

I. Verses for worship

A. Psalm 34:18: The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and he saves those who are crushed in spirit.

B. Lots of parts of Psalm 116

II. Set Up

A. Welcome / Introduction / comments to people there for the first time

B. Last week we began a new series called Broken: Preparing for the Day When Life Doesn't Work and Your Faith is Tested. For some of you, it might be called "How to Survive the Moment." You are in the middle of some real pain. We are glad you are here.

C. The series unfolds along the path we move through when we face a major loss: Shock, Sorrow, Struggle, Surrender, Sanctification and Service. Last week Mike introduced the series and spoke about the first stage: shock. Today he talks about sorrow.

D. Right now...

III. Transition

A. Patricia video

IV. Introduction

A. At Men's Fraternity there are about 25 guys who show up early – before 5 AM – to set up. They are called the men of the blue vest because, they get a blue vest. About 5:30 we meet for an overview of the morning, a little pep talk from David Filkin and a time of prayer. At the end, Dave generally repeats a line from the old TV show, Hill Street Blues – a drama about Chicago police officers. It's given by a police sergeant at the end of the officers' daily briefing. It's "Be careful out there."

B. Well, few of us face the dangers that Chicago police officers do. But, we all get hurt. The question is not, "if we will get hurt," – and I am talking about hurt with a capital "H" – but "when" we get hurt. If we live long enough we will suffer a big H hurt, a major loss. We live in a broken world, where things go wrong: people we love die; marriages break apart; we lose things like our health, our innocence or our job; at some point we realize that the dreams we had about the future will not come true.

C. Some of these losses are major. And as I noted last week, if the hurt is big enough, we might experience shock.

D. The next step on the path – a path that is not quite as linear as I am suggesting, but I think you get that – the next step is sorrow or grief. By which I mean: *the emotional suffering we feel when something or someone we love is taken away.*

E. The more significant the loss, the more intense the grief. We are talking about pain. Not the pain of a broken bone – this is worse. This is an assault on who we are. It's a broken heart, a wounded soul. We describe this as with words like: profound sadness, mourning, heartache, anguish, misery. It's the opposite of joy.

F. For the purposes of today's message I am making a distinction between grief and depression.¹ This is a bit of drawing lines in the sand, but just as we know that not everyone who has a runny nose has the same problem – some have a cold, some have allergies, some have the flu, some have been crying – not everyone who is very sad is sad for the same reasons. Some are grieving – they are in the early stages of processing a loss. Some are depressed.

G. And depression is more of a settled state than grief. And it's caused by different things, it has different triggers.

1. Some depression is caused by events that have not been processed well and, as a result, our grief has become toxic – we are thinking and coping in unhealthy ways.²

2. Some is chemical. Depression tends to run in families leading us to believe that in some cases there is a genetic component to what is going on. Some people may need medical treatment.

3. There are other causes³ and other issues.

H. Today we are focused on grief: our natural response to loss – any loss from losing an important game or losing a job to losing friends, a spouse or a child. The magnitude of grief obviously varies – the bigger the loss the greater the grief, but people process grief differently. Men and women often react to the same loss in different ways. Different cultures respond differently. But in general, when you ask people who are grieving what they feel, they say things like: *I don't care. I can't sleep. I can't focus. I don't have any energy. Everything is gray. I'm sad. I feel like I'm wrapped in a wet blanket. About all I do is cry. I can't go even make small decisions. I wonder if God cares.* Grief is our natural response to a significant loss.

V. Today I want to set Six Points in front of you.

A. **One: Grief is a normal part of life in a broken world.** Some people wrongly believe that being a Christ-follower means we are protected from the things that cause grief. That is never the promise.

1. In Mark 4:37 – 40 Jesus tells the disciples to get in a boat and they set sail for the other side. A big storm comes up and they fear they will die. Meanwhile Jesus is asleep in the front of the boat. It's a famous passage because when Jesus wakes up he rebukes the storm.
2. In our study of Luke – which we will get back to in January – this event was covered in the *Amazed* section. It is one of the many miracles that Jesus did to show who he was – in this case by demonstrating his power over nature.⁴
3. We have Rembrandt's famous painting of this scene hanging in the office. I like it in part because of the reminder that you can be close to Jesus and doing exactly what he told you to do and caught in an ugly storm.
4. Grief is a normal part of life in a broken world.⁵

B. **Two: Grieving is not wrong or unspiritual.** Some think that grieving is unchristian. They believe that Christ's followers are expected to always be happy and smiling, never sad. I thought that for years. But the Bible is full of people who are grieving.

