

THE SILENT STRUGGLE: MASCULINITY, GRIEF,
AND THE JOURNEY TOWARD HEALING

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Advisor:

Dr. Arthur Pressley

Nnabugwu Gogoh

Drew University

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the suppression of grief among Christian men of the African diaspora as a theological, cultural, and psychosocial problem shaped by racialized and intergenerational trauma, constructions of masculinity, and patterns of ecclesial formation. Drawing on a ministry context that includes men of African, Caribbean, Afro-Latinx, and African American backgrounds, the study argues that emotional restriction within Black church and diasporic Christian communities contributes to fragmented identity, relational isolation, and diminished communal and spiritual well-being. Grief is approached not merely as an individual experience but as a formative process tied to identity, relational bonds, and the meaning-making of loss within shared histories of displacement, oppression, and resilience.

This project focuses specifically on Black men between the ages of 30–60 who are active church participants within the five boroughs of New York City, including African American and broader African diasporic communities. Within this defined ministry context, the study advances a central claim: that grief suppression among Black men is not merely a personal or cultural tendency but the result of three converging forces: racialized social formation, masculine habitus, and theological distortion. Together these converging forces restrict the expression of grief and produce embodied, relational, and spiritual fragmentation. By identifying these mechanisms, the project develops a ministry-based intervention in the form of structured grief circles and pastoral gatherings designed to help participants externalize, reinterpret, and release internalized beliefs about grief, thereby fostering movement toward healing, relational integration, and theological wholeness.

Engaging Black theological reflection and interdisciplinary grief studies, this dissertation critiques dominant models of masculinity that equate strength with emotional suppression and limit the capacity for lament across diasporic contexts. In response, the project develops a constructive theological anthropology in which grief is understood as a necessary and potentially transformative dimension of identity formation and communal healing.

The study centers on sustained exegetical and theological engagement with the lives and lament traditions associated with David and the prophet Jeremiah, attending closely to how grief, loss, and emotional expression function within their respective narratives. By focusing on these texts rather than employing a broad range of scriptural references, the project demonstrates how biblical lament can serve as a theological resource for articulating grief, processing trauma, and reimagining faithful expressions of masculinity within diverse Black and diasporic communities.

As a practical theological project, this dissertation culminates in the development of a ministry-based model designed for implementation within diasporic Christian contexts. This model incorporates structured practices such as guided lament, communal reflection, and pastoral accompaniment, creating intentional spaces in which men can engage grief as a relational and transformative process. The study explores how these practices support healing, foster identity reformation, and challenge inherited norms that inhibit emotional expression across cultural contexts.

Ultimately, this study contends that when diasporic church communities cultivate practices that normalize and sustain grief work among men, they participate in the restoration of identity, the healing of communal and intergenerational trauma, and the formation of more life-giving expressions of masculinity. By integrating focused biblical interpretation, theological reflection, and ministry praxis, this dissertation offers an implementable framework for

addressing complex grief within diverse communities of the African diaspora.

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The Silent Struggle: Masculinity, Grief, and the Journey Toward Healing

Introduction: Lament as Liturgy: Framing the Theology of the Grieving Body

Framing Masculinity, Grief, and the Body

Grief is often treated as an individual psychological event, something to be managed privately, overcome through resilience, or resolved through personal fortitude. Yet such framings obscure the ways grief is profoundly shaped by social structures, cultural narratives, and embodied histories. This privatization of grief stands in tension with the biblical witness, which consistently resists isolating suffering from communal life. From the Psalms of lament to the prophetic cries of Israel, grief is presented as communal, relational, and voiced before God. “How long, LORD (Psalm 13:1a)?” is not the question of a solitary individual but the prayer of a people whose suffering demands witness.

For men, particularly Black men, grief does not occur in a vacuum. It unfolds within rigid expectations of masculinity that dictate how pain may be expressed, where vulnerability is permitted, and which emotions are deemed acceptable. These expectations are not incidental; they are actively produced through family systems, educational institutions, religious traditions, and broader socio-political forces. In contrast to these norms, Scripture repeatedly portrays men who grieve openly: David weeps for Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:26), Jeremiah is known as the “weeping prophet (Jeremiah 9:1),” and Jesus himself is moved to tears at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35). Such moments are not depicted as emotional excess or spiritual weakness, but as covenantal fidelity. They reveal that grief is not a failure of faith but a mark of relational depth and moral seriousness before God.

Masculinity, as theorized within gender studies, is not a singular or universal experience

but a hierarchy of performances formed through social, theological, and relational disciplines (Connell, 2005). These norms are taught early and enforced through both overt discipline and subtle social reward. Boys quickly learn that emotional expression, particularly sadness, fear, or grief invites correction, ridicule, or punishment. This cultural formation stands in sharp contrast to biblical wisdom, where strength is not equated with emotional denial but with reverence, humility, and openness before God: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10 NIV),” not the suppression of sorrow. When grief is disciplined out of boys, it is not strength that is formed, but fragmentation.

This dissertation approaches grief not only as an emotional or psychological phenomenon but as a somatic and theological one. Scripture affirms the inseparability of body and spirit: “A crushed spirit dries up the bones (Proverbs 17:22b NIV),” while hope and despair alike are described as embodied realities. Drawing from somatic trauma theory, psychology, and liberationist theological frameworks, this work argues that unexpressed grief is carried in the body, transmitted across generations, and reinforced by theological narratives that spiritualize endurance while neglecting lament. The lament psalms themselves insist that the body remembers what theology often tries to forget: “My tears have been my food day and night (Psalm 42:3a NIV).”

Within Black communities, this embodied grief is intensified by historical trauma and racialized stress. As Dr. Joy DeGruy, a researcher of multigenerational trauma, and Resmaa Menakem, a somatic therapist, demonstrate,¹ trauma is not only remembered cognitively but held physiologically. Scripture names this reality without reducing it to inevitability. “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge (Jeremiah 31:29 NIV).” Yet the

¹ Joy DeGruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Portland, OR: Joy DeGruy Publications, 2017); Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (Las Vegas: Central Recovery Press, 2017).

biblical witness refuses despair as the final word. Such inheritance is not fate; it is precisely what God seeks to heal. The prophetic vision is not disembodiment but restoration: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26 NIV).” This movement signals not only healing but re-formation, a recovery of embodied humanity as God intends it to be lived.

Formation, Deformation, and the Theological Stakes of Masculinity

Masculinity, then, must be understood not merely as a social construct but as a site of theological formation. When grief is suppressed, disciplined, or disallowed, what occurs is not neutral coping but deformation. The self is shaped away from relational truth, embodied presence, and dependence upon God. Scripture consistently frames the human person as formed either toward life or away from it: toward wisdom or folly, flesh or stone, truth or concealment. The disciplining of grief within masculine norms therefore represents not only a social harm but a theological distortion, one that reshapes the human capacity to love, lament, and receive God. To speak of masculinity and grief is thus to speak of formation itself: of whether men are being shaped into fuller participation in divine life or habituated into an emotional exile that contradicts the gospel’s vision of restored humanity.

Theologically, this project is shaped by a sacramental attentiveness to the ordinary, resonant with Herbert McCabe’s insistence that God is not encountered in abstraction but in material, relational reality, and with Henri Nouwen’s emphasis that the Holy Spirit is revealed not through spectacle but through gentle, hidden movements of love, presence, and vulnerability.² This attentiveness is deeply biblical, Elijah encounters God not in wind, earthquake, or fire, but in a still small voice (1 Kings 19:12). Grief, too, often speaks in this quiet

² Herbert McCabe, *God, Christ and Us*, ed. Brian Davies (London: Continuum, 2005); Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Behold the Beauty of the Lord: Praying with Icons* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1986); Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Scent of Wine: A Spirituality of Vulnerability* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998).

register, not demanding explanation, but requiring accompaniment.

The chapters that follow interrogate how masculinity disciplines grief, how theology has often colluded with this discipline, and how alternative frameworks grounded in biblical lament, embodied healing, and communal witnessing offer pathways toward integration and restoration. Such pathways reflect the heart of the gospel, where healing is relational, bodies matter, and salvation unfolds through presence rather than domination. This presence finds its fullest expression in the life of Jesus, and its horizon in Scripture's vision of communal renewal, where grief is neither denied nor erased, but gathered into God's redemptive future. Chapter One begins by examining the earliest site of this formation: the emotional policing of boys.

Chapter 1: The Architecture of Silence: Social Formation and the Deformed Masculine Self

This chapter examines how grief becomes suppressed within masculine identity through processes of social, cultural, and theological formation. Focusing on the relationship between silence, embodiment, and identity, it argues that the restriction of grief is not incidental but learned, reinforced, and internalized over time. Drawing on biblical lament, social theory, and trauma studies, the chapter distinguishes between grief as a relational response to loss and trauma as a disruption of the body's capacity to process that loss. It further contends that when grief is constrained, it does not disappear but becomes embodied, reshaping how men relate to themselves, others, and God. Particular attention is given to how these dynamics manifest within Black and diasporic communities, where histories of racialized violence and survival intensify the regulation of emotional expression. By examining silence as both a social practice and an embodied disposition, this chapter establishes the foundation for understanding how masculine identity becomes deformed through the suppression of grief.

Silence, Strength, and the Withholding of Grief

Chapter One is anchored in Psalm 32, a text that exposes the spiritual and bodily consequences of suppressed sorrow. Psalm 32 belongs to the tradition of penitential psalms, yet its theological significance extends beyond confession into the realm of embodied experience. The psalm opens with beatitude, “Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven,” but quickly turns to the cost of concealment: “When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long (Psalm 32:3 NIV).” The Hebrew verb *חָרַשׁ* (*charash*), translated “kept silent,” carries connotations of deliberate restraint or enforced quiet, suggesting that silence here is not incidental but chosen or compelled.³ This silence is not neutral; it is active suppression.

³ John Goldingay, *Psalms, Volume 1: Psalms 1-41* (Baker Academic, 2006), 432-433.

The consequences are described in deeply somatic terms. “My bones wasted away” invokes not metaphor alone but the ancient Israelite understanding of bones as the seat of vitality and strength.⁴ The internal structure of the self is depicted as deteriorating under the weight of unexpressed truth. Likewise, “your hand was heavy upon me (Psalm 32:4a NIV)” situates this experience within divine relationality, not as punitive destruction but as covenantal pressure. The “heavy hand” of God is not abandonment but an insistence that hidden reality be brought into the open. Silence becomes unbearable precisely because relationship with God cannot be sustained through concealment.

The psalm’s turning point arrives in verse 5: “Then I acknowledged my sin to you... and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” The movement is not from guilt to innocence alone, but from silence to speech, from concealment to articulation. Theologically, this signals that healing is mediated not through endurance but through disclosure. The body that was wasting becomes the site of restoration once truth is spoken.⁵ Thus, Psalm 32 establishes a pattern that extends beyond sin into grief: what is unspoken is not neutralized, it is internalized. Silence is not absence; it is accumulation.

Read in this way, Psalm 32 functions as a theological anthropology of suppressed interiority. It reveals that the human body is not designed to contain unarticulated sorrow indefinitely. What is withheld from relational expression is absorbed into the body. This insight becomes critical for understanding masculine formation: when grief is disciplined into silence, the result is not strength but slow disintegration beneath the surface of composure.

For the purposes of this dissertation, it is necessary to distinguish between grief and

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1984), 80.

⁵ Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 80-81; Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1975), 118.

trauma, terms often used interchangeably but conceptually distinct.⁶ Grief may be broadly understood as a personal and multifaceted response to loss, one that extends beyond emotional reaction into the realms of identity, embodiment, and relational life. While commonly associated with the death of a loved one, grief also emerges in response to other forms of loss: the end of relationships, diminished health, financial instability, or existential disorientation. In this sense, grief is not a singular feeling but an ongoing process of adjustment to a reconfigured reality. It disrupts not only what one feels, but how one understands oneself, others, and God.

This process manifests across multiple dimensions of human experience. Emotionally, grief may present as sadness, anger, guilt, confusion, or even numbness, often fluctuating in intensity and unpredictability. Cognitively and existentially, it may provoke questions of identity and purpose. Physically, grief can register through fatigue, disrupted sleep, and changes in appetite. Socially, it may strain relationships or produce withdrawal. Spiritually, grief may either deepen faith or generate profound theological questioning. Taken together, these dimensions affirm that grief is not incidental to human life; it is formative, reshaping the contours of lived experience.

Within contemporary psychological and social frameworks, grief is often governed by what may be described as “universal norms” of mourning. These norms tend to privilege visible, verbal, and emotionally expressive forms of grieving. Individuals are frequently expected to articulate their pain, seek communal support, and demonstrate a gradual movement toward acceptance and emotional stability. Practices such as open conversation, therapeutic engagement, and ritual participation are often presented as normative pathways toward healing. Even where stage-based models of grief have been critiqued, there remains a persistent expectation that grief should be processed outwardly and resolved progressively.

⁶ David Kessler, *Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief* (New York: Scribner, 2019), 23.

However, these norms are not neutral. They are culturally situated and often assume forms of emotional expression that do not translate across all contexts. For many men, particularly those formed within communities that prioritize endurance, collective responsibility, and emotional restraint, grief does not conform to these expectations. Instead of verbal articulation, grief may be expressed through action, silence, or sustained responsibility toward others. What appears as absence may in fact be displacement; what appears as strength may be structured containment.

The difficulty, then, is not that men do not grieve, but that prevailing frameworks often fail to recognize the forms their grief takes. When normative models define “healthy grief” too narrowly, alternative expressions are misread as dysfunction rather than difference. A more adequate account must therefore expand beyond singular expectations, attending to the ways grief is mediated by culture, formation, and, critically for this study, masculinity. This theological framing finds its fullest expression in biblical lament, where grief is voiced as relational address before God. These cries are seen in Psalm 13:1–2 and 22:1–2, where David laments, “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?” This echoes the honest disclosure Walter Brueggemann describes as faith’s deepest expression before God.⁷

While grief seeks expression, it does not always retain the capacity to be expressed. Trauma, by contrast, names the overwhelming of the body’s capacity to integrate experience, resulting in dysregulation that is neurological, somatic, and often pre-verbal. Resmaa Menakem posits in *My Grandmother’s Hands* that: the body is where we carry the “shards” of our past, registering experiences that exceed cognitive processing and shaping patterns of response long after the initial event. Menakem suggests that our bodies often react to current triggers based on

⁷ Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 79; Douglas J. Schuurman and David Mitchell, *Lamenting Grief: Theology and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 45.

these stored somatic memories, creating a “silent struggle” that the mind cannot always articulate.⁸ While grief and trauma frequently overlap they are not identical: grief seeks expression and relational acknowledgment, whereas trauma often disrupts the very capacity for such expression.⁹

The psalmist’s confession, “When I kept silent, my *body* wasted away,” reveals a theology that refuses to separate emotional truth from physical reality. Unlike Psalm 42, which wrestles with theodicy and the providence of God, Psalm 32 focuses specifically on the physical erosion caused by unresolved internal silence. Silence here is not peace; it is erosion. Strength withheld from lament becomes self-destruction. What the psalm names is not merely personal guilt but the cost of emotional containment, a cost carried in the body and reinforced through social and theological expectation.

This witness stands in direct opposition to cultural and ecclesial constructions of masculinity that equate faithfulness with restraint and strength with silence. Psalm 32 insists that unspoken pain does not honor God; *it corrodes the self*. Healing begins not with endurance, but with articulation, with the risky act of bringing what has been hidden into the presence of God. Such articulation is not merely therapeutic disclosure but a covenantal act, restoring relational truth between the human body and the divine presence. Lament, then, is not a failure of masculine resolve but a discipline of theological honesty. In this sense, lament functions not only as expression but as epistemology: a way of knowing God, self, and suffering that resists distortion through silence.

Read through a Black liberationist and somatic lens, this psalm resonates deeply with embodied histories of grief that have been forced underground for survival. The “*wasting away*”

⁸ Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 2017.

⁹ Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 51.

described by the psalmist echoes contemporary insights into trauma held in the body and passed across generations. As Bessel van der Kolk argues, the body “keeps the score,” registering experiences that exceed cognitive processing and shaping patterns of response long after the initial event.¹⁰ Silence, whether individually chosen or socially imposed, becomes a theological problem when it denies the body its language and God the truth of human suffering. In this sense, silence is not merely an absence of speech but a rupture of relational honesty before God. It is within this biblical and embodied frame that the central claim of this dissertation emerges.

This dissertation argues that the disciplined suppression of grief in men, particularly Black men formed within racialized, patriarchal, and colonial systems, constitutes a theological deformation of Christian formation and a distortion of the *imago Dei*. When silence is sanctified and stoicism spiritualized, masculinity becomes estranged from the crucified and weeping Christ, fragmenting the body, constricting relational intimacy, and weakening communal life. Drawing upon biblical lament, somatic trauma theory, Black liberation theology, and womanist thought, this study contends that grief is not a deviation from faithful masculinity but a sacred epistemology, an embodied and communal liturgy through which men resist dehumanizing formations, recover relational integrity, and participate in God’s liberating and healing work. Trauma, while intersecting with this process, intensifies the stakes by constraining the body’s capacity to access and express grief, thereby deepening the need for practices that restore both regulation and relational presence. To reclaim lament as masculine practice is therefore not merely therapeutic but ecclesial and prophetic: it challenges theological systems that privilege domination over vulnerability and reimagines masculinity as Christ-shaped solidarity with the wounded, the marginalized, and the grieving body of God’s people.

¹⁰ Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Viking, 2014).

Psalm 32 therefore frames this chapter's central claim: when grief is disciplined into silence, especially in men, it does not disappear. It settles into the body, distorts theology, and fractures community. Yet this psalm must be held in tension with other biblical witnesses, particularly texts of lament such as Psalm 42, where suffering emerges not from concealed sin but from perceived divine absence. What follows is an examination of how masculinity is formed to produce such silence, how theology has often sanctified it, and how Scripture itself offers a counter-witness in which grief becomes a site of encounter rather than shame.

Grief, Masculinity, and Social Formation

Grief is intrinsic to human experience, yet for many men it is marked by silence, suppression, and isolation. Scripture portrays grief as communal and voiced; silence rarely as redemptive. This tension raises a critical question: if grief is both natural and biblically sanctioned, how does it become socially restricted within masculine identity? Long before grief is consciously encountered, men are inducted into social worlds that define them in ways they did not choose. These formative processes do not merely shape behavior; they configure what is emotionally permissible, the conditions under which grief may be expressed, and the consequences for violating those norms.

From birth, individuals are assigned names, national identities, religious affiliations, and gendered expectations they did not choose, and much of life is spent performing and defending these inherited identities as if they were immutable. Sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann describe this process as the social construction of reality, wherein meanings become institutionalized and internalized until they appear natural rather than contingent.¹¹ Similarly, Judith Butler argues that gender is not a fixed essence but a repeated performance shaped by

¹¹ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Open Road Media, 2011).

social expectation and regulation.¹² Normative masculinity is imposed, learned through repetition, discipline, and social consequence.¹³ As Raewyn W. Connell demonstrates in her work on hegemonic masculinity, dominant masculine ideals are sustained not only through cultural reinforcement but through the marginalization of alternative expressions. What is learned early is rarely questioned, particularly when deviation carries social, spiritual, or physical risk.

From an early age, boys are conditioned to equate strength with emotional restraint, a lesson reinforced by cultural narratives, religious traditions, and societal norms. The expectation that men must endure pain without visible suffering has profound consequences, shaping not only individual expressions of grief but also collective understandings of masculinity. Over time, this conditioning functions as an interpretive grid through which emotional experience is evaluated, permitting anger or stoicism while restricting vulnerability and lament. Such conditioning trains the body toward containment and teaches the soul to equate vulnerability with danger. This formation stands in tension with the biblical witness, which repeatedly portrays emotional honesty as integral to covenantal faithfulness.

As bell hooks observes, “The first act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is not violence toward women. Instead, patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation;” writing within Black feminist and cultural criticism, hooks identifies this “self-mutilation” as the internalization of emotional restriction required to sustain patriarchal norms.¹⁴ This psychic mutilation manifests most potently in the ways grief is handled or avoided among men. Silence becomes both shield and wound, survival strategy and theological burden. What appears externally as discipline or strength is internally experienced as fragmentation, narrowing the range of emotional life and constricting the capacity for relational depth.

¹² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

¹³ Raewyn W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

¹⁴ bell hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (New York: Atria Books, 2004), 66.

Silence as Habitus: Masculinity Learned in the Body

If repression names the social conditions that constrain grief, formation names what those conditions produce over time. To understand how silence becomes durable rather than situational, this study turns to the sociological framework of habitus. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus illuminates this process: the internalization of social structures into embodied dispositions that shape perception and action without conscious deliberation.¹⁵ Habitus describes not simply what individuals do, but how they come to perceive the world as already structured in certain ways, including what is emotionally permissible. Silence, in this sense, is not merely imposed; it is learned. It becomes posture, instinct, and orientation toward the world. What begins as external regulation is sedimented into the body as internal disposition, rendering silence both naturalized and difficult to disrupt.

Trauma scholarship confirms that repeated exposure to environments where emotional expression carries risk leads to embodied strategies of containment. Van der Kolk (2014) argues that trauma reorganizes the body's response systems, shaping how individuals experience safety, vulnerability, and connection. Where grief seeks articulation and relational acknowledgment, trauma often constrains that capacity by disrupting regulation and narrowing the window within which expression feels safe. Over time, grief is no longer something one feels and expresses; it becomes something one carries. Silence hardens into muscle memory. In this way, trauma does not replace grief but conditions its expression, often forcing it into indirect, deferred, or somatically encoded forms.

This embodied silence functions as an alternative catechesis. It teaches men how to inhabit their bodies, how to relate to others, and how to imagine God. Formation, in this sense, is

¹⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

not limited to formal theological instruction but occurs through repeated bodily practices that inscribe meaning beneath conscious awareness. What appears as emotional absence is more accurately emotional training. The body is not empty but disciplined, shaped to anticipate risk, suppress vulnerability, and maintain coherence within socially sanctioned norms. In racialized and immigrant contexts, this training intensifies. Silence becomes a means of navigating racism, economic vulnerability, and surveillance. To speak grief aloud risks exposure in a world that already reads certain bodies as disposable.

This dynamic can be illustrated through lived experience. I recall, as a younger Nnabu Gogoh, observing the life of a close childhood friend's father. He was a man I had known for years within our shared church community, a figure shaped by the same expectations that were quietly shaping me. He was a second-generation Caribbean man raised within a church culture that emphasized discipline, respectability, and emotional restraint as markers of spiritual maturity. As a child, he was corrected when he cried, instructed to "be strong," and praised when he remained composed under distress. Over time, these external corrections became internalized expectations. By adulthood, he no longer experienced emotional suppression as imposed; it felt natural.

When his father died, he did not weep publicly. He organized the funeral, delivered remarks, and cared for others. Community members commended his strength. Yet in the months that followed, he began to experience chronic fatigue, irritability, and a persistent sense of disconnection from both God and others. I witnessed this shift not as an outsider, but as someone who had grown up watching him embody what we had all been taught strength looked like. What became evident over time was not simply that he was grieving, but that he had no framework for expressing that grief. His silence was not emptiness; it was formation. And yet, I also witnessed

moments, small and often unspoken, where that discipline began to give way. In the presence of trusted relationships, where there was no demand to perform strength, something in him began to soften. It was there that I began to recognize the difference between containment and healing. His body, however, was speaking: through tension, exhaustion, and emotional constriction.

This case illustrates how habitus operates beneath conscious awareness. Silence was not simply a response to grief; it was the only response he had been formed to enact. What appeared as resilience was, in fact, *disciplined containment*. What became clear through this lived experience was that healing did not emerge from increased discipline or theological explanation, but from permission: permission to feel, to name, and to express grief within a relationally safe environment.¹⁶ This recognition was formative, not only for understanding his life, but for naming the architecture of silence that shapes so many men, myself included. Only then did the internalized silence begin to loosen its hold.

While grief seeks expression, it does not always retain the capacity to be expressed. Such narratives are not exceptional; they are patterned. They reveal that masculine silence is sustained not only through ideology but through embodied repetition. What is learned in the body must be unlearned in the body.¹⁷

Inherited Grief and the Black Body

Psalm 42 deepens this embodied theology of sorrow: “My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, ‘Where is your God (Psalm 42:3 NIV)?’” As a lament psalm, this text does not center moral failure but the experience of divine absence and social taunting, situating grief within an unresolved theological crisis. Here grief is not abstract; it is ingested, metabolized, and carried. Tears become sustenance. The language is deliberately

¹⁶ Marc Brackett, *Permission to Feel* (New York, NY: Celadon Books, 2019), 107.

¹⁷ Resmaa Menakem, *Rock the Boat* (Center City, MN: Hazelden Publishing, 2015).

somatic, portraying sorrow as something consumed and circulated within the body. The psalmist's body testifies when theology falters. In contrast to penitential psalms (e.g., Psalm 32), where bodily deterioration is linked to concealed sin, Psalm 42 presents a body that suffers without moral causation, thereby expanding the theological scope of grief.

Somatic scholars further demonstrate that historical trauma is literally stored in the Black Body, as a “*soul wound*” transmitted intergenerationally, proving that unarticulated grief is physiological.¹⁸ Working at the intersection of trauma, race, and embodiment, Menakem argues that unprocessed collective suffering is not only remembered cognitively but patterned physiologically. The body remembers what theology often fails to name. Similarly, Joy DeGruy demonstrates how historical and racialized trauma shapes behavioral and emotional patterns across generations.¹⁹ Here, trauma refers to overwhelming experiences that disrupt regulation and are carried somatically, while grief names the ongoing response to loss: personal, communal, and historical. Unresolved grief, trauma and pain are inherited and unacknowledged, particularly among *Black* men who maintain a performance of invulnerability to navigate a society that reads vulnerability as a threat. Grief, in these contexts, is not absent; it is managed through silence.

