

The title of this morning's sermon is "*Learning to Weep With Those Who Weep.*"

As you can probably tell, we are not in Luke's gospel. While we were ministering to the Moss family, I shared that I was developing a burden to equip the church in this area.

If I had to choose one verse to summarize my ministry, it would be:

Ephesians 4:12 [pastors are] to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

We tend to think pastors are the only ones in ministry, but the Bible says pastors are supposed to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry.

I was listening to a sermon from John MacArthur titled "The Foundation for Fifty-Five Years of Ministry." Here's a quote from it about the need for everyone to minister:

"I understood the church had to be a place of mutual ministry, fellowship, spiritual gifts in one another. We have gifts that we minister to others. I have a spiritual gift for you. My gift is not for me, it's for you. You have spiritual gifts—speaking gifts, serving gifts...Every one of us fits into the body of Christ in a way that the Spirit of God has designed for us to have a ministry that is critical to the life of the church.

Grace Church has always had that. In the early years, the first article ever written on Grace Church was...titled 'The Church with 900 Ministers.' We had 900 people at the time. And what struck him was these were not spectators; these people were really caring for each other. He picked that up on his own.

That article got a lot of traction because people didn't think of churches in that sense. But we were heavily on a bent on giving instruction on the mutual ministry of God's people to each other in a church so that we're not spectators. Things that go on around here, you could never ever imagine that I did them. When I come here, I'm as shocked as you are at everything. Who does all this? This church has always understood fellowship, mutual ministry, caring for each other."

I have the same desire for WCC. I'm thankful so many of you serve because each of you plays a vital role in this church family.

Part of the ministry you should be equipped for is visiting those hurting, and here's why I say this...

Scripture contains verses for specific people, such as husbands, wives, children, single people, widows, older people, and younger people.

Scripture also contains verses for everyone regardless of their season of life. Romans 12 is one of those chapters written to anyone and everyone.

The chapter begins with familiar verses appealing to us to present our bodies as living sacrifices. It is followed by the command not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Then verses 3-8 encourage us to use the gifts God has given us.

Finally, in verses 9-21, Paul has a section titled "Behave like a Christian" or "Marks of the True Christian." These verses are written to every Christian, and Romans 12:15 says:

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

And this brings us to lesson one:

Lesson One: We must all weep with those who weep.

If people have the gift of leadership but not the gift of service, they can't say, "I'll be in charge, but don't expect me to serve."

Or if people have the gift of ministry but not the gift of encouragement, they can't say, "I'll minister, but I won't encourage."

Or if people have the gift of teaching but not the gift of mercy, they can't say, "I'll teach, but I won't be merciful."

While people with the gift of mercy, service, or encouragement might find it easier to weep with those weeping, Romans 12:15 says it is everyone's responsibility.

Similarly:

1 Corinthians 12:26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

I want to equip us to weep with those weeping and suffer with those suffering.

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And here's another reason I want to equip each of you: I wasn't equipped in this area...

I think my first introduction to weeping with those who weep was in 2007; not long after I started pastoring, I went with another pastor to visit a young girl who was dying of a brain tumor. I thought we would visit with her, but she could only get out of bed for a few moments before she had to return. We mainly visited with her father and, I believe, her grandmother, who were understandably devastated by what was happening.

I had no idea what to say, so I'm unsure if I said anything besides introducing myself when I arrived and saying goodbye when we left.

I hate to say it, but I thought the pastor with me did a terrible job. He tried to deliver the previous Sunday's sermon to the father and grandmother, but that didn't go well. It wasn't the time or place.

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I know I'm not the only one who has wondered what to say or how to act in these situations. Pastor Nathan and Jake both permitted me to share that when I was driving to see the Raleys when Brandon drowned, Pastor Nathan asked how to handle the situation. When Jake and I were driving to visit Dick Moss, he asked something similar. I appreciated their humility in wanting to handle these situations well.

