WHAT I’VE LEARNED ABOUT GRIEF

1. LOSS IS UNAVOIDABLE BUT
   There is no LIFE without change
   There is no CHANGE without loss
   There is no LOSS without pain, but grief is a CHOICE

2. “When Jesus saw Lazarus’ sister sobbing, and saw how all those with her were crying also, his heart was touched, and he was deeply moved... Then Jesus started crying. ‘See how much he loved Lazarus!’ they said.” John 11:33-36

   UNHEALTHY REACTIONS
   REPRESS: Unconsciously trying to block out painful thoughts
   SUPPRESS: Consciously trying to block painful thoughts

3. “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”
   Psalm 34:18

4. “Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”
   Galatians 6:2

   “When others are happy, be happy with them. If they are sad, share their sorrow.”
   Romans 12:15
“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven... a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.” Eccl. 3:1, 4

STEPS TO MOVING FORWARD

1. ______________________________________________________________________

   **Jesus said “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”** Matt. 5:4

   Why don’t we let ourselves grieve? _____________________________

   “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.” Psalm 23:4

2. ______________________________________________________________________

3. ______________________________________________________________________

   **A LAMENT: a passionate expression of grief to God**
   An act of worship that can include complaining to God

   Psalms of Lament
   Psalm 3-7,9,10,12-14,17,22,25-28,31,35,36,38,39,41-44,51-61,64, 70,71,74,77,79,80,82,83,85,86,88,90,94,102,109,137,139-143,145

   o ______________________________________________________________________

   o ______________________________________________________________________

4. ______________________________________________________________________

   **“The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who honor him. For he understands how weak we are.”** Psalm 103:13-14

   Jesus: “God has sent me to heal the brokenhearted...” Luke 4:18 (LB)
GETTING THROUGH LIFE’S LOSSES
Getting Through What You’re Going Through – Part 2
Rick Warren
August 10-11, 2013

Hello Saddleback! Welcome to all of our campuses here in Southern California and also around the world and those of you who are joining us online.

This week Saddleback began a brand new era where we became a truly global international church. Last Tuesday thirty of our Saddleback pastors met over in the office. There’s nothing unusual about thirty of our Saddleback pastors meeting together. Except this time we had pastors meeting from four different continents. Live. And we had Saddleback Berlin, Saddleback Manila, Saddleback Hong Kong, Saddleback Buenos Aires pastors joining us.

This is a whole new era folks. Last week for the first time in our history more people worshiped as a part of our church family not at the Lake Forest campus. We had last Sunday morning about six thousand here on Sunday morning at the Lake Forest campus. We had twenty-three thousand others at all of our other campuses. That’s pretty amazing. Since the majority of our church family now is not at this campus I’m going to start rotating around, visiting the different campuses so I can hug and say hi to all of you at our different campuses.

This weekend I’m actually at Corona. And next week I’ll be in Anaheim – The Grove. I hope some of you will join me on this road trip because I’d like to introduce you to some of your brothers and sisters who you’ve never met. Part of our church family that you’ve never seen before, now worshiping in forty different services in all kinds of different locations.

We’re in this series I’m calling the stages of getting through what you’re going through. I told you that there are six stages of getting through what you go through. There’s shock. Then there’s sorrow. Then there’s struggle. Then surrender. Then sanctification and service. We’re looking each week at how do you get through what you’re going through. Today we’re going to look at sorrow – or how to get through life’s losses.

Folks, I feel like the last four months of my life I got a PhD in how to get through losses. How to deal with the great losses of life. What I want to do this weekend is share with you five things that I’ve learned from God’s Word during the last four months; then share with you how do you get through major losses in your life.

I hate to say this but unfortunately you’re going to need this message sometime in your life. You might not need it right now. But I highly encourage you to take notes because you’re going to go through major losses in your life.

Now let’s get right into it. The first thing I learned is this…

1. Loss is unavoidable, but grief is a choice.
Loss is unavoidable but grief is choice. You have to choose to grieve. A lot of people choose not to. They stuff it. They deny it. They try to go through all of the losses of life without ever grieving. That’s a big mistake.

There is no life without change. There is no change without loss. And there is no loss without pain. But grief is a choice.

Let me explain that again. All living things change. The only things that don’t change are things that aren’t alive. Does that make sense? So if you’re alive, part of life is you’re going to go through changes in life. The things around you change, the things inside you change. There is no change without loss. Because in change, you lose some of the old to grab on to some of the new. So there’s loss. You’re losing things all the time in your life.

