

The Theology of Tears: Grief, Lament, Hope, and Healing in African Christian Experience

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Abstract

Grief is universal, yet its expression, interpretation, and ritualisation are deeply shaped by culture, community, and faith. Within many Ghanaian Christian contexts, bereavement is neither wholly private nor exclusively psychological; it is experienced through family networks, congregational life, prayer, music, storytelling, funeral ritual, and theological meaning. This qualitative phenomenological study explores the lived experience of grief among 15 Ghanaian Christians—10 bereaved adults and five pastoral caregivers and Christian counsellors—drawn from the Greater Accra, Ashanti, Central, and Volta Regions. Data from semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions were analysed phenomenologically. Three interconnected themes emerged: **psychological and relational safety, lament as spiritually meaningful expression, and redemptive hope as meaning reconstruction**. Drawing on biblical lament, contemporary bereavement scholarship, African contextual theology, and pastoral counselling, the article develops a conceptual **Theology of Tears** organised around the movement of **Safety–Lament–Hope**. The model does not suggest that crying is necessary for healthy grieving, that grief follows a fixed sequence, or that religious belief automatically produces psychological recovery. Rather, it proposes that Christian pastoral care is most healing when bereaved persons are given permission to grieve authentically, interpret loss without coercion, receive communal accompaniment, and discover hope without being hurried beyond sorrow. The study argues that lament deserves renewed attention within African Christian pastoral practice because it provides a theological language capable of holding grief and faith together. A mature Christian response to bereavement does not silence tears in the name of hope; it creates a compassionate space in which sorrow can be spoken, faith can wrestle, community can remain present, and hope can gradually be rediscovered.

Keywords: African Christian grief; lament; pastoral counselling; bereavement; Ghanaian funerals; spiritual resilience

1. Introduction

Grief is among the most universal human experiences, yet no human being grieves in a cultural vacuum. Death is interpreted through family, language, ritual, religious conviction, social expectations, memories of the deceased, and the circumstances surrounding the loss. Contemporary bereavement research has consequently moved away from the assumption that healthy grieving follows one predictable sequence. People display multiple trajectories following loss, including resilience, gradual recovery, persistent distress, and other patterns (Bonanno, 2004).

Within Ghana, bereavement is especially visible. Funerals and mourning practices have significant cultural, spiritual, social, and relational meaning. Recent research among the Akan, for example,

demonstrates that mourning and funeral practices remain important cultural and spiritual institutions, although gender expectations can substantially shape how grief is expressed and socially received (Adjei et al., 2024).

For the Christian mourner, however, grief has another dimension. Loss may generate theological questions that psychological language alone does not answer:

Where is God in this death?

Why did prayer not change the outcome?

Is it wrong to be angry?

Does crying mean that my faith is weak?

How do I continue believing while admitting how deeply I hurt?

Such questions sit at the intersection of pastoral theology and counselling psychology.

The manuscript from which this article develops captures this intersection through what it calls **The Theology of Tears**: the recognition that tears may become one way in which sorrow is expressed before God and community. The study reports the experiences of bereaved Christians and pastoral caregivers from several regions and denominations in Ghana, seeking to understand how grief, communal mourning, faith, and hope interact.

This article develops that insight while adding an important scholarly qualification: tears should not be romanticised or universalised. Not every bereaved person cries publicly. Some grieve quietly. Some require solitude. Some speak. Others sing. Some remain emotionally numb for a period. Still others experience oscillations between sorrow and ordinary functioning.

The theology of tears proposed here is therefore not a theology requiring tears.

It is a theology that **makes room for them**.

Its central argument is that Christian pastoral care becomes more humane when believers are not forced to choose between honest grief and faithful hope.

2. Rethinking Grief: Beyond Stages and Prescribed Mourning

Popular discussions of grief continue to rely heavily on Kübler-Ross's five stages—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Although the framework has historical significance, contemporary psychology does not support using these stages as a fixed prescription for how bereaved people ought to grieve. Even the American Psychological Association describes the model as non-linear, with experiences potentially overlapping, recurring, or appearing in different orders.

