

**“Why are you sleeping, Lord?”**

**Psalms of Lament**

*“We as a congregation lift our voices to you & pray Psalm 123: “To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens! Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master...so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he has mercy upon us.<sup>3</sup> Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us, for we have had **more than enough** of contempt.”*

*Lord, minister to our hearts now **through** the truth of your word, **with** the comfort of your Spirit, **for** the joy of your church, and all **to** the glory of your Son.*

**\*Greetings** to all; and a **special welcome** to online viewers, **especially Elaine from Overland Park IL**, who worships with us every Sunday and has a prison ministry in Chicago area visiting inmates, sending care packages, and mailing copies of sermons to the female prisoners.

**\*We** greet you in Jesus’ name and pray for God’s favor on you and your ministry.

**Questions:** *How do we process grief? How do we walk alongside others who are grieving? What should we do when frustrated by unanswered prayer? Is it O.K. to complain to God?*

**\*We** have all tasted a **bitter cup of sorrow** and walked through **unexpected valleys of death**

**\*And** when grief hits, it weighs heavy on the soul:

*“Grief can make you feel like you’re going crazy. Grief can make a liar out of you: You say you’re doing fine when really your heart is shattered into 1000 tiny pieces. But everyone wants you to say you’re OK, so you do. We live (in a grief-illiterate culture) that doesn’t know how to grieve.”*  
*(On Grief and Grieving, Kubler-Ross)*

**\*But** there are times grief extends beyond **individuals and families**, and it spreads to an entire community or congregation.

**\*It’s** the type of grief felt when losses are so widespread that people **weep in unison**, and it produces a **collective sorrow**.

**\*That describes where our congregation is at as we enter 2022.**

**\*Individually**, many families are grieving. **Collectively**, we have been hit by heavy losses.

**\*Since** Thanksgiving, **our congregation** has felt the **ripple effects of at least 22 deaths**, representing the loss of deeply loved **family and congregational members**.

**\*Loss of Sisters & Brothers, Moms & Dads; Sons & Daughters; Husbands & Wives...and** all of us deeply touched by the loss of **precious Emily...and sweet Megan**.

**\*New Hope**, as much as I planned to **go back to Daniel**, I felt it necessary to pause for a week and **shepherd our congregation** through the process of grief.

**\*Today** we are going to **Psalms: when life doesn’t seem fair & God doesn’t seem good**.

**\*There** are times when **Living in Babylon** feels like **Walking through Hell**.

**\*This Saturday morning** we have planned a **2 hour Seminar “On Grief and Grieving”** to **shepherd the church through grief...and** give tools of how to **walk alongside others**.

\*In one sense, this message was **prepared 12 years ago**, when I **organized the Psalms** and noticed that **10 Psalms** have one thing in common: **Community Laments**.

\*Times where grief had spread so far, it caused the community of Israel to weep collectively

\*I recall thinking: *“These Psalms of Lament need to be **READY** for a moment when our congregation experiences **widespread, collective grief**.”* (Craig, 2010)

\*New Hope – 12 years later...that time is now.

\*Whether you are **currently walking through grief personally...or you are walking beside others in grief...now is time to go to the Psalm to recapture a biblical process of grief.**

#### **Craig’s 4 S.T.E.P prayer:**

- **S - Shepherd** broken hearts.
- **T - Teach** healthy process of grief.
- **E - Encourage** wise & gracious comfort.
- **P - Prepare** the church to model both hope and grief to the world.

\*N.H.: To every heart heavy with grief & broken into 1,000 tiny pieces...you are loved

#### **1. Sometimes God seems unfair,**

\***Prepared magnets for today, available in person or online: “God, where are you when...”**

\*There are **150 Psalms** that express the full range of human emotions (from heights of joy/praise...to the depths of pain/sorrow).

\*The **largest majority of Psalms (1/3) are Lament.**

**Laments are the darkest moments** of human experience; things that cause cries to fall in midnight hours; burdens that way heavy.

\*They are times when it appears to the writer that **God got it wrong.**

\*They are the times when it feels **God** has acted inconsistent with his character; he has allowed a miscarriage of justice; he has remained silent; inactive.