And there is no loss without pain. Because we don’t like to lose things. But grief is a choice. You have to choose to let grief in. You have to allow it. You have to allow yourself to feel it.

People say, why in the world would I ever want to feel grief? I’ll explain that in this message this weekend, because grief is the key to your spiritual growth. We’ll come back to that in just a minute.

First just let me say this. When I mention grief, most people think grief is something that happens only at funerals, that it only happens with the loss of loved ones.

But really you have thousands of losses in your life. You can lose your health. You can lose your job. You can lose a friend. You can lose your finances. There are literally hundreds and hundreds and even thousands of things that you have in life that you lose. So grief is not simply for when somebody dies. That’s one of the things it’s for. But there are many other things in life you ought to grieve, because they’re losses in life.

Because grief is unpleasant most people just try to avoid it. They want to stuff it. They want to put it aside. “I’m not going to grieve. I’m going to get on with my life. I’m going to deny it.”

I want to say to you, that is the cause of many of your problems – unresolved, unmourned grief. There are things that happened to you as a child, there are things that happened to you at school that you should have grieved over and you haven’t. And if you don’t grieve over it you get stuck at that stage. I’m going to explain that.

Grief is absolutely essential to your life.

2. The second thing I’ve learned is that grief is healthy.

It is healthy. In fact it is the only healthy response when you have a loss.

Now the loss could be anything. It could be the loss of a job, it could be the loss of a career, it could be infertility, it could be the loss of an engagement. Serious financial problems. Stillbirth. All kinds of different things. Maybe the loss of a limb, the loss of a breast, whatever. We all have losses in life.
Grief is actually healthy. It’s good for you. It’s the only healthy response to loss because it’s unhealthy to deny a loss.

Grief is without a doubt the most painful emotion we go through in life. It’s also the most helpful emotion. How is that? How is grief helpful to me?

Grief is God’s tool for you getting through the transitions of life. If you don’t grieve in your losses you get stuck. And some of you are still stuck at age fourteen or age twenty-eight or age thirty-two because you didn’t grieve a major loss in your life and you got stuck there. And you wonder why you have anxieties and you have phobias and you have fears and you have low self-esteem. Because you haven’t learned how to do good grief.

Would you agree that Jesus never did anything wrong? Yes. He never sinned. He never did evil. And Jesus never did anything unhealthy. And yet Jesus grieved. Jesus, the Bible tells us, wept. The Bible says he was a man acquainted with sorrows. When his dear friend Lazarus died, the Bible says Jesus grieved. He cried. In fact, he sobbed.

Here’s what the Bible says in John 11:33 and 36. “When Jesus saw Lazarus’ sister sobbing, [that was Mary] and he saw how all those with her were crying also, his heart was touched, and he was deeply moved... Then Jesus started crying. ‘See how much he loved Lazarus!’ they said.”

Notice Jesus started crying. Sadness is not weakness. That is an American myth that sadness is weakness. Actually weak men are afraid of showing their emotions. Weak men are afraid to cry. Weak men are afraid to get emotional. They’re afraid of their emotions. They’re very weak.

I’ll just be honest with you, on the way to church before this service, I actually cried in the car as I was thinking about and praying about some people that I care about deeply who are in some deep trouble. And I was crying out to God. Nobody has ever accused me of being weak. Weakness and sorrow or sadness are not the same thing. In fact the stronger you are, the more confident you are, the more you’re not afraid to show your emotions.

There are two unhealthy reactions to loss and I wrote them there on your outline. One is called repression and the other is called suppression. Repression is when I unconsciously try to block out painful thoughts out of my mind. And suppression is when I try to do it consciously. I intentionally say, “I’m not going to think about that hurt. I’m not going to think about that pain. I’m going to put my head down and move forward.”

I want to tell you, friend, that is a mistake. To not grieve losses is a mistake. Grief is God’s gift of getting us through the transitions of life.

Let me explain it this way: If I don’t let it out in healthy ways, I’m going to act it out in unhealthy ways.

I see this all the time. People who, as adults are doing all kinds of bad behavior because they never grieved over an alcoholic dad or an unloving mother or mistreatment or prejudice and
bigotry, and things like that on the playground. If you don’t grieve the losses in your life then, as I said, you act it out in unhealthy ways.

