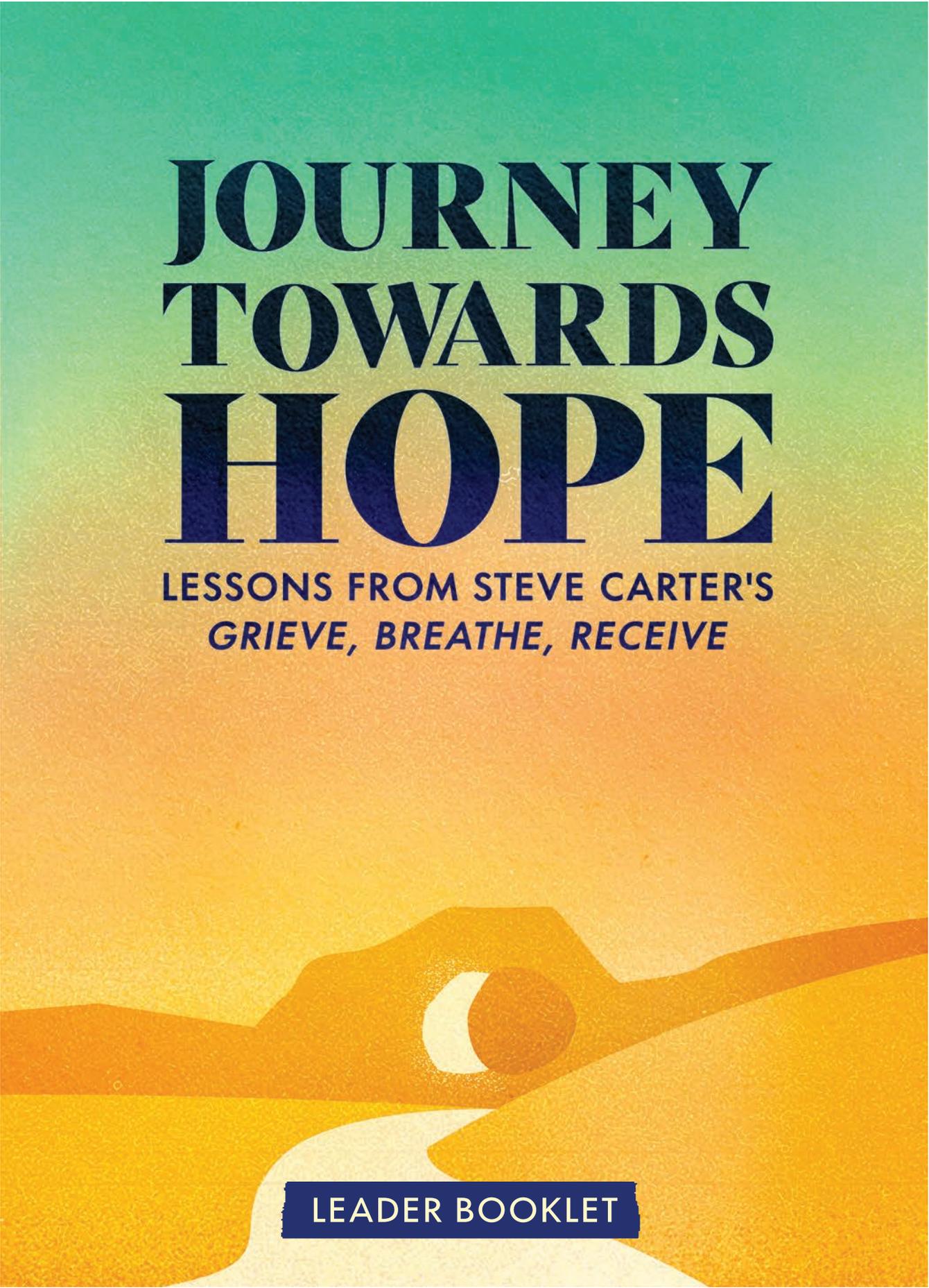


# JOURNEY TOWARDS HOPE

LESSONS FROM STEVE CARTER'S  
*GRIEVE, BREATHE, RECEIVE*



LEADER BOOKLET



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SESSION 1

# WHEN CHANGE SHOWS UP

## SESSION 1: WHEN CHANGE SHOWS UP

Welcome to Session 1 of our Bible study! This week we begin our journey towards hope together as we spend time connecting with each other, watching Pastor Steve's teaching, and then, discussing the video and related passages from the Bible. At the end of each session, we've also included information on corresponding chapters from Steve's book *Grieve, Breathe, Receive*. We invite you to reach for a gritty and courageous hope, the kind that can sustain you no matter what life throws at you.

### CONNECT

Get to know each other in the group! If Story Cards are available, have each person pick an image that represents what life feels like now or that resonates with where they are in their journey with God. Have them introduce themselves and briefly say why they picked the card they did.

