



PACEM in TERRIS

HERMITAGE RETREAT CENTER

A RETREAT FOR THOSE WHO GRIEVE

## *Through the Valley*

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A gentle, faith-based retreat for those mourning the loss of a loved one. There is no rushing here, no performance of healing. God meets us in the grief — not beyond it.



A Three-Day Self-Directed Silent Retreat

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## Foundation: Before You Begin

Before anything else · How to use this guide in grief

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### A WORD BEFORE WE BEGIN

#### *You do not have to be okay*

This retreat makes one simple promise: you do not have to pretend here. Grief is not a problem to solve or a stage to complete. It is love with nowhere to go. God is not troubled by your tears, your anger, your numbness, or your questions. He is present in all of it.

Move through these days at whatever pace is right for you. Skip a prayer period if you need to sleep. Journal only if words come. Sit outside and do nothing. That is also prayer.

*“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”*

— Psalm 23:4

### THE SHAPE OF THIS RETREAT

#### *Lament, presence, and hope*

Day One is for lament — the honest, undefended expression of grief.

Day Two is for presence — finding God in the middle of the loss.

Day Three is for hope — not forced optimism, but the fragile, real hope that the one who wept at Lazarus’s tomb also raised him.

### PERMISSION

#### *What you are allowed to do in these three days*

- Cry — as much and as long as you need to
- Sit in silence without producing anything
- Be angry at God — he is large enough
- Skip a prayer period and take a nap
- Journal nothing, or journal everything
- Simply say the name of the person you have lost

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## Day One: Lament

Grief spoken aloud to God · The Psalms as permission

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The Psalms give us language for what we cannot say. More than a third of them are laments — raw, honest, sometimes furious cries to a God who seems absent. They are in the Bible because God wants us to have words for the worst days. Today we use them.

### MORNING · HOWEVER LONG YOU NEED

#### *Begin with the name*

Sit quietly. Say the name of the person you have lost — aloud if you can. Say it to God. Let whatever comes, come. Tears, silence, memory, nothing at all — all of it is welcome.

### FIRST PRAYER PERIOD · 30 MIN

#### *Psalm 22: The cry of abandonment*

Read Psalm 22:1–19 slowly. ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ This is not a crisis of faith — it is faith speaking from the darkest place. The psalmist does not stop praying. The prayer is the grief itself.

Journal: What have you been afraid to say to God about this loss? Say it now, on paper. He can take it.

*“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?”*

— Psalm 22:1

### SECOND PRAYER PERIOD · 30 MIN

#### *Jesus wept*

Read John 11:17–44. Before Jesus raised Lazarus, he wept. He already knew what he was about to do — and he still wept. This is the God you are grieving to: one who is not above your grief, but in it.

Journal: What does it mean to you that God weeps? Does it change anything about how you are sitting with your own tears?

*“When Jesus therefore saw her weeping... he was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled... Jesus wept.”*

— John 11:33, 35

### AFTERNOON · OPEN TIME

#### *Remember*

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Spend this time remembering. Look at photographs if you have them. Write memories — specific, sensory, ordinary ones: the way they laughed, what their kitchen smelled like, a phrase they used. These memories are not torture. They are the form love takes when someone is gone.

### *Evening*

Read Lamentations 3:17–26. Not victory. Not resolution. Just the thin, real light of steadfast love in total darkness. That is enough for tonight.

*“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning.”*

— Lamentations 3:22–23

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## Day Two: Presence

Finding God in the middle of the loss

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Grief can make God feel impossibly far away. And yet the Bible consistently places God not at the edge of suffering but at the center of it. Today we look for that presence — not to feel better, but to be less alone.

### MORNING · 20 MIN

#### *The God who draws near*

Read Psalm 34:18 and Psalm 46:1–3. Sit in silence for ten minutes. Ask one question and then listen: ‘God, where are you in this?’ Do not fill the silence with your own answers. Then journal whatever came — or did not come. Both are honest data.

