

Lament and Sorrow

I. The nature of pain and hurt

A. Lament is a biblical reality

There is real pain, brokenness, and injustice in the world. **And the Bible actually encourages us to lament the brokenness in the world.** Even though in one sense the Bible commands us to rejoice always (Phil. 4), there is another sense that sadness is a right response to circumstances in this sin-cursed world. There is a whole book of the Bible that is a Lament (Lamentations), as well as many Psalms (ie. Ps. 22). This shows us that it's good for us to learn to lament the things that are broken in this world. The world isn't how it is supposed to be yet. This shows us that true biblical joy is not just happiness. Joy is deeper than that and can be present even when there is sadness.

Now Christian Lament is not like worldly lament. Because of the gospel, the Christian always has hope. So while it is good to lament the brokenness of the world at times, we do not grieve like those who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13).

So as Christians, our response to brokenness is to weep with those who weep, and to rejoice with those who rejoice (Rom. 12:15). We are called to comfort those who are suffering the effects of the fall. As those who are entering into the brokenness of others our first response is to care for and sympathize what they are feeling.

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.

Often, the best way to care for someone in loss is simply to sit and grieve with them. They probably don't need Rom. 8:28 at that moment. Yes, God will work it out for good, but it doesn't *feel* good in the moment and simply sitting and acknowledging and grieving the pain with them is a massive comfort. All of us can provide the simple blessing of our presence in pain.

B. Right and wrong sorrow

On the other hand, not all sorrow is the same. We can be sad about things that aren't sad to God and we can be happy about things that aren't happy to God. **We can rejoice over our sin and mourn the loss of our idols.** We can mourn God's good discipline instead of seeing the goodness in it. So as those who are entering into the brokenness of others, we want to be discerning.

There is a worldly sorrow that leads to death, and a godly sorrow that leads to repentance. Worldly sorrow is sorrow that is sad about something that God says is good. Worldly sorrow is being sad about the consequences of our sin instead of the fact that we have sinned against God.

2 Corinthians 7:8-12

For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it—for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while—I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter. So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the offender nor for the sake of the one offended, but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God.

C. Table Discussion: How have you experienced godly sorrow and worldly sorrow?

II. So how do we help someone in suffering and sorrow?

The Bible's consistent emphasis on how we help others is a gentle approach. Because of our weakness, we need patient help in our sorrow and brokenness.

A. Sympathy/compassion

The book of Job is a masterclass on suffering and sorrow. It teaches key lessons: a) Even great suffering isn't always due to our sin. b) Job's friends were worthless as counselors because of their lack of compassion. Their pride made them oversimplify God and the cause of what happened to Job. c) God has great compassion and care towards Job, despite Job's bitter accusations of God. Even though Job sinned, while God corrected Job, God was gracious to bless and vindicate him.

Job 42:7-8

It came about after the Lord had spoken these words to Job, that the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has. Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves, and My servant Job will pray for you. For I will accept him so that I may not do with you according to your folly, because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has."

Don't take the **words of someone hurting** too seriously as if what they say is their settled conviction. John Piper said this verse had the greatest effect on the counseling ministry of their church.

Job 6:26

"Do you intend to reprove my words, When the words of one in despair belong to the wind?"

God knows that we are only **dust** and treats us with **understanding**.

Psalms 103:13-14

Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.

Jesus can help us because He can sympathize with us and our **weaknesses**.

Hebrews 4:15

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

Jesus was **gentle and lowly** and didn't burden people.

Matthew 11:29

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Jesus teaches the story of the Compassionate Samaritan to instill in us that compassion is at the heart of understanding God's mercy.

Luke 10:33-37

"But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."

Likewise, the story of the Prodigal Son is really the story of the Compassionate Father who is waiting to accept his son.

Luke 15:20

So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

B. Patience/gentleness

God calls us to be patient and gentle with all.

1 Timothy 1:15-16

It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

Colossians 3:12

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience...

1 Thessalonians 2:7-12

But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; just as

you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

2 Timothy 2:24-25

The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth...

C. Persuasion/listening

Proverbs says so much about being a good listener, and how gracious speech allows our words to persuade and take root in people.

Proverbs 16:21, 23

The wise in heart will be called understanding, and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.

The heart of the wise instructs his mouth and adds persuasiveness to his lips.