Over the years, people have told me, "I want to visit so-and-so, but I don't know what to say," or "I heard what happened to this person, and I want to say something, but I'm afraid of saying the wrong thing."

That's why, over the last few months, with Dick Moss's passing, I have felt burdened to preach this.

Believe it or not, I couldn't cover all this in one sermon. So, this morning, I will discuss what we shouldn't do when weeping with those who are weeping, and next Sunday, I will discuss what we should do.

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And this brings us to lesson two:

Lesson Two: Don't (Part One) try to change the mood.

It makes sense that we should rejoice with those who rejoice. When people are successful or prosperous, we should celebrate with them and be happy for them. We shouldn't be downers and start complaining or sharing about our problems, ruining the mood.

But the part that might not sound like what we would expect is that we are also told to weep with those who are weeping and suffer with those who are suffering...versus helping them feel better. In other words, we might expect the verses to read this way:

Romans 12:15 Cheer up those who are weeping.

1 Corinthians 12:26 If one member suffers, encourage him or her.

Instead, we should weep and suffer with them, so we shouldn't try to change the mood.

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Consider these verses:

Ecclesiastes 3:1 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

Solomon lists different seasons, and here are two of them...

Ecclesiastes 3:4 a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

There are acceptable times and seasons to weep and mourn.

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Think about this...

Many books of the Bible are associated with specific topics. For example:

- Proverbs is a book about wisdom. God has given us an entire book to help us become wise.
- Job is a book about suffering. God has given us an entire book to understand suffering.
- Song of Solomon is a book about romance. God has given us an entire book to understand romance.
- Philippians is a book about joy. God has given us an entire book to help us be joyful.

And we have a book called Lamentations. Lamenting is synonymous with weeping. In other words, God has also given us an entire book about weeping and lamenting.

And many of the Psalms are laments.

God wants us to be familiar and comfortable with this topic.

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For now, let's look at someone who didn't know how to weep with someone weeping.

And this brings us to the next part of lesson two:

Lesson Two: Don't (Part Two) "pour vinegar on soda."

If you're unfamiliar with the verse this lesson references, it will make more sense soon.

Here's the context...

Elkanah tried to encourage his wife, Hannah.

Of course, it has to be a husband trying to fix things for his wife, right?

But in the process, he did more harm than good.

Three things make Hannah's life very difficult:

First, her husband, Elkanah, is also married to another woman, Peninnah. Talk to any woman whose husband has a second wife, and she'll tell you how hard her life is.

You may wonder why some men in Scripture took multiple wives. God never condoned this. It is descriptive versus prescriptive. Polygamy portrays the sad reality of ancient cultures.

Luke 7:35 [Jesus said], "Wisdom is justified by all her children."

Justified means declared right. The wisdom of decisions is justified or shown to be right by the children or by what's produced from the decision. Polygamist marriages were always characterized by turmoil and strife instead of peace and harmony, showing its foolishness versus wisdom.

Second, Hannah's life is difficult, because her husband's other wife, Peninnah, is cruel to her.

Third, Peninnah could have children, but Hannah could not. It is bad enough not to be able to have children, but how much worse is it when your husband's other wife can?

With that background, look at 1 Samuel 1:4...

1 Samuel 1:4 On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. 5 But to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the Lord had closed her womb.

While we are on the subject of weeping and suffering, I would be remiss if I didn't point out that we are looking at one of the most common causes of grief, especially for women: not being able to have children.

I know this can be a difficult trial for women in the church:

- They see other women having children
- They see the church celebrating those women having children

But when they have trouble having a child, I can only imagine how difficult that must be.

So, church family, I would ask that any time it comes to mind, pray that God opens the womb of those women who are having trouble having children.

1 Samuel 1:6 And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb. 7 So it went on year by year. As often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat.

We're told twice that Peninnah provoked Hannah to emphasize how bad it was.

