



# A Time to Mourn: Ecclesiastes 3:4

By Mary Hasty

## A Bible Study on Grief and Relationships

### Opening Prayer

*Holy Spirit, bless this study of Your Word. Comfort those who mourn. Amen.*

It's a message every parent fears, whatever the age of his or her child: "Mom, I don't feel well." In my case, these were the words, "Mom, I have leukemia, acute lymphocytic leukemia." That was the beginning of 21 months of roller coaster feelings, hopes, and fears. Our son was 32, married, and the father of a two-year-old son. After some research, we learned his type of this disease was rare, aggressive, and hard to treat. His oncologist had heard of a new treatment method from Germany that showed promise. There followed five months of intensive treatment. We prayed that it would succeed and our son would live to be with his family. Finally, it looked like that had happened. He was free of any sign of leukemia. We rejoiced and thanked God. But, it was not to last.

We cannot read the Bible without hearing about grief. The writer of **Ecclesiastes 3:4** tells us that there is a time to weep and a time to mourn. It is a fact of life. The Old Testament has many references to grief and the way that people mourned.

In **2 Samuel 14:2**, a woman is instructed how to act as if she is in mourning. What is she instructed to do? **2 Samuel 1:11–12**, **2 Samuel 3:31–35**, and **2 Samuel 18:33–19:4** describe David mourning for Saul

and Jonathan, for Abner, and for his son Absalom. What are some of the mourning behaviors mentioned? \_\_\_\_\_

**Genesis 37:34** describes Jacob mourning for the son he believes to be lost. How does he display his grief? \_\_\_\_\_

The Old Testament prophets grieved over the sins of God's people. See **Ezra 9:3**. How did he show grief? \_\_\_\_\_

Certain mourning behaviors were prohibited in the Old Testament. What were they? See **Leviticus 19:28** and **Deuteronomy 14:1**. \_\_\_\_\_

Within a few months, my son was having symptoms again. It took awhile for the leukemia cells to appear. So, we hoped and prayed, but the relapse was finally diagnosed. I retired early from my job and went across the country to be with my son and his family. My husband followed a few months later. I wanted to argue with God that surely He did not intend to take this young man from his wife and child. Four words from Jesus continued to encourage me: "Fear not, only believe." (See **Mark 5:36** ASV.) We were told my son's only chance was to try a stem cell transplant, and it

was not a very good chance. His nurses seemed to be hinting that he and his wife should take what time they had and enjoy it. Whenever I waited in the hospital hall, I would watch the nurses' faces as they left his room. Their smiles would turn to sadness.

My son and his wife decided to take the one chance and have the transplant. Again, we hoped and prayed. After an anxious wait, a suitable bone marrow donor was found. Then began the process of killing our son's own immune system to prepare him for the new cells.

In the New Testament, there is another example of mourning. It was a common practice to hire flute players and mourners. See **Matthew 9:23**. Why do you think they would do that? \_\_\_\_\_

Do people today show grief in the same ways or different ways from those in the Bible? Explain. \_\_\_\_\_

Have you noticed that Christians grieve differently from non-Christians? Describe what you have observed. \_\_\_\_\_

Do you believe grief for a beloved person ever ends? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

Read **2 Samuel 12:15–23**. What did David do when he learned his child had died? \_\_\_\_\_

Does this mean he stopped grieving? Explain your answer. \_\_\_\_\_

What was David's comfort as he grieved? \_\_\_\_\_

What does David's behavior say about how believers should grieve? \_\_\_\_\_

Sadness, anger, guilt, and fear are all common feelings involved in grieving. Why might each be present? \_\_\_\_\_

**T**his procedure involved a transfer to a bigger hospital, a little farther from their home. A room at a motel became our home and, at the end, the Ronald McDonald House became the home for other family members. The transplant itself was the easy part. The difficult part was the harsh toll the preparation of chemotherapy and radiation had taken on his body. Gradually, our son's vital organs failed. In the last days he was put into a medically induced coma to try to help his body. We took turns with him in the Medical Intensive Care Unit. We prayed out loud, sang hymns, played jazz, which he loved, and read aloud books he enjoyed. We hoped he could hear how much we loved him and that he was reminded God loved him too.

Read **John 11:17–37**. Do Martha's words in verse **21** sound like she might have been a little angry? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

Read verse **37**. What might these people have been feeling? \_\_\_\_\_

Read verse **35**. What might Jesus have been feeling? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

Why might Martha and Mary have felt fear because of the death of their brother? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever felt anger or fear after a loved one died? \_\_\_\_\_ Did you feel guilty about having that feeling? \_\_\_\_\_ Should you? \_\_\_\_\_ Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

Why might some people feel guilt after the death of a loved one? \_\_\_\_\_

Because of Jesus, our sins are forgiven, including those we commit as we grieve. See **1 John 2:12**. What is the comfort you find there? \_\_\_\_\_

Why do you think people say to those who are grieving to "get over it"? \_\_\_\_\_

Might there be an appropriate time to say it? Explain your answer. \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, how would you say it in a loving way? \_\_\_\_\_

People in the Bible, including Jesus, openly expressed grief. It can be hurtful to us to suppress or deny grief. On the other hand, if extreme grief continues and becomes disabling, professional help may be needed — from a Christian counselor, if possible.

Read **Jeremiah 31:13**. What does God promise? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the encouragement in **1 Thesalonians 4:13–18**? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the promise in **Revelation 21:4**? \_\_\_\_\_

Amen! So be it. To God be the glory in all things.

**H**e believed in Jesus as his Savior. He told me once that he was not afraid to die. He said he would mostly feel sad about leaving us behind. I had also asked if he ever thought, "Why me?" He answered, "Why not me?" On his last day on this earth, our family and his pastor stood around his bed as his vital signs slowly flat-lined. The words from **Psalm 23:4** and **Psalm 16:8–11** brought comfort. Through the ten years since his death, our grief has been tempered by the knowledge that his soul is with our Lord and that same Lord will raise his body and we will see him one day. Do we still have moments of grief? Oh, yes! Sometimes the feelings hit so suddenly and hard, it seems he left us just yesterday. Most of the time we remember him with gladness, and grief is in the background. We learned about all the feelings in grief: sadness, anger, guilt, and fear. They are all normal and they fade in time.

Before I had children, I thought the death of a child was the worst thing that could happen to a parent. Now I know the worst thing would be to suffer the loss of a beloved child without the Lord Jesus at your side. Surely, it is true: *blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted* (**Matthew 5:4**).

### Closing Prayer

*Thank You for Your Word, Lord, Your Living Word — our help, our comfort, and our peace. Amen.*

*Mary Hasty, a member of Peace Lutheran Church, Conway, Arkansas, is a retired licensed certified social worker and an active volunteer at a local domestic violence shelter for women. Mary has authored material for women's retreats and has served as a writer, director, and performer for a puppet ministry.*