GOOD GRIEF: Learning to Lament with Job
October 2022
Week 1

Day 1: Good Grief
Scripture: Psalm 34:18

Reflection:

"I thought I could describe a state; make a matter of sorrow. Sorrow, however, turns out to be not a state, but a process." C.S. Lewis

Lewis wrote these words in his book "A Grief Observed," after the death of his beloved wife. In his own journey with grief, he realized it takes time and effort to work through a deep loss.

Grief is unfortunately a universal experience. How we process it and go through it can look different. The events that move us into seasons of grief can look different. It's important to note that in the context of this plan we're looking at grief as a loss IN life, not just a loss OF life. For some, the depths of grief might be caused by the death of a loved one, for others, it might be the loss of a job or relationship or a life-altering medical diagnosis. What moves us into grief is unique. As followers of Jesus, we are given a way to work through grief and take our deepest pain, hurts, sorrow, and longings to our Father. It's called lament.

In his book "Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament," author Mark Vroegop describes lament as a "minor key song". He further explains that lament is the way Christians grieve. Learning to lament doesn't change our circumstances, but it can teach us how to process and live with our grief in a biblical way that honors God. We'll heal and grow through our lamenting. It is good to bring our pain to God. He can handle it, and he invites us to share our pain with him, so that we can walk with him through it. He can handle it.

"The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit." Psalm 34:18

Perhaps deep grief is just a memory for you right now. Maybe that season has passed, and the pain of the loss feels different now. Or perhaps your grief is still fresh like a gaping, open wound. Wherever you find yourself at this moment, the Father sees you and loves you. It might be painful to examine your grief and reflect on the circumstances and memories. If you find yourself overwhelmed throughout this plan, please pause and take a moment to talk to the Father. Reach out to someone you trust. We aren't meant to grieve alone.

Journaling and writing out your thoughts and feelings is a great way to process the hard things of life. This week as you work through this plan use a journal or even the notes app on your phone to write your thoughts as you work through the "Ask Yourself and Journal" section.

Ask Yourself and Journal:

- What am I currently grieving? What is a situation in my life where I grieved?
- How do I feel God's closeness in my current suffering? How did I feel God's closeness during that time?

Pause to Pray: *Father God, this (insert name of event/situation that has caused you pain and suffering), hurts me so much. I know that I can't continue without your closeness. Father, I know you're here with me. Open my heart and mind to receive your care especially when I'm hurting…*

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Day 2: The Same God
Scripture: Hebrews 13:8, John 16:33

Reflection: As present-day readers of the Bible we have a unique perspective because we know how the story ends. *Jesus*. He came down to earth and lived among sinners and ultimately died to set us free from our sin. He's promised that there will come a day when death will be defeated once and for all. Pain, suffering, grief, and loss will be no more.

"But take heart, I have overcome the world" - Jesus

Tough times and periods of suffering and grief are a harsh reality that we face in this broken world. But there is good news – Jesus has overcome it all. That is the hope we can cling to when life feels too hard. For the time being, we can lean into God and His word in the Bible to guide us on this life journey.
The Old Testament teaches us a lot about the practice of lament so that's where we'll spend a lot of our time in this study. We'll be observing how different people throughout scripture (even Jesus!) lamented in their times of grief.

Ask Yourself and Journal:
- What does it look like for me to "take heart" during the hard times?
- What did I learn about God in the passages I read?
- What are some attributes that I could use to describe Him?

Pray: *Jesus, I don't always see your plan and purpose during times of pain and suffering. But I choose to trust that your ways are always better. Open my heart and my mind to your will and your ways. Help me to draw closer to you in those moments when I feel overwhelmed.*

DAY 3: Job Suffers
Scripture: Job 1:1, Job 1:13-22, Job 2:7-8, Job 3:1

Reflection: Job's story in scripture is one we often associate with deep suffering and grief. And with good reason. He suffered a lot. The Bible tells us that Job was "*blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil,"* (Job 1:1). Yet Job loses everything. All of his livestock are either killed or stolen, his servants are killed, and a "great wind" killed all of his children. That wasn't even all of it. Eventually, Job is stricken with extremely painful sores all over his body. His suffering was immense and unending. Job's story shows that many different hardships and circumstances in life can lead us to grief. As was customary during that time, Job's friends come to sit with him, and they did not even recognize him. His pain had changed his whole person. Initially, Job doesn't speak out against God. But then it becomes too much to bear, and Job laments.

"Lament is how we learn to live between the poles of a hard life and God's goodness. It is an opportunity to remind our hearts about God's faithfulness in the past, especially when the immediate events of life are overwhelmingly negative,"
Mark Vroegop, "Deep Clouds, Dark Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament"

To practice Biblical lament is to turn to God in prayer. When the pain becomes too much and Job can't handle it anymore, he "*opened his mouth*." Job cries out to God questioning the very purpose of his life. How can one be born just to suffer this deeply?

Ask Yourself and Journal:

- :=What does Job 1:1 teach me about suffering?
- What pain/grief/loss do I need to open my mouth about and bring to God?

Pray: *God, I am hurting. (Insert situation) is causing me pain and suffering. I don't understand why this is happening. I feel…..*

DAY 4: Job Lifts Up His Complaints
Scripture: Job 3:20-26, Job 6:11-13, Job 10:2, Job 11:4-6, Job 16:2, Galations 6:2

Reflection: As we continue through Job's story, it makes sense that he would have something to say about the pain and suffering that he's facing. In fact, he has A LOT to say about it. As he's with his friends they all take turns trying to come up with reasons for why Job's pain is so deep. Job has listened to his friends suggest all kinds of scenarios as to why it would be that he has suffered so greatly. Mostly they assume that he MUST have done something against God to deserve such pain in his life. Job continues to defend himself because he knows that nothing in his past leads to the reality he's now facing.