Another way to say it is this: When I swallow my grief my body rejects it. Doctors have said that a lot of illnesses that people have come from unresolved grief, unresolved regrets and unresolved resentment. You could empty most of the hospitals with a lot of people because of that pain in the back or that pain in the rear or my aching neck, a lot of that is caused because we take emotions inside of us that God never intended for us to keep bottled up. He intends for us to let them out.

So loss is unavoidable in life but grief is a choice. You have to choose to enter into it. You have to embrace it.

Why? Because grief is healthy. It’s good. It’s the way that you get through the stages of life.

The third thing that I learned, and this is a big one…

3. God grieves with me!

God grieves with me. In fact your whole ability to grieve actually comes from God. The only reason you have emotions is because God has emotions. And you were created in the image of God so God gave you the ability to have emotions. The reason you grieve is because God grieves.

Did you know that God gets sad? Did you know that God weeps? Did you know that God sorrows? Did you know that God has regrets when he sees the evil that people do? The Bible says that God is an emotional God.

Your ability to grieve is what makes you different from animals. Cows don’t grieve. Worms don’t grieve. Birds don’t grieve.

When you say “I’m not going to grieve over that loss… I’m just going to put my head down; I’m going to live in denial. I’m going to stuff it.” You are denying the very thing that makes you a human being. You are denying the very thing that makes you like God, in his image. Animals don’t grieve. Humans grieve because they’re made in the image of God. So you don’t want to say, I’m not going to grieve. That’s what makes you a human! If you don’t grieve you’re a robot. You’re emotionally no better than an animal, because you’re not using the abilities God gave you.

The Bible says that God not only gave us the ability to grieve; God actually grieves with us. God suffers with us. He is a suffering God. He is a sympathetic God. When I’m in pain, God isn’t aloof. He’s not standing over on the sideline watching like, Can’t you get over that? Why don’t you buck up and work harder and take it like a man?

No. The Bible says God isn’t standing on the sidelines. He actually enters into your grief. Psalm 34:18 says this, “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and he saves those who are crushed in spirit.”
Circle the word “close”. Some of you are brokenhearted this weekend. Maybe your heart was broken this week, maybe this month or maybe this year. Or maybe it’s been broken for a long, long time. The Bible says God is close to the brokenhearted. When you think God is a million miles away and he’s nowhere to be found, guess what. He’s as close to you as he can get. You just need to tune in to him.

The Bible tells us that grief is healthy and that God grieves with me.

The fourth thing that the Bible teaches us, something I’ve learned, is that…

4. Grief is healed in community.

You’re not going to get well on your own. Nobody gets well on their own. We are better together. We need each other. When God created man and he put him in the Garden of Eden, he was living in a perfect environment. And yet God said, it’s not good for man to be alone.

You know, there’s one thing that God hates. God hates loneliness. God hates it. He made us to be in community, in relationship, to love God and to love each other. Whether you ever get married or not is irrelevant. You need people in your life. You need relationships. You need community.

I don’t have to go into this a lot because we talked about it last week – that fellowship is what you need when you’re in shock and fellowship is what you need when you’re in sorrow. You need other people around you.

The Bible says it like this in Galatians 6:2, “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” In other words, when you’re in pain I’m supposed to carry your pain. When I’m in pain you’re supposed to carry my pain. When either of us are in grief we’re to carry each other’s grief. We are to support each other.

By the way, I mentioned this a couple weeks ago but I’ll say it again. When you’re going through a tough time, when you’re going through a loss, it’s always interesting to see who shows up and who doesn’t. Some people who you expect to show up aren’t going to. And some people you didn’t expect to show up will show up to be there in your pain and in your grief.

I want to tell you this: Don’t judge those people who don’t show up. Just don’t do it. Two reasons. One, you don’t need the resentment. And second, you don’t know what’s going on in their life. Sometime there are fears in their life that keep them apart from you. Sometimes they’re going through something as serious as you are. You don’t know. So just don’t judge anybody if they don’t happened to show up and you expected them to show up in your life. Just be grateful for the ones that do show up.

Romans 12:15 says this, “When others are happy, be happy with them. If they’re sad, share their sorrow.” Circle the phrase “share their sorrow.” Grief is healed in community. Revealing your feeling is the beginning of healing. We share it with each other. That’s what we do in small groups.
GETTING THROUGH LIFE’S LOSSES
Getting Through What You’re Going Through – Part 2

By the way, let me give you a little tip on sharing. When somebody is in pain, comparing never comforts. In other words … let me give you an example. Many people have come up to me in the last four months knowing that I had just lost a son to suicide. They’ll say, I’m so sorry. I know what it’s like. I lost my grandfather.