**Story Cards may also be ordered from retailers such as <https://store.irresistible.church/>**

Here are some additional connection questions, if needed:

*Who is new to the area or our church?*

*Who has been in the area and/or our church the longest?*

*Who grew up the farthest away?*

*What prompted you to join the Bible study?*

### VIDEO

Listen for Steve to discuss the following:

- An illustration for how we imagine life will play out and what happens when change affects that dream or plan.
- A strategy Steve outlines "D.A.R.E."-ing us to be people who grieve yet still have hope.
- A reminder that God sees us in the midst of whatever we are going through.

**NOTES**

## DISCUSS

Steve used Jenga blocks to illustrate how we build an ideal image, often based on healthy dreams and goals, of what our life should be.

1. What were some of the examples Steve gave of those “Jenga blocks” that people hope for or plan for in building their lives? Any examples you would add?

**Marriage, house, dog, job/promotion, children, friendships/relationships, any other good dreams people may have.**

2. Can anyone relate to what Steve illustrated when the Jenga blocks were removed? In what ways?

3. What has been your experience with learning to process and grieve change in healthy, or unhealthy, ways?

## DIG DEEPER

Steve's friend encouraged him to stay present in his grief after several changes and losses crashed his own "Jenga blocks," leaving him reeling in the aftermath. However, his friend also challenged him to be someone who grieved while holding on to hope like the Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

### Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14:

*"Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him." (NIV)*

Here Paul is specifically answering a question that the Thessalonian church had about believers who die before Christ returns. They were grieving a specific kind of loss, the loss of loved ones in their church community, and wondering if death was the end of everything for them.

4. What does Paul say is the reason they can have hope?

**Jesus died and rose, and believers will also resurrect.**

5. Does Paul say they are not to grieve at all? How might one grieve but still have hope?

**He does not say they are not to grieve. Grief is normal and healthy. Ask for ideas about "grieving by with hope," like processing with wise godly mentors/counselors, refusing to isolate from Christian community, drawing near to God and His promises, etc.**



8. Have you heard or maybe used the following “hopeful sayings,” perhaps offered with the best intentions, only to find them NOT very helpful to someone walking through change, loss, or grief?

“All we can do is hope for the best.”

“You’ve just got to believe.”

“You need to have more hope/faith/time/perspective.”

“You just need to move on with your life.”

“God never gives us more than we can handle.” (This is not in the Bible, by the way. More on that below.)

Other?

We wonder then, how we find a “gritty and courageous hope.” What does it look like when the bottom falls out of our lives? Paul helped explain that kind of hope to the house churches in Rome. (Yes, to those living in that same culture that ridiculed hope!)

**Read Romans 8:22-28:**

*“We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*

*Not only so, but **we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly** as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies [a reference to our own resurrection when Christ returns to set all things right, including our full rights and privileges as members of God’s family].*

***For in this hope we were saved.** But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*

*In the same way, **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. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.*

***And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”***

## SESSION 1 WHEN CHANGE SHOWS UP

9. What does Scripture say about the reality of suffering for all of creation including Christians (those “who have the firstfruits of the Spirit”)? Does God’s word minimize it?

**Suffering is not minimized. Suffering is real and common to all, even those who have a relationship with Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit. In fact, throughout Scripture we see that suffering is a given and that following Jesus may cause us to suffer at times. Here, Scripture even likens suffering to the intensity of labor pains at times, combined with a wait, like in labor, for something better in the future that we can’t yet see.**

10. What do believers in Christ base our hope on beyond the trials, circumstances, and griefs that can cause us to groan with the intensity of someone in labor?

**Believers hold onto hope that someday we will be raised again to life and Christ will set all things right.**

11. Who is available to help us hold onto hope during grief even when we cannot form the words to pray?

**The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness, groaning along with us.**

12. Does God promise “not to give us more than we can handle,” as some well-intentioned people have said? What does God promise to do with the pain and suffering that comes into the lives of believers living in this broken world?

**This phrase may come from a misquote of 8:28 (“In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”) or from a misquote of 1 Cor 10:13 (“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”) Regardless we are promised God is at work purposefully redeeming the pain and suffering for eventual good and providing Himself to help us in our weakness.**

## RESPOND

This week we are reminded that there is a “gritty and courageous hope” available to us that we can **D.A.R.E.** to embrace.

13. Would you be willing to take this D.A.R.E. over the next few weeks? Below are the components to consider. Which ones do you think will be the toughest for you?

**D** – dare to **Desire** something good. *If God invaded my areas of change, loss, or grief, what good would I want Him to bring?*

**A** – believe **Anything** is possible. *If Jesus can get up from the grave, could I trust him to rebuild my life?*

**R** – discover how **Resurrection** brings certainty. *If even death is not the end of the story, how does that shape my hope?*

**E** – **Expect** that good is on its way. *Can I develop a confident anticipation that God's goodness is on the way?*

## COMPANION READING AND REFLECTION THIS WEEK

From Pastor Steve in *Grieve, Breathe, Receive*:

*“In order for change to make room for the future, something from our past must be set aside or adapted. This invokes a loss, a giving up of something. Grief fills the vacuum change creates when it visits.” (Page 1)*

Read pages 1–50 (chapters 1–4) of the book. Steve offers additional questions for personal reflection to help you process “what comes up when change shows up.” Jot down any additional insights and feel free to share some of your learnings at the next gathering.

