

Grief

A Sacred Summer

STORY

The Gift of Grief.

Most of us need to stop and grieve the losses of this past year.

Loss of friends and family.

Loss due to death.

Loss due to lack of travel.

Loss due to lockdown and pandemic safety measures.

Loss of rhythms and traditions and ways we've loved before.

Loss of rhythms of work and school.

Loss of jobs themselves.

Loss of innocence when it comes to how we see ourselves.

How we see our country.

How we see the church.

We no longer can hide our eyes.

We now understand the brokenness around us.

We have the invitation to remember.

We have an invitation to pause in these days ahead, to choose to open the gift of grief even though it's painful. Even though we might not be good at grieving.

Jesus says that we will be blessed as we mourn.

Jesus knows all the sadness and all the pain we are feeling today and all the grief and trauma we've experienced in recent months.

Jesus wants to help us process it.

Jesus wants to hold it for us.

We all need to open the gift of grief, even if it's for someone else who is grieving.

*Written by Lilly Lewin.

PRACTICES

Each day of the week, take time to do the 5 or the 15-minute practice.

Plan a time to do the Going Deeper practice sometime during the week.

- **5-minute Practice: Hands of Jesus Practice:** Cup your hands like you are carrying something in them. Picture all the heavy things you are carrying around in your mind and heart right now. Name these things. Your frustrations, people who are hurting, problems with friends or family. Things in the world you cannot fix or control. Now imagine Jesus sitting across from you. He smiles at you and looks at you with compassion. He is reaching out his hands toward you. Drop all the heavy things you are carrying into the strong hands of Jesus. Allow Jesus to hold these things for you. Allow Jesus to keep and carry these things, so you don't have to anymore. Thank Jesus for holding all these things for you.
- **15-minute Practice: Picking the Colors of Grief:** Draw out your grief and sorrow. Find some markers or crayons and some paper. What colors represent the emotions you are feeling right now? What colors represent grief to you? What colors represent sorrow or the loss you feel? Use the crayons or markers to draw, doodle, or scribble out your pain and sorrow. Talk to Jesus about how you are feeling as you draw/doodle/scribble. You could draw out tears, or rain, etc. Allow the process of drawing to be healing.
- **Going Deeper: Breaking the Ice:** There are many stages of grief. Sometimes we need a more physical way to express our pain and sorrow. Using empty milk cartons, fill them with water and freeze them. Go to a safe place outside and drop the ice...throw the ice, break it. You can also get a large pan of hot water or use the kitchen sink and watch the ice block melt. Imagine the ice as your grief and sorrow and allow the hot water to melt it away. Talk to Jesus about this process.

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 56:8, John 11:33-36, Matthew 5:4

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QUESTIONS for Journaling and Discussion

- What are the things that are causing you pain, sorrow, or grief? Take time to notice what things the Holy Spirit brings to mind.
- How does it feel to know that God holds your tears and knows about your pain? (Psalm 56:8)
- How have you experienced loss in the last year? Talk to Jesus about these things.
- How does it feel to know that Jesus wept for the loss of his friend Lazarus? Jesus took time to grieve even when he knew that Lazarus wasn't going to stay dead very long. Jesus took time to grieve with Mary and Martha, and Jesus takes time to be with us in our sorrow and loss too. Talk to Jesus about where you are and how you are feeling today.
- If you are not feeling sorrowful or grieving anything, consider someone you know who has suffered loss recently. Take time to pray for that person to experience the peace and comfort of Jesus. What is one thing you can do for them this week to bring them comfort or joy?

EXPERIENCES

Choose one or several to try.

- **For All Ages: Pouring Practice:** Get a jar, vase or pitcher and a cup of water...hold the cup of water and consider the things that are causing you pain or the things you are grieving. What are the things that make you sad right now? Scripture says that God holds all of our tears. God knows our pain and our sorrow. Pour out the water into the jar, vase or pitcher and give these to God to hold for you. Keep this vessel out in a room where you can see it this week to add to it as needed and remind you that God/Jesus is holding your tears.
- **Grief with Children:** People of all ages need to know that it is ok to grieve, cry, and to express sorrow, especially little ones. Any of these practices can be used for all ages. The Hands of Jesus practice or Picking the Colors of Grief (see the 5 and 15-minute Practices) allow them to draw out their feelings. The Pouring Practice (above) is a tangible way children can see how God holds our grief/tears. All of these practices can help children learn to grieve and process their sadness.
- **All Ages: Blanket of Love:** Get a comfy blanket and wrap it around your shoulders. Allow this to represent the comfort and love of Jesus. As you pray and talk to Jesus about your sorrow, pain, loss, etc. Allow this blanket to be a tangible representation of the love and comfort of Jesus to you. Do this practice each day this week.
- **For Youth & Small Groups: Memories:** Look through old photos. You can use the ones on your phone or photo albums. Look back and consider the losses of last year. What do you notice? What are the good things you see? What are the hard, painful things you notice? Talk to Jesus about this. Journal your thoughts.
- **For Groups & Entire Communities: Create a Slide Show**
 1. Create a slideshow using photos from events of the last year, from elections to Covid, to local events. Watch this slideshow together as a community and use it as a prayer tool. Show the slides slowly, allow the events to sink in, and allow for time to pray for and process these events. Following the slideshow, have a time of further prayer, discussion, or response in writing or art. Provide art supplies if needed.
 2. Create a slideshow using photos from community/group members. Announce ahead of time so people can send in and share their photos, and the leader has time to collect them and create the slideshow. Give people the theme of “things you’ve lost in the last year” or the theme of grief itself. Watch the slides together or post them online and allow people to pray with the slides. Allow for time to process and discuss if doing this in person or let people respond in the chat if showing this via Zoom.
- **Listen:** What is the song that comes to mind when you think of the word grief? Find music, songs that help you experience or process your sadness, pain, and grief. You might choose one song or make a playlist of lament. Check out “Songs of Lament” by The Porter’s Gate or listen to “I am Held” by Pat Barrett.
- **Read:**
 - ***Broken Hallelujahs: Learning to Grieve the Big and Small Losses of Life*** by Beth Allen Slevcove
 - ***My Favorite Color is Blue. Sometimes: A Journey Through Loss with Art and Color*** by Roger Hutchinson

PUSHBACK

You may have a hard time with grief and the concept that grief is a gift to open. That is totally understandable. You may also be saying, “I’m not sad, I haven’t lost anything, I’m not grieving anything right now”. Take time to consider the losses of people around you. Consider the people and places who are suffering. Take time to pray for these people and places.

PRAYERS

- Jesus, you took my suffering and know my pain.
You hold all my tears.
I pour all my sorrow and all my grief into your hands.
Please hold it for me.
Refill my cup of sadness with hope and your peace today.
Thank you for being a God who mourns with us. In Jesus Name, AMEN.
- Lord, You weep with me/us and
You hold my/our tears.
I/We breathe in your comfort.
I/We give you my/our pain.
I/We breathe in your comfort.
I/We breathe out my/our pain.
I/We breathe in your peace.
AMEN.