No you don’t. You don’t know what it’s like. In fact, even if you had lost a son you don’t know what it’s like, because everybody’s grief is different. So when you try to console by comparing, it doesn’t work. Even if you had lost a mother and somebody else had lost a mother, they’re different relationships to their mothers. So everybody’s grief is different. Comparing your pain to somebody else’s never helps anybody in their pain. So just don’t do it. Grief is healed in community.

5. The fifth thing we learn from the Word is that grief takes time.

Grief takes time. It isn’t overcome quickly like, “I’ll give it forty-eight hours and then I’ve got to get back to work.” It just doesn’t happen that way. Grief has its own timetable and you cannot rush it.

I couldn’t count the number of people who’ve said to me things like, are you over it yet? Let me explain something to you about grief. You don’t get over grief, you get through it. You might write that one down. You will never get over the major losses in your life. But you will get through the major losses in your life. Grief is not something you get over.

If you had a baby born and it lived a week and died, you will get through that but you won’t get over it. You will remember it the rest of your life. It’s part of your life story.

So don’t try to get over it; try to get through it. Because grief takes time.

The Bible says this in Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4 “There’s a time for everything. There’s a season for every activity under heaven... a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.”

What the Bible is saying is life is composed of opposites. We have good days and we have bad days. We have up days and we have down days. There’s a time to weep and there’s a time to rejoice. There’s a time to be sad, to mourn. And there’s a time to dance and party. Both of them are legitimate parts of life, and maturity is when you can enter into both.

If you can only enter into the parties of life and you don’t know how to grieve you’re missing half your life. That is the part of your life that causes you to grow spiritually. You don’t grow in the parties. You grow in the valleys.

So he says grief is a season. Circle the word “season.” What a season means is it’s more than one day. It’s more than a week. A season is a season of grief. In the Bible there’s a phrase called “the time of mourning.” It’s used many, many times. It talks about the time of mourning when Moses died. It was thirty days. The whole nation mourned for thirty days.
GETTING THROUGH LIFE’S LOSSES
Getting Through What You’re Going Through – Part 2

When I go to Rwanda, they have a national day of mourning; and they do it every year for the last twenty years for the genocide. It’s not something you want to forget. It’s something you want to remember. There’s a season of grief in life.

Why am I belaboring this point? Because what we do, whenever we face a loss, let’s say you’ve lost your job or you lost your boyfriend or you’ve lost your health or you lost a big deal or you’ve lost your dream or you’ve lost your faith. There are a million different things you could lose. And in that moment the temptation is we immediately want to fix it instead of just grieving the loss.

Don’t try to fix everybody the first thing out of the gate. Just grieve. That’s part of the healing process. It’s how you get on with your life.

We learn this as little kids. You go out and you fall over and you break your head open and you start crying. And the first thing that an adult says to you, “Now, don’t cry.” Really? Don’t cry? My head is bleeding. It hurts!

Parents, there are a lot of things worth crying about! Stop telling or teaching your kids how to stuff it! Because that’s one of the worst lessons you can give them. Let them cry as long as they need to cry. You’re making it sound like the crying is worse than the pain. No, the pain is worse.

When an adult immediately starts saying “stop crying”, it’s like I’m more interested in you not making noise than me taking care of your pain, and me comforting you.

So stop trying to force your kids to stuff it.

What you have to do is learn to lament. What I’m trying to teach you is that you can’t get past your pain until you acknowledge it, you accept it, and you feel it. Once you do that then you can get through it.

But many of you have had a painful or traumatic experience in your life and rather than actually feeling it, actually grieving over it, actually going through the season of mourning, you just put your head down and tried to ignore it, and went on ahead. And it’s popping up sideways here and there. It’s like taking a coke bottle and shaking it up without letting the cap off. It’s going to come out one way or the other.

All kinds of bazaar behaviors and habits and fears and hang-ups and problems come because we don’t actually deal with the losses we have in life. That’s how you get stuck. What happens, we want to get past our sorrow without going through it. And you can’t. You can’t. If you don’t go through the sorrows of life you get stuck there. You may have been hurt as a little kid, or as a teenager, or as a young adult and if you didn’t go through the pain at that moment, you just got stuck. And you’re stuck at fifteen or you’re stuck at twenty-six. Because you can’t get through it by trying to go past it. You just have go in it. We’ve got to go through it.

