

**GREATER THAN: Jesus is Greater Than Grief**  
**John 11:17-36<sup>i</sup>**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Good morning, Trinity! It is good to see you. To those of you that are guests, we want to say a very special welcome to you. My name is Chris Wigley, and I serve as one of the Pastors here at Trinity. Whether you are in the room or you are joining us online, we are excited you are with us today. On behalf of our church family, and our staff team, we welcome you here today.

We would love the opportunity to be able to connect with you. You can help us with that in a couple ways. You can text the keyword, "TBCMP," that stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you do that, a reply text will be sent with a link you can click on. That will direct you to a form that will then provide us with basic contact information to follow up with you.

Or you can stop by the information center in the lobby area. We have a gift we'd like to give you there. Again, we look forward to connecting with you.

**SERIES OVERVIEW:**

We are in week three of a sermon series we have entitled, "Greater Than." We are looking at several different circumstances that are common to our lives and looking at the truth that Jesus is greater than whatever we face. It is my prayer that this series is helpful to you.

So far, we have examined that Jesus is greater than the grave and that He is greater than worry and anxiety. Today's message is entitled, "Greater Than My Grief." Pastor Chuck Swindoll once said about relevant preaching, "If you preach to those that are hurting, you will never lack for an audience." The Bible speaks so much to the variety of hurts that life often throws our way. And it is comforting to know that Scripture speaks to these life situations and my hope and prayer is to give you hope today. There is hope in Jesus.

Now, when it comes to grief, it is a topic that is a universal experience, meaning that everyone encounters grief at some point in our lives. So, I want to approach this topic this morning by looking at a few different aspects. I want to talk about what grief is, what the Bible says about grief, and then equip us to help someone that is grieving. That will serve as our outline this morning.

**OPENING ILLUSTRATION: Grief and Ministry**

You know, one of the most challenging aspects to ministry is often walking people through seasons and periods of grief. There are a couple of particular instances that I have had the opportunity to be with people in their grief that stand out in my mind.

I think of Tom Yeats. Tom was a Student Ministry volunteer in the church that I served as Student Minister. He loved me and encouraged me, but the roles were reversed when he lost his son to suicide. I felt the grief and pain that Tom felt when the news came out.

I think of Dr. Lenore Warren's family, when on Christmas Eve, I gathered in their home as the family surrounded her and said goodbye and we waited on the funeral home to attend to her.

I think of Tyson Reed whose dad was taken in a car accident just a quarter mile from his house his Senior year of High School. I happened to be the first person, outside of family, to arrive at the hospital. I felt the grief of that young man as he collapsed on my shoulders.

Perhaps the most difficult moment in my ministry occurred when a young lady was involved in a head on collision. When I met with the family to discuss the details of her service, I sensed the heaviness of grief in their hearts. And at the service that I preached, the congregation was dismissed, and a special time of goodbye was granted to the family. I stood nearby for 45 minutes assisting funeral directors in preventing the mother from climbing into the casket. I tried my best to answer the family's questions about the afterlife in those moments. Talk about grief.

I understand that this is a heavy subject matter. And while those situations and circumstances I mentioned were difficult, I want to encourage us today and consider how Jesus is greater than our grief. I believe there is hope for us here. We are going to look at a variety of passages but primarily be in John chapter 11. I want to invite you to turn there with me and mark your place as we consider other passages as well. But let's begin, today, by looking at...

**MESSAGE:**

**1) What is Grief?**

One article I read defined grief as, “An intense emotional suffering caused by significant personal loss.”<sup>ii</sup> An article by the Mayo Clinic called grief, “The natural reaction to loss.”<sup>iii</sup> Grief is not only natural, it is necessary. While grief is something that has, or certainly will, visit us all, it is a deeply personal experience. In other words, everyone grieves differently. No one is the same.

We often equate grief with the loss of a loved one, but that is not the only thing that can cause us to experience grief. It can be the result of a variety of things like losing a loved one, the ending of an important relationship, job loss, the news of terminal illness, divorce, and the list goes on.

It was interesting to note in my study this week that there are different lists that outline the stages of grief. I came across a 5-stage suggestion as well as an 8-stage outline. One person I read said that experts no longer look at grief in stages. Instead, they mentioned the need to view them as cycles. The reason for this is because the concept of stages seems to suggest that processing grief is like a ladder that you build upon to get out of the grief process. But the reality is that processing grief is not like a ladder, it's like a roller coaster.<sup>iv</sup>

Almost all lists included the same types of processing. Things like shock, emotional release, anger, guilt, loneliness and depression, and then acceptance and the return of hope.<sup>v</sup> And when working through grief, it is important to know that the roller coaster ride may include visiting each of those descriptors multiple times.

