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Praying our Tears
Psalm 6

*O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger
or discipline me in your wrath.*
² ***Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing;***
*O Lord, **heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror.***
³ *My soul also is struck with terror,*
*while you, O Lord—**how long?***
⁴ *Turn, O Lord, **save my life;***
deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love.
⁵ *For in **death there is no remembrance of you;***
in Sheol who can give you praise?
⁶ *I am **wearry with my moaning;***
every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.
⁷ *My eyes **waste away because of grief;***
they grow weak because of all my foes.
⁸ *Depart from me, all you workers of evil,*
for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping.
⁹ *The Lord has heard my supplication;*
the Lord accepts my prayer.
¹⁰ *All my enemies shall be ashamed and struck with terror;*
they shall turn back and in a moment be put to shame.

There are times when we are blindsided by life—
Like so many of us this week, with the tragic loss of Tim.
Sometimes life hits us like a 2x4 between the eyes,
A tragedy strikes, a life-altering situation comes up,
And it ***changes our lives*** forever.

We do not escape this, even as Christians and followers of Jesus Christ.
We want and hope that if we think the best or act the best,
That only the best will happen to us.
But we know that's not true.
We do not ***escape the brokenness*** of our world.

***I remember the shock of a call from my best friend's parents
When I was a sophomore in college.***

Melinda called to say that my oldest and best friend Nancy,
The friend I met in kindergarten,
The one who lived down the street from me all growing up,
The one I played detective with in the neighborhood,
The one who invited me to my very first VBS....
Had been killed by a drunk driver---
And the driver was a guy who graduated high school with us.
Shock. Total shock.
And anger, and sorrow.

As Pastors, we learn what NOT to say to a grieving person:

*God needed another angel in heaven,
Your beloved is in a better place.*

*This was meant to be,
This is God's will.*

Or the most popular one, the one we all want to believe is true:
Everything happens for a reason.

Here's the problem.

Those are sayings meant to help,
But sometimes they are more helpful to the person saying it
than the person receiving it.

And they ***lead to more questions...***

Like, why does God want this angel?

How is heaven better than leaving a family behind?

How could God cause this tragedy?

My grandfather had abdominal pain diagnosed as gallstones back in 1976.

When they went in to do the surgery, they discovered cancer everywhere.

Liposarcoma.

He died in the hospital, his family at his bedside.

But my **Grandma met with a chaplain** who told her that it was

'his time', God needed him in heaven, and to believe that this was God's will.

You know what she did?

She quit going to church except for weddings and funerals.

That was it.

Later in her life she started reading a Bible again that I gave her,
 But she was not a churchgoer,
 and she told me about that chaplain on many occasions.

That chaplain broke her heart.

One of my favorite authors is Kate Bowler—she is a Duke Divinity Professor.
 And her research is about the ***prosperity gospel***—
 that brand of Christianity that proclaims health and wealth for good people,
 if you just *name it and claim it!*

But here's the problem.

Life is not that simple, is it?

When Kate was in her mid-thirties she had horrible stomach pain for three months.
 She went to the doctor, then another and another.
 They said maybe it's just stress, or just in your head,
 you are a young professor and mother, after all.

Others said it must be your gallbladder—so we'll take that out.
 Eventually she asked for and received a CT scan ...and got a call afterwards.
 "I'm sorry. It's everywhere" they said....*what's everywhere she asked?*
 "The cancer".

She had stage 4 colon cancer.

Kate Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I've Loved*, Random House: NY, 2018,
 pg. 5-6.

She wrote a book about her journey,
 entitled ***Everything Happens for a Reason and Other LIES I've Loved.***
 8 years later, she is alive, and continues to share her insights
 in her great podcast called ***Everything Happens.***
 I can highly recommend her books and podcast.
 She's also written a book entitled ***No Cure For Being Human,***
 and a book of prayers and blessings.

