

Harris Creek Baptist Church  
Nate Hilgenkamp  
Series: It's Complicated  
December 11, 2022

It's the Most Difficult Time of the Year

Passage: Psalm 34:17-19

**17 The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. 18 The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. 19 The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all.**

Well this is the first Christmas that our daughter is really aware of Christmas. Like, last year, she was alive for Christmas. This year she's aware of it because she's a little bit over a year and a half, which has put some pressure on my wife and I. Because we're like, man, we've got to make this the best Christmas ever, we've got to start these Christmas traditions because we want to make sure we're not neglecting her. She needs to grow up with some Christmas traditions. So this year we've started to do something, and I know that as Christians there's a lot of different views on Santa, but here's what I've learned these last couple weeks: my daughter *loves* Santa. And we didn't try to introduce her to him, it just kinda happened because he's all over the place. He's in stores, he's at the mall, he's on the TV. We didn't try to introduce her to him, she just came to know him and she loves him.

So last Friday, we decided that we were going to make all of her dreams come true. We were going to take her to Magnolia to get her picture with Santa. And we knew exactly how it was going to go, because once we told her that we were going to go take a picture with Santa, we put her in the car, the whole drive over there she just kept saying "Santa, Santa, Santa." She was wearing a Santa shirt and just like this was truly going to make her dreams come true, and we knew what was going to happen. We were going to stand in the line, get up to meet Santa, and she was going to be overjoyed. Like, she was going to give him a hug, she was going to smile big, we'd have a picture to last a lifetime, and we got in the line, went to Santa and here's how the picture turned out. (A picture of Nate's daughter and Santa shows on the screen. She is reaching away from Santa crying and obviously very upset.)

Like, this is not at all how I thought it would go! I was holding her, and once I got up to Santa, she went like full on koala on me. Like, she would not let me peel her off me to give her to him, and once I finally got rid of her, she was more panicked than she's ever been in her entire life. That is not how we thought it would go! We thought it'd be a perfect Christmas picture. Instead, it ended up looking like that.

You know, that's a really silly and trite story. To just say, man, I know that for so many of you, your season of life right now is not how you thought it would go. Your season of life right now is not how you pictured it to be. Because when you pictured Christmas at 30, you didn't envision

yourself being still single and there's a deep loneliness there. Or maybe for you, whenever you thought about this Christmas, you didn't envision it without your dad. There's deep grief there. Maybe for you, when you envisioned Christmas as an adult, you didn't envision that it'd be hard to pay for your kids' gifts. And you see, whenever you feel those feelings of loneliness and grief and pain in this season, it feels like you don't belong in this season. Because in this season, everything's supposed to be happy. And man, I've wrestled with whether I should share this or not, but we're family, and I think this will be helpful for some of you, but...a couple of weeks ago, my wife and I, we found out that we were pregnant. And yeah, we were so excited, and Thanksgiving was a Thanksgiving to remember because we got to tell each of our families, and they were just overjoyed for us.

Then on Tuesday this week, we found out that we had a miscarriage. And there's a lot of moments from this last week that I'll just never forget. One of them was when we were in the doctor's office, we'd already run some tests and we were just waiting for them to come back and tell us what we kind of already knew. And there's this playlist in the background, and it could not have been worse. Like, song after song was *Joy to the World! It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year*, and there's a baby on the way, and I just remember thinking, there's not a worse time of the year to have a miscarriage. Because whenever you have these feelings of deep pain and loss, and grief, and suffering, in this season, it just feels like you don't belong. But I've been reminded this week that those feelings of grief, pain, loneliness, and suffering are the very reason for Christmas. This is why Jesus came as a baby in a manger, because all is not yet right, but Christmas means one day it will be.

