

# Reframing Emotions

## Reframing Grief: A Guide for Going Deeper

### Note for Users:

*Reframing Grief: A Guide for Going Deeper* is the sixth week in an 11-week guide that accompanies the podcast *More to It: Reframing Emotions*.<sup>1</sup> Each session is designed to help you and your community know, love, and praise God for His wonderful design for our emotions, even the ones we view as “negative.” The guide features an episode summary, definitions of relevant terms, Scripture reading, discussion questions, activities, prayers, and reflection prompts.

Each section in a session (for example, prayer and discussion) features a timestamp, but the timestamp is simply a suggestion for the amount of time to spend. At times, you and your community may want to linger with the discussion questions. Or maybe you need to spend more time engaging with a concept through a small group activity. You should prioritize what produces the most flourishing in your community, even if it means bending or breaking the time “rules.”

In the podcast, one of our counselors suggests emotions—even the negative ones—are echoes of Eden. If we listen to those echoes and follow them to their source, we might just end up back in the garden, not hiding from God, but experiencing the forevermore joy found in His presence. As you use this guide with your community, we pray that a spirit of unity, curiosity, and humility will be present, creating a space in which you can be vulnerable, drawing near to God and one another.

The Austin Stone Institute, The Austin Stone Counseling Center

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<sup>1</sup> Subscribe to the podcast here: <https://pod.link/1626545281>.

## Session 6: Grief

### Episode Main Point

Grief is a normal reality in this world, yet it is not the final word on our lives. Grief helps us tell the truth about our lives even as we anchor our hope in Jesus who will one day “make all the sad things come untrue.”<sup>2</sup>

### Episode Summary

Grief sometimes surprises us. This is normal, as is grief itself. Grief is an ongoing process as we reckon with the reality of loss. When that process is accompanied by the certain hope we have in Christ, we can begin to integrate loss into our stories.

Grief also serves as an invitation. It invites us to know Jesus, the Man of Sorrows (Isaiah 53). Jesus never thought grief a waste of time. Jesus wept (John 11:35). He invited His disciples to pray and mourn with Him in the garden (Matthew 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:40–46). To Jesus, grief was productive. It both acknowledged the limitations of the human frame and proclaimed confidence in God.

Yet we tend to avoid grief, perhaps especially in the West. Our human nature resists anything that reveals we are not in control. Grief corrects that aspect of our nature, plunging us into the truth of how small and frail we are. As Andrew Dealy puts it, “Grief is kind of bear-hugging the reality of, ‘No, there’s not anything I can do.’”

But if we learn to worship God through our grief, we might discover a better way forward. Grief will not overwhelm us utterly; neither will it leave us more bereft. Rather, grief brought to God and shared with people in community can become the means by which we better know God’s heart for us and care for one another.

### Definitions

- **Grief:** Grief is a deep sorrow over a loss. That feeling is subjective; what seems like a grievous loss to one person may not be perceived that way by another. Grief is the process of learning to live without the thing that has been lost, whether that’s a person, a dream, or some other thing.
- **Ministry of presence:** Ministry of presence reflects Jesus, who became flesh and blood and dwelt among us (John 1:14). As Jesus sat and wept with people, so we can sit and weep with people. When we act as ministers of presence, we bear witness to and honor

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<sup>2</sup> “All sad things come untrue” comes from J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*.

not only the person who grieves but also what has been lost and cannot be regained in the here and now. The ministry of presence reminds us we are not alone in this world. We have Jesus, our Immanuel, and each other.

## Scripture

Isaiah 53; 2 Corinthians 1:3–7; Genesis 3 and 4; Matthew 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:40–46; John 11; 2 Corinthians 5:1–10; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; Ecclesiastes 8:14–17; Lamentations 3; Job; 1 John 4:7–21

## Pray (5 min)

*Before beginning the study, pray aloud, using either your own words or the words provided.*

Heavenly Father, You are near the brokenhearted. When we weep, we can remember Jesus weeping at Lazarus' grave. Our tears matter. You collect them all. Thank You for sitting with us in our grief, as well as in our joy. You are always faithful, never leaving or forsaking us. We don't want to be hasty with grief, but patient and kind—with ourselves and with other people. May even our grief draw us closer to You and Your people. Amen.

## Read (5–10 min)

*Either read the following Bible verses aloud or invite a volunteer to read.*

- <sup>1</sup> Who has believed what he has heard from us?  
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
- <sup>2</sup> For he grew up before him like a young plant,  
and like a root out of dry ground;  
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,  
and no beauty that we should desire him.
- <sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men,  
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;  
and as one from whom men hide their faces  
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
- <sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
smitten by God, and afflicted.
- <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;



upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his wounds we are healed.

<sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have turned—every one—to his own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:1–6)

## Discuss (15–20 min)

*Answer the following questions.*

- According to Isaiah 53:1–6, in what ways was Jesus acquainted with grief?
- Consider Jesus' lived life, His thirty-odd years on earth. We know Jesus experienced grief and sorrow based on the Gospel accounts, but what "smaller" griefs and sorrows might He have experienced in the daily rhythms of human life?
- How does (or doesn't) our society navigate grief? What about the larger church or our communities of friends? How does Jesus offer a different and better way forward?
- Think about the traditional stages of grief: denial, bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance. When have you experienced grief, even if you weren't aware of it at the time? How does the grieving process help you learn to live without the thing that was lost? How could your community support you in that process, and how could you support others?

## Engage (10 min)

*In smaller groups of 2 and 3, respond to the following questions.*

- In what ways is grief a means of telling the truth? What about a means of grace?
- Job's friends initially minister through their presence but eventually shift toward lengthy speeches about why Job is suffering (Job 2:11–13, chapters 4–25). Think of what you know about Job's story. Job has everything: a wife and kids, a successful business, a good reputation, his health. He loses all of those things except his belief that God is still to be praised (Job 1:21). Where do his friends go wrong in ministering to him? What do they do right? How could the friends serve as a model for your community?

## Pray (5 min)

*Either read the following liturgy, a worshipful prayer, aloud or invite a volunteer to read.*

## A Liturgy for Grieving

The mystery of grief—how empty and full



The same life can feel—  
How thick and dark  
The persistent storm of loss  
That swirls me through swells of chaos.

My soul searches for solace, a North Star,  
The howling winds of despair  
Screaming at my back.

Amid waves of salty sorrow  
My eyes seek You,

My beacon,  
Jesus in the Garden,

Shouldering pain I cannot fathom,  
Looking down into that costly cup—

Drinking deeply—  
That the grief that steals my breath  
Might each moment be borne anew  
By You, my hope and harbor.

Grant me mercy, O God.  
Lead me to prayer  
Like the steadfast Son.  
He is my peace and North Star.

## **Reflect**

*Complete the following reflection on your own.*

Read one or all of the garden of Gethsemane passages (Matthew 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:40–46) this week. What stands out to you in your reading? Where is grief present? What about hope? How could the intermingling of sorrow and hope comfort you when you grieve, or are surprised by grief?

Some time this week, also evaluate your typical response(s) to grief. Do you tend toward avoidance, denial, or despair? How does the garden of Gethsemane offer a different approach? What might happen if you followed Jesus' example rather than your usual response?



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