

## **SLIDE 1. Series: Everyday Disciples**

Teaching: *How Do We Journey with God in our Grief?*

Sunday November 10.2024

Last Sunday – we gave thanks to our God for the honest and vulnerable conversation we had at our last Men’s Breakfast (2 Saturdays ago) when we talked about grief and grieving – esp. grieving over a long term.

I was encouraged by this: real men talking about real life in real time. I’ve also been encouraged by the members of a seniors’ small group that I am in - who are exploring how we manage grief and how we can journey with others who are grieving.

So, let me say this at the outset: “Thank you, Larry, for hosting that conversation and thank you, Lois for leading that group. We are blessed by your leadership.”

Thank you both for setting the table for this teaching. I’ll do my best to come alongside of what you have already done and are doing.

Let’s begin by defining what we mean by the word “grief.”

## **SLIDE 2. Grief is the emotional response of sadness brought on by loss or suffering.**

This is the common lot of humankind – to grieve at different times in our lives for different reasons – to experience sorrow and distress and emotional pain – brought on by loss or suffering - through different seasons of being - or for quite some time.

Multiple Bible characters - including Job and Naomi and David - experienced grief under a variety of different circumstances. Even Jesus – mourned (Jn. 11:35)! - and is described as a man of sorrows, someone who is familiar with grief (Isa. 53:3)!

So, a healthy start to our journey with God in our grief is to put our grief in perspective.

- a. That it is common for people to emotionally attach to people and to things
- b. That we live in a world of loss and suffering – that it is not specific to us – that the cosmos – for instance – isn’t picking on us individually
- c. That grief is a natural response to loss and suffering
- d. That grief exists on a spectrum – that we can feel deep sadness when we lose someone we love (even pets!), or when a loved one is sick, or has been for some time, or has to live with a tough health diagnosis, that we can feel deep sadness when life seems to be stacking trouble after trouble on our heads, that we can feel deep sadness when a friend moves away or when someone leaves our church, that we can feel deep sadness when we are let go at work and even when we retire from work, that we can feel deep sadness when we lose something precious – which was a symbol of a treasured person or time.

In summary...

**SLIDE 3. Grief is a natural response to loss and suffering.**

Secondly...

**SLIDE 4. Times of grief serve a purpose.**

**SLIDE 5.** There is this curious line in the book of Ecclesiastes: ***It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart (Eccl. 7:2).***

What?!

Why would it be better to go to a *house of mourning* compared to a *house of feasting*?

Because being in a *house of mourning* – where an unburied body would lay for days – in a Jewish context – would turn mourner's thoughts to the subjects of mortality and the future state – where one could learn from serious and interesting conversations – about how to prepare for death and what comes after it.

The *house of feasting* is little more than noise and clamor, vanity and idle talk – distraction from the inescapability of death and an afterlife – which need our serious consideration – so that we would be ready for what is - *the end of all humankind*.

Serious thought about life. Easier to do at a funeral. Harder to do at a party.

Grief is an emotional smelling salt. It brings us back *to* and grounds us *in* – reality.

Grief forces us to look at the hard edges of life – loss and suffering – and to wonder how we'll make it.

Grief stops us short – gets right in front of us.

But it also comes and goes.

**SLIDE 6. *Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning (Ps. 30:5).***

This isn't to say that our grief will necessarily disappear each morning.

It is to say that our grief is temporary – that sadness is not the last word - that there are reasons for joy every day, and – in the end – for a follower of Jesus – there will come a day when God will wipe every tear, death shall be no more, neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain (Rev. 21:4) – that there is inexpressible joy to come.

**SLIDE 7.** So that Paul would say: ***For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us (Ro. 8:18).***

As one commentator puts it: "There is an end to mourning. Grief has its purpose, but it also has its limit." (*What Does the Bible Say About Overcoming Grief?* gotquestions.org).

**SLIDE 8.** So, to recap – here's how we put our **Grief in Perspective:**

**Grief is a natural response to loss and suffering.**

**Grief serves a purpose.**

**Grief is temporary.**

**SLIDE 9.** And now - through it all, **God is faithful.**

**God journeys with us in our grief** – as He did King David – even through the valley of the shadow of death (**Ps. 23:4**).

We are not alone in our grief – ever – because God is everywhere. He sees our grief. He is available to us when we turn to Him.

**God respects our grief.** As King David wrote in Ps. 56: *You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book* (**Ps. 56:8**).

Not only does God see our grief – He values it.

Imagine – God keeping track of all our grief. He catches our tears – GOD CATCHES OUR TEARS! - and GOD records each one of them in a book.

God knows what it costs us. God knows what it cost Him.

**God empathizes with us in our grief.**

Jesus wept (Jn. 11:35). After Lazarus died, Jesus went to the village of Bethany, where Lazarus was buried.

