



# Taking the Journey of Grief with Hope

*Presentation By:*

**Brad Hambrick, M.Div., Th.M.**

Pastor of Counseling, The Summit Church



# “TAKING THE JOURNEY OF GRIEF WITH HOPE”

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## What Can I Hope to Get From this Seminar?

Whether you are here due to personal need, the needs of others, or for a general interest in the topic, we hope this seminar will benefit you. If we do our job well, parts of this seminar will speak to you personally. There will also be parts that speak to aspects of this subject that are different from your own experience. What follows are **six unavoidable facts** that should help you profit from all of the material you hear (bold faced text taken from Paul Tripp and Tim Lane *How People Change*):

**1. Someone in your life had a problem this week.** That person may be you. Even if you are here for yourself, chances are you know or will know others who struggle in this area. Because we live in a fallen world and have a sin nature, we can be certain that we will battle with sin and suffering in our lives. Because we love people, we can be certain we will be called on to love and assist others in their battle with sin and suffering.

**2. We have everything we need in the Gospel to help that person (2 Peter 1:3).** God has given us Himself, the Gospel, the Bible, and the church and promised they are effective for all things that pertain to life and godliness. Our task as Christians is to grow in our understanding of and ability to skillfully apply these resources to our struggles. These resources are the essence and source of "good advice," and we hope to play a role in your efforts to apply and disseminate this "good advice." We do not aim to present new material, but new ways of applying the timeless, eternal truths of the Gospel found in Scripture.

**3. That person will seek help from friends, family members, or pastors before seeking professionals.** Counseling (broadly defined as seeking to offer hope and direction through relationship) happens all the time. We talk with friends over the phone, crying children in their rooms, spouses in the kitchen, fellow church members between services, and have endless conversations with ourselves. We listen to struggles, seek to understand, offer perspective, give advice, and follow up later. This is what the New Testament calls "one-anothering" and something we are all called to do.

**4. That person either got no help, bad help, or biblical, gospel-centered help.** Not all counseling is good counseling. Not all advice that we receive from a Christian (even a Christian counselor) is Christian advice. Too often we are advised to look within for the answers to our problems or told that we are good enough, strong enough, or smart enough in ourselves to overcome. Hopefully you will see today how the Bible calls us to something (rather Someone) better, bigger, and more effective than these messages.

**5. If they did not get meaningful help, they will go elsewhere.** When we do not receive good advice (pointing us to enduring life transformation), we keep looking. We need answers to our struggles. This means that as people find unfulfilling answers they will eventually (by God's grace) come to a Christian for advice. When they eventually come to you, we hope you will be more prepared because of our time together today.

**6. Whatever help they received, they will use to help others!** We become evangelists for the things that make life better (this is why the Gospel is simply called "Good News"). We quite naturally share the things that we find to be effective. Our prayer for you today is that you will find the material presented effective for your struggles and that you will be so comforted and encouraged by it that it will enable you to be a more passionate and effective ambassador of the Gospel in the midst of "normal" daily conversations.

## “Where Do I Begin?”

In life and counseling, finding the starting point can be difficult. Life is fluid enough that identifying where to begin with a life-dominating struggle can feel like finding the beginning of a circle. In order to help you with this very important question, G4 Groups have developed a progression of five levels of starting points.

A struggle in one of the higher categories may have many expressions or contributing causes in the lower categories, but unless the upper level concerns are addressed first (i.e., substance abuse should be addressed before conflict resolution skills), efforts at change have a low probability of lasting success. The degree of self-awareness usually increases as you go down the page. The level of denial usually increases as you move up the page.

1. **Safety** – When the basic requirements of safety are not present, then safety takes priority over any other concern. Safety is never an “unfair expectation” from a relationship. If safety is a concern, then you should immediately involve other people (i.e., pastor, counselor, or legal authorities).

This category includes: thoughts of suicide, violence, threats of violence (to people or pets), preventing someone from moving freely in their home, destruction of property, manipulation, coercion, and similar practices.

2. **Substance Abuse / Addiction** – After safety, the use of mind or mood altering substances is the next level of priority concern. Substance abuse makes the life situation worse and inhibits any maturation process. The consistency and stability required for lasting change are disrupted by substance abuse.

This category includes: alcohol, illegal drugs, prescription drug not used according to instructions, inhalants, driving any vehicle with any impairment for any distance, and similar activities.

