

CONNECTING WITH GOD THROUGH  
**GROANING**

**A SPIRITUAL TOOLBOX**

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**FOR TIMES OF GRIEF**

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Highlight the statements that are true for you. Ask yourself, *What's my usual way of responding when bad things happen?*

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Browse through these questions and answers aimed at clearing up potential confusion re the self-assessment grid.

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Page 9 ..... **Your turn!**

Read this step-by-step guide designed to help you pray in times of grief. Then, write your own “groaning” and “trusting” prayers.

## Complaining

### Shuts God out of our grief.

- I don't really share my pain, disappointment and doubts with God.
- I vent to other people about my problems, without taking them to my heavenly Father.

### Doesn't trust in God's strength.

- I expect other people to carry me through adversity, and I get very upset when they disappoint me.
- I forget that God both *wants* and *is able* to help me.

### Is not helpful for us *or* others.

- I forget to have a thankful heart.
- I don't feel much joy.
- When chatting with my friends/family, I talk a lot about my own frustrations without first considering how I might use my words to build others up.

## Groaning

### Invites God into our grief.

- I take my pain, disappointment and doubts directly to God.
- I pour out my heart to my heavenly Father, and ask him to fill me with comfort, peace and endurance.

### Trusts in God's strength.

- I look to God for strength. I lean heavily on him during adversity, as well as sharing with friends/family – when they're ready to listen.
- I know that God both *wants* and *is able* to help me.

### Is helpful for us *and* others.

- When I take my burdens to God, and thank him for his constant love, I'm filled with a peace and a joy that don't depend on my circumstances.
- I feel genuine compassion for people who are suffering. I pray for strength to extend God's comfort to others.

## Burying

### Shuts God out of our grief.

- I don't really share my pain, disappointment and doubts with God.
- I try to solve my problems alone, internally, without taking them to my heavenly Father.

### Doesn't trust in God's strength.

- I rely heavily on myself and my own strength to cope with adversity
- I forget that God both *wants* and *is able* to help me.

### Is not helpful for us *or* others.

- I feel numb or panicky in my quiet moments, so I try to keep busy.
- I find it hard to admit weakness, even with trusted friends/family.
- I'm not too patient when supporting others through grief. I just want them to "buck up" and move on!

## Complaining column

**Q: But aren't we meant to rely on other people to carry us through tough times? Isn't that what love is about?**

Yes! We *are* meant to carry each other's burdens. Galatians 6:2 says: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

But when we rely *solely* on other people, we will most definitely be let down, because people aren't perfect. They can't always be there for us in the ways that we need. Notice a couple of verses later, in Galatians 6:5, it says: "... for each one should carry their own load"

**Ultimately, we are responsible for carrying our own load of grief, with God's help.** No-one else can do it for us... We need to seek God with all our hearts, lean on him, and ask *him* to carry us when we are broken. (Matt 6:33-34)

One of the most helpful pieces I've ever read on this topic is here: [desiringgod.org/articles/the-loneliness-of-suffering](http://desiringgod.org/articles/the-loneliness-of-suffering). (If the hyperlink doesn't work, type "desiring god the loneliness of suffering" into Google.) It was a real breakthrough for me, this article. I hope it helps you too!

**Q: So, are you saying that venting to other people is wrong?**

It's a precious gift to have people you can be "real" with, and it's certainly not wrong to be raw and open with a handful of close family or friends. But problems can occur if you *only ever* go to other people, and forget to pour out your heart to God. Why?

### 1. God never grows weary; people do!!!

Isaiah 40:28-29 says,

*Have you never heard?*

*Have you never understood?*

*The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of all the earth.*

*He never grows weak or weary.*

*No one can measure the depths of his understanding.*

*He gives power to the weak  
and strength to the powerless.*

**God wants us to come to him first because he knows he's the only one who can carry our burdens the way we need them to be carried.** He knows people are not equipped to carry our burdens in the way that only he can: tirelessly, unconditionally, and endlessly. (Matt 11:28-30)

## 2. There's also the practical side of things.

If you tend to emotionally dump on friends/family, it can become overwhelming for them. The sad reality is, we can end up pushing people away when we vent too often — leaving us *even more* isolated than before.