One important lesson that we can learn here from Job's friends is what not to say. Part of our human nature is to say something or to try to fix a problem when someone close to us is hurting. The reality is that sometimes it's better to say nothing and acknowledge that many things are not fixable here on earth. We need to learn how to sit with others in their grief and allow them to feel what they feel and experience what they experience. To grieve and be sad are God-given emotions. It's ok to feel those things. We can lament with others without trying to explain away their pain, or trying to figure out the meaning of their loss.

In the practice of lament, we are invited to take our complaints to the Father. Lamenting allows us to move toward hope even in the midst of our pain.

"Faith does not eliminate questions. But faith knows where to take them." Elisabeth Elliot, wife of missionary Jim Elliot who was killed by natives he was ministering to in Ecuador in the 1950s.

Ask Yourself and Journal:

- What complaints do I need to pray out to God?
- How can I be a better friend to someone who is grieving?
- How can I lament with those around me?

Pray: Choose a portion of Job's laments from today's passages and use them to write your own lament, for yourself or for a friend.

DAY 5: God Responds and Job is Restored
Scripture: Job 38:4-7, Job 38:16-18, Job 40:10-14, Job 42:16-17

Reflection: Throughout nearly 40 chapters of this book, Job has questioned God a lot. He's asked God a lot of questions. Making a request is a crucial part of the lamenting process. And now it's time for God to respond to Job.

The interesting thing about God's response is that it's really not what Job is asking for. He's asking to understand why all of these things have happened to him. He's lived a God-honoring life and yet he's still suffered greatly. How can that be? In our own moments of grief, we might do the same thing. Have you ever cried out "WHY?" or sat with a friend as they said "WHY GOD" about something hard in their life. Questions are a natural response when we don't understand.

God takes this opportunity to remind Job who He is. God not so subtly reminds Job that he knows a very tiny piece of a very large picture. A large picture that God created and has full control over. Job is being reminded that he can trust that God knows what he's doing. God lets Job know that we live in an incredible world, and it WAS designed to be perfect, but its broken state cannot prevent our suffering. He's not giving Job a clear answer as to WHY suffering is happening. But He's trustworthy and His plan is always better. Even when we can't see what it is.

Ask Yourself and Journal:

- Do I trust that God has a plan even when things aren't going how I pictured?
- What are some things in my life right now that I need to fully hand over to God's plan?

Pray: Pray the prayer Jesus teaches us in Matthew 6:9-13, *Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen.*

GOOD GRIEF: Learning to Lament in the Psalms
October 2022
Week 2

Day 1: Lament in the Psalms
Scripture: Psalm 10

Reflection:

"Lament is how we endure. It's how we trust. It's how we wait." Mark Vroegop

In a world full of hurt and suffering, and periods of deep grief, it can be easy to get lost in our pain. And let's be honest – all we have to do is turn on the TV or scroll through social media to see just how much pain and suffering there is around us at any given moment. Each one of us has experienced something that has caused us to grieve (and if you haven't yet, this is a good time to prepare for when you do!) The practice of lamenting doesn't change the circumstances that cause us to grieve, but it can lead us toward trusting God in new ways. That is the beauty of suffering. If we allow ourselves to sit in our pain and bring it to God and let him transform us, something more beautiful will always emerge.

Last week we learned about Job and his story of grief and lament. He cried out to God a lot and brought his requests to the Father. Though God doesn't give him answers about the cause of his suffering, God does remind Job that he's in control and his plan is always better.

This week we're going to spend time in the Psalms. The book of Psalms is known for its many lament poems and songs. Some are meant to deal with individual lament, and others focus on lament within a community of people. Most of these laments were written by David. He suffered and grieved a lot throughout his life. The Psalms deal with how we can respond to the suffering in our lives. They help to give words to our suffering. It's believed that the Psalms were written to help those who sang them learn to trust the Lord. And we see throughout the Psalms just how many different circumstances lead us to lament.

In Psalm 10 the author is lamenting injustice- he feels deep grief because of discrimination against the poor and those unable to defend themselves.

Ask Yourself and Journal:

- Recall a time in your life that you felt grieved by the injustice that you experienced or witnessed happening to others. How did you feel? Write out some different thoughts/emotions you may have experienced.
- What injustice do you need to lament right now?

Pause to Pray: *O Lord, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice…* continue your cry of lament.

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Day 2: Yet, But, However
Scripture: Psalm 13

Reflection: The English language is fascinating and the use of specific words and sentence structure can completely change the meaning of a statement. One of the unique attributes of the Psalms is the use of specific literary themes to help drive home the point the writer is hoping to make.

In his book "Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy," Mark Vroegop teaches that the use of words such as "but", "however," and "yet," within a lament show an intentional shift from the cause of the lament to trusting God.

It's within this structure in Psalm 13 that we can see how the author's despair can move into awe and adoration of his Father. As we read through the pain, we begin to see the author turn from deep pain into praise and trust for God. Laying out our hurts, questions, and pain opens the door for those strong emotions to be transferred into trust. The source of David's pain doesn't change as he's writing out his lament, but it allows him to lean into the source of all joy and hope – his Father God.

If we allow ourselves to see the "yet" or the "but" in our suffering, we begin to turn our pain into rejoicing and praise.