*“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”*

— Psalm 46:1

### FIRST PRAYER PERIOD · 30 MIN

#### *Isaiah 43: Called by name through the waters*

Read Isaiah 43:1–5. ‘When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.’ Not: I will remove the waters. Not: the waters will not be deep. I will be with you. God promises presence, not the removal of suffering.

Journal: What would it change if you truly believed God was with you in this — not watching from outside, but present inside the loss?

*“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.”*

— Isaiah 43:1–2

### SECOND PRAYER PERIOD · 30 MIN

#### *Nothing separates*

Read Romans 8:35–39. Does death separate the one you love from the love of God? Paul says no. Does your grief separate you from the love of God? Paul says no.

Sit with this for twenty minutes. It may feel like a doctrine, not a comfort. Stay with it anyway. Truth becomes comfort slowly.

### AFTERNOON · HOWEVER LONG

#### *Write a letter*

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Write a letter to the person you have lost. Tell them what you miss. Tell them what you wish you had said. Tell them what has happened since they left.

This is not magical thinking — it is the language of love practicing its new grammar.

### *Evening*

Read Psalm 139:7–12. Even in the depths, God is there. Even in the darkness, it is not dark to him. Sleep knowing that the one you love and the grief you carry are both held by the same hands.

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## Day Three: Fragile Hope

Not resolution — but the real, thin light of resurrection

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Hope is not the pretense that nothing is wrong. Resurrection hope is specific: it says that the God who brought Jesus out of the tomb has the final word over every grave. Today we hold that hope — however tentatively, however tearfully.

### MORNING PRAYER • 30 MIN

#### *The empty tomb, again*

Read John 20:1–18. Mary weeps at the tomb even after hearing the report. She does not recognize Jesus until he speaks her name. Grief does not end at the announcement of resurrection — it ends slowly, in the recognition of the living presence.

Journal: What would it look like to hear God speak your name today, in the middle of your grief?

### FIRST PRAYER PERIOD • 30 MIN

#### *1 Corinthians 15: The great exchange*

Read 1 Corinthians 15:42–58. What is sown in dishonor is raised in glory. What is sown in weakness is raised in power. Your loved one is not lost. They are changed.

This is the hope of the resurrection — not that death doesn't hurt, but that it doesn't win.

*“Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”*

— 1 Corinthians 15:54–55

### SECOND PRAYER PERIOD • 30 MIN

#### *Revelation 21: All things new*

Read Revelation 21:1–7. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes.’ That promise is for you.

Journal: What do you most want God to wipe away? Name it specifically. Give it to him.

*“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore.”*

— Revelation 21:4

### CLOSING • AS LONG AS YOU NEED

#### *Three things and a blessing*

1. Name one thing you are taking from this retreat — one truth, image, or moment that mattered.

2. Name one person you will let into your grief when you return — someone who will not rush you.
3. Write a short blessing for the person you have lost. Let it hold the hope of reunion.

### *Go Gently, Beloved Griever*

You have not been asked to be finished. You have only been invited to be held. Carry your loss with you — it is the shape love takes. And carry this too: you are not alone in it, and the story is not over.

*“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”*

— Matthew 5:4

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## Core Practices & Extra Scripture

Gentleness · What grief needs · Extra scripture

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### PRACTICE

#### *The grief journal*

Keep writing after you leave. A dedicated notebook — only for the grief — can become a sacred space: for memories, for prayers, for the days when it floods back unexpectedly.

### PRACTICE

#### *Receiving community*

Grief was not designed to be carried alone. Consider sharing this retreat with a pastor, spiritual director, or grief group when you return. Isolation compounds grief; community makes it survivable.

### EXTRA SCRIPTURE

#### *For the hard days ahead*

- Psalm 30:5 — Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning
- Psalm 56:8 — You have put my tears in your bottle
- 2 Corinthians 1:3–4 — The God of all comfort
- Romans 8:18 — The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing
- Isaiah 25:8 — He will swallow up death forever
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14 — We do not grieve as those who have no hope

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