



GRIEF



*Crying out amidst
the pain*

By Alison Lublink & Jodie Sutcliffe



PART 1: It's Okay to Grieve

Read: Genesis 50:1-14, John 11:34-36

Ponder:

Life is full of ups and downs. We are guaranteed there will be times along our journey where we will grieve. Grief can be caused by many things. It could be anything from having to change jobs, move house, changes to our daily life and loss of a loved one. Literally any change to something we care about in our life can cause grief.

Guess what? It's okay to grieve. In fact, it is healthy to grieve. Too often we can try to hide our grief or brush it off. Yet, in our scripture reading from John we see the example of Jesus weeping for his close friend.

The story of Joseph has many examples of grief and loss. Jacob, the father of Joseph, lost Rachel (Genesis 35:16). Jacob described Rachel as the only woman he loved, and in his grief he turned his love and affection to Joseph who was one of the two sons born to Rachel. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers out of their jealousy from the favoritism their father had shown Joseph; and they left Jacob believing his son Joseph had died. Jacob even said he would go to the grave grieving the loss of Joseph (Genesis 37:35). Jacob grieved for

many years until he was finally reunited with his son. Finally, we come to Joseph grieving the loss of his father, Jacob, many years later (Genesis 50: 1-14).

Jacob's death was not unexpected. In fact, he even knew he was dying and gave instructions to his children in chapter 49 on what to do. Yet we see Jacob was overcome with grief when his dad died. It says, "Joseph threw himself on his father and wept over him and kissed him." No matter how much we may expect a loss, it is still incredibly painful when it comes. We need to grieve.

What follows is customary for the Egyptian process of death but also allowed many days of grief. Joseph and the Egyptians mourned his death for 70 days and even after those 70 days, once Jacob was buried, they continued to mourn. Grief is healthy, it is expected and it is okay. It is also a beautiful thing that others grieved along with Joseph and his family. It is good to know we are not alone when we grieve. God also grieves with us and offers us His comfort and support. (See Isaiah 53:3a and Psalm 34:18 for further examples)

At 7 months of age Collins stopped eating and was brought to BethanyKids with a condition called Hydrocephalus – which is an excess build-up of fluid in the brain. When this happened, his father abandoned Collins and his mother, leaving Collins' mother to provide and care for them alone. She was grieving for not only the husband who should be there with her, but also the loss of her son's health.

Through the support provided by the people who donated to BethanyKids she was able to get Collins the help he needed and she felt supported through her grief. She said "I may not have physically met [the] people who give through BethanyKids...but, I believe they rejoice in our triumphs and cry in our setbacks. At least I know someone somewhere cares." She was able to receive the help and support she so-needed in her grief. Just like Joseph, Collins and his

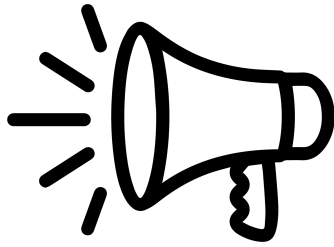
mother do not know all those others who were grieving alongside in support, but in all of it there is a powerful reminder that it is okay to grieve and to support those around us in their time of grief.

Discuss:

1. Have you had a time when you have felt grief but felt like it was not okay to grieve? Why? How could it have been different?
2. What are some things that stand out to you about grief in the story of Joseph?
3. The Egyptians and Canaanites grieved alongside Joseph. Do you feel comfortable in grieving with others who are experiencing grief?
4. What are some ways you can be there for people who are grieving without trying to stop them from experiencing the grief?

Pray: God of Comfort, thank you that you love us and you do not ask us to block out our grief, but instead you grieve with us. We now remember the grief we are currently facing, knowing it is okay to grieve what we have lost. We pause now to remember those in our life who are grieving *(you may like to name them)*. We pray that we can show them the support they need as they grieve what is happening in their life. Provide us and those grieving around us the comfort only you provide.

Do: This week and in the future, allow yourself to grieve knowing that God is alongside you in your grief and can bring you comfort. Also come alongside those in your life who may be grieving and be a support to them in those times; not trying to shut down the grief they may be facing, but to grieve alongside them and be with them in their time of need.