1. The prophets grieve. In fact, Jeremiah is known as the “weeping prophet” because he cries so much. He's also known for writing the Book of Lamentations, which is a big lament – that is, one long cry out to God in pain. It's a big complaint. There is nothing wrong with taking our complaints to God. It's a bad idea to complain about God, but there is nothing wrong with pouring out our hurt and anguish to God. The biblical word for that is lament and the Bible is full of them.⁶
2. King David grieves. David, a man after God's own heart, wrote lots of the Psalms. Many of them express his frustration with how things are going: In Psalms 118:5 he says that “he cried out with anguish to God;” in Psalm 38:8 he says: “I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart;” in Psalm 22 opens with the cry Jesus will repeat on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”⁷ Ever feel that way? This is the prayer of a man seeking after God. There is nothing wrong with bringing our complaints to God, nor of bringing our sadness to him.
3. Paul grieves. In 2 Corinthians 6 Paul speaks of himself as being “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.”
4. Jesus grieves. Jesus never sinned – He did not do anything wrong or unhealthy – but he grieved. He wept at the funeral for Lazarus;⁸ in Isaiah 53 he is described as “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;” in Luke 23 he expresses his anguish over Jerusalem; and in the Sermon on the Mount, He said, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”⁹

5. There is nothing unspiritual about grief. However, we do need to note, those who know Christ should grieve differently. As we learn in I Thes. 4, Christ-followers do not grieve as those who have no hope. Eternity changes everything. Even when everything in this life is unraveling, we can be assured that nothing in heaven has changed and God’s promises about eternal life are still true. Furthermore, those who are in Christ have the Holy Spirit, who is also called “the comforter.” So, again, our grief is different. But...grieving is not wrong. Sadness is not weakness or a sign of poor faith.¹⁰

C. **Three: Grieving is a choice.** Loss is unavoidable, but grief is a choice. We have to choose to “let the pain in.” We have to face it. Not everyone does. A lot of people stuff it – either unconsciously (which we call repression), or consciously (which we call suppression). A lot of people try to ignore their losses, to move through them without ever grieving.

1. This was my m.o. for quite a while – and it just about drove Sheri crazy. Growing up my family didn’t do emotions. So I didn’t have good examples of how to process disappointment; and I also got some bad advice. I don’t remember all of the circumstances of this event. What I do remember is that I was crying and my Dad came into the room and told me that he never wanted to hear me cry again. Ever. It was a sign of weakness; it was pathetic; it was for babies. His message was not, “stuff it” as much as it was “grow up,” but in order to grow up by that definition I had to stuff it. And so I did, and I didn’t cry again for about fifteen to twenty years.

2. What I learned was, when you faced a loss you put the best face on it you could and you came back twice as hard so that you didn’t lose again. This is the only plan some men know. Sadness is weakness. No excuses just results. Suck it up.

3. Well, that approach causes problems. It did for me. For starters, emotions are complicated things.¹¹ We cannot blindly follow them because they are not always good guides. But we cannot ignore them either. And – and here is my point – we can’t selectively shut them down. If you shut down sadness you shut down joy.¹² And, grief will find an outlet.

D. **Four: Grief will find an outlet.**

1. One: Grieving is a normal part of life in a broken world. Two: Grieving is not unspiritual, although we grieve differently. Three: Grieving is a choice. Four: Grief will find an outlet.

2. Grief is like water – it will bubble up somewhere. The basement of our first house flooded a lot. Initially I tried to keep it out by patching the cracks in the walls. That didn't work – the water just found new cracks. What I had to do was install a sump pump. I had to let the water in, but I did that in a way I could manage.
3. I was fortunate in that my grief was never overwhelming and it found socially acceptable outlets. I handled loss and the pain by working harder. I'm not saying this was healthy. But it worked for the low level of loss I faced, and it was acceptable.
4. There are a variety of ultimately destructive but socially acceptable ways for people to process grief. Runners World ran articles on both Zola Budd – remember this picture? – and Frank Shorter (who won a gold in the 1972 Olympics). As it turned out, both were running because the pain of running was the only time they could escape the pain in their heart. Budd's sister had died and she was left in a very bad situation. Shorter's father was a monster who abused his kids. There was a shocking line in the Budd piece that said that in her effort to deal with the stress in her life she ran, and after her sister's death, when the pain was greatest, "I ran myself into world class shape." Some run because the physical pain is the only way they get a break from the emotional pain.
5. Others take more destructive paths, such as cutting. Some people cut themselves because, in an odd and tragic way, it brings relief. The physical pain helps them escape the emotional pain. Or they self-medicate with alcohol or drugs. For others, unexpressed grief emerges as anger.
6. Anger was the case for Robert Lewis. Lewis, the founder of Men's Fraternity, grew up with an alcoholic father who couldn't hold onto a job and who was MIA as a dad. Lewis had a lot of unexpressed anger over this. For a while he was able to channel it into football – where he excelled. But his anger spilled out in unhealthy ways later on and as he entered his thirties he realized that something was wrong. [Let's watch this video.](#)

