**Sermon Topic:** Dancing with the Scars: Loss/Tragedy

**One Main Idea of the Sermon:** Jesus understands your loss and can help you heal

**Goal for Life Application:** Let Jesus help you heal from your loss.

**SLIDE 1 Series:** Dancing with the Scars

**SLIDE 2 Sermon Topic:** Loss/Tragedy

**Introduction**

Samira has a powerful story. It is a story of loss…loss of family, abandonment, loss of childhood. It is also a story of healing and hope! God took her loss and turned it into something positive, as she is guiding and helping others. That is what I get to talk about…how we can find healing and hope in our scars of tragedy and loss, through the scars that Jesus bore for us.

Isaiah wrote these words 700 years before Jesus went to the cross.

**SLIDE 3** "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5)

Pastor Wynne began this series by talking about how Jesus identified himself with his scars. Dr. Spaur followed that by dancing with the scars of hurt and abuse. Last week, we had a panel of experts discuss overcoming the scars of anxiety and depression.

Today…I get to talk about the scars of tragedy and loss. This is my first time to deliver the message here at the Courthouse Campus, and sometimes those first messages can define you as a pastor. I remember the day that I saw my name on the sermon schedule next to..."Dancing with the Scars" series; topic "Tragedy and Loss." All I could think was, "I have become the loss pastor." Now I want to be sure you heard me correctly. I did not say the L-O-S-T, lost pastor. That would be weird! I've been called a lot of things in my life, but oxymoron is not one of them. And we're not going to start today! I said L-O-S-S, loss pastor. I get to talk to you about loss.

We all experience loss at some point in our lives. We will all lose someone close to us and it is important that we know how to process through the grief and pain that comes with loss.

So, what qualifies me to talk about this subject? Here is a brief history. I experienced my first loss at age 17. Three friends and I were hit head-on by a drunk driver. One of my best friends, a kid who lived two houses away from me for the previous 13 years was driving our car. He died that night from massive internal bleeding. I was sitting next to him in the passenger seat without a seatbelt or airbag, and only received a fat lip. I was conscious the whole time, but all I could do was watch, helplessly.

When I was 24, another car accident took three of my close friends. One of them was to be a groomsman in my wedding several months later. At that point in my life, I had carried more friend's coffins than I had been in friend's wedding parties.

It’s a bit overwhelming when people hear how much loss that I have experienced in life: My father died a couple years later, after a long battle with cancer. Ten years ago, my mom had a massive stroke that left her on life support. As her executor, I had to authorize her removal from life support in fulfillment of her living will. I was holding her hand when she breathed her last breath. I have also lost two sisters, and a brother to long-term illnesses, and I lost my youngest son almost five years ago. That is the death loss in my life, so far. I've also experienced loss of family through a divorce, and financial loss that resulted in losing my home. These are my scars of tragedy and loss. So when I talk to you today about loss….I’m not talking with you about what someone else has experienced, but a reality that I have walked through many times. I guess I am the loss pastor…

Tragedy and loss can come in many forms. Loss could be the death of a loved one, abandonment, betrayal, a physical loss, a loss of health, loss of family, or financial loss. Regardless of the type, **SLIDE 4 Loss is devastating**. How we respond to our tragedy and loss can determine if we get stuck in the loss, or if we are able to accept it and move beyond the loss.

How do we respond to loss? In 1969, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross published a book about her conversations with terminally ill patients, titled, "On Death and Dying." In it she described five emotional stages that these patients experienced. They are commonly known as the "Five Stages of Grief;" denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. These are natural human responses to loss. Let's look at each of these.

**SLIDE 5** Denial - In the Denial Stage, denial and shock help us to cope and make survival possible. Denial helps us to pace our feelings of grief. There is a grace in denial. It is nature’s way of letting in only as much as we can handle. A denial response would be, "This can't be happening."

**SLIDE 6** Anger - Anger, the next stage, is a necessary stage of the healing process. You need to be willing to feel your anger, even though it may seem endless. The more you truly feel it, the more it will begin to dissipate and the more you will heal.  An anger response would be, "Why is this happening to me?"

**SLIDE 7** Bargaining - In the Bargaining stage, we want to go back in time. The “if onlys” ( if only this didn't happen, or if only I did this) cause us to find fault in ourselves and what we “think” we could have done differently. Guilt is often bargaining’s companion. We may even bargain with the pain. We will do anything not to feel the pain of this loss. We remain in the past, trying to negotiate our way out of the hurt. The response here may be, "I will do anything to change this."

**SLIDE 8** Depression - Depression - The loss of a loved one is a very depressing situation, and depression is a normal and appropriate response. To not experience depression after a loved one dies would be unusual. When a loss fully settles in your soul, the realization that your loved one is not coming back is understandably depressing. If grief is a process of healing, then depression is one of the many necessary steps along the way. You may ask, "What's the point of going on after this loss?" after this stage.