This matters pastorally.

When grief is treated as a predictable staircase, the mourner may begin to feel unsuccessful at grieving.

"You should have accepted it by now."

"You have cried long enough."

"You need to move on."

Such statements can make an already painful experience more isolating.

Bonanno's research demonstrates considerable diversity in bereavement trajectories, including substantial resilience among many bereaved adults (Bonanno, 2004; Bonanno et al., 2002). Resilience does not necessarily mean forgetting the deceased or avoiding sorrow. Rather, it highlights that human beings differ widely in how loss affects functioning over time.

A theology of tears should therefore resist replacing one rigid model with another.

Healthy grieving cannot be measured by the quantity of tears.

Neither emotional restraint nor emotional expressiveness is inherently more spiritual.

The more appropriate pastoral question is:

Does this person have sufficient safety, freedom, relationship, and meaning to grieve in a way that is authentic rather than coerced?

3. Biblical Lament: Faith That Refuses to Pretend

Christian Scripture offers a remarkably broad emotional vocabulary for suffering.

The Psalms contain protest, bewilderment, sorrow, accusation, remembrance, petition, thanksgiving, and hope. Psalm 13 begins with the unsettling question, *"How long, O Lord?"* Psalm 42 speaks to a downcast soul. Psalm 22 gives language to abandonment and later becomes part of Christ's own cry from the cross.

Lament is therefore not the opposite of faith.

It is one of faith's languages under pressure.

Dickie (2019) argues that lament has often been neglected in contemporary Christian communities even though it provides an important biblical and pastoral resource in contexts of suffering and trauma.

John 11:35—*"Jesus wept"*—provides perhaps the simplest theological foundation for taking grief seriously.

Jesus knew that Lazarus would be raised.

Yet Jesus wept.

Hope did not prevent sorrow.

Knowledge of resurrection did not make tears unnecessary.

This is pastorally significant because Christian mourners are sometimes given the impression that resurrection hope should rapidly remove grief. Yet in the biblical narrative, hope and grief occupy the same sacred space.

Christian maturity may therefore include the capacity to say:

"I believe, and I hurt."

"I trust God, and I do not understand."

"I have hope, and I miss the person who died."

"I know what Scripture promises, and today I still need to weep."

Such statements are not theological failures.

They may represent theological honesty.

4. African Communal Grief and Ghanaian Funeral Life

Grief within Ghanaian communities often has a pronounced communal dimension. Funeral gatherings, family participation, mourning attire, songs, tributes, visits, financial contribution, prayer, ritual, and storytelling make bereavement socially visible.

Research on Akan death culture confirms that mourning and funeral practices serve important cultural and spiritual functions, while also reproducing expectations concerning gender and appropriate emotional behaviour (Adjei et al., 2024).

Boateng's (2012) study of changing Akan funeral practices similarly emphasises the socially binding significance of funeral ritual within Ghanaian life, even as economic and social transformations reshape its expression.

More recent Ghanaian research demonstrates that disruptions to normal burial practices—as occurred during COVID-19 restrictions—could themselves become sources of distress because culturally significant separation and mourning rites were interrupted.

These findings invite an important conclusion.

Ritual is not ornamental to grief.

Ritual helps communities organise loss.

A hymn may hold what ordinary conversation cannot.

A funeral tribute can reconstruct a person's continuing significance.

A home visit can communicate presence before advice.

A shared meal can preserve belonging when death has ruptured the family.

A song may permit emotion where direct speech remains difficult.

Research on Ghanaian funeral tributes further shows that language and metaphor become important means through which bereaved families conceptualise and express grief.

Nevertheless, community should not be romanticised.

Community can comfort.

It can also impose.

Gender expectations may prescribe who is permitted to cry, how intensely, and for how long. Funeral customs can create economic stress. Social expectations can require public performance when the bereaved person needs privacy. Recent Ghanaian research on mourning attire likewise indicates that culturally prescribed mourning practices may provide belonging for some while creating stress and social pressure for others.