Another thing that is important to understand about grief is that there is no prescribed timetable. If you are here today and working through grief, I wish I could tell you that in X number of months you will find a new normal. But that is not the case. Now, I did read that the whole process has been found to last anywhere from 6 months to 4 years. Factors that contribute to longer seasons of grief include the severity of the loss, the circumstances surrounding the loss, your age, and even whether or not you find yourself in a state of what doctors call, “complicated grief.”

Here's what I would tell you if you are experiencing grief. Don't place added weight on yourself by feeling that you have to grieve a certain way or get through it in a particular timeframe. Don't allow people to speed you through the process. And if you are experiencing complicated grief, don't be too prideful to talk to your doctor about that. But don't isolate yourself. Surround yourself

with people. Resist the desire to retreat. Find friends or a support group, that are helpful to you as you process your grief. If you need some resources, please know that our church is available and there are folks that have been where you are and would love to walk with you on this journey. Grief is normal, it is healthy, and it is different for everyone.

We have discussed the definition of grief. Now, I want to consider...

## 2) 5 Promises of God in Our Grief.

There are probably more than 5 promises God makes to encourage those that are walking the path of grief. But these are 5 things that I jotted down that I want to share with you. First, ...

### A) God understands your grief.

I think many times we are too hard on ourselves when we walk through seasons of grief because we think that we should have it all together. But remember, God knows and understands grief. Don't forget that He knows the pain of His innocent Son being murdered. He understands the hurt, the pain, the heartache associated with deep loss.

I think of Isaiah 53:3-4 when I think about this idea. *He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and **acquainted with grief**; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. **4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.***

Beloved, because there is no prescription, and because everyone processes grief differently, do not place any expectations on yourself as to how you need to navigate your grief. God understands grief. Secondly, ...

### B) God is with you in your grief.

One of the greatest promises of God lies in Psalm 34:18. ***18 The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.*** God walks with those that grieve. God provides His presence. He wants to carry your heartache and provide His comfort, hope and encouragement. When you grieve, know that The Lord is close to you and promises to walk with you one step at a time.

God understands grief and He is with you. The third promise of God in our grief is that...

### C) God will give you strength.

There are times in our grief that it is hard to function. The anguish of loss can be so overbearing that we don't want to get out of bed. We can't find the strength to get to work. There is grief so heavy that it can take away our appetite. In those moments, do not rely on your own strength. Instead, be carried by the strength that God provides.

Isaiah 40:29-31 says, *<sup>29</sup> He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. <sup>30</sup> Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; <sup>31</sup> but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.*

Grief can be exhausting. It takes our strength away. But God gives strength in those circumstances. So, as you navigate grief, don't attempt to do so in your own power and strength, rely on God's strength to carry you through.

The promise of God is that He understands, He is with us in our grief, and He provides strength when there is none. Fourthly, ...

### D) God will work something good.

When you face grief, always carry something in the back of your mind; an expectation that God will bring something good from what happened. It may be difficult to see in the moment, but God does what is deemed impossible; good from that which is terrible.

Romans 8:28 says, *<sup>28</sup> And we know that for those who love God **all things work together for good**, for those who are called according to his purpose.* Certainly, all things include the painful things.

There are examples in Scripture, and even testimony from other brothers and sisters, about the good that God brings out of devastation. And while God's blessings could never replace that which was lost, the promise that He is working things in a way that only He can afford us the opportunity to hold onto hope in the midst of the grieving process.

God understands your grief, He is with you in your grief, He will give you strength to walk in and through your grief, and He will work something good. The fifth promise of God that I want to share with you is that...

### E) Joy will return.

Psalm 30, the second part of verse 5. *Weeping may tarry for the night, but **joy comes with the morning**.* I can tell you that while you will always miss that which was lost, joy will return. You will find joy again. When you allow The Lord to carry you through your grief, He will turn your grief into joy. Verse 11 of Psalm 30. *<sup>11</sup> You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness,*

When you face grief in your life, hold onto the promises of God. That He understands, He is present, He will give you strength, He is working something good, and He will bring joy back to your heart.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 says, *<sup>13</sup> But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.* Now, this verse does not say, "don't grieve." It says when you do grieve, do so with hope. The way we do that is by holding onto the promises of God.

