

# when life falls apart.

*God is not afraid of your worst day. God's already in it.*

Grief, trauma, depression, waiting on God, and the prayers the Bible wrote for exactly this.

When Life Falls Apart: Suffering, Lament, and Holding On

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Sunday Worship: Crossland High School, 6901 Temple Hill Rd, Temple Hills, MD 20748. Sundays at 10:00 AM

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This book is pastoral encouragement, not a substitute for professional mental health care. If you are in crisis, call or text 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline): available 24 hours a day.

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*"The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."*

**PSALM 34:18 (NIV)**

# From the Community of Hope family

This book comes to you from Community of Hope AME Church, the family God planted in the DMV in 2006, in a nightclub, with eight people who believed God meant every word. Twenty years in the making. Still going. Still standing with people on their worst days. Still convinced that everyone has a chance.

*"The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."*

**PSALM 34:18 (NIV)**

Whoever picked up this book, whether the bottom dropped out yesterday or years ago, whether you're grieving, surviving, or just barely holding on, the welcome is the same. We don't care how you come to Community of Hope. We only care about the way you leave: seen, held, honest with God, and not alone. This book exists to sit with you in the dark and hand you the prayers God wrote for it.

Where Everyone Has a Chance.

# A letter to the reader

You good? It's okay if the answer is no.

Friend, I need you to know something before you read another page: this isn't a book that's going to tell you to smile through it. I have stood at too many gravesides for that. In twenty years of ministry in this community, I have buried people we prayed hard for. I have sat with mothers on the worst night of their lives. I have watched strong men, the ones everybody else leans on, come apart in my office with the door closed. And I have had my own seasons when the bottom dropped and my prayers felt like they were hitting the ceiling.

So this book won't lie to you. It won't rush you. And it won't hand you a bumper sticker where you needed a shoulder.

Here is what it will do. It will show you the God who stays in the room when everything falls apart, the One who is *close to the brokenhearted*, not disappointed in them. It will teach you a way of praying that most of us were never taught: lament, the Bible's own language for pain. A third of the Psalms pray this way. God put the minor key in Scripture's own songbook, which means your worst day has a place in worship. And it will walk with you through the heavy things by name, grief, trauma, depression, the long silence of waiting, without pretending any of them are simple.

Read this book slowly. Read it out of order, the chapters are marked; go where it hurts. Put it down when you need to and pick it back up without guilt. If tears come, let them. That's not weakness. That's the language this book is written in.

One more thing, and hear me: praying people get counseling. God works through therapists, doctors, and medicine, the same as through pastors. If the weight you're carrying is more than heavy, if you're in crisis, call or text 988 right now, and then call us. This book will still be here.

You aren't too broken for God. You're exactly who God is close to.

With you in the valley,

**Pastor Tony Lee**

SENIOR PASTOR, COMMUNITY OF HOPE AME CHURCH

# when the bottom drops

# This Book Is a Waiting Room

Something happened. Maybe it happened suddenly, a phone call, a diagnosis, a knock on the door, a text you'll never unread. Maybe it happened slowly, a marriage that starved, a depression that crept, a hope that got deferred so many times it stopped answering to its name. Either way, you're here now: in the season nobody chooses, holding pieces that used to be a life.

Before anything else, we want to tell you what this book isn't going to do.

It isn't going to explain your pain away. It isn't going to tell you God needed another angel, or that everything happens for a reason you should be able to smile about by Friday. It isn't going to hand you five steps to feeling better, because grief doesn't take stairs. And it's absolutely not going to tell you that if you had more faith, this wouldn't hurt.

Here's why we can skip all of that: because God doesn't lead with explanations. Look at what God leads with:

*"The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."*

**PSALM 34:18 (NIV)**

Close. That's the whole opening move of heaven when your life falls apart. Not a lecture. Not a to-do list. Nearness. The Hebrew word for "crushed" in that verse means pulverized: ground down to dust. God doesn't wait for you to sweep yourself back into shape before coming near. God moves *toward* the crushed. The worse the break, the closer God gets.

That means this book is less like a repair manual and more like a waiting room, a place where you're allowed to sit down, stop performing, and let Somebody sit with you. Waiting rooms don't demand anything of you. You don't have to understand your situation to be in one. You don't have to be strong. You just have to stay.

And here's what we've learned in twenty years of sitting with people in the dark: **staying is the whole assignment right now.** Not healing on schedule. Not being inspirational. Staying, with God, with breath in your body, with one more page of this book. Everything else in these chapters is downstream of that.

Jesus once stood outside His friend's tomb, a man He was about to raise, a story He already knew the ending of, and before He did anything about the pain, He did something *with* it:

*"Jesus wept."*

**JOHN 11:35 (NIV)**

The shortest verse in the Bible, and one of the deepest. He knew resurrection was four minutes away, and He still stopped and cried with the grieving. Because that's who God is. God doesn't skip the valley just because the mountain is already known. God walks it, with you, at your pace.

So sit down, friend. You're in the waiting room. God's already here.

**TRY IT: JUST SIT**

No assignment tonight except this. Find a quiet place, put your hand on your chest, and say: out loud or in a whisper:

*"God, this is where it hurts. I'm not going to pretend with You. You said You're close to the brokenhearted. Be close to me right now."*

That's the whole prayer. You don't have to feel anything for it to count.

# God's People Fall Apart Too

**Somewhere along the way, a lot of us picked up the idea that falling apart is a faith failure, that real believers stay strong, and if your life is in pieces, you must be doing this wrong.**

The Bible tears that idea to shreds. Not with a verse, with its whole cast.

Job lost his children, his health, and his livelihood in a single season, and spent most of his book on an ash heap, scraping his sores and asking God why he was ever born (Job 3:11). The Bible calls him "blameless and upright" (Job 1:1), the falling apart and the faithfulness in the same man.

Elijah called down fire from heaven, won the biggest showdown in Old Testament history, and one chapter later, ran into the wilderness, sat down under a tree, and prayed to die:

*"I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."*

1 KINGS 19:4 (NIV)

Hold that verse up to the light. The mightiest prophet of his generation, so depleted he asked God to end it. And watch what God did next, no rebuke, no sermon. God let him sleep. God fed him, twice. God let him say his pain out loud, twice. And then God gave him a next step and a companion so he wouldn't be alone (1 Kings 19:5-16). That's God's protocol for a servant who's done: rest, food, honesty, company, one small next thing. Write that down. We'll come back to it.

David, warrior, king, the man after God's own heart, filled his songbook with nights he cried until his bed floated: "I am worn out from my groaning. All night long I flood my bed with weeping" (Psalm 6:6). Jeremiah, the prophet God handpicked before he was born, cursed the day of his birth (Jeremiah 20:14). Naomi came home from burying her husband and both sons and told her whole town to stop calling her

"pleasant" and start calling her "bitter", "because the Almighty has made my life very bitter" (Ruth 1:20). She said that out loud. In public. And God kept her in the story, and put her in the family line of Jesus.

And then there's Jesus Himself. The night before the cross, in an olive grove, He told His closest friends the plain truth: "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Matthew 26:38). He sweated like drops of blood. He asked the Father, three times, for another way. The sinless Son of God didn't face His worst night with a smile. He faced it face-down in the dirt, honest to heaven.

Do you see what this roll call means for you? **Falling apart isn't the opposite of faith. It's part of the terrain faith walks through.** The people God used most weren't the people who never broke. They were the people who brought God the pieces, the ash heap, the wilderness tree, the flooded bed, the olive grove. Every one of them fell apart *toward* God instead of away from God. That's the only difference that matters, and it's a difference you can choose tonight.

