GOOD GRIEF
October 2022

Tips for leading your LifeGroup through this series:

Welcome to the Good Grief series! You may feel nervous about leading a LifeGroup through such a heavy topic. But, as you'll discover, this is timely, necessary, and an opportunity to stretch and grow in the Lord. Not only for you as a leader, but for every member of your group. We encourage you to lean into the sermons every week, take notes, and rewatch on Facebook or YouTube if needed! We encourage you to sit with these leader guides in prayer, asking God to lead you, asking for the presence and power of His Spirit as you plan and as you gather. You are uniquely positioned to take a small number of people into the Word of God to discover truth, root out lies, expose blind spots, encourage one another, comfort one another, and allow the Spirit to transform you all *into his image with ever-increasing glory* (2 Cor 3:18).

-Helpful video resources from the LifeGroup Leader email sent September 28th:
Pastor Derek's vision (15:53)
Pastor Sarah's leader encouragement (4:41)
Pastors Derek and Scott talk with Pam Pressler, LPSW, CPLC (22:57)
Pam Pressler Teaching on Grief (22:55)

-This series is unique in that the reading plans are not tied directly to the sermon series- they focus on learning to lament. The LifeGroup guides will pull together both the sermon and reading plan content. Therefore, to get the most out of the series, please encourage your group to work through the reading plans during their chair time so that you can discuss what they're learning even as you reflect on the sermon.

-In order to follow the YouVersion reading plan with your group:
-Encourage all group members to set Grace as "my church" in their YouVersion app. When that is set, you will see our featured plan on the home page every week.
-As the leader, invite members of your group to read the week's featured plan with you. Select "with friends" when you start the Grace featured plan. Select group members or share the link with them.
-Additionally, you can always find links and pdfs for the reading plans at www.whoisgrace.com/read.

Because of the nature of this series, you may encounter a variety of responses from group members. Some may put a wall up. Some may cry every week. Some may clearly need more help than you or the group can offer. You don't have to meet every individual need! From week 1, make it clear that you are

not a therapist and that there are good options for anyone who needs counseling. The goal of group time is to look at scripture and work through God's truth regarding grief, then to build one another up through prayer and encouragement.

-Life Group Tips and Tricks from Pastor Derek:

1- Ministry of presence – show up and listen.
2- Ask what has been most comforting.
3- Later stages of grief can be just as hard as the initial stages.
4- Time doesn't heal all wounds – intentional healing does.

-Helpful Resources to share with your group:

-GET HELP ministry- www.whoisgrace.com/gethelp
-Christian Counseling Associates (CCA)- www.christiancounselingwpa.com
-Pastoral Care- scott@whoisgrace.com; mikecrisman@whoisgrace.com
-Suggested books, studies, and more at www.whoisgrace.com/read

Leader, we are cheering you on! You are not in this alone. If you have any questions about leading your group, please contact your LifeGroup coach. For questions about this plan, contact sarah@whoisgrace.com.

Lord, may the work that you begin in this leader become fruit for the group that they lead.

-Pastor Sarah and the LifeGroup leadership team

GOOD GRIEF: Shock/Denial

READ plan: Learning to Lament with Job
Pastor Derek
October 2, 2022

Life Group Discussion

Encouragement: Not one of us has escaped the experience of loss. Perhaps unlike any other time in our lives, March 2020 through today has been marked by so many losses. Derek said, "Grief is more than the loss OF life, it is about the losses IN life." Take a few minutes to think through your losses. [Give some examples if necessary- loss of a loved one, loss of a job, loss of "normal", etc.] We'll come back to that list.

Desired Outcomes for the Series

1. To help you to discern how you might be grieving and assess how you are managing that grief.
2. Discern how you might help others in your life who are grieving. You are in one of three situations: 1- You know someone in a crisis, 2- you're in a crisis right now, or 3- you're getting ready to go into one (You're not prepared for it, but God wants to prepare you).
3. Practice an ancient biblical tool for grieving called LAMENT
4. Encourage Christian community (LifeGroups) as one of the antidotes for lingering grief.

