

Prayers for a Grieving Heart

We feel very honored to share this experience with you. Our hearts are in deep pain as we see what is happening in Ukraine. And we want you to know that the world is praying for you, and we are praying for you.

The scriptures that we've selected for our Bible Study are simply from the Gospel because we believe that the Gospel is the best news for our world. We believe it is the message we need the most when we're suffering. Our reading will be brief, but powerful, because we also want to give you a time to share, talk, cry, and pray.

Lesson 1: Isaiah 52:13-53:4

52 ¹³The Lord says, "Look, my servant will succeed in what he has to do, and he will be raised to a position of high honor. ¹⁴It is true that many were shocked when they saw him. He was beaten so badly that he no longer looked like a man. ¹⁵So he will sprinkle [with blood and water] many nations. Kings will be unable to speak because of him. They will see what they had never been told. They will understand what they had never heard."

53 Who has believed our message? To whom did God reveal his arm? ²He grew up before the Lord like a young plant, like a root growing in dry ground. There was nothing special or impressive about the way he looked, nothing we could see that would cause us to like him. ³People hated and rejected him. He was a man who suffered grief, pain, sorrow, and sickness. We treated him like someone of no importance, like someone people will not even look at but turn away from in disgust.

⁴In truth, he took our grief and sickness upon himself; he carried our sorrows. But we thought that God was punishing him, that God was beating him for something he did.

Isaiah wrote this prophecy in 700 B.C., 700 years before the birth of Jesus. During this time, the Assyrian Empire conquered and destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Ten of the twelve tribes of Israel were completely destroyed. Within the next 200 years, the Southern Kingdom was conquered by the Neo-Babylonian kingdom, and the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem were captured and taken as prisoners. During this time of the most intense suffering, confusion, pain, and hopelessness in Jewish history, Isaiah spoke this message of hope, the hope of a Messiah. This Messiah is Jesus.

How does Isaiah describe Jesus?

- He was beaten so badly that he didn't look human.
- He was tender and weak, like a young plant in the desert.
- Everything around him was spiritually dry.
- He didn't look handsome or seem special in any way.
- He experienced man's hatred, rejection, and even disgust.
- He felt grief, pain, sorrow, and sickness.

Where do we see Jesus feeling weak or anxious in the Bible?

- In the garden before going to the cross, Jesus was so anxious and overwhelmed that he sweat drops of blood.
- In the dessert, he was hungry and thirsty.
- He was tempted at the cliff.
- He cried when Lazarus died.
- He felt physical and emotional pain.
- On the mountain, he needed to pray for strength.

How does Jesus see our suffering and feel about our grief?

He understands us. He has mercy and compassion for us. He wants to take our grief and sickness upon himself and carry our sorrows. He wants us to bring our sorrows and needs to him.

What does that mean? Why is this important?

Jesus cares about our grief, our sorrows, our pain, and our sicknesses because he loves us. He cares for us when we are weak, so we don't need to feel that we always have to "be strong."

Grief is a natural and healthy response to suffering. But what is grief? When do we experience grief?

Grief is a form of suffering that we feel when we or someone else has lost something or someone.

How have you experienced loss through the war? *(List was created by Ukrainians and class attendees.)*

- Job
- Friends
- Family members
- Children
- City
- Home
- Security
- Pictures
- Simple things, like a tissue to blow your nose or a cup of coffee
- Hope
- Health
- Belongings
- My future
- My daily routine
- Things I need
- Things I enjoy
- Comfort (you're cold, body aches, hungry, medicine, headaches)
- Sleep
- Peace
- Something else: _____

TalkEnglish

What does the suffering of grief look like?

- Crying / severe sadness
- Anger
- Isolation
- Anxiety
- Feeling grumpy / irritable
- Feeling numb
- Rebellion
- Inability to feel joy
- Inability to move forward
- Inability to talk or express ourselves
- Inability to stop thinking about a situation
- Feeling that life is meaningless
- Lack of trust in God and others
- Denial/avoidance/staying distracted or busy

What feelings have you experienced? *(List was created by Ukrainians and class attendees.)*

- Lonely
- Afraid / fearful
- Angry
- Overwhelmed
- Hurt
- So sad
- Lost
- Worried
- Ashamed
- Overwhelmed
- Peaceful
- Guilty
- Disappointed
- Vengeful (wanting revenge)
- Shocked
- Hopeful
- Helpless
- Hopeless
- Happy
- Anxious
- Grumpy / impatient
- Bitter
- Hatred
- Love
- Numb / no feeling / frozen
- Abandoned
- Confused (i.e. God, why is this happening? Why don't you stop this?)
- Unforgiving
- Something else: _____

Jesus says that he wants us to carry us. How do we let Jesus carry our grief and sorrows?

