

OUT OF THE DARKNESS GROUP QUESTIONS

Questions for Harold Senkbeil's *Christ and Calamity* and content produced
by Christ's Church of Amherst

Session 1: Out of the Darkness

“When Darkness Ends the Song - Psalm 88”

[Video Link](#)

Big Idea: God is inclining his ear, listening to our pain and possibly getting ready to act when we are at the end of our rope.

Group Goal: Reflect on some ways God might be active in our disappointments even when he feels far away.

Facilitator Goal: Select the four questions that will best help your community accomplish the group goal above. You may use the following questions or come up with your own questions. Watch the clock and give adequate time to discuss these, filling in extra time with additional questions.

Warm-Up Questions

- When you think about a season of personal darkness, what comes to mind?
- What did your relationship with God look like during that season of darkness?
- Tell us about a time when you felt distant from God.

Read Psalm 88 Together

Lesson Questions

- Reactions
 - What kind of feelings does this psalm stir in you?
 - What kind of questions does the psalm raise?
 - Why do you think God would pass down a psalm to us that ends so bleakly?
- Discouragement in the midst of darkness

- Tell us about people’s failed attempts at encouragement during one of your darkest times?¹
- Why is it so difficult to encourage well when people are in the midst of some tragedy or disruption?
- Misunderstanding in the midst of pain
 - **Was the psalmist right to blame God?**
 - Have you ever felt like God is punishing you for something (even when you didn’t know what he’d be punishing you for)?
 - **What are ways some pain, setback or disappointment has caused you to stretch your understanding of God?**
- Praying that God might be praised
 - How would you explain God’s desire to glorify himself to someone who’s never read the Bible?
 - **What value might there be in praying that God might be praised?**²
 - Can you think of another famous prayer that does something similar?³
- **Does God sometimes withhold his “felt-presence” from us in the midst of our suffering?⁴ Explain.**
- Prayer as a lifeline
 - Why is it important to distinguish between God’s listening to our prayers and his answering them?
 - What would you say to someone struggling with prayer during some difficult circumstance?
 - **Our psalmist seems to be crying out to God after a series of unanswered prayers. Why would prayer be worth considering when it appears that God is reluctant to act?**
- God’s help
 - What are some ways you experienced God’s help in a time of darkness?

¹ Possible answers: “It’s going to get better.” “She’s in a better place.” “Someday, you’ll look back at this and laugh”

² One possible answer: It may help ground our prayers in other-centered motives.

³ “Hallowed by your name” in the Lord’s Prayer is at its heart a request that God might be honored and glorified.

⁴ This is an open-ended question. Some might say yes. Others might say that his withholding is only perceived.

- **Have you ever found God to be active in surprising ways during some hardship after that season had concluded? Explain.**
- **What can you do this week to re-engage God through prayer in some area of disappointment? How can this group help support you?**

Prayer doesn't always have to end on a hopeful note. The honest, raw prayer that the psalmist offers shows us that God creates space for our messy selves in some of our hardest places. Spend a few moments crying out to God to meet the needs of your group especially in the hour of desperation.

Session 2: Out of the Darkness

Christ & Calamity, Chapters 1-4

Big Idea: We experience Christ's faithfulness, comfort and advocacy when we **think of his faithfulness**, lament and identify with his sufferings.

Group Goal: Consider ways Christ *has been* faithful to you, ways Christ *is being* faithful to you in the midst of your suffering and ways Christ *will be* faithful to you afterward.

Facilitator Goal: Select the four questions that will best help your community accomplish the group goal above. You may use the following questions or come up with your own questions. Watch the clock and give adequate time to discuss these, filling in extra time with additional questions.

Special Note: The questions below have been arranged by chapter. But we have emphasized questions below that may better accomplish your group goal above using **bold** in order to focus on a single theme each session that avoids an overlap in conversation between weeks.

Warm-Up Questions

- Imagine that you lived in a world without calamity...
 - What kind of person would you be?
 - How might your relationship with God look different?
 - What role would hope play in your life?