We have to do what the Bible calls lament. That is to cry out to God with your pain, with your hurt, with your anger, with your complaints and just tell God exactly how you feel.
Let me give you an example. Watch this:

Come to me, oh God. Set me free from this agony. Oh God, oh God, oh God please help me. Every waking moment is filled with the pain of that moment. Every night is filled with terror and with fear. Oh God, how did it happen? Where were you? Why didn’t you stop it?

Oh God, all’s wrong with the world. It’s my voice oh God that sobs to you before the day breaks. Like a balloon that is released to the sky my prayer makes its way to you. Oh God, before the sun even rises and everywhere I turn doors are slammed shut. Oh God, do not slam the door of heaven in my face.

Oh God, the world has been drained of color. The music has been turned off. The silent shroud covers any green that remains. All is grey and smells of death.

I fear for the death of my spirit, oh God. I wrestle to hold on to the deep places of my inner being. My soul is in danger. Save me, oh God. Save me.

Consider my weeping oh Holy One. Be tender hearted when you speak to me. Handle my bruised heart with gentleness; for without you I’m nothing.

Oh God, when you speak the sky is alive with music.

Your hand reaches out and colors the world with a touch. My soul is a rainbow. My sobbing bursts into song.

My God is here.

So grief is a choice. It isn’t going to happen unless you choose to embrace it. If you stuff it, you deny it, you repress it, you suppress it, you’re going to live an unhealthy life. It only happens when you choose to grieve.

And grief is healthy. It’s the only healthy response to loss. God grieves with us. Grief is healed in humility and in community. And grief takes time.

And if I don’t grieve, wherever I’ve had a loss and didn’t grieve it, I’m going to get stuck. Because you can’t get past it, unless you go through it. You get stuck if you try to get past it without going through it.

So how do I get past it? How do I move on in spite of the terrible losses in my life? How do you move forward?

As I said, a lot of people are stuck because they don’t know how to do this. If you want to get unstuck you’re going to need to do four things. You might write these down.

You want to move forward, you want to get past the painful experiences you’ve gone through,
GETTING THROUGH LIFE’S LOSSES
Getting Through What You’re Going Through – Part 2

1. I need to list the losses that I haven’t grieved over.

List the losses I’ve never grieved. You need to go back and really take a little inventory of your life. You need to look at your life and reconsider where have I had major losses in my life? Maybe you went off to war. Maybe you’ve experienced rejection. Maybe you miss some loved ones in your life. Or long-term illness. Or you lost your home or you lost your job, or whatever. What are the things, the losses in your life that you said, I’m going to put my head down and I’m not going to think about it. I’m not going to grieve it; I’m just going to move ahead.

That’s where you got stuck. So you start by listing the losses that I’ve never grieved. In other words, I can’t get past it until I acknowledge it.

Let me ask you. I’m going to ask this of all of our campuses and even those who are online, you can do this too. How many of you would like your future to be blessed by God? Let me see you’re your hands. Yea, that’s unanimous. We all want God to bless our future.

Jesus said grief is the key to blessing. Notice this verse. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Who gets comforted? They. And who are the they? Those who have the courage to mourn.

What is he saying here? Cover-ups don’t get comforted. If I cover up the pain, if I ignore the pain, I deny the pain, I pretend it doesn’t exist, I’m too afraid of my emotions, then I don’t get comforted. And if I don’t get comforted I don’t get blessed. Blessed are those who mourn.

You want God’s blessing? You’ve got to learn how to grieve clean. How to grieve good.

It’s like if you have a wound. If you had a wound, a bad wound, and it got dirty, you would not think of letting a doctor simply put a band aid on it without cleaning out the wound. If you don’t clean out the wound it’s going to fester.

Yet you tried to do that with many things in your life, where you thought, that was painful. I just felt rejected. She just walked out on me; he just walked out on me. I’m not going to think about it anymore. What you did was you put a band aid over a wound that’s just festering. You didn’t clean it out. You didn’t have, clean grief.

My guess is that in your life your unmourned losses are all still waiting there to be mourned. They’re all still waiting.