Denied grief often mutates into rage, numbness, detachment, or despair. These are not alternative emotions but displaced expressions of unacknowledged loss. These manifestations fracture the self and strain relational capacity. What is silenced relocates. For men formed to endure without breaking, the body becomes the archive of loss. This archive is neither purely metaphorical nor merely symbolic; it is neurological, relational, and behavioral. Suppressed grief reorganizes stress responses, narrows emotional range, and constricts the capacity for intimacy. What begins as survival becomes structure. Over time, silence hardens into identity.

¹⁸ Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 45.

¹⁹ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 102.

This dynamic is intensified by systemic violence, economic precarity, and racial surveillance. Grief becomes both personal and collective, inherited and structural. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Black adults are 20% more likely to report serious psychological distress, yet markedly less likely to seek treatment.²⁰ This disparity is not merely behavioral but reflects historically grounded mistrust, limited access to care, and culturally reinforced models of survival. Within this context, masculinity is often shaped by the necessity of endurance. Vulnerability is interpreted as exposure, and exposure as danger. Silence becomes armor. Yet armor worn too long fuses to the skin: protection turns to suffocation. What once preserved life begins to constrict it.

Embodied Lament Beyond Language

In pastoral contexts, grief often emerges outside formal theological speech. When linguistic or theological frameworks prove insufficient, the body and cultural practices assume the work of expression. Men who struggle to pray aloud may reference music (songs, albums, rhythms) that articulate sorrow when words feel inaccessible. Rap music, in particular, frequently functions as an unacknowledged lament, naming rage, loss, and survival in a world hostile to Black vulnerability. When linguistic or theological frameworks prove insufficient, the body and cultural practices assume the work of expression.

These musical testimonies operate as liturgies from the margins. Functionally, they mirror the structure of biblical lament - address, complaint, memory, and longing - even when not explicitly framed as prayer. They carry confession, protest, memory, and longing. They are not distractions from theology but sites where theology is already being performed. Recognizing these practices as theological does not collapse the distinction between sacred and secular but

²⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Mental Health of African Americans," last modified March 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/black-health.htm>.

expands the scope of where divine-human encounter may be discerned. These practices reveal a crucial theological truth: lament often precedes doctrinal articulation. Grief finds language where permission exists. The problem is not that men do not grieve; it is that theology has not always recognized where grief already speaks.

When the church fails to name these expressions as sacred, it inadvertently reinforces the very silence it seeks to heal. This failure is not neutral; it reflects a narrowing of theological imagination regarding how grief may be faithfully expressed. The result is a fragmentation between spiritual language and embodied experience. Men are left to grieve in coded forms, outside ecclesial recognition, while the sanctuary remains emotionally restrained. Consequently, the church risks preserving doctrinal clarity at the expense of pastoral accessibility, leaving embodied sorrow without liturgical home.

The Church and the Formation of Masculine Silence

The ecclesial community, though called to be a site of healing, has at times participated in the disciplining of male grief. Sermons that exalt endurance without tears, discipleship models that equate leadership with stoicism, and worship environments that privilege triumph over lament collectively shape what men believe is permissible before God. These patterns function formationally, establishing implicit theological norms about which emotions signify faithfulness and which signal weakness. When resurrection is proclaimed without dwelling in crucifixion, men learn to bypass sorrow in pursuit of strength. When perseverance is celebrated without acknowledging pain, grief becomes spiritually suspect. In this way, ecclesial practices do not merely reflect belief but actively produce emotionally constrained forms of discipleship.

The silencing of grief is therefore not merely cultural but theological. It reflects not only inherited social norms but also particular interpretive emphases within Christian teaching and

practice. It forms men to believe that emotional containment is holiness. Yet Scripture resists this distortion. The biblical narrative is saturated with weeping prophets, lamenting kings, and a Messiah who enters human suffering fully. These witnesses do not present grief as a failure of faith but as a faithful mode of engaging God amid suffering.

“Jesus wept (John 11:35)” remains a radical disruption of sanitized masculinity. The incarnate Christ does not observe grief from a distance; He inhabits it. Situated within the narrative of Lazarus’s death, these tears emerge not only from personal affection but within the horizon of impending resurrection, underscoring that grief and hope are not mutually exclusive. His tears are neither weakness nor spectacle but revelation. They disclose a divine life that refuses emotional disembodiment. If Christ embodies sorrow without forfeiting strength, then masculine silence cannot be the highest form of faithfulness. It must instead be examined as formation.

Toward a Theology of Reclaimed Grief

This chapter has traced how grief becomes inherited, embodied, and socially regulated, particularly within Black male experience. It has shown how silence operates as both survival strategy and spiritual distortion. Throughout, a distinction has been maintained between grief as a response to loss and trauma as the disruption of the body’s capacity to process and express that loss, even as the two remain deeply intertwined in lived experience. What appears as emotional absence is often disciplined containment shaped by racialized and patriarchal systems.

Yet Scripture offers another formation. Psalm 42 portrays tears as sustenance within the experience of divine absence, while Psalm 32 reveals confession as bodily relief in the context of concealed sin. Read together, these texts distinguish between grief arising from existential suffering and distress linked to moral rupture, while affirming that in both cases the body

participates in theological truth. Together they insist that what is spoken before God heals what silence corrodes.

If silence is learned in community, it must be unlearned in community. If grief is stored in the body, it must be released through embodied practices of lament. If masculinity has been shaped by suppression, it must be reformed through Christ-shaped vulnerability. This movement suggests a pastoral trajectory: recognition of grief, permission for its expression, and integration of that expression within communal and theological life. The question, therefore, is not whether men grieve. The question is where that grief is permitted to live.

And as Psalm 32 has already revealed, what is not given voice before God does not remain dormant, it presses inward, settles into the body, and waits for the moment when silence can no longer be sustained. Chapter Two will examine how theological traditions have at times sanctified suppression, spiritualized stoicism, and misread Scripture in ways that reinforce masculine silence. It will then turn to the crucified and weeping Christ as the decisive counter-formation, proposing that grief is not a deviation from faithful masculinity but a sacred participation in God's redemptive solidarity with the wounded. In doing so, the study will further develop a theological account of grief that is not merely descriptive but formational, oriented toward the reconstruction of masculine identity in light of Christ.

Chapter 2: Distorted Holiness and the Weeping Christ: Suppression, Shadow, and the Reframation of Masculinity

This chapter investigates how theological interpretation and ecclesial practice have contributed to the suppression of grief by framing emotional restraint as a marker of holiness and faithful masculinity. It argues that silence surrounding male grief is not merely cultural but is often reinforced through misread or selectively interpreted Scripture, patriarchal assumptions, and unexamined theological traditions. Through critical engagement with biblical texts, theological voices, and liberationist and womanist perspectives, the chapter exposes how grief has been minimized, spiritualized, or redirected in ways that distort both masculinity and discipleship. In response, it develops a constructive theological reframing in which lament is recovered as a faithful and necessary mode of relating to God. Drawing on Alan Hirsch and Mark Nelson, this study employs the concept of reframation to describe not the replacement of prior theological vision but its reorientation.²¹ I am using reframation to name the process by which distorted associations, particularly the equation of masculinity with emotional suppression, are re-seen in light of Christ's embodied vulnerability and relational presence. By reexamining key biblical witnesses and situating them within contexts of suffering, marginalization, and protest, this chapter contends that grief is not a threat to holiness but integral to it, offering a reorientation of masculine identity shaped by vulnerability, relationality, and truth-telling.

Over the past five decades, significant scholarship has examined grief within Black religious communities, often emphasizing the role of faith as both a coping mechanism and a site of meaning-making. Within pastoral theology, scholars such as J. Deotis Roberts have emphasized the central role of the Black church in mediating grief through prayer, preaching, and

²¹ Alan Hirsch and Mark Nelson, *Reframation: Seeing God, People, and Mission Through Re-enchanted Frames* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2024), 20-25.

communal worship. Roberts argues that grief is processed through collective spiritual practices that “sing out” sorrow, transforming suffering into shared meaning and resilience.²² While this approach rightly centers the communal and theological dimensions of grief, it often assumes that participation in liturgy and verbal expression is sufficient for emotional processing. Such frameworks risk overlooking the ways in which grief may remain unintegrated when it cannot be fully articulated or safely embodied, particularly among Black men formed within traditions of emotional restraint.

By contrast, more recent work in trauma and pastoral studies, such as that of Bessel van der Kolk, challenges purely cognitive or verbal models of healing by demonstrating that unprocessed grief is stored within the body and requires somatic engagement for integration.²³ From this perspective, practices that engage rhythm, movement, and nonverbal expression are not supplemental but essential, particularly in contexts where direct emotional articulation is constrained. This insight exposes a critical gap within traditional pastoral approaches, which have not consistently accounted for the embodied dimensions of grief shaped by racialized, cultural, and gendered expectations.

Pastoral care studies have highlighted the importance of communal rituals, preaching, and spiritual practices in navigating loss, while more recent post-COVID-19 research has underscored the disproportionate burden of collective grief carried by Black communities and the limitations of traditional pastoral responses in addressing prolonged or complex grief. While these studies affirm the centrality of the church in grief care, they often prioritize cognitive, liturgical, or verbal forms of processing loss. Fewer approaches attend to the embodied, nonverbal, and culturally situated expressions of grief that this project foregrounds. This

²² J. Deotis Roberts, *Roots of a Black Future: Family and Church* (Westminster Press, 1981), 112-18.

²³ van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 211-25.

dissertation builds upon these contributions while extending them by centering embodied lament, particularly through rap, movement, and communal practice, as necessary pastoral responses for Black men whose grief has been historically silenced or redirected.

This project focuses specifically on Black men between the ages of 30 and 60, including African American men and men of the African diaspora, who are actively engaged in church communities across the five boroughs of New York City. Within this context, grief is not only personal but socially and theologically mediated, shaped by racialized histories, ecclesial expectations, and communal survival strategies. The central argument of this dissertation is that grief suppression among Black Christian men is not merely psychological or cultural but theologically reinforced; therefore, healing requires not only emotional permission but theological reformation and embodied communal practices that enable grief to be expressed, witnessed, and integrated.

When Silence Is Spiritualized: Suppression, Patriarchy, and the Misuse of Holiness

The silence surrounding male grief is not neutral; it is theological. It reflects interpretive traditions that confuse emotional restraint with holiness and endurance with faithfulness. Scripture has often been selectively read to sanctify stoicism while muting lament. Within its prophetic context, this critique exposes the danger of naming resolution where rupture persists, a pattern that parallels theological tendencies to prematurely silence grief. When theology sanctifies silence, it distorts masculinity and denies lament. Scripture insists there is a time to weep, a time to speak, and a God who dignifies grief rather than erases it (Ecclesiastes 3:4, 7). Read through a prophetic lens, this critique names the impulse to declare resolution where rupture persists. Holiness in Scripture is never emotional numbness. It is covenantal honesty before God.

Job is frequently cited as an exemplar of silent endurance, yet such readings collapse the

book's theological arc. Situated within a prophetic framework, this critique highlights how resolution is imposed upon unresolved rupture, in ways that resonate with theological instincts that quiet grief too quickly. Job's later protest, his refusal to remain silent, reveals lament as covenantal fidelity rather than spiritual failure (Job 3; 23). Job's voice does not betray God; it clings to God through anguish. His speeches function as theological argument, pressing the question of divine justice within an ongoing relationship. His protest is not rebellion but relational insistence that God remain accountable to God's own justice. Likewise, passages such as Ephesians 5:22–25 and 1 Kings 2 are routinely abstracted from their covenantal contexts, recasting dominance as headship and emotional hardness as strength. Detached from their literary and theological settings, these texts are more easily appropriated to reinforce hierarchy rather than relational responsibility. Such abstraction turns relational texts into hierarchies and transforms covenant into control.

Even Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, "not my will but yours be done (Luke 22:42 NIV)," is at times misused to justify emotional suppression, severing obedience from anguish. Within the narrative, however, this moment is framed by visible distress (Luke 22:44), where Jesus' anguish is bodily expressed. Yet the text makes clear that His obedience emerges through agony, sweat like drops of blood, and relational surrender. Submission in Scripture is not emotional erasure but embodied trust voiced through distress. Obedience passes through grief rather than around it.

Psalms 88 stands as a defiant witness to unresolved faith, refusing closure while remaining in relationship with God. As one of the few psalms that does not resolve in praise, it resists the expectation that grief must be quickly overcome. Grief here is not rushed, resolved, or corrected. God abides within lament. The psalm ends without triumph, and yet it remains Scripture. Its inclusion within the canon affirms that unresolved sorrow remains a legitimate form of faithful

speech. Canon itself legitimizes unresolved sorrow. The Bible preserves despair within its prayers, thereby resisting every theological impulse to sanitize pain.

This distortion of holiness is not only biblical but cultural. C.S. Lewis, in *The Screwtape Letters*, exposes how suppression masquerades as piety. Through satirical correspondence, Lewis illustrates how distorted spirituality can redirect attention inward rather than toward God and neighbor. Screwtape advises Wormwood to encourage “pious” suppression of emotion, because distorted spirituality is more effective than outright sin.²⁴ In another letter, Screwtape counsels: “In all activities of mind which favour our cause, encourage the patient to be un-selfconscious... Contrariwise let the reflection ‘My feelings are now growing more devout, or more charitable’ so fix his attention inward that he no longer looks beyond himself to see our Enemy or his own neighbours.”²⁵ Here, suppression is revealed not merely as external temptation but as interior fragmentation, where devotion collapses into self-protection and spiritual attentiveness narrows into anxious self-absorption. Within the ministry context of this study, this dynamic is not abstract. Many participants describe forms of “spiritual discipline” that functioned as emotional avoidance, where prayer replaced expression and silence was interpreted as maturity. Lewis’ insight therefore provides a diagnostic lens for recognizing how theological language can mask unresolved grief, reinforcing the need for pastoral spaces where emotion is not redirected but named and engaged.

What has often been named as external threat may in fact be the unintegrated shadow of the self, the disowned fear, grief, and vulnerability that, when unexamined, disguises itself as virtue. Through satirical correspondence, Lewis illustrates how distorted spirituality can redirect attention inward rather than toward God and neighbor. Silence becomes spiritual pride.

²⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1942; repr., New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 24-25.

²⁵ Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, 25.

Emotional withdrawal masquerades as maturity. The danger is not grief but the refusal to integrate grief into faithful presence. When grief is disowned, it does not disappear; it may instead surface through constricted relational patterns such as defensiveness, control, or rigid theological certainty that resists lament.

Kelly Brown Douglas reminds us that “God is found in the crucified places,” suggesting that grief is not merely endured but honored as a site of divine nearness.²⁶ Scripture does not pathologize sorrow; it dignifies it. To suppress grief, therefore, is not holiness but theological misalignment. It is to call peace where there is no peace. For Black men in this study, this theological misalignment is intensified by racialized expectations of endurance and strength. Douglas’ claim situates grief not only as personal sorrow but as a response to historical and communal suffering, requiring pastoral practices that can hold both individual loss and collective memory. For the men engaged in this study’s ministry context, this insight reframes grief not as private weakness but as participation in a larger historical and theological reality. Pastoral care must therefore create space for this grief to be expressed communally, rather than contained individually, allowing participants to locate their sorrow within both divine presence and collective experience.

***** The Messiah from the Margins *****

Jesus of Nazareth emerges not from centers of power but from obscurity, embodying what Isaiah names as one “despised and rejected... a man of suffering, and familiar with pain (Isaiah 53:3 NIV).” Within the Servant Songs, this figure is marked not by dominance but by suffering that carries communal significance. Born into poverty, raised in a marginalized village, and executed by empire, Jesus fulfills this prophetic imagination not symbolically but socially

²⁶ Kelly Brown Douglas, *Resurrection Hope: A Future Where Black Lives Matter* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019), 88.

and bodily. He is not adjacent to suffering; He is formed within it. His masculinity is shaped not by dominance but by rejection, not by control but by costly presence. His tears are not incidental; they are revelatory. This moment functions as a reframative rupture. Where masculinity has been constructed through emotional control, Christ redefines it through visible grief. What has been culturally coded as weakness is disclosed as divine presence. For the men in this study, this reframing is essential: it relocates vulnerability from the realm of failure into the realm of faithful embodiment.

“Jesus wept (John 11:35).” The Divine Word does not explain suffering. He does not rush to resolve grief; he enters it. Fully divine and fully human, Jesus dignifies grief by embodying it. Situated within the raising of Lazarus, Jesus’ tears precede the miracle, not follow it. His weeping is not a failure of power but an expression of relational presence. He does not rush to resolve grief; He enters it. The Son of God pauses at the site of loss and mourns. His tears are not weakness but a witness to love, loss, and relational presence. More precisely, this moment reveals a theological sequence: recognition of loss, embodied response, and relational solidarity. Jesus does not move immediately to resolution. He pauses. He weeps. He remains. Only then does action follow. This sequence disrupts both cultural and theological tendencies to bypass grief in pursuit of control or clarity. His tears interrupt sanitized masculinity and expose the fragility of stoic faith. In a world where masculine worth is often measured by emotional restraint, Christ reveals divine strength through visible sorrow. His weeping is not sentimentality. It is theological disclosure. Practically, this reframing becomes foundational within grief circles and ministry gatherings, where participants are invited to interpret their own emotional expression not as loss of control but as participation in Christ’s own pattern of relational presence.

Walter Brueggemann stresses that lament is the most honest disclosure of faith, refusing sanitized piety. Within the grief circles central to this project, this means creating structured space where participants are not moved prematurely toward resolution but are encouraged to remain in lament as a legitimate and necessary form of faith. Lament is not redirected it is witnessed, held, and spoken. In his seminal work *The Message of the Psalms*, Brueggemann proposes that lament functions as a form of speech that sustains relationship with God amid suffering rather than dissolving it: “The cry of anguish is the deepest and most honest disclosure of the believer before God.”²⁷ He contrasts “psalms of orientation,” which affirm a stable world, with “psalms of disorientation,” or raw cries from the abyss.

By positioning lament as honest speech that boldly petitions God without pretense, Brueggemann rejects the “numbing” of royal consciousness that demands stoic silence.²⁸ This relational daring finds fuller expression in Brueggemann’s *The Prophetic Imagination*, where he portrays prophets, and by extension lamenters, as those who critique empire’s denial of pain while energizing an alternative vision rooted in God’s empathy for the suffering.²⁹ Jesus’ tears, then, are not weakness but covenantal fidelity, a grief that resists empire’s demand for silence and stoicism. Here, lament becomes “prophetic imagination,” a disruptive energy that names death as enemy and summons divine action against dominance structures. As Brueggemann writes, “The prophet is the one who articulates the alternative world” born from embracing grief’s raw truth.³⁰

His lament is not loss of control but refusal to collude with death’s denial. Through these works, Brueggemann reframes lament not as weakness but as covenantal protest, aligning

²⁷ Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 79.

²⁸ Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 77-80.

²⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 44-46.

³⁰ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 68.

seamlessly with Christ's embodied sorrow that scandalizes stoic masculinity. He names death as enemy rather than accepting it as inevitability. Within the structure of this project, Brueggemann's understanding of lament directly informs the design of communal grief practices. Participants are encouraged to articulate grief aloud, not as complaint detached from faith, but as covenantal speech directed toward God within community. Lament thus becomes both theological practice and pastoral method.

Liberation theology insists that this location matters. James Cone identifies the cross as a modern lynching tree, exposing God's solidarity with the crucified of history.³¹ In this landmark work, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, Cone draws a stark parallel between Christ's crucifixion and the lynching of thousands of Black Americans, arguing that both reveal divine identification with the oppressed: "Nobody who is lynching anybody can understand the cross," as it places God unequivocally on the side of the defeated, transforming defeat into transcendent victory.³² Womanist theologians extend this claim, naming marginalized bodies as ongoing sites of divine revelation. For Black men in urban church contexts such as those in New York City, this theological framework is not theoretical. Experiences of racialized loss, violence, and generational grief shape how masculinity is performed and how emotion is regulated. Liberation and womanist insights therefore ground this project's insistence that grief must be engaged not only individually but communally and historically.

Drawing from Alice Walker's foundational concept of womanism as a Black feminist theology born from survival amid intersecting oppressions,³³ scholars like Delores S. Williams in *Sisters in the Wilderness* (1993) reframe Hagar's story as paradigmatic, insisting that "survival is

³¹ James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 145-158.

³² Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 140-150.

³³ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), xi-xii.

the most basic vestige of faith” for those history seeks to erase.³⁴ This rejection of dominance challenges what Brueggemann calls “royal consciousness,” the pervasive mindset of established power that maintains the status quo by numbing the capacity to feel or acknowledge the pain of the marginalized.³⁵ Marcella Althaus-Reid presses further as a queer Latin American liberation theologian, whose *Indecent Theology* (2000) scandalizes respectable doctrine by reclaiming Jesus’ tears as “indecent,” disruptive to patriarchal respectability.³⁶ To weep publicly is to scandalize the order of dominance, to embody a masculinity liberated from the armor of stoicism. In Christ, grief becomes protest against systems that demand masculine invulnerability.

His lament is the indecency of God breaking through the suits of respectability. Jesus does not visit suffering from afar. He dwells within it. The incarnation declares that grief is not a theological embarrassment but a holy encounter. Serene Jones reframes silence itself as trauma’s symptom, not choice.³⁷ Masculine muteness is often a survival strategy, but Christ’s tears expose its cost: a soul deprived of relational breath. In Him, the wounded self recovers voice, and silence is transfigured into holy weeping. The Word made flesh restores speech to those taught to endure without it.

Shadow, Suppression, and Christological Reframation

If suppression distorts masculinity, Christ reveals its healing. What theology once framed as strength through emotional control is unveiled in Christ as fear of exposure. The shadow self, when denied, fragments the person. When acknowledged, it becomes material for transformation. Within the ministry model developed in this study, this process of acknowledgment occurs through guided communal practices, including grief circles, facilitated

³⁴ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 53.

³⁵ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 44-46.

³⁶ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 122-124.

³⁷ Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a New Shape* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 52.

storytelling, and embodied reflection. These spaces function analogously to therapeutic environments, where participants are supported in naming previously suppressed grief and integrating it within their spiritual and relational lives. Grace does not bypass the shadow; it illumines and integrates it.

Christ does not annihilate the shadow; He illumines it. In Gethsemane, anguish is neither hidden nor indulged. It is prayed. On the cross, abandonment is neither denied nor dramatized. It is voiced. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me (Mark 15:34 NIV)?” is not theological collapse but relational persistence. Echoing Psalm 22, this cry situates Jesus within Israel’s tradition of lament rather than outside of it. The cry of dereliction is not weakness but covenantal refusal to sever relationship even in felt absence. Even forsakenness becomes dialogue.

For men formed to survive through silence, this Christ can feel dangerous. His vulnerability unsettles armor that once ensured survival. Yet this danger is redemptive. Kelly Brown Douglas situates male grief within state-sanctioned violence, arguing that male sorrow is often a response to political and racial demands for hardness.³⁸ In this light, Jesus’ public weeping dignifies oppressed masculinity as holy witness. Lament becomes resistance. Tears refuse the lie that domination is strength. They testify that love is stronger than armor.

Toward Reimagined Masculinity

Pastoral care must move beyond proclamation toward accompaniment, creating spaces where grief may be witnessed without correction. In practice, this takes shape through structured grief circles and ministry gatherings within church communities associated within my circle, where men meet regularly to engage lament through guided prompts, scriptural reflection, and communal listening. These gatherings are intentionally designed to function as both pastoral care

³⁸ Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), 182.

and therapeutic intervention, helping participants unlearn internalized myths about grief and masculinity while cultivating new patterns of emotional and spiritual engagement. The church must become a community where lament is practiced rather than merely permitted.

Lament becomes the threshold: not resolution, not victory, but tears. These practices aim not at immediate resolution but at gradual integration, where participants learn to remain present to grief without suppression. Over time, this process fosters emotional regulation, relational openness, and a redefined sense of masculine identity grounded in vulnerability and communal support. In Christ, masculinity is not stoic endurance but *agapē* that dares to weep. Strength is redefined as presence. Authority is redefined as tenderness. Leadership is redefined as truth-telling. Power is revealed not as domination but as cruciform love that refuses emotional disappearance. Masculinity is not erased but converted.

This chapter has argued that suppression is not merely psychological habit but theological distortion, sustained by misread Scripture, patriarchal expectation, and unintegrated shadow. It has further contended that Jesus from the margins embodies a liberated masculinity, one that refuses both domination and disappearance.

If suppression constitutes a deformation of the *imago Dei*, then Christ's tears reveal its restoration. In Him, divinity does not eclipse vulnerability but expresses itself through it. The weeping Christ discloses that emotional honesty is not a threat to holiness but its expression. To silence grief, therefore, is to resist the very pattern of God's self-revelation in Jesus.

Grief, therefore, is not deviation from masculinity but its redemption. In Christ, the silenced voice is restored. The armored body softens. The shadow is brought into light. And masculinity, once constrained by suppression, is re-formed through crucified love.