\*And so the Lament is...an expression of sorrow or outrage.

\*As you read the Psalms of Lament, a **clear pattern seems to emerge** on grief process:

#### **Processing Grief in the Psalms:**

- *Complaints are Expressed.*
- *Questions are Raised.*
- *Trust is Declared.*

\*NH: As we process grief/loss, the pathway of healing comes by **acknowledging the pain**, not **avoiding it**. **Recognizing the loss**, not **running** from it.

\*When we think **God got it wrong** the first step of healing is to express it: **God, Not Fair!**

**44 – Forgotten!** (*You disgraced us...even though we didn’t forget you.*)

**60 - Rejected!** (*You made your people see hard things.*)

**74 – Alone!** (*The enemy has destroyed everything.*)

**79 – Abandoned!** (*We are brought very low.*)

**80 – Ignored!** (*Given us tears to drink.*)

**83 – Frustrated!** (*Those who hate you have...wiped us out*)

**85 – Lifeless!** (*You WERE favorable...put away your anger!*)

**94 – Impatient!** (*The wicked...crush us! Afflict us! Mock us!*)

**123 – Overwhelmed!** (*We have had more than enough.*)

**137 – Sorrow!** (*We sat down and wept in Babylon*)

\*In other words, the Psalmist is so deeply hurt that God got it wrong that he **points a finger** at God in a way that says: ***This isn't right!***

\*In Israel, our Jewish tour guide (talking of Moses, David, etc) called it: ***Hutzpah.***

\*It's moments when the Jewish people have the **audacity** to go **toe to toe with God** and issue complaints that life doesn't seem fair...and he doesn't seem good

\*Yet...in a way that **honors His authority** and **trusts His character**

\*These laments are **direct, but not defiant. Daring, but not disobedient.**

\*One **of my daughters has Hutzpah** = often saying audacious things to me, which **causes my son to raise eyebrows: "Are you going to let her get way with that?"**

\*The reason she gets away with *Hutzpah*: Even though she expresses **frustration over something she views unfair...**I know she **loves & respects me.**

\*New Hope – I am extremely thankful for the Psalms of lament because they teach how to express our pain to God, yet do so with respect of His name.

**Action Step: *Permission granted to express complaints to God.***

\*Are you confused with His timing? Are you frustrated by His silence? Are you angry over unanswered prayer? Are you grieved over death?

**Two responses to grief:**

**Stuff it.** Push it down. Bury it. Don't express it. Feel bad for even thinking it.

\*The problem is that unexpressed complaints sit in our heart like toxic residue and slowly eat away at the soul.

**Express it.** Bring the pain to the surface and express it to God with **Hutzpah.**

\*New Hope, this is **the starting point** of processing grief. We don't ignore or avoid.

\*The pathway of healing requires we bring our complaints to God and express it to him in a way that is **"Direct, but not defiant. Daring, but not disobedient."**

\***New Hope, God can handle our Hutzpah.**

## 2. ...causing us to question,

\*When processing grief, **Complaints and Questions are TWO SIDES OF SAME OREO.**

\*Title of this sermon is a question pulled right from a Psalm: ***“Why are you sleeping?”***

\*When ***life doesn't seem fair & God doesn't seem good*** it leaves us with big questions that seem to have no answers.

**The Psalms of Lament raise these Questions: “Why, God?”**

**44** – *Why are you sleeping? Why do you hide?*

**60** - *Have you not rejected us, O God?*

**74** - *Why do you hold back your hand?*

**79** - *Why should the nations say, ‘Where is their God?’*

**80** - *How long will you be angry with your people’s prayers?*

**83** - *Do not keep silence!*

**85** - *Will you be angry with us forever? Will you not revive us again?*

**94** - *How long shall the wicked exult?*

**123** - *We have had more than enough contempt.*

**137** - *How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?*

**\*N.H. I said it at Megan’s funeral and I’ll say it again:**

\*Since the day Christian called me...I **joined hundreds of others for 4 years in praying that God would act...and these are the questions I raised.**

*“God, why won’t you do it? Why not for the sake of your glory? Why not for the sake of her husband/children? Why not show off your power for the church/world? Would you not get the greater glory for this?”*

NH: Raising questions to God is a **critical and necessary part** of the grief process.