Look how Elkanah responds to Hannah's suffering:

1 Samuel 1:8 And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?"

Quick question: do you think Elkanah's encouragement made Hannah feel better?

Brothers, I'm not the most sensitive husband in the world, but can we agree that we shouldn't respond like this when our wives are upset?

Elkanah made two mistakes.

First, he asked insensitive questions: “Why do you weep, and why do you not eat?” There are only two possible reasons he asked this, and both are bad.

First, he didn’t know, which makes him the most oblivious husband in human history.

The other possibility, which is more likely and even worse, is that he did know, which gave the impression that Hannah should not be upset.

He looks like the husband whose wife is sobbing and says, “What’s wrong with you?”

Of course, I know none of the husbands in this church have ever asked that before...right?

Second, Elkanah made the king of all prideful statements: “Is not being married to me better than all the children you could have?”

He rebuked Hannah for crying and then said, “Why are you upset about not having any children when you get to be married to me?”

What does it look like when we do this when people are suffering?

- We offer all the reasons they should be happy
 - We point out all the blessings in their lives
 - We remind them how good they still have it
 - Maybe we even tell them how much better they have it than others
 - If we want to be super insensitive, we can even tell them how much better their lives are than ours. That always makes people feel better to hear that: “At least you don’t have it as bad as me!”
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Listen to this verse that has incredible application for ministering to hurting people:

Proverbs 25:20 Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, and like vinegar on soda.

Trying to cheer people up when they’re suffering is like taking their coat when it’s cold or pouring vinegar on their soda.

The next part of lesson two:

Lesson Two: Don’t (Part Three) try to compete.

I don’t know why we are wired like this. It just seems like whenever someone is suffering, our minds are racing to come up with a situation from our lives that is closest, and even worse, than the situation they are experiencing:

- They are hurting, so we want to tell them about times we were hurting, “Oh yeah, oh yeah...”
- They lost someone, so we want to tell them about when we lost someone, “You think your loss is bad!”

And here’s the truth...

It’s not to say we have never been hurt or lost anyone. More than likely, we have. Maybe we have even been hurt more than them or lost more people than them.

But in these situations, we must let everything be about the person suffering.

The next part of lesson two...

Lesson Two: Don't (Part Four) be a false prophet.

The other thing we seem wired to do is to try to explain. We must tell people why this is happening and what God is doing...even though we have no idea. Most of the time we don't know what God is doing or why He is doing what He is doing.

Walking by faith and trusting the Lord means we trust the Lord even when we don't understand. If we did understand, we wouldn't have to walk by faith or trust the Lord.

And if there's any time it's particularly difficult to trust the Lord, it's during trials.

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Now consider this...

If we say God is or isn't doing something, and we are wrong, that makes us false prophets.

Maybe you're listening to this and thinking, "Is it really that bad to say what God is doing when people are suffering?"

It is, and I don't think this because I came up with it on my own. I think this because we have individuals in Scripture who did exactly this – they said what God was doing when it wasn't what He was doing – and He was angry with them.

I'm talking about Job's friends. He was suffering, and they were convinced they knew why. They said it was because Job was a horrible sinner. Listen to these verses:

Job 4:7 "[What] innocent [person] ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off?

In other words, innocent, upright people don't suffer, so you must be terrible to suffer so much!

Job 8:20 "Behold, God will not reject a blameless man, nor take the hand of evildoers.

In other words, God is good to blameless people and bad to evildoers...so you must be really bad!

Job 36:6 [God] does not keep the wicked alive, but gives the afflicted their right. 7 He does not withdraw his eyes from the righteous, but with kings on the throne he sets them forever, and they are exalted.

In other words, God kills the wicked, extends the lives of the righteous and gives them good leaders.

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Now let me ask you something...

Were Job's friends speaking well or poorly of God?

They were speaking well of God!

So, of course, God was pleased with them, right?