Ask Yourself and Journal:
- How can I embrace the "yet" in my current circumstances?
- Write some of your own "yet" statements. Example – *I am hurting, yet I know you're in control. I don't understand why (insert situation) happened, yet I believe your plan is better.*

Pause to Pray: *Father God, please help me to see every "yet," "but," and "however" so that I can trust you in the midst of life's circumstances.*

Day 3: It is well
Scripture: Psalm 22

Reflection:

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Psalm 22:1

The pain in this Psalm written by David is palpable. His pain is so great, and he's not felt relief from his agony or heard answers to his cries. David feels completely alone. He's broken down from the ridicule he's experiencing. [Interesting to note: These are the same words that Jesus will cry out to his Father while on the cross on the day of His crucifixion in Matthew 27:46.]

David is wondering where his God is.

"Be not far from me, for trouble is near and there is none to help." Psalm 22:11

And after some more crying out and requests for God to show up comes the praise.

"I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation, I will praise you." Psalm 22:22

Our grief can turn to trust when we go to God and express our pain and desires to him. The outcome might not be what we want, but the beauty in trusting God is that it doesn't have to be. David recognizes and acknowledges his pain as part of the greater story that God is writing in his people.

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.
Horatio G. Spafford, 1873

Spafford suffered immense losses in a short period. He was an attorney and real estate investor who endured great financial loss during the great Chicago fire in 1871. Not long after, his four-year-old son died from scarlet fever. To help his family heal, Spafford sent his wife and four daughters to Europe by boat to recover. On the way, the boat sank in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean and his four daughters perished. His wife was alone. As Spafford journeyed to Europe to be with his grieving wife, he penned the words to this now widely known and widely sung hymn. Even amid his greatest and deepest suffering, his lament becomes his peace because of the trust he has in God.

Everyone's grief story is different, but we can find hope in watching others who choose to trust even when their circumstances are beyond understanding. Our lament leads us toward trusting God.

Ask Yourself and Journal:
- What did I learn about God in these passages?
- Do I live my life like I truly believe "it is well" despite what life might bring at me?
- If the answer to the above question is no, what are some next steps I can take?

Pause to Pray: *God, sometimes I feel so alone when I'm hurting. Sometimes I forget that no matter how I feel, you're still right there. Help me to see your hand in my life and trust you in new ways.*

Day 4: The Lord is my Shepherd
Scripture: Psalm 23

Reflection:
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me. Psalm 23:4

Our lament prayers allow us to see God as the protector and Good Shepard. Our lament prayers allow us to turn to God in our darkest and most painful moments. Our lament prayers allow us to trust God when we can't make sense of our pain and suffering in a broken and fallen world.

Throughout the last few days, we've seen through the Psalms what it looks like to lament with God. It begins with turning to God through our prayers, which leads to laying out our complaints, then asking questions, and finally toward trust and praise.

The work of lamenting is hard. It's hard to examine and recall the parts of life's experiences that have been the most painful. But it's also essential and beautiful work. There is transformational power in allowing God to take the darkest parts of our lives and redeem them in ways only He can.

It's surely no coincidence that Psalm 23 comes directly following the particularly anguished lament we read yesterday in Psalm 22. We need to be reminded that even if we feel alone, discouraged, and in the depths of despair, there is a Good Shepard right there waiting for us. The work of lamenting helps us to accept and live in God's goodness. Don't give up. Do the hard work of lamenting and let God do the work in you.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Psalm 23:6

Ask Yourself and Journal:

- How do David's words in Psalm 23 turn me toward hope in God?
- How can I receive God's goodness in my life today?

Pause to Pray: Use Psalm 23 as your prayer guide and in your own words, add a few lines about choosing hope in God.

Day 5: **Jesus is Better**
Scripture: Psalm 117, Hebrews 6:19-20, Revelation 21:4

Reflection:

"Suffering is unbearable if you aren't certain that God is for you and with you." Pastor Tim Keller

We've talked a lot about how our lamenting and taking our grief directly to God allows us to experience Him differently and trust Him in new ways. The reality is this – we have to work hard to keep pushing forward in times of grief. The pain and loss in our worldly lives can feel too overwhelming otherwise. It's easy to get stuck in our grief. And let's be honest, that would be understandable. But Jesus tells us there's a better way. He was sent down to earth by his Father in heaven to be the better way.

We don't have to be destroyed by the circumstances in this world. We can live in anticipation of the restoration that we'll someday experience because of our Savior. We have to choose that perspective, though. A better way is available to us. Jesus wants more for us than our pain and suffering. And by remaining close to Him, close to His word, we can live a great life even through our pain.

Next week we'll look deeper into Jesus's life and how he grieved and lamented during his time on earth. But for now, let's end this week with eyes set on Jesus because he's always better.

Ask Yourself and Journal:

- Looking back on a hard circumstance in your life, how can you see now that Jesus is better?
- Write in your journal "Jesus is better…" and then make a list of all the things you need to claim His deliverance over.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, I believe you are better than any circumstance that comes my way. Help me to believe that and live that out every day.*

GOOD GRIEF: Learning to Lament with Jesus
October 2022
Week 3

DAY 1 Jesus Wept
Scripture: John 11:35 ; Isaiah 53:3

Reflection: Jesus wept. He did. He was fully God and mysteriously, fully man. And He felt sorrow and grief. And He wept. We'll dig into the story tomorrow, but for now, just sit in this truth. The Son of God, the Son of Man, the Savior of the world, He felt what you feel. When you weep, remember that He wept. When you fall on your face in agony, Jesus felt that too. When you wish that everything could be different, Jesus did too. When your heart breaks for what used to be, Jesus' heart breaks too.
Our God isn't cold and out of touch. Our Savior isn't aloof and uncaring. Jesus lived and walked a human life in this broken world. He felt all the emotions and He felt them deeply. He understands pain. He understands sorrow. He is acquainted with suffering and grief.