You're not disqualified, friend. You're in the company of prophets.

#### TRY IT: PICK YOUR PERSON

Which one is your seat in this chapter. Job's ash heap, Elijah's tree, David's flooded bed, Naomi's bitterness, Jesus' olive grove? Name it to God:

*"God, right now I'm \_\_\_\_\_. You stayed with them. Stay with me. And do for me what You did for Elijah: rest, bread, honesty, company, and one small next thing."*

# The Lie of the Strong Face

**Let's talk about the performance, because a lot of us are giving one, every single day, and it's killing us slowly.**

You know the script. Somebody asks how you're doing, and the answer comes out automatic: *I'm blessed. I'm good. God is good, all the time.* Meanwhile the marriage is bleeding out, or the grief has teeth, or you cried in your car before you walked in. We've learned to lead with the testimony and bury the truth. Church folks might be the best in the world at it, because somewhere we absorbed the idea that admitting we're not okay would embarrass God.

Hear this plainly: **God isn't embarrassed by your truth. God is grieved by your mask.**

Look at what God said about the worship of people whose insides and outsides didn't match:

*"These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."*

ISAIAH 29:13 (NIV)

God's complaint was never that the people brought too much honesty. It was that they brought too little: polished words on the outside, distance on the inside. God would rather have your wreckage than your performance. David said it straight after his own collapse: "You do not delight in sacrifice... My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise" (Psalm 51:16-17). Won't despise. The thing you've been hiding is the offering God accepts.

And the strong face doesn't just cost you God's comfort, it costs you everybody else's too. Nobody can hold what you won't hand them. The church was designed as a body precisely so the hurting parts could be carried: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law

of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). But a burden you keep denying is a burden nobody can help you carry. The mask doesn't protect you. It isolates you, which is exactly where the enemy wants the wounded: alone, smiling, and dying quietly.

We understand why you built it. Somebody needed you to be strong, your kids, your mama, your team, your congregation. Maybe you grew up in a house where falling apart wasn't safe, where the strong face was survival. We're not shaming the mask; it got you here. But survival tools have expiration dates. What kept you alive in one season will keep you sick in this one.

At Community of Hope we've spent years doing real talk with men about exactly this: brothers who were taught that the only acceptable emotions were fine and angry. And we've watched what happens when one man in the room finally says *I'm not okay* out loud. The whole room exhales. Because everybody was performing, and everybody was tired. Honesty is contagious in the best way. Somebody has to go first.

Here's your permission, in writing: you can be a person of deep faith and say *this hurts*. You can love God and say *I'm not okay*. You can lead the meeting, raise the kids, sing in the choir, and still tell somebody the truth. The strong face was never the assignment. The honest heart always was.

#### TRY IT: ONE PERSON, ONE SENTENCE

This week, retire the mask with one safe person. Not everybody, one. Say one true sentence: "I'm actually not okay right now." That's it. You don't have to explain everything.

And before you do, practice on the One who already knows:

*"God, here's what's under the mask: \_\_\_\_\_. You said You won't despise a broken heart. I'm taking You at Your word."*

# **lament: the prayer nobody taught you**

# A Third of the Songbook

**Here's something they don't usually teach in Sunday school: the Bible's own songbook is full of complaints.**

Open the book of Psalms, God's gift of a prayer book, the songs Israel sang in worship, the words Jesus prayed from the cross, and count. Out of 150 psalms, somewhere between a third and a half are **laments**: songs of pain, protest, confusion, and grief. Songs that say *how long?* and *why?* and *where are You?* Songs written by people whose lives were falling apart, collected by God, and set to music for the whole congregation to sing.

Sit with that. God looked at prayers like this —

*"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?"*

**PSALM 22:1 (NIV)**

— and put them in the Book. On purpose. Forever. That's not an oversight. That's a message: **pain has a place in worship**. The minor key isn't the opposite of praise. It's praise with the truth left in.

Think about what this means. If the only acceptable prayer were the happy kind, God would have edited the Psalms down to about ninety. God didn't. God preserved the 3 AM prayers, the hospital-hallway prayers, the graveside prayers: knowing we'd need words for the worst days and would never find them on our own. Lament is God handing you a script for the conversation you didn't know you were allowed to have.

And notice who prayed Psalm 22. Those exact words, *my God, my God, why have you forsaken me*, are the words Jesus cried from the cross (Matthew 27:46). Let that reframe everything: on His worst day, the Son of God reached for a lament. He didn't improvise a positive confession. He pulled an old song of anguish off the shelf of His memory and prayed it at

full volume, in public, with His dying strength. If lament was good enough for Jesus at Calvary, it's holy enough for you in your kitchen at midnight.

Here's what lament actually is, in one sentence: **lament is taking your pain to God instead of just talking about God, or walking away from God.** When the bottom drops, you've really only got three directions. You can stuff it and perform (Part One covered where that road goes). You can leave: let the pain argue you out of the door. Or you can turn *toward* the very God who could have stopped this and didn't, and tell God everything, including that. That third road is lament. It's the road every psalm of pain walks, and here's its secret: it's the only one of the three that keeps the relationship alive. Complaint to God is still conversation *with* God. The opposite of faith isn't anger. It's silence that packs its bags.

The next three chapters will teach you to pray this way: how a lament is built, what to do with the anger, and how to write your own. You're about to learn the prayer language nobody taught you, from the Book that had it all along.

**TRY IT: READ ONE OUT LOUD**

Tonight, read Psalm 13 out loud, slowly: all six verses. It takes about forty-five seconds. Don't analyze it yet (that's next chapter). Just notice how it feels to hear words this honest spoken in your own voice, and remember: this is Scripture. You're allowed.

## How a Lament Works

A lament isn't a tantrum, and it isn't a spiral. It has a shape, a road that starts in the pit and walks somewhere. The psalmists used the same basic moves so consistently you can learn them like you learned the four moves of prayer in *Just Talk*. Let's walk Psalm 13, the lament you read last night, and watch the shape emerge.

**Move 1: Turn toward God.** Every lament starts by aiming the pain in God's direction:

*"How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?"*

PSALM 13:1 (NIV)

Notice: David is accusing God of forgetting him: *to God's face*. That's the move. Not talking about God to your friends. Not muttering at the ceiling. Addressing God. The moment pain becomes prayer, you've already won the most important battle: you're still talking.

**Move 2: Tell it plain (the complaint).** Say what's actually wrong, without polish:

*"How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?"*

PSALM 13:2 (NIV)

Wrestling thoughts. Daily sorrow. Somebody winning who shouldn't be. David itemizes the pain: mental, emotional, situational. Your complaint can too: the diagnosis, the betrayal, the empty chair, the gray mornings. God can't be shocked and won't be scandalized. God was there when it happened.

**Move 3: Ask for something.** Lament isn't just venting; it makes requests:

"Look on me and answer, LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death."

PSALM 13:3 (NIV)

Look at me. Answer me. Give me light before this kills me. Bold, specific, desperate, and completely welcome. The complaint earns its keep by turning into petition. You're not just describing the pit; you're asking the only One who can do something about it.

**Move 4: Hand God the rope (the trust).** And then, the turn that makes lament *lament* and not despair:

"But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me."

PSALM 13:5-6 (NIV)

Read carefully: nothing about David's situation has changed between verse 2 and verse 5. The enemy is still out there. The sorrow was real this morning. The *but* isn't a denial of the pain: it's a decision about where to anchor while the pain continues. *But I trust*. It's the sound of a drowning man tying himself to something that floats.

