

Facing Reality

The Blessed Battle

Ben Deaver at Tallgrass at The Well on September 25, 2022

Matthew 5:4

So what? We avoid mourning and it prevents us from becoming happy.

Feel what? Feel our feels and the support we can have through it.

Now what? Stop avoiding and start feeling with support in place.

VISION CASTING – Blessed are those who face reality, for God will come alongside them to help them do the hard work (to become healthy and happy).

INTRODUCTION

Invite Morgan to read the Beatitudes.

Matthew 5:3-12

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

PRAY

The Blessed Battle

- Banksy's work of art – *Love is in the Air* or *Flower Thrower*
 - We could probably call this *Kill 'Em With Kindness*.
- The Beatitudes are among the literary treasures found in the Bible along with the 10 Commandments, the 23rd Psalm, and the Lord's Prayer.
 - They represent the upside-down values of Christ's Kingdom.

Context for the Beatitudes

Matthew 4:23-25 ²³ Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. ²⁴ News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. ²⁵ Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

Church of the Beatitudes—Matthew 5-7

- Church of the Beatitudes was built by Antonio Barlutsi.
- Octagon – Every side represents one of the Beatitudes.
- Blessed are the meek...

- This was an amazing place to meditate on the truths of Scripture. All of the earth is the Lord's, for sure. But we need to carve out special places to get away and be with our heavenly Father.
- Sermon on the Mount including the Beatitudes
 - Matthew has Jesus speaking from the top down whereas Luke has Jesus preaching from the lake up.
 - It all depends on the direction of the wind. Your voice can be amplified either way. The acoustics are amazing here. That makes sense.
- God planned, designed, and built this mount to amplify the voice of His Son!

Just a reminder about last week's Beatitude:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

A few definitions from *The Complete Word Study New Testament* edited by Spiros Zodhiates

- Blessed = makarios (3107) μακάριος – to be fully satisfied; Makarios differs from "happy" because "happy" describes the person who has good fortune (from the Eng. Root "hap," favorable circumstances (happenstance). In the biblical sense, a blessed person is one whom God makes fully satisfied, not because of favorable circumstances, but because He indwells the believer through Christ.
- Poor = ptóchos (4434) πτωχός – poor and helpless; one who in his abjectness needs lifting. The penés (3993) πένης may be

poor but he earns his bread by daily labor. The ptóchos is so poor that he can only obtain his living by begging. The penés has nothing superfluous, while the ptóchos has nothing at all.

Scripture Memory:

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are those who mourn! Happy are the sad?!

- Jesus doesn't want us to just be sad for sad's sake.
- However, He knows how we are designed because He Himself designed us and He knows how we are to live. He Himself lived life fully.
- Mourn = pentheó (3996) πενθέω – to mourn, grieve, upon the death of a friend
 - "Get ready to mourn because I'm headed to the cross!"
- Jesus was not afraid of His own emotion or others' emotion for that matter.
- **John 11:35** (Upon being brought to where His friend Lazarus was buried) Jesus wept.
- **Luke 19:41-44**
 - ⁴¹ As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it... (It was sadness, not anger. The sadness is below the anger.)
 - ⁴² and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes."

The Scope of Our Mourning

Sin & Circumstance

Sin – We have sinned against and we have been sinned against.

- Helping Maddox understand that hurt people hurt people.
- It's tough being a pastor's kid because there are so many teaching points from family life but the reason they're good teaching moments is because they apply to all of us. We all have these types of stories.
- Everyone understands what it's like to experience rejection in a relationship and we all understand how we've hurt others by rejecting them.
- *Some need to mourn your own sin.*
 - **Luke 5:8** When Simon Peter saw this (catching such a large number of fish that their nets began to break after Jesus asked them to put out into deep water and led down the nets for a catch), he fell at Jesus' knees and said,
 - "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"
 - **Matthew 26:74a-75** ^{74a} Immediately a rooster crowed. ⁷⁵ Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."
 - And he went outside and wept bitterly.

- **2 Corinthians 7:10** Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.
- Peter vs. Judas
- *Some need to mourn moments you've been sinned against.*

Circumstance – We are given grief and give grief.