So in this sermon series, we're talking about *It's Complicated*, all the complex things in the Christmas season, and last week we talked about the complexities that come from dealing with family in this season, and this week we're going to talk about what often goes unaddressed during the Christmas season. How do we as believers in Jesus go through grief and loneliness in this season? And I just want to make it clear today, I am not teaching on grief today because I'm going through grief. That's not how this was selected. The topic was selected in advance, the speaker was selected in advance. On Monday afternoon, we had a sermon team meeting where we planned out the verses that we were going to preach and we decided on Psalm 34:17-19. So that's Monday afternoon. Tuesday morning we find out what we're going through. And all Tuesday, people sent us one verse over and over and over and over again. People who weren't in that meeting. It was Psalm 34:18. **The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and he saves those who are crushed in spirit.** It's like God knew that I didn't just need to preach it, but I needed to experience it and believe it. And I also want to make it abundantly clear that I was given multiple opportunities not to preach this week. This was not forced on me in any way. I wanted to. Because it's been so helpful for me to wrestle with this text and remind myself that I really believe this. Like, I really believe about who our God is in the midst of pain and grief and suffering. I believe what the Bible says, and as we're going to be in these three verses, we're going to see three things about who our God is in the midst of grief. And it's going to be simple,

just three verses. But I think sometimes when you're in the middle of grief and suffering, simplicity is helpful.

So we're going to see three things about what our God does in the midst of loneliness and grief. But I also want to make it clear, this sermon is not just for you if you're going through suffering or grief or loneliness, this sermon is for everyone, because as we see who our God is in the midst of grief, we see who we get to be to others in the midst of their grief and their sufferings. There's going to be something in this for all of us today. And just some set up on Psalm chapter 34, we actually know a lot about when it was written and who wrote it because there's a prescript in your Bible. It probably says this at the beginning of the passage, it says this, it says ***"Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left."***

You may not know that story, which is okay, but it's in scripture, and it's in 1 Samuel 21 and 22. You probably know who David is because David was the guy who killed Goliath, but he was also the guy who'd become the king of Israel. But in between those two periods, there was a king named Saul who desired to kill David because David was tremendously popular with the people. So he lived much of his life in this season on the run, and this is where we pick up on his story. He had just recently found himself in a certain city running away from Saul. But someone in that city had noticed that David was there, and he said that we need to apprehend him and take him over to Saul so that David would be killed. But then in a weird turn of events, this is just in the Bible, David acts like he's insane. He starts drawing weird symbols on the wall, he starts drooling down his beard, and they let him go because they just think he's crazy. And this is where we pick up on this passage because this is what it says next in 1 Samuel 22:1-2. **David left Gath and escaped through the cave of Adalum. When his brothers and his father's household heard of it, they went down to him there. Now, I've read this story before, I've never noticed this part. It says this in verse 2, All those who were in distress or in debt, or discontented gathered around him, and he became their commander. About 400 men were with him.**

I mean, what a crew this was! Anyone in distress or debt or discontented came and found David and David's in the middle of his own stress and anxiety and grief. There's someone out to kill him, like can you imagine this group of guys in this cave. It's in this moment that Psalm 34 is written. It's in this moment as David is looking at the pain and suffering in the lives around him, and he's looking at the pain and suffering in his own life, and he's got to address an important question. Who do I believe my God to be when it seems like there's nothing going for me? In the middle of my suffering and my pain, what's my theology there? You see, all of us will have to answer that question at some point in our life. When you go through the miscarriage, when you go through the breakup, when you get the cancer diagnosis, when there's a death in the family, when it seems like all is lost, who do you really believe God to be?

Here's who David believed his God to be. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, he wrote these verses, we're just going to read one at a time, and we're going to start in verse 17. It says this, **17 The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them. He delivers them from all their troubles.**

So in the middle of David's anxiety, he just goes, what do I know about the Lord? Like, when all is lost, what do I know about the Lord? I know that when the righteous cry out, the Lord hears them. Which is the first thing that we can learn from this passage. When you're in the middle of pain, grief, and suffering, and loneliness, you can be confident that, point number one, the Lord hears you.