When Jesus saw Martha and the other mourners weeping, He also wept. He was moved by their grief – and by the death of his best friend. What's so amazing about this – to me - is that, even though Jesus knew He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead, He chose to grieve with them – to journey with them in their grief!

It is – as the author of the book of Hebrews says about Jesus Christ our Lord: *We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin* (**Heb. 4:15**).

**God comforts us in our grief.**

As Paul wrote to the Church of Corinth: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God* (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

God will comfort us in our grief – for our own sakes – but God also comforts us – SO THAT – being comforted by Him - *we* would be able to comfort *others* who are grieving.

**SLIDE 10.** So, if these things are true (see slide 9) ...

**Q. *How do we journey with God in our grief?***

**A. We lament – *to God and with each other.***

We talk to God and to each other about our pain.

**SLIDE 11.** Timothy Keller wrote, "**Christians have a HOPE that can be rubbed into our sorrow and anger. The way that salt is rubbed into meat. Neither stifling grief nor giving way to despair is right. Neither repressed anger nor unchecked rage is good for your soul. But pressing HOPE into your grief makes you wise, compassionate, humble and tender-hearted. Grieve fully, yet with profound HOPE.**" *Timothy Keller*

Hope – because God is faithful.

Talk to God about your pain.

**SLIDE 12.** Here are 4 Ts to guide us into how we can journey with God in our grief...

**Turn to God.**

Choose to turn TO God as opposed to AWAY from God. This takes faith and discipline – esp. if you believe that God is at the root of your loss or suffering.

Suffering and loss can tempt us to turn to other things for respect and empathy and comfort – things like TV, the internet, food, alcohol, music, sports.

Remember who God is and what He's done for you in your lifetime – and turn TO Him. God is faithful.

**Talk to God** - like King David talked to Him in **Ps. 13.**

*How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?*

*Look on me and answer, Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death, and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.*

*But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me (Ps. 13).*

King David expressed his impatience, his mental anguish and his deep sadness to God.

But he didn't leave it there. He went on to tell God what he needed.

We should do the same in our grief.

## **Tell God what you need.**

King David asked God to *light up his eyes* – which was a euphemistic way of asking God for wisdom, truth, and goodness. Lastly...

## **Trust God.**

This is how such Psalms end – by choosing to trust God.

As King David said and did: *But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me* (vv. 5-6).

When we commune with God – we are able to open our minds and hearts to the truths that God journeys with us in our grief, that God respects our grief, that God empathizes with us in our grief, and that God comforts us in our grief.

Sometimes - we will experience a peace that surpasses understanding in the midst of our loss or suffering (Phil. 4:8) – an inexplicable sense of comfort – even though our situation hasn't changed.

And sometimes – we will be comforted by others.

The Church – those who follow Jesus Christ – are designed to – among other things – ease each other's burdens.

**SLIDE 12.** Indeed – God tells us to do so - to: ***Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2, ESV).***

And to: ***Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep (Ro. 12:15, ESV).***

God wouldn't ask us to do something we couldn't do.

Often – however – those who are grieving can shut others out – which only increases their feelings of isolation and misery. It is WAY healthier to talk to others about our pain.

To be present.

To listen.

To encourage.

To pray.

To bring over a meal.

Just as we heard last Sunday during our time of congregational prayer – when a couple of different people in our church gave thanks to God for others who met these needs in their lives.

When we talk to God and others about our pain – our grief is lessened.

**SLIDE 13. BENEDICTION. So, may we turn to God, talk to Him about our pain, tell Him what we need, and trust His character – because He journeys with us in our grief, respects our grief, empathizes with us, and comforts us in our grief. And may we also turn to each other so that we would ease each other's burdens, comfort one another, and weep with those who are grieving – because we can.**

#### EXERCISE

I'd like to invite you into a little exercise...

Using Psalm 13 as a kind of model – I'd like to walk you through a draft of your own Psalm using the 4 Ts.

#### **1. Turn to God.**

Take some time to quiet yourself before God. Think about who you are talking to when you talk to God. Think about how you will address Him. Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father...", but there are other ways you might address Him, ie. Lord, Triune God, Abba or Papa, Yahweh, Creator...

#### **2. Talk to God.**

*How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?*

Tell God how you are feeling, ie. grateful, full, at peace, anxious, exhausted, scared. God sees you. He is listening. He is with you and for you.

#### **3. Tell God what you need.**

*Look on me and answer, Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death, and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.*

You may ask God to help you sort your feelings. You may ask God for strength or wisdom or both. You may ask God for something very specific.

#### **4. Trust God.**

*But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me.*

By faith – choose to trust God. Remember who He is and what He has done for you. Enjoy Him. Rest in Him.