- Allow ourselves to feel our grief with Jesus as we pray
- Be honest, open, and share with Jesus the details of our situations
- Share with him our deepest feelings, needs, and questions
- Accept that it is normal to have negative feelings when we've experienced loss

While we may feel tempted to hold our feelings and situations inside our hearts, sharing everything we feel and the details of our situations with Jesus is our first step toward healing.

Take some time to share about how you are feeling, what you've lost, and the details of your situation. No one will tell you, "You're not supposed to feel that." No one is going to judge you. We're simply going to take that grief and pray it upward to Jesus.

Jesus promises that he will not going to leave you in despair. His Gospel brings healing, and we're going to continue learning more about how Jesus can heal our grief.

Time of prayer

Lesson 2: Isaiah 53:5-9

53 ⁵But he was being punished for what we did. He was crushed because of our guilt. He took the punishment we deserved, and this brought us peace. We were healed because of his pain. ⁶We had all wandered away like sheep. We had gone our own way. And yet the LORD put all our guilt on him.

⁷He was treated badly, but he said nothing, like a lamb being led away to be killed. He was like a sheep that makes no sound as its wool is being cut off. He never opened his mouth to defend himself. ⁸He was arrested and judged unfairly. No one came to his defense. But he was put to death and punished for the sins of God's people. ⁹He had done no wrong to anyone. He had never even told a lie. But he was buried among the wicked. His tomb was with the rich.

In the last lesson, we talked about how Jesus himself, the Savior of the world, suffered and felt weak, pain, and sorrow. He suffered in the desert – where he was hungry and thirsty. He suffered from rejection of people. He suffered before he went to the cross in the garden where he felt so anxious that he literally sweat drops of blood. We talked about how he understands our suffering, our feelings of rejection, our stress, our anxiety, our fears, and even our anger. For this reason, we can come to him in prayer with our real feelings, struggles, pain, and questions. Jesus doesn't judge us for how we feel. Out of his great love for us, he wants to carry our situation and our sadness without any judgment.

Review the list of things you've lost in the war. Share any new losses.

Review the feelings you've been experiencing. Share any new feelings.

Sometimes, we are afraid to share our true feelings, doubts, and questions to Jesus, God, in prayer. Why are we afraid?

We know that God is love. We know that God is holy. Sometimes we have feelings, thoughts, and even actions that aren't loving or holy. Since we know this, we fear God's judgment. We may also have been taught not to share these things.

What are some unloving and unholy feelings, actions, or thoughts that we can have during severe suffering? You can think about your own life – or maybe things that you've seen others doing that aren't healthy. *(List was created by Ukrainians and class attendees.)*

- Frustration
- Stress / anxiety that makes us irritable or angry
- Feeling hopeless
- Pushing people away
- Not asking for help or comfort
- Cursing, words of anger
- Arguing, insulting others
- Not listening to good advice
- Pushing God away
- Not believing that God can help us
- Not wanting God's wisdom and help
- Closing off people who cannot relate but want to help

TalkEnglish

- Using alcohol or drugs
- Impurity or pornography
- Eating too much or too little
- Isolation
- Watching too many movies
- Physically hurting or abusing others
- Hurting myself
- Smoking or harming my body
- Seeking revenge
- Hatred, unwillingness to forgive
- Selfishness
- Doing too much of a good thing (i.e. watching movies or the news, working, serving, gaming)

Everyone sins during times of grief. Because of our shame, we can read Isaiah 53:5-6 in a way that reminds us of this guilt, instead of God's love:

But he was being punished for what YOU did. He was crushed because of YOUR guilt. He took the punishment YOU deserved, and this brought YOU peace. YOU were healed because of HIS pain. ⁶YOU wandered away like a sheep. YOU went your own way. And yet the LORD put all YOUR guilt on HIM! – Now, don't you feel guilty??