- Sorrow comes for everyone. Sadness is part of the human experience.
- *Some here need to mourn specific losses you've experienced.*
- Reality is a great tool for discipleship. Facing reality is a great tool for discipleship.
- "Blessed are those who face reality, for they will be comforted."
- The brokenness and pain of others.
- The general sorrow for living in this world.
 - Awareness of those suffering globally.
 - **1 Peter 5:7-9** ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. ⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.
 - Part of dealing with the anxiety of living in this world is by feeling the emotion and casting it on Christ AND knowing that we are not alone in it!

- Maddox keeps asking me if Russia is going to nuke us. There is fear there but there is also a deep sadness about how broken our world continues to be.
- We are born into this world crying and if we face the reality of our world, we will continue to cry.

The Blessed Battle – Facing Reality

We want to feel feelings.

The Confessions by Saint Augustine of Hippo, North African theologian of the 4th and 5th centuries

- “I was held spellbound by theatrical shows full of images that mirrored my own wretched plight and further fueled the fire within me. Why is it that one likes being moved to grief at the sight of sad or tragic events on stage, when one would be unwilling to suffer the same things oneself? In the capacity of spectator one welcomes the sad feelings; in fact, the sadness itself is the pleasure.”
 - Kate mentioned a book I should read BECAUSE it was so incredibly sad.
 - We want the shows and movies we watch to MOVE us to experience emotion...but in a context where we don't actually have to face OUR reality.

- “What incredible stupidity! The more a person is buffeted by such passions in his own life, the more he is moved by watching similar scenes on stage, although his state of mind is usually called misery when he is undergoing them himself and mercy when he shows compassion for others so afflicted.”
- “But how real is the mercy evoked by fictional dramas? The listener is not moved to offer help, but merely invited to feel sorrow; and the more intensely he feels it the more highly he rates the actor in the play. If these tragic human stories—whether referring to events long past or fictional—are played in such a way that they fail to move the spectator to sadness, he walks out in disgust, criticizing the performance; but if he feels sad, he stays on, keenly attentive, and enjoys a good cry.” –p. 37-38
- “...I was forced to memorize the wanderings of some fellow called Aeneas, while forgetting my own waywardness, and to weep over Dido, who killed herself for love, when all the while in my intense misery I put up with myself with never a tear, as I died away from you, O God, who are my life. What indeed is more pitiful than a piteous person who has no pity for himself? I could weep over the death Dido brought upon herself out of love for Aeneas, yet I shed no tears over the death I brought upon myself by not loving you.” –p. 16
 - We watch REALITY TV to enjoy the plight of others while ignoring our own reality!

Hindrances to Our Mourning

1. Cerebral Christianity
2. Avoidance
3. Spiritual Bypassing

Cerebral Christianity

- [The Gospel Coalition article *The Impassible God Who "Cried"*](#)
- Just learning a bunch of theological concepts and memorizing Scripture does not automatically lead to the type of emotional maturity and health that Jesus has in mind for you.
- We're not about the anti-intellectualism that has pervaded American Christianity though.
- One of the impacts of the Enlightenment and Reformed Theology, for all of its positive contribution, is the pervasive reality of spiritual bypassing.

Avoidance – Don't be avoidant. Don't stay in denial.

- Are you avoiding by hiding in a virtual world? Metaverse, Instagram filters
- Are you avoiding by medicating your pain? Pain killers
- The Matrix – blue or red pill?

Spiritual Bypassing

[Very Well Mind article *What is Spiritual Bypassing?*](#)

Signs

Spiritual bypassing is a way of hiding behind spirituality or spiritual practices. It prevents people from acknowledging what they are feeling and distances them from both themselves and others. Some examples of spiritual bypassing include:

- Avoiding feelings of anger
- Believing in your own spiritual superiority as a way to hide from insecurities – Coming up with your own set of rules that you can keep to make you feel good about yourself.
- Believing that traumatic events must serve as “learning experiences” or that there is a silver lining behind every negative experience
- Believing that spiritual practices such as meditation or prayer are always positive
- Extremely high, often unattainable, idealism
- Feelings of detachment
- Focusing only on spirituality and ignoring the present
 - “Too heavenly minded to be any earthly good.”
- Only focusing on the positive or being overly optimistic
 - Toxic positivity
- Projecting your own negative feelings onto others
- Pretending that things are fine when they are clearly not
- Thinking that people can overcome their problems through positive thinking
- Thinking that you must “rise above” your emotions

- Using defense mechanisms such as denial and repression
Spiritual bypassing is a superficial way of glossing over problems in a way that might make us feel better in the short term, but ultimately solves nothing and just leaves the problem to linger on.