Part 2: We Can Cry Out and Complain to God in the Midst of Our Pain

Read: Psalm 142:1-2, Romans 8:26

Ponder:

David is a complicated figure in the Bible. Some hail him as a brilliant and righteous leader; but ultimately he was very much human and made some pretty big blunders throughout his life. Even after God had chosen him and anointed him as King, David had to run for his life. It's not certain just how long he had to hide from King Saul, but it's suggested that it was anywhere from 7-10 years. That's a *very* long time to be on the run. And all throughout that time Saul was relentless in trying to kill David.

I'm sure you can imagine how that might create some very dark feelings for David. I can't imagine being on the run for that long; constantly wondering what I did to deserve this treatment? Wondering if it will last forever? Wondering how I can possibly get out of this intensely awful situation?

A baby named Paul was brought to Bethany Kids with a congenital defect known as Esophageal Atresia: this is when the upper esophagus closes off and fails to connect to the

lower esophagus or stomach. Paul's mother says, "I cried so hard when the news of the condition was revealed. I was scared. I pray that God makes a way." Paul had to undergo surgery multiple times, and multiple groups have contributed to the costs of his medical care.

It's okay to cry, wail, sob and freak out. This doesn't solve our problems, but it's a reminder that we are not alone in our grief and that it's okay to cry out. A reminder that we are all human.

David, Paul and Paul's mother might not have had the same story or experiences, but they shared some of the same feelings. David cried out to God, saying, "I cry out loudly to God, loudly I plead with God for mercy. I spill out all my complaints before him, and spell out my troubles in detail..."

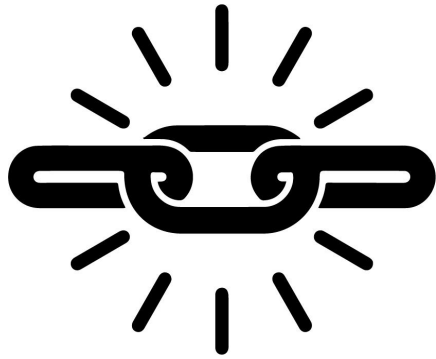
Paul's mother knows what it's like to cry out to God. It's important to communicate to God in all circumstances - not just when we're happy about all the things that are going well, and not just when things are hard and we need his help. But when we choose to be in a relationship with Him, it's important to be honest and communicate our feelings. He can handle it.

Discuss:

1. Have you ever felt that you were in such a dark, upsetting life situation? What are some of the things you thought during that time?
2. If you are in the midst of that grief right now, what are some ways that you're dealing with these feelings? *(Your answer doesn't need to be profound. It can be as simple as "I'm not.")*
3. If you have made it to the other side of that time, how did you get through the extremely difficult days (weeks, months, years)?
4. Do you feel like you have to "have it all together" when you talk to God? Or do you feel like you can cry out to him? Why?

Pray: God, I cry out to you. I ask you for mercy. I lay out all of my troubles in detail before you: *I feel free to pray your troubles here, or give a moment of silence*. God you know my heart. You know my life. You know what I need. God, have mercy on me.

Do: Perhaps this week you can take time to daily cry out to God. If you don't feel like you are grieving anything personally, you can cry out to God for the troubles around the world. This might include: political concerns; global health crises; environmental challenges; BethanyKids families undergoing major health issues; concerns from your own town; the struggles of a loved one.



Part 3: Strong Emotional Responses to Grief are Welcome

Read: Jeremiah 29:11, Matthew 5:4

Ponder:

I can almost guarantee that if you've grown up in the Church, you've heard someone use the verse Jeremiah 29:11: "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" It's one of those verses people like to share with graduates as they move out into the world; or in a Bible study when we're asked to share a favourite Bible verse. It's also an ideal candidate for being taken out of context. Something we don't often think about is that this was spoken by Jeremiah to an entire nation - not just a singular person. Not just that, but spoken during a particularly awful time in history and in the life of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah's heart broke for the nations around him that didn't know God. He was rejected by his own nation time and time again. More than once people tried to stone him. He was persecuted and frequently mocked. But even still, he didn't want to keep God's words to himself. This eventually led him

to be thrown into the cistern of the King's son, where he was left in a pit of mud, without any water or food.