Lesson Questions

I Your Calamity

- Senkbeil (pronounced: SENK-beel) describes faith as “trusting God for help when you can’t detect any available remedy.”
 - Tell us about a time when you couldn’t see a solution to a problem in front of you.
- The author cites C.S. Lewis who wrote: “Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”
 - **Do you find it easy or difficult to hear what God is saying in the midst of pain?**
 - **What kind of things might God speak to us in our pain?**
- In the book of Joshua, the Israelites take their first steps into the promised land. God gives them instructions for what is to follow as they approach and tells them why in a seemingly innocuous statement: “you have never been this way before” (Joshua 3:4).
 - We take great security in knowing what’s coming before us. Was there a time in your life when something shifted dramatically and you no longer knew the way ahead?
 - Why do you think we often find Jesus “gently” chiding (as Senkbeil) the disciples about their fear and lack of faith when they face similar situations?
- How would you respond to someone who says that they simply do not have enough faith in the face of their calamity?
- Senkbeil writes that **God’s “remedy may not match our expectations.”**
 - What is your reaction to that?
 - **When have you found this to be true?**
 - **Why might this be comforting?**

II When You Are Faithless, Christ Is Your Faithfulness

- In an refreshingly open statement, Senkbeil writes: “I have lived as if God did not matter and as if I mattered most. My Lord’s name I have

not honored as I should; my worship and prayers have faltered. I have not let his love have its way with me, and so my love for others has failed. There are those whom I have hurt and those I have failed to help. My thoughts and desires have been soiled with sin.” He continues by saying that even though faith is not a feeling, our experience of faith fluctuates throughout the day like our emotions.

- **How might we keep from being discouraged when our faith fluctuates?**
- How might the failings of Jesus' first followers bring us perspective?
- **What are some ways God has shown his faithfulness to you?**
- **What can you do to free yourself from the “continual teeter-totter of faith’s emotional roller coaster?”** How can this group help you with that?

III When You Cry Out, Christ Is Your Advocate

- Does all “misery come from the gracious hand” of God? How do you make sense of the following challenging texts:
 - See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.” (Deuteronomy 32:39)
 - “The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For ‘God has put all things in subjection under his feet.’” (1 Corinthians 15:26-27)
- Lament has become a popular term for public responses to social justice. But in biblical times, lament was often very personal. Consider the following verses that express lament. How do the following questions differ from the question, “Why me, God?”
 - “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Psalm 22)
 - “Oh God, why do you cast us off forever?” (Psalm 74)
 - “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?” (Psalm 42)
 - “Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people” (Psalm 43)
- Why is it so easy to feel like God is angry at us when we go through pain?

- How does a medical complaint help us to understand the kind of complaint we see people express toward God in the psalms?⁵
- **How might lament grow our faith?**⁶
- Explain why God abandoning Jesus at the cross is a promise that we will never be abandoned.⁷
- What can you do to create more space in your life for lament? How can this group help you with that?

IV When You Are Afflicted, Christ is Your Comfort

- Have you ever been strengthened in the midst of suffering knowing there was some kind of purpose for that suffering?
- Why is purposeless suffering so much more difficult than suffering for some gain?
- How did Jesus find joy in the midst of his suffering?
- What does Senkbeil mean when he says we “can find joy in suffering--provided it is wrapped in the suffering of Jesus”?⁸
- The Apostle Paul writes, “For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too” (2 Corinthians 1:5). How does our sharing in Christ’s sufferings enable us to also share in his comfort?
- **If Christian suffering isn’t purposeless, how would you describe its purpose to someone new to the faith?**⁹
- How is Christian comfort different from the resolution of pain?
- What can you do to receive Christian comfort and extend it like Jesus did? How can this group help you?

⁵ Medical complaints are explanations of where something hurts.

⁶ Senkbeil claims that it forces us to acknowledge that we are not self-made people. Calamity impresses that dependence on us and brings us to lament.

⁷ Senkbeil writes that God loves us for Jesus’ sake in speaking about his “cross-shaped love.” Jesus’ sacrifice is a sure guarantee that he will not abandon us because our sin is paid for and he only sees Christ when he sees those who have put their trust in him.

⁸ Christian suffering does not pay for the sins of others like Jesus’ suffering did. But suffering is your personal link to Jesus (Col 1:24).

⁹ Senkbeil stresses that comfort does not necessarily make pain go away, but it does sustain us. The comfort we receive in Christ binds us closer to him. Our pain helps us to identify with him and draw closer to him in our need.