Scripture:

-Read Isaiah 53:3 and John 16:33- Respond to Derek's assertion that "We live in a world of bad news, but we are a good news people. And that good news came in the form of a person named Jesus. We can expect to be restored through our grief because of who He is and because of what He said."

-Reflect on the 5 stages of Grief. (Remember, these are not linear. They describe aspects of a typical grief response. They do not *prescribe* what you experience.) Are you experiencing one of these?

1- Shock or Denial: "It can't be true." "No, not me."
2- Anger: "Why me?" "This isn't fair!"
3- Bargaining: "God, if You make this better, then I'll never ___ again."
4- Depression: "I've admitted my loss but now a deep sadness has set in."
5- Acceptance: "Life has to go on. But, how? What do I do now?"

-Derek said, "Although things may never be the same for you as they were before, God is still on his throne, and he still loves you, and he still has a path for you to walk out on this earth. **Often the most transformative seasons in our lives involve struggle and loss, and grief**." Can you share an instance of this being true in your life?

-Read Job 2:11-13 and review the signs of shock below. Have you experienced this kind of shock? Have you seen someone you love like this? Reflect on the reaction of Job's friends: They lived in a collectivist culture that celebrated and mourned together. And they did it publicly. Why is grief hard for us (as individuals and as the church) in 21st-century, individualist America?

> The Initial Wave of Shock: Feeling numb | Being confused and disoriented | Shutting down and being unable to process emotions | Avoiding reminders of the loss | Sleeping more than usual | Procrastinating with details surrounding the loss and its consequences | Staying busy all the time | Engaging in mindless behaviors and being easily distracted | Focusing on the needs of others instead of your own | Thinking or saying "I'm fine" or "Everything's fine" | Using substances like alcohol or drugs as a means of escape.

Prayer:

We'll practice lament during our prayer time every week. Remember, we're doing this for ourselves as much as we are for one another! Let's go back to those losses that we wrote down and practice lamenting those things together.

[Leader- repeat the exercise from Sunday by leading your group through the parts of lament with Psalm 77. Take turns reading the Psalm, giving space for members to pray aloud, silently, or in writing.]

> Turn to God (Psalm 77:1-2*: I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, and he will hear me.* ²*In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted.*)
>
> Bring Your Complaint (Psalm 77:2-4 - *my soul refuses to be comforted. 3 When I remember God, I moan; when I meditate, my spirit faints. 4 You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak.*)
>
> Ask Boldly (Psalm 77:10 - *Then I said, "I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High*)
>
> Choose to Trust (Psalm 77:12-14 - *I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds. 13 Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God? 14 You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples.*)

Next Steps:

-Encourage group members to use the YouVersion reading plans for this series (set Grace as "My Church" on the YV app and we'll have the featured plan highlighted each week. Or find links at whoisgrace.com/read.)

GOOD GRIEF: Anger

READ plan: Learning to Lament in the Psalms
Pastor Scott
October 9, 2022

Life Group Discussion
Encouragement: Share something you are learning as you work through the Lament reading plans.
[Leader, be prepared to share your own!]

Scripture:
-What are some emotional expressions in the anger phase of grief? (Frustration | Impatience | Irritability | Rage | Resentment | Loss of control | Pessimism | Cynicism)

-What are some thoughts you may have during the anger stage of grief? ("This isn't fair." | "Why is this happening to me?" | "I am to blame for this" | "Someone is to blame for this" | "Why did God let this happen" | "No one understands" | "They deserve to pay" | "I want revenge")

-Read Psalm 10. Identify the source of David's grief and anger. Look for the "but-yet-however" transition that is common in psalms of lament. What is the turning point of David's anger to trust?

