

**YOU WILL NEED**

- Some time - about 20 mins
- A quiet spot
- A device to watch a Youtube vid
- A Bible, pen and some paper
- Some building blocks (Jenga)

SHORT ON TIME? NOT A BIG READER?

Watch the video about Kabil, reflect on the questions, then turn over, read Marian's story and finish with the closing prayer. You'll be done in under 10 minutes!

Loss is something that has and will affect us all at some point. You might be familiar with loss already; you may have lost a loved one; it could be that you are angry about losing the opportunity to go away or celebrate a birthday with friends or you could be sad at the loss of your school prom. We want to share some stories from our persecuted church family - stories of people who, despite huge loss, are able to cling onto Jesus. When our lives are turned upside down by loss, the amazing promises in the Bible, and our loving heavenly Father, stay the same – and that's something really worth knowing and depending on.

So, find a good chair, grab a drink, your Bible, a pen, some paper and get ready to hear some amazing stories that will challenge and encourage you to know God's provision and peace in these this time of loss and pain.

ACTIVITY: CORNERSTONE

Grab yourself some blocks (Jenga) or maybe some toilet roll to build a tower with. Give yourself a strong foundation and see how high you can go. Now take one of the blocks out of the foundation. Does the tower still stand?

When we experience a loss, it can seem like our world is coming tumbling down like our tower. But just before Jesus was about to die, he quoted Psalm 118: 22-23.

"The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes."

He was saying that the church would be built upon him as a cornerstone, as a foundation. If we keep Jesus and His word as our foundation, our tower may tumble a bit, but we will always have Jesus as our foundation to build on.

PRAY

Just pause. Sit. Slow down your breathing. Focus on God. Ask him to speak to you whilst you go through this devotional. And know that we, and others around the UK, are praying this with you!

Father God. You are good. You are everything I need. Please speak to

me as I read these stories. Help me put aside distractions and focus on You. Teach me something new. Let me know You are with me. Amen

VIDEO: NORTH AFRICA – KABIL

Check out this week's video (click here). This week Naomi shares about Kabil from North Africa, explaining what he had to lose to when he chose to follow Jesus.

- Kabil had to give up a lot to become a Christian – have you ever had to give anything up to follow Jesus?

Kabil was given a really difficult dilemma:

"You must make a choice: it is us or Jesus. Do you want your family, or do you want your new faith?"

- He experienced the loss of his family, his home and his business. This wasn't an easy choice. Put yourself in Kabil's shoes – how do you think he would have felt making this decision?

Experiencing loss will affect us all differently. Kabil was able to deal with the loss he went through by trusting that God would look after him. He says, *"Nothing can equal the life that Jesus gave to me."* As you keep reading this reflection, know that God cares about all your emotions - he is the Comforter – ask Him to be close and speak to you now.

Continued...

STORY: EGYPT - MARIAN

Christians in Egypt and across the Middle East are showing us how to deal with loss. When churches are attacked or homes destroyed, when people are killed or kidnapped, many cling to God, knowing His love is bigger than their questions and pain.

Marian knows this first hand. She's from Egypt, where Christians are facing increasing persecution from violent Muslim extremist groups.

When she was just 14, the unthinkable happened. She was at church, and as one service was ending and another beginning, her dad sent her home to make some tea for him. As the water was heating up, she heard a big explosion. She rushed back to the church and found a scene of carnage. There were bodies and blood. Marian found her father; he was barely breathing:

"I put his head on my lap... and he asked me to take care of my younger brother and sister. Then he closed his eyes and smiled peacefully, his face shining. Then he went to heaven."

A suicide bomber had walked into the church, and Marian's father had run after him, trying to stop him from detonating his bomb-vest. The attack happened just days before Marian's 15th birthday.

- Loss of any kind can happen very suddenly. What loss have you experienced? It could be a death, or it could be you are really feeling the loss of school, family, friendships, sports, holidays etc.

A year and a half later, Marian still misses her dad. But courageously she's still following Jesus, clinging onto Him through pain, trauma and loss. Incredibly she says:

"God takes, but He gives back more. God is love, God is kind, God is merciful. I have experienced this in my most difficult hour".

- Do you know any bits of the Bible which talk of God being with us and His promises to us, even through tough times?
- Try Psalm 23. Read Rev 21: 3-5 and as it says 'write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true' then stick them somewhere you will see them every day.

BIBLE: JESUS WEPT

Loss can be really hard. We will all be coping with different kinds of loss in different ways. Often it can be hard to communicate what we are feeling – in Romans 8:26, the author, Paul says, "...the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans."

There can be points when coming to God can feel too hard and we don't know what to say. But this verse reminds us that we can pray even when we don't know where to start - even if our prayer is just a groan. Thankfully God knows our hearts, he understands our emotions and pain; the Holy Spirit helps us to know that God hears us even when getting words out is hard.

- **Read John 11:38-44**

But there's more too. This passage is amazing as it shows we pray to a God that cried the same tears as we do (John 11:35) even though He

went on to raise Lazarus from the dead. This whole section of Scripture is an intimate insight into the person of Jesus. It shows Jesus being 'deeply moved' because of His love for His friend Lazarus. There's also a remarkable statement about how secure he was in his relationship with God the Father: 'I knew that you always hear me'.

In the same way Marian was moved by her love for her father. She was obviously devastated to lose him, but she also came to know God in a new way in that loss saying: *"God is love, God is king, God is merciful."*

This story of Jesus weeping teaches us two things. One, Jesus knows our hurt and our grief. Point two is that Jesus also teaches us that God hears our prayers, even our wordless groans. Always.

If you're struggling with words to pray the Psalms can be a great place to start. What emotions are you feeling? Trying using these passages to pray:

- **Angry:** Psalm 13 - *"Will you forget me for ever?"*
- **Sad:** Psalm 31:9-10 - *"My eyes grow weak with sorrow."*
- **Feeling low:** Psalm 130:1-2 - *"Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice."*

Sometimes knowing other people have felt similar emotions and have been able to take them to God can help us to take our feelings to him too. Prayer is a great place to start when we've experienced loss – taking our emotions, questions and pain to a God who knows how it feels.

RESPOND

When we lose something, whatever it is, we can be left with a gap or a hole in our lives. Prayer and coming to God will always help, but what practical things can you do to fill that gap? Try writing down some of the things you have lost and something that you could do to help fill that gap.

For example:

- **Loss of a school prom:** Host a 'watch party' with some friends to connect with them
- **Loss of a relationship/friendship:** Commit to getting involved in your youth group or church and seeing if there are ways you can serve
- **Loss of a loved one:** Ask someone to spend some time with you talking about special memories of that person.
- **Loss of a holiday:** Keep busy during the time you would be away by volunteering your time where you can.

Across the world, the spread of coronavirus is having a devastating effect. Lockdown means that many Christians have lost income and can't buy food. On top of this, Christians are often ignored when official aid is distributed. They desperately need our help today. Could you raise money with the 2.6 Challenge or give financially now? Try this link.

PRAY

Father God, we thank You for the example of Christians like Marian, Kabil and our other brothers and sisters around the world who are persecuted for their faith in You. We know that You always hear us and know our hearts even if all we can manage is a groan. Help us to pray, whatever we are feeling and place people in our lives to talk and pray with us. Amen.