NOTES



SESSION 2

# GRIEVE

## SESSION 2: GRIEVE

In our first session we talked about how and why change shakes us, surprises us, and even shocks us with grief, something we don't always understand how to process. We want to become people who "grieve but with hope" (1 Thess 4:13), but we often need a plan forward in that journey towards hope. Today we discuss the first stage of the that journey, which is to fully experience the journey IN grief.

## CONNECT

Welcome any new members joining this week and make quick introductions!

*Did anyone DARE to hope last week by committing to Desire something good, believe Anything is possible, lean into Resurrection certainly, and Expect that good is on its way?*

*What felt encouraging about that?*

*What felt difficult about that?*

*For anyone who read the first portion of Steve's book, did you gain any additional insights or tools?*

## VIDEO

Listen for Steve to discuss the following:

- How Jesus modeled good grief.
- The first crucial step in the grief journey.
- Several healthy ways of processing change/grief and two unhealthy ways we may choose instead.
- The importance of guarding our hearts by protecting the process of grieving, and some of the results when we do not allow ourselves to embrace the grief journey.

**NOTES**

## DISCUSS

Steve discussed that Jesus wept over the things that caused him pain and grief. He wept over the people of Jerusalem because they were without protective, godly leaders (Matthew 9:36 and Luke 19:41-46). Also, you may have heard the shortest verse of the Bible, “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). In that passage, Jesus cried and felt intense feelings (John 11:33-38) over the death of his friend Lazarus, even while knowing he was about to raise Lazarus from the dead.

As Steve mentioned, Jesus, full of strength and wisdom, allowed himself to feel deeply and practice “good grief,” honoring what comes up when change shows up. Steve encouraged us that it is healthy, biblical, and human to honor our Good Friday experiences while still holding on to the truth that Easter Sunday is coming.

1. Steve talked about a first crucial step of the grief journey. What was it?

**Name the change. Ask yourself what you are actually grieving.**

2. Why might it be important to be very honest about what we are grieving?

**Allow the group to talk about different ideas but if needed, guide them toward things like these:**

- Brings the change, pain, or loss into the light so we can see what specifics we need healing from
- Lets us consider who has harmed us and how they need to make amends
- Reduces anxiety, depression, and hopelessness if we’ve been stuck in a nameless grief
- Reduces dependence on distractions and things that numb us from pain as we bravely face truth
- Directs us to reach out for specific kinds of help in our grief
- Gives us an opportunity to mourn and grieve what was, what could have been, and/or who hurt us, and helps us access emotions like anger and fear below the surface.

Steve introduces a drawing of two concentric circles, the inner one representing our lives that have been invaded by change and the outer one representing the hope for what life can become as we courageously examine and respond to what comes up when change shows up. Grief fills the space between, though we do not always recognize it as such. The journey towards hope happens as we process and adapt during that time between what was and what will be, beginning with the “Friday” of our story, the journey IN grief.

## THE GRIEF JOURNEY



3. What were some examples Steve gave of healthy practices for processing grief? Any others you have heard about or found helpful?

**Steve mentioned four:**

- **sit with it (allow thoughts and feelings to come to the surface freely)**
- **name it**
- **process with someone in a small group (“Hey this is what I’m feeling.”)**
- **journaling**

**See what other ideas people mention. Avoid judgement but if an idea seems particularly unhelpful or off-point, redirect to some other healthy practices (drawing and painting, talking with a counselor, meditative prayer, GriefShare, DivorceCare, recovery support groups, walking while processing alone or with a friend, etc)**

4. Steve cautioned that we may choose unhealthy ways of avoiding our grief through distracting and detaching ourselves from the process of healing. What are some common distractions we may employ?

**Lots of ideas here but some you may offer if the conversation stalls include immersing ourselves in work or activities, food, drink, substances, media.**

### DIG DEEPER

Steve found the three-day Holy weekend of Friday (the shock and pain of the Jesus' crucifixion), Saturday (the day of waiting and wondering), and Sunday (the surprise of resurrection victory) a good metaphor for the grief journey when we undergo change, pain, or loss. He also found Proverbs 4:23 to be a key reminder to guard that process our hearts must undergo if we are to journey towards hope.

#### Read Proverbs 4:23:

*“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”*

5. What changes might we need to make in our daily lives to “guard our hearts” when we are processing change, pain, or loss?

**Some ideas might include carving out time and space in our schedules, changing our daily routines to allow for more rest, choosing different books/shows/media/activities – or lack of these things— to support more time to grieve, choosing to be around people who encourage us and point us toward hope, taking extra care of our physical bodies so they can carry the burden of grief, spending time in passages like the Psalms that give words to our pain.**

6. Steve mentioned some things that may begin to flow from an “unguarded” heart that will not allow us to process change and grief. What were some examples he mentioned or others you may have noticed when we do not embrace the grief journey?