And here's the honest part: some days you'll pray Moves 1 through 3 and the trust won't come. The Bible covered that too: next chapter, we'll meet the lament that never turns. But most days, something happens on the road between *how long* and *but I trust* that can't happen any other way. You can't get to verse 5 by skipping verses 1 and 2. The praise that has passed through the complaint is the only praise that holds weight in a hard season. Shortcut hallelujahs snap under pressure. Lament-forged trust doesn't.

Turn toward God. Tell it plain. Ask. Hand God the rope. Four moves. Simple, not easy. But it's the road out, and it's been paved for three thousand years.

**TRY IT: PRAY THE SHAPE**

Pray a thirty-second lament right now using the four moves, one sentence each:

*"God, I'm bringing this to You. Here's the truth: \_\_\_\_\_.  
Here's what I'm asking: \_\_\_\_\_. And even in this, I'm  
choosing to trust Your unfailing love. That's my anchor tonight."*

# Praying Angry

**Now for the chapter some of you have been waiting for, and some of you have been dreading. What about the anger? Not the polite frustration you'd admit at Bible study. The real thing. The *how could You let this happen* thing. The anger at God you've been too scared to say out loud because it feels like blasphemy.**

Meet Psalm 88, the darkest prayer in the Bible, and one of the most merciful things God ever preserved.

Psalm 88 breaks the pattern we learned last chapter. It turns toward God. It complains: oh, it complains: "my life draws near to death" (v. 3), "You have put me in the lowest pit" (v. 6), "You have taken from me my closest friends" (v. 8). It asks. And then, where every other lament pivots to *but I trust*. Psalm 88 doesn't. Here is the actual last verse:

*"You have taken from me friend and neighbor — darkness is my closest friend."*

PSALM 88:18 (NIV)

That's it. That's the ending. No turn, no sunrise, no bow. The psalm ends in the dark, and God put it in the book anyway. Selah.

Do you understand what that means? It means God made room in the Word for the prayer of the person who can't find the *but* yet. It means there are seasons when the most faithful thing you can produce is an honest scream aimed in the right direction, and heaven receives it as worship. The man who wrote Psalm 88 (Heman, one of Israel's chief worship leaders, of all people) never stopped addressing God. Look at how it opens: "LORD, you are the God who saves me; day and night I cry out to you" (v. 1). He's furious, he's hopeless, he blames God directly: *and he's still talking to God*. Eighteen verses of darkness, all of it addressed to the God who saves. That contradiction is the whole testimony: faith isn't the absence of the dark. It's who you say the dark *to*.

So let's settle the fear underneath this chapter: **God can handle your anger.** God isn't fragile, and God isn't petty. God doesn't storm off when the children raise their voices. Job said things about God so raw his friends spent thirty chapters correcting him, and at the end, God said the friends were the ones who'd gotten it wrong: "You have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has" (Job 42:7). Sit with that verdict. The man who yelled his pain at God got commended. The men who defended God with tidy theology got rebuked. God prefers honest fury to dishonest praise.

One boundary, for your own sake: praying angry isn't the same as living angry. Lament is anger with an address on it, it goes to God, gets said fully, and in the saying it starts to move. Bitterness is anger that moved in and changed the locks. The difference isn't intensity; it's direction and traffic. Keep the anger moving toward God, every day if you have to, Psalm 88 on repeat, and it stays prayer. Seal it inside and let it ferment, and it becomes the thing that has *you*. So keep talking. Loudly counts.

If all you've got tonight is the dark and a direction, you've got enough. Pray it.

#### TRY IT: THE PRAYER YOU'VE BEEN AVOIDING

Say the sentence you've been afraid to say to God, the angry one, the accusing one, the one that feels illegal. Say it out loud, addressed to God:

*"God, here's what I've been holding back: \_\_\_\_\_."*

Then stay one more minute. Don't tidy it up. Don't apologize for it. Just stay in the room with God after you've said it. That staying: that's Psalm 88 faith. It counts.

# Write Your Own

You've read laments. You've prayed pieces of them. Now you're going to write one, your own psalm, in your own words, about your own broken thing. Before you object that you're not a writer: neither were most of the psalmists. They were shepherds, refugees, and prisoners with honest mouths. That's the whole qualification.

Why write it down instead of just praying it? Three reasons. Writing slows you down enough to find the true words under the automatic ones. Writing makes the pain *sayable*: trauma and grief lose a little of their choke-hold when they're forced into sentences. And writing gives you a record: a document you can pray again on the next bad night, and, someday, further down the road than you can see right now, evidence of what God carried you through.

Here's the frame. Take a page, journal, phone notes, the back of this book, and build your lament in the four moves you learned:

**1. Turn toward God.** Start with God's name and your real position. Not "Dear God, thank You for this day." Something true: *"God, it's me. I'm on the bathroom floor again."* The psalmists started where they actually were: "Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD" (Psalm 130:1). Start in your depths, whatever they are.

**2. Tell it plain.** Write the complaint. Name names. Name dates. Name what was lost and what it's costing you: sleep, appetite, hope, the ability to walk past their room. Don't write what you're supposed to feel. Write what's actually there, including the parts about God: *You could have stopped this. You didn't. I don't understand You right now.* If Chapter 6 taught you anything, it's that this belongs in the prayer.

**3. Ask.** Write what you actually want from God: not the humble-sounding version, the real one. Heal them. Bring them back. Get me through the night. Make the numbness lift. Show me You're there. Give me one reason. The psalmists asked for outrageous things; ask for yours.

**4. Hand God the rope, if you can.** Finish with whatever trust is true today. Maybe it's full-throated: *But I trust Your unfailing love.* Maybe it's a mustard seed: *I'm still here. I haven't left. That's all I've got.* And if today is a Psalm 88 day and there's no turn in you, end without one, and write tomorrow's date at the bottom. The turn can come later. God accepts installments.

"Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge."

PSALM 62:8 (NIV)

Pour out: that's the verb. Not filter. Not summarize. Pour.

When you've written it, do one more thing: pray it out loud, once, to God. A lament isn't finished until it's delivered. Read it slowly, in a whisper if that's all you have. You may cry. Let that happen: tears are part of the delivery system.

And keep it. Date it. You are building something the old saints called a "book of remembrance", your own psalter, one honest page at a time. Some of the borrowed laments in the back of this book started as somebody's bathroom-floor prayer. Yours may hold somebody else up one day. That's how the Psalms happened, after all.

#### TRY IT: TONIGHT'S PAGE

Set aside fifteen unhurried minutes tonight. Four moves, one page, no editing for church. Then deliver it out loud to the God who is close to the brokenhearted.

If the page stays blank for ten minutes, write one sentence: *"God, I can't even write it yet."* That's a lament too. Date it and keep it.

# the heavy things by name

# Grief: When You Lose Somebody

**There's an empty chair in your life. A voice you keep almost-hearing. A phone number you can't delete. This chapter is for you, and we're going to walk gently, because grief is holy ground.**

First truth: **grief is love with nowhere to put itself.** It isn't a malfunction, not a faith problem, not a stage you failed to complete. You grieve deeply because you loved deeply, the price and the proof of it. So when the church folks tell you to "celebrate, don't mourn," remember what Scripture actually shows: when Lazarus died, Jesus, knowing the resurrection was minutes away, stood at the tomb and wept (John 11:35). When Stephen was killed, the church didn't skip to the victory: "Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him" (Acts 8:2). Godly men. Mourned deeply. In the same sentence. Deep mourning isn't a lapse of faith. Sometimes it's the evidence of it.

