**Part V**

**Enlarging Your Soul Through Grief and Loss**

Matthew 26:36-46

January 26th, 2014

**Brene Brown** clip entitled Love Weeps. Have you heard it?

Two affects which people fear the most is shame and grief.

She tells this story about growing up in a catholic school in New Orleans. It was mostly like magical thinking. Like…

There’s a reason for everything. If something tragic happens it was supposed to happen.

She remembers a tragic circumstance in her neighborhood where good friends of there’s son was killed in a tragic accident in her home; and then a few months later she was diagnosed with cancer.

At the Toddler’s funeral another boy came up to introduce the funeral and said that this wasn’t a time to grieve, that would be selfish, this is a time to celebrate.

**Brene Brown** when she was a little girl she remembers being angry. Totally pissed off. And she remembers her mom saying this to her.

I want to be clear with you. This isn’t a time to celebrate; this is a time to grieve. It’s OK to be sad. And be assured that God is grieving today too.

It made her pause. Huh? Her mom repeated, God is weeping too.

She remembers thinking to herself, that truth changes everything.

Then the reporter interjects, “Jesus Wept.”

Ya, Love Weeps.

It’s true, we who know Christ and have the hope of heaven; God redeeming our suffering, don’t cry or mourn quite the same as those who don’t have this hope; but we do cry and grieve.

Actually I believe that because of Christ, we can grieve well. We can grieve in such a way that our hearts actually enlarge through grief and loss.

Look at the examples of grieving well in scripture.

In Genesis 6 scripture says God Himself grieved he had created humankind because of the evil and the brokenness they were creating.

2/3rds of the Psalms are Laments.

There is a whole book entitled Lamentations.

Jeremiah was called the weeping prophet.

The writer of James encourages his readers to “grieve, mourn and wail; turn your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.”

Don’t run from your reality, run to it.

**Pete Scazzero** says, “There is no greater disaster in the spiritual life than to be immersed in unreality. In fact the true spiritual life is not an escape from reality but an absolute commitment to it. Loss marks the place where self knowledge and powerful transformation happens.”

No wonder the wise teacher of Ecclesiastes teaches us that “There is a time for every activity under heaven…. a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.”

Even Jesus practiced this. Jesus wept at the death of his friend Lazarus. Jesus wept for his people in Jerusalem…He longed to gather them as a hen gathers her chicks.

**Today we’re going to look at Jesus’ example of what it means to Enlarge Our Soul Through Grief and Loss.”**

Interesting that today this weekend, when we’re looking at this we have two deaths in our River Family. Glen Van Brummelen’s father passed away after a long fight with incurable cancer and the sudden unexpected passing of David Carlin’s mother Dot.

A good example of grieving well, enlarging your soul through grief and loss has been Glen.

I had opportunity share a lunch with Glen and hear his heart around the loss of his dad.

In fact Glen e-mailed me after discovering what I was speaking on this weekend, asked me if he could write something about his dad and if I would share it with you.

**Here’s his letter.**

**Glen VanBrummelen**

So much of grieving comes down to accepting our own limits.

**Limits are behind all loss.**

**I am curious, what kinds of things are you grieving in this season of your life?**

You are allowed to feel sad you know.

Instead of feeling the sadness I think we do all kinds of things.

**Pete Scazzero** says that in our culture addiction has become the most common way to deal with pain. We watch TV incessantly. We keep busy, running from one activity to another. We work 70 hours a week, indulge in pornography, overeat, drink, take pills – anything to help us avoid the pain.

**No wonder I started mt biking** quite seriously when my parents divorced. Riding was a gift to me; but need to be mindful that I’m not using this good gift to hide or escape in unhealthy ways.

This is why it is good for seasons, to stop doing even the thing we love to do, in order to make sure we’re not using it to avoid pain in some unhealthy ways.

Fasting from your sport or hobby, simply to sit in quiet, and to feel the loss is good. Healthy.

Some people demand that someone or something like a marriage or sexual partner or an ideal family, or child or an achievement or a career or a church take our loneliness away.

**No wonder growing up I started** dating really early. I was addicted to relationships. Break up with a girl and on week later I had a new girlfriend.

All so I didn’t have to live with the intense pain.