Examples

Spiritual bypassing can sometimes be difficult to spot because it is often very subtle. However, looking at examples can help make this phenomenon more apparent:

- Following the death of a loved one, people tell surviving relatives that the deceased is “in a better place” and that it was “all part of God’s plan.”
- A woman is angry and upset about something that someone else has done. When she tries to share her feelings, her friends tell her to stop being so negative.
- A relative regularly crosses boundaries and behaves in ways that are hurtful to other family members. Rather than confront this behavior, those who have been harmed feel that they need to repress their anger and remain overly tolerant.

Spiritual bypassing is also often used to dismiss the very real concerns of people who are dealing with problems. People who are faced with discrimination are often advised to simply be “nice,” “civil,” or “patient” when dealing with blatant abuse. It suggests that people can rely on individual positive thinking to overcome complex social issues.

If you say these things, you might be engaging in spiritual bypassing:

- "Everything happens for a reason."
- "Just let go and let God."
- "It was for the best."
- "It was a blessing in disguise."
- "Good vibes only!"
- "Thoughts and prayers!"
- "The Devil made me do it."
- "Just trust God."
- "It just wasn't God's will." (with a smile)
- Not owning your stuff.
- After hurting someone, "The blood of Christ covers it!" Yes, but...
- From Facebook Post: To suggest "God is good all the time and all the time God is good" is to minimize the experience of persons who live daily with their backs against inflexible inequitable inhumane systems.
 - We have an entire subculture of Christianity in America engaging in major spiritual bypass as it relates to inequity.
 - Can you imagine Jesus looking out over the crowds at people who are suffering and are oppressed by governmental and religious systems and in His big Sermon on the Mount declaring, "God is good, all the time" and expecting the response from the helpless and harassed sheep to be, "All the time, God is good."

- **Jeremiah 29:11** For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.
- **Jeremiah 29:10-19**
 - ¹⁰ This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."
 - ¹⁵ You may say, "The LORD has raised up prophets for us in Babylon," ¹⁶ but this is what the LORD says about the king who sits on David's throne and all the people who remain in this city, your fellow citizens who did not go with you into exile— ¹⁷ yes, this is what the LORD Almighty says: "I will send the sword, famine and plague against them and I will make them like figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten. ¹⁸ I will pursue them with the sword, famine and plague and will make them abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth, a curse and an object of horror, of scorn and reproach,

among all the nations where I drive them. ¹⁹ For they have not listened to my words," declares the LORD, "words that I sent to them again and again by my servants the prophets. And you exiles have not listened either," declares the LORD.

- Can you imagine Jesus looking out over the crowds at people who are suffering and are oppressed by governmental and religious systems and in His big Sermon on the Mount declaring, "I know the plans I have for you... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Without the context of recognizing the current AND future sorrow and suffering? And the need to listen to His word and respond.
- Dealing with life is so much more than throwing around spiritual platitudes at one another. Life is complex and difficult....

Before resorting to platitudes, ask yourself who the comment is really helping. Is it really giving someone comfort or insight, or is it just a way of dismissing a difficult situation so that you can feel better?

What do you need to mourn this morning?

How will you make time and space to mourn?

Now that HOPEFULLY we are more in touch with the need to connect with our emotions and mourn, or the need to face reality...let's get to the next step towards being happy and healthy.

Blessed are those who mourn, *for they will be comforted.*

- Comforted = parakaleó (3870) παρακαλέω – from para (3844), by the side, and kaleo, to call (2564); to call to one's side, hence aid
- They will be comforted. They will be come alongside.
- Story: Maddox crying and Maris and I coming alongside him and helping him engage his emotions and move through them to become a more mature person, a more mature friend and student and young man.
- Some Bible words are stripped of their power when we turn them into merely nice little sayings or platitudes.
- Comfort is not just offering a shoulder to cry on but rather coming alongside to support someone as they do the hard work to grow and mature and become a healthy and happy human being.
- Encourage is another one of those words. Encourage means to infuse with courage. (feebly) "You can do it." vs. (with grit) "You got this!"
- Paraprofessional come alongside a student in need of academic or behavioral support.
- Paramedics come alongside someone in critical need of medical support.

