

Leadership Tip!

One of the most important ingredients to being a successful life group is to focus on the people and not the content. Strive to create an environment that emphasizes authentic relationships in your group.

UNEXPECTED - GRIEF**STARTER QUESTIONS:**

What does grief look like?

How can grief affect your life?

MAIN IDEA:

We are wrapping up a series titled “Unexpected”, looking at the life of Joseph and how we can relate to his story. Last week we discussed skeletons and how to get over the weight of our past.

This week we are discussing grief. At some point in our lives we all experience grief. Grief is a hard burden to bear. It not only affects our family and the ones close to us, but it can also affect our relationship with God, and what we believe about God.

As we look at the story this week, we see that Jacob spent a great deal of his life grieving. Jacob not only grieved over what he thought was the death of his favorite son Joseph; but he also grieved when he thought he was going to lose more of his sons....

KEY SCRIPTURE:

“Then Jacob tore his clothes and dressed himself in burlap. He mourned deeply for his son for a long time. His family all tried to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. “I will go to my grave mourning for my son,” he would say, and then he would weep.” *Genesis 37:34-35 (NLT)*

How is grief affecting Jacob’s life?

We see in this scripture the picture of a man defined by his grief and loss:

It affected the way he looked on the outside (tore his clothes)

It affected way he felt on the inside (“mourned deeply”)

It affected the relationship with his family (refused to be comforted by family)

It affected his will to live (thoughts of his grave)

In the next scripture we see how grief also dominates his thoughts and paralyzes his decision making....

“...Jacob exclaimed, “You are robbing me of my children! Joseph is gone! Simeon is gone! And now you want to take Benjamin, too. Everything is going against me! ...My son (Benjamin) will not go down with you. His brother Joseph is dead, and he is all I have left. If anything should happen to him on your journey, you would send this grieving, white-haired man to his grave.”

Genesis 42:36-38 (NLT)

What would you have done in this situation?

As we read through this story, the grief that Jacob was experiencing controlled his life. At the risk of losing another son, he was willing to starve his family. When we allow grief to take over, it affects everything in our life.

ENGAGE AUTHENTICALLY: Do any of you have an experience with grief that you would like to share?

When we face grief there are two questions we should ask:

1. Why did this happen? (the question everybody asks)

- Some people blame God.
- Some people blame others.

2. What should I do now? (The question we need to ask)

NOTE: Have a discussion about possible responses to these questions. (If anyone shared their experience with grief ask how they would have, or did respond to these questions.)

No one I can think of chooses to live a life in grief and mourning. Our instinct is to want to try to overcome the feeling of grief. Often times, just like Jacob, this is a huge undertaking. In the message, Pastor Hank mentioned several steps that will help us overcome grief:

1. **Look for things to be thankful for.** (Genesis 41:51-52)
2. **Have faith that God can make good come out of bad.** (Genesis 50:20)
3. **At some point, we have to let our “Benjamin” go.** (Genesis 43:13-14)

NOTE: Discuss each step. Have someone read the scripture associated with each step.

Which one of these steps would be the hardest for you?

FINAL THOUGHTS:

Are you still dealing with any grief in your life?

Grief is a strange thing. Everyone grieves differently. Some break down and cry and have a terrible time right away. For others, grief takes a while to settle in and take hold. There's not a right way or a wrong way to grieve. But just as some don't allow themselves to properly grieve over time, some don't allow themselves to stop grieving.

As Christians it is important for us to not take our eyes off of Jesus. All the therapy in the world is not more powerful than seeking comfort in God during our darkest times.

Part of that connection all of us share with God is right here in our life group. We must commit to be there for each other, to love one another and to "build each other up". We must commit to putting an arm of love around each other and be a genuine, authentic minister to each other when we are dealing with grief and loss.

How can our group pray for you?

Read this scripture as a group:

"I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord."
- Romans 8:38-39 (NLT)

CLOSE IN PRAYER

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURE:

Proverbs 19:3

Job 5:8

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Philippians 4:6

FAMILY FOCUS

Leading kids through grief can be difficult at best. Tragedies like the death of a family or friend or the divorce of a prominent couple weigh heavily on everyone, even the smallest members of the church. During tough times, it's easier said than done, I know but you can do it! Touch on each of these key points when leading your kids through grief.