Second truth: **grief keeps its own calendar.** Whoever told you year one is the hard part and then it lifts, they meant well and they were wrong. Grief comes in waves, and the waves don't check the date. It ambushes you in the cereal aisle. It sits down heavy on birthdays and holidays and random Tuesdays. Ecclesiastes says there's "a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance" (Ecclesiastes 3:4), but it never says how long each time lasts, because nobody can. So release yourself from the schedule. You're not grieving too long. You're loving somebody who isn't here, and love doesn't expire.

Third truth: **you can grieve and hope at the same time.** Paul told the Thessalonians, whose people were dying, that believers grieve differently, but read it carefully:

*"Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope."*

**1 THESSALONIANS 4:13 (NIV)**

He didn't say *don't grieve*. He said don't grieve *without hope*. The grief is assumed, expected, permitted. Hope doesn't cancel the tears; it changes what's underneath them. If the one you lost knew Jesus, the separation is real but it isn't final. "We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him" (1 Thessalonians 4:14). You will see them. That truth won't stop the waves, but it puts a floor under the ocean.

Some practical mercy for the road: Say their name: out loud, often; the people avoiding it in front of you mean well, but you don't have to play along. Tell the stories, even the ones that make you cry mid-sentence, especially the funny ones. Keep what's worth keeping and feel no guilt about the rest. Let the firsts be hard, first birthday, first Christmas, first ordinary Monday, and don't face them alone. Eat. Sleep. Let people bring the plate of food; receiving isn't weakness, it's how the body of Christ works (Galatians 6:2). And write laments, you have the tool now. Grief may be the exact pain lament was built for.

One day, not soon, and not on anybody's schedule, you'll notice you laughed and didn't feel like a traitor. That's not forgetting. That's love learning to carry itself a new way. Until then: waves, tears, God's nearness, one day at a time.

**TRY IT: SAY THE NAME**

Tonight, bring them into the prayer by name:

*"God, I miss \_\_\_\_\_. Thank You for every day I had them.  
Here's what I'd say if I had five more minutes: \_\_\_\_\_  
Hold them, and hold me, until the seeing-again."*

# Trauma: When It Won't Stay in the Past

Some pain doesn't stay where it happened. It follows you. A sound, a smell, a certain kind of silence, and suddenly your heart is pounding like it's happening again, because to your body, it's. If you know that ambush, the flashbacks, the hypervigilance, the numbness, the rage that arrives before the reason, this chapter is for you. And it comes with a promise: we won't rush you, and we won't shame you.

First, let's take the shame off the table. What happened to you wasn't your fault, and what it's doing to you now isn't weakness. Trauma is what happens when something overwhelms your capacity to process it: violence, abuse, loss, war, the things you saw, the things done to you. Your body learned to survive it, and your body doesn't easily unlearn survival. That's not broken faith. That's biology doing what God built it to do, protect you, long after the danger passed. You aren't crazy. You are wounded. Wounds are treatable.

Second, hear what God says about safety, because trauma's deepest lie is that nowhere is safe and no one can be trusted:

*"The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."*

**PSALM 18:2 (NIV)**

Rock. Fortress. Refuge. Shield. Stronghold. David, a man who lived through ambushes, betrayal, and years of being hunted, stacked up five safety words in one verse because one wasn't enough. This is God's self-description for people whose safety was stolen: *I am the place they can't reach you*. Healing from trauma is, at its core, slowly daring to believe that again, that safety exists, that trust is possible, that the hypervigilant guard your body posted can eventually stand down. That belief rebuilds in inches, not leaps. God is patient with inches.

Third, and we say this as pastors, with everything in us: **trauma usually needs more than prayer alone, and that isn't a knock on prayer.** God heals through the Word and the divine presence, and God also heals through trauma-informed counselors, therapists, and doctors. Getting professional help for a traumatized mind is no more a faith failure than getting a cast for a broken leg. Some of the strongest believers we know sit in a counselor's office every week and bring what they find there back to Jesus. Our church runs a counseling ministry for exactly this reason. Prayer and therapy aren't rivals. They're teammates, we said it in *Just Talk* and we'll keep saying it: praying people get counseling. That's wisdom, not weakness.

A few honest markers for the road. Healing isn't forgetting, the goal isn't amnesia; it's a memory that no longer detonates. Triggers shrink slowly; celebrate the day the ambush lasted five minutes instead of five hours. Telling your story to safe people, a counselor, a pastor, one trusted friend, drains the wound a little each time; secrecy is the infection. And the God who was there when it happened (that's a hard sentence; take it to God in lament. Chapter 6 gave you permission) is the same God walking backward through it with you now, redeeming what God didn't cause.

*"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."*

**PSALM 147:3 (NIV)**

Binds up: slow, careful, hands-on. Not zaps away. God isn't ashamed of how long your healing takes. Don't you be either.

#### **TRY IT: ONE SAFE STEP**

Healing from trauma starts with one safe person hearing one true piece. This week, take a single step: contact a counselor (our church can help you find one: 240-273-9115), or tell one trusted person one paragraph of your story. Before you do:

*"God, my rock and my refuge: You know what happened. Give me one safe place to set a piece of this down, and stand guard while I do."*

# Depression: When Everything Goes Gray

There's a kind of heaviness this book hasn't named yet, so let's name it now. Not sadness with a reason: sadness is at least alive. This is grayer than that. The flatness. The fog. Food loses its taste, sleep stops working or won't stop, and the things you used to love sit there like furniture. People say "choose joy" and you'd laugh if you had the energy. If that's you: welcome to the chapter the church should have written a long time ago.

First, the sentence that needs to be said from every pulpit in America: **depression isn't a sin, and it isn't a faith failure.** It's an affliction: sometimes triggered by loss or trauma, sometimes arriving with no reason it's willing to give, sometimes wired into brain chemistry the way diabetes is wired into a pancreas. Spiritual giants have carried it. We met Elijah under his tree in Chapter 2: done, depleted, asking to die. Charles Spurgeon, maybe the greatest preacher of his century, told his congregation openly about his "causeless depression" and called it a fog no reasoning could lift. David wrote from inside it:

*"Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God."*

**PSALM 42:5 (NIV)**

Look at that verse's honesty: David is preaching to his own soul because his soul isn't listening. "I will yet praise him", not "I feel praise now." Yet is a future-tense word. Depression prays in future tense, and God receives it.

Second: **the gray lies to you, so you'll need borrowed truth.** Depression isn't just an emotion; it's a filter that colors everything: God feels absent, people feel far, the future feels canceled, and you feel like a burden. Write this down while you can still see it: *the filter isn't the facts*. God hasn't moved (Psalm 34:18 is still true in the fog). The people who love you aren't better off without you, that thought is the sickness talking, never the truth.

On the days you can't generate hope, borrow it: a psalm on repeat, a friend who prays when you can't, this chapter re-read. Elijah's God didn't scold him for being empty. God fed him and let him sleep, twice, before anything else (1 Kings 19:5-8). Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is eat something and go to bed. That's not a joke. It's the actual biblical protocol.

Third, and hear us with all the love in this church: **get help, and take it in every form God sends it.** Talk to your doctor: depression is medical as well as spiritual, and ruling out the physical is step one. See a counselor; therapy works. If they prescribe medication, hear this clearly: taking medication for your brain is no different from taking insulin for your pancreas. It isn't weak faith. It's stewardship of the body God gave you. We have watched medication give people back the ability to pray, to feel a sermon again, to laugh at their kid's joke. God works through doctors. Let that happen.