- All of these comforters, or paras, come alongside to help face reality and then move through it to greater health, whether academic, medical, physical, etc.

We are *comforted* by the Spirit AND community.

- The Scriptures teach us that we are comforted by or come alongside by both the Spirit of God AND Christ's community.

Support from the Spirit

- Advocate/Helper/Comforter = paraklétos (3875) παράκλητος John 14:26 – from 3870; the Comforter (the Holy Spirit) (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 1 John 2:1); legal advocate who makes the right judgment call; someone giving evidence that stands up in court
- **John 14:16** And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—
- **John 14:25** But the Advocate/Helper/Comforter/paraklétos, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.
- **John 15:26** When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me.
- **1 John 2:1** My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

Mutual Support from Christ's Community

- **2 Corinthians 1:3-7** ³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort (support), ⁴ who comforts (comes alongside) us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort (come alongside) those in any trouble with the comfort (support) we ourselves receive from God. ⁵ For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort (support) abounds through Christ. ⁶ If we are distressed, it is for your comfort (support) and salvation (deliverance); if we are comforted (supported), it is for your comfort (support), which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. ⁷ And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort (support).
- Alongsiders Church – Should that be our new church name?
- Gym analogy — tough workout and coming alongside
 - Sometimes the support is simply presence
 - Sometimes the support is a word of encouragement, infusing with courage
 - Sometimes the support is a word of exhortation, gently correcting something
 - Sometimes the support is celebration
 - Sometimes the support is joining in the grief

RESPONSE & ACTION

Blessed are you who face reality, for God will come alongside you to help you do the hard work (to become healthy and happy).

1. What do you need to mourn this morning?

- a. What reality do you need to face?
- b. Specific sin or trauma?
- c. Specific loss or circumstance? I have some specific books to recommend if you need help experiencing grief.
- d. The weight of living in a broken world?

2. How will you make time and space to mourn?

- a. Journaling
- b. Reflection
- c. Getting out into nature
- d. Allowing yourself to cry and be sad...and you may need to face anger first.
- e. My story – Cerebral faith... miscarriage, Dad's suicide attempt, broken relationships, difficult leaderships dynamics

3. How do you sense God wanting to comfort you, wanting to come alongside you?
- a. Is Jesus calling you back to Himself or to Himself for the first time?
 - b. Is there support He has for you in our church community?
 - c. Is there extra help you need, like professional counseling, to come alongside you to help you face reality and move through it towards greater health...so that you are also able to be a comforter to others eventually?
4. Have courage to mourn and be comforted.

INSPIRATION

Invite the Worship Team up

Isaiah 53:3

He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of sorrows, and familiar with pain.

Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised,
and we held him in low esteem.

At the very moment when Jesus needed comfort, when He needed support, He had no one come alongside Him. And He gave His life for you and for me. Greater love has no one than that they give their life for a friend.

Isaiah 53:5

But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

- Healing takes time.

CONCLUSION—REFLECT & REPENT

Jesus' Invitation to you...

Matthew 11:28-30 ²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Pray the song *Still in Control*

How can I say it is well when my voice can barely speak?

How can I sing You a song in the midst of suffering?

Jesus, will You meet me here? Let Your peace wash over me.

I need You now more than ever. Teach my soul to sing.

We need You now more than ever. Teach our souls to sing.

Amen.

Chopping Block:

Sermon Structure (according to Andy Stanley):

1. **ME** (Orientation) – Introduce yourself and your topic – find common ground with your audience.
2. **WE** (Identification) – Build an emotional common ground with your audience – build as many bridges emotionally as possible.
3. **GOD** (Illumination) – God has a solution for us today – engage your audience with the text – Don't just read it. Don't explain it to death. Make it fascinating!
4. **YOU** (Application) – Find one point of application everyone can embrace. Don't ask them to make a life-altering decision. Give them a measurable or reachable goal. Encourage them to try something for a week, a day, or even a month.
5. **WE** (Inspiration) – cast a vision – prompt a decision by briefly describing what would happen if this group of people would follow what has been taught. Tell them to imagine what WE could do together.