1. *The Lord hears you.*

And this matters. It matters to be heard. Let me explain why. We all know this: Recently, like within the last week and a half, there was something wrong with my credit card, there was something that was supposed to show up in my account, and it wasn't. So I called the number that my bank had given me and whenever I called it, it went to one of those computer animated things and they were like, "Thank you for calling, what are you calling about today? You can say something like, credit card, or bank account, or mortgage." And I said, "Credit card." And they said, "Thank you for calling about your savings account." And I said, "No! No! I'm calling about my credit card!" And we just went back and forth, back and forth, until—I don't think I'm the only one here—I'm going "Speak to a person! I want to speak to a person! Just put a person on the line!" And eventually, the robot did and gave me a person, but once I got the person, there was like a language barrier there, and they weren't understanding what I was saying and eventually they just go, you know I'm sorry I don't understand, but I've written down what you said and I'm going to talk to my boss and we'll give you a decision in a letter in the mail in 10 to 15 business days. It's like, are you kidding me? The customer service was horrible, and it was like, I knew in that moment, I knew I shouldn't have banked at Whataburger. I was like, what was I thinking, man?

You see, the whole time in that conversation I just didn't feel heard, by the person or by the robot. One of my highlights of this last week—truly, like one of my favorite moments of this last week, was I had gotten up early one day, it was like 5:30 or something, and the lights were off in our house, everything was quiet. And I'm just sitting there in our living room and I hear something from my daughter's room. So I go over to her room and I put my ear up against the door and my daughter's kind of learning how to speak right now, she's learning words, and what I heard was her just going "Peek-a-boo! Peek-a-boo! Peek-a-boo!" Just over and over and over again. I'm on the other side of the door going girl, who are you talking to? There's nobody in there! It's pitch black! But I'm telling you, I could've stood there with my ear up against that door for an hour listening to my daughter. Because I delight in her and I want to hear what's on her heart.

You know, just speaking from experience, whenever you go through pain and grief and loneliness, one of the things you'll likely start to ask yourself is "Does God hear me?" And one of your first responses will likely be, of course he doesn't, because if he heard me, he'd know how I feel and he'd do something about it. When you're in the middle of loneliness and grief and suffering, you've got to decide, who is your God? Is your God a father who delights to hear you? Or is he someone who's just bothered that you're calling? We don't have to wonder, and you

don't need my opinion. Scripture tells us who our God is. Elsewhere in scripture, Proverbs 15:29, **The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.** 1 Peter 5:7, **Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.** And this one's my favorite, Isaiah 65:24, **Before they call, I will answer, while they are still speaking, I will hear.** I mean, I love that imagery. It's like he's just sitting by the phone waiting to answer us. But it's more than that, he says, "Before you call, I've already heard you, that's how attentive I am to you," because he wants to hear from us, and he wants to hear from all of us. And not just like all of us, but like *all* of us. Everything that's inside of us. He wants to hear the joy and the celebration just as much as he does the grief and the pain and the suffering. He's going, "Tell me about it, I want to know."

And really, the Psalms are a perfect example of this. There are plenty of Psalms that are honestly off-putting to me. There are prayers in the Psalms that make me uncomfortable because of the ways they doubt God and question God. But God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, preserved them in the Bible to remind us that God's saying, hey I can handle whatever you've got. I want to hear whatever you're going through. You know, oftentimes when you're in the middle of that season, the last thing you want to do is actually talk to God about what's going on in your heart, because oftentimes, when you're in the middle of loneliness and grief and suffering, you just want to run from the pain. So you escape to things like busyness, or you try to numb yourself, or food, or Netflix, just anything to avoid actually addressing the pain. But you can't grow in the pain if you run from it. You need to run to it. You need to go to God and be honest with how you feel. And there's healing in there.