This reframing, drawing on Alan Hirsch and Mark Nelson, names a re-seeing of God,

self, and community through renewed theological imagination.³⁹ It does not discard inherited frameworks but reinterprets them in light of the living Christ, so that what was once perceived through distortion may be perceived truthfully. In this sense, reformation is not innovation but reorientation: a recovery of vision shaped by love, incarnation, and relational fidelity. This reformation is not merely personal but ecclesial. When men recover lament, communities recover truth, as reformation calls the church to a “passionate love affair with a passionate God,” replacing stoic isolation with mutual dependence.⁴⁰ When masculine bodies are freed to grieve, the church is freed from triumphalism. When tears are welcomed, Christ is no longer abstracted from suffering but encountered within it, mirroring Jesus’ raw lament over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). The crucified and risen Lord does not call men to emotional exile but to participatory solidarity with a grieving world, , reflecting reformation's insight on love's initiative: “First we were loved, now we love. He loved us first.”⁴¹

A church that cannot recognize male tears as holy will struggle to recognize the crucified God. Thus the question is no longer whether men may weep, but whether the church will recognize such weeping as holy. For in the tears of Christ, masculinity is not diminished. It is made whole. This dissertation therefore proposes not only a theological reimagining but a practical pastoral intervention. By integrating reformation, lament, and embodied communal practice, it offers a model through which Black men can move from suppressed grief toward healing and wholeness. In this way, the work bridges theology and praxis, demonstrating that transformed belief must be accompanied by transformed practice if masculine identity is to be genuinely renewed. Within the ministry context of this project, reformation is operationalized through structured grief circles and pastoral gatherings where participants are guided to

³⁹ Hirsch and Mark, *Reformation*, 20-25.

⁴⁰ Hirsch and Nelson, *Reformation*, 20–25, 45.

⁴¹ Hirsch and Nelson, *Reformation*, 20–25, 45.

reinterpret their emotional experiences through theological reflection, embodied practices, and communal witness. These spaces function not as abstract theological discussions but as lived environments in which suppressed grief is named, reframed, and expressed. In this way, reformation becomes not only a shift in thought but a practiced reorientation of the body, relationships, and spiritual imagination.

Chapter 3: The Cultural Construction of Masculinity and Emotion

This chapter examines how masculinity is culturally constructed through practices of comparison, emotional regulation, and social expectation, with particular attention to how these formations shape men's relationship to grief. Moving from theological foundations established in earlier chapters, the focus here shifts to the social and historical processes that render vulnerability suspect and emotional expression costly for men. Drawing on biblical narrative, social theory, and psychological research, this chapter argues that masculinity is not an innate essence but a learned and embodied discipline that conditions how men interpret and express loss. Through sustained engagement with the figure of Saul alongside broader cultural analysis, the chapter demonstrates how identities formed through competition, surveillance, and emotional suppression become increasingly rigid and reactive when confronted with disruption. In contrast, alternative models of masculinity grounded in lament and relational openness are explored as pathways toward greater psychological integration and communal health. By situating grief within the dynamics of cultural formation, this chapter exposes the cost of emotional repression and prepares the way for a more embodied and restorative theological vision.

While the dynamics explored in this chapter have broader applicability, this study is grounded in a specific pastoral context: Black men between the ages of 30–60 who are active in church communities across the five boroughs of New York City. These men include African American, Caribbean, and other African diasporic identities shaped by shared yet distinct histories of racialization, migration, and ecclesial formation. This specificity is critical, as the cultural construction of masculinity examined here is not abstract but emerges within urban, racialized, and faith-based environments where emotional expression is both socially regulated and theologically interpreted.

Masculinity, Comparison, and the Fear of Vulnerability

This chapter turns from the biblical authorization of lament established in Chapter One toward the cultural and historical forces that have rendered grief suspect, particularly for men. If Scripture repeatedly affirms lament as faithful speech before God, why has emotional expression become so difficult, even dangerous, for men to practice? The answer lies not in theology alone, but in the cultural construction of masculinity itself.

This chapter is also anchored in the tragic formation of King Saul, a biblical figure whose unraveling reveals how masculinity shaped by insecurity, comparison, and emotional repression becomes spiritually and socially destructive. Saul's story is not primarily one of moral failure but of formative failure, illustrating what happens when power, identity, and worth are constructed without the capacity for emotional truth. His rage toward David does not emerge from weakness but from a masculinity unable to metabolize vulnerability, loss of status, or grief within the body or before God. What Scripture exposes here is not simply an emotional reaction but a formed posture: an identity that tightens rather than yields when confronted with disruption.

The women's song in 1 Samuel 18 functions as a cultural mirror. Within the narrative of Saul's early kingship, this public celebration marks a turning point in how his identity is perceived and destabilized. Saul's worth is suddenly measured publicly, comparatively, and competitively. Honor is quantified, reputation is ranked, and masculine identity is rendered visible through numerical comparison. Rather than grieving the loss of singular esteem or acknowledging fear, Saul internalizes resentment. Scripture notes that he becomes "very angry" and begins to watch David with suspicion. The text notably offers no moment in which Saul laments and processes this disruption before God. Instead, Scripture highlights an ongoing posture of vigilance, epitomized by the note that "Saul kept a close eye on David (1 Samuel 18:9 NIV)," suggesting a body trained toward surveillance, threat detection, and control rather than

trust or release.

Silence does not yield peace; it calcifies into domination. More precisely, Saul's inability to process loss initiates a sequence: disruption (loss of status), emotional constriction (absence of lament), and physiological activation (vigilance and threat perception). What cannot move toward grief settles instead into the body as vigilance, aggression, and rigidity. Contemporary trauma research confirms what the biblical narrative already assumes: when fear and loss cannot be expressed relationally, the human body defaults toward control as a means of survival. In this way, Saul's story is not only descriptive but diagnostic.⁴² Saul's emotional repression thus becomes a physiological posture, shaping not only his inner life but his leadership, relationships, and capacity for covenant.

From a liberationist perspective, Saul represents a masculinity formed under systems that reward dominance and punish vulnerability. Using James Cone's framework, domination can be interpreted not simply as moral failure but as a theological response to threatened identity under conditions of oppression.⁴³ Applied to Saul, and by extension to contemporary Black male experience, this suggests that when identity is constructed through external validation and survival pressure, grief becomes dangerous because it exposes vulnerability. As a result, grief is not processed but displaced into control, allowing fear to reorganize both the self and communal relationships. Saul's fear is never named liturgically; it is enacted politically. Such formations reduce personhood to performance, teaching leaders to understand themselves primarily through status, comparison, and threat rather than interior truth. When grief is denied interpretive space, identity collapses into role, and fear becomes the organizing principle of both the self and the community. What emerges is not trauma itself but a social field shaped by unprocessed fear and

⁴² Judith L. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992; repr., 2015), 33; van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 102.

⁴³ James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), 12.

suppressed grief. When grief is denied movement, it does not disappear; it governs. When grief is denied movement, it does not disappear; it governs.

Masculinity as a Formed Discipline

From early childhood, boys are conditioned to suppress emotional expression, a process deeply embedded within patriarchal and colonial systems that equate masculinity with stoicism, dominance, and emotional control. bell hooks argues that boys are often socialized away from emotional vulnerability in ways that fracture relational capacity.⁴⁴ This conditioning is not incidental but systematic, reinforced through family socialization, educational settings, media representation, peer policing, and religious interpretation. Psychologists consistently demonstrate that boys receive fewer empathetic responses to sadness and fear than girls, leading to the internalization of emotional suppression as normative masculine behavior.⁴⁵ These patterns do not remain at the level of external expectation; they become internalized and embodied over time.

Through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus, this process can be understood as the internalization of emotional restriction into embodied instinct.⁴⁶ For the Black men in this study's ministry context, grief suppression is not experienced as a conscious choice but as a pre-reflective response shaped by repeated social reinforcement. This explains why grief is often displaced into action, silence, or responsibility rather than verbal expression: the body has been trained to interpret vulnerability as risk. Habitus therefore provides a mechanism for understanding how cultural expectations become lived emotional realities.

Neuroscientific research confirms that such suppression carries long-term consequences.

⁴⁴ bell hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (New York: Atria Books, 2004), 32.

⁴⁵ William Pollack, *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1999), 145; Niobe Way, *Deep Secrets: Boys' Friendships and the Crisis of Connection* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 58.

⁴⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 16-22.

Chronic emotional inhibition is associated with heightened sympathetic nervous system activation, increased cortisol levels, and impaired affect regulation under stress.⁴⁷ When grief is consistently inhibited rather than expressed, it does not dissipate; it is rerouted into hypervigilance, irritability, aggression, or emotional numbing. While trauma may intensify these patterns under conditions of sustained threat, the suppression of grief alone is sufficient to produce significant psychological and physiological strain. Masculinity thus functions not merely as ideology but as a learned bodily discipline.

This slow disciplining of emotional life mirrors the spiritual formation described by C.S. Lewis in *The Screwtape Letters*. As Screwtape counsels, “Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one, the gentle slope... without signposts.”⁴⁸ Lewis later clarifies that this gradual deformation operates through distraction, urging that “our business is to get them away from the eternal, and from the Present,” since “the Present is the point at which time touches eternity.”⁴⁹ Masculine emotional repression unfolds incrementally and invisibly through this same displacement from presence. Boys are rarely commanded outright to reject grief; they are trained to defer it, minimize it, or treat it as unnecessary, dangerous, or shameful. Over time, emotional silence becomes second nature.

David and the Alternative Masculinity of Lament

David functions in the biblical narrative as a counter-formation: he is defined not by moral superiority, but by an emotional porosity before God. Across the Samuel narratives and the Psalms attributed to him, David’s life is marked by public and embodied expressions of grief and repentance. David dances, weeps, fasts, mourns publicly, and writes psalms that oscillate

⁴⁷ James J. Gross and Robert W. Levenson, “Hiding Feelings: The Acute Effects of Inhibiting Negative and Positive Emotion,” *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 106, no. 1 (1997): 95-103; Bruce S. McEwen and Elizabeth Norton Lasley, *The End of Stress as We Know It* (Washington, DC: Joseph Henry Press, 2012), 72.

⁴⁸ Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, 64.

⁴⁹ Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, 74-77.

between rage, despair, hope, and repentance (2 Samuel 1:11–12; Psalms 13, 51). Scripture does not portray David’s lament as a threat to leadership but as integral to covenantal life.

The contrast between Saul and David is not strength versus weakness; it is defended masculinity versus grieved masculinity. Saul tightens in the face of disruption; David yields and is reshaped. Divine presence in the narrative does not override emotion but moves through it. Where Saul resists grief and becomes rigid, David allows grief to move, transform, and reorient him toward God and community.

Psychological research affirms this distinction. Emotional expression within trusted relational contexts is associated with resilience, adaptive coping, and relational health.⁵⁰ Grief that is allowed expression becomes integrative; grief that is suppressed becomes governing. Trauma may complicate this process, particularly where safety and relational trust are compromised, but the capacity to express grief remains central to psychological and relational integration. Scripture here anticipates neuroscience.

This distinction between suppressed and expressed grief is not merely theoretical but directly informs the ministry intervention developed in this project. Within the grief circles and pastoral gatherings facilitated in New York City church contexts, participants are guided through structured practices that mirror Davidic lament: naming loss, voicing emotion, and situating grief before God in community. These practices function as both theological and therapeutic interventions, creating conditions in which suppressed grief can move from internalized burden to articulated experience. In this sense, Scripture is not only interpretive but formative, shaping the design of the ministry model itself.

Case Study: Black Masculinity, Grief, and Survival

⁵⁰ James W. Pennebaker and C. K. Chung *Opening Up by Writing It Down: How Expressive Writing Improves Health and Eases Emotional Pain* (New York: Guilford Press, 2011), 44.

Read through a Black liberationist lens, Saul’s story resonates with contemporary formations of masculinity shaped by racial capitalism, surveillance, and scarcity. Within Black communities, emotional suppression has often functioned as a survival strategy in the face of racial terror, economic precarity, and chronic threat. Enslaved Africans were denied mourning rituals; grief had to be hidden to survive. This adaptive emotional constriction, though necessary in one historical moment, has been inherited across generations.

Within Black liberation theology, James Cone explicitly names this dynamic, systems of domination require emotional numbing to function efficiently. Grief interrupts productivity; lament names injustice. For Black men in particular, public vulnerability has often been punished, policed, or weaponized.⁵¹ Masculinity becomes a necessary yet costly shield.

Contemporary psychological studies confirm that Black men experience disproportionately high levels of unresolved grief related to racial violence, mass incarceration, and premature death, while simultaneously facing cultural prohibitions against emotional expression.⁵² Here, grief names the ongoing relational and communal experience of loss, while trauma names the physiological and psychological imprint of chronic threat; the two are distinct but deeply intertwined. This chronic state of “weathering,” a term describing the premature biological aging caused by systemic stressors, results in Black men having a life expectancy of approximately 70.2 years, significantly lower than the 74.8 years observed in white men.⁵³ Furthermore, Black men exhibit a 58% prevalence of hypertension compared to 44% in non-Hispanic white men, highlighting the physiological toll of structural stress.⁵⁴ The result is

⁵¹ Cone, *Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 145-58.

⁵² Daphne C. Watkins and Harold W. Neighbors, “An Initial Exploration of What it Means to be a Black Man,” *Journal of Men's Studies* 15, no. 1 (2007): 11-24; Thema Bryant-Davis et al., “The Trauma of Racism: Implications for Counseling, Research, and Education,” *The Counseling Psychologist* 42, no. 6 (2014): 818-34.

⁵³ Elizabeth Arias et al., “United States Life Tables, 2021,” *National Vital Statistics Reports* 72, no. 12 (Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, 2023), 5.

⁵⁴ Connie W. Tsao et al., “Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics—2023 Update: A Report From the American Heart Association,” *Circulation* 147, no. 8 (2023): e93-e621.

not emotional absence but embodied overload: grief carried without outlet and trauma carried without resolution, manifesting in hypertension, depression, and shortened life expectancy.

Womanist theologian Emilie Townes exposes how such masculinities are sustained relationally. Townes describes the “cultural production of evil” as the normalization of practices that harm bodies while appearing morally justified.⁵⁵ Emotional repression is one such practice. What is framed as strength becomes communal harm, carried across bodies, families, churches, and institutions.

Within the ministry context of this study, these dynamics are consistently observed among men participating in church-based gatherings across New York City. Many report functioning competently in leadership, family, and work roles while simultaneously lacking language or permission to process grief. The grief circle model developed in this project is designed to intervene at precisely this point: not by introducing grief where it does not exist, but by creating structured, relational spaces where grief already present can be safely expressed, witnessed, and reinterpreted.

You Are Not Your Trauma: Sexism, Emotional Formation, and the Loss of Personhood

Recent psychological scholarship emphasizes the danger of identity reduction: the collapse of personhood into trauma history, diagnosis, or role. In *Sexism & Sensibility*, Jo-Ann Finkelstein argues that everyday sexism teaches girls to distrust their emotional lives, framing their reactions as excessive or disruptive.⁵⁶ Over time, emotional attunement is replaced by self-surveillance, as girls learn to monitor themselves rather than trust their internal signals.

Although Finkelstein’s focus is on girls, the implications extend across gender. The same patriarchal logic that labels girls “too emotional” teaches boys that emotional expression is

⁵⁵ Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 18-21.

⁵⁶ Jo-Ann Finkelstein, *Sexism and Sensibility: The New Psychology of Sex and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 88.

incompatible with strength. Where girls are disciplined into minimization through dismissal, boys are disciplined into absence through prohibition.⁵⁷ Sexist systems thus deform emotional formation across genders. Patriarchy does not simply silence emotion, it differentiates its suppression, engineering different forms of emotional dislocation depending on gendered expectations.

Finkelstein demonstrates that resilience is not built through suppression but through emotional validation. Children taught that their feelings are intelligible develop greater psychological flexibility, while those taught to override emotion internalize shame.⁵⁸ What is silenced internally does not vanish; it fragments. Suppressed emotion does not disappear but reorganizes itself beneath consciousness, often emerging somatically or relationally.

This insight carries theological weight. The doctrine of the *imago Dei* affirms that personhood precedes performance, pathology, and productivity. Human worth is thus grounded not in function, emotional control, or social role, but in relational belonging to God. Historically, Jewish and Christian theological traditions have resisted reducing the image of God to any single human capacity, whether rationality, moral agency, or dominion. Instead, these traditions have insisted that the image encompasses the whole person as a relational being in relationship with God and others.

Masculinity formed around invulnerability trains men to see themselves as functions rather than persons. When worth is tied to dominance, usefulness, or emotional self-sufficiency, the *imago Dei* is subtly eclipsed by what might be called an anthropology of utility. Grief exposes the limits of self-sufficiency and reveals dependency as a feature of creaturehood rather than a defect. Biblically, such dependency is not a defect but a constitutive feature of

⁵⁷ Finkelstein, *Sexism and Sensibility*, 88.

⁵⁸ Finkelstein, *Sexism and Sensibility*, 88; Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson, *The Power of Showing Up* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2020), 112.

creaturehood; the Psalms, the prophets, and even Christ's own lament assume that vulnerability before God is not a failure of the image but an expression of it. Saul's collapse illustrates this danger: his inability to grieve reorganizes not only his interior life but the social world around him. Deprived of a theological vision in which dependence is permissible, Saul's masculinity contracts into performance and control, distorting both his self-understanding and the covenantal fabric of the community. What is lost is not merely emotional expression, but relational truth itself.

Masculinity in the Present Tense

This chapter must be read in the present tense. Masculinity today is not merely inherited from the past; it is actively formed in real time through digital architectures that reward grievance, performative certainty, and outrage. Social media platforms, algorithmic feeds, and influencer economies increasingly catechize men into postures of dominance, suspicion, and emotional rigidity. What appears as cultural polarization is, at a deeper level, a crisis of formation. Digital ecosystems privilege reaction over reflection, control over vulnerability, and certainty over grief. In such environments, masculinity is not invited to mature; it is incentivized to harden.

Sociological and psychological research confirms this shift. Studies on online radicalization demonstrate that grievance-based communities, particularly those oriented around masculinity, thrive by offering men a sense of belonging rooted in resentment, victimhood, and reclaimed dominance.⁵⁹ These spaces promise clarity and power but require emotional contraction as the price of admission. In these spaces, grief, tenderness, and ambiguity are framed as weakness, while anger and certainty are valorized as truth. Men are not simply

⁵⁹ N. Dashtgard, "Online Radicalization and the 'Manosphere,'" in *The Routledge International Handbook of Online Radicalization*, ed. K. Behr (London: Routledge, 2022), 204; Debbie Ging, "Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere," *Men and Masculinities* 22, no. 4 (2019): 638-57.

socialized into these identities; they are disciplined into them through repetition, affirmation, and algorithmic reinforcement.

This discipling is especially formative for younger men and boys who are coming of age within the information age, and now the era of artificial intelligence. Research indicates that adolescent and young adult men are disproportionately shaped by online masculinity influencers who equate manhood with control, sexual dominance, emotional detachment, and economic superiority.⁶⁰ As AI-driven tools increasingly curate content, amplify grievance, and simulate authority, the risk intensifies: boys learn to outsource discernment, suppress emotional complexity, and mistake confidence for wisdom. The church cannot afford theological silence here. Formation is happening, whether ecclesial spaces participate or not.

Theologically, this is not best understood as moral decline but as spiritual deformation. Scripture consistently testifies that leaders who cannot grieve will rule destructively, because unprocessed grief (relational loss) and unintegrated trauma (embodied threat) together reorganize power toward control rather than care. The following examples trace a consistent biblical pattern: masculinity severed from lament becomes destructive.

First, King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel embodies a masculinity formed by certainty, control, and the refusal of vulnerability. His authority is grounded in spectacle and domination, symbolized by the golden statue demanding total allegiance (Daniel 3). When confronted with truth, he does not grieve; he rages. His eventual psychological collapse in Daniel 4 is not arbitrary punishment but the embodied consequence of leadership severed from humility, dependence, and lament.

Similarly, Pharaoh in Exodus embodies a masculinity of hardened certainty. His repeated

⁶⁰ Luke Sculos, "Who's Afraid of 'Toxic Masculinity'?" *Class, Race and Corporate Power* 5, no. 3 (2017): 1-5; K. Robb, "AI and the New Discipleship of Boys," *Journal of Digital Theology* 12, no. 2 (2025): 14.

refusals to yield, narrated through the hardening of his heart (Exodus 7–11), signal not merely stubbornness but a sustained resistance to relational and moral disruption. The repeated declaration that Pharaoh’s heart was “hardened” (Exodus 7–11) functions as a physiological metaphor. Rigidity, not strength, governs his leadership. His incapacity for lament culminates in communal devastation, including the loss of his own son.

In the New Testament, this same pattern persists. Herod Antipas in the Gospels exemplifies masculinity governed by performance and pride. Unable to tolerate shame or loss of face, he orders John the Baptist’s execution rather than acknowledge fear or regret (Mark 6:17–29). The narrative exposes the cost of such performative masculinity: prophetic voice is silenced, and violence is normalized.

In contrast, Scripture presents leadership shaped by humility and lament as capable of restraint, discernment, and restoration. This alternative is not abstract but embodied across the biblical witness. David’s authority is sustained not by certainty but by repentance and grief. Jeremiah’s prophetic power flows from his tears. Jesus’ messianic authority is revealed not through emotional control but through weeping, anguish, and surrender (John 11:35; Luke 22:44). Scripture consistently aligns grief with discernment and rejects any theology that divorces power from lament.

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann argues that societies organized around control and productivity must silence grief because lament interrupts dominant narratives of inevitability.⁶¹ Lament destabilizes false certainty by naming loss and dependence on God. It tells the truth that something is wrong and refuses premature resolution.

Psychologically, the absence of lament produces precisely what Scripture names: brittleness, reactivity, and danger. Research on emotional suppression links unresolved grief and

⁶¹ Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, 67.

trauma to aggression, impulsivity, authoritarian attitudes, and decreased empathy.⁶² When grief has no sanctioned outlet, it is converted into rage or numbness. Masculinity formed without lament does not become neutral; it becomes volatile.

For men formed in digital spaces that reward certainty and punish vulnerability, lament is subversive. It refuses immediacy. It disrupts performative dominance. It insists on relational accountability to God, to community, and to the self. Pastorally, lament must therefore be reclaimed not as emotional indulgence but as disciplined faithfulness.

From Silence to Flesh: Masculinity and the Body as Theological Site

The argument developed thus far demonstrates that emotional repression is not an essence of manhood but a historically produced discipline, reinforced by empire, patriarchy, racial hierarchy, and theological distortion. Scripture does not sanctify this discipline; it exposes its cost. Masculinity formed without grief produces leaders who hunt rivals instead of mourning losses, communities that valorize endurance over honesty, and societies unable to tell the truth about their pain.

Yet grief does not disappear when silenced; it relocates. What cannot be spoken is carried in the body, in vigilance, fatigue, illness, and despair.⁶³ Biblical wisdom literature and prophetic vision both attend to this embodied reality. Proverbs warns that “a crushed spirit dries up the bones (Proverbs 17:22 NIV),” naming the physiological consequences of internalized sorrow, while Ezekiel’s vision of dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1–14) extends this imagery to a communal register, revealing that restoration must address embodied despair, not merely belief. This relocation of grief is both physiological and theological, shaping posture, cardiovascular stress,

⁶² James J. Gross and Oliver P. John, “Individual Differences in Two Emotion Regulation Processes: Implications for Affect, Relationships, and Well-Being,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 85, no. 2 (2003): 348-62; van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 115.

⁶³ Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 35–37.

and neuroendocrine response.

As the preceding chapters reveal how masculinity has been disciplined into silence, the argument that follows insists that silence leaves a residue. When grief is denied expression and trauma remains unintegrated, both settle into the body, shaping how men breathe, rest, move, and relate. Scripture does not pathologize this reality. It names it and refuses to abandon it. Before healing can become communal practice, the body itself must be acknowledged as a theological site.

Returning to David as a sustained counterexample, he is remembered not for emotional restraint but for emotional expression. He weeps, fasts, dances, writes psalms of anguish, and mourns publicly (2 Samuel 1:11–12; Psalm 51). Scripture presents his masculinity as emotionally porous before God. His faithfulness is not rooted in control but in relational availability. Where Saul resists disruption, David yields to it and is reshaped.

This trajectory reaches its fullest expression in Christ. Jesus' weeping at Lazarus's tomb (John 11:35) and his anguished prayer in Gethsemane (Luke 22:44) further affirm that grief within covenant is not weakness but fidelity. Divine presence does not bypass emotion; it moves through it.

Read through a Black liberationist lens, Saul's narrative resonates with contemporary masculinities shaped by surveillance, competition, and scarcity. In societies marked by racial capitalism and colonial hierarchy, emotion becomes dangerous because it reveals dependency. As noted earlier, Cone reminds us that systems of domination require emotional numbing to function efficiently. Lament destabilizes power because it names loss and injustice.⁶⁴

Womanist theology sharpens this critique. Emilie Townes describes the "cultural production of evil" as the normalization of practices that harm bodies while appearing morally

⁶⁴ Cone, *Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 150.

justified.⁶⁵ Masculine emotional repression is one such production. When men cannot grieve, communities absorb their unresolved fear through violence, rigidity, and silence. What is framed as individual strength becomes collective harm, carried in bodies, institutions, and theological imaginations alike. This collective embodiment of unresolved grief parallels trauma research demonstrating intergenerational transmission of stress and suppressed emotion.⁶⁶

Saul's tragedy is not the loss of power but the loss of access to his interior life before God. Emotional repression is not morally neutral; it is spiritually and corporeally formative. When grief is denied movement, it does not disappear; it governs. Returning to Saul as a sustained scriptural anchor, masculinity is reframed not as an internal trait but as a formed practice shaped by cultural narratives, social comparison, and emotional prohibition. Saul's story exposes how identity constructed around comparison and control inevitably collapses when it cannot accommodate grief.

