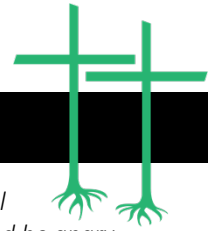


MINISTRY TOOL #18 – FOR ADDRESSING GRIEF

Presence, Love, Patience, & Truth



Not all “problems” are problems. Sometimes a person will come to you seeking freedom from painful emotions. But sometimes those emotions are entirely appropriate. Sometimes a person should indeed be angry or sad. What they often need is permission to grieve and a safe context in which to do it.

Galatians 6:2 – Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

EXPLANATION:

Sometimes people don’t need freedom from their emotions. Some emotions need to be felt for them to be processed. When we give a person permission to feel what they feel in appropriate situations, they will often then trust us more to help them through the experience.

In the book of Job, after tragedy befell Job, his friends gathered around him, grieving alongside him, and sat with him in silent mourning for seven days and seven nights (Job 2:12–13). This was probably the best thing Job’s friends did. Where they went wrong (as we see through the rest of the book) is when they started troubleshooting with Job, trying to fix him.

Sometimes the best thing we can do is sit quietly with a person, being present with them and mourning alongside them. They don’t need advice; they need us to be present. They need us to be emotional scaffolding for them—a strong structure that surrounds them while they’re falling apart inside. If we say anything, it is to encourage healthy grieving and to reinforce gospel truth.

Such people need to be given time to work through what they’re feeling. Everyone grieves differently and for different lengths of time, and the magnitude of grief varies from one situation to the next. Love them through the struggle. Let them know that it’s okay and right to grieve. Give them permission to have unanswered questions. When appropriate, speak truth—not platitudes or clichés, but rock-solid truth. And never be in a hurry to “fix” the person.

GOSPEL SUMMARY:

If the aim of the gospel is that we die and let Jesus live through us, then true emotional health looks like Jesus. Knowing that Jesus never sinned is helpful because that means emotional health sometimes looks like table-flipping anger or blood-sweating anguish.

We just need to be clear about what situations warrant that sort of response. Not every situation that rubs you the wrong way warrants an explosion, and never should we lose self-control and call it Christlike. But as our hearts align with righteousness, our emotions become grounded in God’s heart, helping us to respond to painful and unjust situations in righteous ways.

Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus, even though He knew He would raise Lazarus to life. Mourning is the appropriate response to death, and it was fitting that Lazarus be grieved over.

Our appropriate emotional response to a broken world does not mean we lose our hope. On the contrary, our hope remains, coloring the way we experience these emotions. As 1 Thessalonians 4:13 says, we “do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.”

HOW TO:

- ❑ **PRESENCE** – Be present with the person. Give them your full attention. Take their situation as seriously as they are taking it, but do so with strength and self-control. This models an appropriate way to experience what they’re feeling.
- ❑ **LOVE** – Prioritize the person. Listen to them intently as they vent to you. Show compassion and see if there are ways to minister to them. Encourage their house church to provide meals if needed, or perhaps babysit for their kids, or cover unexpected expenses for the person. Be an advocate for the person so they can receive from their house church (or others in our network) whatever practical help they might need.
- ❑ **PATIENCE** – Don’t be in a hurry to fix the person. This process can take hours, days, weeks, months, or sometimes (rarely) even years.
- ❑ **TRUTH** – As you listen to the person throughout the process, pay attention to any misconceptions of God that might be developing. With gentleness, love, and compassion, point them to a better understanding. Help them remain grounded in gospel truth as they work through the grief they’re experiencing.