This is one of the things we can learn if you're someone in this room who's not going through grief or suffering or loneliness in this season because we want to be like God in every single area of our life. What does God do with those of us who are in pain and grief and loneliness? He hears them and this is what we get to do for those people who are struggling right now. It's hard to express the kindness that you feel when someone actually hears you. Like, they actually ask you how they're doing and they're not listening in order to speak, in order to tell you a perfect Bible verse, or something awesome that comes to their head, they're listening just to listen because they want to know what's on your heart. And while listening doesn't change your situation, man it changes something. It changes something to be known that you're cared for, and let me remind you today, your God cares for you, because, point number one, your God hears you. You might also be thinking, man I know, but I first read this and I was like what good is Him just hearing? Like, that doesn't do anything about our situation. We're going to get to that in a second. God does something about our situation. We'll get to that in verse 19. But here's verse 18, **The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.** You know there's all sorts of levels of brokenness, but that word "crushed" in this passage can literally be translated as dust. Like, it just feels like your life has been pulverized. It's those moments when you feel like you've been broken, only to be broken some more. Like, your life is in a million pieces and you just feel like you're dust. And what God says is when you're there,

he's there with you. Which is point number two, the second thing we can learn from this passage, the Lord is near to you.

## *2. The Lord is near to you.*

And one of the things we can learn from scripture is that God desires to be with his people. If you just look at the trajectory of scripture, the entire trajectory of scripture is God saying, "I'm trying to get closer to my people." Let me just give you a brief overview of the Bible. It starts in the book of Genesis. When God created everything perfectly, he created Adam and Eve, and what happened was God was with them. He was with them in the garden and he walked alongside them in the cool of the day. But when they sinned, there was a brokenness and a chasm now between mankind and God. They no longer lived in as close of a relation, but God said I don't want it to be that way. I want to get closer to my people. So you turn a couple pages, and he directs the people of God to build the temple. We've got a picture of a part of the temple here. Where this is is called the holy place, and behind that curtain is called the holy of holies. And in the holy of holies, this is where God's presence would be. He'd be present in that place because God was saying, I reject the fact that I've got to be, that there's got to be a chasm between mankind and me. I've got to get closer to my people. So he became present in a place. But God said, that's not good enough. I want to get closer to my people, I don't want to just be present in a place, I want to be present through a person, so he became present through the birth of his son, Jesus, on Christmas. Emmanuel had come, God with us. And he was now present through the form of a person. But God said, that's not good enough. I want to get closer to my people. I want to get even closer. So Jesus lived, died, and resurrected, and then what happens in Acts? Over and over again in Acts, it says that the Holy Spirit fell upon them. And then in 1 Timothy, it says that the Holy Spirit lives within us.

So look at this trajectory of scripture. What happens is, God is with mankind in the beginning. Mankind sins and there's a separation. Then God becomes present in a place, and he becomes present in a person, then he becomes present in all of us, because time and time again, he's saying I just want to get closer to them. I just want to get closer to them. I want to be with my people, and the promise of God is that at all times, but especially in your brokenness, God is right there with you. In the shattered spaces of your heart, he's there because you've never once been left alone. You've never once been abandoned. He's been by your side every step of the way. And this week I got to experience that, and in God's providence, I was a couple days behind on the Bible reading plan. So we found out about the miscarriage Tuesday morning and then the first time I really got to spend time in God's word was on Wednesday night. And so on Wednesday night I was just by myself and opened up my Bible to the next chapter that I was going to read, and it was Isaiah 43.

These were the first five verses that I read. It says this, **1 But now, this is what the Lord says—he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over**

**you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. 3 For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead. 4 Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life. 5 Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west.**

You see, the truth is, what we went through this week was really, really hard. But the truth is, it was not hard to see that God was in it with us. Because when I read that, it was like he was speaking directly to me, "Nate remember, don't be afraid because I'm with you even now." And again, if you don't feel brokenhearted, if you're not hurting in this season, if you're not lonely or grieving in this season, we can once again learn from God here, because we want to be godly in everything that we do. And what does God do with those of us who are grieving and suffering? He hears us, and he's near to us. So if you have someone in your life who's going through a difficult season, don't you dare let them go through it alone. Don't let your uncomfortability and your unknowing-ness of what to do keep you from doing something. That's the only wrong decision. Because when a bomb goes off in someone's life, what will happen is most people will run away because they're uncomfortable by the pain, they're uncomfortable by the chaos. JP reminds our staff this all the time, when a bomb goes off, as believers in Jesus, we are not those who run away. Instead, we run towards the pain. We run towards the grief, we run towards the chaos, because this is what Jesus has done for us.