3. **Trauma** – Past or present events resulting in nightmares, sleeplessness, flashbacks, sense of helplessness, restricted emotional expression, difficulty concentrating, high levels of anxiety, intense feelings of shame, or a strong desire to isolate should be dealt with before trying to refine matters of character or skill. Trauma is a form of suffering that negatively shapes someone’s sense of identity and causes them to begin to constantly expect or brace against the worst. **The mentoring and G4 Group materials for the grief seminar are written for a trauma level struggle.**

This category includes: any physical or sexual abuse, significant verbal or emotional abuse, exposure to an act of violence, experience of a disaster, a major loss, or similar experience.

4. **Character** – This refers to persistent dispositions that express themselves in a variety of ways in a variety of settings. Because both the “trigger” and manifestation change regularly and hide when convenient, it is clear that the struggle lies within the core values, beliefs, and priorities of the individual. Skill training alone will not change character.

This category includes: anger, bitterness, fear, greed, jealousy, obsessions, hoarding, envy, laziness, selfishness, pornography, codependency, depression, social anxiety, insecurity, and similar dispositions.

5. **Skill** – With skill level changes there will be a high degree of self-awareness that change is needed in the moment when change is needed. However, confusion or uncertainty prevents an individual from being able to respond in a manner that it is wise and appropriate.

This category includes: conflict resolution, time management, budgeting, planning, and similar skills.

Hopefully, after reading these five points, you will have less of a “jump in anywhere and try anything” mentality towards your struggles. Change is hard but knowing where to start helps to establish confidence. Remember, you are not alone. Christ will meet you and the church will walk with you at any of these five points.

## WHAT IS G4?

***G4 groups provide a small group atmosphere where individuals invest a season of their life in overcoming a particular life-dominating struggle of sin or intense suffering. They provide a safe environment where members learn insights and skills that will allow them to more fully engage in biblical community.***

G4 has 7 core values which guide each group:

**Bible-Based & Gospel-Centered:** Programs and information do not change people. God changes people through the power of the Gospel and the wisdom of His Word. The relational structure of G4 Groups is the vehicle God has ordained to transport the Gospel and Scripture into the lives of His beloved, enslaved, and hurting children.

**Recognize the Difference Between Sin & Suffering:** G4 Groups recognize that struggles of sin are different from struggles of suffering in terms of cause, dynamics, emotional impact, relational influence, and other ways. While every believer is simultaneously a saint, sinner, and sufferer, there are fundamental differences (practically and theologically) between a struggle an individual does (sin) and those that happen to the individual (suffering).

**Built On Honesty & Transparency:** The courage to be honest about our suffering or sin is often the essential expression of faith God calls for in overcoming a life-dominating struggle. G4 Groups create an environment that fosters honesty and transparency by incarnating the love of God and protecting confidentiality within the group.

**Uphold Confidentiality:** We all have a story to tell. G4 Groups are a safe place where group members can be open, honest, and transparent without fear that their issues will be shared outside of the group. G4 group members commit to hold in confidence things shared within the context of the group environment.

**Avoid Struggle-Based Identity:** We recognize that when an individual has struggled with one issue for an extended period of time that struggle begins to define them. G4 Groups are structured in content, duration, and philosophy to alert the participants to this temptation and guide them away from it. G4 Groups strive to teach and model what it means to live out of an identity as a dearly loved child of God.

**Blend Discipleship, Accountability, & A Guided Process:** G4 Groups are more than a Bible study on a given subject. They develop a practical theology of their subject during the group study and guide members through an intentional process during the personal study while the members hold each other accountable.

**Transition Into Larger Small Group Ministry:** The goal is for each G4 Group member to be in a general small group within a year. Group members may choose to be a general small group the whole time. If desired, at "graduation" the G4 Group leader would direct the participant to a small group with a leader who has completed personal study and counseling exercises for that area of struggle. It would be the participant's choice whether to disclose that was the reason for choosing that leader's small group.

## The 9 Steps of G4

We do not believe there is a one-size-fits-all solution to the struggles of life. Neither do we believe there is any magic in these particular steps. However, we do believe that these steps capture the major movements of the Gospel in the life of an individual. We also believe that it is through the Gospel that God transforms lives and modifies behavior as He gives us a new heart.

In G4 Groups we attempt to walk through the Gospel in slow motion with a concentrated focus upon a particular life-dominating struggle. We do this in a setting of transparent community because we believe God changes people in the midst of relationships.

We believe that the Gospel speaks to both sin (things we do wrong) and suffering (painful experiences for which we are not responsible) to bring peace, wholeness, and redemption. We also believe that every person is both a sinner and a sufferer. However, we believe the Gospel is best understood and applied when we consider how the Gospel relates to the nature of our struggle. The nine steps below are those used by G4 Groups to address struggles of sin and suffering.