No wonder so many in our culture suffer from a low-level, or high-level depression. We have avoided true healthy grieving. We have run from pain, instead of find Jesus in it.

So how do we grieve well?

**Let’s read Matthew 26:36-46**

“He became anguished and distressed.”

This is to suffer greatly. Excruciating or acute distress. It’s the anguish of grief.

Distress is defined as great pain, anxiety, sorrow, acute in this case mental suffering.

**The NIV** translates this sorrow. Sadness.

**Marks Gospel** uses the Greek word which means “horror came over him”.

The interesting thing that Jesus does is that he tells his friends how he is feeling.

He goes on to say, “My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

He’s public about it.

He tells his closest friends. He asks them to keep watch with him. Not counsel him; not try to minimize what he’s feeling. Not to counsel…but simply to keep watch…. which means to pray.

The deepest care anyone can give someone in this state.

I know what I’d do. I would try to fix the situation. Counsel. Make it better. Encourage.

All Jesus asks his friends to do is keep watch…and pray.

I think many of our responses would be “you want me to do what? Pray? What’s that going to accomplish? That doesn’t make me feel very good because it feels like we didn’t do anything.”

**Reminds me of Job.**

**Job 1:3** says he was the greatest man among all the people of the East.” He was the Bill Gates of his day. His physical wealth was staggering.

But he wasn’t just wealthy; he was godly, faithfully walking with God. **Job 1:1** says he “feared God and shunned evil.”

Then disaster struck and in one day he lost everything. The richest man in the East was reduced to poverty and all his 10 children died.

But still he didn’t blame God. Scripture says he simply worshipped God. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Then he got these boils all over his body. He stank. He reeked of death. His wife told him to curse God and die.

His “friends” showed up to comfort him. For a period of time they stayed with him in quiet, but one by one they began to speak…trying to fix the situation.

I can hear Job simply requesting…stay here, keep watch with me, pray.

Instead they tried to fix.

**Charlie Peacock** sings a song I can hear Job requesting of his friends.

“Now is the time for tears, don’t speak, save your words, there’s nothing you can say, to take this pain away. Don’t try so hard. You can just simply be. Cry with me don’t try to fix me friend. That’s how you comfort me.”

This is how Job wished his friends had responded to him in his suffering. This is how Jesus was asking his disciples to respond. This is our hearts cry as well.

I love how Jesus models what it is to grieve here. He is so public. He tells his disciples how he is feeling. He asks them for help, and he models it.

I think we can stand to learn something from Jesus here.

So many suffer in silence. Particularly men suffering from feelings of depression do so in silence. Part of the problem is that they have no friends to whom they can share the burden. So many men carry shame when it comes to depression.

Or we are so clued out of what we’re feeling that we don’t even notice we are depressed until it’s gone on far too long.

Jesus doesn’t go behind closed doors and suffer alone. He is public.

He falls with his face to the ground.

Have you ever been with someone grieving to this degree?

It says a lot about what is happening inside someone emotionally and spiritually. Our posture in prayer says so much.

Jesus is in absolute distress and anguish.

We don’t know what it was like for Jesus in this moment.

**Luke 22:44** says “and being in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood.”

 This is an actual physical condition where the body is under such stress that the capillaries burst and the blood mixes with the sweat gland.

**Pretty intense.**

Jesus is about to absorb every sin that’s ever been committed in human history; genocide, rape, incest, war, murder, anger, unforgiveness, contempt, lust, pride…I mean go down the list.

It’s not just that he’s about to be nailed to a Roman cross, it’s that he’s about to suffer for our sake, so we would never have to.

He’s about to become sin on our behalf so we wouldn’t have to experience the ultimate consequence of sin, which is forever separation from God.

But there’s also the suffering of the loss of friends. He knew his friends would all desert him in his time of need. He knew his friend Judas was about to betray him. He knew he would be absolutely alone.

He’s in anguish. He’s going through huge transition. From this life to the next. From death to resurrection. And it wouldn’t come without a huge fight.

He’s letting go of control.

Eventually Jesus prays, “My Father. If this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done.”

Lord I give up control. I surrender to your good perfect will. I trust you will take care of me. I trust that you will not abandon me to the grave. I trust this isn’t the end. I trust death won’t have the final say.