Session 3: Out of the Darkness

Christ & Calamity, Chapters 5-8

Big Idea: We experience closeness to Christ, his help, his transforming joy and his faithfulness when we **accept difficult paths**, look to him for care, meditate on his word and believe in him when we cannot see.

Group Goal: Consider some ways suffering might be thought of as an opportunity for something better.

Facilitator Goal: Select the four questions that will best help your community accomplish the group goal above. You may use the following questions or come up with your own questions. Watch the clock and give adequate time to discuss these, filling in extra time with additional questions.

Special Note: The questions below have been arranged by chapter. But we have emphasized questions below that may better accomplish your group goal above using **bold** in order to focus on a single theme each session that avoids an overlap in conversation between weeks.

Warm-Up Questions

- What's an area of your life that you'd find particularly challenging to turn over to Jesus if he asked you to give it up?

Lesson Questions

V When You Bear Your Cross, Christ is Your King

- What does it mean when Jesus invites his disciples to deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow him?
- In chapter five, Senkbeil (pronounced: SENK-beel) observes that “If we were to continue merrily along, indulging our selfish inclinations, we would find ourselves not only alienated from those we love but estranged from God himself.” **How can the crosses that we bear or the “tight spots” he puts us in remedy breaks in those relationships?**
- **In what ways do hardships help us see what matters most in life?**
- What would you say to encourage someone that the way of the cross though “frequently frightening” is better?

VI When You Are Weak, Christ is Your Strength

- Jesus taught that not even one sparrow will fall to the ground without God noticing (Matthew 10:29). How can we make sense of God’s care during the days calamity upon calamity seem to pile upon us?
- **In chapter six, Senkbeil discussed the problem of evil, saying “ultimately, you don’t solve suffering--you endure it.” What’s your reaction to his statement?**
- **Why might “deemphasizing pain or diluting suffering” be the wrong approach for Christians?¹⁰**
- How do you feel about the claims of some Christians who say we should avoid medical relief in moments of pain such as the use of antidepressants?
- **Is there a time and a place where Christians should accept pain without turning to physical remedies?**
- The book of Lamentations is an expression of grief over the suffering brought on by God after Israel had severely disobeyed him time after time. In its middle we find a moment of reprieve: “Though he cause

¹⁰ Be open to different answers. Senkbeil says, “We ought never call evil good any more than we would call good evil.”

grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men” (Lamentations 3:32–33). **The NET version translates verse 33 as follows: “For he is not predisposed to afflict or to grieve people.” What does that tell us about God?**¹¹

- Read Hebrews 4:15-16. Why can we have confidence that Jesus will help us when we are weak and at our rope’s end?
- **What are some ways we can remind ourselves that God is present in the middle of our affliction?** How can this group help each other with that?

VII When You Are Sad, Christ Is Your Joy

- In chapter seven, Senkbeil describes a marked difference between what the words of people do and what the word of God does. The first describes. The second creates. **Why is that significant when we are looking for joy in the midst of our sadness?**
- How can self-talk end up making a person’s sadness worse?
- Senkbeil brought up John 14:27 as a verse that is transformative: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” Spend a few moments finding some verses from God’s word that create joy in the midst of sadness.
- Christians can easily fall into the trap of masking their sorrow instead of allowing God to bring inner joy. What’s the cost of doing it this way?
- What’s a good way to approach meditation on God’s word? What pitfalls might one avoid?
- Senkbeil calls trials God’s testing program. **What have you learned from people in your life who test positive for faith after having gone through some difficult trial?**
- **Read James 1:2-4. What would it take for you to be able to look at a trial with joy because of the opportunity it brings?** How can

¹¹ Though grief may come to those who disobey, that’s not his desire.

this group help you?

VIII When You Are in Darkness, Christ Is Your Light

- In chapter eight, Senkbeil says that in our darkest times, faith hangs by a thread. “Yet faith is faith, and if you believe in Jesus in those darkest valleys of your distress, you are blessed. Jesus said so himself!” **What does he mean when he says faith is faith?**
- Have you ever gone through a season where you experienced extreme heart-break and your mind was on overload? How did you navigate some of the darkness spiritually?
- Describe what it’s like to live in the space between faith and doubt where you wonder if God is even there to hear you but you cling to the truth that your darkness is not too dark for him.
- **Someone who was worried about an upcoming life change once admitted, “I’m afraid to hope.” What are some ways we can remind ourselves that Jesus has not abandoned us even in our darkest hour?** How can this group help you?