<b>Sin-Based Groups</b>	<b>Suffering-Based Groups</b>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 1. ADMIT I have a struggle I cannot overcome without God.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 1. PREPARE yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually to face your suffering.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 2. ACKNOWLEDGE the breadth and impact of my sin.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 2. ACKNOWLEDGE the specific history and realness of my suffering.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 3. UNDERSTAND the origin, motive, and history of my sin.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 3. UNDERSTAND the impact of my suffering.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 4. REPENT TO GOD for how my sin replaced and misrepresented Him.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 4. LEARN MY SUFFERING STORY which I use to make sense of my experience.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 5. CONFESS TO THOSE AFFECTED for harm done and seek to make amends.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 5. MOURN the wrongness of what happened and receive God’s comfort.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 6. RESTRUCTURE MY LIFE to rely on God’s grace and Word to transform my life.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 6. LEARN MY GOSPEL STORY by which God gives meaning to my experience.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 7. IMPLEMENT the new structure pervasively with humility and flexibility.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 7. IDENTIFY GOALS that allow me to combat the impact of my suffering.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 8. PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 8. PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 9. STEWARD all of my life for God’s glory.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 9. STEWARD all of my life for God’s glory.</p>

**To learn more about G4 Groups visit [www.summitrdu.com/g4](http://www.summitrdu.com/g4)**

## Chapter I

### "Preparing for Your Grief Journey"

PREPARE yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually to face your suffering.

**"Living in denial about my loss would be more costly than anything  
God would take me through in the grieving process.**

**God is good for bringing me to the point of addressing my suffering.**

**Therefore, I will put myself in the best physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual  
position possible to face my suffering."**

**Memorize:** Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV), "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- "Come to me" – Jesus wants to give you more than an answer or a process. He offers Himself.
- "Are heavy laden" – Times of significant loss are intense. God recognizes the weight of this season in your life.
- "I will give you rest... for your souls" – God wants to give his children rest at the deepest part of our being.
- "Learn from me" – Jesus is well-acquainted with the journey ahead of you (Isaiah 53:3). He knows the way.
- "I am gentle" – Jesus will travel this journey at a pace you can bear. His concern is for you, His companion, more than the destination (lessons you may learn or ministry for which you are prepared).

#### Teaching Notes

"Death is so deeply emotional and stunningly final that there is nothing you can do ahead of time to sail through your moment of loss... Don't feel guilty or embarrassed if you feel unprepared to face it. There is no way to prepare for what you are going through. But just knowing that may help you (p. 3-4)." Paul Tripp in *Grief: Finding Hope Again*

"Grieving cannot be completed in a lesson, a lecture, or an appointment. Such structured commitments can be useful parts within a whole helping relationship, but grieving takes place over a long period of time, and helping must also be a process over time. Grief does not usually happen on a schedule (p. 29)." Judy Blore in "How to Help a Grieving Child" from *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Winter 1998).

"You don't need to be fixed (p. 1)... Cars and refrigerators break down; people don't. We shed tears, cry, or weep. We were created to cry. It's a fitting response to sorrow (p. 32)... Grief brings you into the world of the unknown (p. 4)... Grieving is a disorderly process. You won't control it, nor can you schedule its expression (p.12)." H. Norman Wright in *Experiencing Grief*

"Everyone who loves will experience [grief] sooner or later, and the greater the love, the greater the grief when the time of loss arrives (p. 143)... The loneliness of grief is one of the worst and most draining things about it – and, be it said, one of the most dangerous too (p. 145)." J.I. Packer in *A Grief Sanctified*

"Many people find that the hardest part of the grief journey is simply getting started (p. 31)." Bob Kelleman in *God's Healing for Life's Losses*.

"There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be about me. I dread the moments when the house is empty. If only they would talk to one another and not to me (p. 1)... In grief nothing 'stays put.' One keeps on emerging from a phase, but it always recurs. Round and round. Everything repeats. Am I going in circles, or dare I hope I am on a spiral? (p. 67)." C.S. Lewis in *A Grief Observed*

### Embedded Study

Even though it is only the beginning of this study, thank you for getting this far. It is a testimony to your strength and courage that in the midst of your loss and pain you have not abandoned the search for hope. You may not feel strong or courageous at this point. In reality, you probably feel numb, weak, afraid, intimidated, or overwhelmed. But the mark of courage is not the absence of fear, but continuing on in the face of fear. That is what you are doing. It is commendable and good. We are praying for you and trust that God will bless this step of courageous faith with the hope and peace you desire.

