30 June - 6 July 2024 Let’s talk about grief and loss

2 Samuel 1: 1, 17-27

**David Hears of Saul’s Death**

**1**After the death of Saul, David returned from striking down the Amalekites and stayed in Ziklag two days.

**David’s Lament for Saul and Jonathan**

**17**David took up this lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan, **18**and he ordered that the people of Judah be taught this lament of the bow (it is written in the Book of Jashar):

**19**“A gazelle[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Samuel+1%3A1-27&version=NIV#fen-NIV-8042a)] lies slain on your heights, Israel.  
    How the mighty have fallen!

**20**“Tell it not in Gath,  
    proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon,  
lest the daughters of the Philistines be glad,  
    lest the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice.

**21**“Mountains of Gilboa,  
    may you have neither dew nor rain,  
    may no showers fall on your terraced fields.[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Samuel+1%3A1-27&version=NIV#fen-NIV-8044b)]  
For there the shield of the mighty was despised,  
    the shield of Saul—no longer rubbed with oil.

**22**“From the blood of the slain,  
    from the flesh of the mighty,  
the bow of Jonathan did not turn back,  
    the sword of Saul did not return unsatisfied.  
**23**Saul and Jonathan—  
    in life they were loved and admired,  
    and in death they were not parted.  
They were swifter than eagles,  
    they were stronger than lions.

**24**“Daughters of Israel,  
    weep for Saul,  
who clothed you in scarlet and finery,  
    who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold.

**25**“How the mighty have fallen in battle!  
    Jonathan lies slain on your heights.  
**26**I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother;  
    you were very dear to me.  
Your love for me was wonderful,  
    more wonderful than that of women.

**27**“How the mighty have fallen!  
    The weapons of war have perished!”

**Bible notes**

Following David’s victory over Goliath, he built a reputation as a soldier and leader. He grew in popularity, but was scrupulously loyal to Saul, even though the king was behaving increasingly erratically. His friendship with Saul’s son Jonathan deepened and both protected each other.

Saul faced greater and greater challenges as king, and was finally defeated in battle. His sons died round him and he fell on his own sword – a tragic end. 2 Samuel begins by mentioning David’s success in battle, giving focus to the contrast between the two leaders. It then tells of how the news of the deaths came to David, and describes his subsequent lament. David’s song uses the ‘rhyming thought’ of parallelism, typical of Hebrew poetry, where each statement is repeated in two different forms, doubling the imagery and impact of the ideas. It begins by naming the king as ‘Israel’s glory’ and there is a pattern of praise-filled images throughout the song, focusing on Saul and Jonathan as heroes in life who shared a common death. Their glory is further highlighted by the comparison to lions’ strength and eagles’ speed, and by the song’s refrain ‘How the mighty have fallen!’.

David calls for a reversal of the natural order itself. There is to be no more water for the mountains where Saul and Jonathan died. Gilboa is condemned to drought and barrenness, as though the land itself is in perpetual mourning for them. The song of lament is intensified by the painful expectation that the women will sing songs of joy in the coastal Philistine cities of Gath and Ashkelon. This contrasts with the mourning of the women of Israel, whom Saul enriched with the richest clothing of the time.

Perhaps some of the notes of lament echo tradition and convention in David’s desire to praise his predecessor and emphasise the glory of the king, but the song ends with a broken-hearted cry of distress for David’s friend and brother, Jonathan, their relationship smashed by death. David’s lament is recorded in a collection of songs, the Book of Jashar (cf. Joshua 10:13), and becomes one of the core songs of the people in times of grief.

**Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

‘Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone’, wrote WH Auden in his poem ‘Funeral Blues’. Normal life cannot continue once someone has gone. David’s lament expresses the same idea: no rain should fall on the mountains where Saul and Jonathan died. They should remain barren for ever. Yet both Auden and David had to pick up life again. A new reality takes hold, impoverished by loss but still worth living; and eventually joy begins to return. Whole-hearted lament is one of the resources that enables this renewed life, and the church has its place in enabling that, but it’s equally important to affirm that life continues to be God’s gift to us, to be used and enjoyed as the place where we find God’s love.

Questions for reflection

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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| [A person swinging on a pole  Description automatically generated](https://www.rootsontheweb.com/media/26633/representation-of-dying-child.jpg) |  |

**Questions**

* What does this image show?
* Do you find it easy to talk about your emotions?
* How does your church help those experiencing  
  various kinds of grief and loss?

## Prayer

*Adapt to your local context.*

**A prayer of thanksgiving**

Thank you for the pictures we have seen today, Lord: the joy of Jairus’ daughter raised; the esteem of David for Saul and Jonathan. We praise you for the picture of deep relationships you give us. We thank you for our friends and family, praying that we will experience such bonds; that we will be there for each other in your strength. We know that you accompany us, whether in joy or pain. You enable us to show your love. We thank you for all the hues and shades of the life we share with you and our brothers and sisters.

**Amen.**

**A prayer to end the Bible study**

Lord, be with us on our journeys with others  
and open our eyes to you.  
**Amen.**