They go back and forth with Job throughout the book and then listen to the very end:

Job 42:7 The Lord said to Eliphaz..."MY ANGER BURNS AGAINST YOU AND AGAINST YOUR TWO FRIENDS, FOR YOU HAVE NOT SPOKEN OF ME WHAT IS RIGHT, as my servant Job has. 8 Now

therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves...For YOU HAVE NOT SPOKEN OF ME WHAT IS RIGHT, as my servant Job has.”

God is repetitive for a reason. Twice, He said He was angry with them because they spoke wrongly of Him. In particular, they spoke wrongly about why Job was suffering...even though they sounded like they were speaking well of God.

So, when people are suffering, don't tell them what God is doing unless we know for sure...and we probably don't.

Many of the clichés and platitudes we offer can also make us false prophets:

- We say, “Things can't get any worse” or “Things won't get any worse.” Things can probably get much worse, so how do we know they won't?
- Similarly, we say, “Things will get better.” How do we know they will get better? Maybe they will get worse.

When my brother passed away unexpectedly from a drug overdose in my early twenties, there was no shortage of people, both believers and unbelievers, who seemed to be comfortable telling me why he died. Keep in mind that none of these people knew him or knew anything about him.

I know everyone meant well, but I remember finding only one person's sentiments comforting. I received a letter from a pastor's daughter, and it made three points:

First, she said she was very sorry about what happened, and that's a pretty good thing to say to people.

Second, she said the opposite of everyone else: she didn't know why this happened. That was refreshing because I doubted everyone knew why this happened.

Third, I wasn't a Christian then, so I didn't understand God's sovereignty, but she told me that God was in control, which greatly encouraged me. I'm not sure we should always say this to people because it could sound cliché or like we are preaching to them, but it encouraged me.

If people ask you why something happened, you can say, “I'm sorry. I don't know, but I can tell you that God is in control.”

Next week, we'll talk more about what we should say and do.

For now, let me draw your attention to this verse:

1 Thessalonians 4:13 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you MAY NOT GRIEVE AS OTHERS DO WHO HAVE NO HOPE.

So, Paul said to grieve or weep, just not like those without hope.

Who grieves without hope?

Unbelievers!

Paul used the same language to describe unbelievers elsewhere:

Ephesians 2:12 You were separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, HAVING NO HOPE AND WITHOUT GOD in the world.

So when Paul says not to grieve without hope, he's saying not to grieve like unbelievers.

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Just think about why this is the case...

What hope do unbelievers have when they grieve or weep?

None. When they lose a loved one they believe they'll never see them again. There is no hope for them.

But as believers we have the blessed hope:

Titus 2:13 [We are] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

As believers we have the hope of seeing Christ.

Let me tell you someone who had this hope during his weeping, and that's Job. He said:

Job 19:25 For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth;

Job didn't see his Redeemer as some force or concept. He saw Him as a Person who would stand victoriously on the earth at the end of time.

This thought gave him hope and comfort.

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In the next verse:

Job 19:26 And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God,

Job felt like God hid Himself from him...just like we might be tempted to feel when we are grieving.

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Notice he said...

My skin will be destroyed

What did Job's skin look like?

Job 2:7 says he had painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

But he also said, "In my flesh, I shall see God."

So which is it...is his skin destroyed, or does he see God in his flesh?

It's both!

He expected his present, earthly body to be destroyed, but he expected to receive a new glorified body.

1 Corinthians 15:53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

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Notice he said, "I shall see God."

He knew he would see God in this glorified body.

And listen to what this thought produced in him in the next verse...

Job 19:27b How my heart yearns within me!

This reality seemed to be almost more than he could handle.

Job probably experienced more weeping and suffering than anyone in history, but he could have great hope because he knew he would see his Redeemer.

This is the hope we have, too, and next week, we'll talk about sharing this hope with others.

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If you have any questions or if I can pray for you in any way, I will be up front after service, and I consider it a privilege to speak with you.

Let's pray.