When you need to weep, remember that Jesus wept. And He is with you now. He weeps with you.

Ask Yourself:
-Have I ever thought about the emotions of Jesus?
-What does it mean for me that my Savior felt the emotions that I feel?

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, You are fully God and fully man. And You felt the emotions of a man. Jesus, You wept! When my heart breaks, when the tears fall, You understand my sadness. I am so grateful that You know…*

Take a Next Step: If you haven't done it in a while, give yourself permission to cry. For the loss of a loved one, for the loss of a job, for the bad news, for the suffering of a friend. Let the tears fall and know that your Savior is there beside you.

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DAY 2 Lament for a Friend
Scripture: John 11:1-44; 1 Timothy 2:1-5

Reflection: There is so much to discover in this chapter of John's gospel. Jesus deliberately delays going to Lazarus' sickbed. Why?

> "*for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe*." (John 11:15)

Jesus demonstrates once again that He has the power to do incredible signs and wonders, even raising someone from the dead! And this leads many to believe that He is the Messiah, but not everyone believes. This miracle spurs the religious leaders into their final plot to kill Him.

Jesus also clearly declares once again that He is God when He says to Martha,

"*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?*" (John 11:25-26)

But the center of this story is a sick friend. Lazarus, friend of Jesus. And Lazarus dies. He's gone. His sisters have lost their brother. Jesus has lost his friend. And in that moment, when Jesus sees the tomb, He weeps. His heart breaks for the loss of someone He loved. His heart breaks because the sin and brokenness of this world have been condemning loved ones to death since Genesis 3. He weeps because when He created the world, He created it to live and thrive in abundant life. He didn't create it to die. And while Jesus knows that He is going to raise Lazarus back to life, He weeps at the havoc sin has caused- beloved brothers, and beloved friends will continue to die. Lazarus will die again. Jesus himself will die. This grieves the heart of God.

But don't forget the gospel. God has made a way. He has defeated death. Though Jesus died, He rose from that grave. And though you will die, and your loved one will die, you also can be raised to new life. Abundant, eternal life in the presence of your Savior, Jesus Christ.

Ask Yourself:
-Do I believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life?
-Even as I grieve, lament, and weep for this broken and dying world, who can I pray for that needs to know that Jesus is the resurrection and the life?

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, your heart breaks to see the sorrow and death of your creation. Each person you made is meant to live an abundant life with you! Break my heart for what breaks yours, Jesus! Open my eyes to see the hurting and the tears of others. Give me boldness and compassion to share the hope of salvation in your name with them…*

Take a Next Step: Set an alarm for 3 pm today and pray for 3 hurting loved ones for 3 minutes using John 11:25-26 and 1 Timothy 2:1-6.

DAY 3 Lament for Jerusalem
Scripture: Luke 13:34; Matthew 23:37; Luke 19:41-44; Isaiah 5:4

Reflection: In the story of Scripture, God chooses a people, the descendants of Abraham, and He calls them His people. God leads them. He saves them. And He promises that they will become a great nation, and live in a great land, and will be a great blessing to all the other nations. These people promise God that they will obey Him and follow Him and serve Him forever.

God is a promise keeper. The Israelites become a great nation and the land of Israel is a great land. And God's presence dwells with them in their great city of Jerusalem.

But God's people are not promise-keepers. They compromise. They sin. They replace God and His wisdom with kings and their own wisdom. Rather than flourish, they fade.

In the time of Jesus, God's people are living under the oppression of the Roman Emperor. They're hoping for a Messiah. Hopeful that God will rescue them again as He did long ago from Egypt when Moses led them out.

Enter Jesus. Immanuel. God with us. God incarnate. God's Word made flesh. Not only has God sent The Messiah, but The Messiah is God Himself. He has come to rescue His people. He has come to lead them out. Not out from Roman rule, but out from under the slavery of their own sin. This is the greater exodus! Jesus is the greater Moses!
But wait, the people aren't lining up to follow. Instead, most of them think He's crazy or dangerous or yet another wannabe messiah. God's people aren't listening to His Word. And so, the Savior stands and weeps for His people. He weeps for their lack of understanding. He weeps that they are blind to His ways. He weeps, for even though He is about to show them The Way, so many will never follow.

Ask Yourself:
-In what ways am I blind to God's word and God's work in my life?
-How can I pray for God's people, for His church, to remain faithful to following Him?

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, how we must break your heart! Yet, You have shown your people great mercy. You died so that we don't have to be trapped in our sin. You rose from the dead so that we too can rise to new life with you. May my heart break for my sin, yet rejoice in your saving grace…*

Take a Next Step: Pray for your church today. Pray for leaders who follow closely after Jesus and for the congregation to be hungry for the words and the ways of Jesus. Invite a friend to pray with you!

DAY 4 Lament for God's Plan
Scripture: Genesis 3:13-15; Isaiah 53:4-6; Luke 22:39-46; Hebrews 5:7-9

Reflection: God created a perfect world. Satan came with temptation. Adam and Eve fell to that temptation. And God promised that one day He will defeat Satan. But how will God accomplish this? How will He rescue people from their sin, from the destruction of Satan's lies and temptations?