From an early age, boys are conditioned to suppress their emotions, a pattern reinforced through family systems, peer dynamics, media, and religious interpretation. Psychologists note that these cultural scripts become internalized early, creating a framework in which vulnerability is equated with weakness.⁶⁷ When such inhibition becomes chronic, research indicates measurable stress dysregulation and diminished emotional integration.⁶⁸

Such disciplining rarely occurs through dramatic prohibition but through gradual normalization. Emotional narrowing becomes ordinary, even virtuous. Theologically, this represents a deformation of discipleship: men are trained away from relational vulnerability, from lament, and from bodily honesty before God, producing a brittle and reactive masculinity.

⁶⁵ Townes, *Womanist Ethics*, 45.

⁶⁶ Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 52.

⁶⁷ Pollack, *Real Boys*, 150.

⁶⁸ Gross and John, "Individual Differences," 350.

The Foundations of Masculinity

The concept of masculinity is not static but rather a social construct that varies across cultures and historical contexts. In Western society, masculinity has been defined by ideals such as independence, dominance, and emotional control. These ideals are not innate but produced through institutional, cultural, and interpersonal systems of reinforcement.⁶⁹ Sociologist Raewyn Connell describes “hegemonic masculinity” as the culturally exalted form of masculinity that subordinates other gender expressions and reinforces male dominance.⁷⁰ This dominant framework of masculinity discourages emotional vulnerability, as it is perceived as a sign of weakness or inadequacy. Grief, in particular, becomes incompatible with masculine legitimacy because it exposes dependency, loss, and relational need.

Historical developments intensified this formation. The Victorian emphasis on restraint, the Industrial Revolution’s provider ideal, and later militarized nationalism increasingly equated masculinity with productivity, discipline, and emotional containment.⁷¹ Across these developments, relational depth was gradually eclipsed by functional performance.

The Emotional Repression of Boys

Studies indicate that male infants display emotional expressiveness comparable to female infants.⁷² However, as boys mature, they receive consistent messages that sadness and fear threaten masculine belonging.⁷³ Caregivers often respond less empathically to boys’

⁶⁹ Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 12.

⁷⁰ Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 77; R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 829-59.

⁷¹ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 15; Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (New York: William Morrow, 1999), 22.

⁷² M. Katherine Weinberg et al., “Gender Differences in Emotional Expressivity and Self-Regulation during Early Infancy,” *Developmental Psychology* 33, no. 3 (1997): 435-43.

⁷³ Pollack, *Real Boys*, 150; Way, *Deep Secrets*, 42.

vulnerability, subtly teaching them to internalize grief rather than articulate it.⁷⁴

The phrase “boys don’t cry” functions as moral instruction rather than casual speech. Over time, emotional restraint becomes associated with strength, and openness with liability. What begins as adaptation becomes formation: grief is redirected inward, shaping bodily tension and relational distance. When such grief remains unprocessed, it may also take on traumatic dimensions, particularly when paired with chronic stress or threat. From a theological perspective, this disciplining interrupts spiritual formation.

Scripture assumes a radically different posture toward emotional expression. Psalm 8:2 and Matthew 18:3 together situate children as models of dependence and honest expression before God. Within this framework, the capacity to cry out is not immaturity but faithfulness. When boys are taught to suppress grief, they are subtly trained away from lament as prayer.

Masculinity and Faith Traditions

Religious teachings have also played a role in reinforcing the cultural construction of masculinity. Certain interpretations of Christianity, for example, emphasize male leadership and emotional fortitude, often portraying biblical figures like King David or Jesus Christ through a lens that highlights strength while minimizing their moments of sorrow. Such interpretations frequently privilege authority, certainty, and control while neglecting the scriptural witness to lament, dependence, and vulnerability. This selective portrayal reflects how religious narratives are sometimes shaped more by cultural norms than theological accuracy.⁷⁵ The result is a theological imagination in which masculinity is aligned with stoicism rather than faithfulness.

Yet a more attentive reading of Scripture resists this distortion. Jesus weeping at

⁷⁴ Way, *Deep Secrets*, 42; Ross A. Thompson and S. Meyer, “Socialization of Emotion Regulation in the Family,” in *Handbook of Emotion Regulation*, ed. James J. Gross (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), 249-68.

⁷⁵ John Tosh, “What Should Historians Do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain,” *History Workshop Journal* 38, no. 1 (1994): 179-202.

Lazarus's death (John 11:28–35) and David's public mourning over Saul and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:11–12) *must be read within their narrative contexts as acts of relational fidelity rather than emotional excess*. In both cases, grief is neither hidden nor corrected; it is witnessed, communal, and situated within covenantal relationship. Jesus' tears do not undermine his divinity; they reveal it. The Incarnation itself affirms that divine life does not bypass human sorrow but enters it fully. Likewise, David's lament does not disqualify his leadership; it situates his kingship within relational fidelity to both God and community.

The notion that men should bear their burdens in silence is not a biblical imperative but a theological distortion rooted in patriarchal formation. Such distortion often masquerades as spiritual maturity, equating faith with emotional containment rather than honest engagement before God. Instead of discouraging emotional expression, faith should provide a framework for processing grief in a healthy and transformative manner. Unfortunately, many religious communities uphold rigid gender norms that discourage men from seeking pastoral counseling or openly grieving, further deepening their emotional isolation.⁷⁶ In such contexts, silence is mistaken for strength, and emotional suffering is spiritualized rather than tended.

As this chapter has shown, the cultural construction of masculinity has long dictated that men should repress their emotions, particularly grief. This expectation is reinforced through societal structures, developmental experiences, and religious interpretations that equate emotional vulnerability with weakness. When theology colludes with these formations, it does not merely misread Scripture; it participates in the deformation of persons. What is at stake, then, is not only social health but theological formation: whether masculinity is being shaped toward relational participation in God's life or disciplined away from it.

⁷⁶ Bobbi J. Robert and J. West, "The Impact of Rigid Gender Roles on African American Men's Use of Counseling," *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* 28, no. 3 (2000): 150; R. Marie Griffith, *Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 210.

These norms, however, are neither divinely mandated nor psychologically inevitable; they are culturally produced and therefore open to reformation. The biblical tradition itself provides alternative models of masculinity marked by lament, relational accountability, and embodied truthfulness. By critically examining the roots of these beliefs and offering alternative models of masculinity that embrace emotional authenticity, society, and the church, can begin to recover a more faithful, compassionate, and theologically grounded vision of what it means to be a man. The next chapter turns more explicitly to theological reconstruction, examining how lament functions not as weakness but as faithful speech, and how grief, when honored, becomes a site of healing rather than fragmentation.

Chapter 4: The Body Remembers: Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Masculinity and Grief

This chapter explores the relationship between grief, masculinity, and embodiment, arguing that what is emotionally suppressed is not eliminated but carried within the body. Building on earlier discussions of theological distortion and cultural formation, this chapter turns to biblical and theological resources that refuse any separation between spiritual life and physical existence. Drawing on wisdom literature, prophetic vision, and theological anthropology, it contends that grief is not merely an internal or emotional experience but an embodied reality that shapes memory, identity, and relational capacity. Particular attention is given to how suppressed grief manifests physiologically and communally, especially within contexts marked by trauma and prolonged survival. By engaging both Scripture and contemporary theological reflection, this chapter develops a framework in which the body is understood as a site of theological meaning rather than a passive container of experience. In doing so, it argues that healing from grief must be embodied, relational, and communal, challenging masculinities that have been formed through disembodiment and emotional restriction.

Embodiment, Memory, and the Refusal of Disembodied Faith

The argument developed in the earlier chapters advances here: Scripture insists that what is silenced does not disappear; it is carried in the body. The biblical witness consistently refuses any separation between emotional life, spiritual meaning, and physical existence. Proverbs 17:22 names this connection with stark clarity: a “crushed spirit” does not remain abstract or internal; it dries up the bones. Interior devastation manifests somatically.

The proverb neither moralizes emotion nor suggests that joy can be willed into existence; instead, it testifies to an observable reality: interior collapse reshapes bodily vitality. Wisdom

literature does not frame grief as sin or failure, but as a force with physiological consequence when denied truthful expression. Contemporary research similarly observes that chronic emotional suppression dysregulates stress and immune systems.⁷⁷ The body remembers what speech denies.

Ezekiel’s vision intensifies this truth by placing embodiment at the center of communal restoration. The prophet is brought not into a debate or doctrine, but into a valley of bones: dry, scattered, and exposed. The setting resists abstraction; restoration must address material collapse. These bones represent a people who have lost not only hope but coherence. “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is gone; we are cut off completely (Ezekiel 37:11 NIV).” This is collective despair made physical.

Notably, God does not begin restoration by correcting belief or issuing commands. Rather, God begins with a question: “Son of man, can these bones live?” (Ezekiel 37:3 NIV). In the Hebrew text, the address is not a proper name but the term אָדָם (*’ādām*), a word that signifies “human being” or “earth creature,” broadening the scope of the question beyond the prophet alone into an existential inquiry posed to humanity itself.⁷⁸ Rather than demanding immediate faith or action, God invites honest reckoning with devastation as it is experienced in the body and held in communal memory.

Restoration unfolds through a process that includes naming loss, reassembling what has been fragmented, and breathing life where vitality has been exhausted. Speech and breath precede movement. Word and Spirit act together upon the body. The body becomes the site of divine action.

⁷⁷ Bruce S. McEwen and Elizabeth Norton Lasley, *The End of Stress as We Know It* (Washington, DC: Joseph Henry Press, 2002), 72; Stephen W. Porges, *The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, and Self-Regulation* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2011), 154.

⁷⁸ Leslie C. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 373-75.

For men formed within masculinities that prohibit grief, Ezekiel’s vision is particularly instructive. Dry bones are not signs of moral failure; they are the residue of prolonged survival without lament. The body bears what the culture forbids the mouth to speak. Healing, therefore, cannot be merely cognitive or spiritualized. It must be embodied, relational, and communal.

Reframation: Grief, Masculinity, and the Question of Theological Anthropology

The biblical movement from *heart of stone* to *heart of flesh* signals more than emotional healing; it names a process of “reframation,” a renewed way of seeing God, the self, and human vocation through the life and posture of Jesus Christ. The Lord declares, “I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26 NIV).” This transformation is not achieved through emotional suppression, moral correction, or the denial of grief, but through a reorientation of perception itself. To receive a heart of flesh is to *see again*, through the reconciling vision revealed in Christ.

Brian Zahnd’s language of “reframation” is helpful here, as a contemporary theological articulation of a deeper missional framework developed by Alan Hirsch and Mark Nelson.⁷⁹ In their work, *Reframation: Seeing God, People, and Mission Through Reenchanted Frames*, missional theologians Alan Hirsch and Mark Nelson describe “reframation” as a synthesis of reframing and reformation, a process through which inherited theological frameworks are reoriented through renewed imagination and deeper engagement with the biblical narrative. Rather than abandoning tradition, reframation invites the church to perceive God, humanity, and mission through expanded theological lenses that recover mystery, relationality, and the expansive scope of redemption. Seen in this light, reframation names the moment when inherited theological frames are disrupted and reoriented through the reconciling vision revealed in Christ.

In this dissertation, reframation names the theological shift required to move from

⁷⁹ Hirsch and Nelson, *Reframation*, 45.

masculinities formed by emotional suppression toward masculinities capable of grief, relational presence, and covenantal love. Grief becomes one of the primary sites where such distortion is exposed. When loss disrupts inherited narratives of control, strength, and emotional restraint, it reveals the inadequacy of masculinities formed around domination rather than communion. Grief is not an interruption of formation but a moment of theological crisis: a breaking open that makes reformation possible.

Karl Barth's doctrine of reconciliation grounds this claim more fully. Barth insists that in Christ, God does not bypass human reality but restores it, revealing what it means to be truly human precisely where humanity has been most distorted.⁸⁰ Such restoration echoes the Pauline claim that "if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come (2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV)," a renewal that does not discard creaturely life but reconciles it. Reconciliation is not escape from creaturely vulnerability but its healing. Masculinities that prohibit grief, therefore, are not merely culturally conditioned; they represent theological deformation: patterns of formation that resist the reconciling work of God by denying dependence, relationality, and honest encounter. The heart of stone is not simply emotional hardness; it is a refusal of creatureliness itself.

Moltmann's theology of the crucified God further clarifies why reformation must occur *within* grief rather than beyond it. For Moltmann, the God revealed on the cross is not distant from suffering but present within it, drawing wounded humanity toward transformation through shared pain and promised renewal.⁸¹ Isaiah's proclamation of the Suffering Servant, "Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering (Isaiah 53:4, NIV)," grounds this claim scripturally. Hope, in this framework, is not escapist or deferred; it is forged in the midst of loss through faithful presence. Grief thus becomes a site where eschatological life presses into present reality,

⁸⁰ Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. 4, pt. 1 of *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956; repr., 1974), 157.

⁸¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 220-25.

reshaping identity through participation in God's suffering love.

This theological vision necessarily presses toward practice, even as it is first articulated at the level of doctrine and imagination. If reformation involves learning to see self, God, and community through Christ's reconciling presence, then healing cannot be reduced to cognitive assent or private emotional processing. James exhorts the church, "confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed (James 5:16, NIV)," locating healing within communal vulnerability. Transformation must take embodied, relational, and communal form, spaces where grief is not managed or minimized, but witnessed, held, and honored. Practices such as accompaniment, communal lament, guided reflection, and creative expression emerge not as add-ons to theological reflection, but as its natural outworking. They do not manufacture transformation; they cultivate the conditions in which it may occur.

Crucially, the distinction between reformation and deformation matters theologically because it concerns the nature of salvation itself. Scripture does not depict redemption as the destruction of the old creation, but as its renewal humanity being re-formed in Christ rather than erased (Romans 12:2).⁸² When grief is disciplined out of men, the result is not maturity but hardening. The heart of stone persists, not due to a lack of faith, but because formation has occurred within frames that equate emotional restraint with godliness. Such frames confuse stoicism with sanctification. Reframed masculinity, by contrast, receives grief as a sacred teacher, one that draws men into deeper participation in love, dependence, and communal life.

In this way, reformation functions as both a constructive theological proposal and an implicit pastoral task. It names how God heals, not by demanding stoicism, but by restoring sight; not by bypassing grief, but by dwelling within it. Masculinity reformed through grief is not

⁸² Brian Zahnd, *Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God: The Scandalous Truth of the Very Good News* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2017), 112; Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. 4, pt. 2 of *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 310.

diminished but redeemed, becoming capable of covenantal presence, truthful vulnerability, and shared hope. Grief does not undo formation; it completes it.

When God Addresses the Human Body: Grief as a Shared and Sacred Condition

The exploration of masculinity and grief must be anchored in biblical and theological perspectives, for the biblical canon consistently portrays men grappling with loss, lament, and vulnerability. Scripture offers both explicit narratives and implicit patterns that reveal how men have historically encountered sorrow as a shared human and spiritual condition. These portrayals are not marginal or exceptional; they function as theological testimony that unsettles dominant cultural scripts of masculinity. In contrast to models that equate manhood with emotional restraint, the biblical witness presents grief as an integral dimension of faithful living.

Throughout Scripture, men grieve in public, embodied, and relational ways. Jesus himself stands as the most theologically disruptive example. At the tomb of Lazarus, he does not spiritualize loss or rush toward resolution; instead, he enters fully into the grief of the community, weeping openly before friends and mourners alike (John 11:33-35). His tears are not private but witnessed, situating masculine grief within relational space and affirming sorrow as a legitimate response to love and loss. Likewise, King David's lament over Absalom is neither restrained nor discreet. He cries aloud, repeating his son's name in a public display that unsettles the political order (2 Samuel 18:33-19:4). David's grief disrupts expectations of royal composure, revealing that covenantal love outweighs performative strength. The psalms further reinforce this pattern, particularly in texts attributed to David where sorrow is voiced without apology through crying out, bodily exhaustion, and unfiltered complaint (e.g., Psalm 6:6; Psalm 13:1-2). Together, these texts testify that biblical masculinity makes room for grief that is seen, heard, and shared.

This pattern of embodied masculine grief extends beyond Scripture into the practices of

the early church, what might be described, borrowing Black vernacular, as the wisdom of our “ancestors.” Augustine of Hippo, often remembered for his theological rigor, records his profound and bodily grief over the death of his mother Monica, describing how sorrow overwhelmed him physically and emotionally before God.⁸³ Rather than concealing his grief, Augustine interprets his tears as an act of love and an honest posture before God. Similarly, John Chrysostom warned against emotional suppression, arguing that tears were not signs of weakness but evidence of compassion rightly ordered toward God and neighbor.⁸⁴ Even among the Desert Fathers, figures often mischaracterized as emotionally austere, grief was understood as spiritually formative. Abba Poemen taught that tears functioned as a kind of baptism, cleansing the soul and softening the hardened heart.⁸⁵ These ancestral witnesses do not depart from the biblical witness; they receive and extend it, affirming that public, embodied sorrow was understood as a mark of spiritual maturity rather than masculine failure.

Taken together, Scripture and early Christian testimony reveal a counter-tradition in which masculine grief is neither hidden nor pathologized. Sorrow becomes a site of encounter with God, with community, and with one’s own humanity. Tears, cries, torn garments, fasting, silence, and protest function not as emotional excess but as truthful speech before God. Theological reflection on these narratives illuminates the tension between socially constructed masculinity and the vulnerability demanded by loss, reframing masculine grief not as weakness or failure but as sacred expression shaped by love, attachment, and covenantal rupture.⁸⁶

⁸³ Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 173–175 (Book IX).

⁸⁴ John Chrysostom, *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, trans. Paul W. Harkins (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1970; repr., 2007), 115.

⁸⁵ Abba Poemen, cited in *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks*, trans. Benedicta Ward (London: Penguin Classics, 2003; repr., as Sinclair, 2024), 115, 305.

⁸⁶ Marcus J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Redeeming the Faith of Our Prophetic Heritage* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003), 88; Margaret R. Miles, *Plotinus on Body and Self* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 64–75.

Crucially, these biblical accounts refuse to treat grief as disembodied emotion or internal struggle alone. Loss is registered in the body through weeping, posture, ritual action, and exhaustion, underscoring Scripture's insistence that spiritual life is inseparable from embodied experience. Men do not merely feel grief; they inhabit it. Their bodies become sites of memory, protest, and prayer. In this way, the biblical canon anticipates contemporary theological and psychological insights that recognize sorrow as something carried somatically and communally rather than resolved through cognitive assent or spiritual discipline alone. Within this theological framework, specific biblical examples of masculine grief must be read not as isolated moments of sentimentality, but as revelatory encounters in which sorrow becomes a site of divine-human engagement.

Biblical Examples of Masculine Grief

One of the most poignant examples of male grief in the Bible is found in the shortest verse of Scripture: "Jesus wept (John 11:35 NIV)." This verse is often quoted, but not always fully reckoned with Jesus; the embodiment of divine power, breaks into tears before a watching crowd. This moment, occurring at the tomb of Lazarus, challenges the notion that men must suppress their emotions. Jesus, despite being divine, allows himself to grieve publicly, demonstrating that sorrow is not a sign of weakness but an expression of deep love and humanity. His tears confront cultural expectations that equate masculinity with emotional silence.

The Old Testament also offers profound examples. King David, known for his warrior strength, openly lamented the loss of his son Absalom: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son (2 Samuel 18:33 NIV)!" Here, David's public display of grief illustrates that even powerful leaders are not immune to

emotional suffering. His lament underscores the reality that grief, particularly in fatherhood, can be overwhelming and uncontrollable. Rather than diminishing his kingship, David's lament humanizes it.⁸⁷

Job, a man described as “blameless and upright (Job 1:1 NIV),” experiences unimaginable loss, yet his grief is prodigious and multifaceted. He responds to catastrophe by rending his garments, shaving his head, and collapsing toward the ground, gestures that signal social rupture and existential disorientation. In doing so, he enacts an ancient ritual of sorrow, refusing to hide his pain behind masculine reserve. These acts situate Job's grief within communal and theological meaning rather than private collapse. Unlike modern expectations that often call men to internalize pain, Job's actions suggest that expressing sorrow is integral to faith and healing. Grief here is neither denied nor disciplined away; it is ritualized, witnessed, and carried in the body before God.

Job's response resists both stoic suppression and sentimental excess. His body becomes the site of theological speech, bearing witness to loss before explanation or resolution is offered. The text presents grief not as failure of faith but as faithful posture, acknowledging finitude and dependence before God. Job's sorrow invites reflection not only on how men grieve, but on what grief reveals about God, humanity, and faithful masculinity. If grief is spiritually formative and theologically meaningful, then the question is not whether men should grieve, but how the church receives, shapes, or silences that grief in communal life.

Theological Reflections on Grief and Masculinity

Theologically, grief is not merely an emotional response but a spiritual journey. It exposes human attachment, finitude, and dependence upon God. Scripture consistently presents

⁸⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination: Preaching It Proclaimed* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 142.

grief as a site of encounter rather than failure. From the psalms of lament to the prophets' cries, sorrow becomes a mode of truth-telling before God. Lament does not signal weak faith; it signals honest relationship. As Walter Brueggemann argues, lament functions as an act of covenantal speech, refusing denial and naming loss in the presence of God who listens.⁸⁸

This theological understanding resonates deeply with traditions within the African diaspora and the Black church, where grief has long been held as both sacred and communal.⁸⁹ Practices such as moaning, wailing, call-and-response lament, homegoing services, and embodied preaching have historically allowed sorrow to be voiced rather than suppressed.⁹⁰ These practices are often dismissed as emotionalism, yet function as spiritual technologies of survival, enabling grief to be carried collectively rather than borne alone.⁹¹ From the cries of enslaved Africans to the shouted prayers of contemporary Black worship, grief has been understood not as private pathology but as shared spiritual labor, carried through the body, voice, and community. Black ecclesial leadership has long embodied a theology of grief that recognizes sorrow as a place where God is already present.

Process theology offers a complementary framework for understanding grief as spiritually transformative rather than disruptive to spiritual life. Emphasizing God's ongoing, relational involvement with creation, process theologians argue that God does not stand outside human suffering but participates in it. John Cobb and David Ray Griffin contend that God experiences the pain of the world, responding creatively and compassionately to each moment of

⁸⁸ Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 52-57.

⁸⁹ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970), 68–72; K. Laurie and Robert A. Neimeyer, "African Americans in Bereavement: Grief as a Function of Ethnicity," *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying* 57, no. 4 (2008): 367–385.

⁹⁰ A. J. Fuller, "The Black Church: A Community Resources for Grief and Grieving," *Death Studies* 21, no. 5 (1997): 477-93; A. E. Lipscomb et al., *Black Male Grief: A Contextualized Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 94.

⁹¹ J. S. Bryant, *Grief and the Black Church: A Womanist Reflection* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2023), 112-28; Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 45-52.

loss.⁹² In this view, grief is not an interruption of spiritual growth but one of its primary pathways. Transformation occurs not through emotional control, but through honest engagement with pain in relationship with a suffering God.

This perspective is further deepened by the work of theologian Marjorie Suchocki, who argues that divine power is not coercive but persuasive, working within suffering rather than overriding it. Suchocki insists that God feels the world fully, taking into Godself the pain, grief, and terror experienced by human beings.⁹³ Grief, then, is not borne alone; it is shared within the divine human relationship. For men formed within masculinities that demand emotional containment, this theology disrupts the notion that strength requires silence. Instead, it suggests that vulnerability is the very space where divine presence is most intimate.

Black Liberation Theology, as articulated by James Cone, intensifies this claim by situating grief within histories of oppression and racialized suffering. Cone insists that God identifies decisively with those who suffer under systems of domination, including the emotional and psychological suffering of Black men whose grief has been policed, ridiculed, or rendered invisible. For Cone, the crucifixion of Jesus cannot be separated from the lynching of Black bodies in America. Christ is not only crucified on a Roman cross but metaphorically lynched on Southern trees, bearing the unresolved grief of a people denied justice, dignity, and the freedom to mourn openly.⁹⁴

Within this framework, suppressed grief is not merely a personal struggle but a political and theological wound. The denial of grief functions as a tool of domination, enforcing

⁹² John B. Cobb and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 47.

⁹³ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1988), 112.

⁹⁴ James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), 75-76; Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 89; James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), 123; James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 150-51.

emotional numbness as a condition of survival. Grief, therefore, becomes an act of resistance. To lament is to refuse the lie that suffering is normal or deserved. For Black men in particular, grieving openly challenges a system that has demanded endurance without acknowledgment and strength without tenderness. In Cone's theology, grief is not only sorrow for what has been lost; it is protest against the conditions that made such loss inevitable.

Taken together, these theological perspectives reframe masculinity not as emotional mastery but as relational faithfulness. Grief becomes a site of divine human encounter, communal solidarity, and moral truth-telling. Rather than weakening masculinity, grief exposes its deepest vocation: to remain present to love even when love is wounded.

The Role of the Church in Male Grief

The church has traditionally served as a space for communal lamentation, yet contemporary expressions of Christianity, particularly in Western evangelical and charismatic contexts, often fall short in supporting men navigating grief. Historically, the church functioned as one of the few communal sites where sorrow could be voiced, ritualized, and held collectively. Liturgical traditions, such as lament psalms, offer a structured way to process sorrow. Psalm 34:18, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit," affirms grief as neither shameful nor spiritually deficient. However, when churches avoid sorrow and promote constant celebration, they risk cultivating a theology that equates emotional control with spiritual maturity. In doing so, they unintentionally validate stoicism as the preferred masculine posture, silencing those whose pain cannot be neatly resolved in a praise song or sermon. What emerges is not resilience but spiritual bypassing, an avoidance of pain disguised as faith.