**SLIDE 9** Acceptance - Finally Acceptance - This stage is about accepting the reality that our loved one is physically gone and recognizing that this new reality is the permanent reality. We will never like this reality or make it OK, but eventually we accept it. We learn to live with it. It is the new norm with which we must learn to live. We must try to live now in a world where our loved one is missing. In resisting this new norm, at first many people want to maintain life as it was before a loved one died. In time, through bits and pieces of acceptance, however, we see that we cannot maintain the past intact. It has been forever changed and we must readjust. We can say, "It is going to be okay."

These emotional responses are typical, but each person's grief is as unique as they are. You may skip some of these responses. You may bounce back and forth between them as you process and heal from the loss. And you may get stuck in one or more of these emotional responses. **SLIDE 10 The key to healing from a loss is getting to a point of acceptance.** We don't want to get stuck!

Transition: Thankfully, **SLIDE 11 we have a Savior who experienced loss and knows how to help us**. Let's take a look at the types of loss that Jesus experienced.

**SLIDE 12 1) Jesus experienced the loss of someone close.**

(The death of John the Baptist.)

**SLIDE 13 9**The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted **10**and had John beheaded in the prison. **SLIDE 14** **11**His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother. **12**John’s disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus. **SLIDE 15 13**When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.  (Matthew 14:9-13)

(The death of Lazarus)

**SLIDE 16 32**When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” **SLIDE 17**  **33**When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. **SLIDE 18** **34**“Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. **35**Jesus wept. **36**Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” (John 11:32-36)

In both of these instances, Jesus took time to grieve.

**SLIDE 19 2) Jesus experienced facing his own death**

Just after Jesus entered Jerusalem to the cheers of the people, Jesus said these words,

**SLIDE 20 27**“Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. **28**Father, glorify your name!” (John 12 :27-28)

(Anxiety/Depression)

His words become more intense, in the garden, just before his arrest.

**SLIDE 21 41**He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, **42**“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” **43**An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. **44**And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. (Luke 22:41-44).

(Bargaining/Anxiety)

**SLIDE 23 3) Jesus experienced betrayal**

Betrayal by Judas

**SLIDE 24 21**After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, “Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.” (John 13:21)

**SLIDE 25 47**While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him,**48**but Jesus asked him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” (Luke 22:47-48)

Betrayal by Peter

After Jesus' arrest, Peter followed the crowd to the courtyard to see what would happen. Three times people identified him as a follower of Jesus and three times he denied it.

**SLIDE 27 55**And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. **SLIDE 28 56**A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, “This man was with him.”

**57**But he denied it. “Woman, I don’t know him,” he said.

**SLIDE 29 58**A little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.”

“Man, I am not!” Peter replied.

**59**About an hour later another asserted, “Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.”

The last time, **SLIDE 30 60**Peter replied, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. **61**The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter.

**SLIDE 31** Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.” **62**And he went outside and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:55-62)

**SLIDE 32 4) Jesus experienced abandonment and separation from his Father**

**SLIDE 33** From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land.**46**About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, **SLIDE 34** *“Eli, Eli,* *lemasabachthani?”* (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). (Matthew 27:45-46)

**SLIDE 35** Psalm 22

**1**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
    Why are you so far from saving me,  
    so far from my cries of anguish?  
**2**My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,  
    by night, but I find no rest…

**SLIDE 36 7** …All who see me mock me;  
    they hurl insults, shaking their heads.  
**8**“He trusts in the Lord,” they say,  
    “let the Lord rescue him…

**SLIDE 37 14**…I am poured out like water,  
    and all my bones are out of joint…  
**15**…my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;  
    you lay me in the dust of death…

**SLIDE 38 16**…they pierce[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+22&version=NIV#fen-NIV-14221e)] my hands and my feet…  
**18**…They divide my clothes among them  
    and cast lots for my garment.

**SLIDE 39 Jesus understands tragedy and loss because he experienced both.**

**SLIDE 40 Jesus grieved, but he didn't get stuck there.** In fact, quite the opposite occurred after each of these losses. **SLIDE 41 Some of the biggest miracles in Jesus' ministry happened right after these losses!** After Jesus went to the solitary place following John's death, the crowds followed him and this is where he fed 5000 men and their families with five loaves of bread and two fish!

After Jesus grieved for Lazarus, he called him out of the grave after four days, and Lazarus came out alive! Many people put their faith in Jesus because of this miracle!

After facing his own death, betrayals of two of his disciples, and God, the Father turning his back on him, Jesus performed the greatest miracle of all. He defeated death and walked out of the tomb after three days, and made the way to restore our relationship with God!

Do you think Jesus has stopped turning tragedy and loss into miracles? Do you believe He could help you get to Acceptance quicker than you could on your own? I think Samira, the woman in the video, would say Yes to both these questions. God took her loss turned it around and now she is helping others avoid the loss that she experienced.

**Trusting Jesus in our losses can get us to Acceptance quicker, and miracles can happen.**

Can I tell you a story? It's a hard story to tell, and for some of you, it may be a hard story to hear. I ask that you stick with me to hear the miracle at the end.

On May 18, 2011 at 8:30AM, I received a phone call that I will never forget. At the time, I was in the middle of a required class for my first district ministry license, and I was in the planning stages for a ministry called Celebrate Recovery. The call was from a Richmond police detective who wanted to meet with me. At first, he wouldn’t say why, but then he told me it was in regards to my son, Mark.