And if the gray has started whispering about ending it, if you've had thoughts of harming yourself, stop reading and reach out *right now*. Call or text **988** (the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, 24 hours). Then tell somebody who loves you, and call us. Your life isn't a burden. Your story isn't over. The fog is lying to you about that, and it won't lift by itself, but it does lift. We have watched it lift. Stay.

*"The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing... Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me."*

**PSALM 23:1, 4 (NIV)**

Through the valley. Not around it, but not stuck in it either. Through is a promise with an exit. Keep walking. In the fog, God doesn't need to be seen to be there.

#### TRY IT: THE GRAY-DAY MINIMUM

On the worst days, shrink the assignment to three things: eat something, tell God one true sentence, tell one person one true sentence. That's the whole day's spiritual to-do list.

*"God, it's gray today. I can't feel You. I'm choosing to believe You're here anyway: that's my 'yet.' Send bread and sleep, like You did for Elijah."*

# When It's Your Own Fault

We need to talk about the hardest version of falling apart, the one almost no book will touch. It's one thing to hold on when the storm wasn't your fault. But what about when it was? The marriage you wrecked. The money you gambled. The addiction you fed until it ate the house. The people you hurt on your way down. What do you do when you're standing in ruins and the fingerprints on the wrecking ball are yours?

Here's what you don't do: you don't get to skip this chapter by drowning in it. Shame will tell you that wallowing *is* repentance, that feeling maximally terrible forever is how you pay. It isn't. Shame isn't godly sorrow; it's godly sorrow's counterfeit. Paul drew the line sharply:

*"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."*

**2 CORINTHIANS 7:10 (NIV)**

Two sorrows. One turns you toward God and *moves*, it confesses, repairs what it can, and walks forward changed. The other just circles the ruins forever, and Paul says plainly where it ends: death. The enemy doesn't care which extreme gets you: denial that never faces it, or shame that never leaves it. Both keep you out of grace.

Now watch the man who wrote the textbook on self-inflicted ruins. David: adultery, deception, a murder arranged to cover it, a child lost in the aftermath, a family that never fully healed. Consequences that stayed. And out of that wreckage he wrote Psalm 51, the most famous confession in history: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love... Against you, you only, have I sinned" (Psalm 51:1, 4). No excuses. No spin. Full weight. And then this astonishing ask: "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). *Create*, the same word Genesis uses for making something from nothing. David is asking God to do creation-level work in the exact place he destroyed. And

God did. The Bible's verdict on this flawed, guilty, repentant man: a man after God's own heart. The ruins were real. So was the restoration.

So here is the road, and it's older than all of us. **Own it entirely**, to God first (1 John 1:9 still stands: confess, and God is faithful and just to forgive), and where possible to the people you hurt, without the word "but." **Repair what can be repaired**: restitution isn't earning grace; it's what grace does with hands (ask Zacchaeus, who paid back four times over and heard Jesus say salvation had come to his house, Luke 19:8-9). **Accept what consequences remain**, forgiveness is instant; rebuilt trust and repaired lives run on longer clocks, and walking faithfully inside consequences is its own testimony. **And then receive the mercy: all the way**. Not the partial version where God forgives you but you keep the case file open on yourself. If God has cleared it, your continued self-prosecution isn't humility. It's calling God's verdict wrong.

One more thing, because somebody reading this needs it: your worst chapter can become the exact place God deploys you. This church is full of people whose ministries grew out of the rubble of their old lives: that's half the testimonies you'll hear on any given Sunday. It's never too late to start over, begin, or keep going. We didn't put that on the wall for the people who never wrecked anything.

#### TRY IT: PSALM 51, FIRST PERSON

Tonight, pray David's prayer as your own, out loud:

*"Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your unfailing love. I did  
----- . No excuses. Create in me a pure heart:  
creation-level work, right here in the ruins. And when You've  
forgiven it, teach me to close the case file too."*

# waiting on God

# The Silence Is Not Absence

You've prayed. You've lamented: properly now, four moves and everything. You've been honest, you've been angry, you've handed God the rope. And heaven, as far as you can tell, has said nothing. Days of nothing. Months of nothing. Maybe years. The silence of God might be the heaviest weight in this whole book, so let's carry it together for a chapter.

Start here: you're in enormous company. The Bible is full of God's favorite people staring at a quiet sky. David: "How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?" (Psalm 13:1). Job begged for an audience with God for thirty-plus chapters before he got one. The people of Israel waited four hundred years between the last prophet of the Old Testament and the first cry of the New: four centuries of silence, and then, a baby in Bethlehem. Even Jesus, on the cross, prayed a psalm into a darkened sky and heard no audible answer (Matthew 27:46). Silence isn't a sign that you've been dismissed. It's a documented feature of the walk, the part every saint eventually gets, and the part nobody frames on the wall.

Now the harder, better truth: **silence isn't absence**. Those are different things, and the difference is everything. Look at the story Jesus' friends lived on the road to Emmaus. Their world had collapsed: Jesus crucified, hope buried, and they were walking home in the wreckage. And the risen Jesus Himself came and walked with them, "but they were kept from recognizing him" (Luke 24:16). Read that again. The answer to every prayer they'd been crying was *walking beside them*, present, listening, even talking, and they couldn't see it was Him. Not until later, at the table, when the bread broke and "their eyes were opened" (Luke 24:31). Then came the sentence that should be carved over every silent season: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road?" (Luke 24:32). He had been there the whole time. The silence was never absence. It was presence they couldn't recognize yet.

That's how it usually works. Almost nobody sees God clearly in the middle of the quiet stretch. But ask people on the other side of one, and the testimony is nearly universal: *looking back, God was all over it*. The

provision that arrived oddly on time. The person who called. The strength you had no explanation for. The way you were kept: through the very months you were sure God had left. Faith in the silence is mostly this: trusting now what you will see later.

And what do you do while you wait for later? Keep doing the things that keep the line open. Keep praying, even flat, even short; "I'm still here" is a complete prayer. Stay in the Word, not for fireworks, but because it's how God most often speaks, and you want to be where the speaking happens. Stay at the table, worship, church, the family; Emmaus eyes opened at a shared meal, and yours might too. And keep a record, because when the silence breaks (it breaks), you'll want the evidence of what God was doing the whole time.

*"I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning."*

**PSALM 130:5-6 (NIV)**

More than watchmen wait for the morning, and here's what the watchman knows that makes the waiting bearable: the morning has never once failed to come.

#### **TRY IT: THE STILL-HERE PRAYER**

Every day this week, pray this, especially on the days it feels pointless:

*"God, it's quiet, and I'm still here. I believe the silence isn't absence. Walk with me on this road even if I can't recognize You yet, and open my eyes at the table."*

# What Waiting Grows

**Nobody chooses the waiting room. But here's the question that changes everything about it: what if the wait isn't a delay in the story: what if it's a chapter of it? Not the pause before God does something, but one of the places God does the deepest work?**

Take Joseph. At seventeen he got the dream: leadership, honor, a future (Genesis 37). What he got next was a pit, a slave caravan, a false accusation, and a prison cell: thirteen years of everything moving in the wrong direction. And buried in the story is one small line that explains all of it: "the LORD was with Joseph" (Genesis 39:2, 21), in the pit, in Potiphar's house, in the prison. The wait wasn't wasted; it was the workshop. The boy who bragged about his dream became the man who could steward it: someone who could hold power without being poisoned by it, forgive brothers who sold him, and say to their faces one of the greatest sentences in Scripture: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20). You can't say that sentence at seventeen. Only the wait can teach it.

