

A Timely and Encouraging Message: How to Deal with Grief, Disappointment, and Loss

Where is God in our pain? How are we to process it?

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it great loss, fear, and death. With our 24/7 news cycle, we hear all of the gruesome details and sad stories. People are dying without their families. And families are unable to grieve and mourn in community. Fear has gripped those who are senior citizens or have underlying health issues. We can no longer safely attend church or go to work. We can't even go to the grocery store without wearing a mask and washing our hands. And even then, we still fear we may contract the virus.

There have been losses and disappointments— weddings cancelled or rescheduled. The birth of babies unable to be attended by grandparents and extended families. Birthdays celebrated virtually.

We are created in the image of God as relational beings. Touch and presence are important to our well-being. How are we to cope in the midst of a pandemic with worldwide impact?

Sickness and death are the result of sin. Sin separates. We are seeing a physical representation of the separating power of sin. Are we allowed to grieve as Christians? Absolutely! The Bible calls it lament: “to feel, show, or express grief, sorrow, or regret. to mourn deeply” ([dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com))

But what the enemy has intended for evil, God will use for good. We must seek Him and be attentive to His voice. John Ortberg quotes Dallas Willard in his book, *Soul Keeping*, on the importance of our souls:

If your soul is healthy, no external circumstance can destroy your life. If your soul is unhealthy, no external circumstance can redeem your life...The salvation of your soul is not just about where you go when you die. The word salvation means healing or deliverance at the deepest level of who we are in the care of God through the presence of Jesus. Sooner or later, your world will fall apart. What will matter then is the soul you have constructed. (*Soul Keeping: Caring For the Most Important Part of You*, p. 40 & 48).

What is Lament? An entire book in the Bible was written about it – Lamentations. We also have Psalms of Lament. In fact, most theologians would classify almost half of the Psalms as Psalms of Lament.

Mark Vroegop writes in *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament*, “Lament is the honest cry of a hurting heart wrestling with the paradox of pain and the promise of God’s goodness...Christians affirm that the world is broken, God is powerful, and He will be faithful. Therefore, lament stands in the gap between pain and promise” (p. 25-26).

I. Jesus is Our Example

Jesus has conquered death because it was impossible for death to hold Him – “And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power” (Acts 2:24).

“Up from the grave He arose with a mighty triumph over His foes, He arose a victor from the dark domain and He lives forever with His saints to reign, He arose, He arose, Hallelujah Christ arose” (Robert Lowry, 1826-1899).

Because we are in Christ, death cannot hold us! There are two deaths – physical and spiritual. He has not only broken the hold of death but also broken the fear of death. We grieve, but not as those who have no hope. (1 Thessalonians 4:13)

Hebrews 2:14-18

Jesus was the pioneer and perfecter of our faith – Hebrews 2 – in bringing many Sons to glory...freeing those who all their lives have been held in slavery to fear of death.

Jesus went into the grave and turned on the light. But Jesus felt. He felt deeply – (grief and anger at death - John 11:33-38; Compassion - Matthew 9:36; Righteous anger when He cleansed the temple– John 2:15; Anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane – Matthew 26:37-38; Luke 22:44).

Jesus may not calm the storm around you, but He will calm the storm within you!

II. His Word is Our Foundation

Emotions are God given. We have been given examples in Scripture of those who have turned to the Lord in their times of deep grief and lament. Our emotions should point us to Jesus, not control us or our actions.

Religious people tend to stuff or deny their feelings.

Secular people tend to be defined by their feelings.

There is a Christian response. Turn to the Lord, lift up your complaint and questions to Him, and place your trust in His character.

The Psalms are prayers that were sung to God. You will find expressions of deep grief, betrayal, discouragement, helplessness and loss. When you have no words, God's Word will provide them for you. God's Word brings health to your soul.

A. God's Word is Our Foundation – Psalm 1

We will be like a tree planted beside streams of water. We will develop deep roots that keep us well-grounded amidst the storms of this life.

B. Keep the End in Sight – Psalm 2

Wars will rage, people will scheme, but the Lord is on His throne and no one will be able to thwart His plan! Christ is the Victor; thus, our victory is sure!

C. Trust the Lord in the Midst of Your Pain – Psalm 3, 31, 42-43, and 46

“What is so comforting about these Psalms is not that there is a swift resolution There isn't. The comfort lies in seeing that by remembering what God is like, in asking hard questions of his soul, and in pleading with God according to His character, the Psalmist finds God in the darkness” (Courtney Reissig, *Teach Me to Feel*, p. 89).

1. Voice your pain
2. Seek the Lord for help
3. Trust His character - Instruct your soul to trust and praise

D. Prayer and Praise are our Greatest Weapons – Psalm 145-150

The more we fix our eyes on Jesus the more we will praise Him.

“Psalm 1 tells us of the blessed life and the outcome of the blessed life – you will grow and be sustained by God. Psalm 150, the very last Psalm in the Psalter, tells us the final outcome of all of our lives – endless praise” (Courtney Reissig, *Teach Me to Feel*, p. 89).

The Psalms end with five Psalms of pure praise.

“You might think lament is the opposite of praise. It isn’t. Instead, lament is a path to praise as we are led through our brokenness and disappointment. The space between brokenness and God’s mercy is where this song is sung. Think of lament as the transition between pain and promise. It is the path from heartbreak to hope” (Mark Vroegop, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament*, p. 28).

Pray the Psalms - (Read through them monthly. Start with the day of the month, then add 30 each time until you have read 5 Psalms each day.)