Pastoral care therefore needs cultural appreciation without cultural idealisation.

5. Spirituality and Bereavement

Religious faith is frequently assumed to make bereavement easier.

Research paints a more complex picture.

Wortmann and Park's (2008) integrative review found that religion and spirituality were generally associated with more positive adjustment to bereavement, but relationships were inconsistent and depended considerably upon how religion, spirituality, and outcomes were defined and measured.

A more recent systematic review of qualitative studies similarly concluded that spirituality can play an important role throughout bereavement and that spiritual needs deserve attention within holistic care (Martins et al., 2024).

Religion can provide meaning, ritual, hope, prayer, communal support, continuity, and beliefs concerning death.

Yet religion can also complicate grief.

The mourner may wonder whether God caused the death.

A person may feel guilty for being angry.

A bereaved parent may struggle with unanswered prayer.

Someone may be told that prolonged sadness demonstrates weak faith.

The pastor may therefore need to distinguish **faith that accompanies grief from theology that suppresses grief**.

Spiritual resources are most ethically integrated when the counsellor listens to how the bereaved person actually understands God rather than imposing an interpretation prematurely.

6. Meaning Reconstruction After Loss

Bereavement frequently interrupts the story by which a person understands life.

"We were supposed to grow old together."

"My child was supposed to bury me."

"I prayed for healing."

"Our family will never be the same."

Loss can therefore disrupt identity, expectations, relationships, assumptions about justice, and beliefs about the future.

Neimeyer (2011) describes bereavement as involving processes of meaning reconstruction, particularly when a death disrupts the survivor's existing self-narrative. Difficulty finding or rebuilding meaning may be associated with more intense grief for some bereaved people.

This does not mean that every death must be explained.

Some losses remain inexplicable.

Pastoral counselling should be wary of theological sentences beginning with:

"God did this because..."

The counsellor may not know.

Meaning reconstruction is not the invention of a satisfying divine explanation.

Sometimes meaning is humbler:

"I still do not understand why she died, but I know how I want to honour her life."

"My loss has changed me."

"I can remember him without pretending he never existed."

"I am discovering that I can carry love and grief together."

Meaning does not erase grief.

It can help grief become integrated into continuing life.

7. Purpose of the Study

The study explored how Ghanaian Christians experience grief and lament within the overlapping worlds of Christian faith, family, culture, church, and pastoral care.

It asked broadly:

1. How do bereaved Ghanaian Christians describe the relationship between grief and faith?
2. What role do tears, lament, communal ritual, song, and pastoral presence play in their experience?
3. How does Christian hope contribute to the reconstruction of meaning following bereavement?
4. What implications do these experiences have for culturally responsive pastoral counselling?

8. Methodology

8.1 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological design.

Phenomenology was chosen because the primary concern was lived experience: how bereaved individuals understood sorrow, faith, community, tears, ritual, and hope rather than how frequently particular grief responses occurred.

The approach was informed by pastoral-psychological interpretation, recognising that participants' accounts emerged simultaneously from emotional experience, Christian belief, cultural practice,

and relational context. The source manuscript identifies this as an intentional combination of phenomenological inquiry and pastoral theological interpretation.

8.2 Participants

Fifteen participants were purposively selected.

Ten were bereaved Christians—six women and four men—who had experienced the death of a spouse, child, or parent within the previous three years.

Five were pastoral caregivers and Christian counsellors: three pastors and two trauma-informed lay counsellors who had accompanied grieving individuals or families.

Participants ranged from 29 to 68 years and came from the Greater Accra, Ashanti, Central, and Volta Regions. Pentecostal, Charismatic, Methodist, and Independent Evangelical traditions were represented.

8.3 Data Collection

Data were generated through semi-structured interviews and two focus-group discussions over approximately three months.

Individual interviews lasted approximately 60–90 minutes and explored the relationship between faith and grief, experiences of tears or communal mourning, and perceptions of church ritual and pastoral support.

Focus groups explored shared interpretations of lament, song, mourning practices, and Christian hope. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed, while reflective field notes were used to preserve relevant contextual observations. The source manuscript reports that qualitative data were organised and coded using NVivo.

