

EXCERPT



Can You Just Sit with Me?

Healthy Grieving for the Losses in Life

September 26, 2023 | \$18, 192 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0621-4

It takes time and space to grieve well. Sharing her own stories, Natasha Smith invites us into a reflection on grief and how to cling to hope even in our darkest moments. With practical tools and prayers that point us to God who always sits with us in our grief, this book creates space for us to grieve, learn, and heal in healthy ways.

Give Yourself Permission to Grieve

Tears streamed like water piercing through a broken dam. Days, months, and years prior, I hid my sadness like a game of hide and seek. If you asked me about it, maybe I would share a cookie-cutter response. "Everything is fine." But 2020 brought quarantine—my routine thrown out the window, kids 24/7, and homeschool. During that time, the grief knocked harder.

"Mom, what's wrong?" My five-year-old's voice sounded pinched.

"It's my sister's birthday, and I'm sad because I can't celebrate it with her."

Nothing new had happened. My sister had been gone for over nine years. But 2020 made the grief unbearable to me. When I cried, my five-year-old consoled me, "It's okay, Momma." She grabbed my arm. Unknown to her, she was permitting me to grieve. So I sat at my desk instead of running to the other room and cried right there.

Have you ever bottled up your sadness? Have you ever hidden your tears, pain, or grief? Have you ever avoided questions about your loss? Have you ever thought no one cares? Me too. Maybe you are waiting for permission to grieve. Is permission needed to grieve? What role does culture, family, and upbringing play in the way you grieve? How do you permit yourself to grieve?

Culture influences the way we grieve. We live in a fast-paced culture that cares about making the world go around and not about how you feel. In our culture, there is no time to grieve. Maybe the way our culture brushes over loss and grief causes us to fear how we respond to grief. I've been in groups where someone became visibly upset with tears and you could tangibly feel the discomfort in the room. Tears or emotions are often unwelcome in most environments. Just think about what is presented across social media especially. We are inundated with images of happy-go-lucky faces, pretty pictures, and perfectly manicured square spaces—void of any resemblance to the reality of the grief-filled world in which we live. These pictures almost force you to wear a smile regardless of your circumstances, your hurt, and your grief. They almost force you to hide your grief.

There is no surprise then, that in our "hurry up and get over it" culture, grieving becomes a lonely journey, a journey only the grieving participate in—and even then, they are not willing participants. Some jobs only offer, at most, a few days off from work for an immediate family loss. But what about a close friend, family pet, or a home? Those losses are unrecognized and uncovered. They are not included in our times of grief—as if this world isn't set up to give us the time nor the space to grieve.

Our world minimizes and trivializes grief. Culture influences the way we choose to grieve, the time we take to grieve, and it dictates our need to grieve.

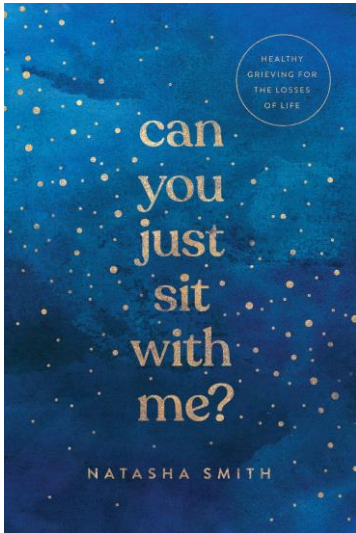


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"Tears are important to God. They tell stories we can't imagine." —taken from chapter three

The Bible's take on giving ourselves permission to grieve begins with recognizing we are made in the image of God.

"And God said, Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26 KJV). Since we are made in the image of God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are also body, soul, and spirit. Within the soul lie our emotions, which means you are made with a great capacity to feel and express emotions. Furthermore, we must conclude we have permission to grieve because Jesus did. We know from Scripture that Jesus wept (see John 11:35). Tears are important to God. They tell stories we can't imagine. The psalmist writes,

You keep track of all my sorrows.
You have collected all my tears in your bottle.
You have recorded each one in your book. (Psalm 56:8 NLT)

We often see tears and immediately attempt to interpret them. When we see someone crying, our natural response is to ask, "What's wrong?" Tears can mean an array of emotions including sadness, joy, or even anger. Your tears may simply express the hurt you feel at the reality of your loss. When I think of tears, I think of the way water flows from a faucet. The water is pressurized, waiting for the water to be released. And it is the same with our emotions and our tears. Often something acts as a blocking valve, holding us back and holding tears in. But when we feel safe, when we feel we have permission, we finally let them flow.

You have permission to grieve, friend.

Giving yourself permission to grieve means coming to the realization it is okay to not be okay.

-Adapted from chapter three, "Permission to Grieve"



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Natasha Smith is a wife, mother, and writer from North Carolina. Her work has appeared at Her View from Home, Focus on the Family, and TODAY Parents.

Hope is Found in Christ

What was the catalyst that led you to write this book?

Natasha Smith: The catalyst was 2020. It felt like grief. It was the only way I could describe it. Because it was an all too familiar feeling for me. Dark. Hopeless. Full of desperation and despair. People were dying. Racial violence and murders were at a high, and the pandemic and relationships were dying even in the church due to the political divide. No one was seemingly listening to the pain of the other. Hence, *Can You Just Sit with Me?* was birthed.

I wrote this book to be a grief advocate, to garner support for those hurting and suffering in grief, who feel alone like I did. Those who feel unseen like I did and who felt no one understood them, including God. I wrote this book to let them know they are not alone and to point them to the hope I found in Christ, in whom they can find hope too.

Share your thoughts about grief and highlight what makes your beliefs about grief distinctive?

Natasha: Grieving can be a lonely journey, but God sits with us in our grief for however long it takes. And he provides for us a living hope, comfort, peace, and a pathway to healing. In my view, everyone will grieve over someone or something, and grief is more than the loss of a loved one. However, healing is possible because grief is not love; God is love. Grief is not an indicator of weak faith, it is normal. God understands our grief because he has experienced grief himself. God welcomes our questions, and he has answers.

What sense of comfort do you hope readers will have after reading your book?

Natasha: *Can You Just Sit with Me?* shines the light of hope we can only receive through Jesus during such dark and despairing times in life. The book points to biblical example after example of how our God is the God of all comfort and peace, and how he deeply understands our grief. It shares these biblical stories of men and women who walked the same grief journey we experience and how our God showed up in their lives. Oftentimes, not how they expected him to, but he showed up, and it made the difference. I hope my readers have the following five takeaways:

- As you sit with your grief, God sits with you.
- You are not crazy (or losing it), grief is hard yet normal.
- Healing is possible through Jesus.
- Jesus is our example for grieving. He provides a biblical grief model. What would Jesus do?
- Biblically speaking, grief is not love, God is love. Rest and find comfort in his love.



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