**Resentment, bitterness, lack of trust, fear of putting ourselves out there—encourage the group to think about other things that flow from us when we don't allow ourselves time to process grieve.**

In *Grieve, Breathe, Receive*, Steve explains more about the word guard:

*“The Hebrew word translated as “guard” is natsar, which means to relentlessly defend and guard what matters most from danger. Picture the defensive wizardry of NBA basketball star Patrick Beverly— that’s the kind of fierce energy this verse wants us to bring to the table when it comes to guarding our hearts.” (Page 56)*

Along with encouraging us to guard our hearts, Scripture offers numerous passages that give words to our feelings and model how to grieve with honesty. As Steve mentioned, the Bible contains an entire book called Lamentations and over forty psalms of lament that contain a full range of emotions and honest conversations with God about pain, loss, and injustice.

Jesus cries out the opening lines from one such psalm during his crucifixion, making clear his physical, emotional, and spiritual agony while fulfilling prophecies that he would take our punishment for sin. Examine a portion of Psalm 22 below to see how the writer gives an honest account of physical, emotional, and spiritual anguish while also reminding himself of God’s character and past actions.

### **Read Psalm 22:1-5:**

*“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from saving me,  
so far from my cries of anguish?  
My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,  
by night, but I find no rest.  
Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;  
you are the one Israel praises.  
In you our ancestors put their trust;  
they trusted and you delivered them.  
To you they cried out and were saved;  
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.”*

7. What are some of the expressions of grief, anguish, and loss that you notice?

**The group will likely pick up on the overt ones such as feeling forsaken, crying in anguish, feeling unheard, being unable to rest. You may also want to point out that the writer expresses a subtle anxiety that he might trust God but God may not deliver him— something he dialogues with God about as he examines past evidence of God’s faithfulness. Even if the timing and nature of God’s deliverance may look different than the writer expected, he has evidence that God has been trustworthy in the past.**

8. Can you relate to any of these?
  
9. What are some of the descriptions of God's character and past actions that you notice? Why do you think the writer includes these, too?

**God “enthroned” may be a reminder of God’s sovereignty and right to be praised, his past faithfulness to ancestors reminds that they did not misplace their trust and that he was their deliverance. It is also asking God to show the same faithfulness to him. To answer his cries just like his ancestors’ cries.**

**Many passages of scripture, particularly in the Psalms but also in books like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Job, offer a pattern of humans holding up their “case” before God, pointing to the reality of their anguish and “throwing themselves on the mercy of the court,” i.e. rehearsing God’s trustworthy faithfulness as shown in the past and asking Him to be true to His nature. This is an example of how we grieve but with hope, however long it takes.**

Note that the writer continues to alternate between truthful expressions of agony and truthful statements about God — for 26 more verses! The other lament psalms all follow a similar pattern, showing that the journey through change, grief, and pain are a process to be embraced, not a quick fix to be applied. While almost all end on a positive statement of God’s character or promises with a transition that feels decidedly hopeful, Psalm 88 ends still asking God when His help will arrive, expressing deep anguish, and naming specific pain:

**Read Psalm 88:13-18:**

*“But I cry to you for help, Lord;  
in the morning my prayer comes before you.  
Why, Lord, do you reject me  
and hide your face from me?  
From my youth I have suffered and been close to death;  
I have borne your terrors and am in despair.  
Your wrath has swept over me;  
your terrors have destroyed me.  
All day long they surround me like a flood;  
they have completely engulfed me.  
You have taken from me friend and neighbor —  
darkness is my closest friend.”*

10. Why might it be important for God's word to include a psalm that ends without a tidy, hope-filled ending? Do you find this encouraging or discouraging as you contemplate the grief journey?

**Some may find this troubling but ultimately, this psalm reminds us not only that processing change, grief, and loss won't always fit the timetable we would like but also that God will keep listening to our honest prayers of lament for as long as it takes. You might want to have them take a look at the next Psalm 89, an exuberant, free-flowing song of praise as a reminder that joy does return eventually but we can trust God IN our grief for as long as it takes to journey toward hope.**

## RESPOND

This week we were reminded that when the shock and pain of change comes, we find ourselves in our "Friday," just like the disciples who watched Jesus arrested, beaten, and crucified. Though we may know intellectually that "Sunday" is coming, we must begin our grief journey to get there. Steve asked us to consider a question:

11. What do you struggle to embrace or honor either about the process of grieving change or about the parts of your story that caused the change?
12. Consider reading and reflecting on these six psalms of lament this week: Psalm 3, 4, 5, 22, 88, 142. How might reading and reflecting on the honesty of the Psalms help you in with that struggle?