While this is true – we are the cause of Jesus's suffering because of our sin – this is the voice of shame, not the voice of our loving Father. Out of his great love, our heavenly Dad sent his own arm, Jesus – his only Son – as a sacrifice for our sins because he knew that it would be impossible for us to save ourselves (John 3:16). Jesus himself said in John 12:47 that he doesn't want to condemn us. He loves us and only wants to save us.

Read the passage again in this way and listen for God's voice of love:

But HE was being punished for what you did. HE was crushed because of your guilt. HE took the punishment you deserved, and this brought you PEACE. You were HEALED because of HIS pain. ⁶You wandered away like a sheep. You went your own way. *And yet* the LORD put all your guilt on HIM. – Why? Because he doesn't want you to be punished. HE loves YOU that much!

When we are suffering severely, we can begin think, "Is God really love? Has God forgotten me? Am I really saved? Why doesn't he come to my rescue?" These temptations can feel very real. But the truth is that Jesus wants to take all of your suffering and carry it in his arms, holding you the entire way, as a loving Father would hold his precious child. He offers to forgive all your sins if you believe in him and want to receive his forgiveness (John 1:12-13).

Because of his love for us, we can be completely honest about our feelings, thoughts, actions, and sins. Instead of hiding them, we can allow Jesus to forgive our sins and heal our hearts.

Now that you know that Jesus loves you, he doesn't want to judge you but wants to carry your sorrows, take on the punishment for your sins, and offer you overflowing mercy, are there any ways that you've sinned in your suffering – thoughts, attitudes, or actions? Maybe you've had bad feelings toward people or even toward God? Are there any other burdens, sorrows, or sins that you've never carried to Jesus?

Time of prayer

Lesson 3: Isaiah 53:10- 12

¹⁰But it pleased God to crush his servant and cause him to suffer. Since he gave himself as an offering for sin, he will see his children and lengthen the days of his life so that they never end. He will succeed in doing God's will. ¹¹After his suffering he will see the light and will be filled with gladness.

The Lord says, "My servant, who always does what is right, will make his people right with me; he will take their sins upon himself. ¹²For this reason, I will reward him and make him great. I will give him the rewards of one who wins in battle, and he will share his rewards with those who are strong. I will do this because he gave his life for the people. He was considered a criminal, but the truth is, he carried away the sins of many. Now he will stand before me and speak for those who have sinned."

In the last lesson, we were reminded that we are oftentimes afraid to go to God with our true feelings or deeply personal situations. We can fear his judgment or disapproval. Sometimes we don't know what to do with our feelings and fear that God won't even help us. In reality, Jesus doesn't feel that way at all. In fact, he feels the exact opposite of what we fear. He loves us and wants to help us. He won't abandon us in our feelings, if we release all our needs, emotions, and fears to him. He will be with us forever.

Review the list of unloving or unholy ways that we deal with our suffering in Lesson 2.

As we dive into verses 10-12, we might notice a strange statement about God. Can you find it?

Reread verse 10. Why is this verse a little strange?

This verse seems strange that such a loving Father would also want to crush his child and get pleasure from his suffering. Does God like it when we suffer?

Isaiah 53:10 shows us that how God sees suffering is very different from how we see suffering. Suffering is something that we try to avoid, but God uses suffering to accomplish his will. God needed and wanted Jesus to suffer so that his children could know their true Father, experience his love, his healing, and his forgiveness. He deeply longs for a living and breathing relationship with his children in this life and into eternity! This is the will of God.

Because of Jesus's sacrifice, those who suffer in Christ will never face suffering for eternity. In Christ, suffering always has an end. Jesus showed this to us through his miracles.

How did Jesus take away the suffering of people around him?

- Healing the blind man
- Feeding five thousand hungry people
- Raising the dead to relieve those who were mourning
- Making wine for a couple who felt ashamed
- Protecting a woman caught in adultery

Jesus's suffering on the cross also did not last forever. How did God take away Jesus's suffering?

God relieved Jesus's physical suffering through death.

Death entered our world is the result of human sin. The punishment for sin is spiritual death and separation from God. Yet, because of Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection, we now have hope in death. For the followers of Jesus, death is a permanent release from suffering and the promise of eternal life with our loving Father, where there is no more sorrow, death, suffering, or pain (Revelation 21:4).