> "*He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel*." (Genesis 13:15)

One day a Son of Man will come, and He will defeat sin, defeat death, defeat Satan. And that Son's name is Jesus. But how will Jesus accomplish this? He will take the curse of death from us and take it on himself.

"*But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed*." (Isaiah 53:5 NLT)

And here Jesus is. The night that He will be betrayed. He had dinner with His disciples. He told them, yet again, that He would have to die, but that He would be raised to life. They're not getting it. He needs to get out of that room and talk to His Father. He needs to pray.

By tomorrow evening He will be dead. He knows this is what's coming. He also knows that it will not be painless. It will be humiliating and very, very painful. As a man, this will be the hardest thing He has done- willingly surrender himself to the worst death imaginable.

And Jesus gets on His knees to pray. He sweats blood. He pours out His heart and soul to the Father. And the Son of Man laments for God's plan. Does it have to be this way? Does He have to be betrayed? Does He have to surrender? Does He have to be beaten and scourged? Does he have to die this kind of death? This plan is not fun. This plan hurts. This plan is hard. Yet, in His agony, Jesus prays…

"*Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine*." (Luke 22:42 NLT)

God's will is good. God's will is often hard. But God's will is good. Jesus knew this. Jesus went to the cross for this. The will of God has saved your life in Jesus' Name.

Ask Yourself:
-When have I found it hard to follow God's will?
-How can I pray like Jesus when the will and way of God are so hard?

Pause to Pray: *God, this plan of yours is so hard! I have cried. I have asked You, begged You, to do this in a different way. Yet here I am. And here is hard. With all my heart I want your good and perfect will above my own. Give me the courage to walk this hard road…*

Take a Next Step: You don't need to walk the hard way alone! Jesus even asked his disciples to stay awake and pray with Him. Ask a trusted friend, mentor, or family member to commit to praying for you and with you over the week or month.

DAY 5 It's Not Supposed to Be This Way
Scripture: Psalm 13:1-6; Romans 8:18-25; Revelation 21:1-6

Reflection: With every news headline, every emergency siren, every phone call in the night, every diagnosis, and every loss, our hearts break. We grieve over all the despair and darkness. We are brokenhearted for those who are hurting and lost. In Paul's letter to the Romans, he writes that even creation is groaning under the brokenness of this world. All of us, even the trees and the elephants and the otters, know that IT'S NOT SUPPOSED TO BE THIS WAY!

Praise God, there is a way out of the suffering and the grief. Praise God there is more beyond this life. Jesus is the Way. Jesus is the Life. How long will He delay in coming back? No one knows the answer to that question. While we wait, we wait with groaning. But we also wait with hope. We are not abandoned. We are not forsaken. God continues to work miracles. Jesus continues to transform lives. In tragedy and among the heartbroken, the Spirit of God moves and works to call all men and women and children to the Father.

Because one day, one glorious day, He will come. And our tears will cease. And the hurt will stop. And life will be without end. Come, Lord Jesus!

Ask Yourself:
-How have I seen God working in the hard things of my life?
-Am I prepared for Jesus to return? Who in my life needs to know that He is their Savior?

Pause to Pray: "*You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever!*" Psalm 30:11-12

Take a Next Step: During your commute, while you take a walk, as you do your chores, listen to worship music that will lift your eyes from the hard stuff to the Savior.

GOOD GRIEF: Learning to Lament in Lamentations
October 2022
Week 4

DAY 1 Feel the weight
Scripture: Lamentations 1:1-22

Reflection: Sometimes the losses we grieve are unexpected and unexplainable; the tragic accident, the dreadful diagnosis. Sometimes they are so very personal, and their turmoil is hidden deep in our hearts; a betrayal of trust or an unrealized dream. But the Book of Lamentations grants a look at another kind of situation; written to process the all-encompassing grief of the nation of Israel after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., this collection of poems laments the catastrophic consequences of their longstanding rebellion against their covenant with God.

Like all scripture, this book serves both then and now purposes – it gave the people of that time a framework for mourning in the midst of an incredibly long and difficult season, but it also provides instruction for those who came after, including us. While it may be difficult to read, there is much to learn about lament and faith by staying engaged through the entire book.

The writer of Lamentations spends a lot of time looking around at the devastation and giving voice to the pain of all that had happened. It may seem excessive or repetitive, but the depth and breadth of his descriptions are actually a gift. They force us to slow down and feel the oppressive weight of the situation. They memorialize the moment. The poems represent the original sorrow of the Israelites well, but they also serve as a powerful reminder to the generations that follow. Clearly and honestly remembering mistakes of the past, and the consequences they brought, can help us avoid following the same paths. Without such potent recollections, it becomes far too easy to gloss over history and minimize the importance of its lessons.

Ask Yourself:

-When has remembering a past mistake helped you to make a better decision going forward?

-How can this type of instructive reflection be valuable in your family, your church, or your community?

Pause to Pray: *Father God, help me to slow down today and be fully present. Teach me to take time to embrace the good and the hard and to look for your hand in both. Help me to memorialize important moments and learn all that you desire to teach me...*

Living Lament:-Grab your journal and take some time to feel the weight of a loss you have experienced recently and express it on paper. It doesn't have to be huge or life-altering to hold value in this place. Practicing lament in small losses helps us develop a language and method for facing much harder situations that may come in the future.