Not just a pit of despair (though, it was that as well), but an actual pit. If anyone had a reason to feel hopeless grief, it was Jeremiah.

But even throughout these emotional times where Jeremiah grieved deeply for these people, he felt hope in God.

Rachel knows what it's like to have grief over the present and in anticipation of the future. She came to *BethanyKids* to help her daughter get treatment for a serious neurological condition. She might have had a brave face for her daughter, but she couldn't maintain that bravery when she was alone. She feared for her daughter's life; for the future. She had a strong emotional reaction to her daughter's health concerns. How could she not? Daily, during rounds at the hospital, she spoke about a loss of faith. Her life felt like such a struggle; one that could not easily be solved. While Rachel didn't trust in God at first, she did begin to read a Bible that was given to her at the hospital. For both Paul's mother and Jeremiah the prophet, their experiences in faith were strengthened by allowing themselves to experience the grief and not swallow it. We don't always have to have all the answers when we reach out to God. Sometimes it's enough to reach out.

As we face challenges in our own lives we can be empowered not just by the phrase penned by Jeremiah, but by his example of faith amidst tragedy.

Discuss:

1. Have you ever felt like you couldn't talk to God unless you had complete faith in Him at that moment? Why did you feel that way?
2. Are you an emotionally demonstrative person? Or are you quiet and reserved? How does this impact your relationship with God?
3. Is there someone in your life that is experiencing grief, and who feels like they can't depend on God? Have you thought about sharing a Bible with them and pointing to some of the other people in the Bible that felt the same way? Why or why not?
4. What's your favourite Bible verse? Go ahead and read the entire chapter surrounding that verse to gain context. Think of it in a new light and try to see what you can glean from it in.

Pray: As we come to you in prayer, Jesus, I express to you *[insert your emotion here]* about *[insert your situation here]*. This situation is upsetting, frustrating and I am grieving. Even when I don't trust fully in you, I am thankful that you continue to hear my prayers and walk beside me in this grief.

Do: We challenge you this week to share your strong emotional reactions with God. When something grieves you (big or small; personal or not), take it to God and let Him know how you feel about it.



Part 4: We Can't Always Explain Why Things Happen the Way They Do

Read: Exodus 2:23-25, Matthew 27:46

Ponder:

As Christians we tend to have some very dramatic language for things when they don't seem to be going our way. In fact, it often sounds downright poetic. We speak of the "wilderness" that we're in. Or we talk about the "journey" that we're on. And if we're feeling particularly destitute, we talk about how God has "forsaken" us. *Forsaken* is such an interesting word because it's not one that we'd use regularly in our everyday lives. But if we want to really cry out to God and express our frustration with how things are going? Well, there are 50+ verses in the Bible that mention feeling "forsaken" that can help us do that.

"Forsaken" literally means to be abandoned or forgotten. Perhaps that is an accurate description for something you have experienced in your life. There might have been some truly horrible circumstances you've had to go through where feeling forsaken seemed like the accurate way to describe it. If so, you're not alone. After all, even Jesus when he was dying on the cross, called out to God and asked why He'd forsaken him.

We don't know why things happen the way they do. People commonly wonder why bad things happen to good people. The Israelites anguished over this a lot while they were wandering in the desert for 40 years. Can you even imagine the various types of grief they were experiencing? Moses was trying to lead these people through a multi-generational grief while also dealing with it himself. It must have been a lot to handle.

Joshua was washing his face one morning when he felt a tiny painless lump under his right nostril. He brushed it off as nothing more than a common pimple. However, as time went by the lump stretched across his nose and covered his right eye. It continued to cause problems and as he dealt with ridicule from his peers, his mother felt helpless. Amid tears she said, "I do not know what I ever did to have my son go through this." She was grieving for her son's pain. If you're a parent, I'm sure you can identify with this sentiment. How do we continue on when we are stuck in such a wilderness of grief?