So whatever you do, just take a step closer to them. Send the text, make the phone call, make the meal, and invite them over to watch a movie. Whatever you do, just take a step closer to them. And really one of the things you can do in this season, one of the most faithful things you can do is just get with God and ask him, who in my life needs me to be near them? Who in my life needs me to be near them? Would you just make it clear to me? And maybe it's someone who lost their parent ten years ago at Christmas. Just because it feels like it was a long time ago doesn't mean the pain isn't still there. Or maybe it's someone who's in Waco but they don't have family here, and they're lonely in this season, and they just need you to be near them, and I'm telling you, when you move towards them, when you move near them, you're acting in the way that God acts.

And I, for one, am just so grateful for our people here in Waco, who have just aced the test this week. I mean time and time again, people just came through for us, and at one point my wife looked at me this week, and she was like, "Nate, we just can't ever leave Waco." Like we can't, we're stuck here forever because we have the best people in our corner. And we got to experience the nearness of God through the nearness of his people. And you have an opportunity to do that as well. So point number two, the second thing we can learn is that the Lord is near to you. Okay, verse 19, this is what it says, **The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all.** Now this is confusing. Like, we read this, this should be confusing, it's confusing to me. It says the righteous person may have many troubles.

That shouldn't be the case! Because with my theology, I believe that if you are righteous, God should protect you from troubles, right? Like, if you are righteous, God should protect you from troubles. But if he doesn't, how can he still be good? Like, if you were a righteous person and you still go through troubles, how can God still be good?

It's because that he's promised that he will deliver us not from some of our troubles, but from all of them, because he's not going to wipe away some of our tears, he's going to wipe away all of them, because point number three, the third we can learn is that the Lord will deliver you.

### *3. The Lord will deliver you.*

And even this week, I had to face the fact that I kind of believe that since I follow God, I don't deserve to suffer. I mean I just remember looking at my wife going, man she's one of the most faithful people I know, she doesn't deserve to go through this. She shouldn't have to go through this. The problem is, that just doesn't really align with scripture because scripture doesn't say that you follow God and your life is going to be really easy. Scripture says that if you are righteous, you may have *many* troubles. And this means that your pain and suffering and your loneliness is not necessarily because you did something wrong. This is different from what the rest of the world believes about suffering. Like, the Christian view of suffering is completely unique to what the rest of the world believes about pain and grief and suffering. Let me explain why.

Buddhism was essentially founded on the idea of finding freedom from suffering, and there's four noble truths which are basically the foundation of Buddhism, and they are this: life is suffering, suffering is the result of our desires, we can avoid suffering by changing our desires, and then finally, the fourth step is Nirvana, in which you exist without suffering, and you get there by detaching your emotions and your feelings from everything in your life, whether it be to your spouse, your kids, your money, your job, whatever it is, you can actually live a life in which you don't suffer if you're willing to detach your emotions from the things in your life.

Hinduism has much to say about suffering, Hinduism believes in karma. So really what goes around comes around. If you've been bad, if you've done wrong things, then bad things, harmful things will happen to you. So if you suffer, it's because you really had it coming.

Islam talks about suffering. Islam says that if you go through suffering, it's because of a lack of belief in you. So since suffering is your fault, you can actually get yourself out of suffering by proving to God that you believe in him. So you can actually do good works and prove to him that you trust him and believe in him, and you can remove yourself from suffering.

Atheism says suffering is meaningless. It's all just random chance, it's just meaningless natural selection, we're all just a cluster of cells that's one day going to turn to dust, and if you suffer, there's just no point in it.

