

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

GROUP GUIDE: WEEK 23

CONVERSATION STARTER

What's your favorite sad song? What about this particular song do you connect with more than others?

JESUS WEPT

Jesus' beloved friend has died. But he doesn't just heal him from a distance, even though we've seen earlier in John that he is perfectly capable of doing so. Instead, Jesus goes to Bethany to share in the grief of Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha. And even though he knows what he's about to do, Jesus still pauses to weep.

The Message says, "When Jesus saw her sobbing and the Jews with her sobbing, a deep anger welled up within him."

Jesus doesn't just have compassion for Mary and Martha and the fate of Lazarus, he's angry about it. His grief stirs him up because he knows that death was never supposed to be part of our human experience. Death is an invader, sneaking into God's good world through the voice of the serpent and the tendency humans have to define good and evil for themselves instead of allowing God to define it for them. Death is the enemy of God. And Jesus is angry about it. He weeps in the face of death, at its effects on God's people—the pain it causes and the grief it leaves in its wake.

Even though Jesus, more than anyone, knows that one day all wrong things will be made right, he still weeps. Isaiah 53:4 speaks of the Messiah as one who "has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."

Before we focus too quickly on the hope of resurrection, we have to allow ourselves to feel—to weep with those who weep and grieve with those who grieve. Our tears don't mean that our faith is weak or small, it means we're human. And Jesus gives us permission to express the fullness of our emotions, not as ones without hope, but as ones who love others deeply.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stuck out to you about the reading from this week? Was there a verse or idea that was particularly meaningful or challenging for you?
2. The Bible Project says Agape love “is not primarily a feeling that happens to people. This kind of love is a choice to act in ways that offer well-being to others.” What does it look like on a practical level to love someone sacrificially?
3. Can you think of a time when following Jesus cost you something or didn’t feel like the wise choice? How did you get through it, and what kept you going?
4. Are there environments where you find it more difficult to follow Jesus or where following Jesus feels unwise? Why do you think this is the case?
5. Jesus didn’t just resurrect Lazarus from a distance, he went to Bethany to be with the sisters and share in their grief. What does this tell us about Jesus’ desire and tendency toward us in moments of suffering?

WEEKLY PRACTICE

This week, think of a situation or circumstance in your life right now that makes you want to cry out to God—something going on in your own life or the life of a friend or family member, or something that breaks your heart about the world around you. Use the form of a lament psalm to put your thoughts, feelings, and emotions in poetic writing (don’t get caught up on making your psalm rhyme). If you’re not sure what to say, use the traditional structure to guide you. Start by describing the situation—be sure to get specific about how the circumstances make you feel; share your doubts, fears, worries, and anxieties with God. Next, ask God for help—share your wants and desired outcomes for the situation at hand. Finally, end with a statement of affirmation about what you believe God can do in the midst of this situation. Go ahead and thank God for how He will work in and through these troubling circumstances.

After you finish, spend time praying over your psalm, just like we’ve been practicing with the other psalms. Reflect on your experience: how did it feel to express your worries, doubts, or deep emotions with God? Is this something you feel comfortable doing—why or why not? How do you think God felt or thought about your prayer? What does this reveal about your picture of who God is and how He relates to you?