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DAY 2 The Problem of Sin
Scripture: Lamentations 2:1-22; Leviticus 26:23-33 and 40-45; Acts 1:6-8

Reflection: The second chapter of Lamentations doubles down on the message of the first, continuing to lament the pain of enduring the Lord's anger and judgment. If this was the only bit of scripture we had available to us, we might begin to assume that this defines God's character. Fortunately, that is not the case. Looking back to the passage in Leviticus we can see that the pain and destruction of Lamentations are only part of a much larger story. When God brought the Israelites out of Egypt and began to prepare them to occupy the promised land, He clearly laid out the terms of their collective covenant relationship with Him. He made them aware of the blessings that would flow from obedience and the curses that would result from rebellion. While the destruction of Jerusalem was devastating, it was actually a testament to the holiness and righteousness of God. He faithfully fulfilled His word through their discipline. As the writer of Lamentations recounted this, the people could acknowledge and repent of their communal unfaithfulness. It was important for the nation to mourn together the destructive effects of their collective sin.

God loved His people then and He loves His people now. Although the cost was high, getting their full attention and addressing their sin was essential to the long arc of His plan for the ultimate restoration of all mankind. And we know that complete restoration is coming through Jesus and the Holy Spirit because God IS faithful.

Ask Yourself:
-What role do you think apathy played in the downfall of Jerusalem?
-What impact do you think collective mourning had on the Israelites going forward?
-As you look around your community today, what cultural trends do you find concerning?
-How can you let the lessons of Lamentations impact the way you respond?

Pause to Pray: *Holy God, I worship you today for you are righteous and true, faithful to every word you have spoken. Awaken my heart to the ways that I have failed to uphold your holiness in _____. Enliven your Spirit within me to share your perfect love with those around me.*

Living Lament: Grab your journal! Try your hand at writing a short lament prayer specifically addressing a current point of grief in your community. Maybe God is leading you to pray for an area of rebellion against His Word, a lack of love, or_____. Then reach out to a friend or two who share this concern and find a time to lament together.

DAY 3 Everyone is hurting
Scripture: Lamentations 4:1-22, Lamentations 1:18-19, Lamentations 2:20-21

Reflection: Pain and suffering tend to narrow our focus. When hard times hit, our human nature kicks in and we are tempted to turn inward, thinking only about our own personal struggles. But the writer of Lamentations took the time to notice that everyone around him was grieving and suffering in some way; young and old, rich and poor, princes and priests. Some died by the sword, and some experienced famine. Everyone was hurting. As he composed his lament, God helped him see the pain of others and their unifying brokenness. As he wept for his own losses, he also wept for his neighbors and the

collective pain of their nation as a whole. Through this, we learn that lament can help us really **see** each other and authentically grieve together. There is comfort and healing in that place.

Ask Yourself:
-When have you walked through a shared season of suffering with others?
-How did mourning together help the healing process?
-How did it impact your relationship with each other?

Pause to Pray: *Merciful Father, I thank you for seeing me – all that I am and all that I'm meant to be. And I thank you for never leaving me, no matter how far I might wander. Soften my heart, God, to begin to see the people around me with that kind of love.*

Living Lament: It's possible that you keep a prayer list of some sort, to remember to pray for friends and family facing difficulties. As you pray for them today, try to lean in a bit deeper. Ask God to grant you revelation not only about the situation they are facing but the pain and grief surrounding it as well. Once you have tuned your heart in this way, reach out and offer to connect and pray *with* them.

DAY 4 The Source of True Hope
Scripture: Lamentations 3:1-66

Reflection: Lament involves talking to God with gut-wrenching honesty about what is going on and how we feel about it, but it doesn't stop there. Lament is incomplete if we don't then hand that pain over to God and trust Him to lead us through it. As we learned in week two of this plan, every lament has a pivotal moment that shifts our attention from our mourning to God's mercy. The pain doesn't necessarily stop, and the situation isn't necessarily resolved, but we begin to see hope again.

Lamentations 3:21-23 reveals one of these moments. Notice that it is nestled deep within his recounting of affliction, confusion, and pain. And notice that nothing in his situation has changed. He is essentially still standing in the smoldering ruins of Jerusalem, death and suffering all around him. And YET, he chooses to intentionally turn his attention and thoughts to the same God who has allowed that destruction.

Ask Yourself:
-What exactly is the author of Lamentations "calling to mind" in verse 21?
-What does this reveal about the source of true hope?
-What are some other places where you are tempted to seek hope in?

Pause to Pray: *My faithful God, as the tasks and trials of today swirl around my thoughts, teach me to focus my attention on you. Forgive me for seeking help and hope in _____. Encourage my heart to find hope in You alone.*

Living Lament: Redirecting our thoughts during hard situations is not easy! But the scriptures give us many examples that can help. Take some time to look up several lament transitions: 'yet,' 'but,' and 'even so'. Write them out or even memorize a couple so that you have a starting point the next time you find yourself needing to refocus. Here are a few possibilities to get you started: Psalm 13:5; Psalm 31:14; Psalm 52:8; Psalm 71:14; Psalm 86:15 ; Psalm 102:12, 26-27 ; Habakkuk 3:17-19

DAY 5 Worth the Wait
Scripture: Lamentations 5:1-22; Lamentations 3:25-27

Reflection: The book of Lamentations doesn't end like the story of Job – nothing has been resolved or restored. The nation is still grieving. Questions are still unanswered. Restoration is not yet even on the horizon. We don't tend to like that. We like resolution. We like to have a plan and take action.

But part of the wisdom of Lamentations is found in learning to wait on God. The arc of His story does not end in death, darkness, and despair. It ends in victory. In the meantime, the practice of lament teaches us to: Talk to Him. Express all the emotions and questions to Him. Repent and seek forgiveness from Him. And then **trust** Him to be faithful to what He has promised.