Session 4: Out of the Darkness

Christ & Calamity, Chapters 9-11

Big Idea: We experience life and victory in Christ in the face of darkness when we spend time in God's Word, reflect on the life beyond and **give thanks for all God gives us.**

Group Goal: Imagine some ways thankfulness can change your life especially in seasons of great difficulty.

Facilitator Goal: Select the four questions that will best help your community accomplish the group goal above. You may use the following questions or come up with your own questions. Watch the clock and give adequate time to discuss these, filling in extra time with additional questions.

Special Note: The questions below have been arranged by chapter. But we have emphasized questions below that may better accomplish your group goal above using **bold** in order to focus on a single theme each session that avoids an overlap in conversation between weeks.

Warm-Up Questions

- Death and loss is not something our culture likes to consider much. When it comes unexpectedly, it often feels like an unwelcome intruder. Describe some sudden loss you experienced. What kind of emotions did it invoke?

Lesson Questions

IX When You Are Alone, Christ Is With You

- We can be around a lot of people and still feel lonely. Some people feel lonely at work. Others feel lonely in their marriage. Others feel lonely in their singleness. What triggers loneliness in you?
- What would you say in response to someone who felt abandoned by God in their loneliness? How can Christians talk about friendship with God when Jesus left them to wait?
- In chapter nine, Senkbeil (pronounced: SENK-beel) writes: “Instead of retreating into your head to cope with misery, you need to get out of yourself. In stressful times fears and doubts cycle endlessly through our minds in a continuous loop of anxiety and distress.” **In what ways can you relate to that statement? What do we need to do to get out of our heads?**
- Senkbeil points to Romans 10:17 when we are struggling with the faith to believe God has not abandoned us to bide our time on this earth: “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” Based on this, how can Christians cultivate their faith in a God who is with them?
- **What are some things you can change in your life to take in the words of Jesus each day?** How can your group help you?

X When You Are Dying, Christ Is Your Life

- The Bible seems very comfortable with conversations about death. Why don't we talk about it more? How might one bring up these conversations with elderly parents, children and even grandchildren?
- In contrast to those who speak about “death with dignity,” Senkbeil calls death “the ultimate indignation” - a division between body and soul. How can we recognize the bad that death brings all while humanizing the dying process?
- So many people conceptualize life after death as a bodiless existence. And that's true to the teachings of many religions. But not so with Christianity. **What's at stake in the Christian belief about the final resurrection?**¹²

¹² Examples: The goodness of God in creating our bodies. The value of our bodies even if we don't always like them. The hope that eternity will have more to offer and not less.

- Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15 that Christ appeared to over five hundred people after he was raised from the dead. His death passes the test of eye-witness evidence. And so does his resurrection. Why is that significant for our own hope of eternal life?
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:8. How might this encourage someone who is afraid of dying alone?
- Senkbeil offered a daily analogy for us to consider death. “To help us get ready, we have a dress rehearsal every night as we lie down to sleep in anticipation of rising in the morning.” He continues prayerfully, “Teach me to live that I may dread the grave as little as my bed. Teach me to die that so I may Rise glorious on that awefull day.” **What are some ways we can remind ourselves of the shortness of life and the promise of what’s to come?** How can this group help with that?

XI Christ Is Your Victory

- In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus pointed to the birds to show how God cares for the little things and to ease our anxiety about the future. **What are some other ways in nature God has shown his care?**
- **How would you encourage the meticulous planner to trust in God’s care for tomorrow?**
- In chapter 11, Senkbeil writes that “Thankful prayer will help you too through your darkest days and deepest valleys.” **What is it about thankful prayer modeled by Jesus and his disciples that helps us through them?**
- In Philippians 4:5-7 Paul tells the anxious soul that prayer requests should be accompanied by thanksgiving. **In the midst of trauma, how can gratitude possibly precede a resolution to the problem?**
- What are some of the blessings God has given you that most often slip through the cracks of your prayers of thanks?
- What do you think eternity will be like?
- **What are some examples of things on this earth that we must suffer a little for in order to obtain a significant good at the other end?**

- **Is it ever reasonable to thank God for suffering? Explain.**
- **What are some steps we can take to awaken and nurture a thankful spirit that's strong enough to endure the most difficult seasons? How can this group help you do that?**

Session 5: Out of the Darkness

Pain and the Plan of God: The Book of Job

Video Link

Big Idea: God is fair even in our suffering because our praise in the midst of pain is a part of his mysterious plan to make a broken world right.