Through *BethanyKids*, Joshua was diagnosed with maxillary ossifying fibroma and surgery was completed. Joshua is now able to hold his head high. Joshua has declared, "Thank you for helping me to see properly. I can now read without strain and I am now a testimony back in my village, school, church and the whole community. I am so happy now."

Not all of us have resolution like this to our grief, and sometimes we are left in the wilderness for much longer than we'd like, similar to the Israelites. We don't know why things happen the way they do. I can't offer you any concrete consolation, but I can tell you that the wilderness for the Israelites eventually ended - but likely not the way they expected or in the time they wanted. And I can tell you that God had not forsaken Jesus on the cross; but it certainly didn't end in a way that was comfortable for Jesus, or in the timing

that Jesus would have potentially preferred. But it did end the way it was meant to, and in God's timing.

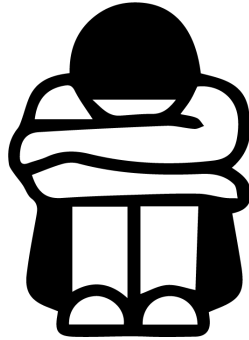
While we will always fight to restore health wherever possible, we also pause to grieve with families and children who are having a very difficult journey and feeling, perhaps as we have occasionally felt, forsaken.

Discuss:

1. Have you ever wondered why good things happen to bad people? Has someone ever asked you this question? What conclusions did you come to?
2. Have you ever experienced a difficult situation that ended up turning out well, but not in a way that you anticipated? Share about it if you're comfortable.
3. Sometimes we're not only dealing with the grief, but we are leading others through it. If you are the leader, what are some ways people can support you? If you are being led through your grief, what are some ways you can support your leader?
4. How does it make you feel knowing that Jesus cried out to God on the cross asking Him why He'd forsaken Him?

Pray: O Lord, we don't understand why things are the way they are. This earth brings us so much trouble and pain. I ask that you help me to look to you when I am feeling confused and overwhelmed in my grief. I ask that you help me to trust that You will overcome, even if I feel helpless and lost in the wilderness.

Do: As you come across moments or situations that make you feel burdened about the grief in your life or our world at large, pause and breathe in while saying: "I might feel forsaken..." and then breathe out while saying: "...but God is still here." Repeat this breath prayer 3 times.



Part 5: Sometimes We Push Everyone and Everything Away

Read: Ruth 1:6-27, Psalm 34:18

Ponder:

Naomi had been through so much loss. Firstly, together with her husband she had to leave her home town of Bethlehem during a famine to go to Moab, a foreign land which had a different religion. Then, she lost her husband Elimelech leaving her with her two sons and her sons' wives who were Moabite women, so not even women from her own tribe. After all of this, 10 years later she also lost her sons. Naomi was experiencing so much grief she even eventually changed her name From Naomi, which means "sweet or pleasant" to Mara, which means "bitterness."

Naomi and her daughters were left with no one to provide for them. Naomi then heard the famine was over in Judea and the women started the journey back to Naomi's homeland. On the way, in the midst of her grief and believing that there was no way she could possibly provide for her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, Naomi decided to tell them to go, leave her

and find someone who can provide for them within their own tribes. She pushed very hard for them to leave. Orpah decided to go back, but Ruth insisted on staying with Naomi. We see in the rest of the story that this was for the best.

When we are going through grief we can feel like we need to do it alone. So often we can push away those who want to love us and be there for us. This can include friends and family like in the example of Naomi, or it could also be God that we try to push away. The good news is that God is near even when we are grieving, and God understands fully all that we are going through even when we try to push Him away.

Gladys came to *BethanyKids* after so much rejection and isolation and fear of being seen. She was born with a genetic disorder called encephalocele. It was a swell above her nose that grew as she did. Unfortunately, misinformation and beliefs in her community about what caused this condition made her a victim of rejection and isolation. She was teased and bullied because of this. It would have been easy in her grief or her parents' grief to always hide away.