That's the pattern, all through the Book. Moses waited forty years in Midian before the bush burned. David was anointed king years before he wore the crown, years spent in caves, writing the psalms that now carry the rest of us. Even Jesus, thirty years of quiet obscurity in Nazareth before three years of ministry. God, it turns out, is never in the hurry we're in. God grows things the way farmers do, and Scripture reaches for exactly that image:

*"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."*

**GALATIANS 6:9 (NIV)**

At the proper time. Harvests don't rush, and neither does the God who plants them.

So what exactly does waiting grow, if you let it? Scripture is specific. It grows *strength*, "those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles" (Isaiah 40:31), and notice the strength comes to those still hoping, still waiting, not after. It grows *character*, Paul traces the chain: "suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame" (Romans 5:3-5). Every link forged in the wait. And it grows *roots*, Jeremiah's tree planted by the water, unafraid when heat comes, "its leaves are always green" (Jeremiah 17:8), because drought-season roots grow deep or not at all. The quick and comfortable seasons grow your branches. The waiting seasons grow the part of you that holds when the storm hits.

One warning, though, because waiting has a counterfeit: there's a difference between waiting *on* God and just going numb. Biblical waiting is active, the watchman on the wall is awake, scanning, expecting (Psalm 130:6). Habakkuk, fed up with heaven's timeline, climbed the rampart and said "I will stand at my watch... I will look to see what he will say to me" (Habakkuk 2:1), and God answered him: "For the revelation awaits an appointed time... Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come" (Habakkuk 2:3). Linger is honest. Certainly is the anchor. Keep praying, keep planting, keep showing up like the answer is coming, because it certainly is, and you want to be found on the wall when it does.

You wanted the harvest by Friday. God's growing you an orchard. Trust the Farmer.

#### TRY IT: NAME WHAT'S GROWING

Ask God the waiting-room question tonight, not "how long?" (you're allowed to keep asking that one too) but also:

*"God, while I wait: what are You growing in me? Show me one thing this season is building that the fast version of my life never could. And keep me on the wall, expecting."*

## Held: When You Can't Hold On

There's a moment in every hard season nobody warns you about: the moment your grip gives out. You've prayed, you've lamented, you've waited, you've white-knuckled it, and one ordinary Tuesday you realize you have nothing left. No faith-feelings, no strength, not even words. If holding on is the assignment, you're about to fail it.

Good news, friend. Holding on was never the assignment. Being held is.

Look at the promise buried in Deuteronomy, spoken to people heading into the scariest chapter of their lives: "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27). Underneath. Not arms you have to grab: arms already *under* you, set lower than your lowest point, so that when your grip fails and you finally fall, you fall a few inches into God. The strong version of you was never what was holding this together. It was God the whole time. The collapse just makes it visible.

And when even your prayers run out, when you can't produce one more word, heaven has that covered too:

*"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans."*

**ROMANS 8:26 (NIV)**

The Spirit personally prays for you when you can't. And the Spirit isn't the only one: "Christ Jesus who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Romans 8:34). Sit with that picture: on the day you couldn't pray at all, two Persons of the Trinity were praying *for* you. Your worst prayer day is still a day you were prayed for. That's not poetry. That's the actual mechanics of grace.

But God's arms usually come dressed in people, and this is the part of the chapter you might resist. There's a story in Mark 2 about a paralyzed man whose four friends carried him to Jesus. The crowd blocked the door, so

they went up, tore open the roof, and lowered their friend down on his mat. And Mark records this astonishing detail: "When Jesus saw *their* faith, he said to the paralyzed man, 'Son, your sins are forgiven'" (Mark 2:5). Their faith. Not his. The Bible doesn't tell us the man on the mat believed anything that day: maybe he was too far gone to believe. His friends believed for him. Their faith carried what his couldn't.

That's what the church is for, and it's why you can't do this season alone. There are stretches when you will be the man on the mat, no strength, no faith—feelings, nothing to contribute but your weight. In those stretches, the assignment is one word: **let them**. Let people carry you. Let them pray when you can't (their faith counts. Mark 2 says so). Let them bring the food, sit in the silence, drive you to the appointment, drag you to church when you'd rather disappear. "Carry each other's burdens" (Galatians 6:2) has two roles in it, and receiving is the harder one for most of us. Receiving isn't weakness. It's obedience with the pride removed.

Twenty years in this church, we've watched it over and over: nobody survives the falling-apart seasons alone, and nobody was supposed to. Somebody in your life owns a piece of rope and a corner of your mat. Tell them the truth. Let them lift.

Underneath are the everlasting arms. And around you, if you'll allow it, are the ordinary ones God works through.

#### TRY IT: HAND SOMEBODY A CORNER

Name your four, or your one. The people who'd tear a roof open for you. Then do the hard thing: tell one of them the truth about where you are, and ask for one specific thing (a prayer, a meal, a ride, a check-in text every morning).

*"God, my grip is gone. Thank You that Yours isn't. Give me the humility to be carried, and show me who's holding the rope."*

# hope that limps

# The God Who Keeps Your Tears

**Buried in one of David's laments, written while he was seized by enemies and scared for his life, is one of the tenderest verses in the whole Bible:**

*"Record my misery; list my tears on your scroll — are they not in your record?"*

**PSALM 56:8 (NIV)**

Some translations put it even more vividly: *put my tears in your bottle*. Either picture will preach. David is claiming, in the middle of the mess, that not one tear he has cried has hit the floor unnoticed. God keeps records. God keeps receipts. Every 2 AM, every hospital hallway, every silent scream into a pillow: logged, bottled, kept. Nothing you have suffered has been off the books with heaven.

Why does that matter? Because pain's cruelest whisper is *this is meaningless*. The grief is bad enough; the suspicion that it's all just noise, unseen, uncounted, wasted, is what breaks people. And against that whisper, Scripture sets a God who inventories tears. What God records, God intends to deal with. The ledger exists because a reckoning is coming: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21:4). God can only wipe what God has counted. The bottle is proof the ending is planned.

But the promise isn't only for later. Here's the verse you've probably had quoted at you, and it deserves better than it usually gets:

*"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*

**ROMANS 8:28 (NIV)**

Read it carefully, because what it doesn't say matters as much as what it does. It doesn't say all things *are* good. The diagnosis isn't good. The loss isn't good. The thing that happened to you isn't good, and God doesn't ask you to call it good, the Bible calls death an *enemy* (1 Corinthians 15:26), not a blessing in disguise. What the verse says is that God *works*, present tense, ongoing, sleeves rolled up, in all things, weaving even the evil and the broken into a story that ends in good for God's children. Joseph said it standing in front of the brothers who sold him: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good... the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20). The harm stayed harm. And God outworked it.

We've watched God do it in this church for twenty years, and we'll testify: the woman whose grief became the ministry that now holds other grieving mothers. The man whose recovery became the reason other men walk through our doors. The family whose worst year became the testimony that saved somebody else's marriage. None of them would call the pain good. All of them will tell you: nothing was wasted. Not one tear. God doesn't waste sorrow, God composts it. What fell dead into the ground comes back up feeding something alive (John 12:24, the grain of wheat had to fall to multiply).

So here's the hope this chapter hands you, and it limps honestly, like all real hope does: your suffering has a witness, a record, and a future. You may not see the working-together-for-good yet. Joseph didn't see it for thirteen years, and some of it you may not see this side of heaven. But the bottle is on the shelf with your name on it, the Weaver hasn't put the work down, and the day is already on God's calendar when every recorded tear gets wiped by the same hand that counted it.

Cry freely, friend. They're all being kept.

