

## Lesson 6 A Prayer of Grief Psalm 102

**Purpose:** To learn to pray in times of grief.

**Grief:** (n.) deep sorrow, especially that caused by someone's death, trouble or annoyance

**Synonyms:** Sorrow, misery, sadness, anguish, pain, distress, agony, affliction, bereavement, remorse, mourning.

"Grief still feels like fear. Perhaps, more strictly, like suspense. Or like waiting; just hanging around waiting for something to happen. It gives life a permanently provisional feeling... The act of living is different all through. Her absence is like the sky, spreading over everything." (C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*)

Grief is an experience of deep sorrow over a significant loss. Whether the loss we have suffered is the loss of a loved one, a job, our health or our home, the physical, emotional and spiritual suffering is intense. Grieving is an important spiritual and emotional process that allows us to feel the impact of the loss on our lives so that we can slowly take in the reality of the loss on our lives and make painful, necessary adaptations. As a part of this process, we need to find people to express our feelings to. And we need to express our feelings over our loss to God.

**Group Discussion:** List on a piece of paper all the losses, big and small, you have experienced in the past few years. Share as much as you want to with the group.

**Personal Reflection.** How would you describe the experience of grief as you have experienced it physically, emotionally and spiritually.

**Note from the ESV Study Bible: Psalm 102.** The title, "a prayer of one afflicted," makes it clear that this is an "individual lament." The complete title is "A Prayer of One Afflicted, When He is Faint And Pours Out His Complaint Before The Lord."

### Outline of Psalm 102

- **102:1-2** O Lord, Hear Me When I Call.
- **102:3-11** I Am in Distress as My Enemies Taunt Me.
- **102:12-17** O Lord, You Will Have Pity on Zion.
- **102:18-22** Let Them Always Remember This in Zion.
- **102:23-24** O Lord, Do Not Shorten My Life!
- **102:25-28** The Lord is Eternal, and His Faithfulness Outlasts the World

This psalm speaks our anguish to God in times of grief. Read **Psalm 102**.

### Discussion:

1. What emotional response do you have toward the psalmist as you read this psalm?

- a. I initially responded with sorrow and pity for the psalmist as he begins to describe his situation. But beginning in verse 12, it seems as if the tone of the poem changes and it is more upbeat. This gave me some adoration for the psalmist. It was as if he takes on a winning attitude.
  - b. In verse 23, it seems as if the psalm takes on another downward tone and there is the feeling of sorrow and pity toward the psalmist.
2. How does this psalm contrast the fleeting nature of human life and God's eternal existence?
  - a. It is important to realize that the psalmist did not have a sense of life after death. As a result, the psalmist is saying to God, "it really isn't fair that you should cut me off in the midlife, when my life as a human is so short and your life is eternal. It isn't fair, and what good will it do anybody?"
3. The psalmist is saying with this contrast that for humans our time on earth is very short and passes away quickly. We experience pain and suffering that has impact on us. But God is enthroned forever. God will be remembered throughout all generations. Even those yet to be created shall praise God.
4. In **verses 1-2**, the psalmist pleads for God to hear him. This is so important in a time of grief and distress because one can feel very hopeless, helpless and alone. There is a great need to be heard by God. Our faith in Him turns us to Him. The psalmist needs to know that God has not forgotten him.
5. Let's take a closer look at **verses 2-11** and see how the psalmist describes his current physical and emotional state.
6. What is it about grief that can create the kind of experience described in **verses 2-11**?
  - a. Grief is a powerful physical, emotional and spiritual experience. Sometimes when we lose someone or something close to us we feel as if "we have lost a part of ourselves." We become deeply attached to people, places and dreams. The loss of any of these requires an enormous adaptation on our part—one that we would rather avoid.
  - b. Sometimes people suppress or deny the reality of the lost until a long time later and then they feel the full impact. Many people avoid talking about the subject and try to hold it in.
  - c. During times of grief, people need support from others.
7. How does the writer's descriptions of suffering compare with your experiences of grief?
8. Focus on one of the powerful images the writer uses in **verses 3-11** to express his suffering. What meaning does the image convey?
9. The psalmist seems to be blaming God and pleading with God at the same time. What does he blame God for (**vv. 8, 10, 23**)?
  - a. What does he plead for (**vv. 1-2, 24**)?

- 10.** The writer seems to have mixed feelings about God. What positive perspectives does he express about God (**vv. 12-22, 25-28**)?
- 11.** Mixed feelings about God are common in times of suffering and grief. What is it about times of grief that might create these mixed feelings?
- a.** One feeling that may come upon us in a time of grief is that God is not with us. Or we may have a longing for God.
  - b.** Are there others?
- 12.** How could this psalm help you in times of grief?

**Prayer:** Spend some time expressing to God whatever grief you may be experiencing for yourself or others.

### **Now or Later**

Write about the mixed feelings you have experienced toward God in times of grief. Spend some time reflecting on the helpfulness of being able to express all of your thoughts and feelings to God.