The fact that you are at this point is also a testimony to God's faithfulness and presence. You feel like your loss and circumstances could crush you, and you are right. It is an interesting study to consider how the phrase "my strength" is used in the Psalms (18:1, 22:15, 28:7, 31:10, 32:4, 38:10, 59:9, 59:17, 71:9, 102:23, 118:14, 138:3). It is as if they alternate between cries of desperation and pronouncements of praise. Grief is an experience that causes me to find the end of my strength (my abilities or emotional resources) and realize it is only *My Strength* (God) that can sustain me in the painful moments when death touches my life.

The goal of this study (and the relationships in which you will go through this study) is to help you access Your Strength (the one true God) in the midst of your grief. God loves you (1 John 4:19). God longs to care for you and is not just waiting for you to "get it together (Psalm 147:3)." God is not offended by your tears, but values them (Psalm 56:8). God is not repelled by your questions, even if they are angry ones (Psalm 44:23-26). God does not intend to leave you alone in your pain (Joshua 1:9). God will be patient while you grieve (2 Peter 3:9).

### Where Do I Begin?

It is easy to think of this question as, "What should I do?" But that is not what God asks of you. Your first step is not one of overcoming, but preparing. This means God wants you to put yourself in the best physical, emotional, and relational position possible for the journey ahead. God is more concerned about you, as His child, than He is about the destination of a fully processed grief. If you are going to complete the journey, you will need to allow yourself to be cared for by God and others. We must all grieve as children, because death reminds us that we are not as independent and autonomous as we would like to believe.

**Read 1 Kings 19:1-8.** Elijah is facing the suffering of being persecuted and he is facing it alone (at least to his knowledge). Notice the first thing God does for His discouraged child – God lets him sleep and feeds him (v. 5), then God acknowledged the "journey is too great for you (v. 7)" as a way of encouraging Elijah. No longer did Elijah need to feel like he should be able to do this on his own. No longer did Elijah have to express his thoughts as if God did not understand (as in v. 3-4). By allowing Elijah to prepare physically, God demonstrated He understood Elijah's limits.

**Read Psalm 3:3-5.** In this Psalm David is on the run for his life (v. 1-2). Notice what God does first for His child – God lifts his chin out of shame (v. 3), listens to his cries (v. 4), and gives David sleep (v. 5). David knows he would not sleep at a time like this apart from God's giving him rest. God's involvement was not restricted to the approaching army. God began by preparing His child for what was ahead by giving David sleep.

So what does this mean for you? It means the place where God would have you begin is to care for yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually. As you do this, you are not being selfish. In reality, you are experiencing God's love for you as you cooperate with His will for your life at this time.

Do not feel guilty about caring for and allowing yourself to be cared for in this way. Part of what makes it so difficult is when we begin to multiply the experience by other emotions. Frequently, at this stage in the process, people allow their grief to become multiplied by guilt over being an inconvenience or they resist God's nurturing care through others as a way to avoid guilt. Now is a time to receive care without guilt.

**Reflection:** As you seek to apply items from the list below, regularly call to mind that God loves you and wants this time of restoration for you. God is not impatiently rushing you to begin being productive for Him again (as if He cherished your activity more than your person). God takes pleasure in wiping away each tear and comforting each burden *now* as a foretaste of what He has in store for His children *later* (Rev. 21:4). God wants us to begin knowing Him now like we will know Him then when we enter into His perfect rest.

**Question:** How do you respond when you hear that God wants you to prepare for the grief journey ahead more than He wants you to be "productive"? Are you able to receive this as an indication of His love and compassion for you?

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## Areas of Preparation

You are preparing for a journey; a journey for which none of us are ever fully prepared. With that said, there are six areas of life that are important to consider as you seek to maintain the physical and emotional stamina that grief requires. You should not feel pressured to do them all or to do them well in order to accelerate the grieving process, but to receive them as a gift from God who loves you and is caring for you in this difficult season.

Some of these will be easier to apply immediately. Others will become more relevant once you have completed steps two and three of this journey. Making sure that you maintain these areas of preparation is important enough that your encouragement partner will be asked to review these materials with you at the end of each chapter.