## COMPANION READING AND REFLECTION THIS WEEK

From Pastor Steve in *Grieve, Breathe, Receive*, on naming the source of our grief:

*“Sometimes we make generalizations or create false narratives that stunt the grieving process. But when you define reality and put a name to the source of your wound, a sacred movement toward healing is unlocked within.” (Page 52)*

Read pages 51–110 (chapters 5–9) of the book. Steve offers additional questions for personal reflection to help you continue the journey IN grief, the “Friday” of your story and then move into “Saturday,” the journey THROUGH grief, with encouragement to use this waiting and wandering time well. Jot down any additional insights and feel free to share some of your learnings at the next gathering.

**NOTES**



SESSION 3

# BREATHE

## SESSION 3: BREATHE

Welcome to “Saturday,” the in-between place in the grief journey after the shockwaves of the initial change but before the “Easter Sunday” of our story when restoration, healing, and joy return. As we will learn, we may feel compelled to journey **THROUGH** grief as quickly as possible, only to discover we must slow down, breathe, and learn to trust God in deeper ways.

### CONNECT

Welcome any new members joining this week and make quick introductions!

*Did anyone read and reflect on the psalms of lament?*

*What did you learn about the psalm writers' experiences with hardship or change?*

*Did you resonate with anything they experienced or expressed?*

*For anyone who read the next portion of Steve's book, did you gain any additional insights or tools?*

### VIDEO

Listen for Steve to discuss the following:

- Why and how the in-between “Saturday” of grief may be a time for deepening trust in God.
- An acronym for the grief journey and the thoughts and feelings that characterize the middle portion of the journey.  
**Point out the place on page 30 in the Discuss section to fill in the acronym for any note-takers in your group.**
- The role of forgiveness and a related prayer we can practice.

**NOTES**

DISCUSS

THE GRIEF JOURNEY



Steve discussed the middle “Saturday” stage of our journey when we are processing change, grief, or loss. After the shock and pain of a change subsides – that “Friday” part of the journey—we begin what may feel like a desert season of wandering and waiting while we wrestle with various thoughts, memories, and emotions. While we are tempted to rush the steps to get through our grief as fast as possible, Steve encouraged us to recognize the benefits of embracing this time of wandering and waiting.

1. Steve likened our journey to process change, grief, and loss to the Israelites’ desert wanderings, which extended for many years beyond what a journey from Egypt to the Promised Land should have taken. What did he say the Israelites struggled to understand about God when they left Egypt?

**They struggled to trust God and they often grumbled and rebelled against him during this time.**

### SESSION 3 BREATHE

2. What was one reason that Steve gave for their faulty view of God? What other reasons might have contributed?

**For years in Egypt, their picture of power, leadership, and sovereignty was the cruel, abusive Pharaoh. When they thought about God as sovereign ruler, it is easy to imagine that they thought about the trauma and pain Pharaoh had caused them, and they reacted to God with distrust and even outright rebellion. Other factors could be growing up around a religion that worshipped false gods who needed to be appeased and anger at God for their original trauma, wondering why a good God would allow them to suffer in the first place.**

3. Though God often corrected rebellious behavior among the Israelites during the desert wandering, he consistently provided for them with the protective cloud of his presence, fresh water, manna for food, and even supernatural care so that their clothes and sandals did not wear out for 40 years (Deuteronomy 29:5). What character traits of God did the extended desert time allow them to experience over and over to help change a faulty view of God?

**They learned that God was trustworthy, faithful, loving. Allow the group to add other ideas from what they may know from this period of Israel's desert wandering (forgiving God, just God, etc). In the process of moving to the promise land, they needed to unlearn their old view of "God as Pharaoh."**

4. Can you relate? Have you needed to unlearn perceptions of God that were based on interactions with people or events in the past?

## DIG DEEPER

As Steve began the middle phase of processing change, grief, and loss, he was often surprised by feelings of anger and depression and the way his mind brought up frequent memories of past hurts. His mentor helped him see that the middle phase of the grief journey is often characterized by these feelings and thoughts, giving him the SPADURA framework for the grief journey:

**S – Shock**

**P – Pain**

**A – Anger**

**D – Depression**

**U – Upside Turn**

**R – Reconstruction**

**A – Acceptance**

His mentor encouraged him that he would need to acknowledge and work through his “Saturday” feelings and thoughts. Each person’s grief journey is different just as the change that sends us on that journey is different. The greater the change, particularly in cases of traumatic events and loss, counseling and other support for mental health is highly encouraged.

5. During the middle desert wandering stage of grief, what are some healthy ways of working through the strong emotions, vivid memories and pain caused by change?

**May want to return to any of the things the group came up with from Session 2, question 3 such as processing with others, journaling, support groups, counseling, prayer practices, etc. The point here is that the middle part of our journey cannot be skipped. We stay in the messy middle longer when we don’t deal with the stuff that comes up when change shows up.**

Because some of Steve’s grief was brought about through hurtful actions by others, he also realized he needed to learn a lot more about forgiveness. He focused on two concepts from Scripture that helped him receive forgiveness for self and practice forgiveness of others. One concept had its roots in the Old Testament from the time of the Israelites’ desert wanderings:

**Read Leviticus 16:20-22:**

*“When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat’s head. He shall **send the goat away** into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall **release** it in the wilderness.”*

6. In the Old Testament, the priest helped the people observe the holy day of atonement, when the temple and the people were cleansed in the sight of God for a year’s worth of sin and rebellion. Though the priest made animal sacrifices as a substitute for the punishment demanded by people’s sin, he also used a living “scapegoat.” How did the priest and his assistants create a strong symbolic picture of God removing the people’s sin and forgiving them?