#### TRY IT: ASK FOR THE RECEIPT

Tonight, pray Psalm 56:8 back to God:

*"God, You said my tears are on Your scroll. So You saw  
----- . It's in Your record. I'm trusting You to work in it,  
waste none of it, and wipe every one of them on the day You  
promised."*

# Honest Questions, Honest Answers

**Suffering asks questions that Sunday clichés can't hold. We don't dodge hard things around here, so here are the ones people actually bring us, answered as honestly as we know how.**

## **"Why did God let this happen?"**

We don't know. We're not going to pretend we do, and we'd gently warn you about anyone who claims they can read God's specific reasons off your specific pain (Job's friends tried that; God rebuked them. Job 42:7). Here's what we do know: we live in a world broken by sin, where bodies fail, people choose evil, and "the whole creation has been groaning" (Romans 8:22). God's answer to that groaning wasn't a lecture from a safe distance. It was a cross: God entered the suffering personally, took the worst of it, and came out the other side dragging death behind. So while we can't tell you *why*, we can tell you two things with certainty: it isn't because God doesn't love you (the cross settled that permanently. Romans 5:8), and it doesn't get the last word (the empty tomb settled that). Some questions get answered. Some get outlived, held in the hands of Someone who was there. We'll ask the rest face to face.

## **"Is God punishing me?"**

If you're in Christ, no. Hear it again: no. "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). The punishment your sins deserved landed on Jesus in full; God doesn't collect the same debt twice. Yes, choices carry consequences (Chapter 11), and yes, God disciplines beloved children like a loving Father (Hebrews 12:6), but discipline trains, it doesn't destroy, and it never comes with abandonment. A hard season isn't heaven billing you. When Jesus' disciples saw a blind man and asked "who sinned, this man or his parents?", Jesus rejected the whole equation (John 9:2-3). Reject it too.

## **"I can't feel God anymore. Is my faith dead?"**

No: numbness isn't apostasy. Feelings are the first thing heavy seasons take, and the enemy loves to spin the numbness into a verdict. But faith was never a feeling; it's a direction. You're reading a book about holding on to God, that is faith, currently operational, in the dark, which is exactly where faith does its most serious work. "We live by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7), or by feelings. Keep the habits (Chapter 12), let others believe with you (Chapter 14), and let the feelings come back on their own clock. They usually do: ask anybody who's been through the desert.

### **"Do I have to forgive the person who did this?"**

Eventually, for your own soul: yes, forgiveness is commanded (Colossians 3:13), because unforgiveness is a poison you drink hoping they get sick. But hear what forgiveness is *not*: it's not saying it didn't matter, it's not automatic trust, it's not staying in reach of somebody unsafe, and it's not a feeling you have to manufacture by Friday. It's a decision to release the debt to God: often a decision you'll make many times over years, in layers, as the wound allows. Deep wounds may need a counselor's help to forgive well. Take your time. God, who saw exactly what they did, will handle justice better than your bitterness ever could (Romans 12:19).

### **"Someone I love took their own life. Are they lost?"**

This question deserves more gentleness than any tract has ever given it. Here's what we believe from Scripture: salvation rests on Christ's grip, not on the circumstances of a person's final hour: "no one will snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28), and Paul was convinced that neither death nor life nor *anything in all creation* can separate God's children from that love (Romans 8:38-39). Suicide isn't the unforgivable sin; it's most often the final symptom of a terrible illness. If the one you lost belonged to Jesus, illness didn't cancel that. Grieve with hope, get support for the particular weight survivors carry, and if that weight includes guilt, bring it to Chapter 8 and to a counselor. You couldn't have loved them out of an illness. You loved them. That mattered.

### **"When will this end?"**

We can't say: nobody honest can. But we can say what the Book says: "weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5), and the nights, however long, have never yet outlasted God. Your season has an expiration date known to God. Until it

comes: waves, bread, sleep, honest prayer, held by the family. We'll be here the whole time.

Got a question we didn't answer? Bring it. Sunday, or [info@hiphopenation.com](mailto:info@hiphopenation.com), or sit down with one of our pastors. You won't shock us, and you won't be judged. We were born in a nightclub. Questions are family around here. Simple.

# Scarred, Not Finished

**One last picture before we send you back out, and it might be the most important one in this book.**

When Jesus rose from the dead, glorified, victorious, death defeated, the whole cosmic battle won, He could have come back with any body He wanted. Flawless. Unmarked. Every trace of Friday erased. Instead, look at what He did on resurrection evening, standing in front of His terrified friends:

*"Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see."*

**LUKE 24:39 (NIV)**

He kept the scars. The risen, glorified Son of God still carries the nail marks. He showed them to Thomas a week later and invited him to touch them (John 20:27). The wounds that should have been the end of the story became the *proof* of the story. Heaven's answer to the worst thing that ever happened wasn't to erase it. It was to resurrect through it, and wear the evidence forever.

Friend, that's your future. Not a life where the falling-apart never happened: nobody can give you that, and anybody selling it's lying. A life where the wounds close into scars, and the scars stop screaming and start testifying. There's a difference between a wound and a scar: a wound is still open, still bleeding, still running the show. A scar is healed history: it's *over*, even though it's still *visible*. You don't get back the person you were before the bottom dropped. You become someone else: slower to judge, quicker to weep with those who weep, harder to shake, easier to trust with somebody else's 2 AM. The comfort you received becomes transferable: that's not a nice sentiment, it's the actual system God runs:

*"...the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."*

**2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4 (NIV)**

So that. Your survival has a destination. Somewhere down the road, not yet, not on demand, but surely, somebody's world is going to fall apart, and the most powerful person in their life won't be the friend with the seminary answers. It will be you: the one who can sit in their dark without flinching, because you know the terrain. The one who can say *I was on that floor, and God was there, and you won't always feel like this*, and be believed, because your scars back you up. In this church we call that the ministry of the scarred, and it's carried more people through more midnights than every eloquent sermon we've ever preached.

And when you walk again, because you will walk again, expect the limp. Jacob wrestled God through the longest night of his life and walked away blessed *and* limping, both at once, forever (Genesis 32:25-31). The limp isn't failure. It's the proof you were in the real fight and didn't let go. Hope that limps is still hope: truer hope, honestly, than the kind that's never been tested. This whole book has been teaching you to limp forward: lamenting instead of pretending, held instead of white-knuckling, scarred instead of erased.

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted. Close on your worst day. Close right now, in whatever's still unhealed. And close on the day, mark it, it's coming, when your scars become the reason somebody else holds on.

Not finished, friend. Not even close.

**TRY IT: THE SCAR PRAYER**

*"Jesus, You kept Your scars, so I'm going to stop being ashamed of mine. Heal my wounds into scars. And when the day comes, make my scars a testimony: proof to somebody on the floor that You raise what falls. I'm not finished. Amen."*

# Laments you can borrow

Some nights you don't need a lesson, you need words, right now. Borrow these. Say them exactly as written, or change them until they sound like you. Borrowed laments count. God filled a third of the songbook with them so you'd never run out.