Isaiah 57:1 says this:

The righteous die and no one questions it in their heart. Men devoted to God are taken away and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be protected from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they enter rest as they lie in death.

Christians die before they are old, children die, and some babies are never born. Why? God clearly gives us the answer so that we will never wonder or doubt. He takes his children early to protect them from the evil that is coming. Even though we deeply suffer and grieve their loss, we can know that our loss is their relief from evil and suffering that God knew they desperately needed.

Even though suffering in Christ always has an end, Jesus promises us that here on earth we will face very difficult times (Matthew 24, John 16:33). The question is – why God? What is the purpose of this suffering? Today, we're going to walk through God's purpose of suffering and how we can experience hope in that purpose.

Suffering statements:

- God allows suffering because suffering has a meaningful purpose.
- God can heal suffering, both emotional and physical.
- In Christ, suffering always has an end.
- In Christ, God releases all our suffering through death.

Take a minute to review the definition of grief in Lesson 1.

Review the list of things you lost. Share any new losses.

Review and add to some of the feelings you've been experiencing. Share any new feelings.

Review the list of unloving and unholy ways that we respond to grief in Lesson 2.

While grieving is a natural response to loss, sin is a natural human response to grief. Why is it important to know how we grieve naturally and to learn healthy ways to grieve? The sins that we experience when grieving can cause our grief to continue for a much longer period. Sin can also cause us to experience new, additional forms of grief beyond the original situation. Sin sometimes feels good in the moment, but the effects of this sin can cause lasting damage to ourselves and others.

We Sometimes respond to grief by attempting to turn off our emotions. Examples include isolation, ignoring our feelings, using alcohol or drugs, or doing too much of a good thing, like watching too many movies or too much TV, playing too many video games, overserving, overworking – doing anything all the time so that we're simply too busy to feel.

These are symptoms that we are avoiding and even denying what we feel.

Denial is a normal part of grieving and is the first step of the grieving process.

Unhealthy grieving may be a sign that we haven't started or finished bringing our deepest and most honest feelings to Jesus for healing and help.

Jesus teaches us a second way that we can overcome denial and sinful patterns when we suffer. We learn this form of healing through James 5:13-15.

¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

In James 5:13-15, how can others help us with our healing and overcome denial? How can we help them to help us?

Sharing our grief with friends who love us and with the spiritual leaders in our lives is part of Jesus's plan for healing. He tells us not only to share our situations and ask for prayers, but to confess any sins that we've experienced during our time of suffering. The response of our friends should be the same as Jesus's response: to comfort us, encourage us, relate to us through their own stories, guide us through scriptures for strength and direction, and earnestly pray for us and with us.

Sin is not the only form of denial. When we are in denial about our suffering, we may also make statements that sound godly, selfless, righteous, or overly positive. While the statement may be true, it may not be true for our situation, or it doesn't express how we really feel. Sometimes statements are false, but they feel true. Whether true or false, these statements can stop us from acknowledging our true feelings and working through our grief in healthy ways.

Sometimes people trying to help us may also speak these statements. This too can shut down the grieving process and are not helpful for someone who has suffered significant loss.

Can you think of some true and false statements that can keep us from feeling and expressing our needs to Jesus and to others?

Denial statements:

- This can't be happening. (i.e. Maybe even, "This war isn't real.")
- Everything will work out.
- God's in control.
- God works for the good – he has a good reason
- I shouldn't feel this way / My feelings are wrong
- I know I'm supposed to forgive, so I do
- Others have it worse than I do
- I'm being selfish and should just focus on other people

TalkEnglish

- It's a hopeless situation
- There's nothing anyone can do
- People don't really care or want to help
- People have their own problems
- Talking about it won't help / I'll get depressed
- Talking about it will only make it worse
- I'll discourage others

Take a minute to think about how these statements keep us in denial and a state of grief.

Denial statements also hurt our relationship with Jesus and others. Why might this be true?

Sharing grief with others creates strong emotional bonds. If we deny feelings using denial statements instead of grieving the way Jesus wants us to, then we don't experience the loving relationship with our Savior and others the way God designed. Not sharing our grief keeps us distant from God and people, isolated, lonely, and overburdened. In this state, our grief remains.