Group Goal: Consider the role pain plays in the midst of our praise.

Facilitator Goal: Select the four questions that will best help your community accomplish the group goal above. You may use the following questions or come up with your own questions. Watch the clock and give adequate time to discuss these, filling in extra time with additional questions.

Warm-Up Questions

- How would you have defined “fairness” if you had never read the book of Job?
- Briefly summarize the book of Job.

Lesson Questions

- Reactions
 - What kind of feelings does the book of Job stir in you?
 - What questions linger from the book of Job?
 - It’s not uncommon to imagine what test might put the most pressure on a person to turn their backs on God. Job lost his health, his business, his belongings and his children. You could say that even his wife and friends turned their back on him.
What kind of losses might prove to be the most challenging to your faith?

- **Why might some people find the picture of God presented in the book of Job troubling?**
- Job's friends
 - How do the friends of Job explain the suffering they see in him?
 - Why do you think they answer it that way?¹³
 - Job's friends learn a hard lesson about speculating about a person's innocence. But what if Job had sinned openly? Would their comments have been out of turn?¹⁴
- The adversary
 - In Job 1 the adversary challenges God to "stretch out [his] hand and strike" everything Job has (1:11). The Lord responds by saying, literally, "Everything he has is in your hand" (1:12). At the end of the book, the narrator tells us that Job's brothers and sisters and everyone who knew him before came and comforted him "over all the trouble the Lord brought on him" (42:11). **Who's hand brought calamity on Job?**
 - **Of all the things the adversary could have questioned Job's sincerity over, why do you think he questions the sincerity of Job's praise?**
- Let's consider a few verses from the New Testament. **What do the following verses contribute to our understanding of the divine battle happening behind the scenes between God and Satan?**
 - James 1:13-14 says, "When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed."
 - In Luke 22:31-32, Jesus says, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."
 - Matthew 13:24-30 says, "Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his

¹³ In Job 6:21, Job responds to Eliphaz by saying, "Now you too have proved to be of no help; you see something dreadful and are afraid." Perhaps they are personally afraid.

¹⁴ See 1 Corinthians 10:29-31 where Paul claims some Corinthians are weak, sick and have even died because of sins they have committed against the body.

field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' 'An enemy did this,' he replied. The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.' ”

- God's final address
 - Read Job 40:7-41:34.
 - Can you identify the Behemoth and the Leviathan? What's the purpose of these creatures in God's final speech to Job?
 - **In what ways might God's final speech address Job's attempt to “discredit [God's] justice” in Job 40:8?**
 - Job did not repent after God's first speech ended in chapter 39. What was it about God's final speech that brought about change?
- The epilogue
 - **If the book of Job teaches that people don't always get what they deserve, what does Job's return to riches teach us at the end of the book?**
- Fairness
 - **If God is fair throughout the pages of Job, does your definition of fairness from before hold up? If not, how might you change it?**
 - **Can someone be treated fairly and not be given what they deserve?**
 - What does Job repent of in Job 42:6?
- Pain
 - **What can pain or loss tell us about a person's relationship with God?**

- **What are some roles pain plays in praise?**
- If God looks at the heart and not the outward appearance (1 Samuel 16:7), why would a test like this be necessary for revealing the authenticity of Job's praise?¹⁵
- Praise
 - Consider this statement of Job's at the beginning of the story: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised" (1:21).
 - Based upon what we learn in the heavenly scene before this, would you consider his statement accurate?
 - Would you say Job maintains this attitude throughout the book? (If not, what changes him?)
 - **How might the difference between thankfulness and praise be demonstrated by Job's statement?**
 - What might we learn from Job's struggle with faith?
 - **Why do you think Scripture makes such a big deal of praise?**
 - Have you ever been moved to praise in some surprising moment? What was that experience like?
 - **What is it about God that makes him worthy of praise when things are bad?**
- **What are some ways we can nurture our own hearts to worship in preparation for difficult seasons? How might this group help you with that?**

