



WILLIAMS CHAPEL CHURCH
Chief Apostle Kimberly Nixon, Pastor



THE SUITCASE OF GRIEF

Unpacking Grief

Matthew 26:36-38 KJV

Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. [37] And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. [38] Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.

Luke 24:13-21 KJV

And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. [14] And they talked together of all these things which had happened. [15] And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. [16] But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. [17] And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? [18] And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? [19] And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: [20] And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. [21] But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done.

Unpacking Grief:

What I Am Grieving, What I Am Carrying, What I Am Fearing, and What I Am Trying to Understand."

You can think of grief as **carrying a suitcase filled with everything connected to what happened to you**. From the outside, the suitcase has only one label: **GRIEF**. But when you finally open it, you discover grief was **never just one thing**.

Inside may be **sadness, anger, disappointment, rejection, regret, loneliness, fear, unanswered questions, shattered expectations, memories, changes in identity, and uncertainty about the future**.

Sometimes we have carried the suitcase for so long that we no longer know what is making it so heavy. We simply know, **"I'm tired."**

And that is where unpacking becomes important.

You don't unpack a suitcase by turning it upside down and dumping everything onto the floor. **You take things out one piece at a time**. You look at what is there. You identify it. You decide what needs



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attention, what needs healing, what needs grieving, what needs forgiving, what needs accepting, and what you are finally ready to release.

Some things in the suitcase belong to **what happened**.

Some belong to **what you thought would happen but didn't**.

Some belong to **what somebody did to you**.

Some belong to **what you wish you had done differently**.

Some belong to **what you lost**.

And some belong to **what you are now afraid you may lose next**.

That's why grief can feel heavier with time rather than lighter. **We may keep putting things into the suitcase without ever taking anything out.**

And there is another layer

Sometimes we discover things in the suitcase that **predate the present loss**.

A present rejection may uncover an old abandonment.

A present disappointment may awaken an old betrayal.

A present physical limitation may awaken grief over independence, identity, aging, or the future.

A death may reopen several deaths.

One loss can become the doorway through which **unprocessed grief from other seasons begins speaking again**.

So when someone says, **"Why is this affecting me this much?"**, the answer may be:
Because you aren't only carrying what just happened.

The goal isn't an empty suitcase

This is important.

Healing doesn't necessarily mean forgetting everything that happened. Some memories will remain.

Some losses permanently become part of our story.

The goal is that **what remains in the suitcase no longer weighs what it once weighed**.

You may keep the memory without carrying the torment.

You may remember the person without being overwhelmed by the absence.

You may remember what happened without reliving it every time you remember it.

You may acknowledge what was lost without believing that everything ahead of you has also been lost.

Eventually, you can carry your story differently.



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Instead of asking yourself only:

“How am I doing with my grief?”

Put the imaginary suitcase in front of yourself and ask:

“If I opened my suitcase today, what would I find inside?”

Then don't rush yourself.

Because you might say:

“Anger.”

Then ask, *What am I angry about?*

“Disappointment.”

What has disappointed me?

“Fear.”

What am I afraid of now?

“Regret.”

What do I wish had happened differently?

“Loss.”

What exactly do I believe I lost?

And eventually you may reach something you haven't been able to say:

“I don't know who I am now that this has happened.”

Now you are no longer simply discussing grief.

You are unpacking it.

And perhaps the central statement for us is:

You cannot heal what remains unnamed at the bottom of the suitcase.

The invitation of healing is not, **“Carry it better.”**

It is:

“Let's open it.”

Grief rarely arrives as one emotion. What we call *grief* may actually be a container holding many different losses, fears, questions, and wounds.

You can think of it as **opening the suitcase instead of trying to carry the whole suitcase at once.**



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Grief can contain:

- ***What I lost*** — a person, relationship, role, ability, opportunity, season, dream, or sense of normalcy.
- ***What changed*** — life does not look or feel the way it once did.
- ***What I miss*** — sometimes we aren't only grieving people; we're grieving who we were before something happened.
- ***What hurt me*** — disappointment, rejection, betrayal, humiliation, abandonment, or feeling unseen.
- ***What I am angry about*** — "This wasn't supposed to happen this way."
- ***What I fear*** — "What if things never return to what they were?"
- ***What I cannot understand*** — grief often carries unanswered why questions.
- ***What I wish had happened differently*** — conversations, decisions, relationships, medical outcomes, family circumstances, ministry experiences.
- ***What I am trying to accept*** — acceptance does not mean approval. It means acknowledging what has happened without allowing it to consume the rest of your life.
- ***What I still hope for*** — grief and hope can occupy the same heart.

Sometimes grief is layered

One event can awaken losses that were already present.

You may begin grieving **one thing**, only to discover underneath it:

grief → disappointment → anger → fear → vulnerability → loss of control → questions about the future.

That is why someone can say, *I don't understand why this has affected me so deeply.* The present event may have touched several deeper places at once.

Four questions for unpacking it

Instead of simply asking, "**Why am I so sad?**", try asking:

What am I grieving?

What have I lost—or what feels as though I have lost?

What am I carrying?

What emotions, responsibilities, memories, or expectations have become heavy?



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What am I fearing?

What am I afraid this loss means about my future?

What am I trying to understand?

What happened that I still cannot make sense of?

What needs to be released, and what needs to be mourned?

Those are not necessarily the same thing. Some things need forgiveness and release. Other things need to be **properly grieved** before you can move forward.

Biblically, grief isn't the absence of faith. Jesus Himself said, **"My soul is exceeding sorrowful"** (Matthew 26:38). Scripture gives language for lament because God never required His people to pretend that painful things did not hurt.

Unpacking grief means giving each pain its proper name so that everything hurting inside you is no longer simply called "grief."

"Unpacking Grief: What I Am Grieving, What I Am Carrying, What I Am Fearing, and What I Am Trying to Understand."

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