You say, I don’t know what to do. I’m going to give you two tools this week. I’ll send them to you. Give me your cell phone number and I’ll text it to you. One of them is a Life Losses Checklist. These are tools to jog your memory. Have I ever grieved about this in life? I’ll send that to you. Then Questions to Think About The Losses in Your Life. I’ll send this to you. Just text me or write your phone number and say I want the checklist. I’ll send it to you. Or give me your email and I’ll do it that way.

Why do we do this? You say, I don’t know if I want to do that or not. I don’t know if I want to go back and think about my losses and whether I’ve grieved over them or not.
GETTING THROUGH LIFE’S LOSSES
Getting Through What You’re Going Through – Part 2

Why don’t we allow ourselves to grieve? One word: FEAR. You’re a fraid cat! You’re scared. You’re fearful. What are the fears that you, supposedly a mature adult, are still holding on to?

There’s the fear of, if I really go back and think about the losses in my life and I allow myself to grieve over them, I might be overwhelmed with emotion.

Yes. It’s not going to kill you. It’s like a wave. It’ll come and then it’ll go. So what? You’re afraid of your own emotions? Really? Then you’re afraid of yourself. That’s not very healthy.

“I’m afraid that if I really grieve about that loss I’ll never recover.” You will recover. Where you won’t recover is if you keep it a secret. You keep pushing it down. That’s like shaking up the coke bottle. You keep pushing it down.

You say, “I’m afraid that I’ll lose my mind.” You won’t lose your mind. You might if you keep it a secret. You might if you keep pushing it down. But if you let it out, the boogy man isn’t that big anymore. You bring him out into the light.

What you need to do if you’re afraid to grieve about a loss in your life, you need to claim the 23rd Psalm, the most famous psalm in the Bible. Psalm 23:4 says this, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”

That’s one of the most famous verses in the Bible. But I want you to look at it like you’ve never seen it before.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow...” Circle the phrase “walk through.” You’re walking through it. You’re not going to stay stuck there.

What I’m asking you to do is to consider the things maybe you’ve never grieved. And you walk through them. You’re not going to stay there. You’re not going to stay stuck there the rest of your life. You’re going to walk through the valley.

But you’ve never walked through it so you’re stuck on the other side. That’s why you can’t grow. That’s why you can’t get rid of those habitual patterns in your life that are holding you back. You walk through it.

Then circle the word “shadow.” Walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

When you’re kids, when you’re a child, we all feared shadows. Particularly at night time. Why? Because shadows make things appear bigger than they really are. But nobody ever died from a shadow. You’re not going to die in the valley of the shadow of death. You’re not dying. You’re still alive. It’s not going to kill you. On top of that, you’re going to walk through it. It’s a shadow. And you, God, are with me.

So why am I afraid? Not once in the Bible are we told to “weep not,” or are we told to “sorrow not,” or are we told to “cry not,” or are we told to “grieve not.” But we are told to “fear not.”
GETTING THROUGH LIFE’S LOSSES
Getting Through What You’re Going Through – Part 2

fact, 365 times in the Bible we’re told “fear not.” Why? That’s one for every day of the year. Because grief doesn’t paralyze, fear does. What you are afraid of is actually paralyzing you more than the grief itself. Your fear of your emotions is actually paralyzing you, not your grief. Grief doesn’t paralyze. Grief gets you through the valley of the shadow to the other side. Then you can get on with the rest of your life. And then you can grow and you’ll be more mature and you’ll be richer in spirit. It’s the fear that holds you back.

So I need to list the losses that I’ve never grieved.

Then number two, if you’re serious about getting unstuck,

2. Identify what I’ve really lost.

I go back and I look at, what did I really lose in that childhood? I go deeper, beyond the obvious. What did I lose by having an alcoholic dad? What did I lose by being laid off? What did I really lose when my parents divorced? What did I really lose when my family moved so often as a child? Did I lose stability? Did I lose security? Did I lose identity? Did I lose encouragement? Did I lose my credibility when that happened? Did I lose trust?

You need to look past the obvious and say, when that happened to me, that painful thing or when that loved one died or when that person walked out of my life or whatever happened, what did I really lose? And that’s what you need to grieve.

As I said, I’ve got a list of questions you can ask yourself.

The third thing you do, you make a list of the losses you’ve never grieved and you say what did I really lose there.

3. You have the courage to lament.

I need to have the courage to lament. Lament is not a word that we use much today. It’s a Bible word so I want to deal with it. It’s the kind of action that you must do in order to be healthy emotionally and spiritually.