Trust is confident expectation, faithful reliance; it almost always involves waiting. It means acknowledging that He is in control, and we are not. While we remain engaged in conversation with Him, we can stop striving, stop trying to figure it out, and let Him do His work. As we place our hope in Him and rest in His presence we will find that His salvation is worth the wait.

Ask Yourself:
-What do you find most difficult about waiting on God?
-How do you think the practice of lament can help you find healing in that place?

Pause to Pray: Pray through Isaiah 40:27-31 as you wait on the Lord today.

Living Lament:

Grab your journal! As we wrap up this week, spend a little time reflecting on things that God has taught you through seasons of waiting.

GOOD GRIEF: Learning to Lament Your Sin
October 2022
Week 5

DAY 1 Don't Turn Away
Scripture: 2 Samuel 11**;** 2 Samuel 12:9-14; Psalm 51:1-19

Reflection: Through the first four parts of this Learning to Lament plan we have seen that the situations leading to and surrounding our seasons of grief vary widely. This week we are looking at how to lament when the pain and sorrow, interwoven with guilt and shame, are the result of our own personal sin.

Our passages in 2 Samuel 11 and 12 reveal a series of King David's sinful decisions, including pursuing another man's wife for his own and ultimately having that man killed as he attempted to conceal his actions. David's sin did not go unnoticed by God – He sent the prophet Nathan to confront David with the weight of it and describe the consequences that would follow. David wrote Psalm 51 as he became keenly aware of what he had done, and there is much to learn through how he responds.

Since Adam and Eve and their coverings of leaves (Genesis 3:7), we have all encountered the temptation to hide when we have done wrong. Whether trying to avoid the consequences or overcome with shame, our human response is to duck our heads, shut our mouths, and avoid all eye contact. Although David had tried the avoidance tactic when Bathsheba first became pregnant, at this moment, confronted by God, he did something different. He turned *toward* God and started praying. In doing so, he took the first step in penitent lament.

David began his lament by addressing God and declaring whom he knew God to be; merciful, loving, and compassionate. He followed this with immediate recognition of who *he* was; a sinner. Part of the power of lament is found in resisting the urge to hide and instead being willing to talk to God - and doing so with deep level honesty about who God is and who we actually are.

Ask Yourself:
-What is your first response to being confronted by something you have done wrong?
-How has guilt or shame changed your conversation with God at that moment?
-What can help you keep that line of communication open no matter how badly you would like to hide?

Pause to Pray: *Father God, you know me. You know my wayward heart and all the ways that I sin against you. Have mercy in this moment God, according to your unfailing love. Help me resist the temptation to hide or ignore _____ and turn toward you for guidance instead. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Living Lament: Grab your journal! Take some time to write about whom you know God to be. How has he shown himself faithful in your life? In what ways has His love become real to you? What other characteristics come to mind when you think about Him?

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DAY 2 Confessions of the Heart
Scripture: Psalm 51:3-5; Psalm 32:1-11

Reflection: Classic lament prayers begin with addressing God and then move into a time of expressing the pain, frustration, and fear of the moment. When the pain involves facing our own sin and its consequences, this time of expression will likely include confession as well.

While it's easy to imagine that David was reflecting on the specific mistakes that he made, maybe even replaying them in his mind like many of us do every day, it is important to notice that his lament acknowledges his recent sin without excuse or justification and then shifts his focuses to something much bigger than the acts of disobedience themselves. He traces his sin back to its root – his sinful nature – and recognizes that his offenses are actually against God. This is an important shift to make as we lament our sin and its ripple effects in our lives. Repenting of the action tends to focus our attention on its situational consequences while repenting of the *heart* behind the act focuses our attention on restoring right relationship with God. David understood that acknowledging the act was necessary but that ultimate peace and healing would come through the restoration of the relationship.

Ask Yourself:
-How would you describe the difference between grieving the consequences of sin and mourning sin itself?
-How do you think David's approach impacted his ability to process his pain?

Pause to Pray: *Heavenly Father, I thank you for being a God who is present with His people; that you desire to be near me and active in my life. Today I acknowledge _____ and invite you to show me your heart for this situation. Help me humbly receive your correction and take the steps you place before me. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Living Lament: As you journal today, talk to God about how you process your mistakes and sinful attitudes. Honestly reflect on how you might be tempted to lament the situational consequences of sin rather than sin itself. Confess any wayward perspectives you may hold related to this.

DAY 3 Behold! There is hope…
Scripture: Psalm 51:6; Isaiah 55:6-11; Jeremiah 29:10-14; Romans 8:26-28

Reflection: Depending on the Bible translation you are reading, Psalm 51:6 begins with a word like behold, yet, or but. With this transition, David reminded himself that no matter what he had done or why he did it – God's ultimate plan is for good. Not only is God's plan good, but He has given, and will continue to give, David what he needed to live in it. David confessed his failure to obey God's word, and yet he knew that God is faithful to His promises and therefore he had hope that God would continue to work things together to accomplish His good plans, even through David himself.

Recognizing this momentary remembrance in the middle of David's lament is essential for all of us who grieve our rebellions and mistakes. As we stand in the messes we make, it can be difficult to get beyond the guilt and shame. We can get stuck in the brokenness and our inability to change what has happened. We know we don't deserve God's grace and mercy. And *yet*, God has a really good plan for His people and He *will* bring that plan to fruition.