Provide normalcy. Canceling all events may feel like the right thing to do, but it may not be. Children need normalcy when tragedy strikes. Repetition gives comfort. Keep to the schedule, if possible. Don't make radical changes during this time.

Encourage prayer. Show kids how to deal with tragedy by praying about it, together. Never air "dirty laundry" in front of kids but lift up names, pray for wisdom, healing and peace. After you have prayed for the family directly affected by the tragedy, I pray for the children. Often times, children ask for private prayer and I lead them in prayer whenever asked.

Involve parents. Tragedy affects the whole family. Show your grief. Talk about it. Show that it is normal to grieve. You may need to model this for your kids. There is a time to be strong, and a time to show that it is normal to cry.

Be Spirit-sensitive. At times, the Holy Spirit offers healing moments. He may drop a scripture into my spirit or inspire a child to sing a song. Welcome those moments and allow them to happen. God always knows best.

Offer scripture. The Word of God brings comfort when it is applied to any bad situation. Spend some time digging in the Word for scripture that your kids need. Provide that to them. Keep the short, if possible and pick ones easily remembered.

Be real. Pretending "the bad event" did not occur is not a good strategy for leading children through a tragedy. Respect how kids feel and share how you feel. I might say something like, "Yes, I will miss him too. It makes me sad to think I won't see him at church. But I will always remember his smile and I know what the Bible says about dying. Do you remember that scripture we talked about?"

Being there for each other as a Life Group is just as important as the parents being there. This is a great way to model community and how we love one another.

UNEXPECTED

"Grief"

05/22/16

Things I learned about grief and loss:

- Grief and loss is hard, even for Christ-followers
- Grief and loss have a way of shaping what you believe about God
- Everybody grieves

"Then Jacob tore his clothes and dressed himself in burlap. He mourned deeply for his son for a long time. His family all tried to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "I will go to my grave mourning for my son," he would say, and then he would weep." Genesis 37:34-35 (NLT)

"...Jacob exclaimed, "You are robbing me of my children! Joseph is gone! Simeon is gone! And now you want to take Benjamin, too. Everything is going against me!... My son (Benjamin) will not go down with you. His brother Joseph is dead, and he is all I have left. If anything should happen to him on your journey, you would send this grieving, white-haired man to his grave." Genesis 42:36-38 (NLT)

2 Questions to ask when facing grief and loss:

1. Why did this happen? (the question everybody asks)

- Some people blame God when it's their own fault

"People ruin their lives by their own foolishness and then are angry at the Lord." Proverbs 19:3 (NLT)

- Some people blame God when it's the devil's fault

"His wife said to him, "Are you still trying to be godly when God has done all this to you? Curse him and die." Job 2:9 (Living)

- Some people blame others when it wasn't their fault

"My advice to you is this: Go to God and confess your sins to him." Job 5:8 (Living)

2. What should I do now? (The question we need to ask)

- Look for things to be thankful for

"Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you." 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NLT)

"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done." Philippians 4:6 (NLT)

“Joseph named his older son Manasseh, for he said, “God has made me forget all my troubles and everyone in my father’s family.” Joseph named his second son Ephraim, for he said, “God has made me fruitful in this land of my grief.” Genesis 41:51, 52 (NLT)

- Have faith that God can make good come out of bad.

“Even though you planned evil against me, God planned good to come out of it. This was to keep many people alive, as he is doing now.” Genesis 50:20 (GW)

- At some point, we have to let our “Benjamin” go.

“But the famine continued to ravage the land of Canaan. When the grain they had brought from Egypt was almost gone, Jacob said to his sons, “Go back and buy us a little more food... take your brother (Benjamin), and go back to the man. May God Almighty give you mercy as you go before the man, so that he will release Simeon and let Benjamin return. But if I must lose my children, so be it.” Genesis 43:13-14 (NLT)