**Placed his hands on the goat’s head while confessing the people’s sin on their behalf as a means of transferring the people’s sin, then released the goat into the desert to send away the people’s sin and guilt for another year.**

7. In what ways might this picture of forgiveness also foreshadow Jesus taking the sins of people on himself once and for all?

**Jesus willingly submitted himself to take on our sin. Though we often associate his death with the sacrifice of animals—he paid the price once and for all through giving his life—he is also pictured here because he willingly went outside of Jerusalem to the wasteland of Golgotha (literally the garbage dump outside the city) to release people from sin once and for all.**

In the New Testament, one Greek term for forgiveness, *aphiemi*, is frequently used because it means to release and send away, reminding people of the ancient “scapegoat” in the desert. One such place is in Jesus’ model prayer.

**Read Matthew 6:12:**

*“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”*

8. What do we trust God to do with our debt of sin when we turn to him for forgiveness?

**We trust God that through the sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection of Jesus our sins can be fully released and sent away, no longer counting against us.**

9. What are we trusting God to help us do with others' debts of sin toward us when we practice forgiveness?

**We are choosing, though God's help, to release people from the debt of sin they have created against us, and to send away those debts. Note: forgiveness is not repressing the memories of past wrong; it is choosing to send those wrongs to the Father to deal with on our behalf rather than trying to extract revenge from fellow broken humans. It is an act of surrender to and trust in the Father.**

The Greek term *charizomai* is another New Testament word for forgiveness, one that the Apostle Paul often used. Paul had been a bloodthirsty zealot who persecuted Christians before Christ changed his life. Paul was keenly aware that the grace (*charis*) of God extended to him through the cross was to be freely extended to others, so he used a word for gracious forgiveness, *charizomai*, such as in his letter to the Colossian church.

**Read Colossians 3:13:**

*"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."*

10. When you think about how God extends grace, mercy, and forgiveness to us because of Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross for us, what thoughts come to mind?



## COMPANION READING AND REFLECTION THIS WEEK

From Pastor Steve in *Grieve, Breathe, Receive*, on learning to trust God by practicing forgiveness:

*“What I’ve come to realize is that forgiveness is a solo sport. Forgiveness is an act you must freely choose to do. No one can force you; you can’t forgive yourself before you’re ready. You can be free only after you are sick and tired of carrying that extra dead weight. Forgiveness is a process. It takes time. The deeper the pain you’ve experienced, the more complex the healing and, therefore, the longer and more difficult the practice of forgiveness tends to be.” (Page 118)*

Read pages 111–192 (chapters 11–16) plus the Benediction that closes the book. As your journey towards hope now anticipates the Easter Sunday of your story, re-examine your initial commitment to DARE: Desire something good, believe Anything is possible, lean into Resurrection certainty, and Expect that good is on its way. Jot down any additional insights and feel free to share some of your learnings at the next gathering.

**NOTES**



SESSION 4

# RECEIVE

## **SESSION 4: RECEIVE**

Welcome to the final session of our Bible study! Our prayer is that you feel more equipped than when you began to examine and respond to life's changes while sustained by a gritty and courageous hope.

### **CONNECT**

Welcome any new members joining this week and make quick introductions!

*If you used Story Cards during week one, would you choose the same image today? Something different?*

*What has surprised you most as you have learned about the grief journey?*

*What has been your biggest takeaway from our time together?*

*For anyone who read the final portion of Steve's book, did you gain any additional insights or tools?*

### **VIDEO**

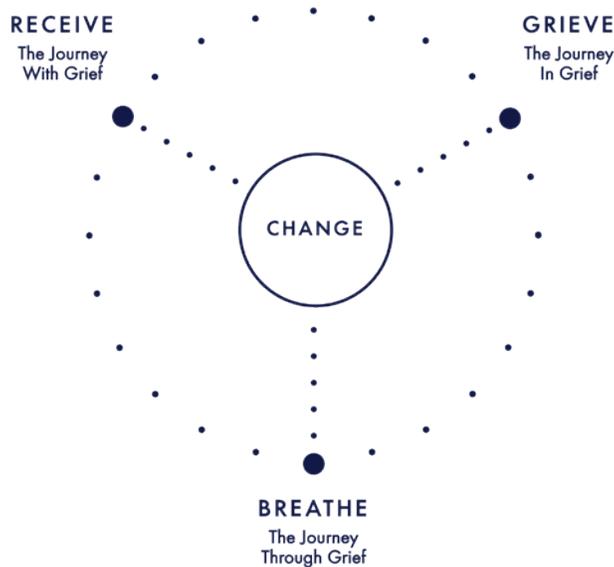
Listen for Steve to discuss the following:

- Why Steve calls the final stage “the journey WITH grief” and an example from Jesus' life after the resurrection.
- How the resurrection shapes our ability to hope.
- Some of the things we may receive on the “Sunday” of our grief journey when we remain open to what God has for us.