What denial statements do you find yourself saying?

Another hindrance to our healing is pride. Healthy pride, such as pride in our country, school, or children for their accomplishments, values, or character are an encouraging and positive part of life. However, pride in the form of sin keeps us bound in denial, grief, and loneliness and blocks relief and comfort that we could receive through love.

What is pride and how can we recognize it in our lives?

- We don't want to look bad to God, others, or even ourselves
- We don't want to look weak or unspiritual
- We want to look better than we really are
- We want to appear strong when inside we feel weak
- Our worth and value as a human being comes from looking good or strong
- Our worth and value as a human being comes from being stronger than other people

Jesus was weak, he prayed in weakness, anxiety, fear, grief, and physical pain. He was humble and open about his feelings, his needs, and his weaknesses before God and even people. When he was facing death, he called his friends together and told them what he was going through and how he felt. He weiled with tears in the garden with friends close by who could probably hear him. Even though they fell asleep and didn't understand his suffering, Jesus still invited his friends into his suffering.

If we're trying to be strong in suffering when Jesus, the Son of God, was weak, what does that tell us about ourselves?

Has pride been keeping you from experiencing the love and healing God wants for you? Explain.

Considering what you've been learning about suffering, what do think are the main purposes of suffering?

Isaiah 53 and James 5:13-15 teaches us that God allows us to suffer to draw us closer to him, to depend on him, and to experience his love, peace, strength, and comfort. Suffering teaches us to trust God through all situations, to long for him, and to search for him. Suffering allows us to go deeper into our relationship with Jesus more than we've ever experienced in our lives. We begin to understand what matters the most in life: our relationship with Christ. We realize that we can no longer put our faith and hope in this world and that everlasting faith, hope, and love are found only in Jesus Christ. In suffering, we long for eternal relief and the hope of heaven becomes stronger in our hearts. We no longer fear death, but we yearn to live in peace and rest with our heavenly Father and want to invite others into eternal life.

Suffering helps us to receive love from people who genuinely care for us. In a deep and meaningful way, we experience human kindness and friendship that can last a lifetime. We experience Christ's love through the hands of people around us. As we experience this love, we are then able to turn and love others.

Through suffering, we learn compassion for other people. We can now share real experiences with others who are going through the same challenges. We understand better how they are feeling, how they are responding, why they might be behaving in a certain way. We learn not judge one another. We learn how to be patient with others in their grief. We learn how to support, encourage, and pray with others who are hurting. We can help people to recognize the signs of unhealthy grief and point them to the One who can comfort and heal them fully: Jesus Christ. We can make an eternal difference in the lives of others who are also suffering.

Isaiah 53:11 says that after his suffering, Jesus saw the light of heaven, the light of our salvation, and the joy of finishing his life faithfully. In this, Jesus was filled with gladness. From this study, we hope that you can begin to see a ray of light around the tragedies of your situation and that your walk with Jesus will grow more and more as your experience his love and the love of others who care so much.

Time of Prayer

Go to the next page.

TalkEnglish

If you are having trouble beginning to pray honestly to Jesus, then you can try these prayer statements. Your prayers may begin simple, but as the Holy Spirit works in your heart, you will begin to grow and experience Christ's peace, direction, power, and work in your life.

Prayer Statements:

Jesus, I experienced _____ (Share some details about your situation.)

Jesus, I lost _____ (Refer to the list of losses from Lesson 1.)

I feel _____. (Pick some emotions from the list in Lesson 1.)

Jesus, I confess that I have grieved in unhealthy ways by _____. Would you forgive me?
(Pick some ways from Lesson 2.)

Jesus, thank you for your love for me. I need your help. Would you _____. (State what is it that you want Jesus to do.)

After you've prayed, here are some things you can do to listen for Jesus's words of love, comfort, direction, and healing:

Spend time in silence or take a quiet walk outside

Spend time reading the New Testament or Psalms

Attend church and listen for his response

Share your grief with a close friend

Spend time writing about your experience, thoughts, and prayers

Write about what you are learning

Watch for ways that Jesus answers your prayers and write about them

Share what you are experiencing and seeing with others

When you experience new feelings of grief, continue bringing these needs to Jesus in prayer