Proverbs 18:13

He who gives an answer before he hears, It is folly and shame to him.

Proverbs 20:5

A plan in the heart of a man is like deep water, But a man of understanding draws it out.

Proverbs 22:11

He who loves purity of heart and whose speech is gracious, the king is his friend.

Proverbs 25:15

By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue breaks the bone.

D. Winning

People need to be persuaded to the truth. Our goal is to win people, not arguments.

Proverbs 11:30

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who is wise wins souls.

1 Corinthians 9:19-22

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.

1 Peter 3:1-2

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

Matthew 18:15

"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother."

2 Corinthians 4:12; 7:3-4

So death works in us, but life in you.

I do not speak to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together. Great is my confidence in you; great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort; I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction.

III. The wisdom of helping

When someone is hurting, or someone is in crisis, as we already said, our first response should be to weep with them, to show compassion, to listen, and to simply be there for them. But in crisis, our goal is to eventually move past that to being able to help them. Ultimately, we know, the truth spoken in love is what helps people. And so we need wisdom to know what will actually help the person grieving or hurting.

As we already mentioned, sorrow can be coming from a variety of places in our hearts. Our sorrow can actually be godly or worldly sorrow. We have to be very careful not to merely judge someone's sorrow, but we do need wisdom if we are going to help. Sorrow can be an indicator of inordinate desires or ruling desires in our hearts, idols as we saw last time.

But often as people our sorrow is over things that aren't eternal, that are simply due to our weakness. For example, we grieve because of pain. It hard, it hurts. Now we could simply tell everyone to stop grieving and rejoice because as James says, pain is actually good for us. But that is a harsh perspective, and now how God treats us as we already saw. He has compassion on us in our weaknesses. So often when we grieve, in some sense, we are grieving a loss of an idol, something that isn't ultimately satisfying. Since as believers we can't lose Christ, we aren't grieving not having Him, and so in some sense all other losses are over losing something less significant. And yet, how does the Bible deal with those losses?

- The widows in Acts 6:1 who complained weren't told to just stop complaining. They weren't just told to rejoice in their suffering. Their legitimate need was addressed to care for them.
- One of the most interesting and nuanced passages about sorrow in the Bible is 2 Cor. 2:7-8. There Paul argues that the Corinthian who had been disciplined for his sin should now be comforted and restored, so that he wouldn't be overwhelmed with excessive sorrow. Even though this person was suffering the effects of his own sin, Paul was concerned that he not be overwhelmed with sorrow.

2 Corinthians 2:7-8

...so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.

A. A hypothetical

It's like when a 7 year old girl drops her ice cream on the floor and starts balling about it. Yes, it's an overreaction, yes, it shows that she was idolizing ice cream. But a good dad doesn't just say, "Suck it up kid, life is pain, and anyone says differently is selling something." What will a good dad do? They will say, "It's no big deal," and go buy another ice cream. Now of course, there are times we can't simply go buy another ice cream. Either way we are called to tenderly shepherd her

heart and point her to Christ as ultimately the only thing that can satisfy. But remember, that 7 year old little girl all of us. We all are sad over hard things in life that aren't eternal. We all need God's compassionate grace and mercy.

Now of course, if the 7 year old girl is screaming and yelling and demanding ice cream, instead of just crying about it, that's a different situation. If she is yelling, screaming, and demanding, and we say, "Poor girl, I will get whatever you want," you will create a entitled terror. So we want to help shepherd her through her heart issue and won't go get her a new ice cream until she is sorry for being demanding. We would compassionately tell her, we're sorry you dropped your ice cream, but we can't be demanding. We need to trust the Lord and be thankful. We care for her but shepherd her heart towards what is good. But if she repents of being demanding, I'm probably going to get her a new ice cream. Just teaching her to suck it up isn't a gospel response. Compassionate truth telling is always God's way.

But once again, if the situation wasn't that she accidentally dropped her ice cream, but said, "I didn't want this flavor," and threw it on the ground, that's a different story. We're not buying her a new ice cream. She needs to learn that ice cream won't make her happy, that her idols aren't good for her. We can still be kind and compassionate, but that's a different story.

If the thing that she is lamenting over is good, we care about the loss of it. Yes, you may be wanting it more than you should. That's part of being human, that's weakness. But we want good things for you, and we care about you and want good things for you. So we can mourn with people over the loss of things and bear with their weaknesses. Wanting something good too much is different than wanting something evil.