## FOR THE NIGHT GRIEF WON'T QUIET DOWN

*"God, I miss them so much I can't breathe. You saw the moment they left and You see this empty room now. I'm not going to pretend I understand. But You said You're close to the brokenhearted, so be close, right here, right now. Hold them until I get there. Hold me until morning. Amen."*

## FOR THE MORNING EVERYTHING IS GRAY

*"God, it's gray again. I can't feel You and I can barely move. So this is my whole prayer: I'm still here. Send what You sent Elijah: bread, sleep, and Your nearness. I will yet praise You. Not yet. But yet. Amen."*

## WHEN THE MEMORY AMBUSHES YOU

*"God, it came back again: my heart is pounding like it's happening now. You are my rock, my fortress, my refuge, my shield, my stronghold. Stand between me and that memory. Remind my body the danger is over. Heal what was done to me, slowly if that's how healing works, but surely. Amen."*

## WHEN YOU'RE ANGRY AT GOD

*"God, I'm furious, and You already know it, so here it's out loud: You could have stopped it and You didn't, and I don't understand You. I'm not leaving: that's the only promise I can make tonight. Darkness is my closest friend right now. I'm telling You that because You put those words in Your own Book. Stay in the room with me. Amen."*

## FOR THE LONG WAIT

*"God, how long? I've prayed this prayer so many times the words are worn smooth. I'm tired of the silence. But I'm choosing to believe the silence isn't absence, that You're on this road with me even when I can't recognize You."*

*Though it linger, I will wait for it. More than watchmen wait for the morning.  
Amen."*

#### **WHEN THE RUINS ARE YOUR OWN FAULT**

*"God, have mercy on me according to Your unfailing love: I did this, and I'm done making excuses. Create in me a pure heart. Repair what I broke where it can be repaired, give me the strength to live faithfully inside what can't, and teach me to receive a mercy this size. Amen."*

#### **WHEN YOU CAN'T PRAY AT ALL**

*"God: that's all I've got. One word. Your Spirit prays for me with groans deeper than words, and Jesus is interceding for me right now. So I'm going to sit here and let heaven do the talking. This silence is my prayer. Receive it. Amen."*

#### **FOR SOMEBODY ELSE'S WORST DAY**

*"God, You see them on the floor tonight. I can't fix it and I won't pretend to. Be close to them the way You've been close to me. Send their four friends. Keep their tears in Your bottle. And if I'm supposed to be one of the carriers, show me my corner of the mat and I'll take it. Amen."*

# When you need more than a book

We meant what we said in Chapter 10, and it deserves its own page.

Some weights are too heavy for a book, even this one, even the Bible verses in it. Not because God isn't enough, but because God works through people: counselors, therapists, doctors, and the family of faith. Reaching for them isn't weak faith. It's wisdom wearing work boots. Praying people get counseling.

## IF YOU ARE IN CRISIS RIGHT NOW

If you are thinking about harming yourself or ending your life, or you're afraid for someone who is, call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline). It's free, confidential, and answered 24 hours a day, every day. Please do it now, before you read another page. This book will wait. Your life comes first.

## IF YOU'RE CARRYING MORE THAN YOU CAN MANAGE

Talk to your doctor: depression, anxiety, and trauma have medical dimensions, and ruling those in or out is step one. Find a licensed counselor or therapist; if cost or finding one feels overwhelming, contact us and we will help you look. Our church believes in counseling so strongly we built it into our ministry.

## IF YOU NEED PRAYER AND PEOPLE

Reach us at [info@hiphopenation.com](mailto:info@hiphopenation.com) or 240-273-9115. Our team prays over every request: that's not a formality; it's the engine of this church. And if you're local, pull up Sunday. You don't have to be okay to come. That's rather the whole point of us.

You aren't a burden. You aren't too much. You are exactly who this church, and this church's God, exists for.

Friend, you made it through a book about the things most people can't even talk about. That took courage. Before you go, receive this blessing from your Community of Hope family. We mean every word.

May you never again believe that falling apart disqualifies you, you walk in the company of prophets, psalmists, and the weeping Christ.

May you pray the minor key without shame. May your *how long* be honest, your anger have an address, and your laments land in the very book God keeps.

May your grief be allowed its waves, your body unlearn its alarms, and your gray mornings be met with bread, sleep, and a God who doesn't scold the empty.

May you be carried when your grip fails, and may you always know which four friends own a corner of your mat. May the silence never convince you of absence. May the wait grow roots in you that no drought can touch.

And when the healing comes, slowly, with a limp, on God's calendar, may your scars stop screaming and start testifying, until somebody on their own worst floor holds on because you did.

To whatever hurting, exhausted, still-here soul the Lord placed this book in front of: you are seen. Your tears are counted. The morning has never once failed to come. It's NEVER too late.

Where everyone has a chance.

Simple.

In the name of Jesus, who wept, by the comfort of the Holy Spirit, who groans with you, into the hands of the Father, who keeps the bottle: amen.

# Scripture index

A handful of the most important passages behind this book. Bookmark them. Read them in context, and let them find you on the hard nights.

- Genesis 32:25–31; 37; 39:2, 21; 50:20
- Deuteronomy 33:27
- Ruth 1:20
- 1 Kings 19:1–16
- Job 1:1; 3:11; 42:7
- Psalm 6:6; 13; 18:2; 22:1; 23; 30:5; 34:17–18; 42:5; 51; 56:8; 62:8; 88; 130:1–6; 147:3
- Ecclesiastes 3:1–8
- Isaiah 29:13; 40:28–31
- Jeremiah 17:7–8; 20:14
- Habakkuk 2:1–3
- Matthew 26:36–46; 27:46
- Mark 2:1–12
- Luke 19:8–9; 24:13–35, 39
- John 9:1–3; 10:28; 11:35; 12:24; 20:24–29
- Acts 8:2
- Romans 5:3–5, 8; 8:1, 22–28, 34, 38–39; 12:19
- 1 Corinthians 15:26
- 2 Corinthians 1:3–4; 5:7; 7:10
- Galatians 6:2, 9
- Colossians 3:13
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14
- Hebrews 12:5–11
- 1 John 1:9
- Revelation 21:1–5

Soli Deo Gloria

# You're invited

Falling apart was never meant to be done alone.

You can absolutely walk a hard season with just God and this book: everything in these pages is yours either way. But something happens when broken people carry each other that doesn't happen any other way. Four friends and a roof. A casserole on the worst week. A room full of imperfect people who have all been on the floor at some point, learning to trust God together.

That's what we are. Community of Hope AME Church started in 2006 in a nightclub with eight people, because we believe church should meet people where they actually live, including the valley. Twenty years in the making, that hasn't changed. We preach and teach Jesus unapologetically. We go into dark places and call it being the light. And we mean our name: this is a community where everyone, everyone, has a chance.

We don't care how you come. Come grieving. Come angry. Come numb. Come in whatever you wore yesterday, with whatever's left of your faith. We only care about the way you leave.

## PULL UP SUNDAY

Sundays at 10:00 AM

Crossland High School

6901 Temple Hill Rd, Temple Hills, MD 20748

## CAN'T MAKE IT IN PERSON?

Watch live on YouTube: @hiphopenationtv

Facebook: @CmtyofHope · Web: [www.hiphopenation.com](http://www.hiphopenation.com)

## CARRYING SOMETHING HEAVY RIGHT NOW?

Reach us at [info@hiphopenation.com](mailto:info@hiphopenation.com) or 240-273-9115. Our team prays over every request, and we can connect you with counseling. You don't have to be okay to call.

## KEEP READING: THE REST OF THE SERIES

*Just Talk: A Simple Guide to Prayer*, your conversation with God

*Reading the Text, Reading Your Life*: how to study Scripture and your seasons

*Breath and Fire: A Spirit-Filled Life for Ordinary Disciples*, the Person and power inside you

*Start Here: What Just Happened When You Said Yes*, your first steps as a new believer

We'll save you a seat.

— Rev. Tony Lee & the Community of Hope family

**where everyone  
has a chance.**

*We'll save you a seat.*

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**COMMUNITY OF HOPE AME CHURCH**

Sundays 10 AM · Crossland High School