

GOOD GRIEF

Kara Lassen Oliver

STUFF YOU WILL NEED

- a large sheet of paper
- markers
- a Bible
- scissors
- construction paper

CHECKING IN

Before you meet together, take a few minutes to be still and to pray. Pray for each person in your group. Open the session with the exercise below, and then talk about the questions that follow.

Before the session, write on a large sheet of paper the poem “Tears of Relief” by Sudha Khristmukti. Post it where everyone can read it.

Tears of Relief

I don't cry much anymore.
In fact, I have to try really hard to cry.
The tears are deep inside,
invisible to the world,
cloaked behind a forced smile
or hidden in dead numbness
as I go through the motions,
trying to follow a daily routine.
But I read in the Bible
that Jesus wept over Jerusalem.
He wept over his friend Lazarus.
He felt the helplessness and loss.
He didn't put up a brave front.
He didn't need to be stoic.
He didn't keep grief bottled up.
He didn't think his tears were a sign of weakness.
He was bereft of words, broken, and blue.
And in his witness of personal, intense, unspoken grief,
in his weeping,
he taught me to let go,

to let the tears flow from my heart,
to admit the blessedness of being human,
to feel the peace and pure relief
of not having to pretend
that it doesn't hurt.

Invite people to take turns reading aloud the lines of the poem. Then discuss these questions:

Which line is most meaningful to you?

What does our culture say about grief? sadness? crying? How does our culture shape the way we express our grief or sadness?

When was the last time you cried? Did you cry alone or with another person?

EXPLORING THE WORD

Scripture: Revelation 21:1–5

Invite the group to reflect on Revelation 21:1–5, using the ancient practice of *lectio divina* or “sacred reading.” If your group is not familiar with *lectio divina*, explain that it is a way of listening to scripture as God’s word to us. Invite people to get into a comfortable position and to close their eyes; then lead them through the exercise.

1. Read slowly and expressively Revelation 21:1–5. Allow a minute of silence.
2. Read the passage again, asking people to listen for a word or phrase that catches their attention and to hold it gently in their mind. Allow a minute of silence. Then invite people to say aloud, without explanation, the word or phrase that stood out for them.
3. Read the passage a third time, asking people to notice an image or picture that forms in their mind as they listen. After a minute of silence, invite people to briefly describe the image that came to mind.
4. Read the passage one last time. Ask people to be in prayer about what God is saying through the word or phrase and the image they have received. After a minute of silence, invite people to talk with one another about their prayers.

SHARING IN PRAYER

Before the session, cut out construction paper teardrops, enough for each person to have two or three. Have available extra teardrops.

Distribute the paper teardrops and markers. Invite people to write on each of their teardrops one or more words about a situation in their lives in which they feel guilt or pain.

When everyone is finished, collect the teardrops, mix them up, and redistribute them.

Read aloud Psalm 30:5b (NRSV): “*Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.*” Then invite people to pray for one another by asking God to turn into joy the grief described on each teardrop they are holding. Conclude the session with a minute of silence; then read again Psalm 30:5b.

TAKING IT FURTHER

This week, find one way to turn grief into good grief.

—**devozine** In the Habit (September/October 2009) Copyrighted © 2009 by The Upper Room[®], All rights reserved.