We have looked at what grief is and at God promises in your grief. Now, in the time we have left, I want to talk through...

### 3) How to Help Someone That Is Grieving.

I want to equip you on how to be helpful. The truth is that when someone we love is grieving, it is often awkward for us because we don't know what to say. And in those moments, we can do more harm than good. Feeling like we need to say something spiritually profound, we often say things that are trite and wind up being hurtful. So, I want to give you 4 ways to help someone that is grieving, and I want to do that by looking at John chapter 11.

In this chapter, Jesus has been away doing ministry and gets word that His friend, Lazarus, is sick. By the time Jesus makes it to Bethany, he has already died. And the scene that we see is one that is filled with grief. But in this scene, Jesus gives us an example to follow in how to help others that are grieving.

The first thing we learn is the need to...

#### A) Understand people grieve differently.

Look with me at verses 18-21 as we see how people grieve differently.

*<sup>18</sup> Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, <sup>19</sup> and many of the Jews*

had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. <sup>20</sup> So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, **she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house.** <sup>21</sup> Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Martha went out in public while Mary stayed inside. Two different approaches to grief. Do not place a method or a timeline on someone that is grieving. Simply be there with them and make a commitment to be there for the long-term.

I have found that the immediate time following the loss, especially a death, people are surrounded by family and friends. But what happens in the weeks and months following? Everyone returns to their lives and the grieving person is left alone.

Notice that the people that had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. The funeral was over, and Lazarus was in his tomb. But people hung around afterward to console them. That is very important. Be a friend that is there for the long haul and don't place a timetable on their grief.

Sometimes people will say, “It's time to move on. Life goes on.” Or people say, “You've moved on too fast. I can't believe you are already over it.” Please don't say those things. Everyone's timetable is different and while you mean well, it places an added weight on the person that they don't need to carry. It makes them feel like something is wrong with them. Listen, people grieve differently; understand that.

Secondly, the way you help someone grieving is to...

### B) Enter their grief.

When you enter into someone's grief, you simply provide your presence. Jesus did that in John 11. Look at verse 33. <sup>33</sup> *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.* Jesus entered into their grief. And when you read the text here, Jesus didn't say a whole lot. He simply was present and made observations.

When you have a friend that is grieving, keep your words few. Simply say, “I'm so sorry.” Don't say, “God needed her in Heaven more than you need her here.” Listen, people don't grieve because their loved one is in Heaven. People grieve because they aren't around anymore. Grief is the feeling of loneliness,

missing loved ones. For every reason you give someone that God needed them more, they could give you 100 reasons for why that isn't true. They are missing them.

And never say, “I know exactly how you feel.” Because that's not a true statement. You may have lost someone but remember that grief is different for each person. So, it is impossible to know exactly how someone feels. Keep your words few and simply pray for your friend and enter into their grief. Thirdly, ...

### C) Resist the urge to cheer up.

When we find ourselves in an awkward situation, we have a tendency to break the ice by lightening the mood. When someone is walking through grief, attempting to cheer them up is not helpful. Look at verses 33-36 as we see what Jesus models for us.

<sup>33</sup> *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.* <sup>34</sup> *And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”* <sup>35</sup> **Jesus wept.** <sup>36</sup> *So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”*

Jesus didn't try to cheer them up. No, He wept with them. We learn here that when people we love grieve, you need to grieve with them. Demonstrate empathy. Romans 12:15 says, <sup>15</sup> *Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.*”

Don't say, “Time will heal all things.” The truth is that time plus taking the right steps is what heals. Time is also an arbitrary factor. How much time? Again, keep your words few, resist the urge to cheer them up, just enter into their grief. Fourthly, ...

### D) Give space and grace.

When I say space, I don't mean distance. I mean to expect the person grieving to say anything they feel they need to say. When we create that space and extend to them grace, we are the most helpful. Jesus did this very thing.

Verse 21 of John 11. <sup>21</sup> *Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”* And verse 32, <sup>32</sup> *Now when Mary came to where*

*Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."*

Martha and Mary both expressed a disappointment to Jesus. If He'd only been there things could have been different. And Jesus gives them the space and the grace to speak that.

Listen, if a grieving person blames God or expresses disappointment in God, please do not give them a theological lecture on why they shouldn't do that. Remember, blame and anger are part of the grieving process. Simply respond, "I'm so sorry for your loss and I am praying for you." Space and grace.

Most people that are grieving need someone to listen, not someone to fix the situation. There is some brokenness that you and I cannot fix.

Remember the story of Job in the Bible? He had lost everything and then his friends showed up and they just sat by his side for 7 days and said nothing. They were grieving with him. But things went sideways the moment they opened their mouths. Hurt happened when they started talking and trying to say something spiritually profound. They felt the need to correct Job instead of giving him the space and grace he needed.

How can you help a friend that is grieving? Understand that each person and circumstance is different, enter into their grief and grieve with them, resist the urge to cheer up, and give lots of space and show lots of grace.

### **CONCLUSION: Invite the Band to come back up.**

As we close our time together today, I want to share with you an illustration.

### **ILLUSTRATION: Japanese Art of Kintsugi (Ken SueGee)**

Kintsugi is the Japanese art form of repairing broken pottery by mending the areas of breakage with precious metals. I have a picture that I want to show you. [\[Show picture\]](#).

The concept behind this is to highlight the breakage and the repair instead of attempting to disguise it. It involves a detailed and intricate process that takes time to finish.

In many ways, grieving is like this art form. Don't try to mask the breakage, allow God to fill the broken pieces and fashion something in our life. It is

important to know, if you happen to be grieving over something, that while things are broken now, it is God's desire to redeem. God doesn't want to cover the breakage, you see, but to highlight His restorative work in and through your life. Allow God to work. He is greater than your grief.

The hope that we have in times of grief lies in the peace of healing that comes by way of a relationship with Jesus. If you know Jesus, know that He will carry you through your grief. If you do not have a personal relationship with Jesus, I can tell you that hope in all circumstances comes by way of surrendering to Him.

God has a plan for your life. He loves you and desires a relationship with you. However, our relationship with God is hindered because of sin in our life. The Bible says all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But God has provided a remedy to our sin problem. Jesus became our sin on the cross at Calvary. And when we receive Jesus and our Savior and Lord, our sinfulness is exchanged for Jesus' perfection and when that happens, a right relationship with God is restored.

Have you trusted Jesus as your Savior and Lord? If not, you can today. In a moment, I am going to pray, our elders will be here at the front, and we would love to visit with you about what it means to make Jesus the Lord of your life.

Perhaps there are those of you here today that are walking through grief. I'm so sorry for your loss. I want you to know that you are loved and we are here with you. We would love to pray with you or over you.

If you are truly struggling through grief, I want you to know that there are resources that can help you. We have church members that have traveled that road and would love to visit with you. There are support groups that can help you. Don't struggle alone. Allow other godly people to enter into your grief and walk with you in and through it.

Let's pray. You respond.



## ENDNOTES:

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<sup>i</sup> Works consulted in preparation of this message: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, “*Courage in Grief*” booklet, accessed online at: [https://p.billygraham.org/courage-in-grief/?utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=paid&utm\\_campaign=nn-courage-in-grief-resource&SOURCE=BY200NCGG&qclid=EAlalQobChMI08ns84Wy9wIV13ZvBB1oMg9MEAAAYASAAEgI\\_2ifD\\_BwE](https://p.billygraham.org/courage-in-grief/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=paid&utm_campaign=nn-courage-in-grief-resource&SOURCE=BY200NCGG&qclid=EAlalQobChMI08ns84Wy9wIV13ZvBB1oMg9MEAAAYASAAEgI_2ifD_BwE); Carol DerSarkissian, MD, “*What is Normal Grieving, and What Are the Stages of Grief?*” article written November 9, 2020, accessed online at WebMD: <https://www.webmd.com/balance/normal-grieving-and-stages-of-grief>; Mayo Clinic, “*What is grief?*” article written October, 19, 2016, accessed online: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/patient-visitor-guide/support-groups/what-is-grief>; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “*Grief and Loss*,” article accessed online: <https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/stress-coping/grief-loss/index.html>; Grief Share, “*God, What is Going On?*” article published on GriefShare website: <https://www.griefshare.org/healing/god>; Robert Furrow, “*How to Survive Grief*,” taught at Calvary Albuquerque on Sunday, September 27, 2020.

<sup>ii</sup> *Courage in Grief* Booklet, Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

<sup>iii</sup> *What is Grief?* article published October 19, 2016 by the Mayo Clinic.

<sup>iv</sup> Robert Furrow, “*How to Survive Grief*,” taught at Calvary Albuquerque on Sunday, September 27, 2020.

<sup>v</sup> *Courage in Grief* booklet and the WebMD article written by Carol DerSarkissian, MD, “*What is Normal Grieving, and What Are the Stages of Grief?*” article written November 9, 2020.