In Jeremiah 29:10-14, the prophet Jeremiah spoke the word of the Lord to His people while they were in exile, reaping the consequences of their sin. They had wandered far from God and yet God had not forgotten or forsaken them. He reminded them- His plans for His people are good and all that He promised would be restored as they returned to Him with all their hearts.

Let the truth of God's heart for His people encourage you today. No matter how far you may have wandered, if you return to Him, there is hope. There is always hope.

Ask Yourself:
-David believed that God desires faithfulness and truth and that He teaches us wisdom. How do you think he arrived at that conclusion?
-What are some examples from your own faith journey that would support this belief? How do you think this points to God's good plans for His people?

Pause to Pray: *Father God, I thank you today for the good plans you have for me. Even in _____, I choose to remember that your ways are not my ways and that no matter what I might see with my eyes, your word will be accomplished. Help me to always find my hope in you. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Living Lament: Spend some time reflecting on the faithfulness of God. If you have any areas that seem hopeless in this season, confess your fears and then intentionally contrast the things you see with your eyes with the truth of God's word. As you write out your confessions, use those transition words (behold, yet, but, even so) to shift your focus from the hard to the hope.

DAY 4 Trust the Truth
Scripture: Psalm 51:7-15; Luke 15:18-24

Reflection: After David turned toward God, confessed his sin, and acknowledged that God designed a better way for him to live, David started making his requests. His lament asked God to take several specific actions – purge, hide, create, restore, deliver, open… Notice that each of these requests is paired with a faith-filled expectation. He is confident that if God purges or cleanses him, he *will be* clean. If God hides His face from his sins, David's iniquities *will be* blotted out or forgotten.

In this, we see a model of trust. David wasn't just making desperate pleas; He was identifying what he needed and trusting those things to God. He knew that God has the power and authority to grant these requests and was simultaneously convinced that God wanted the best for him. Seeking God for help would be fruitless if he didn't trust these essential truths.

The story of the Prodigal Son in Luke chapter 15 gives an illustration meant to build our faith in these same truths. After the son had squandered everything he had, he was able to recognize and acknowledge what he truly needed. He knew that his father had the ability and resources to provide these things and so he headed back home. As he humbly returned, he learned that his father was not only willing and able to satisfy his basic needs but that he wanted even more to celebrate their reunion. The prodigal's fallen state became a pathway toward joy and restoration.

As we continue to practice Biblical lament, trusting God with our pain is critical. Trusting that he can handle it, that He can speak into it, that He can deliver us through it. All of it. But even more, trusting that He wants to fully restore us and that He will.

Ask Yourself:
-Reflecting on the list of David's requests, what observations can you make about the types of things he asks for?
-Given the circumstances of his lament, what else might you have expected him to ask of God?
-What can you learn by contrasting the things he included and those he did not?

Pause to Pray: *Father God, I worship you today as Jehovah Jireh – you are my provider. As I come to you with my needs, increase my faith that you are able and willing to act on my behalf. Help me to walk confidently through this time of transformation, knowing that you want what is best for me. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Living Lament: Ask God to search your heart today, to help you see any areas where you doubt his ability or willingness to act on your behalf. Journal through what He shows you.

DAY 5 Ripple Effects
Scripture: Psalm 51:12-19; Psalm 51 heading; Luke 22:32

Reflection: As we close our short study on lamenting our sin with Psalm 51, let's make one final observation. David's lament of his private sin recognizes the ripple effects of his disobedience beyond his own life and seeks to use the personal pain of his failure to lead others in a better way. He commits to teaching fellow sinners God's ways and then, as the human King of God's people, he intercedes for the prosperity of Jerusalem. He understood the close connection between the faithfulness of a king to the blessing of his people and he knew that as a leader and example his failure would have a broader impact on the nation. He asks God to bless the nation despite his shortcomings.

In addition to humbling himself before God and those he would teach directly, notice that David composed this psalm "For the director of music." This indicates that it was intended for use in temple worship services. It was not written for David's private use alone, but also as a worship model for generations to come.

We're not all kings, but we all have influence on the lives of people around us. This means that our sin too will have ripple effects. David's lessons about honesty, submission, and trust serve to remind us that like him our pain can be transformed into a path forward if we will trust God with it. Jesus himself similarly instructed Peter in Luke 22. He knew that Peter would fail – and that would be difficult and painful – but he also knew that the experience could transform Peter and be used to strengthen the kingdom. The practice of Biblical lament is one of the tools we have been given to help us process our pain and allow it to transform us for our good and God's glory.

Ask Yourself:
-What are some of the ripple effects of David's sin in this situation?
-How do you think recognizing those impacted his journey back to obedience?
-How can this help you think about your sin differently?

Pause to Pray: *Heavenly Father, I confess that I don't always think about the broader impact of my sins on my loved ones and neighbors. Please transform my heart so that I may be used by you to strengthen others and be an example of your redemptive mercy. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Living Lament: Invest some time composing your own lament poem today. Think back through the things God has been showing and teaching you this week and pour out your heart on the page.

FOR FURTHER READING & STUDY-

From RightNow Media:

Grief: Involving Your Team During Times of Grief by Henry Cloud

Grieving a Loss by Nancy Guthrie

Anchors for the Soul by John Mark Hicks

Suggested Reading (with Amazon links):

"Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament" by Mark Vroegop

"The Radiant Midnight: Depression Grace and the Gifts of a Dark Place" by Melissa Maimone.

"Prayer in the Night: For Those Who Work or Watch or Weep" by Tish Harrison Warren