What is a lament? A lament is a passionate expression of grief to God. To lament means I have a passionate expression of grief to God. I cry out to God. I may shout to God. I may weep. I may yell. It’s a passionate expression of grief to God.

A lament is an act of worship. It is an act of worship that can actually include arguing with God and complaining to God.


We usually do the second. We complain about God. That’s a sin. But God says you can complain to me all you want. God can handle it.
GETTING THROUGH LIFE’S LOSSES
Getting Through What You’re Going Through – Part 2

We’re going to look at this in detail next week when I talk about struggle and how do you argue with God and how do you complain to God and it become an act of worship. I’ll let you in on a little tip, a little advance notice. God can handle it. God can handle your rage. He can handle your resentment. He can handle your regrets. He can handle your complaining. He can handle your accusations.

It’s like a parent with a little child grabbing at your knees having a temper tantrum. You can handle a temper tantrum of somebody less mature than you are. God can handle your pain. You can tell him anything you want. Why? Because he already knows it. He just wants you to get it off your chest. He wants you to admit it.

You just heard, a minute ago, an example of a modern lament. It was written by Ann Weems who wrote a book on modern laments.

But the Bible is all full of laments. Complaints to God. Prayers of complaint and accusation and grief. You know what I love about the Bible? What I love about this book so much: It doesn’t whitewash any negative emotion. It’s all there; it’s just all there. If a guy says, “God I think this sucks!” It’s in the Bible. “God I think you’re being unfair right now. You just cheated me. You broke your promise. God – you need to fix that, God.” And God just puts it right there in his book.

God isn’t afraid of negative emotions. We are, but God isn’t. I love it because life is not all sunshine and roses and rainbows and My Little Pony. And unicorns. And picking flowers and talking about peace and love. A lot of life is tough. Everybody agree with that? Life can be rough. And just like the Bible says, there’s time to weep and there’s a time to rejoice. There is time to party and there’s time to cry. This is part of life.

God says to be fully alive, to be fully human is to accept it all. If you only accept the parties of life and not the grief you live half a life. You’re emotionally stunted because you’re living only the good parts. And there’s no depth, there’s no color to your life. The depth and the color comes in the grief, in the tough times, in the valleys of the shadow.

The Bible is full of laments. In fact, there’s an entire book in the Bible. It’s called Lamentations. That’s what that book is. If you’ve ever read the book of Lamentations, it’s an entire book of Jeremiah complaining that God got it all wrong. And it’s in the Bible. And God just says have your say, Jeremiah. Go ahead. Just spout off. What he was grieving was the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.

In the book of Psalms... most people think the book of Psalms is about thanksgiving and praise. There are 150 Psalms in the Bible, in the book of Psalms. Sixty-five of them are psalms of lament. If you go read them, it can be pretty shocking that there’s that much negative stuff in the Psalms. And David and a whole bunch of guys say, God, this is bad. I don’t like this. And God says that’s an act of worship too. That’s as much an act of worship as thank you God, praise you God, as, right now God, I don’t like you. Because you’re talking to God about God.
GETTING THROUGH LIFE’S LOSSES
Getting Through What You’re Going Through – Part 2

If you want to read the pinnacle of the dark Lamentations it’s Psalm 88, by a guy named Heman. The final thing that he says is “Darkness is my only friend.” That guy is pretty upset. Darkness is my only friend. He’s handling that.

This Bible right here, I call this my depression Bible. I’ve had it since I was a teenager. When I was a teenager I bought this. It’s the Living Bible paraphrase. In 1981 I went through a year, a really bad year. It was a very depressing, very discouraging year. I was under a cloud of depression the whole year. It didn’t leave for a year. I was filled with all kinds of fears and anxieties and depression. My goal wasn’t God, build a great church. But my goal was, God can you get me through this week? Can you get me through today?

I took this Bible and I opened it up to the middle which is Psalms, and I read through the book of Psalms. I underlined every verse, highlighted every verse that either a) I identified with in my pain, or b) was an encouraging word of promise that would encourage me. I underlined them all. And I’ve still got it. Now, if I start to get discouraged I go get my depression Bible. I open it up and I just start reading just the underlined parts and I get encouraged again.

You see, every emotion known to human man is in the book of Psalms. It’s all expressed there.