Passages:

- **Mark 1:15** (Dallas Willard paraphrase) All the preliminaries have been taken care of and the rule of God is now accessible to everyone. Review your plans for living and base your life on this remarkable new opportunity.
- **Hebrews 2:10-11** ¹⁰ In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. ¹¹ Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.
- **Hebrews 13:11-13** ¹¹ The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. ¹² And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. ¹³ Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. ¹⁴ For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.
- **Hebrews 4:14-16** ¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

- **Luke 6:17-19** ¹⁷ He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, ¹⁸ who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, ¹⁹ and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.
 - Tyre and the spiritual battle.
- **Ephesians 6:10-13a** ¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ^{13a} Therefore put on the full armor of God...
- **Isaiah 6:1-8** In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;

the whole earth is full of his glory." ⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ⁵ "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." ⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." ⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"
- **Luke 19:41-44** ⁴¹ As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it ⁴² and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴ They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."
- **Revelation 3**
- **Isaiah 55**
- **John 6**

Notes:

- "All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves." –Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (thoughts, reflections, aphorisms)
 - 17th-century mathematician and philosopher

- Died at age 39
- Contemporary of René Descartes
- "...in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." –Benjamin Franklin in 1789
- Kill them with kindness
- The Upside-Down Kingdom
- Civil/Subtle sins
- Jerry Bridges quotes
- The centurion mourning
- Religious leaders like whitewashed tombs — no mourning
- St. Augustine of Hippo
- Lean into the storm. Go through the storm.
- Israel at the edge of the Red Sea

Resources:

- *Divine Conspiracy*
- *A Grief Observed* by C.S. Lewis
- *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows through Loss* by Jerry Sittser
- *Lament for a Son* by Nicholas Wolterstorff
- *The Beatitudes Project* podcast

A Grief Observed by C.S. Lewis

A classic work on grief, *A Grief Observed* is C.S. Lewis's honest reflection on the fundamental issues of life, death, and faith in the midst of loss. Written after his wife's tragic death as a way of surviving the "mad midnight moments," *A Grief Observed* an unflinchingly truthful account of how loss can lead even a stalwart believer to lose all sense of meaning in the universe, and the inspirational tale of how he can possibly regain his bearings.

A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows through Loss by Jerry Sittser

With vulnerability and honesty, Jerry Sittser walks through his own grief and loss to show that new life is possible--one marked by spiritual depth, joy, compassion, and a deeper appreciation of simple blessings.

Loss came suddenly for Jerry Sittser. In an instant, a tragic car accident claimed three generations of his family: his mother, his wife, and his young daughter. While most of us will not experience such a catastrophic loss in our lifetime, all of us will taste it. And we can, if we choose, know the grace that transforms it.

Whether your suffering has come in the form of short-term illness, chronic illness, disability, divorce, rape, emotional abuse, physical or sexual abuse, chronic unemployment, crushing disappointment, mental illness, or the loss of someone you love, Sittser will help you put your thoughts into words in a way that will guide you deeper into your own healing process.

A Grace Disguised plumbs the depths of our sorrows, asks questions many people are afraid to ask, and provides hope in its answers:

- Will the pain ever subside?
- Will my life ever be good again?
- Will the depression ever lift?
- Will I ever overcome the bitterness I feel?
- What is God's plan in all of this?

The circumstances are not important; what we do with those circumstances is. In coming to the end of ourselves, we can come to the beginning of a new life.

Lament for a Son by Nicholas Wolterstorff

Well-known Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff has authored many books that have contributed significantly to scholarship in several subjects. In *Lament for a Son* he writes not as a scholar but as a loving father grieving the loss of his son.

In brief vignettes Wolterstorff explores with a moving honesty and intensity, all the facets of his experience of this irreversible loss. Though he grieves "not as one who has no hope," he finds no comfort in the pious-sounding phrases that would diminish the malevolence of death.

The book is in one sense a narrative account of events--from the numbing telephone call on a sunny Sunday afternoon that tells of 25-year-old Eric's death in a mountain-climbing accident, to a graveside visit a year later. But the book is far more than narrative. Every event is an occasion for remembering, for meditating, for Job-like anguish in the struggle to accept and understand.

A profoundly faith-affirming book, *Lament for a Son* gives eloquent expression to a grief that is at once unique and universal--a grief for an individual, irreplaceable person. Though it is an intensely personal book, Wolterstorff decided to publish it, he says, "in the hope that it will be of help to some of those who find themselves with us in the company of mourners."

READER: From the fifth chapter in the Gospel of Matthew:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and
falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in
heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets
who were before you."

This is the Word of the Lord.