-Read Psalm 44. The tone of this Psalm seems to turn the anger toward God. It may have been written when Israel was surrounded by enemies. How does this psalm follow the pattern of lament (Turn to God | Bring Your Complaint | Ask Boldly | Choose to Trust)?

Prayer: Describe the anger you feel over a loss in your life. Take some time to be honest with God about how you feel.
[Leader, if the group is comfortable, do this out loud. If not, encourage everyone to write it down or pray silently. Close the prayer time with the "choose to trust" portion of lament using the language of the psalms- *But you, O God, see our trouble and grief… You hear, O Lord, the desire of the afflicted… We trust in your unfailing love… God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our guide even to the end…*]

Next Steps:
-Are you in the Anger stage of grief right now? According to various authors there are thirty-three imprecatory (cursing) psalms which, either entirely or in part, fall into this category (Psalms 5, 7, 9, 10, 13, 16, 21, 23, 28, 31, 35, 36, 40, 41, 44, 52, 54, 55, 58, 59, 63, 68, 69, 70, 71, 73, 83, 94, 104, 109, 137, 139, 140). This lament form was used by the Israelites in times of personal and national distress. Learn to express your anger by digging into some of these psalms and using the framework of lament (Turn to God | Bring Your Complaint | Ask Boldly | Choose to Trust).

GOOD GRIEF: Bargaining

READ plan: Learning to Lament with Jesus
Pastor Derek
October 16, 2022

Life Group Discussion
Encouragement: Share something you are learning as you work through the Lament reading plans. Consider your reaction to this statement: "Lament and grief are for people who are weak." [Leader, be sure to steer the conversation to truth! In lament, God has given us a way to process the losses of life. Even Jesus practice lament. Praise God for His compassion!]

Scripture:
-What characterizes the Bargaining Stage of Grief? (Feeling guilty or ashamed of thoughts or actions | Feeling scared, insecure, or anxious | Ruminating over what could have been | Holding yourself responsible for the circumstances | Punishing yourself | Worrying and overthinking things | Judging yourself and others | Making comparisons to others' circumstances | Trying to predict the future and assuming the worst | Wishing or praying for a different outcome | Thinking or saying "What if…" or "If only I had…" or "If I do this then…" | wondering if the loss wouldn't have happened if you did certain things differently.)

-Derek's used the story of Jacob wrestling with God (Genesis 32:22-30) to highlight how it's okay to struggle with grief. We celebrate victory, power, strength, confidence, and prestige. We despise and fear weakness, failure, and doubt. Though we know that a measure of vulnerability, fear, discouragement, and depression come with normal lives, we tend to view these as signs of failure or even a lack of faith.

-Read Luke 22:39-44.
Following the Last Supper, Jesus goes to a private place to pray. What an incredible window into the Son of Man's grief! What do you learn from Jesus about lament? About bargaining?

> "*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)

-Reflect: At its best bargaining helps transition us to acceptance. At its worst, it positions us to try to take the place of God.

Prayer: Pray the Lord's prayer together, pausing after "*thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven…*" and allow for group members to lift their lament to God, aloud or silently. Then finish the prayer "*…give us this day our daily bread…*"

Next Steps:

-Memorize Luke 22:42

-Pair group members together to be prayer partners for the remainder of the month. Encourage them to share their “complaints” with one another so that they can pray for one another using the lament pattern of prayer: Turn to God | Bring Your Complaint | Ask Boldly | Choose to Trust

GOOD GRIEF: Depression

READ plan: Learning to Lament in Lamentations

Pastor Scott

October 23, 2022

Life Group Discussion

Encouragement: Share something you are learning as you work through the Lament reading plans. [Leader, be prepared to share your own!]