NOTES

DISCUSS

THE GRIEF JOURNEY



Steve discussed that the goal of the grief journey is not to forget our story but eventually, to be able to carry that story differently in light of the “Easter Sunday” surprises like care, healing, mercy, and grace that God provides. No one expected a crucified and buried Jesus to resurrect. Easter was a massive surprise, and the resurrection became ground zero for hope that with God all things are possible. Yet Jesus did not erase the evidence of what had happened on Friday.

1. What did Steve say Jesus showed his disciples as evidence?



## DIG DEEPER

Steve says that for Christians, the resurrection is what allows us to grieve but with hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13) and for us to hold onto the possibility that hope might show up looking like something we never thought was humanly possible. It allows us to pray, like Steve, “Lord, surprise me today and keep me open to what you want to do,” keeping our hands and heart ready to receive from God. Mary Magdalene, the first person to see Jesus alive after his resurrection, received the surprise of her life that included a bonus blessing she could not have imagined.

### Read John 20:1, 11–18:

*Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.... Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”*

*“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don't know where they have put him.”*

*At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”*

*Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”*

*Jesus said to her, “Mary.”*

*She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”). Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”*

*Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.*

5. What do you think Mary expected to find when she arrived at the tomb on Sunday?

**Allow the group to imagine the scene – what would you expect to find at a tomb before dawn? Darkness? Solitude? Other mourners from among their friends? From those who may be familiar with the account from the combined gospels, could include details like stone over the entrance, soldiers guarding it but otherwise deserted, possibly a gardener or other laborer who she might enlist to help her get spices inside the tomb to anoint Jesus' body.**

6. Describe all the things that must have been very different from what she expected.

**Opportunity for the group to really pay attention to the passage, looking for details like no stone over the entrance, no body, angels talking to her – what might have tipped her off that they were angels? Jesus – and how did he look to her? Is this surprising, too?**

7. What evidence do you see that Mary is clearly and understandably in the very early “Shock” and “Pain” stages of grief (remember SPADURA from Session 2)?

**Openly weeping, in shock so not everything is registering, willing to haul a corpse away by herself if needed.**

8. How does this help you understand her reaction to the events unfolding?

9. Jesus responds to Mary with deep kindness and comfort during her grieving. What do you notice him doing in verses 14–16 to honor her grief and give her a chance to process it?

**This may take a little probing from the group but help them see that He:**

- **Moves toward her, providing the gift of presence**
- **Acknowledges her tears and gives her an opportunity to tell her story**
- **Calls her by name, no longer just the formal address of “Woman” similar to our “Ma’am” or “Madame,” reaffirming their friendship and years of discipleship together**
- **(And though not expressly stated in 14–16, he receives her embrace, providing additional comfort to his friend – we infer this from verse 17 because at some point, he says its time to stop holding on. Note – some may bring up that through church history, various interpretations of Jesus’ words, “Do not hold on to me,” including those that suggest Mary was not allowed to touch him for various reasons, have been proposed. Just a few verses later, though, we find Jesus commanding the disciple Thomas to touch his nail-scarred hands. What seems more likely is that Jesus wanted to orient Mary to the next part of the divine plan—she could not hold on to the person he had been before but must release him and be released, herself, to the next glorious chapter in God’s plan—see the next question.)**

Verses 17–18 represent an important pivot for Mary in her grief, from being *in* it and trying to work *through* it, to carrying it *with* her as part of a miraculous, joyful story. Jesus comforted her, but now he commissions her.

10. What assignment does he give this first eyewitness of the resurrection?

**Mary is often called the “apostle—which means ‘one sent to proclaim a message’—to the apostles.” At a time in history when women were not considered by Greco-Roman society to be reliable witnesses in court cases, Jesus commissioned her with the greatest news of all. Mary embraced this second Easter surprise of a brand new purpose and proclaimed the he was alive and about to enact the next part of his plan, ascending to heaven, which Jesus had told the disciples earlier would let him send the Holy Spirit to fill them.**

11. For anyone in the Friday or Saturday of processing change, grief, or loss, how does Mary's story encourage you to hold on to hope?

## **RESPOND**

Steve closes with the encouragement to keep our hands and hearts open to receive the hope God has for us. God is not done with our stories!

1. As you consider what you need to grieve (a change, a loss, an expectation), how you need to breathe (inhaling God's care and grace toward you, exhaling bitterness and unforgiveness), and receive (what God is teaching you, how he is redefining your story, what Easter surprise he has for you), what do you sense is your next step in the process?
  