You see, that's what the world believes about suffering. But the Christian view of suffering is entirely different. We do not believe that we can avoid suffering. We do not believe that



suffering is always our fault. We do not believe that suffering is meaningless. What we believe, and this is different, and this is crazy, is that we believe our God takes on our suffering so that we might ultimately be redeemed and freed from our suffering. He doesn't look down at us and say, hey you need to fix your problems, you got into this mess. He said, no, I'm going to take on your problems for you because, this is what Isaiah is prophesying about Jesus in Isaiah 53.

He was despised and rejected by mankind. A man of suffering and familiar with pain, like from whom people hide their faces, he was despised and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, and the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

You see, this is why the feelings of pain and grief and loneliness are welcome at Christmas, because this is why he came. Jesus did not just come to be born as a cute little baby in a manger, he came to destroy the devil's work. 1 John 3:8 says the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. And you see the light of the world had to come because we were living in tremendous darkness. But in the middle of that darkness, light breaks forth as Jesus appears to tell us you're not alone, you're not abandoned, and your fear is not final. Your pain is not permanent. Instead, I've come to turn your grief into gladness. Your failures into forgiveness and your brokenness into beauty. This is who our God is. He tells us not that we have to figure it out ourselves, but he takes on our pain and our suffering so that he might relieve us and redeem us from it. Because in him there is not just an ear that hears, there's not just someone who is present with us, but there's someone who will deliver us from whatever it is we're going through.

But you know, when you're in the midst of grief, sometimes it doesn't really feel like you're being delivered. It's one thing to read these verses and go, man, I don't feel like my situation has changed. This is once again where our community can come in. Again, if you're not grieving or lonely or in pain, but you know someone who is, man I'll just challenge you this season to ask yourself and to ask God, God what might I do to be a part in their deliverance? God what might I do to be a part in their deliverance from their pain and their suffering? Sometimes that looks like prayer for them, and I've been overwhelmed by the amount of people who have been praying for us. I've woken up to coworkers who text me at 2 am saying that they were praying for us. Man, it just meant the world to us. Sometimes that deliverance comes through prayer, sometimes being a part of that deliverance means dropping off Chick-fil-a at their front porch. Sometimes that deliverance means inviting you over to have a meal. But just ask God what might I do to play a part in their deliverance? And sometimes our full deliverance will happen here, but we can know that it will always happen in eternity.

So, in summary, this is what we know about God, whenever you're going through grief, pain, and suffering, we know that point one, the Lord will hear you, point two, the Lord is near to you, and point three, the Lord will deliver you. And as I said at the beginning, whenever you have feelings of grief and loneliness and suffering, it just feels like there's not really a place for you at

Christmas. It's because all the Christmas stories that we read are stories of happiness and joy and peace. I mean we've heard the same Christmas stories year after year after year. We hear the stories of the shepherds with their sheep at night or an angel appearing to Mary, or there's a baby born in the manger. We feel like all the Christmas stories are happy stories. But they're not. Because there's one story in the middle of the Christmas story that is different from the rest of them. It's not happy and joyful and peaceful, it's entirely gruesome and evil. You might not even know what I'm talking about right now because we skip over it, but it's right there. Like, it's right there in the Christmas narrative. You might have heard about the Magi, how they were on their way to see Jesus, they saw a star and were following this star, and eventually had run into King Herod. And King Herod asked what they were up to, and they said they were going to find this king that had been born. And Herod said hey, on your way back, tell me where he is, I want to go and worship him. But they were warned through a dream not to go back to Herod so they avoided him and then this is what happens next in the Christmas narrative.