The early Christian church also emphasized the importance of bearing one another's

burdens, framing suffering as a shared responsibility rather than an individual failure. This communal orientation suggests that healing from grief is not meant to be an isolated endeavor but a relational and embodied process. Pastoral care, when done well, creates sacred space for men to grieve without fear of emasculation or judgment. Such care affirms that grief belongs not only in private prayer but within the gathered life of the community. However, rigid gender norms still persist in many congregations, discouraging men from seeking counseling, shedding tears in worship, or naming their sorrow aloud. This silence is not merely cultural; it is theological. Masculinity, in many church settings, has been linked to emotional suppression, with stoicism elevated as a spiritual virtue rather than recognized as a survival strategy with profound costs.⁹⁵

Lewis' *Screwtape* advises keeping the patient's spiritual life detached from emotional reality, encouraging "a merely Christian habit without Christ."⁹⁶ When churches sideline lament in favor of forced celebration or premature resolution, they echo this distortion, maintaining religious performance while severing faith from lived experience. This creates a spirituality that discourages emotional honesty, particularly in men, and reinforces societal scripts that already push them toward emotional suppression. In such environments, grief is not healed; it is managed, deferred, or displaced, often into anger, withdrawal, or bodily distress.

At this point, the question is no longer whether grief is biblical or theologically valid, but what happens when the church fails to receive it. When congregations lack theological language and pastoral practices for male grief, sorrow does not disappear; it migrates. Unspoken grief surfaces as relational rupture, emotional isolation, spiritual disillusionment, and physical and psychological distress. The church's silence thus participates in the wider social dynamics of

⁹⁵ Frank Thomas, *The Substance of Things Hoped For: A History of Black Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020), 45-47.

⁹⁶ Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, Letter VII.

unresolved grief, manifesting in bodies, relationships, and communities.

For the church to be a place of true healing, it must reclaim lament as a holy act and redefine strength not as control but as the courage to be vulnerable before both God and community. This shift requires intentional pastoral leadership, liturgical imagination, and the dismantling of inherited gender norms that have long equated manhood with emotional restraint. Without this work, the church risks reproducing the very patterns of silence and harm it is called to heal.

Biblical and theological perspectives on grief reveal a counter-narrative that challenges restrictive models of masculinity. From David's psalms to Jesus's tears, Scripture affirms that men have long experienced and expressed sorrow in deeply human and spiritually faithful ways. Theology likewise supports a vision of manhood that includes emotional honesty, embodied lament, and relational vulnerability. Recovering these truths allows faith communities to name male grief not as unmanly or unholy, but as sacred, an expression of love, attachment, and covenantal fidelity.

Yet this theological vision does not automatically translate into lived experience. For many men, particularly within contemporary Western and racialized contexts, cultural expectations of masculinity actively resist the forms of vulnerability Scripture affirms. The tension between theological permission and social prohibition creates a fracture in which grief is felt but not spoken, carried but not witnessed. Attention now turns to this fracture, where dominant constructions of masculinity shape male grief, enforce emotional silence, and embed unresolved sorrow within bodies, relationships, and communal life.

Chapter 5: The Societal and Theological Impact of Suppressed Grief

This chapter examines the consequences of grief that is constrained, silenced, or rendered illegitimate within both social and theological frameworks. Building on the biblical witness that presents lament as embodied and relational, it explores how cultural constructions of masculinity and certain theological interpretations converge to suppress emotional expression, particularly among men. By tracing the movement from sacred lament to silenced sorrow, this chapter argues that unprocessed grief does not disappear but becomes internalized, shaping psychological health, relational capacity, and communal life. In doing so, it highlights suppressed grief as not only a personal burden but a formative societal and theological problem with far-reaching implications.

Grief, Witness, and the Consequences of Silence

Chapter 4 established Scripture's insistence that grief is embodied, preparing us to examine the reality of what happens when grief is constrained or silenced. Psalm 34:18 affirms that sorrow is a space of divine encounter: "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." Lamentations 2:11-12 depicts a people whose unspoken anguish festers into despair: "My eyes fail from weeping, I am in torment within; my heart is poured out on the ground because my people are destroyed." Together, these texts highlight both the necessity of lament and the consequences of grief left unexpressed, framing sorrow as relational, communal, and spiritually significant.

Biblical narratives further illustrate the dual realities of grief honored and grief denied. David's open lament over Absalom (2 Samuel 18:33) and Jesus' tears at Lazarus' tomb (John 11:35) model grief as relational, public, and human, even for those entrusted with leadership or divine authority. Conversely, Eli's failure to interpret grief and warning signs (1 Samuel 3:13) and Rehoboam's suppression of empathy (1 Kings 12:6-15) demonstrate the harm that occurs

when emotional and relational realities are disregarded.

This chapter takes these scriptural realities as its starting point, asking: How do societal norms and theological practices interact to suppress men's grief today? Tracing the journey from sacred lament to silenced sorrow, the chapter examines how unprocessed grief becomes embodied, relational, and intergenerational, shaping masculine identity and communal life.

These scriptural insights are not treated as abstract theological claims but as the foundation for practical intervention. In the ministry framework developed in this study, biblical lament is operationalized through guided communal practices, participants are invited to articulate grief aloud, engage Scripture as reflective mirror, and situate personal loss within a shared theological narrative. This movement from text to practice ensures that lament is not only affirmed but enacted.

The Weight of Unspoken Sorrow: Masculinity, Social Formation, and Emotional Prohibition

From early childhood, many boys are taught, explicitly and implicitly, that emotional restraint is a requirement of masculinity. Grief, in particular, is framed as incompatible with strength, leadership, and manhood. Tears are tolerated only briefly, if at all, and vulnerability is often met with correction rather than care. Over time, this social conditioning forms what bell hooks describes as a “patriarchal masculinity” that requires men to sever themselves from their emotional lives in order to be accepted as men.⁹⁷ Drawing on bell hooks's analysis, this project interprets emotional disconnection not as individual deficiency but as the outcome of patriarchal conditioning that requires men to sever themselves from vulnerability. Within the context of Black male grief, this means that the inability to express sorrow is not a lack of feeling but a learned survival strategy. The result is not emotional maturity, but emotional disconnection.

⁹⁷ hooks, *Will to Change*, 27.

This conditioning does not merely discourage emotional expression; it actively trains boys to mistrust their inner lives. Sadness becomes a liability. Dependency becomes shameful. Grief becomes something to be managed privately or displaced altogether. As hooks argues, patriarchy socializes men to believe that emotional vulnerability threatens their authority and autonomy, producing men who are emotionally armored but relationally impoverished. Lost in this formation is emotional literacy and the capacity for intimacy with others, self, and God.

When grief is denied legitimate expression, it does not disappear. Instead, it is redirected. Suppressed sorrow often reemerges as anger, emotional withdrawal, compulsive productivity, substance use, or aggression. Men may appear functional while remaining internally fragmented, carrying unresolved grief beneath performances of strength and control. This internalization of grief contributes to emotional isolation, strained relationships, and diminished psychological well-being, particularly in contexts where men are discouraged from seeking help or naming pain.

For Black men, this burden is intensified by historical and ongoing structures of racialized oppression. Cultural expectations of stoicism have often been reinforced by survival imperatives, teaching Black men that emotional expression invites vulnerability in a world that is already hostile. As James Cone notes, suffering within oppressed communities cannot be understood apart from the social conditions that shape it.⁹⁸ Grief carried by Black men is not only personal loss, but accumulated historical sorrow loss layered upon loss, often borne in silence.

In this context, suppressed grief becomes both a psychological burden and a theological problem. When men are taught - explicitly or implicitly - that faithfulness requires emotional control, grief is rendered suspect. Silence is mistaken for strength. Endurance replaces lament. The cost of this formation is profound: men learn how to survive, but not how to grieve; how to

⁹⁸ Cone, *Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 150.

function, but not how to heal.

What the Body Bears: Psychological, Relational, and Somatic Consequences of Suppressed Grief

Grief that is unacknowledged does not remain confined to the interior life. When sorrow is denied expression, it is carried elsewhere, most often in the body and in relationships.

Psychological research consistently demonstrates that unresolved grief is associated with depression, anxiety, substance misuse, and increased risk of physical illness.⁹⁹ These outcomes reveal a deeper truth about embodiment. What is not spoken is stored. What is not witnessed is internalized.

Men formed within masculinities that prohibit vulnerability are particularly susceptible to somatic expressions of grief. Emotional suppression places sustained stress on the nervous system, disrupting regulation and increasing physiological arousal over time. Chronic suppression has been linked to elevated cortisol levels, cardiovascular strain, compromised immune functioning, and inflammatory responses.¹⁰⁰ Grief that is culturally forbidden becomes biologically costly. The body carries what masculinity refuses to name.

Relationally, suppressed grief often manifests as emotional withdrawal or volatility. Men may struggle to articulate loss, yet experience heightened irritability, distance, or disengagement from partners, children, and communities. Intimacy becomes threatening because it risks exposure. Over time, relationships suffer not from a lack of care, but from an absence of emotional language capable of holding pain. Grief remains present, but unnamed, circulating through conflict, silence, or isolation.

Within Black communities, these dynamics are intensified by historical trauma and

⁹⁹ J. William Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*, 5th ed. (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2018), 65.

¹⁰⁰ Bruce S. McEwen and Elizabeth Norton Lasley, *The End of Stress as We Know It* (Washington, DC: Joseph Henry Press, 2002), 123.

racialized stress. The expectation that Black men must remain strong in the face of ongoing injustice compounds the pressure to suppress grief. Intergenerational exposure to violence, loss, and premature death creates layers of unprocessed sorrow that are rarely afforded communal space for lament. As Resmaa Menakem argues, racialized trauma lives not only in narrative memory but in the body itself, shaping posture, breath, and stress response.¹⁰¹ For many Black men, grief is not episodic but cumulative: carried across time, relationships, and generations.

This somatic burden is not simply an individual problem; it is a communal one. When grief is suppressed, communities absorb its consequences. Unprocessed sorrow contributes to cycles of aggression, emotional disconnection, and burnout, particularly in leadership contexts where men are expected to be perpetually resilient. In churches, families, and social movements, men may function as pillars while quietly collapsing under the weight of unresolved loss. Strength becomes performance rather than capacity.

Theologically, these realities expose the cost of separating spirituality from embodiment. When grief is treated as an internal weakness rather than an embodied truth, faith communities risk reinforcing the very patterns that harm those they seek to serve. The body becomes the unwilling confessional, testifying through illness, exhaustion, and distress to losses that were never given words. Suppressed grief does not disappear; it migrates, embedding itself in flesh, behavior, and communal life.

In response to these realities, this project develops a structured ministry practice consisting of facilitated grief circles held within church settings. These gatherings are designed with specific components: guided prompts for naming loss, embodied practices that engage breath and posture, communal witnessing without correction, and theological reflection that reframes grief as faithful expression rather than weakness. Led by myself within ministerial

¹⁰¹ Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 14-15.

context, these sessions function as hybrid spaces, part pastoral care, part therapeutic process, aimed at helping participants externalize grief, challenge internalized beliefs about masculinity, and move toward integration.

Theological Distortion and Masculinity

While Scripture models grief as sacred, embodied, and relational, many Christian communities have simultaneously reinforced rigid forms of masculinity that discourage emotional expression. Doctrinal interpretations, pastoral practice, and cultural theology often conflate spiritual maturity with stoicism, teaching men that vulnerability signals weakness rather than faithfulness. This theological distortion creates dissonance between the biblical witness and lived experience. Men are called to embody the faith but denied the means to process loss authentically.

These distortions recur throughout Scripture, where cultural expectations and power structures override lament and relational presence. When Rehoboam ascends the throne, the people plead for relief from harsh rule, yet his advisors encourage him to suppress empathy and enforce authority, privileging power over relational sensitivity (1 Kings 12:6-15). Similarly, Eli, the high priest, fails to interpret grief and warning signals correctly, indirectly contributing to his sons' corruption and death (1 Samuel 2:12-36). Even in the New Testament, Peter's initial refusal to fully bear the weight of Christ's death exemplifies tension between public expectation and authentic sorrow (Matthew 26:69-75; John 21:15-19). These narratives show that grief is socially constrained even when Scripture models lament as sacred.

Historical church leaders further reinforced this distortion. In early North African Christianity, Tertullian's ascetic rigor elevated self-mastery and restraint, often treating

unmanaged emotion as moral danger rather than faithful lament.¹⁰² Origen’s homilies interpret suffering primarily as divine pedagogy, subordinating natural grief to doctrinal reflection and spiritual progress.¹⁰³ Medieval monastic rules valorized endurance, silence, and mortification, praising those who accepted loss without complaint as spiritually rigorous.¹⁰⁴ Later, strands of Western Protestantism shaped by Calvin’s doctrine of providence sometimes treated “immoderate” sorrow as failure of faith, pressuring believers to curb overt grief.¹⁰⁵ Though diverse, these trajectories share a common thread: grief is managed as a problem to control rather than received as relational experience to witness.

Theological analysis highlights the consequences of this distortion. Process theology reminds us that God participates in human suffering, honoring grief rather than denying it.¹⁰⁶ Black Liberation Theology situates grief within histories of oppression, asserting that God identifies with those whose pain has been silenced by racial, social, and theological forces.¹⁰⁷ When religious teaching contradicts these frameworks, grief is displaced or internalized, producing relational and somatic costs including depression, spiritual disillusionment, strained families, and communities fractured by unprocessed sorrow.

These distortions are lived and embodied. Men navigating faith communities inherit lessons that conflate manhood with emotional control, intensifying tension between God’s relational call and societal expectation. Suppressed grief migrates into bodies, relationships, and

¹⁰² Tertullian, *On Patience*, trans. S. Thelwall, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885; repr., New York: Creative Media Partners, 2018), 707-17.

¹⁰³ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1979), 112-15.

¹⁰⁴ Benedict of Nursia, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, trans. Leonard J. Doyle (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1948; repr., 2010), 45; Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961; repr., 2024), 21-25.

¹⁰⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960; repr., Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 253–255 (Book III); John Calvin, *Sermons on 2 Samuel: Chapters 1–13*, trans. Douglas Kelly (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 87–88.

¹⁰⁶ Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 164-66; Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 112.

¹⁰⁷ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 22; Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 63-65.

communities, leaving men ill-equipped to experience the sacred, relational grief that Scripture and ancestral practice affirm. Addressing this distortion requires recovering scriptural models of lament and reclaiming communal spaces where vulnerability is recognized as faithful presence.

Societal and Theological Reinforcement of Suppressed Grief

Historically, sermons, catechesis, and liturgical expectations have elevated endurance over lament. Phrases like “trust God and move on” or “real men don’t cry” function as theological commands that silence grief. As C. Eric Lincoln observed, Black men navigating faith communities face compounded pressures: performing masculinity under racialized oppression while internalizing spiritual discipline that equates suffering with moral deficiency.¹⁰⁸ Religious language meant to offer hope can become an instrument of suppression, converting grief into guilt or shame.

This distortion manifests in selective scriptural interpretation. Passages emphasizing strength and triumph are lifted from context, while texts modeling lament are minimized or spiritualized. The result is theology privileging performance over presence, producing men who grieve in secret or not at all. At times, biblical narratives have also been interpreted in ways that reinforce such patterns. Eli rebuked young Samuel for speaking freely to God, establishing precedent where spiritual sensitivity was misread as disorder (1 Samuel 3:13). Pharaoh’s hardened heart in Exodus has sometimes been interpreted as stoic endurance rather than warning against resisting relational engagement with God.

Historical leaders contributed as well. John Wesley emphasized self-discipline as a marker of holiness, often prioritizing restraint over emotional processing. Jonathan Edwards framed suffering as spiritual ascent while minimizing embodied grief. Within the Black church,

¹⁰⁸ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 157-60.

leaders such as Richard Allen emphasized endurance under oppression as virtue, unintentionally reinforcing stoicism among male congregants.¹⁰⁹

Process theology and Black Liberation Theology offer corrective frameworks. John Cobb, David Ray Griffin, and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki insist that God participates in human suffering, creating relational space where grief is honored (Cobb & Griffin, 1976; Suchocki, 1988). James Cone situates grief within systemic oppression, arguing that God identifies with silenced pain (Cone, 1969; Cone, 1970). When theological teaching ignores these principles, it misrepresents God's nature and compounds communal cost.

Theological distortion is not abstract; it has material consequences. Men formed under constricted interpretations navigate emotional life with heightened risk for depression, relational strain, and somatic stress. The church can unintentionally become a site of harm, perpetuating patterns Scripture seeks to disrupt. The cost is spiritual and corporeal: men carry grief in bodies expected to appear resilient even when breaking.

Finally, distortion shapes intergenerational formation. Boys in faith communities absorb assumptions about God, strength, and emotion long before grief is named. When sorrow is minimized or spiritualized away, they learn that grief must be endured rather than expressed. Over time these patterns calcify. What begins as protection becomes constriction. What is framed as maturity becomes hardening. Men learn to function and persevere but not to attend to loss relationally.

The result is not absence of grief but its relocation, from speech into silence, from prayer into the body, from community into isolation. Masculinity formed within these limits appears

¹⁰⁹ John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, ed. Thomas Jackson (London: Epworth Press, 1952), 50–52; Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 257–260; Richard Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen* (Philadelphia: Martin R. Thompson, 1833; repr., Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), 23–25.

stable yet carries unresolved sorrow. Suppressed grief must therefore be understood as formative theological problem. The question is not simply whether men are allowed to grieve, but what humanity is shaped when grief is denied expression. When silence is normalized, men are trained to privilege control over presence and endurance over relational truth.

This chapter has traced the cost of this formation for men, families, and faith communities. When grief is denied space to be seen and shared, it embeds itself in bodies and communal life. What remains is not resilience but fragmentation, lived quietly and often faithfully, yet unresolved. The work ahead is not merely to permit grief but to reconsider the frames through which masculinity and faith have been learned. Chapter Five turns toward healing practices that do not suppress sorrow or rush resolution, but create space for grief to be held, witnessed, and transformed within communal and theological life.

Chapter 6: Healing as Embodied Lament: Rap, Movement, and Pastoral Praxis

This chapter turns from the reality of suppressed grief toward pathways of healing grounded in embodied lament and communal expression. Drawing from biblical traditions that affirm movement, music, and public expression as forms of worship, it reframes healing as an active, participatory process rather than a purely cognitive or private one. By engaging rap, dance, and somatic practices as contemporary expressions of lament, the chapter argues that the body becomes a vital site of theological meaning and restoration. These practices offer alternative pastoral pathways, particularly for men whose grief has been silenced, enabling sorrow to be expressed, witnessed, and transformed within both community and faith.

Embodied Lament, Sacred Rhythm, and Healing in Motion

While Chapter 5 exposed the formative cost of silenced grief, Chapter 6 turns toward reformation, the theological and pastoral work of perceiving masculinity and healing through Christ's reconciling presence. Reframation does not discard stories of loss or survival; it reorients how they are lived. It shifts the interpretive lens from suppression as strength to vulnerability as sacred participation in God's redemptive life. As Brian Zahnd suggests, the movement from a heart of stone to flesh requires restored sight through the compassionate, embodied gaze of Jesus.¹¹⁰ This resonance continues in Karl Barth's insistence that redemption restores creatureliness rather than negating it, and Jürgen Moltmann's claim that God meets humanity within suffering, transforming pain through divine solidarity.¹¹¹ Together, these voices affirm that healing is not an escape from grief but a different participation in it, through practices that re-form perception, re-open the body, and re-situate sorrow within communal life. Healing is therefore not anesthesia but awakening. This chapter explores rap, movement, and somatic

¹¹⁰ Zahnd, *Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God*, 89.

¹¹¹ Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. 4, pt. 2 of *Church Dogmatics*, 147-59; Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 227-43.

practices as primary sites for such reformation, preparing the ground for the redefined masculinity explored in the conclusion.

This embodied theology is not abstract or symbolic. The narrative context of 2 Samuel situates David at a critical moment in Israel's political and theological life. Having consolidated power and established Jerusalem as the political center, David orchestrates the return of the Ark of the Covenant, the central symbol of divine presence, into the city. This is not merely a religious act but a national and theological event, charged with questions of legitimacy, kingship, and divine favor. Within ancient Near Eastern royal expectations, kings were to embody composure, control, and symbolic distance from the populace. Public emotional excess, particularly bodily exposure, risked undermining royal authority.¹¹²

In 2 Samuel 6:14, David dances “with all his might” before the Lord, offering a public, physical expression of devotion that risks humiliation and critique. His actions therefore carry political as well as theological significance: David relinquishes royal decorum in order to participate fully in embodied worship. His movement is excessive, unguarded, and relational. David's dance functions as embodied testimony, refusing to separate faith from flesh, reverence from rhythm, or leadership from vulnerability. When Michal condemns his lack of restraint, Scripture sides with embodied devotion, affirming that bodily expression before God is fidelity rather than disorder. The text subtly subverts royal decorum and patriarchal composure, suggesting that authentic worship destabilizes rigid masculinity.

Together, these texts establish a crucial theological claim: grief, joy, protest, and praise are meant to be *performed*, not merely contemplated. This biblical pattern is further intensified in the prophetic tradition, particularly in the life and witness of the prophet Jeremiah. Often referred

¹¹² Simo Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part I: Letters from Assyria and the West* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1987), 35-41; Saana Svärd and Ulrike Steinert, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Emotions in the Ancient Near East* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2022), 117-21.

to as the “weeping prophet,” Jeremiah’s ministry unfolds within the catastrophic unraveling of Judah’s political and theological world in the face of Babylonian invasion. Yet his grief is not incidental to his message; it is integral to it. Jeremiah does not merely announce judgment, he embodies sorrow. His prophetic vocation is marked by lament that is personal, communal, and theologically charged.¹¹³

In texts such as Jeremiah 8:18-9:1, grief overwhelms the boundaries between prophet and people: “Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears...” Here, lament is not restrained or contained. It is excessive, bodily, and ongoing. Jeremiah’s tears collapse the distance between proclamation and participation. He does not stand above the suffering he names; he is immersed within it. His body becomes a site where divine sorrow and communal anguish converge.

Theologically, Jeremiah’s lament reveals that grief is not a deviation from faithfulness but a mode of it. His sorrow is directed toward God, shaped by covenant relationship, and sustained within divine presence. Rather than resolving grief, the text allows it to remain open, unresolved, and voiced. This aligns with the broader biblical refusal to silence lament.¹¹⁴ Jeremiah therefore stands alongside David not simply as one who speaks, but as one whose body participates in the emotional and theological reality he proclaims. His witness expands the grammar of lament beyond isolated expression into sustained, embodied, and relational grief.

Biblical faith consistently authorizes movement, sound, repetition, and intensity as vehicles for encountering God. Lament is not confined to words alone; it is carried in breath, tempo, posture, and communal synchronization. Where speech fails or is unavailable, the body

¹¹³ Carolyn J. Sharp, *How the Light Gets In: Ethical Life through the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 157-63.

¹¹⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 27-30.

continues to pray. The body does not wait for theological clarity before responding to God. What is being described here is not merely expression but formation. Repeated patterns of movement, rhythm, and communal participation begin to reshape how grief is perceived and processed. Over time, the body learns new responses, where vulnerability no longer signals danger but possibility. In this way, embodied lament becomes not only a release of grief but a re-training of the self.

This scriptural grounding creates theological space for contemporary forms of embodied lament, particularly those emerging from communities whose grief has been historically marginalized or surveilled. Rap music, breakdancing, and communal performance function within this biblical lineage. Like the Psalms, rap narrates loss, names injustice, and oscillates between despair and hope. For many Black men, rap and hip hop are among the few culturally sanctioned spaces where vulnerability, sorrow, fear, longing, and confession can be voiced without forfeiting masculine identity. Like David's dance, embodied movement externalizes inner anguish and transforms private pain into public witness. These practices are not deviations from biblical faith; they are contemporary continuations of Scripture's insistence that healing involves the whole person. They represent living psalms forged in neighborhoods rather than temples, yet no less sacred.

For men, especially Black men, formed within masculinities that prohibit vulnerability, embodied lament offers an alternative grammar of faith. Where emotional expression has been disciplined out of speech, rhythm and movement provide access to grief without requiring premature articulation. Healing begins not with explanation but with participation. The body speaks before the mind interprets. In this way, embodied lament becomes a pastoral site of truth-telling, resistance, and restoration. It also becomes a corrective to theological traditions that have privileged cognition over incarnation.

This chapter proceeds from this scriptural foundation to explore rap, movement, and somatic practice as forms of sacred lament and pastoral care. These practices do not replace Scripture; they activate it. They reclaim grief as communal, embodied, and theologically meaningful, revealing healing not as the suppression of sorrow but as its faithful expression before God and one another.

Healing Beyond Words

Grief, when unacknowledged, becomes a silent burden carried in both body and soul. Scripture refuses such silence. Psalm 149:3 commands praise through movement: “Let them praise his name with dancing,” locating healing not merely in speech or cognition but in rhythm, breath, and embodied participation. Biblical faith affirms that the body is not peripheral to spiritual life; it is a primary site of encounter, testimony, and restoration. Healing is not only believed, it is enacted. It is rehearsed through gesture and reinforced through communal rhythm.

For men, particularly Black men, the weight of unexpressed grief is intensified by cultural, ecclesial, and historical forces that equate masculinity with emotional restraint and bodily control. These formations stand in tension with a biblical imagination that celebrates embodied devotion, such as David dancing “with all his might” before the Lord (2 Samuel 6:14, NIV). Where David’s movement signifies faithful vulnerability, modern masculinities often demand composure and containment. The result is not maturity but embodied dissonance: men trained to endure grief rather than metabolize it.¹¹⁵ Endurance without expression produces spiritual constriction rather than resilience.

Healing cannot be reduced to cognition or verbal articulation alone. Trauma research and somatic theology converge in affirming that what remains unspoken is stored in the body,

¹¹⁵ hooks, *Will to Change*, 45; Cone, *Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 112.

requiring rhythm and communal witnessing for release.¹¹⁶ Within Black communities, practices like rap and hip-hop, emerging both within and beyond formal ecclesial structures, function as vital sites of lament and survival. In these spaces, Black men articulate a vulnerability often denied elsewhere. Rap narrates grief and oscillates between despair and hope; it is a contemporary psalm forged at the intersection of historical trauma and communal resilience. It is theology performed in cipher form, the communal circle where MCs gather to speak, witness, and improvise collective truth.