2. Who might you reach out to in order to support you on your journey?

## A FINAL ENCOURAGEMENT FROM PASTOR STEVE

*"I know you have what it takes to make it the rest of the way. I know there will be pain and ache waiting at the finish line, but there will also be recovery, care, and confidence in yourself that you can't begin to comprehend this side of the finish line.*

*Close your eyes and picture it: you, on the other side of your grief.*

*Strong. Healed. Brave.*

*Grateful. Confident. Unshakable.*

*Because Sunday is coming.*

*We run the race and become someone who embraces the possibility of hope.*

*First, we must **grieve**. Then we learn to **breathe** again. And from there, we can **receive** the new mercies God has for us."*

*(Grieve, Breathe, Receive, page 190)*

If you have not finished *Grieve, Breathe, Receive*, we hope you will continue reading! Steve also has a free devotional series available for download to help you connect to the book of Psalms.



Download the three *Evening Psalms* devotional sets at  
<https://www.stevemcarter.org/evening-psalms>

Grace + Peace,

*Steve Carter and the team at Faithbridge Church*

# LEADER GUIDE

### LEADER GUIDE

Welcome to our Journey Towards Hope adult Bible study based on Steve Carter's book, *Grieve, Breathe, Receive: Finding a Faith Strong Enough to Hold Us!* We are grateful you are here, whether that's hosting a discussion table at our 4-week on-campus Bible study or facilitating your own small group. For some people you will lead, this may be the first time they have experienced a small-group style Bible study, while others will be very familiar with the rhythms of participating. Regardless, we hope this guide helps facilitate great discussion, whether it's encouraging the quieter participants to share or helping the very verbal members leave room for others to talk. Remember to reach out to us if you have questions, ideas, or concerns at any point along the way!

### PREPARATION

Each week please bring your Bible so that you can model looking up the scripture passages, even though we have printed them in the guide. Though this study is not homework intensive, please come prepared by watching the video ahead of time using the links provided by our team, scanning through the questions, and jotting down answers or any questions you may like clarification on. We highly recommend reading ahead in Steve's book for the fullest experience. Not everyone in your group will do the companion reading from his book during the study, but many will and may have questions.

During your preparation time, select 1 or 2 questions you most want to discuss in each section if time begins to run short. Our team has included additional leader notes in green throughout the guide where you may want more information or ideas for steering your group toward a great discussion.

Starting on the next page, you'll find the basic format and flow for each of the segments in your guide.

## CONNECT

This section contains some suggested “get to know you” questions or check-in ideas to learn how people may have applied the lessons from the week before. Plan to spend about **15 minutes** here. The goal is to get people ready to focus on spiritual things and renew their contact with each other after a week away. We recommend saving prayer requests/follow up on previous prayer requests for the final minutes of table time rather than during this segment.

## VIDEO

Just prior to watching the video, a member of our team will welcome everyone and introduce the topic of the session’s video by walking through some highlights to listen for Steve to discuss. For those facilitating elsewhere in a small group, introduce these 3 to 4 highlights, which are listed in this section along with space to take notes. Videos are roughly 12 minutes in length.

## DISCUSS

This section typically has 2 to 4 questions closely tied to Steve’s main points. You’ll begin your table discussion immediately after the video ends and the lights come up. For a one-hour discussion time, with room for prayer with your group at the end, you will want to spend about **15 minutes** in this section. There are introductory and sometimes brief commentary sentences in this section that you can either read aloud to your group as you go or ask someone at your table to read them.

## DIG DEEPER

This section references Bible passages to read, followed by 6 to 8 questions to help the group understand the passages and tie them into the main idea of the session. You will want to spend the bulk of your time, about **30 minutes or more**, in this section. If possible, ask one of the table members ahead of time if they would like to read the passages to the group so they can be ready to read. There are introductory and sometimes brief commentary sentences in this section that you can either read aloud to your group as you go or ask someone at your table to read them.

### RESPOND

This section offers a challenge or call to action for the week ahead, usually reiterating something that Steve closed with in the video or a similar challenge flowing from what you just discussed. Because some of the challenges can feel personal or even a bit vulnerable to some at the table, you will not lean heavily into discussion here, though you may have a few who jump in to answer. That's ok! Read the section and questions and encourage the table to think about or jot down how they would respond even if they are not comfortable sharing.

You may want to shift quickly from this section to a time to review prayer requests for your group before the Grow Team does a final wrap up and general closing prayer. You may want to designate someone in the group to email prayer requests each week so that members can be praying for one another.

### COMPANION READING & REFLECTION

The Faithbridge Journey Towards Hope study does not have required homework between sessions, but the experience is so much richer for those who also read along in *Grieve, Breathe, Receive* between gatherings. Point out this Companion Reading section to the group (about 50 pages per week) and encourage them to journey deeper by reading the corresponding chapters. This section contains a quote from *Grieve, Breathe, Receive* to whet their appetite and offers a space to write additional insights they learn from their reading. Steve's book also has reflection questions they may wish to answer in personal study. In our sessions 2 – 4, you'll find there is also a question in the opening Connect section that asks for any insights for those who did the companion reading. Remind them that our hope is that they are blessed by the book at whatever pace they are reading!





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REVISED: 06/24