

UNEARTHED

Digging beneath the surface and bringing our whole selves before God.

Job: "Finding God in the Dark"

Day 1:

We began this entire series looking at how our world is broken. Since sin entered the scene in the Garden, Eden has been broken. This brokenness isn't just around us; we experience it specifically as we walk through pain and suffering, experiencing grief and loss.

At times, it's difficult to figure out how a good God would allow such suffering. Yet, Christianity offers a unique theology of suffering that brings great hope—both to those who follow Jesus and to the world. Tim Keller, in his book *Walking through Pain and Suffering*, writes, "Christianity teaches that, contra fatalism, suffering is overwhelming; contra Buddhism, suffering is real; contra karma, suffering is often unfair; but contra secularism, suffering is meaningful. There is a purpose to it, and if faced rightly, it can drive us like a nail deep into the love of God and into more stability and spiritual power than you can imagine. . . . While other worldviews lead us to sit in the midst of life's joys, foreseeing the coming sorrows, Christianity empowers its people to sit in the midst of this world's sorrows, tasting the coming joy" (30-31).

Isaiah 53 tells us Jesus is a "man of sorrows, acquainted with grief." He is a suffering servant. One who entered into suffering when it wasn't deserved. Just like Job, Jesus did nothing to incite suffering. Even more so than Job, he was truly innocent. Keller goes on to describe this beautiful side of Jesus and how He heals our suffering:

Jesus lost all his glory so that we could be clothed in it. He was shut out so we could get access. He was bound, nailed, so that we could be free. He was cast out so we could approach. And Jesus took away the only kind of suffering that can really destroy you: that is being cast away from God. He took that so that now all suffering that comes into your life will only make you great. A lump of coal under pressure becomes a diamond. And the suffering of a person in Christ only turns you into somebody gorgeous (180-1).

When we take our suffering to Jesus, the One who is familiar with pain and loss, He transforms us.

Read Job 38.

As you read today, notice the difference in God's vantage point versus your own. How does reading this chapter change your perspective? What loss or grief do you need to name in Jesus' presence today? How have you found peace, freedom, and intimacy with God through suffering and loss?

Day 2:

Read the following:

Psalm 34:18

Psalm 23

John 11:1-44

Matthew 26:36-47

*Which passage impacted you the most? Why?
What is God speaking through his Word to you today?*

Day 3:

Today we will spend some time looking at our own story to see how pain and suffering, grief and loss have affected our own lives. As you begin, look back over the Scripture passages from this week.

- What losses have you experienced throughout your life? How have they affected you?
- As you look back on the hardships of your life, where do you see God's presence with and attentiveness to you? How is looking back on the loss different than when you were first experiencing it?
- How have you compensated for the loss you experienced? Were there things you sought for comfort or ways you avoided grieving?
- Where is forgiveness needed as you examine your suffering with God?
- What scriptures remind you that God has walked this valley with you?

"Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat fall to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (John 12:24)

Day 4:

Making sense of loss and hardship is a challenging part of following Jesus. We can know that God is good while also living through difficulties that make that reality hard to believe. We read Scriptures like “all things God works for the good of those who love him” (Romans 8:28) and wonder how that applies to our own loss, especially when we’re still grieving.

Thankfully, we have a Savior who is familiar with suffering, loss, and hardship. Jesus encountered every kind of emotion we face. On the cross, He left us an invitation to process the truth of the goodness of the new life only He can bring.

In his book *The Holy Longing*, Ronald Rolheiser explains there are two types of death: “There is terminal death and paschal death. Terminal death is a death that ends all possibilities. . . . Paschal death is a death that, while ending one kind of life, opens the person undergoing it to receive a deeper and richer form of life.” This is the kind of life Jesus refers to in John 12:24. While the kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it produces new life through its death.

Rolheiser also distinguishes between two types of life. He shares, “There is resuscitated life and there is resurrected life. Resuscitated life is when one is restored to one’s former life and health, as is the case with someone who has been clinically dead and is brought back to life. Resurrected life is not this. It is not a restoration of one’s old life but the reception of a radically new life.”

Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection are known as the Paschal Mystery for this very reason. Jesus’ death on the cross was not a terminal death. While it was final in the sense of fulfilling the law, His death brought new life with it. That new life isn’t the same as the old life before. When we meet Jesus, He brings resurrected life—life that is radically new.

As we enter another practice this week, we’re invited to look at our losses, grieve them, and open our hands to the new life Jesus longs to bring. Rolheiser writes, “Unless we mourn properly our hurts, our losses, life’s unfairness, our shattered dreams, our radical inconsummation, and all the life that we once had but that has now passed us by, we will live either in an unhealthy fantasy or an ever-intensifying bitterness.”

Take time today to work through your own grief and loss in the practice found in the *Unearthed Journal* on page 72.

Day 5:

In his book *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, Pete Scazzerro writes, “Good grieving is not just letting go, but also letting it bless us. Job did just that. The old life for Job was truly over. That door remained closed. That is the great grief about our losses. There is finality. We can’t get it

back." When we experience loss in whatever form it comes, the blessing can be difficult to see, especially right away.

But as we walk with Jesus, sharing our grief with him and allowing him to heal us, ultimately, we will be blessed. That is the lesson of Job. Scazzerro shares,

As [Job] followed the difficult path of allowing his losses to enlarge his soul for God, God blessed him superabundantly. Not only was he spiritually transformed but "the Lord restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before. . . . The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part." . . . This account is meant to encourage us to trust the living God with the many mini-deaths that we experience in our lives. The central message of Christ is that suffering and death bring resurrection and transformation. . . . But remember, resurrection only comes out of death—real death.

Our losses are real.
And so is our God, the living God.

Your losses are real.
Your pain and suffering is real.
But our God, the living God who is Healer, Redeemer, and Restorer, is indeed, very real, too.

Look back over your notes from this week.

What do you notice?

What new thing did God reveal to you?

How has God spoken to you through Scripture or the discoveries you've made?

What's God inviting you to as a result?

Consider...

- Taking time to look back through the ways Jesus has resurrected your losses throughout your life. Where have you experienced healing and what types of new birth has he brought?
- Take extended time to continue writing out your story. Look for the thread of God's goodness throughout your life—even in the moments of suffering. Ask him to show you where he was in the difficult places.
- Take a prayer walk somewhere beautiful, carrying some small stones that represent the losses in your life. As you walk with Jesus, name those losses as you go, inviting him to speak into each one of them. As you name them, drop them along the way, giving the burden of healing to Jesus to carry.
- Consider sharing your discoveries throughout this study with a trusted friend. Take time to listen to their story as well. Notice where you see God at work.