This chapter contends that such practices are not ancillary to pastoral care but theologically legitimate forms of embodied lament. Like the Psalms, rap gives language to sorrow and protest. Like David's dance, breakdancing and rhythmic movement externalize inner anguish and transform private pain into communal testimony. When recognized as sacred practice, these forms engage the whole person, body, memory, spirit, and community, restoring grief to its rightful place as a site of divine encounter and healing presence.¹¹⁷ Healing becomes participation in divine solidarity rather than escape from embodied pain.

Rap Music as Narrative Lament

Rap is often dismissed as entertainment or social commentary, yet at its core it functions as a contemporary Psalter for communities historically denied theological and social voice. To dismiss it in this way is to overlook its functional role as a site of emotional survival and communal meaning-making, particularly within contexts where traditional pastoral structures have failed to hold grief. Psalm 149 calls the people of God to praise "with timbrel and harp," locating theological expression not only in words but in beat, breath, and communal cadence. Rap participates in this biblical economy of lament and praise, where rhythm and embodied

¹¹⁶ van der Kolk, *Body Keeps the Score*, 205; Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 18.

¹¹⁷ Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 122; Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 94.

performance are integral to faith. Through rhyme, repetition, and percussive speech, rap communicates grief, survival, protest, and hope, often at once. This claim becomes clearer when traced historically, revealing not isolated protest songs but a developing lineage of lament within hip hop's prophetic imagination.

This theological resonance can be traced across generations of hip hop. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, *The Message* by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five named urban despair with prophetic clarity: "It's like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder how I keep from going under."¹¹⁸ Widely heralded as the first instance of "conscious rap," this track fundamentally shifted hip hop from party-centric escapism to a medium of sociopolitical critique. The song offered no easy resolution. It bore witness. Like Psalm 88, which ends without triumphant closure, "The Message" allowed communal anxiety to be spoken aloud. Its cadence carried exhaustion; its repetition stabilized communal fear. It functioned as sonic lament in a decade when theological institutions were largely silent about the structural despair it described.

Like the Psalms of lament, rap refuses linear resolution. It moves between despair and defiance, sorrow and resilience, anger and testimony. Loss is named without apology. Injustice is protested without spiritual bypass. Hope, when it emerges, is hard won rather than sentimental. This mirrors biblical lament, which dwells honestly in pain as a legitimate form of faithfulness.¹¹⁹ Truth telling precedes healing.

In the 1990s, this lamenting impulse deepened in *Keep Ya Head Up* by Tupac Shakur. *Regarded by many as the high-water mark of empathetic rap*, Shakur fused protest with fragile hope: "And since we all came from a woman. . . ."¹²⁰ The song oscillates between grief and affirmation, indicting systems while insisting upon dignity. Like many psalms, it moves between

¹¹⁸ Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five, "The Message," Sugar Hill Records, 1982, vinyl LP.

¹¹⁹ Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 52.

¹²⁰ Tupac Shakur, "Keep Ya Head Up," *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.*, Interscope Records, 1993, compact disc.

complaint and confidence. It is both wound and balm. By centering the pain of women and children, Shakur disrupted the hyper-masculine tropes of his era. Tupac's vocal delivery embodies a masculinity wrestling publicly with its own formation, mirroring the psalmist who questions God yet refuses to sever covenant relationship. He effectively transformed the recording studio into a space of public confession and communal healing.

By the twenty-first century, this lamenting lineage matured into communal refrain. In our present era, *Alright* by Kendrick Lamar has functioned as communal lament and eschatological refrain. Often described by critics and activists as the unofficial anthem of the Black Lives Matter movement, the track emerged amid public protest against racialized violence. Its chorus, "We gon' be alright," operates not as naïve optimism but as defiant hope.¹²¹ The verses narrate temptation, survivor's guilt, systemic injustice, and spiritual wrestling, while the refrain gathers communal breath into resilience. This movement mirrors Psalm 13, which journeys from abandonment to trust. Lamar's refrain functions liturgically; it is sung in the streets as psalmody once filled temple courts. It represents a "prophetic imagination" that refuses to let the current struggle have the final word. It is grief refusing annihilation. By anchoring modern protest in a rhythmic confession of faith, Lamar bridges the gap between the pews and the pavement.

Taken together, these artists form a lineage of prophetic imagination within hip hop. Grandmaster Flash names the wound without anesthesia. Tupac wrestles publicly with dignity amid despair. Kendrick gathers fragmented grief into communal refrain. Each stands within a tradition that refuses silence, speaks from the underside of power, and imagines survival beyond present suffering. In biblical terms, they function as contemporary psalmists, narrating affliction while gesturing toward covenantal hope. This is not prophecy detached from community, but prophecy forged within it. Their collective witness demonstrates that rap's lament is not episodic

¹²¹ Kendrick Lamar, "Alright," *To Pimp a Butterfly*, Top Dawg Entertainment, 2015, compact disc.

but generational, an evolving grammar of sorrow, resistance, and fragile eschatology.

Rap's theological significance lies in both lyric and form. Rhythm regulates the body. Repetition stabilizes emotion. Communal recognition transforms isolation into witness. Trauma scholars observe that patterned sound and cadence help regulate the nervous system, creating conditions for emotional integration.¹²² Psalm 149 situates praise within embodied rhythm, suggesting that faith is enacted as well as spoken. What begins in the body becomes voice; what is voiced becomes testimony.

Rap must therefore be understood as embodied lament. Its kinship with dance is not accidental. In Scripture, dance responds to overwhelming reality, whether joy, grief, fear, or deliverance. David danced “with all his might” before the Lord (2 Samuel 6:14). His movement was vulnerable, excessive, and publicly embodied. Black expressive traditions collapse the divide between movement and meaning in similar fashion. The cypher becomes sanctuary. The beat becomes pulse. Lament moves before it explains.

For pastoral care, this recognition is essential. Attending to lyrical themes, cadence, metaphor, silence, and repetition becomes a theological practice. Within these narratives pastors discern grief, identity, moral imagination, and eschatological longing. James Cone insists that Black expressive culture functions as theological speech born from suffering.¹²³ Rap extends this lineage. It is not merely commentary on faith; it is often faith struggling to breathe.

I write from lived proximity, having been formed in the communities where hip-hop emerged. As a breakdancer and collaborator, I knew these artists as neighbors whose work carried the weight of grief and resistance. Their cadences served as survival strategies and communal confessions when ecclesial spaces could not hold lament. Recognizing rap as lament

¹²² van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 214.

¹²³ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 88.

does not replace Scripture; it reveals Scripture's ongoing embodiment. It extends the biblical tradition of truth telling into cultural forms forged in crucible conditions.

Such recognition also intensifies Christologically. If Christ is the Word made flesh who enters human suffering, then wherever suffering finds truthful, embodied expression, Christ is not absent. The incarnate Logos is not confined to parchment but meets humanity in breath, vibration, and communal cry. Rap's raw confession echoes Gethsemane's anguish; its communal refrains echo resurrection hope struggling toward articulation. When communities chant "We gon' be alright," they rehearse a fragile eschatology that sings through crucifixion rather than denying it. In this sense, rap participates in the grammar of cross and resurrection, lament that refuses despair's final word. It affirms that the grief already being expressed is a sacred text awaiting witness.

This section prepares the pastoral framework that follows. Healing begins in movement, finds articulation in voice, and matures through communal witness. When rap is honored as narrative lament, it bridges silenced grief and shared healing, joining the body's knowledge to the community's care. It becomes contemporary psalmody, grief set to beat, sorrow made breathable.

Movement and Somatic Healing: Breakdancing and Embodied Lament

If rap gives voice to grief, movement inscribes it in the body. Where lyrical lament names the wound, embodied movement metabolizes it. Trauma research consistently demonstrates that unexpressed grief and stress are stored somatically as argued by trauma psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk in his foundational work on embodied trauma.¹²⁴ Long before I had language for this in theology or psychology, I knew it in my own body. Breakdancing, stepping, and communal rhythmic movement allowed the body to metabolize what speech could not carry. Where words

¹²⁴ van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 230.

were unsafe or unavailable, movement became grammar.

Neuroscientific research increasingly confirms what embodied communities have long practiced: trauma constricts the body's regulatory capacities, narrowing breath, tightening musculature, and heightening vigilance as argued by trauma psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk in his foundational work on embodied trauma. Rhythmic, repetitive movement interrupts this constriction. It restores breath depth, stimulates bilateral coordination, and reintroduces agency into bodies shaped by hypervigilance. Breakdancing, with its cycles of descent and elevation, collapse and recovery, spin and stillness, becomes not only artistic performance but somatic renegotiation. The dancer falls to the floor and rises again. The choreography itself rehearses survival.

I witnessed this in cyphers, gyms, schoolyards, and neighborhood gatherings. Spinning, footwork, freezes, and floor work were not merely aesthetic. They released grief lodged in chest, jaw, and shoulders. In the cypher, this release is communal rather than solitary. The circle holds the dancer. Witnesses lean in, clap, shout affirmation, and echo rhythm. The nervous system, once isolated in defensive posture, encounters co-regulation through collective cadence. What trauma fragments, rhythm gathers. The cypher functions liturgically. It is call and response. It is confession without words. It is testimony enacted in muscle and sweat. The circle says, without formal creed, "You are seen. Your movement matters." What appeared as performance often functioned as lament enacted in motion.

Breakdancing in particular carries theological symbolism. Power moves demand risk. Freezes suspend the body between motion and stillness. Footwork traces intricate patterns close to the ground. These embodied vocabularies mirror lament's oscillation between collapse and defiance. To spin on one's back and rise into balance is to narrate resurrection in kinetic form.

The body proclaims what the mouth cannot yet confess: I am still here. The floor that could signify defeat becomes the surface of creativity. This inversion reflects the Gospel's paradox in which what appears as humiliation becomes revelation. The body participates in protest, sorrow, and resilience.

These practices constitute theological knowing. Grief is not solely cognitive. It lives in breath and muscle. Breakdancing taught me that healing often begins before understanding. The body moves first; meaning follows. This sequence challenges Western theological habits that privilege cognition as the gateway to transformation. In Scripture, bodies often respond before theology is articulated. In 2 Samuel 6:14, King David publicly celebrates the Ark's return through the uninhibited embodied worship of dancing. The hemorrhaging woman reaches out to Jesus before she testifies, and her healing occurs through embodied faith prior to verbal confession (Mark 5:27–34). In the Gospel of John, the disciples run before they understand resurrection, because often, physical response precedes theological comprehension (John 20:3–8). In similar fashion, breakdancing allows grief to surface in embodied improvisation before narrative coherence is possible. Theology emerges from motion rather than preceding it.

When ecclesial spaces silence lament, communities generate alternative sanctuaries. Dance floors, sidewalks, basements, and street corners become sites where sorrow is released without explanation. These spaces function as alternative sanctuaries, particularly for young Black men whose bodies are often surveilled, disciplined, or criminalized in public space. Within the dance circle, the same body marked as a threat becomes an artist. The kinetic vocabulary once associated with danger becomes beauty. This reversal carries pastoral weight. It re-narrates embodiment itself. The dancer does not escape his body; he reclaims it. Somatic lament becomes somatic dignity.

Recognizing such practices as legitimate mourning aligns with Scripture's witness. The Gospel witness presents Jesus as one who weeps openly and bodily within the presence of others, without offering explanation or justification for his tears. The text does not specify the cause of his weeping; instead, it foregrounds the fact of his visible, embodied lament. This matters theologically. Jesus does not conceal grief, delay it, or translate it into controlled discourse. He allows it to be seen. In doing so, he authorizes grief as a legitimate, public, and relational act within faithful life. His tears function not as a problem to be solved but as a revelation of a fully embodied humanity that remains open in the presence of suffering.

He carried anguish bodily in Gethsemane, where Jesus names his soul as "overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death Matthew 26:38 NIV)." Faith does not deny embodiment; it enters it. God meets humanity within suffering, not beyond it. Embodied lament therefore stands not outside Christian theology but at its center. Indeed, the incarnation intensifies this claim. In Jesus Christ, God does not redeem humanity abstractly but through muscle, sweat, breath, tears, and pierced flesh. The crucified body is not metaphor but material. Resurrection does not discard wounds; for John 20:27 shows us that the risen Christ still bears the marks of crucifixion but it transfigures them. Breakdancing's grammar of descent and elevation, vulnerability and strength, echoes this Christological rhythm. The body falls, the body rises, the body bears witness. Healing is not disembodiment but restored participation in one's own flesh before God and community.

For pastoral praxis, this means movement-based gatherings, dance prayer spaces, and embodied lament circles are not peripheral innovations but theologically coherent responses to suppressed grief. They honor the body as the site of divine encounter. They allow lament to be metabolized rather than managed. And for men formed to survive through stoicism, they offer a

redemptive rehearsal: strength expressed not as rigidity, but as rhythmic resilience. If rap and movement together constitute embodied lament, pastoral theology must now ask how such practices can be intentionally cultivated within ecclesial care. The question is no longer whether lament exists, but how it may be recognized, permitted, and integrated within the life of the church.

Pastoral Care Model: Embodied Lament in Practice

To translate embodied lament into pastoral praxis, this dissertation proposes a model shaped by the scriptural movement of a post-exilic Psalm 149, where bodies move, voices rise, and communal witness is formed. Within the ministry setting of this project, this model is implemented through recurring grief circles and church-based gatherings facilitated by myself. These sessions typically include guided listening (rap/music), optional movement-based engagement, and structured opportunities for verbal or nonverbal expression. Participants are not required to articulate grief cognitively at the outset; instead, the model allows expression to emerge through rhythm, presence, and communal witnessing. Over time, these practices aim to help participants externalize suppressed grief, reinterpret it theologically, and integrate it into a more expansive sense of self and faith. This Psalm situates praise first in embodiment: “Let them praise his name with dancing... let the faithful rejoice in this honor (Psalm 149:3, 9 NIV).” Movement precedes proclamation, and communal participation precedes theological articulation. This ordering corrects pastoral approaches that privilege cognition over embodiment, particularly among men whose grief has been historically silenced.

The first pastoral task is recognition. This requires a shift in pastoral imagination: from interpreting behavior as resistance to reading it as communication. What appears as disengagement may in fact be displaced grief; what appears as hardness may be protective

adaptation. Leaders must learn to perceive grief where it already exists, expressed indirectly through music references, agitation, withdrawal, anger, or compulsive activity. These are often misread as resistance or immaturity. Instead, they may be understood as pre verbal lament, where the body moves before the voice speaks. Trauma research confirms that grief is registered somatically before cognitive integration occurs as demonstrated in contemporary trauma studies.¹²⁵ Recognition therefore requires attentiveness to rhythm, posture, repetition, and emotional tone. These are invitations to accompaniment, not distractions from faith.

The second movement is permission. Psalm 149 imagines praise, and by extension lament, as communal and audible. Dance and song are shared acts. Pastoral contexts must therefore cultivate environments where grief moves from body to voice without fear of correction. Worship must make space for sorrow as well as celebration. Counseling and peer settings must allow tears, anger, silence, and embodied expression without rushing toward resolution. Validating grief expressed through culturally resonant forms such as rap and movement signals that lived language is welcome before God. As Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann, known for his work on the Psalms as acts of protest and faith, argues, lament is faith because it refuses denial and demands relationship.¹²⁶

The third movement is integration. Psalm 149 culminates in communal identity: “This is the glory of all his faithful people (Psalm 149:9 NIV).” Grief voiced and embodied becomes shared witness. During the isolation of the COVID 19 pandemic, this integration became urgent. As co-host of the podcast Hip Hop and Theology, I engaged theologians, pastors, and artists in sustained listening to hip hop’s theological resonance. We wrestled with artists such as Tupac, Nas, The Notorious B.I.G., Wu Tang Clan, Rick Ross, KRS One, Eric B. and Rakim, Kendrick

¹²⁵ van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 230.

¹²⁶ Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 58.

Lamar, Queen Latifah, and Cardi B, whose work consistently engages suffering, survival, faith, and hope. What emerged were sustained practices of lament shaped by lived experience and collective memory.

For those formed within hip hop culture as participants and neighbors, these artists functioned as contemporary psalmists. Their work named fear, violence, aspiration, and divine encounter where formal theological discourse often fell silent. Hosting these conversations became pastoral praxis. Grief was discerned and witnessed within community. Hip hop operated as archive, altar, and communal liturgy.

Pastoral care must therefore cultivate pathways where grief is released and held collectively. Guided listening practices that treat hip hop as contemporary lament texts, movement based prayer spaces, and testimony circles mirror Psalm 149's flow from embodied movement to voiced truth to communal witness. Collaboration with artists affirms that the church receives lament from the people it serves. These practices extend Scripture's lament tradition into contemporary sound and flesh, reinforcing that grief embodied and shared is sacred faithfulness (Cone, 1975; Hopkins, 2004; Menakem, 2017).¹²⁷

Theological Implications

Rap and movement-based lament challenge disembodied and overly cognitive models of grief. First, they affirm embodied presence as a theological necessity. Grief is lived in breath, muscle tension, and exhaustion; it is carried in the body as much as in the mind. Scripture assumes this reality. The Psalms provide a visceral vocabulary for the somatic experience of suffering, speaking of bones wasting away under the burden of unconfessed anguish (Psalm 32:3), hearts melting like wax amid overwhelming distress (Psalm 22:14), and bodies trembling as sorrow drains the soul's strength (Psalm 119:28). Such imagery renders suffering tangible,

¹²⁷ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 142; Hopkins, *Being Human*, 77; Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 62.

anchoring the life of faith in lived, physical experience and underscoring that lament is an embodied act. Trauma theory confirms that unexpressed grief imprints itself on posture and the regulation of the nervous system. Rap and movement, therefore, do not merely illustrate theology - they enact it, calling pastoral care to honor the body as a vital locus of memory and divine encounter.

Second, these practices recover communal witness. Just as biblical lament is voiced within the assembly, the psalmist affirms that this shared rhythm of struggle and praise constitutes the “glory of all his faithful people (Psalm 149:9 NIV).” Rap cyphers and dance circles mirror this scriptural pattern, creating spaces where grief is brought into collective presence, heard, held, and affirmed by the community. Within these embodied gatherings, sorrow is not only expressed but transformed through communal participation. Pastoral care that neglects these communal dimensions risks reinforcing the very isolation that sustains trauma; conversely, when the community bears witness to the body’s cry, it participates in the work of holistic restoration.

Third, embodied lament functions as resistance. Within Black communities, grief has often been regulated by expectations equating restraint with strength. Embodied lament disrupts these norms. Liberation theologian James Cone posits that Black expressive culture serves as a theological site where suffering is named and reimagined before God.¹²⁸ Rap and movement transform mourning into prophetic witness, exposing structural violence and racialized trauma. Lament is therefore therapeutic, political, and theological. It refuses silence and insists that God is encountered amid struggle.

Finally, these practices integrate with tradition rather than depart from it. Rap and embodied movement mirror the biblical grammar of lament found in Psalms, prophets, and

¹²⁸ James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972), 104.

Gospels. They hold protest and praise together. Just as biblical lament addresses God honestly within covenant relationship, these practices create theological encounter through divine presence and communal responsibility. Grief embodied and witnessed is not failure of faith but profound expression of it.

Healing as Holistic Practice

Healing from grief, particularly for men conditioned to suppress emotion, requires a deliberate integration of mind, heart, and body. Somatic and trauma-informed care suggest that rap, breakdancing, and embodied lament provide essential pathways for such integration.¹²⁹

When pastoral care embraces these practices, the church and seminary affirm that grief is not a sign of weakness but a vital site of divine encounter. This form of embodied lament aligns with the biblical witness, from the raw vulnerability of David's psalms to Jesus weeping at Lazarus' tomb (John 11:35, NIV). In this way, lament becomes a pedagogy of presence and solidarity, deeply resonant with the insights of liberation and process theology.¹³⁰

These practices offer a necessary counter-narrative to cultures of repression. Within this framework, grief is not merely endured but actively engaged and transformed. Healing emerges when lament is honored as a sacred, communal, and embodied act, creating space for honest encounter with God and others.¹³¹ Moreover, lament expressed through voice and movement is rarely separate from the medium of music itself. Rhythm, tone, and vibration generate a visceral landscape through which grief is felt, processed, and shared. Scripture repeatedly affirms that music mediates the movement of the human spirit toward the Creator, enabling sorrow, longing, and hope to be expressed beyond the limits of ordinary speech. Attending to this dimension deepens a theology of embodied lament by recognizing music not merely as accompaniment, but

¹²⁹ Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 81; van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 230.

¹³⁰ Cone, *Spirituals and the Blues*, 104; Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 118.

¹³¹ hooks, *The Will to Change*, 68.

as a spiritual medium through which emotion is carried into transformative divine encounter.

Music, Emotion, and the Spiritual Body

Throughout Scripture, music functions as a conduit through which human emotion moves toward God. The Psalter itself is a collection of songs designed to carry lament, praise, fear, and longing through melody and rhythm. A hymn of praise emphasizing musical skill and communal expression, invites the faithful to “praise the Lord with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy (Psalm 33:2-3 NIV).” Here music is not decorative but formative. Sound shapes the emotional and spiritual posture of the community. Similarly, within the theological interpretation of Israel’s history aimed at showing God’s sovereignty in human affairs we find a narrative demonstrating music’s therapeutic and spiritual effect within the royal court. When David plays the harp for Saul, “relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him (1 Samuel 16:23 NIV).” The text implies that music possesses a therapeutic and spiritual capacity, calming distress and restoring inner equilibrium.

Theologically, such passages suggest that music operates at the intersection of body, emotion, and spirit. Sound is felt physically as vibration, regulating breath and pulse while simultaneously carrying meaning and memory. Contemporary research in psychology and neuroscience confirms that rhythmic sound can help regulate emotional states and support trauma integration by engaging the nervous system through patterned repetition.¹³²

Somatic therapist Resmaa Menakem similarly emphasizes that practices involving breath, rhythm, and vocal vibration can regulate the nervous system through what he describes as “vagal braking,” a process in which slow breathing, humming, or tonal sound stimulates the vagus nerve

¹³² van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*.

and helps settle the body after states of activation or distress.¹³³ Through these practices, the body gradually shifts from defensive arousal toward greater stability and presence. Music therefore participates in the same somatic processes that movement and dance activate. Rhythm organizes breathing, vocalization engages bodily vibration, and the patterned repetition of sound creates space for emotional release. Within this framework, music becomes not merely expressive but regulatory, enabling grief and sorrow to move through the body without overwhelming it.

For many communities, particularly within Black musical traditions, emoting through music has long functioned as a spiritual practice. Spirituals, gospel, blues, and hip-hop all carry the emotional weight of collective history. These musical forms allow sorrow, protest, endurance, and hope to be expressed communally rather than privately. Theologian James H. Cone observes that Black expressive traditions often serve as sites where theology is sung before it is written, where faith emerges from the lived struggle of a people seeking God within oppression.¹³⁴ Music therefore becomes more than artistic expression; it becomes theological testimony. It allows emotion to move outward, transforming private grief into shared witness. The Spirit who groans with creation - describing divine intercession through wordless groaning (Romans 8:26) - also moves through breath, rhythm, and communal sound, transforming embodied lament into prayer.

This dynamic is deeply somatic. Music engages breath, heartbeat, and vocal resonance, aligning bodily rhythms with communal sound. In many worship traditions, singing together produces a sense of shared emotional regulation and belonging. Practical theologian Don E. Saliers argues that liturgical music shapes the emotional imagination of faith communities, forming how believers experience sorrow, hope, and divine presence.¹³⁵ When grief is sung

¹³³ Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 112-18.

¹³⁴ James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2022), 3-15, 62-68.

¹³⁵ Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 67-72.

rather than silenced, the body participates in prayer even when language fails. Emotion becomes devotion.

Within the framework of this dissertation, emoting through music represents another dimension of embodied lament. Rap, rhythm, and musical production allow grief to be voiced in ways that preserve dignity and cultural identity. Beats, samples, and melodic refrains provide emotional scaffolding through which difficult truths can be spoken. Music holds what words alone cannot carry. It becomes a container for sorrow that is both personal and communal.

Recognizing this dimension has significant pastoral implications. Churches and ministries seeking to address male grief must learn to hear the emotional worlds embedded in music. Listening sessions, communal reflection on songs, and worship practices that incorporate culturally meaningful music can open pastoral pathways otherwise closed to traditional forms of counseling. In these spaces, men may find permission to feel before they are able to explain. Music becomes a bridge between silence and speech, between isolation and communal care.

Ultimately, emoting through music reveals that healing is not merely cognitive or verbal but vibrational and relational. Sound travels through bodies, gathering individuals into shared emotional space. Within that space, grief can be carried together rather than alone. When music becomes lament before God, it transforms sorrow into prayer. The body listens, the voice joins, and the community bears witness.

Rap, breakdancing, and music together constitute complementary modalities of embodied lament, allowing grief to surface in voice, movement, and vibration. Rap gives narrative form to sorrow, protest, and resilience, translating private anguish into communal witness. Breakdancing externalizes emotion in movement, allowing the body to metabolize stress stored in posture, musculature, and breath. Music carries grief through sound and rhythm, engaging the nervous

system to facilitate both emotional expression and regulation.