Has anyone ever told YOU that ***"everything happens for a reason"***,
 while you are suffering?
 Have you used that to comfort someone else?
 We often think this way in times of trial and tragedy.
 It sounds like that statement ***SHOULD be comforting, but often it's not.***

Kate Bowler reminds us that everything

does NOT necessarily happen for a reason.

It's an interpretation of **Romans 8:28**, which reads:

We know that all things work together for good^[u] for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

The problem is this:

Paul is saying that **God can bring good OUT of all things**,
NOT that all things happen for a reason, or that all things **ARE** good!

There are some things that are **NOT good, and NOT of God**.

There is **evil and senseless suffering and brokenness** in our fallen world—
Just like we see on the news.

Just like we saw this week with the tragic loss of Tim.

Even Jesus admitted this in Luke 13,

when he said that suffering is not a direct result of sin,
in other words, **there's no formula**. Jesus said:

those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse than all the others living in Jerusalem? No...

So if we don't say that everything happens for a reason,

If we don't believe that---

What DO we believe?

What CAN we do in times of trial?

Well, we CAN cry out to God—with our cries, tears, and anger.

God can handle all of it.

And we can certainly turn to the BIBLE.

What if we turned to the **Psalms** even more?

Like **Psalm 34:18** which says:

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Or what about Psalm 42:

*As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.*

²*My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.*

*When shall I come and behold
the face of God?
³ My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me continually,
“Where is your God?”*

And then there are Psalms like Psalm 6 today, which is so *raw and honest*.

*I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.
⁷ My eyes waste away because of grief;*

When have YOU felt that way?
I know I have.

And you know how grief comes in waves?
Often when you least expect to be knocked over by it all?
The Psalmist understands that, so well.

*Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing;
O Lord, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror.
⁴ Turn, O Lord, save my life;
deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love.*

This is the kind of talk we can have with God—
We can bring our tears and our raw, honest pain to God.
Because God hears.
God responds.
God heals and brings hope.

There’s a beautiful verse about tears in Psalm 56:8:
The Psalmist says to God:
*You have kept count of my tossings;
and **put my tears in your bottle.**
Are they not in your record?*

Think about that image for a moment.
Not one tear falls from our eyes that God doesn’t collect in a bottle.
God sees our pain.

God hears our cries.
 God is with us, no matter what we face.

Today we heard the story of the prophet Elijah,
 Just after he was on the mountaintop, quite literally.
 Elijah had just defeated the pagan prophets of Baal,
 In a contest to see whose God was the real God.
 Naturally the real God showed up bringing fire,
 Lighting even the rain-soaked wood.
 It was an emotional and spiritual ‘high’ for Elijah.

But then the evil Queen Jezebel decided to hunt him down,
 And he took off, running for his life.
 And just like what happens in our lives,
 When we go from the ***top of the mountain*** to the ***bottom of a valley,***
He got depressed.
 Deeply depressed.

He sat down under a tree,
and asked that he might die,
*“It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life,
 for I am no better than my ancestors.”*
⁵ *Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep.*

And what happened after that?
 Did God get upset with him?
 Did God ignore him?
 No--God sent an angel to feed him.
 God heard his cries for help,
 God saw his tears,
 And God responded—with care and provision.
 Just like God responds in our lives, when we are most in need.

We cannot say why bad things happen to good people.
 We cannot say why bad happens, all the time in this world,
 But we can say that ***God is with us in it all.***

Isaiah 43 says that God walks with us through the waters and fires of life,
Do not fear God says....
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.

*When you walk through the fires, they will not consume you.
For I am the Lord your God,
Do not fear, for I am with you.*

Our God loves us so much, that our tears are collected by God.
Not a sorrow goes by without God's notice,
Or God's response.

So we can pray our tears,
Just like we can pray at any time, for any reason.

***Friends, hear the Good News of the Gospel for us today:
God is with us.***
And God keeps our tears in His bottle.
We do not understand the bad things that happen,
But we do know that God is with us, ***through everything that happens.***

May we trust in God's power and presence,
And for the gift of that presence in our lives,
All God's people can say together, Amen.