Matthew chapter 2 verse 16. **When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.** For what we know about Bethlehem and the surrounding areas, that likely would have been about fifteen young kids. Fifteen boys who were slaughtered. Fifteen families that were torn apart, parents who were grieving. This is the definition of evil. But if we want to understand the arrival of Jesus, we can't leave out the darkest parts of the story. Because he was born in the midst of grief. He was born in the midst of pain. He was born in the midst of death. But this is why he came. This moment is one of the moments why he came in the first place, because I cannot imagine the pain that these parents felt as they watched their sons be killed right in front of them. I cannot imagine. But God can. Because Jesus was not just sent to be born as a cute baby in a manger, he was sent to die on a cross and God got to go through the same thing that those parents did. He got to watch his son be brutally murdered. But Jesus didn't just die, three days later he rose again and defeated death so that death no longer has the final say. Evil no longer has the final say. Hopelessness no longer has the final say. Your suffering no longer has the final say. Your loneliness no longer has the final say, your grief, your hopelessness, your pain, none of that has the final say anymore because Jesus does. And in him there is life, peace, and hope no matter your situation.

So friends, I hope you know that the arrival of Jesus wasn't as much of an arrival as it was an invasion. He came to destroy the devil's work. He came to undo everything that had gone wrong. And I hope you remember that there's room for you in the Christmas story. That there's room for you at Christmas if you've got grief and loneliness and pain and suffering. Because it's in the middle of that that Jesus was born. He was born in the midst of it to tell us something. He was born Emmanuel, God with us, to tell us that he hears us, he's near to us, and he will one day deliver us.

I'm trying to believe that. I hope you would too. And now we're going to close with something a little bit different. We're going to pray like we always do, but I just, man, I think it is helpful to know that you're not alone in your grief. I know one of the things that you don't really want to do on the surface is tell anyone. But we don't want you to go through it alone. So if you're like me right now in this season, and there's not something that...that if there's something that's not right in your life—if it's pain or loneliness or grief, and it doesn't have to be a miscarriage, it can be loneliness, whatever it is—if that's you, would you just raise your hand right now? Because we want to pray for you. We want to know what's going on in your life, we want to care for you. If that's you would you just raise your hand? I know that's uncomfortable, and it takes courage, and it's a Baptist church and we're not used to that. But we want the Holy Spirit to be at work in your life. So take note of that, and now what we're going to do is we're all going to stand and if there was someone around you who raised your hand, just put your hand on them and let's pray for them together. So let's stand and we'll pray.

Father, thank you that we are not alone. That in the midst of our grief and our suffering and our pain, we can be confident that you hear us, you are near to us, and you will ultimately deliver us. And God I do pray for deliverance for these friends. Whatever it is that they're going through, whether they raised their hand or not. I pray that you'd deliver them from their pain and their suffering and their loneliness. But in the middle of that deliverance, in the waiting of that deliverance, Father, I pray that they wouldn't just wait on a certain situation, but they would wait on their Savior, and as they wait on you I pray that you'd restore their strength, that they'd soar on wings like eagles, that they'd walk and not grow faint. Not because their life is perfect but because they know that they're perfectly loved by a perfect Father. So Father, thank you so much for Christmas because of what it means. It doesn't mean that all is perfect, that all is right. It means that this world is broken, but it's for that reason that you came to bind up the brokenness. And to tell us that our pain is not permanent, our fear isn't final, and our suffering isn't unseen. And Father, would you just empower the church to be the church. This week, would we go out and hear from somebody, be near to somebody, and be a part of the deliverance of somebody? Would we be activated to go and be the hands and feet of Jesus? Might we do things that make us feel a little bit uncomfortable, but things that would ultimately be faithful?

So Father, I just want to be first in line to say thank you for Jesus. That in every season of life, we can know beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he is alive and with us and for us, and it's in his powerful name that we pray. Amen.

