For instance, in citing Jeremiah 29:11 as immediately applicable to his reader, he is taking a promise given to Israel (and only to Israel given the explicitness of the seventy-year captivity) and treating it as written to the church (160).

Invisible Grief effectively draws the reader to consider unmet desires and expectations. Because we are spiritual beings who can consider not only what *is* but what *could* and *ought* to be, unrealized hopes are genuine sources of sorrow in a fallen world. And the solution to invisible grief is the same as it is for visible grief—the grace of God in the present and the hope of eternal life in the future, and both of these come through Christ.

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