One day though, someone witnessed her being bullied at school and he took a picture hoping to get Gladys some help. He then learned of *BethanyKids*. Sometime later she was brought to *BethanyKids* and her condition was able to be treated due to the generous supporters. Gladys now says "she wants to be a teacher so that I can tell people not to laugh at others." She is now able to finish her education without fear.

Gladys could have easily felt she needed to lock herself away or in her grief, pushed away the man who was taking her photo. However, she did not, and as a result she was able to get the help and support she needed and become someone who can help others in similar situations.

Discuss:

1. Do you think it was reasonable for Naomi to ask her daughters-in-law to leave her?
2. What are some of the things or people we may try to push away in our grief and why would we do this?
3. Have you ever had someone who was grieving push you, or others, away? Did you understand at the time what was happening?
4. How can we support someone who is trying to push us, others or things away because of grief?

Pray: Dear God, thank you that you promise in your word that you are close to the brokenhearted and save those who are crushed in spirit. I pray that in our times of grief we remember that. Help us not to be people who push you or others away but help us instead to trust and draw near to you. May we also be people who are there for those who need us most even when they try to push us away.

Do: Spend some time praying and reflecting on your own journey and how you could allow God and others to help you or be there when you need it most. Then ask God to open your eyes to people who may be experiencing grief alone and ask for guidance on ways to support them.



Part 6: Stand Firm and Stay Determined

Read: Ruth 1:16-18, Matthew 1:5

Ponder:

There are times in our life where we have a number of options or responses we can take in our journey and all of them can seem right. This was a crossroad for Ruth. She had been through the grief of losing her husband and she was now caring for Naomi, her mother-in-law. Naomi had now given her an alternative option. The logical thing for outsiders would have been for Ruth to take Naomi up on her offer to leave and go home to her own family. No one would have questioned her decision. Instead, she stuck to the deep conviction she had in her heart to stay with Naomi and she was firm and determined to do just that.

The results of her standing firm and staying determined were huge. Ruth went from being a foreigner to being someone who was respected, blessed and honoured. She even ended up mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus. Sometimes we know in our heart that we need to remain firm and determined even when other people and circumstances are telling us otherwise.

Ann Wacuka is a wonderful example of someone continuing to be firm and determined even when doctors, her husband and more, were not. When Ann's daughter Shekaina was born she knew something was wrong. Her hands were clenched, she had fused fingers and her legs were bowed. Shekaina was born with a genetic condition that caused this. Ann was actually born with the same condition but was able to get the help she needed although is using crutches or a wheelchair for life. Ann's husband left her saying, "my family has no such deformities."

Ann knew her daughter's condition was not life threatening as she too had survived it. However, the doctors she was seeing were not able to help and said Shekaina would end up in a wheelchair or crutches like her mother. Ann kept on pressing on and she eventually found a hospital at Kijabe that could help. They said Shekaina would need several surgeries but she would eventually be able to walk again.

Being a single mother, this was a big financial burden as insurance only covered part of the cost. Once again Ann did not give up and she did everything she could to raise the money needed, including winning bronze in the world championships for swimming. Ann has remained so firm and determined when it could have been just as easy to give up. What a story of determination and commitment.

Discuss:

1. What kind of emotions must Ruth have felt at this difficult moment in her life?
2. How do you think Naomi must have felt?
3. Has there been a time in your life where you have felt convicted to stand firm on something even though you did not have to?
4. Is there a bible passage you hold tight to, that gives you confidence to stand firm?

Pray: Dear God, thank you that you remain firm and determined for us even when we don't do the same. Help us

to remain standing firm and determined in our faith in you. Help us to stand up for what is right, even when it may not be the easy way. Help us to stand up and support others you put into our lives even when they may try pushing us away.

Do: Seek God first in what you do and say. Standing firm and staying determined is easier when we are doing it with God in relationship with him and not relying on our own strength. Read and pray Ephesians 6:10-18 (the Armour of God) each day this week and go into your decisions knowing He is with you, strengthening and guiding you along the way.

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