a) I was on a retreat in Colorado one day, and part of that day, I started thinking about my dad. Just thinking about what were the good things I experienced with my dad, and there were a lot of good things as I've told you about. But one of the things that hit me in that moment – because I was still struggling with anger in that – but one of the things that hit me in that moment was I began to think of all the things that I wish me and my dad could have done that we didn't get to do. This may sound strange to you guys, but I think that was the first time I ever thought those thoughts, about what we missed. Not what he did – but what he missed. That's a whole different thought pattern. Suddenly when I started thinking about all the things that I wished we would have had more of – or we could have done – I told you, I didn't feel a lot when I was a young man except anger - but for the first time, these big old tears came to my eyes, which kind of surprised me because I'm not a weepy type at all. Then the more I thought about it, the more the tears began to just flood down my face. I began to find myself banging the table -- not in anger anymore – but in grief over what I missed and he missed, and what we missed together. I know he didn't want to miss those things. Then something magical happened. In the midst of those tears, I forgave my dad because I realized he never, ever intended to do the things that actually happened in our home. You know men, you'll never be free from the past until you can let dad go; until you can forgive him and realize he was just a man. He wanted to be your hero, but he was just a man with his own stuff.¹³

E. **Five: Grieving is healthy. (Cover Ups Do Not Get Comforted).** It's hard to face the pain but it's healthy. In fact, it's the only healthy option we have. If we do not face it – and some of you haven't – then we get stuck. And some of you are.

1. You were hurt by your father or mother, or a teacher or coach or a bully or a racist or a jerk or a boss. You were taken advantage of, robbed, raped, abused, cheated or bullied. But instead of facing the pain you've tried to ignore it and it is holding you back. It's become poison. .

2. Major loss that isn't processed goes bad. It becomes toxic or leads to depression or anger or addictions. This is especially the case for kids who do have many resources for processing what is going on. But, at one level, you stay stuck at that point until you process it.

3. One of the very first counseling appointments I ever had – 30 years ago – was with a college freshman brought to see me by her roommate, who introduced her and said, “She can't say ‘Mom.’”

a) I'm like, “What do you mean? You can talk, right? And you can say Tom and milk and other words?” But you can't say “Mom.”

- b) Right. I can talk but I can't say "Mom."
- c) So tell me about your Mom.
- d) She died when I was eight.
- e) I'm sorry. How did she die?
- f) We don't talk about that. I'm not sure.
- g) You've never talked about your Mom's death?
- h) No. My Dad doesn't go there. We never talk about her. Ever.
- i) So, grief went bad. And it finds an outlet. In her case, it's that she can't say 'Mom,' which was obviously a sign of much bigger issues.

4. Most situations are not quite that clear cut. But here's what I want to be sure you hear: grief is not sin, but it is dangerous. It's a bit like anger in that you can be angry and not sin, but you'll have to work at it.¹⁴ Because unless you do something, it will lead you into trouble.

5. Loss needs to be expressed or it will set up camp and you will get stuck. Grieving is the healthy way. Crying, mourning, leaning into the pain and being sad – is good.

F. **Six: God has given us tools to deal with our grief.**

1. First of all, He gave us emotions, including the ability to cry. Crying is a gift from God. No other animal has that ability.¹⁵ But we do and we can pour out our grief with tears.¹⁶ Tears are not the goal, but facing the pain is and tears help us move through it.

2. Secondly, he gave us friends. Grief is healed in community. We all need each other. We are better together. God is on record saying that it's not good for man to be alone. God hates loneliness. He has eternally existed in the perfect fellowship he enjoys with himself, and he made us to be in community as well. Married or single, we all need others in our life. We need community. And we especially need community when we have suffered loss.¹⁷ The challenge with preaching a sermon to more than one person is that some need to hear one thing, and others need to hear the exact opposite. Some of you are stuck grieving. Others never grieve. One of the reasons we need good friends – wise friends – is to help us see ourselves. Some of you might need a therapist to help with this. But there is no life without change. There is no change without loss. And there is no loss without pain. We need to face the pain. We need to choose to grieve. We have to allow it. We have to allow ourselves to feel it.

