

5 Adaptive Muscles

#1 Tending Grief Worship Resources

Recommended Scriptures

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

There is a natural and spiritual time for grief that forms us even as we may have the instinct to try to avoid it (outline below).

Matthew 26:36-46

Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane is facing something he does not want and surrenders to the path he is on and to God's care.

Psalm 4

Call for God to hear us and the assurance that God does. (See Illuminating Resilience link below).

Lamentations 5

Acknowledgment of suffering and the inevitable questions it brings.

Isaiah 40

God's comfort amid hopeless circumstances.

Specifically, 40:28-31. Note the onomatopoeic Hebrew word for "comfort" in v 1: *nacham*.

Psalm 73

Faithfulness to God amid struggles.

John 11:25-26

The death of Lazarus brings Jesus' followers sorrow and invites Jesus into pain. God always invites us to new beginnings if we can open ourselves to grace amid our sufferings.

Psalm 137

Very personal and brutal lament, included in biblical literature to remind us that we can say it all to God who can hear us and still love us through the anger that can accompany grief.

Matthew 5:4

Jesus sets a different imagination for their religious rituals by coming back to "you have heard that it was said... but I say to you..."

Revelation 21:4

"God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more, mourning and crying will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

Psalm 30: 2, 1

"Oh Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me...You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that my soul may praise you and not be silent."

Isaiah 61:3

"God gives me beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that God may be glorified."

Key Themes, Definitions, Theological Ideas

Grief – Emotional sorrow from loss

Seven Stages of Grief:

- Shock and denial
- Pain and guilt
- Anger and bargaining
- Depression
- The upward turn
- Reconstruction and working through
- Acceptance and hope

God's Will – God's plan is a delicate idea to minister from in the space of grief. Not everything that happens is God's plan AND God is forming us amid all our happenings. This is the idea behind Romans 8:28...God will cooperate with us towards good but God will never force us or dominate us, but instead invites us through grace.

God is Close to Those who Suffer – the scriptures are clear that God is specially attuned to the suffering.

The Holy Spirit is a Comforter – The Holy Spirit is given to the disciples in John 14 as a comforter.

Shortcutting Grief – Often grief can be short-cutted because we do not want to deal with loss. This is unhealthy, missing what God is doing, and does not honor what is lost.

Grief is Nonlinear - Grief responses often come at moments we do not expect. Even if we go through a period of grieving there are unexpected triggers.

Spiritual Journey/Spiritual Seasons – The spiritual journey is often understood in the metaphor of seasons. We experience God and grow differently in seasons of joy and sorrow, happiness, and pain, etc. See sermon outline.

New Life/Resurrection – New life/resurrection is a delicate idea to minister from in a season of grief (see shortcutting). God is making all things new, but we must go through seasons of grief instead of around them.

Common Points of Grief in Churches:

- Loss of members through death, relocation, or estrangement
- Diminished capacities among certain members due to illness or other life changes
- Change of pastors/change in community/loss of centering of the church in its community
- Loss of long-term traditions/programs / beloved components of worship
- Loss of consensus and collaboration around common issues
- Losses related to the pandemic or due to divisions in the UMC
- Loss of financial stability
- Loss of predictability and “ordinary” rhythms of life together
- Lower levels of attendance, activities, and programming

Worship Resources (liturgy/hymns/songs/stories/poems, etc.)

Poems

Where the Breath Begins

by Jan Richardson

Beloved is Where We Begin

by Jan Richardson

For a New Beginning

by John O'Donohue

Shelley Walters website Illuminating Resilience

NPR Life Kit

Motoi Yamamoto art

All Saints Sunday

Hymns

“Pues Si Vivimos” UMH 356

“Saranam” UMH 523

“Nearer, My God, to Thee” UMH 528

“O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go” UMH 480

“Out of the Depths I Cry to You” UMH 515

“Canticle of Redemption” UMH 516



Salt Project

Worship resource site with free videos, graphics and commentary.



“Train Yourself to Always Show Up” by Sharon Brous

The power of communal grieving by telling us of a ritual used by our ancient ancestors.

Practices of Grieving

Grieving Tree

A grieving tree is placed outside the sanctuary, encouraging members to record a loss or sadness on a paper leaf and place it on the tree. Leaves of different colors could represent expressions of “lament” or “gratitude” or “praise.” At certain intervals there could be a time of gathering to acknowledge the losses represented, commend them to God, and ask for healing and renewal for those who have brought these burdens; as well as to give thanks for the presence of goodness, gratitude, and praise even amid hurt and loss.

Prayer Wall

A prayer wall of metal latticework in an outdoor area, providing ribbons of different colors for tying onto the lattice. The invitation was for prayers of lament, intercession, and thanksgiving.

Candle-Lighting

A candle-lighting table in the sanctuary, ideally in an alcove or side area. Worshipers are invited to engage that table in various ways to express a loss, a surrender, a hope, a gratitude.

Anointing Oil

Anointing with Oil for Healing and Wholeness per the Book of Worship is a ritual I've used quite frequently in worship, including on Sunday mornings, though it lends itself to smaller gatherings as well.