Did you ever realize that Jesus didn’t get his miracle? God didn’t answer his first prayer, because God had something even better waiting for him…resurrection.

I think we can pray similar prayers in our time of distress can’t we?

Lord, take this cup from me. And often he doesn’t. Often the Father’s response is the same. “No, you will drink the cup.” There’s no way around it.

Often we want our own way in suffering. We want the outcome to look a certain way. But this passage shows us that we can’t control the outcome. We’re not God and we don’t get all our miracles either.

Jesus shows us in this what it’s like to be human. Jesus is fully human and fully God. Yet he walks through and owns his losses. In this way his soul is enlarged through grief and loss.

I so appreciate people like Brene Brown who is talking openly about her coming back to God and that God to her is simply presence in suffering. This idea that God weeps.

I agree with David Gibbons who says one of the reasons why Buddhism is on the rise in North America is that Buddhism isn’t afraid to talk about their pain; the problem of pain.

For Jesus to become more tangible for the outside world we need to become more comfortable talking about and embracing our pain.

Like Jesus going more public with it. To be self aware enough to know when we are grieving, and then to invite others to keep watch with us in it.

**So how do we do this well?**

1. **Listen to the Interruption**

Every time loss comes into our lives it’s an interruption.

It is an interruption, but instead of shutting it down or avoiding it, we need to pause. Pay attention to what God might be doing or saying.

Job is a great example of this.

Job didn’t curse God, but he screamed out his pain – he held nothing back.

Read it. He said things like “May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, ‘ a boy is born! That day may it turn to darkness…the arrows of the almighty are in me, my spirit drinks their poison…”

Pretty honest stuff. No avoiding here. This is embracing his reality.

Not simply quoting “Couldn’t be better, after all, God’s working all things for good, I just can’t see it yet!”

There are really healthy examples of godly people grieving well all through scripture. Yet we seem to go the other way.

One biblical scholar wrote this article entitled “God Damn God: A Reflection on Expressing Anger in Prayer.” He says the Psalms have been called a school of prayer. If this is true then it must be said that Christians in recent years at least have been quite selective in their approach to the curriculum. A significant number of Psalms have been deemed unacceptable for use in worship. These are the cursing or imprecatory psalms.”

We don’t want to wallow or become fatalistic in our pain so we keep our true feelings hidden.

We think that to be like Jesus we have to stuff our hard emotions of irritation, anger, annoyance and hatred. They are sins so we better keep them hidden.”

So as a result we end up leaking bad emotions all over the place.

In public we are all nice and respectable, yet in private we explode. Or our anger shows up is sarcasm, or passive aggressive behaviors or giving the silent treatment.

Instead of hiding, Jesus calls us to pause and sit with the hard emotions. Acknowledge they are there.

This pausing is waiting at the wall isn’t it?

We can be so tempted to try to bypass the suffering, make the pain go away; go shopping, eat more chocolate, watch more TV, drink more, do more Christian service, get busy, exercise more…we all have ways like Abraham, birth our own Ishmaels rather than wait for God’s best.

Waiting at the wall; that confusing middle can be hard. But so key.