3. Third: we have the Psalms. The Psalms are gift to the grieving. God has not only given us tears to cry and friends to help us sort things out. He has given us the prayers to pray when we are filled with grief. Most people think the book of Psalms is about thanksgiving and praise. There are 150 Psalms in the Bible. And close to half are psalms of lament. If you read them, it's pretty shocking how much negative stuff is in them. David and others say, "God, this is bad. I don't like this." And God says that pouring out your heart like that is OK. In fact, arguably, it's an act of worship.

G. Men and women, God cares for you. He loves you. He sent his Son to provide a way back. In Psalm 103:13 we read that God is close to the brokenhearted. It says, "The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who honor him. For he understands how weak we are."

H. Tell him that you are hurting and scared. "God, I'm grieving. God, I just got fired and I don't know what to do. It's a huge loss." Or "That big deal I was working on just fell apart," or "The divorce, it's final," or "The engagement is off and I'm broken. I need help. I'm broken." He will not say, "Stop your crying." He's tender. He's compassionate. He understands how weak we are.¹⁸

VI. There is more to say.

A. You need to hear that grief takes time. Don't think: I'll give myself 48 hours and then move on. It doesn't happen that way. Grief has its own timetable and you cannot rush it. And that means you need to give others time. Last week, under the "show up and shut up" part, I said, "Do not ever say – and then I rattled off a few things like, "I know how you feel," or, "It's going to be OK. God has everything under control." Well, here is another thing not to say, "Aren't you over it yet?" First of all, you don't get over it, you get through it. Grief fades slowly. It becomes a smaller part of who we are. Immediately after a major loss we are the loss. That's all we identify with. I'm the person who got fired. I'm the stroke victim. I'm the mother who lost a child. I'm the person whose marriage failed. I'm the person with cancer.¹⁹ My initial point here is, don't try to fix everybody right out of the gate. Let them grieve. That's part of the healing process.²⁰

VII. There is more to say. Next week we continue with struggle. Right now we move into communion.

A. And this is the appropriate time to say, one of the assumptions about all of this is that you know God personally. And that you have met him on His terms. Because – hey, He is God, He is the creator. He is the one who decides the terms.

- B. This table reminds us of the terms. We come, aware of our brokenness and in repentance, to declare his Lordship. And in taking the bread and the cup we once again celebrate the work He did on our behalf – paying our debt so that we might be free.
- C. This table highlights all of that.

VIII. Wrap up and Announcements

A. Grief is a gift. It's a normal reaction to loss. Cover-ups don't get comforted. If you cover up the pain, ignore or deny it because you are too afraid of your emotions, then you will not be comforted. You are trying to put a Band-Aid on a dirty wound – and that will not work. Some of you have un-mourned losses that are still waiting to be mourned. I want to invite you back tonight for our service of lament, where we will be providing space for you to grieve and be honest about your sadness. It's at 7 here in the LF sanctuary.

¹ I might also make a distinction between grief, depression and what some refer to as the Dark Night of the Soul – an oppressive and depressive malady that has sidelined (at least for a time) some of the most faithful Christians. It's a depression linked to a crisis of faith.

² This toxic grief infiltrates everything to the point of harming you and your relationships.

³ I believe some people get depressed because they get caught in a downward spiral: low self-esteem leads to low goals, which leads to low performance, which leads to lower self-esteem. The opposite also happens: high performance leads to higher self-esteem, which leads to higher performance. Those who lack a certain measure of discipline often get pulled downward in this spiral. Success makes us feel good and move forward.

⁴ As we move through this section of Luke we watch as Jesus systemically demonstrates his power over sickness, evil and death. Here, as with turning water into wine, he demonstrates his power over nature.

⁵ In my reading for this message I came across an article in which the writer, who was a pastor, said, "I have the privilege of offering eternal life to any man, woman, or child who is willing to have it. In Christ's name I can offer pardon, peace, grace and glory to anyone who recognizes their sin and embraces Christ. But I dare not offer him long life, an increased income or freedom from pain. I dare not promise the man who takes up his cross and follows Christ, that in the following he shall never meet a storm."

⁶ Phil 4 opens with the conflict between two women. Verse 5 and following is related to the conflict. Paul is offering some ways to move through conflict. Instead of being anxious, present your prayers (with petitions) to God.