Think about it this way: How can we live a life of love (the foundation of the Christian life) if we're constantly consumed by our own problems, to the point where other people's needs are not even a blip on our radar? 1 Corinthians 13:4-5 says, "Love is patient, love is kind... It is not self-seeking."

To sum up, please keep being real with your close friends and family. I'm certainly not suggesting that you freak out about being a burden, and pull back completely from all close relationships in your life!

All I'm trying to say is: watch how you relate to people. If you do tend to vent a lot, stop and think: **How can I consider the needs of others *as well as* thinking about my own needs?**

*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (Eph 4:29)*

If you struggle with these things, please talk to a counsellor, or a pastor at your church. There's a limit to how much I can help you from the other side of this screen! Plus, I'm not a trained counsellor or pastor; I'm just someone who's travelled this path before you, and that's how I know about these things.

I struggled for many years. I used to vent to anyone who would listen! I was dealing with major issues at the time (post-traumatic stress) and I just couldn't contain my emotions.

Looking back, I can see how I pushed more than one close friend away... and that only increased my sense of isolation, sadly. It was a destructive cycle.

Thankfully, with the help of my counsellor, I managed to work through these traumas over several years. Now, I'm free – free to love others, because I'm no longer drowning in my own emotions.

If you struggle to contain your emotions, to the point where you're unable to consider the needs of others, please seek help. It can make a world of difference. God has gifted many people with the ability to counsel you through your grief. Reach out!

## Groaning column

**Q: I take my weakness to God, and I look to him for strength... But I don't have much strength to care for other people who are in pain. Is that bad??**

If you had just broken both legs, you wouldn't expect yourself to climb up ladders at the church working bee next weekend, would you?! Same goes for grief. For a little while it's all-consuming, and that's normal.

If you've always been an active, helpful person, it can be excruciating to sit on the side-lines. And it's easy to get tangled up in guilt over the fact that you're not *giving* and *servicing* like you used to do. God can teach you about his grace like never before through these times. Don't despair! (2 Cor 12:9)

Once your grief settles (could be weeks, months, or years — it's different for each person), *then* you'll have strength to care for others again. It may look different to before. God may even give you a new type of ministry as a result of your grief!

Think of a tree that's been pruned. It's all stumpy and bare. But when the new shoots grow, fruit will appear — fruit that can nourish others. Be reassured, God is able to make those bare branches of yours fruitful again... in *his* time.

It's a good idea to get help from a grief counsellor sooner rather than later. When you work through grief actively and intentionally, its impact and duration can be reduced.

**Q: I'm not always filled with peace and joy. Is this a sign that I'm not *truly* trusting in God?**

This is a tricky one. The answer is: it can be a *Yes*, but it's also quite possibly a *No*. Let me explain: I've lived with Major Depressive Disorder and General Anxiety Disorder for over half my life. Both conditions are well managed these days, with the help of medication and therapy. But, honestly, joy and peace are not always bubbling forth from *this* spring — even when I *am* trusting in God with all my heart!!

Let me say this, though: When I remember to pray and groan to God, my anxiety *does* lessen, leaving room for God's "peace that passes understanding." (Phil 4:7) **That edgy feeling may not completely disappear, but it does subside.**

And when I cling to the Cross, fixing my eyes on the things above (Col 3:1-2), my soul *does* get filled with an inexplicable joy. In Jesus, I have a sense of purpose and belonging, even when bedbound and alone. **This is not always a happy feeling for me. But it is a sense of joy — real joy — nevertheless. A joy that no unpleasant circumstance can take away from me.**

## Burying column

**Q: I've never been the type to talk about my problems; I prefer to keep my thoughts to myself... How can I share my pain with God if I don't really have any words for my feelings?**

If you find it difficult to put words to your feelings, perhaps you could try **listening to worship music?** It's something you can do while you drive, walk, cook, eat, or just lie there feeling numb. The lyrics can be your prayers when you don't have many (or any) words of your own.