(JP comes out). Amen. I asked Nate to come out with me and I didn't tell him why. Right, I just want to honor you. I'm so proud of you. It is such a joy and a privilege to be led by you even in a challenging week. And thank you for sharing your suffering with us. And I want you guys to know how much I love this man, how much I love this family, and I want to pray for you because you were kind to pray for us, so Lord, I do just lift up Nate, Adelle, and Jacie and their sweet family to you. And Lord I pray that you would just continue to bless them. And continue to meet

the needs of their hearts in this time. I pray that you would make Christmas sweet in the midst of loss, in the midst of suffering and challenges. Father, thank you for your faithfulness at work through him as he opens the word and instructs our hearts and your Holy Spirit intersects with his humanness to bring about a supernatural work in this body. I just pray that you would continue that Lord. And so thank you for my friend, thank you that we get to do this together as your servants. We just love you. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you, I appreciate it.

I know that a lot of you have experienced loss and you don't have an opportunity to share it with thousands of people, nor would you want to. And it's just God's providence, and Nate is right that this was on the calendar. He was slotted to speak. What a message, he just ministered to my heart this morning, and well you know that we are here for you as the body of Christ and there's actually a ministry that's starting this week, would you tell them about it?

Yes, so we have a grief share surviving the holidays tomorrow night. Also in God's providence that we had that scheduled already. That's at 6:30, and you can register for that at [HarrisCreek.org/events](http://HarrisCreek.org/events). And so it's for anybody who's lost someone, who's not looking forward to what's coming, to missing them at Christmas. You can come and be with other people and learn how to cope with that.

The church has notoriously been awful at this. And I'm talking about the big C American church. I've seen it in different places that I've moved into. Someone experiences loss and their community of faith says we don't know what to say, so they say nothing, and we just wanna give them space. And that is not like...let me just give you three things that someone taught me that I have just seen the Holy Spirit work through. And I know we're coming after a message of three points, and different applications, but this is not a replacement of that. It really is to bring a crystal clear application to much of what he just said. Which is something happens, like the bomb goes off, and you've seen it in the movie, it's like (makes bomb noise), like you can't even hear, like you don't know which way is up, and you look at it and you see it from afar, and there's this...you're in this like I hate that that happened, I'm glad it didn't happen to me and I know I'm supposed to do something, I'm not sure what I'm supposed to do, and I don't know what to say.

There's three things. Show up. Number one, show up. Okay I'm here. Number two, resist the urge to say something profound. Okay? You don't need to do that. Just give a hug. Shoulder to cry on. I just want you to know I'm here. Not gonna be here long, but I just want you to know I'm here. And I'm not afraid of this, I'm not withdrawing from you, and I'm sure that you want space, but before I give you space, man I just want to give you a hug. I'm here. Show up. Resist the urge to say something profound. Identify a need and meet it. Right? Which is so much better than, hey call me if you need anything. If you need me I'm right here. The bomb...they don't know what they need. They don't know what they need. Just bring a meal. Bring a dessert. Write a note. Wash a car. Fill it up with gas. Take the dog. Watch the child. Mow the lawn. Wash the windows. Just identify a need and meet it. And that's work, I'll be honest. It's easier to say, hey call me if you need anything. That's so much easier. It takes work to think of

through what is a need that I can meet and it can be so small and so tiny. But just identify a need and meet. So show up, resist the urge to say something profound, it's not the time to go Romans 8:28 on them, all things work together for the good of those who love him. No. That's not the time for that verse. Show up. Resist the urge to say something profound. Identify a need and meet it. Like, if we just did that as a body of Christ, the whole world, the church would follow. The church would follow, so those are the three things. I'm going to keep that vision in front of you, I'm not going to stop saying that. I want you to say it to each other. Like let's just do that every single time.

Just know we're here, don't forget about tomorrow night. Grief share. You have that card on your chair, that's not for you, you don't need to put that on your fridge. It's just a reminder. You know what it is. That's for you to hand to a neighbor. As you go eat this afternoon. Leave with your server. That's an invitation that you can hand out. So take that with you, please don't just drop it in the trash. There's a printing cost associated with that, so let's steward it well. If we can serve you in any way, please let us know, there will be a team of folks up here that would love to pray with you. You can stop at the welcome center out there. I love you guys. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.