**SLIDE 43**- **Picture collage of Mark** I had heard about these types of phone calls. The first thing that I did was call my son's phone, only to have it go immediately to voicemail. I knew that my son was dead, but I didn’t want to believe it. It felt like my heart was ripped from my chest. It was the most empty and alone that I have ever felt, sitting by myself, in my family room. This is the setting for the most intimate conversation I have ever had with God. Now God did not speak audibly to me, but I have spent enough time with Him to know His voice when responses come into my mind. It was like He was right there, as we talked.

I said to God, “My son is dead.” He immediately replied, “My Son died also. I know exactly how you feel.” There was great comfort and compassion in His words. Then He said, “By the way, he is not your son.” That got my attention. After a pause, He continued, “He is My son. I gave him to you.” All I could say was, "Thank you for the time You gave me with Mark."

God says the same of you. You are His daughter; you are His son. At Enon, He calls you His son, and calls you His daughter. To those watching online, You are His daughter, you are His son. My question to all of you is this… have you accepted Him as your Father? Have you told Jesus, "I've made mistakes. I've sinned. Come into my life and help me. I need you." He will.

The Psalmist says, “For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother’s womb” (Ps. 139:13). In Matthew 10:30 Jesus says, “And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” He knows you that well. My number gets smaller every day. Have you called him Father?

That conversation laid the foundation for my healing. I came out of denial, and never went to anger or bargaining. I went straight to depression and began to process my son's death. When the detectives arrived, they confirmed what I knew, and told me Mark had taken his life. I could have quit right then. I could have gone into isolation and deep depression. I could have picked up some unhealthy habit to try to ease my pain…but I didn't. I had already invited God into this situation, and He wasn't going to let me. He prompted me to use the principles I was learning through Celebrate Recovery, and apply them to this situation. I spent a lot of time with God and placed all of this in His hands, as I had no control over the situation and I needed His strength to get through.

Regarding Mark's death being a suicide…God knows Mark's state of mind, and He knows all about His relationship to my son. God is his judge… it's not me, or anyone else…and God has given me peace about this whole situation.

God continued to move me forward by doing something really crazy. He told me to speak about Mark at the funeral. That was not on my list of things to do. For the next three days He kept putting thoughts in my head of what to say. I never wrote anything down because it was all there in my head. When it was time for me to speak at the service, I went forward and honored my son with the words God gave me. Speaking the words helped to release my hurt. At the end, I invited Mark's friends to tell me stories when they see me next. When the service ended and I went outside, and I turned to see a line of about thirty of Mark's friends waiting to talk to me. I was blessed by story after story of how Mark helped, supported, and loved his friends. I was never more proud of my son, as I was right then. That did more for my healing than anything else, and helped me on my way to Acceptance. I'm glad I did the crazy thing God asked me, or I never would have heard those stories.

God also gave me the strength to complete the last two weeks of my ministry class, and

**SLIDE 44**- **Picture Ministry License** I was able to receive my District Minister's license that summer. That was very important, because in September, **SLIDE 45**- **Picture of Wedding** I was able to conduct the marriage ceremony for my son, Drew, and his best friend, April! I also continued the planning for Celebrate Recovery ministry, **SLIDE 46**- **Picture of CR** and we launched Celebrate Recovery at Southside Church on September 30, 2011! Over the past four and a half years, we have witnessed over 100 changed lives through Celebrate Recovery! I have also been able to take the experience of my son's death, and minister to parents who have lost children. You see…I may the loss pastor, but God took my losses, and through His strength and guidance, He changed me into a recovery pastor! Only He could do a miracle like that!

What about you? Where are you in your losses?

Some of you have let God turn your losses into miracles, and you are helping others! Praise be to God!

Some of you have made it to the Acceptance stage. You know things are going to be okay, despite the loss you experienced. Is God calling you to do more? Was He involved in getting you to the Acceptance stage? Is there a miracle you're missing out on because you are holding back?

Some of you are stuck in a past loss. You are bouncing back and forth between depression, denial, anger, and bargaining. You can't find a way to accept the loss. Have you tried to give it to Jesus? Can you trust Him to get you through?

Some of you are facing a loss right now. Are you trying to face it alone, or have you invited Jesus to be in it with you? He wants to help you. Will you let Him in?

Let's pray.

**Response:**

Footsteps Counseling and Celebrate Recovery are available if you are in the middle of a loss, or if you are stuck in a loss and would like a safe place to talk about it

Maybe you want to place loss of someone close or some other type of loss in Jesus' hands. You can do this by writing their name or the type of loss on a piece of paper and give it to Jesus by pinning it on the cross.

Maybe you want to talk to Jesus about a loss you've experienced, come to the altar and talk to Him.

Go to the candle station and light a candle in remembrance of a loved one.

Take the communion elements and remember how Jesus' body was broke, and how his blood was shed. Then remember, by His wounds, His scars we are healed.

Let's stand, listen to this song and respond how God is leading you.