

# Growing through Grief

Rob Rogers      April 2, 2023

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## Introduction

In light of the horrific and violent act that was perpetrated on six precious people last Monday at The Covenant School in Green Hills we're going to push pause in our parables series today to address some necessary things that need tending to.

I want to make you aware of our safety team made up of incredibly diligent and faithful volunteers led by staff member David Berryman, who serves this body so well. They are constantly preparing and training for all kinds of different scenarios, are in constant communication with one another through each Sunday service, and other events throughout the week, so that every single person who steps foot on this campus is safe and protected.

We also share a part of our building with Grace Christian Academy, and they have an extensively trained security team as well, on both our campus and theirs. Grace Christian Academy and Grace Chapel are in constant communication to ensure the safety of all the students and families that are on campus throughout each week.

You also may have noticed that at every Sunday gathering or large event we host here, Williamson County Sheriff's deputies are present near the entrances and patrol the campus throughout the services.

I share all this with you, because in the days in which we are living, we do not want to be manipulated or overcome by fear or evil — but we will be prepared for it when it shows up on our doorstep.

In light of all of that... and in light of the unimaginable grief our friends and neighbors have experienced at the Covenant School... and the residual sorrow and grief we may be carrying this morning... I want speak directly to some of the weight we may be carrying, the questions we may be asking, and we're going to create some extra space for all of us to come to God in prayer today.

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## God, why?

**PERSONAL:** I don't know about you, but I've come to God over the last week just speechless, *"God, I don't even know what to say! I don't even know how pray about this... I'm angry. I'm heartbroken... confused even... and everything in between...."* Even though I've resolved the answer to this question in my heart and mind over and over and over again... still the question comes... *"God, why? Why did You let this happen? Even, how could You let this happen?"*

And that's a scary question to ask... because we know that God is good... we believe that God is ultimately in control. To make room to allow those questions to come to surface can be scary.

***"Rob what good is this going to do? Or, what good is being sad about anything going to do? Let's fix the issue and move on! I don't have time to sit around and feel bad about it...."***

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## Pay attention to our grief and pain

If we never allow room to face our pain, or to ask the hard questions, even to give voice to our struggles or doubts — we're not only stunting our spiritual and emotional maturity — we actually won't ever know the joy of knowing God in the darkest moments of life, and we actually won't become like Jesus.

**DANGER:** There has been an unfortunate tendency in the western church to ignore our own grief, or the grief of the people God has called us to serve. To simply act like everything is fine, to pull yourself together, to put on a smile, to toughen up and move on. God wants you to know today, that's NOT His desire for us.

In fact, it's the most dangerous response to grief and loss... because it hardens the heart, poisons the soul, and cripples our ability to feel empathy or compassion for others. Ultimately, unaddressed grief only leads to further devastation and grief, not only in our own souls but also in our relationships with others.

On the other hand — **if we'll make room to pay attention to our grief, our hard questions, our wrestlings, and bring them before the Lord — we can come to know Him far more intimately through our pain, than we ever will in prosperity. We'll be more compassionate, loving, and free not less...**

This is why there's not only an entire book of the Bible dedicated to lamenting (Lamentations)... but Psalms, the longest book in the Bible, includes psalms of adoration, of thanksgiving, of wisdom, of repentance, even psalms of doubt. But Psalms of Lament, far outnumber any other kind of psalm. More than half of the 150 psalms are classified as psalms of lament!

### Psalm 42:3

"Tears have been my food day and night."

### Psalm 43:2

"Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"

### Psalm 77:8-9

"Has His unfailing love vanished forever? Has His promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful?"

*"The very presence of these prayers in scripture is a witness to God's understanding.*

*God knows how men speak when they are desperate."*<sup>1</sup>

*~ Derek Kidner, Warden of Tyndale House in Cambridge*

- In other words, the very fact that God put these prayers in the book of Psalms in the Bible... tells us an enormous amount about Him!

You don't have God looking at this prayer saying, *"I can't have that kind of prayer in my Holy Word! People can't think that it's okay to pray like this! I don't want to be identified with someone who prays like that!"*

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Keller. *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*. (Penguin, Oct 1, 2013) p. 248

But God does put it in the Bible... and God does identify Himself with people who pray exactly like that! God knows how we speak when we're stricken with grief, and sorrow, when we're desperate, when we're angry!

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## I am a God of grace

***Do you know what this means?*** It means God is looking at every single one of us this morning and saying *"I am your God, not because you put a smile on your face, not because you're tough and pull yourself up by your bootstraps! I'm not your God because you say everything right, or do everything right... I am your God because I am a God of GRACE!"*

***You know what that does? It gives you the freedom to face your pain.*** Because you know that God will not abandon you in the middle of it. He won't leave you while you're wrestling through it... in fact, he's in the wrestling WITH you.