### **3 B.A.D. errors in grief process:**

- **Bypass** the process, thinking it unnecessary.
- **Avoid** the process, thinking it unhealthy.
- **Discard** the process, thinking it unbiblical.

\*New Hope, as your pastor called to shepherd you I want you to know: When life seems unfair, raising questions to God **healthy, necessary, & biblical.**

**Action Step: Take time to process EARTHLY GRIEF before celebrating ETERNAL HOPE.**

\*YES we are people who believe Jesus defeated death, reversed decay, and rose triumphantly, giving hope of resurrection to all who believe.

\*But still Scripture says **death is our mortal enemy** that is yet to be destroyed.

\*Even in the best of cases when we celebrate eternal hope, we still grieve and lament that death has taken another one we love.

\***Pastor Tim** shared a heartbreaking story. In the 90's while doing a **Masters in Grief counseling** in Chicago, he interviewed American **missionary couple (2 daughters.)**

\***Oldest daughter** had died overseas in an auto accident. They returned to the states and had a funeral - a "**goodbye birthday party**" that was 100% joy and celebration with no lament and no acknowledgment of the pain.

\***Two months later**, their younger sister died by suicide, leaving a note: "*I don't know why you're happy about my sisters' death. I feel terrible.*"

\*The couple admitted to Tim w/ sorrow: "*In the midst of celebrating the hope of future glory, we failed to acknowledge the pain of earthly loss.*"

\*New Hope, remember Scripture does not say "*We do not grieve.*" Rather it says: "*We grieve, but not as those who have no hope.*" (1 Thess 4)

\*At the **best of funerals...YES**, we can spike the football knowing we have hope in the resurrection...but **STILL WE WEEP.**

### 3. ...and yet we trust Him.

\*Along with complaints and questions Psalms of Lament have a **surprising ingredient.**

\*Like **yeast to bread, eggs to an omelet, sugar to a pie...**there is **one ingredient tucked into every Psalm of Lament** that makes IT: **HUMBLE HUTZPAH.**

\*We may **COMPLAIN** (life isn't fair); we may **QUESTION** (God, why?)...but even as we express our Hutzpah, our posture remains: "***I may not get it, but I trust you.***"

\*It's the one essential ingredient that helps bring healing to the man/woman in grief

**Trust declared: "*I may not get it, Lord, but I trust you.*"**

**44 – Forgotten?** *In God we boast continually and give thanks to your name forever.*

**60 - Rejected?** *With God we shall do valiantly.*

**74 – Alone?** *Yet God my King is from of old, working salvation in the earth.*

**79 – Abandoned?** *But we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever.*

**80 – Ignored?** *Give us life and we will call on your name.*

**83 – Frustrated?** *You alone...are the Most High over all the earth*

**85 – Lifeless?** *Yes, the Lord will give what is good.*

**94 – Impatient?** *The Lord will not forsake his people. The Lord is my refuge.*

**123 – Overwhelmed?** *Our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he has mercy.*

**137 – Sorrow?** *O Babylon, blessed shall he be who repays you for what you have done to us.*

\*This is the key ingredient to the process of grief. Somehow, somehow, even as we grieve, we lay hold to the promises of God.

**Action Step:**

*Even when life lays you out, lay hold the promises of God.*

\*For me, more than anything else, the **3 promises I run to again and again:**

- **At the moment, God is at work.**
- **In the morning, God will be faithful.**
- **Whatever the outcome, God is in charge.**

**NH: The “Grief and Grieving” seminar on Saturday is much needed as we walk through sorrow**

\*As we collectively walk along the pathway of grief, we end our service by LAYING HOLD OF THE PROMISE, from the LAMENT OF ALL LAMENTS:

*“...**BUT** this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning. Great is Your Faithfulness.”*