Theologically, these practices align with Scripture, where bodily and auditory expression communicate devotion, lament, and hope. David's dancing before the Lord "with all his might" (2 Samuel 6:14 NIV) demonstrates the legitimacy of excessive, public, and relational expression of faith, while also disrupting the royal decorum found in the royal imagination. Similarly, Psalm 149:3 shares a communal summons to embodied praise with the call to "praise his name with dancing," highlighting movement and sound as primary vehicles of spiritual encounter. Music and movement are not ancillary to faith; they are embodied forms of prayer, lament, and reconciliation.

Contemporary research affirms the somatic power of music. Rhythm regulates breath, repetition stabilizes attention and emotion, and collective performance fosters co-regulation and communal witness.¹³⁶ Practices involving breath, rhythm, and vocal vibration function as a form of "vagal braking," whereby slow breathing, humming, or tonal sound stimulates the vagus nerve and helps settle the body after distress.¹³⁷ Music therefore functions as both expression and physiological regulation: it allows grief to move through the body safely, cultivates presence with sorrow, and prepares participants for relational and spiritual engagement.

By combining rap, breakdancing, and music, communities create holistic pastoral spaces where grief is not denied or contained but actively metabolized and witnessed. Rhythm, vibration, and movement together open pathways for men, particularly those formed in masculinities that restrict vulnerability, to receive grief as a sacred teacher, connecting their bodies, emotions, and spirits to God's restorative work. In this sense, lament expressed through rap, movement, and music becomes simultaneously theological, somatic, and spiritual. The body

¹³⁶ van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 214.

¹³⁷ Resmaa Menakem, *The Quaking of America: An Embodied Guide to Navigating Our Nation's Upheaval and Racial Reckoning* (Las Vegas: Central Recovery Press, 2022), 112-18.

moves, the voice articulates, and the nervous system settles. Through processes such as vagal regulation, the body is able to carry grief without overwhelm. The practices create space for the transformative encounter of God, where vulnerability, expression, and presence converge. Healing through sound and motion bridges internal experience and communal witness, situating grief as a medium for spiritual and relational reconciliation.

Chapter 7: Healing, Reconciliation, and Redefining Masculinity in Grief

This chapter turns toward the theological and pastoral meaning of healing as it emerges from sustained engagement with grief. Having traced how masculine identity is shaped by the suppression of lament and the embodied consequences of unprocessed sorrow, the focus now shifts to healing as reconciliation. Healing is not the elimination of grief or the restoration of emotional control, but the gradual reconstitution of relational life with God, self, and community. It is the process through which vulnerability is no longer treated as threat but as the site of restoration and divine encounter. Within this frame, masculinity is reimagined not as emotional containment but as openness to transformation through truthful engagement with loss.

In the context of this project, healing is not approached as an abstract theological concept but as a structured pastoral process enacted through recurring grief circles and ministry gatherings facilitated within church communities in New York City. These gatherings function as intentional spaces where Black men are guided through the work of naming, expressing, and reinterpreting grief. The goal is not simply emotional release, but the transformation of internalized narratives - what participants often carry as embedded myths about masculinity, strength, and silence - so that new patterns of relational and spiritual engagement can emerge.

Healing, Reconciliation, and the Sacredness of Vulnerable Masculinity

Chapter 6 traced the movement from silenced grief to embodied lament, demonstrating how rhythm, rap, and somatic practices create theological and pastoral spaces where sorrow can be expressed, witnessed, and metabolized. If that work engaged grief in motion, the present chapter turns toward healing as reconciliation. Healing is neither the erasure of grief nor the restoration of emotional control. Rather, healing is the theological reconstitution of masculinity through reconciled relationship with God, self, and community. It is the reorientation of the self before God and community through divine presence that grieves, suffers, and restores alongside

humanity.

This theological vision is grounded in key biblical texts that frame grief not as failure but as sacred encounter. In the Beatitudes, Jesus declares, “Blessed are those who mourn (Matthew 5:4 NIV),” locating grief within the economy of divine comfort. Likewise, the psalmist proclaims that God “heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds (Psalm 147:3 NIV),” portraying divine care as attentive, relational, and embodied rather than distant or abstract. Together, these texts establish mourning as a threshold through which divine presence is encountered rather than avoided.

This movement from lament to reconciliation resonates with the work of major twentieth-century theologians who reimagined God’s relationship to human suffering. The Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth, writing in the context of the early twentieth-century European crisis, emphasizes that human identity is constituted in encounter with God, particularly in moments of crisis and dependence.¹³⁸ The German theologian Jürgen Moltmann, shaped by his experience as a prisoner of war during World War II, articulates a vision of the “crucified God,” insisting that God does not stand apart from suffering but participates fully in it.¹³⁹ Applied to the ministry context of this study, Jürgen Moltmann’s theology of the crucified God provides a framework for validating participants’ experiences of suffering as sites of divine presence rather than theological failure. Similarly, Karl Barth’s emphasis on encounter informs the relational structure of the grief circles, where healing is understood to occur not through explanation but through lived engagement - with God, with others, and with one’s own grief.

More recently, pastor and theologian Brian Zahnd calls for a renewed theological imagination shaped by the cross, inviting believers to perceive the world with hearts made tender

¹³⁸ Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. 4, pt. 2 of *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 5-18.

¹³⁹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 227-57.

rather than hardened.¹⁴⁰ Reconciliation is therefore not primarily cognitive but relational, communal, and embodied. It is the reordering of masculine identity around divine vulnerability rather than cultural control. Grief must be held and integrated within lived rhythms before renewal emerges. For men shaped by cultural and ecclesial stoicism, the question becomes pressing: How might sustained engagement with grief open pathways toward a vulnerable masculinity authorized by God's own presence in suffering rather than constrained by expectations of control?

If Chapter 6 opened the body as a site of lament, this chapter opens the heart as site of reconciliation, preparing the way for the constructive work that follows, in which masculine identity is reshaped in light of God's restorative vision. Grief is neither pathologized nor hurried toward closure. Healing unfolds relationally and over time. The embodied and communal dimensions already established now lead us to ask how men, particularly those disciplined into emotional restraint, might engage grief as transformative spiritual practice rather than private burden.

Before exploring healing relationally, it is necessary to recognize that embodied lament provides its theological groundwork. Grief carried in breath, rhythm, and posture is not separate from God's work but becomes the medium through which divine presence operates. Jesus wept at Lazarus' tomb and voiced anguish in Gethsemane, integrating bodily and spiritual lament into faithful encounter with God. Barth's theological project emphasizes God's engagement with humanity in concrete existence, reminding us that God encounters humanity in the particularities of suffering.¹⁴¹ Moltmann, writing in the aftermath of war and trauma, emphasizes God's suffering presence in the world, revealing healing as participatory rather than controlling.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Zahnd, *Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God*, 109-28.

¹⁴¹ Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, 5-18.

¹⁴² Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 227-57.

Zahnd, drawing from pastoral theology, underscores lament as a faithful response that participates in redemption even before resolution appears.¹⁴³ Embodied lament therefore prepares the person for a healing that is nonlinear, communal, and inseparable from divine accompaniment.

Building on this foundation, healing in this chapter is approached as reconciliation with loss within the self, before God, and in community. Scripture affirms mourning as sacred threshold rather than a condition to suppress. Matthew 5:4 situates grief as blessed condition through which divine comfort is received. Psalm 147:3 affirms God's healing as intimate and responsive, binding wounds rather than denying them. This carries pastoral implications. Ministers and communities are called to witness grief holistically, recognizing body and spirit as sites of divine encounter. Masculinity is reframed accordingly. Vulnerability and truthful expression become theological practices through which men participate in God's healing work.

Healing as a Nonlinear and Relational Process

Healing is reconciliation with loss. Scripture consistently affirms mourning as sacred passage through which restoration unfolds. Matthew 5:4 names grief as opening to divine comfort. Psalm 147:3 reveals healing as relational binding of wounds. Grief is neither deficiency nor failure of faith but a formative site of divine encounter.

This theological frame resists premature closure. Healing unfolds over time and in relationship. For men formed by cultural scripts equating masculinity with restraint, grief becomes an opportunity for transformation rather than threat to identity. Emotional truth is reclaimed. Masculine identity is reimagined. Relational integrity is restored through vulnerability witnessed and sustained within community.

The Role of Faith in Healing

¹⁴³ Zahnd, *Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God*, 109-28.

Within Christian theology, grief is expected rather than anomalous. The comfort promised in Matthew 5:4, translated from the Greek term *paraklēthēsontai*, evokes the language of divine consolation—one who draws alongside. This semantic field is developed more fully in the Gospel of John, where the cognate term *paraklētos* is used to describe the Holy Spirit as Comforter and Advocate (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7), suggesting that divine comfort is not abstract but relational and indwelling.¹⁴⁴ Healing is therefore relational before remedial as noted by New Testament scholars.¹⁴⁵

Process theology deepens this vision by rejecting divine detachment. Developed by thinkers such as Alfred North Whitehead and later theologians, God is relationally engaged with creation, affected by suffering, and present within grief, working persuasively toward healing.¹⁴⁶ Liberation theologies likewise refuse images of an untouched God. James Cone insists that God is disclosed in the crucified Christ who enters human agony rather than observing from distance.¹⁴⁷

Black feminist and womanist theologians extend this critique. Delores Williams and Kelly Brown Douglas challenge traditions that sanctify emotional restraint and silence, particularly for marginalized bodies.¹⁴⁸ They reject images of an emotionally detached God that mirror patriarchal and racialized control. Womanist theology instead affirms divine presence in embodied suffering and grief as truthful response to lived reality.

¹⁴⁴ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 952; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), 499.

¹⁴⁵ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 445; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 165.

¹⁴⁶ Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 44; Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 342.

¹⁴⁷ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970), 82

¹⁴⁸ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 161; Douglas, *Stand Your Ground*, 194.

Scripture reinforces this witness. In Exodus 2:23–25, a foundational liberation text in which God responds to suffering, God hears Israel’s cries and is moved by their groaning. Notably, the text employs the more general term *’ēlōhîm* (God) rather than the covenant name YHWH - introduced explicitly in the following chapter - suggesting that even prior to being fully named, God is already attentive to human suffering, hearing, remembering, seeing, and knowing (Exodus 2:23-25).¹⁴⁹ The Gospel narratives present Jesus as one who does not conceal grief but expresses it openly within communal space, allowing sorrow to be seen rather than explained. In Gethsemane, Christ names anguish openly before God (Matthew 26:38-39). These texts reveal a God who enters grief rather than correcting it. Grief becomes the primary site of divine encounter.

This theological vision carries formative implications for masculinity. When God is imagined as impassible and unaffected, men are disciplined into mirroring that posture. Emotional restraint appears godlike. Vulnerability becomes suspect.¹⁵⁰ A suffering and relational God authorizes a different formation. If God grieves and draws near, men do not betray faith through lament. They participate in divine life as emphasized in contemporary theological reflection on divine suffering.¹⁵¹

Masculinity is therefore re-measured not by containment but by relational capacity. Presence to pain, willingness to be seen in weakness, and truthful naming of loss become marks of maturity. Healing becomes formation into intimacy with God, others, and one’s wounded self. Vulnerability is not the collapse of masculinity but its theological reconstitution. Grief, engaged

¹⁴⁹ Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 43; Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 48.

¹⁵⁰ Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 54; Marcia J. Bunge, *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 132; Björn Krondorfer, *Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism: A Critical Reader* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 210.

¹⁵¹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 235.

rather than suppressed, becomes a site of spiritual growth where identity is reshaped through accompaniment and divine presence rather than endurance alone.

Lament as Spiritual Discipline and Masculine Recovery

Lament occupies a central place in the biblical imagination, particularly within the Psalms. Psalm 22 opens with the anguished cry later echoed by Jesus on the cross, “*Eli, Eli, lamah azavtani?*” a question that does not seek explanation but names felt abandonment. As Goldingay observes, lament refuses denial while remaining oriented toward relationship. It is speech that keeps covenant alive when certainty collapses.¹⁵²

The marginalization of lament within contemporary masculinity mirrors its marginalization in many church contexts. Men are often permitted to serve, lead, and endure, but rarely to grieve publicly. Recovering lament as spiritual discipline offers a biblically grounded grammar for emotional expression that legitimates sorrow without collapsing into despair. Lament becomes not a failure of faith but a disciplined refusal to sever relationship with God or community in the face of pain.

Community as a Space for Reconciliation

Healing in Scripture is rarely solitary. In the Lukan account of the early church, the early Christian community in Acts 2 is marked by shared life: devotion to teaching (*didachē*), fellowship (*koinōnia*), shared meals, prayer, and the mutual holding of need. The language of *koinōnia* signals participatory belonging, a shared life in which burdens are distributed rather than privatized.¹⁵³

This vision contrasts sharply with modern Western masculinities that prize

¹⁵² John Goldingay, *Psalms: Volume 1: Psalms 1-41*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 320-43.

¹⁵³ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 160.

self-sufficiency and emotional independence. These patterns are often reinforced by ecclesial practices that privilege private spirituality over shared vulnerability. Liberation theology challenges this paradigm by insisting that healing cannot be separated from solidarity. James Cone argues that suffering borne alone is intensified by isolation, while suffering held in community becomes a site of resistance and dignity.¹⁵⁴ Gustavo Gutiérrez likewise frames salvation as communal, locating reconciliation in restored relationships that counter social fragmentation.¹⁵⁵ Grief, therefore, is not a private failure but a collective reality demanding communal response.

Somatic scholarship reinforces this claim. Trauma research demonstrates that regulation and healing occur most effectively in relational contexts. The nervous system is social; safety and integration are restored through attuned presence rather than solitary endurance as developed in Stephen Porges' polyvagal theory and trauma research by Bessel van der Kolk.¹⁵⁶ When men are formed within masculinities that prohibit dependency, their bodies often remain in states of hypervigilance or collapse. Communal practices of lament such as shared testimony, ritual mourning, collective prayer, and embodied presence function not only as theological acts but as somatic interventions. They retrain the body to experience safety and connection, countering the physiological costs of isolation.

Progressive Christian theologian and former bishop John Shelby Spong's theological critique further illuminates the ecclesial implications. Spong rejected forms of Christianity that privatize faith and sever spirituality from relational responsibility, arguing that authentic

¹⁵⁴ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 142.

¹⁵⁵ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 110.

¹⁵⁶ Stephen W. Porges, *The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, and Self-Regulation* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2011), 154; van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 214.

Christian life is lived in honest engagement with suffering.¹⁵⁷ The church's vocation is not to offer abstract answers but to become a community capable of living fully and loving wastefully.¹⁵⁸ This vision challenges masculinities that equate faith with emotional restraint. Reconciliation emerges through shared vulnerability and truth-telling, practices often suppressed in masculine formation.

Churches that cultivate communal practices of grief such as support groups, ritual lament, shared testimony, and embodied prayer enact a theology that refuses isolation. These practices re-form masculine identity within a grammar of mutuality and care. Reconciliation becomes the re-knitting of bodies, stories, and relationships fractured by silence. Community is the site where grief is witnessed, dignity restored, and men freed from carrying sorrow alone.

Redefining Masculinity Through a Theology of Vulnerability

Healing from grief requires a redefinition of masculinity. The Christological witness destabilizes constructions of male strength rooted in dominance and emotional suppression. Jesus expresses grief openly within communal and relational space, and names anguish in Gethsemane, and submits to suffering without relinquishing relational openness. Vulnerability is not incidental to his ministry; it reveals divine love. The crucified Christ does not merely permit vulnerability; he unveils it as the very power of God (1 Corinthians 1:25). Masculinity measured by domination collapses before this revelation.

A theology of vulnerability reframes masculinity as relational presence rather than emotional control. Strength is measured by truth-telling and the willingness to be seen in pain. The cross redefines strength as steadfast relational presence rather than emotional invulnerability.

¹⁵⁷ John Shelby Spong, *Eternal Life: A New Vision: Beyond Religion, Beyond Theism, Beyond Heaven and Hell* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 88.

¹⁵⁸ John Shelby Spong, *A New Christianity for a New World: Why Traditional Religion is Dying and How a New Faith is Being Born* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 112.

For grieving men, this redefinition loosens scripts that equate expression with weakness and opens pathways toward integrated, faithful personhood.

Practical Pathways Toward Healing

Theological reflection must be accompanied by pastoral practice if healing is to move from abstraction into lived reality. Grief is not resolved through doctrinal affirmation alone. It requires spaces and relationships capable of holding vulnerability over time. Counseling and spiritual direction provide structured environments where loss, anger, and fear can be named without pressure to perform strength. Such practices reflect a pastoral theology of accompaniment, echoing the biblical image of God who draws near to the brokenhearted rather than standing apart from them (Psalm 34:18).

Men's support groups extend this work communally, offering what pastoral theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore and practical theologian Carrie Doehring describe as mirroring: the recognition of one's pain in others. This recognition disrupts isolation and counters the myth of self-sufficiency. When men hear their stories echoed in communal testimony, grief becomes shareable rather than shaming. These gatherings function as ecclesial practices of reconciliation, re-forming masculine identity through mutual vulnerability.¹⁵⁹

Creative and embodied practices further expand healing beyond propositional language. Journaling, music, visual art, and movement allow grief to be processed somatically and symbolically when words are insufficient. Trauma research underscores that loss is often stored in the body, requiring non-verbal expression for integration.¹⁶⁰ Theologically, such practices resonate with the biblical tradition of lament, which employs poetry, song, gesture, and ritual. Creative expression becomes prayer, an offering of woundedness rather than a performance of

¹⁵⁹ Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 94; Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 156.

¹⁶⁰ van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 230; Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 62.

control.

Mentorship and discipleship embed these practices within intergenerational relationships. When older men share experiences of loss not as triumph but as endurance and ongoing healing, they model a masculinity that integrates vulnerability with wisdom. Discipleship becomes formation in emotional and relational maturity, not merely instruction in belief.

Taken together, these practices embody faith. They honor the full humanity of grieving men and resist the reduction of masculinity to stoic endurance. By cultivating intentional structures of support, the church participates in God's healing work, creating spaces where grief can be named and integrated rather than denied. Healing emerges as a restored connection to self, community, and a God who meets men in their honesty.

Within this project, these pastoral practices take concrete form through recurring grief circles facilitated by the author within his ministry context. Each session follows a consistent rhythm: (1) opening grounding practice, (2) guided reflection on loss, (3) communal sharing without interruption or correction, (4) theological framing through Scripture, and (5) closing integration practice. Over time, this structure allows participants to externalize grief, challenge inherited beliefs about emotional restriction, and develop new relational capacities. In this sense, the model functions analogously to group therapy while remaining explicitly rooted in theological anthropology and ecclesial practice.

Moving Toward Wholeness

Healing from grief does not culminate in final resolution. It creates capacity, the capacity to imagine life, faith, and masculinity differently after loss. Pastoral theologian Carrie Doehring and grief theorist Robert Neimeyer emphasize that healing concerns integration rather than

closure: learning to carry grief in ways that expand relational and spiritual possibility.¹⁶¹ Healing does not erase grief but reconfigures one's relationship to it. This reconfiguration is not merely conceptual but embodied and relational. It involves a retraining of perception, where grief is no longer interpreted as threat but as a site of encounter: with God, with self, and with others. What was once avoided becomes engaged; what was once suppressed becomes integrated into the fabric of identity. In this sense, healing is not the resolution of grief but the transformation of one's posture toward it.

As men learn to lament without shame and experience vulnerability as spiritually generative, inherited narratives equating masculinity with emotional silence begin to loosen. These narratives, reinforced by cultural and ecclesial norms, have defined strength through restraint rather than connection as explored in masculinity studies by Krondorfer and theological reflections by Coakley.¹⁶² Healing interrupts this formation, creating space for alternative masculine scripts grounded in relationality and dependence on God and community.

What emerges is not perfected masculinity but reoriented masculinity, open and still in formation. Practical theologians describe such identity as unfinished, shaped through ongoing reflection and embodied faith rather than mastery, while Moltmann's later theology frames.¹⁶³ Masculinity formed in this way is resilient, capable of holding sorrow without denial and hope without illusion.

This chapter has argued that healing makes such reorientation possible, but it does not complete the work. Healing prepares the ground. It loosens the soil of inherited masculinities so that new forms of identity may take root. The deeper question therefore remains: What kind of

¹⁶¹ Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*, 94; Robert A. Neimeyer, ed., *Techniques of Grief Therapy: Creative Practices for Counseling the Bereaved* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 45.

¹⁶² Krondorfer, *Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism*, 210; Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 54.

¹⁶³ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *Christian Theology in Practice: Discovering a Discipline* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 118; Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 235.

masculinity can be formed when grief is no longer denied but integrated into faith, identity, and communal life? How might masculine identity be reshaped not only by repair, but by theological imagination: by visions of God, humanity, and the future that refuse despair without denying pain?

If Chapter 7 has focused on healing as capacity, Chapter 8 turns toward construction. Having traced how grief can be integrated rather than suppressed, the final chapter asks how masculinity might be reimagined in light of God's redemptive future. This movement is not away from lament but through it, toward a hope that does not bypass suffering but transfigures it. Christian hope does not anesthetize grief; it sanctifies it within a larger promise. Drawing on apocalyptic theology, particularly the Johannine vision of renewal of renewal in Revelation, Chapter Seven explores how grief can become a generative site for masculine identities shaped by honesty, compassion, and divine accompaniment. If healing reconciles men to their wounds, apocalyptic imagination reorients those wounds toward a future where sorrow is neither denied nor sovereign (Revelation 21:4). The final movement of this dissertation therefore asks not only how men survive grief, but how grief: held within divine promise, participates in their transformation.

Chapter 8: Toward a New Vision of Masculinity and Grief

This final chapter moves from healing as reconciliation toward a constructive theological vision of renewal. Having traced how grief disrupts inherited formations of masculinity and how healing reorients relational life, the focus now turns to the question of what masculinity might become when shaped by grief within the horizon of divine future. This movement is not away from suffering but through it, toward a theological imagination in which loss is neither erased nor absolutized but gathered into a larger story of transformation. Masculinity, in this sense, is not restored to prior forms of strength but reconstituted through participation in God's renewing life, where identity is reshaped by vulnerability, hope, and enduring relational presence. This reconstitution is not automatic. It requires the disruption of deeply embedded assumptions about control, self-sufficiency, and emotional restraint. Without such disruption, the language of renewal risks being absorbed back into the very frameworks it seeks to transform.

Kainos Renewal: Masculinity, Grief, and God's Transformative Future

The closing vision of the New Testament canon, the Book of Revelation, emerges from a context of persecution, displacement, and imperial violence faced by early Christian communities under Roman rule. Revelation's promise, "*Behold, I am making all things new*" (*Idou kainà poiō panta*), does not announce the erasure of history or the forgetting of pain, but the transformation of what has been wounded.¹⁶⁴ Spoken to communities marked by persecution, loss, and imperial violence, this declaration is not naïve optimism but defiant hope. The Greek term *kainos* signals renewal rather than replacement, something made different without being discarded. What has been broken is not denied; it is taken up and transfigured. Redemption does

¹⁶⁴ Greg K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1055; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 382.

not discard wounded history; it reconstitutes it.

The apocalyptic imagination, as developed within Revelation's symbolic and visionary framework, refuses both nostalgia and denial. It neither returns men to an imagined past of untested strength nor leaves them imprisoned within inherited scripts of domination. Instead, it discloses a future in which what has been wounded is gathered into divine faithfulness. Scars remain, yet they no longer signify defeat but witness to endurance and renewal.¹⁶⁵ The future of God does not erase masculine wounds; it re-narrates them.

Read through the lens of grief and masculinity, this promise challenges models of manhood that equate strength with invulnerability or redemption with emotional amnesia. God does not promise untouched lives, but renewed ones. Grief is not excluded from God's future; it is carried into it. Loss is neither ignored nor spiritualized away, but woven into a transformed identity marked by deeper relational and ethical capacity.¹⁶⁶ Masculinity shaped by this vision is not restored to stoicism or control but transformed through loss into greater openness, compassion, and truthfulness. It is strength crucified and raised. Such masculinity is eschatological rather than defensive. It lives toward God's promised future rather than clinging to inherited performances of strength. It dares to believe that tears are not threats to identity but thresholds to transformation.

Hope is not the opposite of grief but its companion. Revelation's newness does not bypass lament but fulfills it. For grieving men, this eschatological vision offers not escape from pain, but a future in which pain does not have the final word. What emerges is not triumphalist masculinity, but resilient masculinity capable of holding sorrow and hope together.

¹⁶⁵ Robert H. Mounce, *What Are We Waiting For? A Commentary on Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 45-47.

¹⁶⁶ Greg K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 958; N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 462.

From Silence to Sacred Transformation: Reimagining Masculinity Through Grief

Grief is not weakness but a profound dimension of human existence that shapes the soul. Yet masculinity has long been constrained by cultural and theological expectations that suppress emotional expression, compelling men to bear pain in isolation. This dissertation has traced the consequences of that suppression. It has argued that suppressed grief does not disappear but reemerges as fragmentation: spiritual disengagement, relational distance, anger, addiction, or emotional exile. What is not lamented is displaced. What is not named is enacted. Theologically, such displacement distorts the *imago Dei* by narrowing masculine identity to control rather than communion.

In response, biblical witness and theological reflection offer a more humane vision of masculinity, one that permits lament, embraces vulnerability, and understands healing as communal and spiritual practice. From the psalmists who cry aloud, to the prophets who protest injustice, to Jesus who weeps and suffers openly, Scripture does not present emotional suppression as maturity. It presents relational faithfulness amid sorrow as strength. The biblical canon, read as a whole, resists every construction of manhood that requires emotional disappearance.

Such a vision does not emerge without resistance. Forces, cultural, psychological, and spiritual, work to keep grief unarticulated and men disconnected from their emotional lives. In contrast to the strategies advocated by Screwtape, strategies that celebrate numbness, distraction, and self-deception, this reimagined masculinity seeks truth and transformation. Screwtape warns his nephew not to awaken the patient's inner life: "He can't attend to you and to the Enemy at the same time."¹⁶⁷ Emotional and spiritual awareness disrupt the forces that depend upon denial. A renewed masculinity must therefore encourage men to feel, to connect, to grieve, and to hope.