8.4 Data Analysis

Analysis followed Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological procedure: repeated engagement with transcripts, extraction of significant statements, formulation of meanings, clustering of themes, development of an integrated description, participant validation, and synthesis.

Three major themes were identified:

1. **Psychological and relational safety**
2. **Lament as spiritually meaningful expression**
3. **Redemptive hope and meaning reconstruction**

These themes form the empirical foundation of the proposed Theology of Tears.

8.5 Researcher Reflexivity

Because pastoral research occurs in relationships, the position of the researcher required explicit consideration.

The researcher approached participants as a Christian counsellor and pastoral theologian. This provided cultural and theological familiarity but also created a risk of interpreting participants through predetermined religious assumptions.

Reflective journaling was therefore used to distinguish pastoral response from analytical interpretation and to remain attentive to participants whose experiences of God, church, grief, or hope did not neatly correspond to expected theological patterns. The source study explicitly recognises this insider–researcher tension.

8.6 Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality, withdrawal rights, and the emotional sensitivity of discussing bereavement. Pseudonyms were used, and identifying details were excluded from reporting.

The source manuscript reports that interviews could be paused when participants experienced acute distress and that pastoral or psychological follow-up was available when requested. It further reports that approval was obtained from the Ethics Review Board of the College of Counselling and Psychology.

No ethics-reference number is supplied in the source manuscript and none is introduced here.

9. Findings

9.1 Theme One: Safety—Permission to Grieve

Participants repeatedly described healing as beginning with permission.

Not explanation.

Permission.

One widow recalled being repeatedly instructed to remain strong because she was a woman of faith. Internally, however, she experienced intense suffering. Her experience changed when a pastor explicitly permitted her to cry.

Another participant described abandoning the effort to appear composed in prayer and discovering that honest weeping felt more healing than maintaining a religious performance.

These accounts reveal an important pastoral distinction between **being strong** and **being safe**.

Safety meant being allowed to speak.

To become silent.

To cry.

To remember.

To ask questions.

To admit anger.

To say that prayer felt difficult.

To experience grief without immediately being corrected.

The manuscript describes this shift as the moment at which faith ceased to be performance and became participation in care.

This resonates with broader bereavement research showing that there is no single normal emotional trajectory and that adaptive grieving should not be judged according to one prescribed pattern (Bonanno, 2004).

The pastoral implication is straightforward:

Before asking what a bereaved person believes, we may first need to ask whether the person feels safe enough to tell us what he or she actually feels.

9.2 Theme Two: Lament—Faith in the Language of Sorrow

The second theme concerned lament as emotionally and spiritually meaningful expression.

Participants described prayer through tears, singing hymns when ordinary prayer became difficult, telling stories, remaining silent in God's presence, and finding language for sorrow within Scripture.

One bereaved mother described reaching a point at which she could not formulate prayer verbally and experienced her tears themselves as prayer.

Another participant described singing familiar hymns after losing both parents—not as performance but as a way of carrying grief when ordinary speech felt insufficient.

These experiences should not be interpreted as evidence that crying itself constitutes a specific psychological treatment. Rather, they show how **culturally and spiritually meaningful expression can help some bereaved people articulate, contain, and interpret painful experience.**

The study further found that music often created emotional permission. Pastoral participants observed that people who remained composed through sermons sometimes became visibly emotional during hymns and worship.

Lament therefore functioned not simply as emotional discharge but as relationship.

Sorrow was addressed.

God was addressed.

The deceased was remembered.

Community witnessed.

Pain acquired language.

The original participant accounts describe this movement vividly.

9.3 Theme Three: Redemptive Hope—Living With, Not Erasing, Loss

The third theme concerned hope.

Importantly, participants generally did not describe healing as forgetting.

They described changed relationships with grief.

For some, loss deepened compassion.

For others, it altered ministry.

Others developed greater sensitivity to bereaved families or found ways to support people experiencing similar losses.

One widow described beginning to care for others without ceasing to mourn herself. A pastor who had lost a child reported that his preaching changed from an emphasis on victory without vulnerability toward a more embodied understanding of hope.

Such accounts may be discussed alongside the literature on meaning reconstruction and post-traumatic growth, but with caution.

Not everybody grows through bereavement.

No mourner should be pressured to turn death into a ministry.

Suffering does not become good simply because something meaningful later emerges from it.

Contemporary grief research recognises multiple trajectories, and meaning-making is important for some mourners but is neither automatic nor identical across individuals (Bonanno, 2004; Neimeyer, 2011).

Redemption in the present framework therefore means **the possibility of a future that is not entirely controlled by the loss.**

10. The Theology of Tears: A Pastoral Counselling Framework

The findings support a three-movement framework:

Safety → Lament → Hope

These should not be understood as rigid stages.

A bereaved person may move repeatedly among them.

10.1 Safety: “You Do Not Need to Pretend Here”

The first pastoral task is presence.

Before interpretation, intervention, or advice, the counsellor creates a relationship in which grief is not morally graded.

Safety may involve:

confidential listening;

permission for silence;

validation of varied grief responses;

attention to sleep, functioning, family relationships, and mental health;

recognition of cultural and spiritual meanings;

and referral when distress exceeds the scope of pastoral counselling.

A theology of tears begins by refusing to demand emotional performance.

10.2 Lament: “You May Tell God the Truth”

The second movement provides language.

For Christian clients who desire such integration, lament may include selected Psalms, prayer, journaling, remembrance, music, storytelling, silence, or participation in meaningful funeral and memorial rituals.

Dickie's pastoral-theological work supports the recovery of lament as an important Christian resource for communities facing trauma and suffering.

The counsellor does not dictate what the bereaved person should say to God.

Lament is precisely the opposite of scripted religious correctness.

Its question is:

What would you say to God if you did not have to protect God from your feelings?

10.3 Hope: “Your Grief May Remain, but Your Story Continues”

The third movement concerns the reconstruction of a livable future.

Christian hope does not mean that sorrow disappears.

First Thessalonians 4:13 does not prohibit grief; it distinguishes Christian grieving by hope.

Pastoral hope may involve remembering the deceased meaningfully, reconnecting with relationships, returning gradually to responsibilities, reconsidering changed identity, developing continuing bonds, reconstructing purpose, or simply discovering that one can experience joy again without betraying the person who died.

Meaning-reconstruction research indicates that the capacity to integrate loss into a continuing life narrative may be significant for bereavement adaptation, especially where loss has profoundly disrupted identity and assumptions about life (Neimeyer, 2011).

11. When Grief Requires More Than Pastoral Consolation

A theology of tears should never become a justification for under-assessing serious psychological distress.

Most grief does not constitute mental disorder.

Some grief, however, becomes persistently disabling.

Prolonged grief disorder is now recognised clinically when intense grief remains persistent and significantly impairing beyond defined diagnostic timeframes; research also demonstrates that elevated symptoms in the first year can identify some people at heightened risk of later persistent difficulties.

Pastors and Christian counsellors should therefore be alert to concerns such as:

persistent inability to function;

severe depression;

suicidal thinking;

traumatic circumstances surrounding the death;

substance misuse;

persistent disabling guilt;

psychotic symptoms;

serious neglect of physical health;

or prolonged, overwhelming yearning and impairment.

Referral is not pastoral failure.

Referral is part of pastoral responsibility.

A mature theology of grief can pray with someone and recommend psychological treatment.

It can read Scripture and encourage psychiatric evaluation when necessary.

Faith and competent care need not compete.

12. Pastoral Implications for the African Church

The findings challenge churches to reconsider how grief is handled in preaching, liturgy, counselling, and congregational life.

12.1 Recover Lament in Worship

Christian worship should have language for more than victory.

There must also be language for funerals, miscarriage, bereavement, disappointment, unanswered prayer, and remembrance.

The Church needs both Psalm 150 and Psalm 13.

Celebration without lament produces an emotionally incomplete spirituality.

12.2 Replace Clichés With Presence

Bereaved people frequently receive statements such as:

"God knows best."

"Be strong."

"Don't cry too much."

"At least he is in a better place."

Such statements may be well-intentioned.

They may also close conversation.

Pastoral presence can be more powerful:

"I am here."

"Tell me about her."

"You don't have to be strong for me."

"What has this week been like?"

"Would you like me to pray, or would you prefer that I simply sit with you?"

Classic pastoral counselling has always understood that ministry is sometimes the disciplined refusal to fill silence.

12.3 Preserve the Strength of Communal Care

African Christian communities possess significant relational resources.

Visits.

Food.

Music.

Prayer.

Financial support.

Family gathering.

Funeral attendance.

Storytelling.

Memorialisation.

These practices can resist the isolation that often accompanies bereavement.

Yet communal care must remain responsive rather than coercive. Ghanaian research shows that funeral customs can create both belonging and psychological strain.

12.4 Train Pastors in Grief and Mental Health

Seminaries should treat bereavement care as a core pastoral competency.

Training should include contemporary grief theory, culturally informed assessment, depression, suicide risk, prolonged grief, trauma, spiritual struggle, family dynamics, crisis referral, funeral theology, and the ethics of counselling.

A pastor may know how to conduct a funeral without knowing how to accompany a widow six months later.

The second skill is no less pastoral than the first.

13. Implications for Christian Counselling Practice

Christian counselling with bereaved clients should remain both **faith-sensitive and client-centred**.

Prayer should be invited rather than imposed.

Scripture should console rather than silence.

Theological interpretation should emerge through dialogue rather than be announced prematurely.

Cultural practices should be explored rather than assumed.

The counsellor might ask:

What has your faith been like since the death?

Are there Scriptures that comfort you—or trouble you?

What do people around you expect your grieving to look like?

When do you feel most alone?

What funeral or family rituals were meaningful?

Are there ways in which your church has helped?

Are there ways in which it has made grief more difficult?

What do you most miss about the person?

What would healing mean to you—not to other people, but to you?

Such questions respect both psychology and theology.

14. Discussion

The findings suggest that the significance of tears lies less in crying as a physiological act than in what tears may represent relationally and theologically.

For participants, tears could signify permission.

Honesty.

Memory.

Attachment.

Prayer.

Communal belonging.

A temporary release from the expectation of strength.

This helps explain why the image of "theology of tears" is pastorally compelling.

The phrase should nevertheless be understood metaphorically rather than sacramentally in a strict theological sense. Tears are not automatically channels of grace, and the person who does not cry is not less receptive to God.

The deeper sacramental quality, if such language is retained, lies in **God's presence within embodied human vulnerability**, not in tears as a substance possessing therapeutic power.

This qualification brings pastoral theology into closer conversation with contemporary grief science.

Research demonstrates considerable flexibility in healthy bereavement responses. Resilient individuals do not necessarily engage in intense emotional expression, and limited visible grief should not automatically be interpreted as denial (Bonanno, 2004).

The model therefore rejects two opposite errors:

"Strong Christians should not cry."

and

"Healthy Christians must cry."

Both prescribe grief.

Pastoral wisdom makes room.

15. Theological Contribution: Hope That Does Not Hurry Sorrow

The principal theological contribution of this study lies in reclaiming Christian hope from triumphalism.

Triumphalism hurries Good Friday because it already knows Easter is coming.

Pastoral theology remains at the tomb long enough to notice that Jesus wept there.

Resurrection faith does not require the Church to deny death's pain.

Indeed, resurrection matters precisely because death matters.

The Theology of Tears therefore proposes that mature Christian hope has at least three qualities.

It is **truthful**: death hurts.

It is **relational**: grief should not have to be carried alone.

It is **eschatological**: sorrow does not have the final word.

Holding all three together prevents pastoral care from collapsing either into despair or superficial optimism.

16. Limitations

This study has several limitations.

First, the purposive sample consisted of only 15 participants and cannot represent the extraordinary diversity of Ghanaian Christianity or African grieving practices.

Second, all participants identified as Christian. The study therefore cannot determine whether the proposed framework applies in the same way within Muslim, African Traditional Religious, secular, or religiously plural settings.

Third, participants represented selected regions and denominational traditions. Ghanaian funeral and mourning practices differ substantially across ethnic, geographical, denominational, gender, generational, and socioeconomic contexts.

Fourth, participant narratives were interpreted through the researcher's pastoral-theological orientation. Reflexivity can reduce but cannot eliminate this interpretive influence.

Fifth, the model is conceptual and phenomenologically derived. The **Safety–Lament–Hope** framework has not yet been validated as a clinical treatment protocol and should not be presented as empirically proven therapy.

Finally, personal testimonies of finding purpose following loss should not be generalised into an expectation that every bereaved person must achieve post-traumatic growth, ministry involvement, or a positive reinterpretation of death.

17. Directions for Future Research

Future research should test the Theology of Tears across larger and more diverse Ghanaian populations and compare experiences among Akan, Ga, Ewe, Mole-Dagbani, and other cultural groups without presuming a single African grieving pattern.

Longitudinal research could examine how communal ritual, church participation, spiritual struggle, social support, meaning reconstruction, and psychological functioning change during the months and years following bereavement.

Mixed-method studies could combine qualitative narratives with validated measures of grief, depression, spiritual well-being, religious coping, social support, and functioning.

Further research should also examine gender. Contemporary Ghanaian scholarship indicates that mourning practices are partly structured through gender expectations, making it important to understand whether men and women receive different social permission for vulnerability (Adjei et al., 2024).

Research should finally evaluate whether lament-informed pastoral interventions add benefit beyond ordinary supportive pastoral care.

The question must remain empirical:

Does the model help, for whom, under what circumstances, and with what possible risks?

18. Conclusion

There are moments in pastoral ministry when words become too small.

A spouse has died.

A mother has buried her child.

A son stands beside his father's coffin.

A family returns from the cemetery to a house whose silence has suddenly changed meaning.

At such moments, theology does not disappear.

But theology must learn how to speak softly.

The Theology of Tears begins there.

It begins with the conviction that sorrow does not need to be hidden in order for faith to remain credible.

It refuses to interpret every tear as unbelief.

It equally refuses to prescribe tears to those who grieve differently.

It creates space.

Space for memory.

Space for questions.

Space for anger.

Space for silence.

Space for prayer.

Space for community.

Space for professional help when grief becomes disabling.

And, eventually, space for hope.

The Gospel does not require mourners to pretend that death does not hurt.

Christ Himself stood before a grave and wept.

That image may be one of pastoral theology's most important correctives.

The Christian counsellor therefore need not hurry to explain every death.

Sometimes the holiest response is presence.

To sit beside the bereaved.

To listen.

To remember the person who died.

To allow lament.

To resist clichés.

To know when to refer.

To pray when prayer is welcome.

And to hold hope gently enough that it does not become another burden the grieving person must carry.

Within Ghanaian Christian life, communal mourning offers rich resources for such care. Funeral rituals, hymns, storytelling, visits, prayer, and shared memory can surround the bereaved with belonging. Yet these traditions become truly pastoral only when they make room for the individuality of grief.

The contribution of a Theology of Tears is therefore not the claim that tears heal everything.

It is something more modest and perhaps more enduring:

grief deserves a place in the life of faith.

The Church that makes room for lament need not fear that it has abandoned hope.

It may instead discover a deeper hope—one that does not stand at a distance from suffering, but sits beside the wounded until they are ready to rise.

And perhaps that is one meaning of *Jesus wept*:

that before resurrection became proclamation, compassion became presence.

Ethical Statement

The source study reports that participants were informed about the study, participation was voluntary, confidentiality and pseudonymisation were employed, and participants could withdraw. Interviews could be paused when distress arose, and pastoral or psychological follow-up support was available. The manuscript further reports approval by the Ethics Review Board of the College of Counselling and Psychology. No formal ethics-reference number is supplied in the source manuscript and none is asserted in this article.

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