

**Greeting & Privilege** to bring the word of God today  
**Intro self**

**Opening remarks:**

- [Keith LOVES this church; and they love him!]
- He shared with me that many of you have faced loss & sadness recently.
- I'm so sorry to hear that—I know how that feels:  
The loss of a parent or another loved one; a child caught up in the spirit of the world; an unanswered prayer for healing; a painfully toxic workplace; a personal struggle with a persistent sin; the loss of a job; the loss of a dream.
- It can be hard to trust in the goodness of God when we're passing through a shadowy valley.
- But hey, Church, What are we told when we're struggling?:  
"Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say, rejoice." (Phil 4:4)  
"Give thanks in all things, for that is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thess 5:18)
- When we are in that place of anxiety, loss or grief, and we read that we should "rejoice always," it seems like either a pipe dream, or we're not good Christians—we don't have enough faith.
- Is that true? How should we, as followers of Jesus, respond to heartache, loss, and grief?

**Lament**

- First of all, it's ok to grieve in times of pain and struggle.
- God created us with emotions, and feeling emotions is part of being like God.
- It is not sinful to be sad.
- The biblical word for grieving is *lament*.
- It's a process of working through heartache and loss. [Entire book of the Bible...]
- Over 40 Psalms are laments: **3, 5-7, 13, 17, 22, 25-28, 32, 38, 39, 42, 43, 51, 54-57, 59, 61, 63, 64, 69-71, 86, 88, 102, 109, 120, 130, and 140-43.**
- Let's look at just one: **Psalm 6:1-10:**  
O LORD, don't rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your rage.  
Have compassion on me, LORD, for I am weak.  
Heal me, LORD, for my bones are in agony.  
I am sick at heart. How long, O LORD, until you restore me?  
Return, O LORD, and rescue me. Save me because of your unfailing love.  
For the dead do not remember you. Who can praise you from the grave?  
I am worn out from sobbing.  
All night I flood my bed with weeping, drenching it with my tears.  
My vision is blurred by grief; my eyes are worn out because of all my enemies.  
Go away, all you who do evil, for the LORD has heard my weeping.  
The LORD has heard my plea; the LORD will answer my prayer.  
May all my enemies be disgraced and terrified.  
May they suddenly turn back in shame.

- Notice the range of emotions: shame & repentance, physical pain, thoughts of death, heart-sick, fear of danger, exhaustion, anger at enemies. There may be more.
- Now notice who the psalmist is addressing: LORD, YHWH. God is *with* him!
- When we are in pain, when we feel lost, or feel all is lost, we can take our emotions to God, because He is with us in those times of trouble.
- We don't need to hide our emotions from God, He is a safe place of refuge.
- It's one thing to cry out to God: "Where were You, when I needed You most?"
- It is entirely another to complain: "Where was God when I needed Him?"
- In the former, we step into the presence of God; the latter we turn our back on Him
- We can feel the feels, because we are in the presence of Jesus.

### Trust in God

- To continue to seek to be with God in times of hardship is...well...hard.
- It takes a lot of faith to keep trusting God when it looks like He's not listening.
- [A couple in my hometown with two small children, best friends with my brother and his wife. The wife got cancer. It got bad. Everyone was praying for her: my whole family, their church, our church—hundreds of people praying. It got worse. My dad got a word from the Lord that she would be healed. She passed away.]
- How do you keep trusting God when something like that happens?
- We have two choices, don't we? We can keep on trusting, or walk away.
- For me, I want to align myself with Peter in **John 6:69-69**: *Lord, who else are we going to go to? You alone have the words of eternal life. We know you, you are the Holy One of God. And Job 13:15: Though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him.*
- Those two verses have been my resting place in the deepest, darkest times in my life.
- And I've found that in adversity our faith has the opportunity to truly grow.
- God meets us in our pain; He gets us through it, and we learn, again, that He really can be trusted.
- We can move forward through loss and grief, because God is who He says He is.

### Be Thankful

- Now we get to the "rejoicing" part. Now we can begin to think about being thankful.
  - We acknowledge and work through our very real pain, we try our best to keep trusting in God no matter the circumstances.
  - While we're going that, there are at least three things we can be thankful for:
- 1) We can be thankful that we don't have to suffer alone, or face it alone.
    - I am so grateful for those in my life who love me and have walked with me through the pain.
    - I'm sure you are, too. Burdens shared are lighter.
    - **Galatians 6:2**: *Bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ.* (And what *is* the law of Christ? LOVE!)
    - [BF George; just knowing there's someone who cares makes it easier.]
    - If you feel alone, then reach out. I would hope that there is someone in your church, or your circle of Christian friends, who would be willing to walk with you and what you're going through.
    - You. Are. Not. Alone. **That is something to rejoice about!**

- 2) Second, we can be thankful that God is redeeming all things, including every painful experience and every loss.
- We know that God doesn't bring suffering on us.
  - Suffering comes from the freedom He's given us, and the abuse of that freedom that we and others have brought about in this fallen world.
  - But God is so incredible: He works through the suffering to accomplish great things; the best example of this is the cross: through the most evil and heinous act (the death of God's Son), God wrought redemption for all who turn to Him.
  - What God did through the cross, He continues to do for us: suffering, grief, sorrow, loss—God can use all of it to grow our faith, to conform us to Christ, & to bring comfort to others through us.
  - Think of **2 Cor 1:3-4**: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*
  - I truly can't describe the countless ways God has used my struggles and suffering to make me more like Jesus, and to teach me how to love others more like He does.
  - God will use every one of our trials to glorify Himself, to bless us, and to bless others as we continue to trust Him. **For that, we can be thankful.**
- 3) Finally, we can be thankful in times of difficulty because God is ultimately a God of hope.
- **Rom 15:13**: *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*
  - Because God is working to redeem all things, we can trust that in the end, it will all have been worth it—even when it doesn't seem that way now.
  - There is nothing too dark, too devastating, too painful, for God to redeem.
  - If God can redeem the cross, He will redeem our tragedies as well.
  - [Corrie Ten Boom, author of *The Hiding Place* and a survivor of the Ravensbuck Nazi death camp, who watched her sister starve to death, writes: "There is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still."]
  - "Where there is hope, there is life" is a well-known saying.
  - God is life. "Where there is God, there is hope." **Let us be thankful.**

### Conclusion

- At times all of us will face loss and pain.
- There's good news: God is with us, God redeems us, God brings hope.
- We just need to keep trusting Him:
  - Trust Him when we lament.
  - Trust Him while we walk that rocky road with others.
  - Trust Him with patience that He will truly work good out of bad.
- And allow our trust to erupt in thanksgiving.
- God, who loves us more deeply and completely than we can imagine, is a God of hope!