So here’s your assignment, your homework… Start reading through the book of Psalms. Get a modern paraphrase, the Living Bible, the Message paraphrase or New Living – there are lots of good ones. And start reading through the book of Psalms and underline every verse that you identify with and every verse that encourages you. Then you’ll have it in your time. And you’ll have it to share with others when others are in their discouraging parts.

So have the courage to lament.

There’s one other thing you need to do.

4. You need to ask Jesus to heal your broken heart.

I ask Jesus to heal my broken heart. Because he’s understanding. He made me. The Bible says he’s close to the brokenhearted. Psalm 103:13-14 says this, “The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who honor him. For he understands how weak we are.”

When we come to God and say “God, I’m hurting. God, I’m scared. God, I’m grieving. God, I just got fired and I don’t know what to do. It’s a huge loss.” Or “I just lost it all in the stock market.” Or “That big deal I was working on, it just fell apart,” or “That divorce, it’s final,” or “That engagement, it got broken off. Dear God, all the things I wanted, they haven’t happened. I wanted to get married; it hasn’t happened. I wanted to have a baby and a family; it hasn’t happened.”

Tell that to God. You know what God’s going to say? He’s not going to say, “Stop your crying.” That’s what adult humans do. He’s tender. He’s compassionate. He understands how weak we are.
GETTING THROUGH LIFE’S LOSSES
Getting Through What You’re Going Through – Part 2

In fact, Jesus said this in his first public sermon in his hometown in Nazareth. Luke 4:18, Jesus said, “God has sent me to heal the brokenhearted.” That’s what Jesus came to do. He came to heal the brokenhearted.

So in your pain, the last thing you do is you look toward God. While you’re walking through the valley of the shadow you look to Jesus.

You know what I discovered about shadows? Wherever there’s a shadow there’s a light. There’s a light. When I’m walking through the valley of the shadow and I see that shadow over there and it’s scaring me, what do I do to get through the valley of the shadow? I turn my back on the shadow and look directly into the light. And I’m not afraid anymore because I’m not looking at the shadow. I’m looking at the light.

Have you looked to the light? Jesus said “I am the light of the world.” You need to give your life to Christ. If you haven’t done that, you need to do it no matter what campus or online, wherever you are. You need to give your life to Christ. Because you don’t have the resources to make it through all the losses that are going to come into your life if you don’t have the power of God in your life – Jesus Christ who came and died for you to love you.

The best way to prepare for the loss of a loved one, the best way to prepare for a loved one’s death, and you’re going to have loved ones who die just like I did… the best way to prepare for a loved one’s death is to make sure you’re prepared for your death. If you were to die tonight do you know you’d go right to heaven? Have you settled that issue? If you haven’t, let’s do so right now. Let’s bow our heads.

Prayer:

Would you pray this prayer in your heart? Dear God, you know all the things that scare me. Sometimes I’m even afraid of my own emotions. Sometimes, I’m afraid to show them. And I admit I have often equated sadness with weakness, not strength. I realize that I needed to learn some stuff today about grief. That it is a choice. It doesn’t happen unless I let it happen in my life. And God, many times I’ve pushed it down. I’ve suppressed and repressed and I’ve denied and I’ve gone ahead thinking that I could go past it without going through it. Lord, help me to realize that grief is healthy. It’s the only healthy response to loss. Thank you that you grieve with me. Thank you that you’re close to the brokenhearted. Thank you for putting me at Saddleback Church where I can be in a healing community, where we carry each other’s burden and we can share each other’s sorrows. I want to be in a small group to build that kind of connection, that safety net when I’m in pain and when I can help others in their pain. Lord, many times I’ve rushed at always trying to find an answer, a quick fix, an instant solution instead of realizing that grief takes time and that there’s a season for everything in life. Forgive me for that. Help me to make a list of the things I’ve lost in life that maybe I was too busy or too afraid to grieve. I don’t want to be stuck any more. I want to identify what I’ve really lost. And I want to have the courage to lament, not just an intellectual exercise, but to feel the grief and to express it. Thank you God that you can handle all my questions and all my fears and anger and everything. You love it all and can handle it. Jesus, I ask you to heal my broken heart. I do that by first of all asking you to come into my heart and change me. Fill my life with love where there’s emptiness. Thank
you that you’re a Father that’s tender and compassionate. You understand the weaknesses in my life. Thank you Jesus that you came to heal the brokenhearted. Start that today in my life. As much as I know how, I say yes to you. I want to go your way, not mine. I want to learn to love you and trust you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.