Lent

The season of Lent invites consideration of themes related to “shriving,” wilderness, penitence, longing, and surrender. Holy Week, of course, holds a rich fund of expressions of mourning and grief (Palm/Passion Sunday, Maundy Thursday/Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday; as does All Saints' Sunday/Day).

Longest Night Service

A Service of the Longest Night, hosted on or near December 21st, the Winter Solstice, also provides a promising opportunity to blend expressions of loss and mourning with hope and assurance. Among the musical resources for that occasion are “The Hills Are Bare at Bethlehem” and Peter Mayer’s “Longest Night.” Other ritual aspects of such a gathering may include bringing strips of raveled cloth, representing sorrows and losses, forward to dress the manger; also anointing with oil.

Labyrinth



Labyrinth Locator



How to Make a Masking
Tape Labyrinth

Sermon Outline

Text – Ecclesiastes 3:1-8:

- 1 There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:
- 2 a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
- 3 a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
- 4 a time to weep and a time to laugh,

a time to mourn and a time to dance,
5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
6 a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
7 a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
8 a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.

Abstract

This sermon is designed to create space for grief in and around the experiences of a church congregation. Too often grief goes unrecognized or unsupported because it can be awkward to talk about. This message will act as a catalyst for permission-giving and further conversation for naming and processing communal grief.

Outline

- I. Introduction
 - a. Ecclesiastes
 - b. The spirituality of a time for everything
 - i. God is forming us in the uniqueness of these seasons
 - ii. Some seasons are more comfortable than others
 - iii. We often want to define spirituality through the more pleasant of seasons rather than have faith through the less pleasant seasons
- II. A time for grief
 - a. The spiritual presence of grief
 - b. What common griefs come in our churches
 - c. The experience of grief can leave us [We are formed in grief to be] more compassionate, aware of others' pain, and ultimately prepared for new directions
- III. The cost of avoiding grief
 - a. Unhealthy patterns
 - b. Missing what God is doing
 - c. Not honoring what has been lost

Sermon Outline (cont.)

IV. Grief in community

- a. Grieve with one another
 - i. Bring up the conversation
- b. Grieve for one another

V. Conclusion

- a. Value what is now and one another
- b. Where is new life/resurrection showing up

Quotes and Further Study

“When pain is brought to speech, it turns to energy. When it is not brought to speech, it turns to despair. That means that the people who make a difference are the ones who bring pain to speech . . . Lament is the breakout of numbness by the admission of pain and loss. If we don’t stay close to our pain, then we can’t stay close to our neighbor’s pain.”

– **WALTER BRUGGEMAN**

“Every great loss demands that we choose life again. We need to grieve in order to do this. The pain we have not grieved over will always stand between us and life.

– **RACHEL NAOMI REMEN**

“Ambiguous loss makes us feel incompetent. It erodes our sense of mastery and destroys our belief in the world as a fair, orderly, and manageable place. But if we learn to cope with uncertainty, we must realize that there are differing views of the world, even when that world is less challenged by ambiguity . . . If we are to turn the corner and cope with uncertain losses, we must first temper our hunger for mastery. This is the paradox.”

– **PAULINE BOSS**



Igniting Imagination Podcast:
Leading Organizational Grief
with Shannon Hopkins



Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times
by Soong-Chan Rah



This video depicting elephants grieving a lost member of the herd. What can we learn from them about tending to our grief?



Igniting Imagination Podcast:
Stewarding Ambiguous Loss
with Dr. Pauline Boss

Quotes and Further Study (cont.)

“Finding the power of the sacred, not despite suffering, but in the midst of it: This is the alchemy of dark emotions. Through this alchemy, grief moves us from sorrow for what we’ve lost to gratitude for what remains. Fear of life’s fragility is transformed to the joy of living fully, with openness. And even despair becomes the ground of resilient faith - not just an opiate for our pain, but a profound commitment to life as it is.” ”

– **MIRIAM GREENSPAN**

“Buried deep within the Mishnah, a Jewish legal compendium from around the third century, is an ancient practice reflecting a deep understanding of the human psyche and spirit: When your heart is broken, when the specter of death visits your family, when you feel lost and alone and inclined to retreat, you show up. You entrust your pain to the community.”

– **RABBI SHARON BROUS**

“In every childhood there is a door that closes. Only real love waits while we journey through our grief. That is the real trustworthiness between people. In all the epics, in all the stories that have lasted through many lifetimes, it is always the same truth: love must wait for wounds to heal. It is this waiting we must do for each other, not with a sense of mercy, or in judgment, but as if forgiveness were a rendezvous. How many are willing to wait for another in this way?”

– **ANNE MICHAELS,**

The Winter Vault

“You do not have to sit outside in the dark. If, however, you want to look at the stars, you will find that darkness is necessary.”

– **ANNIE DILLARD**

“Pain isn’t neutral. It hardens or softens my heart.”

– **SUSAN CLASSEN**