

INTRO:

In this time of covid-19, and for South African's we're in day 52 of lockdown, not all of us are infected but all of us are affected. This can cause stresses and anxieties of our own as well as being anxious for friends and family that are going through great difficulties in this time

I want to speak today on this and on my observation that these anxieties and the difficult time we are in is causing many to go through stages that resembles the 5 stages of grief and loss.

For some it's the unknown factor, not sure of the future, no end goal in sight that cause anxiety... for others they are grieving loss of income, loss of family and social interaction, loss of meaningful routine or in many cases throughout the world, grieving the loss of a loved one.

GRIEVING:

The 5 stages of grief and loss are: **1. Denial; 2. Anger; 3. Bargaining; 4. Depression; 5. Acceptance.** People who are grieving do not necessarily go through the stages in the same order or experience all of them.

Denial: "This isn't happening, this can't be happening," We block out the words and hide from the facts. We start to believe that life is meaningless, and nothing is of any value any longer.

Anger: The anger may be aimed at inanimate objects, complete strangers, friends or family or even God in the form of a lament (I will unpack what I mean by lament in a moment)

Bargaining: The normal reaction to feelings of helplessness and vulnerability is often a need to regain control through a series of "If only" statements. [When my mom died, I felt that "if only I had visited her before she died"] for you it could be "if only I had saved more" or "if only I had a better job". Secretly, we might make a deal with God in an attempt to postpone the inevitable, and the pain that goes with that

Depression: this is dominated by sadness and regret.

Acceptance: we are no longer resisting the reality of our situation, and we are not struggling to make it something different. However, we could still be experiencing sadness.

In reality some might not even recognise that they are going through the grief cycle. However when we begin to understand what many and perhaps including ourselves are experiencing, could be the different stages of the grief cycle or something that resembles it, we will be more understanding of where they are at and will be able to show compassion instead of reacting to them in a defensive manner.

We will also be more able to encourage and come alongside and show empathy. If we understand that we are going through these stages, it also helps us be honest

with God and close ones as to where we are at without feeling ashamed or guilty.

In saying all of this, I do not however want to oversimplify the 5 stages of grief or to imply that every time we feel sad or angry we are in that particular stage of grief it's just that I have, as I said, noticed people going through what resembles the 5 stages brought on by this difficult time.

LAMENT:

In describing the anger stage, I spoke of lament, I love how Professor Soong-Chan Rah describes it in his book Prophetic Lament,

“Laments are prayers of petition rising out of need. But lament is not simply the presentation of a list of complaints, nor merely the expression of sadness over difficult circumstances. **Lament in the Bible is a liturgical response to the reality of suffering and engages God in the context of pain and trouble. The hope of lament is that God would respond to human suffering that is wholeheartedly communicated through lament.**”

So we need to be honest before God as He knows our heart anyway, if we pray a nice religious prayer but in our hearts we are angry, God knows that so just be honest and say “God I am angry”.

Here is an example of a lament found in Habakkuk 1:2-4

How long, Lord, must [we] call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save? Why do you make [us] look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before [us]; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted. Habakkuk 1:2-4

FOCUS:

In these times we are living in, what we focus on is vital, what we focus on will mould our thinking, will either bring peace and hope or rob us of peace and hope.

Paul wrote this about the hardships they were experiencing:

2 Corinthians 4:8-10

⁸We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

Here, through all the hardships, Jesus is the focus

He also wrote in his letter to the Philippians, that they should not be anxious about anything...

Philippians 4:6-8 ESV

Do not be anxious about anything,[what] but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God [how]. And the peace of

God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, [the things we should focus on] whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Colossians 3:1-2

Living as Those Made Alive in Christ

3 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 **Set your minds** on things above, not on earthly things.

CONCLUSION:

Hebrews 12

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, **so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**

St. Patrick - Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger, Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger