

Here Lies Love: A Litany for a Community Encircling the Grave of Someone Whose Life Was Tragically Lost



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I'm sitting in a dark room listening to Yo Yo Ma and crying over the death of another Black teen I saw on the news—this one for playing his music too loudly. I'm remembering the teen boy in my community who was killed in a drive-by shooting and how the kids at the center where I worked grieved so deeply for him. I'm angered by migrant children dying of thirst and homeless people dying of exposure. I'm confused by the death of a mother whose daughters are still toddlers. I want to honor these lives by grieving their deaths well, but I'm overcome. I'm trying to remember Jesus—not only as the crucified one but also as the victor over sin and death.

In reality, grief is always breathtaking and core-shaking. Grief takes us completely out of our depth—no matter how much we try to prepare. Wearing sackcloth and ashes, lamenting and fasting, pausing and praying feel like the only appropriate responses. How do we carry our grief to Jesus when it's embedded in our soul?

As followers of Christ, we are not in uncharted territory. Jesus warns us, "In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!" (John 16:33). He reminds us, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live" (John 11:25). When grief comes, I want to acknowledge this truth while also not rushing to the solution of my pain too quickly. I don't want Jesus to be victor quite yet. I want to know that he sees and shares my grief. So I think about the death of his beloved friend Lazarus and how he himself wept. I think about how death moved the Savior to tears.

I wrote this litany to remind us that though we lay our loved ones to rest and we feel a myriad of emotions, not a single one of them is foreign and unseen by Jesus. So take heart, friends. Let's gather close to our people and proclaim the goodness of our God in spite of our loss.

ONE: Jesus, you can empathize with us as we grieve. You, Lord, have sat with the trauma of loss. You know the anger, sadness, and confusion that comes when death visits your loved ones. You know because you wept for the loss of your friend. Weep with us today, Lord. We trust in you to meet us in this space. Remind us that we are not alone.

ALL: Come, Lord Jesus, bring us comfort.

ONE: Lord, teach us the power of lament, and give us courage to weep with those who weep. Surround us and those who have been shaken by tragedy with love and community. Give us new resolve to love ourselves and others fully.

ALL: Come, Lord Jesus, bring us connection where this death has brought senselessness.

ONE: We do not want to be lost in this grief and overwhelmed by the depths of our despair. We want to hear you calling us to a place of rest. Help us, Jesus, to nestle into the safety of your wings.

ALL: Give us ears to hear you whisper “I am here” to our broken hearts.

ONE: Jesus, our minds swirl with memories of our loved one. We cannot forget their laughter and their vitality. We cannot imagine life without them. We are stunned by the vulnerability of the body, the brevity of our time together.

ALL: Come, Lord Jesus, bring us comfort. We trust you to work all things together for our good.

ONE: Jesus, our Prince of Peace, true source of wholeness, true bringer of Shalom. Our world is violent, and violence delights in inflicting wounds of suffering and grief. In spite of this, you have called us to be peacemakers. With wounded hearts, you welcome us into your work of binding the wounds of this world.

ALL: Wounded Healer, we choose to partner with you. Help us to be the community we need. Show us how to bear one another’s burdens.

ONE: Jesus, our humble King, you are victorious over sin and death. For the joy of true connection with those whom you love and for the joy of reconciliation, you endured the cross. You faced death head on, and you won. Love prevailed, bringing joy from despair.

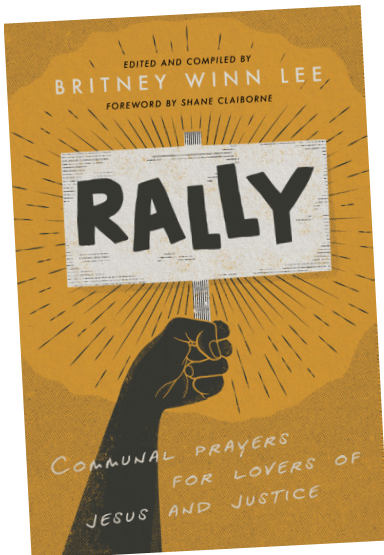
ALL: Come, Lord Jesus, and bring us victory over death. It will not overcome us because you have reclaimed the grave for life.

ONE: Show us how to take up our crosses. In surrendering our pain to you so that you can truly connect with us. In not ignoring the depth of our suffering so that your Spirit may guide us back to healing. In resisting hatred, revenge, and division by seeking reconciliation.

ALL: We commit ourselves to you.

ONE: Let us join you in conquering death and all its effects. May we, in the wake of this tragedy, remember the presence of our empathic Priest, the healing love of our Prince of Peace, and the unmatched victory of our humble King.

ALL: Amen.



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