Scripture:

-What depressive thoughts and feelings do you experience while you're grieving? (sad, empty, or numb | overwhelmed by the requirements of daily life | Experiencing despair and hopelessness | Sleeping or staying in bed all day | Crying often | Experiencing a cascade of sadness with every reminder of the loss | Thinking that others will not understand your loss | Believing that your grief will overwhelm others | Withdrawing from other people instead of letting them help you | Feeling tired and low on energy)

-Read Jeremiah 20:7-18. Jeremiah was faithful to God. Faithful to his calling. Faithful to his people. At best he was ignored or derided. At worst, he was beaten, locked up, or thrown in a well (Jer 39:6). Jeremiah 20 records his state of mind after being beaten and locked up by a priest. Imagine you visit him- what does he look like? Sound like? There are 52 chapters in this book, so he must not give up on God's calling- what would keep him going, day after day, putting one foot in front of the other? (see Jer 1:19)

-Read John 16:33. Jesus said these final words to his disciples before he prays (John 17) and faces arrest and crucifixion. Imagine the disciples in the garden after his arrest. Or hiding in the upper room after his death. Imagine all the ways they could have expressed the stages of grief. How do these words of Jesus give them, give us, something to hold onto when the world around us is so bleak? What does it look like to "*take heart*"?

Prayer: Who needs prayer this week? Is someone in the group walking in depression? Invite (don't force anyone beyond their comfort zone) individuals to a chair in the middle of the group. Everyone can place a hand on them, or just extend hands toward them and pray for them using the lament pattern of prayer (see below).

Next Steps:

-Prayer Partners: continue to pray for one another using the lament pattern of prayer: Turn to God | Bring Your Complaint | Ask Boldly | Choose to Trust. [Take it to the next level and get together to pray with one another!]

GOOD GRIEF: Acceptance

READ plan: Learning to Lament Your Sin
Pastor Derek
October 30, 2022

Life Group Discussion
Encouragement: Share what you have learned about someone else's experience of grief. How are we similar? How are we different?

Scripture:
-What are the characteristics of the Acceptance stage of grief? (Feeling positive and hopeful | Seeking out new meaning | Feeling more secure and relaxed | Engaging with reality as it is rather than what you thought it would be | Being more mindful and present | Coping and adapting to the circumstances | Being able to tolerate emotions and be vulnerable | Communicating in an honest, assertive, and open manner | Taking care of yourself and having self-compassion.)

-Both lamenting loss and lamenting sin can leave us feeling ashamed if we "move on." How is acceptance NOT just "being okay"?

-Read Psalm 51 and 2 Samuel 12:13-24. Both of these describe the aftermath of David's sin- one is his own song of lament and one is the narration of the events that unfolded. How is acceptance expressed in each?

-Pastor Derek said, "I'm mourning but I'm going to start moving. I'm grieving but I'm going to start growing. I'm hurting but I'm going to start healing. I'm wounded but I'm going to start walking." What does acceptance look like for you? (accept what cannot be changed, remember it's not the end of the story, take care of yourself, refocus on God through worship, find something productive to do)

Prayer: Stand or sit in a circle close enough to hold hands or place hands on shoulders. Recognize the hard work that the group has done together with the Lord through this plan. Recognize that you are all better equipped to lament. Not only alone, but *with* one another. Move into prayer using the ACTS model:
[Leader options: 1-prep for this by choosing psalms/scripture to read for each portion. 2-allow prayer partners to break off together for the supplication portion. 3-ask everyone to pray a single sentence for each section. 4-be creative!]

Adoration: Praise God for his compassion. His steadfast love.
Confession: Forgive us for allowing the pain of this loss to take our eyes off of You, to stop our hearts from seeking you, to hold back our hands from helping others…

Thanksgiving: Thank you for promising to walk with us through every loss… Thank you that You will make all things new…

Supplication: We need You, Lord…

Next Steps:

-What is *your* next step? How will you take care of yourself? Does a friend need you to sit with them in their grief? Do you need to call a counselor? Do you need to continue daily lament prayers? Do you need to learn more (recommended resources at www.whoisgrace.com/read)?