¹⁶⁷ Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, Letter VIII.

Awakened attention to grief becomes resistance against spiritual diminishment.

This path requires theological reconstruction. Masculinity must be reimagined through a theological anthropology that honors the full range of human emotion. Process theology contributes by portraying God not as distant or unmoved, but as relationally present within suffering, moving with creation toward healing rather than demanding emotional control. Through prayer, theological reflection, and communal practice, men can redefine grief not as a burden to carry alone but as a site of divine encounter.

Such reconstruction calls for a shift in personal and communal imagination. Men must be granted space to express grief without fear, and faith communities must cultivate environments that sustain lament and accompaniment. In doing so, the church does not abandon strength but redefines it. Shaped by God's promise to make all things new, masculinity becomes a gateway to faithfulness and renewal.

As Lewis suggests through *Screwtape's* disdain for vulnerability and community, "The man who truly and disinterestedly enjoys any one thing in the world... has defeated your attack."¹⁶⁸ A redefined masculinity rooted in love and emotional truth becomes a site of spiritual resistance where men are not merely surviving grief, but remade through it.

Jesus, Communal Eschatology, and the Reformation of Masculinity

Jesus embodies this vocation fully. He is "the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15 NIV)," a text situated within an early Christological hymn that presents Christ as the visible expression of God's nature and purposes. Karl Barth insists that Jesus Christ is humanity as God intends it, true humanity revealed in obedient freedom and covenantal love.¹⁶⁹ In Christ, the image of God is embodied and visible in a life open to God, neighbor, and suffering.

¹⁶⁸ Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, Letter XIII.

¹⁶⁹ Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, 147-59.

Richard Bauckham clarifies that Jesus' identity is participatory in God's own life. By locating Jesus within the divine identity, the New Testament reveals a God whose nature is expressed through self-giving love and solidarity with the suffering.¹⁷⁰ Crucifixion is not an interruption of divine power but its truthful expression. To follow Jesus is to be drawn into God's way of being in the world.

Within this Christological frame, the classical theological concept of the *imitatio Dei*, the call to reflect God's character in human life becomes concrete in the *imitatio Christi*, the imitation of God as revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹⁷¹ As Stanley Hauerwas argues, the Christian life is fundamentally a matter of discipleship in which believers are formed to live as Christ lived, embodying practices that make visible the character of God in the world.¹⁷² Jesus does not dominate but serves; he does not deny pain but enters it; he gives himself through love. Jürgen Moltmann's theology of the cross underscores that divine solidarity with suffering is constitutive of God's self-revelation.¹⁷³ God is revealed within grief. Likewise, Miroslav Volf argues that reconciliation requires vulnerability, the making of space for the other without erasing pain.¹⁷⁴ In Jesus, such vulnerability grounds a new community.

For masculinity, the implications are profound. If Christ reveals true humanity, then formations grounded in suppression, dominance, or invulnerability are distortions rather than ideals. Masculinity shaped by Christ is practiced compassion and covenantal presence. It is fidelity within relationship, not control over others. Jesus authorizes a masculinity capable of

¹⁷⁰ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 18-25.

¹⁷¹ Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Aloysius Croft and Harold Bolton (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003; repr., 2017), 27-35; David P. Gushee and Glen H. Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 24-38.

¹⁷² Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 99-118.

¹⁷³ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 235.

¹⁷⁴ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2019), 140-45.

grief, intimacy, and self-giving love, reflecting not cultural power but divine likeness. His tears at Lazarus' tomb do not undermine divine authority; they reveal it. His anguish in Gethsemane is not spiritual weakness but covenantal fidelity. At Golgotha, masculinity stripped of control becomes the site of redemptive power. Resurrection does not negate vulnerability; it vindicates it. The risen Christ still bears wounds, now transfigured, signaling that healed masculinity does not forget grief but carries it differently.

This Dissertation as a Constructive Theological Proposal

This chapter, and the dissertation as a whole, advances a constructive theological proposal concerning masculinity, grief, and Christian formation. Rather than only critiquing harmful masculine norms or offering pastoral strategies in isolation, this work reimagines masculinity through a synthesis of Christology, eschatology, and lived experience. Drawing from Black Liberation Theology, Process Theology, and practical theology, it argues that grief is not a problem to be solved but a sacred site where masculine identity is reshaped in relationship with God and community.

By grounding masculine formation in the life of Jesus and the communal hope of Revelation, this proposal resists both therapeutic reductionism and escapist eschatology. Healing is not framed as individual self-improvement, nor is hope deferred to a disembodied future. Masculinity is instead understood as dynamically formed through practices of lament, vulnerability, accompaniment, and faithful presence, practices that mirror God's relational life revealed in Christ.

The dissertation therefore offers a theological reorientation. It contends that masculinity is most fully itself not in emotional control but in covenantal vulnerability before God and neighbor. Masculinity is not something to be defended or restored to a former ideal, but

something continually formed in response to grief, love, and divine presence. Grief becomes not a threat to masculine identity but a formative discipline through which men are drawn more deeply into the life of God.

From Silent Strength to Sacred Wholeness: Masculinity Reformed Through Grief

This dissertation contends that when grief is received as sacred and communal rather than suppressed as masculine failure, masculinity can be reformed into a vocation of relational presence, vulnerability, and hope grounded in the renewing life of God. The arc of Scripture, from creation in Genesis through covenant, cross, and consummation in Revelation, testifies to a God who creates humanity for relationship, accompanies humanity through suffering, and promises a future shaped by love rather than domination. Jesus stands at the center of this arc, embodying the image and imitation of God and revealing a way of being human marked by compassion and fidelity. His life exposes the inadequacy of masculinities formed by silence, control, and emotional exile, and invites men into fuller participation in divine life.

Revelation's promise, "Behold, I am making all things new," does not erase grief but gathers it into God's redemptive future. This hope is communal, grounded in presence rather than escape and oriented toward transformation rather than denial. The Alpha and Omega does not bypass sorrow; he brings it to fulfillment. This promise stretches backward as well as forward. It reaches into memories of fathers who were never permitted to weep, into communities where survival demanded hardness, into sanctuaries where sorrow went unnamed. The voice from the throne speaks into those histories with restorative authority.

When men are freed to grieve without shame and to love without armor, masculinity itself becomes a site of theological renewal. What was once defended becomes offered. What was once hidden becomes witnessed. What was once hardened becomes hospitable. Here, grief

becomes vocation. It tutors compassion. It dismantles illusions of autonomy. It binds men to one another in shared fragility.

Such transformation is not optional for the church but essential to its witness. If the church continues to sanctify stoicism and reward emotional concealment, it inadvertently catechizes men into spiritual isolation. A community shaped by *kainos* renewal must embody this ontological newness now by creating liturgies, pastoral practices, and communal rhythms where lament is audible and vulnerability is honored. As lexical scholarship clarifies, in the New Testament, *kainos* (καίνοϛ) refers to that which is new in nature and different in kind from the old, rather than merely something recent in time.¹⁷⁵

Ecclesial faithfulness requires spaces where men learn that to grieve before God is not to fail but to participate in the work of redemption. To follow Jesus is to refuse emotional exile and to trust that God is present in sorrow as well as joy. In Christ, masculinity is not abolished or idealized but redeemed. Redeemed masculinity does not silence grief; it carries it within hope. In that redemption, grief becomes not the end of meaning but the beginning of wholeness. The throne that declares “I am making all things new (Revelation 21:5 NIV)” speaks not to disembodied souls but to wounded men invited into communion. Here, strength is redefined as presence, power as love, and grief as the doorway through which God makes all things new. The final word over masculinity is not suppression, not stoicism, not despair, but renewal.

¹⁷⁵ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 494.

Appendix 1: GriefShare - Past Work

Grief Share schedule and Subjects covered

<https://www.griefshare.org/>

A support group to help you move through the grief process

1 - Is This Normal?	Saturday, November 01, 2025	10:00am–12:00pm
2 - Your Grief Journey	Saturday, November 08, 2025	10:00am–12:00pm
3 - Loneliness & Sadness	Saturday, November 15, 2025	10:00am–12:00pm
4 - Self-Care	Saturday, November 22, 2025	10:00am–12:00pm
5 - Fearful & Overwhelmed	Saturday, November 29, 2025	10:00am–12:00pm
6 - Anger	Saturday, December 06, 2025	10:00am–12:00pm
7 - Regrets	Saturday, December 13, 2025	10:00am–12:00pm
8 - Grief & Your Household	Saturday, December 20, 2025	10:00am–12:00pm
9 - Grief & Your Friendships	Saturday, December 27, 2025	10:00am–12:00pm
10 - Questions for God	Saturday, January 03, 2026	10:00am–12:00pm
11 - Stuck in Grief	Saturday, January 10, 2026	10:00am–12:00pm
12 - Hope & Resilience	Saturday, January 17, 2026	10:00am–12:00pm
13 - What Do I Live for Now?	Saturday, January 24, 2026	10:00am–12:00pm

GriefShare is a structured, Christ-centered support ministry designed to help individuals navigate the deep and often disorienting pain of loss. Rather than leaving people to struggle in isolation, it intentionally brings participants together in small-group settings where healing can begin through shared experience and spiritual grounding. Within these groups, individuals

engage in video-based teachings, personal reflection exercises, and guided discussions that invite honesty, vulnerability, connection and anonymity.

Each session is thoughtfully organized around practical and emotionally relevant themes—such as loneliness, anger, regret, forgiveness, and hope—offering both biblical insight and real-life application. These themes are not approached superficially, but with the understanding that grief is layered, complex, and deeply personal. By addressing these dimensions directly, GriefShare provides participants with language for their pain and tools for navigating it in healthy, life-giving ways.

What makes GriefShare particularly distinctive is its intentional balance between **teaching and community**. It does not rely solely on information or instruction, nor does it leave individuals to process emotions without guidance. Instead, it creates a **safe, consistent, and structured environment** where people are invited to process grief honestly while being supported by others who understand the weight of loss. In this space, participants are not expected to perform strength or hide their emotions—they are given permission to be fully human.

For Black men, this aspect of GriefShare carries even deeper significance. In many cultural and social contexts, Black men have been conditioned to equate strength with silence and endurance with emotional suppression. As a result, grief is often carried privately, without language, support, or release. Within this reality, GriefShare becomes more than a support group—it becomes a **countercultural space of restoration**, where silence is broken, stories are shared, and vulnerability is reframed as strength rather than weakness.

Theologically, GriefShare is grounded in the conviction that God is not distant from human suffering but deeply present within it. Scripture affirms this truth in passages like Book of Psalms 34:18, which declares that God is near to the brokenhearted, and Second Epistle to the Corinthians 1:3–4, which describes God as the source of all comfort. Even more powerfully, the example of Christ in Gospel of John 11:35 reveals that divine strength is not expressed through emotional distance, but through compassionate presence and shared sorrow.

Because of this foundation, the ultimate goal of GriefShare is not to “fix” grief or rush individuals past their pain. Instead, it seeks to help participants **move through grief with intention**, allowing their loss to be acknowledged, their emotions to be expressed, and their faith to be deepened. Healing, in this context, is not about forgetting what was lost, but about learning how to live faithfully and fully in its absence.

Over time, participants are guided toward **rediscovering hope, rebuilding their sense of identity, and re-engaging life with renewed purpose**, all while keeping God at the center of their journey. For many—especially Black men—this process becomes transformative, breaking long-standing cycles of emotional silence and opening the door to deeper relationships with God, self, and community.

Ultimately, GriefShare offers something both simple and profound:

a space where grief is not hidden, but honored;

where pain is not dismissed but witnessed;

and where healing is not forced but faithfully nurtured in the presence of God and others.

Appendix 2: GriefShare Impact - Present Work

There are so many heart centered, positive impacts in my experience with my brother Nnabu and Grief Share. I met Nnabu in GriefShare. When I heard him talk about men in grief and ministry with this, my heart immediately jumped and was drawn in.

I'll speak about my Grief Share experience first. During my first meeting, I shared my experience, frustrations, deep learning, and what I now understand as anticipatory grief related to caregiving for my mom who lives with my husband, Everett, and me. Plus my birth father's passing last February 19th, 2025.

Reverend Carla helped me see a blind spot: not giving myself time to grieve my father. That clarity, was such a V8 moment, a big awareness I did not see due to my mom moving in with us a week after my father's funeral ceremony in Puerto Rico. I was very angry at myself, my mom, my sister, and everybody. Mainly myself. Grief Share helped me process my grief, not stay stuck in it, and move forward. I have been inspired to paint, and dance my grief!

I reached out to Nnabu to discuss my grief journey. My time with him, which still involves talking, has been very supportive because he helped me to see truthfully what lies beneath my grief. Especially when I get angry at the situation with my mom who has terminal lung disease and Alzheimer's. One of Nnabu's many teachings and wisdoms has helped me move through all my grief and life. Key thing is moving through.

The other point is that as a man, I come from Puerto Rican descent where machismo is paramount. Grief with certain men is not allowed. More like, grief is held in. Men are supposed to be the strong ones. In my culture, men grieve differently from women. Nnabu created and held a space where I could grieve in my own way.

With Nnabu, I cried, got angry, felt joy, and feared my own mortality when my mom dies. My

mom is still alive.

I love Nnabu's analogy of going to the gym of grief. On the first day, I could only lift 5 lbs, the next day, I could lift 10 lbs. Each day I can lift more until the grief gym gets easier. Nobody can tell me how to grieve, as Nnabu would often say to me.

I am moving through my anticipatory grief with my brother Nnabu, who has been part of my counsel in addition to my therapists and mentors.

In closing, Nnabu and GriefShare have been incredible and tangible support systems for me. I am profoundly grateful, Aho, Amen, Ashe!

S. Garcia

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Sam Garcia Jr., CRTC, Spiritual Mentor, Soul Retrieval
www.samgarcia.life
heartoneness@gmail.com
206.697.1357

Only love is real.
There is no life outside this moment.
Leonard Jacobson

Presentation Title: “Healing in Strength: Grief, Faith, and Expression for Black Men”

1. Naming the Unique Weight of Grief in Black Men

- Grief is often compounded by:
 - Cultural expectations to “be strong”
 - Historical trauma and systemic pressures
 - Many Black men are taught to **endure, not express**
 - *Truth*: Suppressed grief becomes prolonged pain
-

2. Reclaiming Emotional Expression as Strength

- Strength is not silence—it is **truth-telling**
 - The Bible shows men expressing grief openly (David, Job, Jesus)
 - *Key shift*: Expression is not weakness—it is spiritual courage
-

3. The GriefShare Model in Context

- GriefShare emphasizes:
 - Christ-centered healing
 - Safe community
 - Practical steps forward
 - For Black men, this becomes:
 - A **brotherhood space**
 - A place to be **seen, heard, and restored**
-

4. Faith as an Anchor in the Storm

- Faith has historically sustained Black communities through loss and injustice
- Scripture reminds us:

- o God is present in suffering
 - *Practice:* Daily check-ins with God—not just formal prayer, but honest conversation
-

5. The Power of Lament (Real Talk with God)

- Lament is biblical and necessary
 - Encourage:
 - o Speaking anger, confusion, sadness to God
 - o Writing prayers that reflect real emotions
 - *Key idea:* God can handle your truth
-

6. Music as a Healing Language

- Music is deeply rooted in Black culture as a form of survival and expression







7

- From spirituals to gospel to soul, music:
 - Carries pain and hope simultaneously
 - Helps release what words cannot
- Encourage:
 - Worship playlists
 - Singing, even privately
 - Reflecting on lyrics as prayer

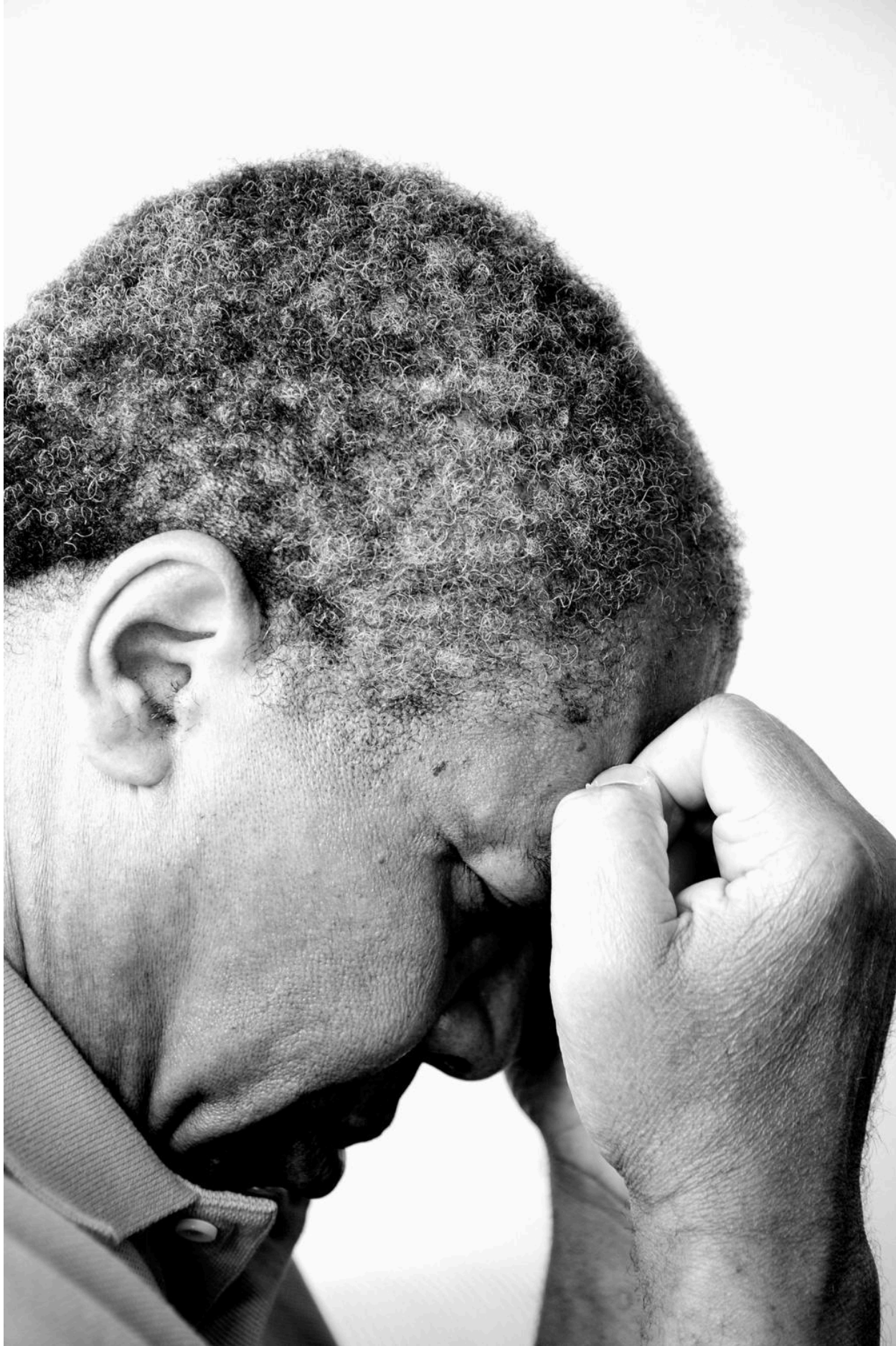
7. Brotherhood: Healing in Safe Community

- Isolation deepens grief
- Healing grows in:
 - Honest conversations
 - Shared testimonies
- Create space where men can say:
 - “I’m not okay” without judgment

8. Physical and Creative Expression

- The body holds grief—movement helps release it





- Encourage:
 - Exercise (walking, lifting, sports)
 - Journaling or spoken word
 - Art, music creation
 - *Insight*: Expression is healing in motion
-

9. Confronting Anger, Guilt, and Silence

- Many Black men internalize:
 - Anger from injustice
 - Guilt from loss
 - Teach:
 - Naming emotions breaks their power
 - Forgiveness is part of freedom
 - *GriefShare principle*: Healing requires honesty
-

10. Reclaiming Hope and Purpose

- Grief changes you—but it does not have to destroy you
 - Encourage:
 - Mentorship
 - Serving others
 - Sharing your story
 - *Truth*: Your healing can become someone else’s breakthrough
-

Closing Reflection

Ask:

- “Where have I been silent in my grief?”
 - “What is one way I will express my pain this week?”
-

- Play a gospel or reflective song
- Group prayer (spoken or silent)

- Moment of remembrance

THE BELOVED BODY RETREAT

Decolonizing Masculinity Through Body, Spirit & Imagination

A 7-Day Wellness Retreat for Black Men | Mount Kailash Rejuvenation Centre, Saint Lucia

At a Glance

Location	Mount Kailash Rejuvenation Centre, Saint Lucia
Duration	7 Days / 6 Nights (Sunday arrival – Saturday departure)
Participants	15–20 men (application required)
Sessions	Daily 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM Evenings open
Investment	\$3,000 – \$3,500 per participant (flights not included)
Scholarship	\$1,500 (base cost only) — 4 spots — Seminary/Student
Deposit	\$500 USD non-refundable deposit to secure a spot
Projected Revenue	~\$54,000 (16 × \$3,000 + 4 × \$1,500)
Estimated Expenses	~\$40,000 (meals, transport, honorariums, venue, materials)
Contact	ljoeldautruche@icloud.com / info@mountkailashslu.com

Vision & Purpose

The Beloved Body Retreat is a sacred 7-day container for Black men to decolonize inherited narratives about masculinity, reconnect with their bodies, and move toward embodied liberation. Drawing from liberation theology, process theology, somatic healing, and Rastafarian wisdom, the retreat offers a rare integration of faith, body, and brotherhood.

Facilitator Team

Rev. Dr. L. Joël Dautruche	Lead facilitator — somatic theology, liberation theology, decolonizing faith, masculinity & grief. Thematic oversight and integration across all 7 days.
Dr. Rafael Reyes III	Co-facilitator — sacred imagination, process thought, spiritual reconstruction. Inter-religious bridge drawing from the Bahá'í principle of the oneness of humanity.
Hon. Priest Kailash	Host & Co-facilitator — Rastafarian wisdom, plant medicine, herbal healing, embodied wellness. Provides the sacred container of Mount Kailash Rejuvenation Centre.

Guest Facilitator:

Dr. Nnabu Gogoh — Black liberation theology, grief work, and embodied pastoral praxis. Guides participants in engaging suppressed grief through theological reflection, communal witnessing,

and somatic expression, particularly within the lived experiences of Black men navigating faith, identity, and emotional healing

As host of the retreat at Mount Kailash Rejuvenation Centre, your role is foundational to everything that happens here.

THE LAND & ANCESTRY

You provide the sacred container and ground the group in the history and ecology of Saint Lucia.

OPENING & CLOSING

Co-leads the rituals that mark the beginning and end of the sacred container (Day 1 evening and Day 7 morning).

LEAD FACILITATOR — DAY 4

Primary lead for Ancestral Wisdom & Healing Practices: Rastafari philosophy, rites of passage ceremony, herbal medicine workshop.

THE APOTHECARY

Herbal medicine and wellness products available for participant purchase on Day 4.

OPEN PARTICIPATION

Welcome to join, observe, or co-facilitate on any other day at your discretion.

7-Day Thematic Arc

Day 1 — Sunday	Arrival, Opening Ceremony & Brotherhood Covenant
Day 2 — Monday	Masculinity & Survival Narratives (Joel + Reyes)
Day 3 — Tuesday	Sacred Imagination & Reimagining Faith (Reyes + Joel) + Waterfall Mud Bath
Day 4 — Wednesday	Ancestral Wisdom & Healing Practices (Kailash — primary) + Rites of Passage Dance
Day 5 — Thursday	The Sacred Body — Pleasure, Shame & Liberation (Joel) + Beach Massage
Day 6 — Friday	The Sacred Body, Continued + Gros Islet Street Party (optional)
Day 7 — Saturday	The Man I Am Becoming — Integration, Closing & Sending Forth

Embodied Somatic Experiences

Each day includes somatic practice woven into the structure. Major experiential activities:

- Waterfall Mud Bath at the Pitons — Day 3 afternoon, with guide KaSeem
- Traditional Rites of Passage Dance — Day 4 afternoon (African diaspora tradition; facilitator sought via Cultural Development Foundation of St. Lucia)
- Beach Massage — Day 5 afternoon (receiving touch as a healing, non-sexual somatic practice)

- Gros Islet Friday Night Street Party — Day 6 evening (optional; somatic release through music, movement & joy)

Spiritual Approach

The retreat integrates three living traditions in dialogue:

- Liberation & Somatic Theology — body as site of revelation and healing (Joel)
- Process Theology & Sacred Imagination — God as relational and dynamic (Reyes)
- Rastafarian Embodied Wisdom — ancestral knowledge, plant medicine, ecological spirituality (Kailash)
- Black Liberation Theology — grief as sacred resistance and communal healing (Gogoh)

"This retreat intentionally models transposition — learning across traditions without collapsing them into one another."

Key Logistics

- Airport: Hewanorra International Airport — 15-passenger van + 7-passenger van
- Accommodation: Shared retreat villa (participants)
- Meals: Breakfast + lunch daily. Dinners: TBD — communal dinners recommended to deepen brotherhood
- Closing Session: Saturday 9:30 AM – 12:00 PM
- Platform: Telegram App, communication & post-retreat integration
- Social: @PastorLJoel (Instagram + TikTok)

Prepared for Hon. Priest Kailash | Mount Kailash Rejuvenation Centre | info@mountkailashslu.com

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