Is it very different for us as adults than as kids? Fundamentally we are like kids and our heart responses are the same. When someone is discouraged because they are sick again with chronic illness, or because their car is totalled, they don't need someone telling them to suck it up because heaven is coming. It's true in a sense, but that's not how God deals with us. Yes, we need truth. Yes, we need reminders. But we need them given from a place of compassion.

- B. Table Discussion: When someone is sad/depressed about a non-eternal loss, say they lose their job, what would be the two extremes in terms of how we help them? How should we help them instead?

So it takes wisdom to know how to handle sorrow. On the one hand, we shouldn't simply be naive, and think that all sorrow is the same and the only right response is to just agree with the hurting person about whatever they are thinking or feeling. We want to help people to feel how God feels, to be sad about what makes God sad, and to rejoice in Him and in eternity. But we also want to be ambassadors of God, and exhibit His compassion and kindness to us in our weakness.

IV. What the gospel must clearly **show** and **communicate**

There are key gospel truths that we must be clear in communicating when we are helping people. Often times these things can be true, but we either undermine or don't communicate them clearly. It takes intentionality to clearly communicate consistently with the gospel. Jesus didn't come to help the healthy but the sick, it's those who are hurting who need gospel help.

A. **We are for you** - God's ways are good for you

If someone thinks or knows that you aren't wanting their good, why should they listen to you? Would you accept help from someone that had ulterior motives? This is why it is so important in the gospel that God shows His goodness. God establishes His truthworthiness and we should labor to do the same. If we really care for people we will show that genuine care. This is why Paul labored so hard to show how he was for people (1 Thess. 2:7-12). Just coming alongside and physically caring for someone suffering, bringing them food, helping them

B. **We are not better than you** - The gospel is where all our righteousness is found

If someone thinks or knows that you think you are more deserving of God's favor than they are, they will know you are self-righteous and your help is just to puff yourself up. This is why the Bible is so full of verses not to judge each other, because it undermines the truth that we are all in desperate need of mercy and grace (Matt. 7:1; Luke 6:36-37; James 4:11-12). This is why we want to be so careful not to be shocked/surprised by other people's problems or sin. If we really know the depths of our own struggle and sin, we won't be shocked by others' sin.

C. **We understand you** - God knows what we need

If someone thinks or knows you are misdiagnosing their true heart problem, they won't accept your cure. Would you accept chemotherapy from a doctor when you knew you had the flu and not cancer? Even if the doctor was very caring and compassionate, if he diagnosed the wrong condition, his solution won't be correct. In the same way, we want to be careful to understand the people we are trying to help, and if we don't agree with the diagnosis of the problem, then we won't agree about the cure (Prov. 18:13; 1 Pet. 3:7).

D. **We don't write you off as hopeless** - The gospel gives hope of true transformation

It doesn't matter how broken someone appears, the gospel is the supernatural power of God to change people. So that means there is always hope for change. Ultimately, even though this world is broken as believers our hope is the return of Christ (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 2:4-5; Titus 2:13).

E. **Checking ourselves**

This is why helping others in their crisis always starts with us. We have to make sure that we are genuinely concerned for their good, not driven by self-righteousness, condemnation, bitterness, or anything other than genuine care for the person. If we really want to help people, we have to be ambassadors of God and His grace.

Jesus commands us not to judge/condemn, because we too have faults.

Matthew 7:1-5

"Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

Paul wants us to be full of the fruit of the spirit to truly help others.

Galatians 6:1-2

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

We know that anger does not produce righteous fruit, peace does.

Proverbs 14:29

He who is slow to anger has great understanding, But he who is quick-tempered exalts folly.

James 1:19; 3:13-18

This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger...

Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

V. Table Discussion: What are ways that we can unintentionally communicate something that goes against these core gospel truths when helping hurting people?

VI. Small Group Questions:

- Without telling your whole story, think about the hardest thing you have ever walked through. How did people help or try to help you through it?
- When you went through that hard situation, what truth did your heart really need to embrace?

VII. Homework

Think again through one of the hardest situations you have been through in life. Now answer the following questions:

- What did that situation reveal about your heart?
- What truth did you need to hear in that situation?
- How would you have wanted someone to help walk with you to encourage you in that truth?