

Spiritual Formation Society of Arizona
Collective: Spiritual Formation and Grief
Travis Collins

“We say that there ought to be no sorrow, but there is sorrow, and we have to accept and receive ourselves in its fires. If we try to evade sorrow, refusing to deal with it, we are foolish. Sorrow is one of the biggest facts in life, and there is no use in saying it should not be. Sin, sorrow, and suffering are, and it is not for us to say that God has made a mistake in allowing them.

Sorrow removes a great deal of a person’s shallowness, but it does not always make that person better. Suffering either gives me to myself or it destroys me. You cannot find or receive yourself through success, because you lose your head over pride. And you cannot receive yourself through the monotony of daily life, because you give into complaining. The only way to find yourself is in the fires of sorrow. Why it should be this way is immaterial. The fact is that it is true in the scriptures and in human experience. You can always recognize who has been through the fires of sorrow and received himself, and you know you can go to him in your moment of trouble and find that he has plenty of time for you. But if a person has not been through the fires of sorrow, he is apt to be contemptuous, having no respect or time for you, only turning you away. If you will receive yourself in the fires of sorrow, God will make you nourishment for other people.”

- Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

“It is critical to recognize that not simply the hardship, but also our reaction to the hardship is forming us. With each discomfort we experience, our responses both reveal the person we are and set the trajectory for the person we are becoming. Whether we age with grace and poise or become bitter, resentful people is largely determined by our response to disappointment.”

- Jeff Manion, *The Land Between*

1. How do you usually respond to disappointment?

2. What are the negative beliefs about God, yourself or others come up that may keep you from moving towards God in intimacy? (I won’t be okay, I am not enough, I am bad, God is not there for me, This is God’s fault...)

3. Look at the list of common temptations below, then ask the Lord, “Lord, what temptation(s) am I facing in the midst of my loss and grief right now? What temptations do I often fall into?”

Pretend
Protect
Perform
Hopelessness & Despair
Self-fixation
Comparison
Hiding my guilt

Control
Denial
Isolation
Blame
Unwholesome Talk
Condemnation of others
Covering my shame

Self-condemnation
Filling my void
Bitterness
Resentment
Unforgiveness
Unrighteous anger
Victimization

4. What behaviors have these temptations lead you to? What has been a result of these behaviors in your relationships? Sit with God and allow him to show you how these responses to pain, suffering, loss and transition have come up for you in your life? Where are they keeping you from the full and abundant life in Christ? Allow God to reveal your heart, and return it to him as an act of sacrifice and surrender.

“Lamentation names what is wrong, what is out of order in God’s world, what keeps human beings from thriving in all their creative potential. Simple acts of lament expose these conditions, name them, open them to grief and anger and make them visible for remedy.”

- Kathleen O’Connor.

1. Sit and reflect on the word David from Psalms 6:2-9.

2 Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am faint;
heal me, Lord, for my bones are in agony.

3 My soul is in deep anguish.

How long, Lord, how long?

4 Turn, Lord, and deliver me;
save me because of your unfailing love.

5 Among the dead no one proclaims your name.
Who praises you from the grave?

6 I am worn out from my groaning.
All night long I flood my bed with weeping
and drench my couch with tears.

7 My eyes grow weak with sorrow;
they fail because of all my foes.

8 Away from me, all you who do evil,
for the Lord has heard my weeping.

9 The Lord has heard my cry for mercy;
the Lord accepts my prayer.

2. Ask God what particular circumstance or event He is inviting you into right now, breathe deeply and open your heart to Him and allow yourself to be “lead to yourself”.

3. What do you want to say to God about your experience. Find words to express your “death”, trusting that he can handle all of you and is inviting you to be honest *with* him.

4. Ask God to reveal to you what is true. What is true about how He sees you? What is true about how he sees your circumstances? Jesus in Mathew invites all of us who are weary and burdened to come close to him, and he promises to give rest to our souls. Allow the words of your Father to bring rest to your souls.