**Illustration:** One of my favorite movies of all time is *Shawshank Redemption*. In the movie, Tim Robbins is wrongfully convicted of murder and sentenced to two life sentences at Shawshank State Penitentiary. Toward the end of the movie, after almost two decades of imprisonment and horrendous abuse, the Robbins character has dug a tunnel out of his cell. In order to escape, he has to crawl through the prison sewage pipes, not knowing how long it will take, where it will lead him. It seems like it will never end...

***Often, that's how we feel about facing grief and sorrow.*** We're just crawling through all the sewage, in a dark tunnel, not sure will ever end...

Finally, Robbins emerges out of sewer on the other side the prison walls, and there's an enormous rainstorm that showers over him, cleanses him, rids him of all the muck and filth — as he looks up to the sky with sheer joy on his face... knowing that's he's finally free. *But he never would've gotten there had he not crawled through those sewage pipes!*

This is exactly what happens if we'll make room, not just to grieve, but to bring our honest, raw, grief to God.

What's true is, if we'll allow it, is that we learn an enormous amount more about God's grace in grief, in sorrow, in pain, in suffering, in anguish — than we ever will in prosperity.

David Watson, shortly before His death wrote this...

*"When you crush lavender, you find its full fragrance; when you squeeze an orange, you extract its sweet juice. In the same way it is often through pains and hurts that we develop the fragrance and sweetness of Jesus in our lives."<sup>2</sup>*  
~ David Watson

In David's life, when he hears of King Saul and his son Jonathan's deaths... he models this for us.

### 2 Samuel 1:17-18

And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and Jonathan his son, <sup>18</sup> and he said it should be **taught to the people of Judah...**

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<sup>2</sup> David Watson. *Fear No Evil*. (John Murray Press, May 22, 2014)

The grief isn't just his, it isn't just personal... it's communal. He orders the people to join him in his lament for Israel's prince and King. He recognizes that something precious in Israel is now gone, and will never return.

*King David understood how important it is for people to pay attention to their pain, and walk through it, not run from it.*

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## Jesus grieved

To paraphrase Henri Nouwen *"the degree to which we grieve our losses is the degree to which we will become people of compassion."*<sup>3</sup>

Look at Jesus! Jesus not only wept at the tomb of Lazarus; but also, today is Palm Sunday, the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, knowing it would lead to his inevitable death on Friday. And as Jesus hung on that cross, He did not say... *"God will be victorious! Praise His holy name! God is good, all the time!"*

***Is God good? Absolutely.*** Jesus never wavered on that... but He never used the goodness of God to gloss over His own grief!

***What does He say instead? "My God, my God, why, have you forsaken Me?"***

**Jesus doesn't minimize the pain, he doesn't ignore the heartache — He faces it, grieves it, gives voice to it, and trudges his way through death itself into resurrection life.**

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## Communal prayer of grief

Please bow your heads and place your hand on your heart as I pray for us.

*"God today, we do grieve. We slow down to face the reality that there has been a great loss with friends and neighbors close by. God we grieve the deaths of..."*

*Evelyn Dieckhaus, William Kinney, Hallie Scrugg,  
Katherine Koonce, Cynthia Peak, Mike Hill*

*And although we know they're at home with you now, we grieve for the heartache, the trauma, the unspeakable pain their families are carrying today. Oh God, have mercy on them. Be near.*

*God, we grieve over Audrey Hale, the marring and twisting of your good design for her... the utter deception of her heart and mind to believe that taking the lives of innocent children and adults was her best option. Oh God, we grieve for her, and for her family, grappling with what their daughter had done.*

*"God, we grieve for our nation that seems so utterly lost and confused, so polarized and senseless at times. We grieve the reality of ideologies that are hell bent on twisting Your good and beautiful design, and Your marring Your image in creation. We grieve the 22 people in our area lost this week in tornadoes.*

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Scazzero. *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship* (Zondervan, Mar 30, 2021) p. 129

*“God today, we ask you, come quickly. Make it right. Redeem what the enemy meant for evil. Do not hide Your face from Your people. Be near. As we face our sorrow, both great and small, would you make us like you, sanctify us, and make us people of great empathy and compassion in an often cold and heartless world. Lord Jesus, Come quickly.” In Jesus name, Amen.*

Whatever your personal response is... God can handle our deepest sorrows, greatest fears, our lamenting, our highest joys, and everything in between. He not only allows it — He invites it. Let’s come to Him

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## Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever questioned, “God, why?” When? How did you resolve your question?
2. Have you practiced the Christian cliché of ignoring your grief, acting like everything is fine, pulling yourself together, putting on a smile? How is this a dangerous response to grief and loss?
3. Discuss: “You’ll come to know Jesus far more intimately through pain than through prosperity.”
4. What is the purpose of, need for, result of “communal lamentation”?
5. Discuss: “The degree to which we grieve our losses is the degree to which we will become people of compassion.”
6. In Jesus’ journey to the cross, how did He express His own grief? Did He ever waiver on the goodness of God?

## NOTES