⁷ It is worth reading further in both of these Psalms. Read Psalm 38 from vs 8 forward. Read all of Psalm 22 and you will see how, as is often the case, the initial cries of pain are comforted. Also, please note that this Psalm – which Jesus quoted on the cross – ends well. During Christ's time faithful Jews had memorized the Psalter, and they referred to them by their first line – i.e., they did not call Psalm 22, "Psalm 22." They called it "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" But they all knew how the Psalm ended – it is ultimately a Psalm proclaiming the goodness and rescue of God the Father.

⁸ John 11:33 reads: "When Jesus saw Lazarus' sister sobbing, (that was Mary) and he saw how all those with her were crying also, his heart was touched, and he was deeply moved... Then Jesus started crying. 'See how much he loved Lazarus!' they said."

⁹ This is not simply, blessed are those who are frustrated over anything and start to mourn – i.e., blessed are those who get sad because the Cubs are out of it again. If you read this in context you see that it's a bit more of, "blessed are those whose hearts are broken by the things that break God's heart." If you do not occasionally grieve what is going on in this world there is something wrong with your heart.

¹⁰ And by the way, the church is – and has been – full of leaders who have been overwhelmed by grief - Martin Luther the great reformer being one of them.

¹¹ It can be helpful to think of emotions – along with our thoughts and desires – as part of what the Bible describes as the "heart." Our emotions, like our thoughts and desires, cannot be ignored but they cannot be completely trusted either. They need to be examined in light of Scripture.

¹² And when you shut down sadness, you end up being alone in your sadness – shutting out people as well.

¹³ Now there may be a few of you saying, 'no, you don't know my dad. My dad was evil.' You know – to be real honest – because I believe in evil, there probably are some guys out there who just chose – even in the face of a family – to do evil to them. If that's the few of you, then you have another choice – it's not so much to forgive your dad, but simply to release your dad to God's ultimate justice. Here's what the Scripture in Romans 12:19 says: "Never take your own revenge, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'vengeance is Mine and I will repay.'" I want you to know we live in a moral universe, and though justice will not be wrapped in this life, what the Bible promises from Genesis to Revelation is that there will be justice; you can count on that. So, if there have been hurts inflicted upon you that were hurts of evil, you know, it's time to just let that go and not try to get even, because there will be a time for justice. So release your dad to God's justice. So, if you're a son wounded by dad, choose to touch this wound responsibly.

¹⁴ "Grief is a legitimate emotion, at times even a virtue. But there must be no place in the soul for bitterness." R.C. Sproul, "The Dark Night of the Soul," TableTalk

¹⁵ Animals do not have the range of emotions that we do. They feel fear, but not regret. A cow doesn't feel regret. A worm doesn't feel remorse. Your dog might run away from the mess he made with his tail between his legs, but it's fear of getting in trouble, not remorse for making the wrong choice that is on display. Animals do not have the range of emotions that we do, but God does. His grief – and his other emotions – are different than ours. Got gets angry but doesn't lose control and act like an idiot. But God grieves. He understands our pain. God does not say, "Suck it up and act like a man."

¹⁶ Some of you have not cried in a long time. Like me you were told not to cry. Or you were too overwhelmed to face the pain. I had to work on crying – and it took a couple years after I realized that not crying was not a sign of strength but a sign of trouble. It took a while to get the tears to flow.

¹⁷ Galatians 6:2 reads, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." In other words, when you're in pain I'm supposed to help carry your pain. When I'm in pain you're supposed to help carry my pain. And that makes it lighter. When we share pain it gets lighter. When we share joy and love it multiplies. See also: Romans 12:15: When others are happy, be happy with them. If they're sad, share their sorrow. Share their sorrow: grief is healed in community. Revealing your feeling is the beginning of healing. We share it with each other. That's what we do in small groups.

¹⁸ In fact, Jesus said this in his first public sermon in his hometown in Nazareth. Luke 4:18, Jesus said, "God has sent me to heal the brokenhearted."

¹⁹ And part of what is upsetting is our belief that this is all others see. No it isn't. I got news for you, they are not thinking about you at all. They've got their own issues, and if they are thinking, they see you for more than that. If you've lost a child that will always be part of your story – a very important part. But it's not the complete story. In Solomon's reflections on life – the Book of Ecclesiastes 3 – he says: There's a time for everything. There's a season for every activity under heaven... a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance."

²⁰ Parents, please hear this: there are things worth crying about. Stop encouraging your kids to stuff it! Because that's one of the worst lessons you can give them. Let them cry as long as they need to cry. You're making it sound

like the crying is worse than the pain. No, the pain is worse. When an adult immediately starts saying “stop crying”, it’s like I’m more interested in you not making noise than me taking care of your pain, and me comforting you.