Praise in the midst of difficulty declares the goodness of God in the cosmos. Spend a few moments praising God with your group. You may consider reading Psalm 96 together:

*1 Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
2 Sing to the LORD, praise his name;*

¹⁵ Possible answers: God may have known, but Job did not. God may see the heart, but he judges a person by the actions of that heart (see 2 Cor 5:9-10).

- proclaim his salvation day after day.*
- 3 Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among all peoples.*
- 4 For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
he is to be feared above all gods.*
- 5 For all the gods of the nations are idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.*
- 6 Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and glory are in his sanctuary.*
- 7 Ascribe to the LORD, all you families of nations,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.*
- 8 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering and come into his courts.*
- 9 Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth.*
- 10 Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns."
The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved;
he will judge the peoples with equity.*
- 11 Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;
let the sea resound, and all that is in it.*
- 12 Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them;
let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.*
- 13 Let all creation rejoice before the LORD, for he comes,
he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples in his faithfulness.*

Session 6: Out of the Darkness

Hope in the Shadow of Loss: Interview with Tim & Joan Lafferty

[Video Link](#)

Big Idea: We can enjoy every moment in this life and anticipate the next one when we cling to the promises of Jesus.

Group Goal: Imagine what it looks like to better embrace the present and anticipate our heavenly futures to come.

Facilitator Goal: Select the four questions that will best help your community accomplish the group goal above. You may use the following questions or come up with your own questions. Watch the clock and give adequate time to discuss these, filling in extra time with additional questions.

Warm-Up Questions

- When Tim and Joan first heard the news of their boys' muscular dystrophy, they described it as being like a dream. Tim said that his heart broke. **Can you share with us a time when you felt like that?**

Lesson Questions

- Grieving
 - In his video, Pete gave his parents permission to grieve but encouraged them not to grieve without hope paraphrasing 1 Thessalonians 4:13.
 - **Why would grieving be something we might need permission to do?**
 - What does it look like to grieve with hope?

- Joan did a wonderful job of guiding Pete through some of his questions early on. What principles would you suggest to someone who has to coach someone through difficult news?
- Beautiful lives
 - Pete wrote to his parents in one of his final gifts to them that he and Joe had “such great lives.” **In what ways does that challenge our views over what a great life has to look like?**
- Living in the present
 - **When you think of how Tim and Joan described their son Joe’s ability to uniquely live in the present, what does living in the present look like with those you love?**
 - Has some difficult moment or season in your life spurred you to reflect more on what you are doing and how you are spending your time in life?
 - What did you learn about yourself during that time?
 - What did you learn about God during that time?
 - How did your relationship with God change if at all?
- Breaking the Illusion of Control
 - **How do you think embracing God as Pete and Joe’s Father helped Tim and Joan come to a place of acceptance?**
 - The boys’ diagnosis broke Tim and Joan’s illusion of control.
 - **What are some things you do that reinforce the illusion of control in your life?**
 - **Have you ever come to a point where the illusion of control was broken?**
 - What good can come from something like this?
- Tim shared that when we cling to the promises we can overcome what we are facing. **What are some of God’s promises that help you stand strong in difficult seasons?**
- Life After
 - Consider the words of the Apostle Paul from 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 that Tim quoted: “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs

them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

- In some sense, Joe and Pete’s disease was an accelerated example of what is happening to us all. What are some other reminders of our outward “wasting away”?
- **Describe a moment that you felt like you were experiencing an inward renewal in spite of what was happening on the outside.**
- There is so much uncertainty about what life looks like beyond the grave. Tim and Joan said that a life beyond was a life they were looking forward to. Pete expressed the same thing in his video.
 - What keeps us from having that same hope for the next world?
 - **What can we do to foster beautiful anticipation for the life to come?** How can this group help you with that?

Spend some time as a group praying for one another as you close, especially praying that we can embrace the moments we have as a gift and hope for more to come because of Jesus Christ.