Also, remember that **your prayers don't have to be long when you groan to God.** One sentence is enough for my husband to tell me how he's feeling – he's a man of few words (which I more than make up for!!). Interestingly, his prayers tend to be shorter too, and that's OK! Remember what Jesus said, just before teaching his disciples the Lord's Prayer?

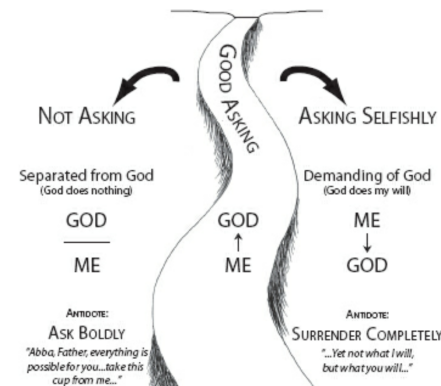
*And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (Matt 6:7-8)*

It's not how many words you say that matters; it's what's in your heart that counts – your childlike dependence on God.

## “Good Asking”

The diagram below is from a wonderfully helpful book that I read recently, called *A Praying Life*, by Paul E. Miller. Over the next few pages we'll be looking at balancing our prayers by BOTH *groaning* AND *trusting*. Most of us find one aspect easier than the other, so we tend to focus just on that. But we need to do both!

**Groaning without trusting** can leave us drowning in the hopelessness of our sorrow, whereas **trusting without groaning** can leave us feeling spiritually numb and distant from God.



I think this diagram captures the balancing act really well, even though it wasn't designed specifically for the topic of grief. So, have a good look at it before moving to the next page. (Apologies for the poor image quality; it's the best I could do.)

## Groaning Prayers from the Bible

### Jesus' Prayer, Mark 14:34-36

*"My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." He went on a little farther and fell to the ground. He prayed that, if it were possible, the awful hour awaiting him might pass him by. "Abba, Father," he cried out, "everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."*

#### 1. GROANING

How did Jesus look *inward* – crying out to God in distress?

#### 2. TRUSTING

How did Jesus look *upward* – yielding to God, remembering God's faithfulness?

### Prayers in the Psalms

- Psalm 77
- Psalm 102
- Psalm 142

Pick one of the psalms above. How did the psalm writer:

- (1) Groan in their distress;
- (2) Trust in God's faithfulness?

#### 1. GROANING

Looking *inward* – crying out to God in distress.

#### 2. TRUSTING

Looking *upward* – yielding to God, remembering God's faithfulness.



## My Prayer, Part 1 - GROANING

→ Looking *inward*. Taking my distress to God.

I'm sad/angry/confused/scared...

I don't understand...

I wish...

It doesn't seem fair...

Why...?

How long...?

*Guide for a "groaning" prayer, in which you speak your true feelings to God, even the not-so-lovely ones!!!*

## My Prayer, Part 2 - TRUSTING

→ Looking *upward*. Yielding. Remembering.

**But I know that...**

*Focus on God's character: He is good, loving, faithful, patient, etc.*

**... and I trust that...**

*Focus on God's "big picture" plan, revealed to us in passages like Rom 8:18-39, Eph 1:3-23, Col 1:9-21.*

**Thank you for...**

*Focus on God's good gifts that can never be taken away, e.g. Jesus' sacrifice for us; his promise to always be with us, no matter what; God's plan to make us more like Jesus through our struggles; the wonderful future he has in store for us in heaven.*

**Please help me!**

*We all need help trusting and remembering who God is — letting **this** beautiful reality rule in our hearts, so that our immediate circumstances won't have the last word!*

*Ideas for a "trusting" prayer, in which you remember how great and loving God is.*

## My Prayer, Part 1 - GROANING

→ Looking *inward*. Taking my distress to God.

I'm sad/angry/confused/scared...

I don't understand...

I wish...

It doesn't seem fair...

Why...?

How long...?

*Write your own "groaning" prayer, in which you speak your true feelings to God, even the not-so-lovely ones!!!*

## My Prayer, Part 2 - TRUSTING

→ Looking *upward*. Yielding. Remembering.

But I know that...

... and I trust that...

Thank you for...

Please help me!

*Write your own "trusting" prayer, in which you remember how great and loving God is.*