**It’s in those moments we come to grips with what it is we are actually grieving.**

**I believe each transition in our lives needs to be grieved.**

Things like…

* **our physical bodies** – we are aging. Getting older. We can’t do what we once were able to do. These things must be grieved. But in embracing my limits, I have to acknowledge that I am not the most gifted athlete. I have strengths; but also weaknesses or limits. With kids, I can’t train for every race…be a world class athlete.
* **Our family of origin** – your family, ethnicity country of origin all gave you gifts and limits. Whether you had two parents or one, or were adopted, all of us enter adulthood with limits we need to embrace. Come to terms with.
* **Our marital status** – both marriage and singleness have limits. There are things you can and cannot do when you are married or when you are single. If you have children, the number of kind of children all shape the kind of limits you have.
* **Our intellectual capacity** – none of us are brilliant in literature, math, engineering, carpentry, physics, music, physical prowess and social skills, all at the same time.
* **Our spiritual gifts** – You may 2-3 or more spiritual gifts but none of us have all the gifts. Some have been given the gift of prophecy; meanwhile you may have been given the gifts of shepherding and mercy. Celebrate what you have been given, and grieve away what you haven’t.
* **Material wealth** – some of us have been given the ability to make money. Some of us not so much. Fact is our resources limit us all. Our level of prosperity limits us. This reality too needs to be grieved.
* **Your raw material** – we all have been given a unique personality and temperament. You are unique. You might be a high feeler. An extrovert. Charismatic. Great skills in some ways, but it has its limits. Likely you are poor organizationally. This limit needs to be embraced. Come to terms with how God made you.
* **Our time** – you only have one life. You can’t do it all. I would like to do so many things but my time is running out. I am limited by stage of life, lack of finances…all these are limits.
* **Our work** – Our work is hard. Always collecting money. Working in the cold and rain. Your work is never finished. Working with people where you can’t control people’s choices, you are often filled with disappointment and slow results. As a pastor I can grieve I didn’t get a trade in order to help makes ends meet. Grieve it away buddy!
* **Our relationships** – relationship won’t be perfect until heaven. We would love a perfect church, perfect house church, perfect pastor, where everyone has the maturity and energy to love one another perfectly but it isn’t going to happen. We must grieve this limit or we will always be dissatisfied, or moving from church to church, or demanding too much from others and always disappointed.
* **And our spiritual understanding** – the secret things belong to the Lord. There are some things you will ever understand. We must leave lots of room for mystery. So much of God is incomprehensible.

**John the Baptist** is a great example of this.

When Jesus came onto the scene and people began leaving John and going to Jesus John replied in **Jn 3:30** “I accept my limits, my humanity, my declining popularity. He must increase. I must decrease.”

Part of spiritual formation, growing up in Christ is helping people accept their limits. And rest in God.

To grow in grace and in humility.

Some people don’t like a weak distressed Jesus. The early church had a group of people called Gnostics who minimized anything physical. They didn’t want a Jesus who was tempted or weak.

The Gnostics preferred to have a Jesus who was above it all.

A triumphalistic Jesus.

The way we often handle pain and loss you’d think that if we were Jesus on the cross, instead of Jesus crying out on the cross, “Father, why have you forsaken me!” we would have Jesus sing the great hymn “Victory in Jesus” or “It is well with my soul.”

We have to be careful we don’t use these statements of faith to bypass our need to grieve well.

The greatest gift we as men can give our boys is what Richard Rohr calls the 5 essential truths of what it means to be truly masculine and spiritual.

* Life is hard
* You are not the centre of the universe
* Your life is not about you
* You are not in control
* You are going to die

Accept your limits.

This is what pausing, waiting in that uncomfortable middle accomplishes. It teaches us so much. Allows us to grow up.

The first step is for us to pause, wait at the interruption; listen to God and to ourselves rather than shove it away or medicate it away. In this way we allow Jesus to grow us up.

**The second step is…**

1. **Learn to Fall.**

The term comes from a small book by **Phillip Simmons** entitled “Learning to Fall”. He was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig’s disease at 35 where you lose bodily control and you end up falling a lot.

So he wrote a book entitled “Learning to Fall”, preparing himself for what life was going to be like for him.

I like the term because learning to grieve and embrace our limits is like learning to fall.

The idea of “falling” flies against the message of western culture where our success is defined by our wins and successes, rather than our losses.

It’s bigger, better, higher; more success, and we think we know how we are going to get there. And it’s not by falling; it’s not by weakness and poverty of spirit.

Christianity is a spirituality of descent, not ascent.

It’s not climbing a ladder of success, but one of descent.

It’s going the way of the cross and a burial, which leads us to a resurrection.

It’s tough.

We find ourselves at the wall and we cry out to God, Lord, I don’t want to go this way. I’m asking for another way, but Lord if it is your will I want it.

There’s something significant that happens at the Wall – where we fall. Wait.

Our stubborn self will can potentially be broken.

I am not talking about breaking your spirit, where you lose something healthy.

I am talking about dying to your self-will.

This need to always be right, be understood, the best, comfortable, safe, in control.

This is one gift parenting can give us. It’s one thing I am learning on a whole new level in our adoption – when I get upset because “I” didn’t get my quiet morning with my coffee, “I” get upset because someone isn’t listening to “Me”, “I” get upset because I was woken up again in the morning, poked and prodded and annoyed, that “I” get upset because I can’t control this kid…

I realize that my self-will is way too in charge.

This is what Falling can give us.

Being humbled…realizing that you don’t have what it takes…that you are weak…and in need of grace.

**Hebrews 5:8** says “although Jesus was a son, he learned obedience by what he suffered.”

If Jesus learned obedience by what he suffered, what makes us so different?

Obedience…by what he suffered. This involves a giving up. Realizing your way isn’t the best way. Learning to trust. Submit. Give up.

Like I said at the last CWG, it’s our self-will that often get’s in the way.

It’s that part of us that fights God. That part of us that makes it impossible to say “Not my will but your will.”

God, you know what’s best. I rest in you.

You can tell someone who has stopped fighting. Who has surrendered? They are at peace. The conflict is over. They can really love well b/c it’s no longer about their needs being met. Not so easily wounded. They can love well.

**I like the fact Jesus prayed this prayer 3X encourages me.**

“If it’s possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.”

Sometimes it’s a fight. We too have to pray these kinds of prayers 3-4X. Or 3,000 X until our self-will finally gives up.

There’s a lot going on in this text. Jesus is coming up against demonic powers; all kinds of temptation. After The Tester tempted Jesus after his baptism, scripture says he left Jesus until an opportune time. This was that time.

But there’s self-will. What he wanted versus what the father wanted.

All we know is that Jesus didn’t automatically obey. He struggled. He wrestled. He fought through.

So do we.

Jesus came to a place of obedience through prayer. That’s where it happened.

This learning to fall; learning to wait at the wall, is counterintuitive. It doesn’t feel right. It feels counter productive.

It’s where we learn all the places where we try to play God. A place where we can begin to let go of that need to control.

I am learning how much I like control. That really all of us to some degree like control.

Controlling life. Controlling people. Controlling what’s going on around us. Controlling even God.

**I am realizing how controlling I am.** How do I know this? In my marriage. I try to fix.

Kenda shares with me how nice it would be if we had a fence in the yard to block the wind; the next day off I’m out there digging fence posts!

At the Wall I hope I am learning that I’m not God. That I can’t fix. That’s up to God.

The sad thing is that many of us go through a crisis; a time of waiting at the Wall and we get up and immediately start trying to fix again.

It shows that I guess we didn’t learn it yet. Lots of self will still alive in us.

**Story: Well known Pastor here on the west coast.**

Tells a story of a phone call he received one day from the wife of a church planter. She let this pastor know that her husband was on the floor weeping; he had come to the end and she didn’t know what to do for him. So she called this pastor up who was his mentor.

He paid him a pastoral visit. He walked in and saw this guy prostrate on the floor, weeping. And what did he do?

He kicked him and proceeded to berate him for being on the floor. Time to get up, and dust yourself off and get going. Church Planters aren’t quitters!

I heard this guy tell this story and I was appalled.

When you find yourself on the floor, that circumstances have brought you to your knees, that’s a good thing. That is where God wants us. Growth and freedom come through accepting our poverty of spirit.

Even when well-intentioned spiritual people try to fix, don’t let them.

Just like Jesus needed close companions, so do we.

People with us that will simply pray with us. Not telling us what to do. Not telling us to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. But helping us discern what good gift God has for you at the Wall.

When we accompany people who are in this place, who have fallen, or at the Wall, don’t pretend that you know what God’s doing. Because fact is, we don’t know.

Accompanying people in their grief is not in your face. The disciples were watching from a distance; so do we need to watch from a distance. Grief and loss is a lonely place. It’s lonely because nobody can grieve for you.

But we still need people with us. People who are present; but not full of words. People that simply cry with us. Lend us their ear.

That’s what this is about isn’t it. Learning to pause and learning to fall is not about causing us to be co-dependant on people, but teach us to learn to depend on God.

Teach us that there’s nowhere else to go.

Our lifeline in these times is prayer. Is silence. Is paying attention to Jesus’ voice. Contemplation.

**I like the words of U2’s Mysterious Ways.**

“Let her talk about the things you can’t explain. To touch is to heal; to hurt is to steal. If you want to touch the sky better learn how to kneel. On your knees boy.”

It’s about prayer. It’s about you and Jesus.

**Communion**