### I. Sleep

The first three areas of preparation concentrate primarily upon your physical health and, therefore, have a significant degree of interdependence. Jesus said of his disciples in Gethsemane that "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak (Matt. 26:41)." The way that grief disrupts our patterns of sleep, appetite, and exercise can have the same affect upon us. Physically grief can bring such a strain that it becomes hard to face the emotional and spiritual journey ahead. Consider the following findings:

"A long-term study indicated that the death rate of widows and widowers is from two to seventeen times higher during the first year following the death of a spouse. Dr. Glen Davidson has discovered that about 25% of those who mourn experience a dramatic decrease in the body's immune system six to nine months after their loss. This is one of the reasons why grieving people are more susceptible to illnesses (p. 381)." Sharon Hart May in "Loss and Grief Work" in *Caring for People God's Way* edited by Tim Clinton, Archibald Hart, and George Ohlschlager.

Grief disrupts sleep. For some people, it is the number of things that need to be done which creates an anxiety that prevents sleep. For other people, it is the stillness and time to think that comes along with trying to sleep that tempts them to try to avoid sleep. For still others, there is nothing intentional or emotional about the struggle to sleep. The shock of the loss just makes it hard for sleep to "happen." But giving yourself time to sleep is an important part of grieving well and the restoration of the mind and body.

If you are having trouble sleeping, consider the following suggestions to help with sleep at this time.

- Believe that sleep is intended as a good gift from God and do not feel guilty for resting.
- Pray that God would give you restful sleep and believe He wants you to have it.
- Memorize a passage of Scripture related to your grief and repeat it slowly as you lay down to sleep.
- Play soft music or nature sounds to help prevent your mind from thinking while trying to sleep.
- Reduce the level of caffeine and sugar in your diet.
- Avoid daytime naps so that your sleep is in concentrated blocks.
- Establish a bed time routine. This may be intimately related to the grieving process if you lost a spouse or young child. If so, then chapter 7 will have materials to help you in acclimating to these changes.
- Take a warm bath to relax your body.
- Try muscle relaxation or stretching exercises before going to bed.
- Establish a deep slow breathing pattern that simulates sleep breathing.
- Talk with a medical professional about the possibility of a sleep aid.

### 2. Diet

Grief can affect appetite in ways similar to depression; meaning you may want to eat as a form of self-comfort or lose interest in eating. Your goal at this time is not to become a super-health-minded-person but merely to put yourself in a healthy physical condition that will prevent illness or weight change from complicating the grieving process.

Consider the following suggestions to help with your diet at this time.

- Eat several small meals throughout the day.
- Take a multi-vitamin.
- Consider a Vitamin C booster for your immune system.
- Avoid excessive sweets or caffeine. These will impact blood sugar levels or impact your sleep cycle.
- Eat as many fruits and vegetables as possible.

### 3. Exercise

Cardiovascular exercise is particularly beneficial – walking, light jog, bike ride, swimming, or low-weight-high-repetition weight lifting. This type of exercise counters many of the physiological effects of stress that accompany grief. Additionally, the natural fatigue of exercise helps to maintain a healthy sleep cycle during the grieving process.

With this emphasis on protecting health during a season of grief it is important to remember that grief itself is not unhealthy.

“While grieving is painful, it is to be viewed as a healthy response, for without it a complete emotional recovery is not possible (p. 519).” J.A. Larsen in “Grief” from *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling* edited by David Benner and Peter C. Hill.

It is the stress of grief that is unhealthy, not the process itself. However, unless we pay attention to our sleep cycle, diet, and activity level, then grief can negatively impact our health and life patterns. It is these influences that drain our energy, foster depression, create illness, and make it feel like grief will never end.

### 4. Community

The impact that grief and loss can have on our relationships is as great as the effects they can have on our bodies. Often we begin to feel like a burden to others and that our presence hampers the ability of anyone else to have a good time. It is in light of this that Paul Tripp offers a warning:

“In grief, it is tempting to turn inside yourself and avoid the community around you (p. 11).” Paul Tripp in *Grief: Finding Hope Again*

**Read Galatians 6:2.** Notice the implication – if we are not bearing one another’s burdens, then we are not fulfilling the law of Christ. By withdrawing from our friends during a season of grief, we prevent them from being able to obey God. We become a literal stumbling-block to their walk with God rather than a perceived joy-kill to their social plans. Allow people to honor God in the way they love you by sharing your burden with them.

**List:** Write the names of people who care about you: family, friends, small group members, etc... They cannot bear a burden of which they are unaware. Tell them of your grief. The rest of this study will help you discern what you should share with them and how they might be involved in your journey.

**List:** You should also be prepared to answer the question, “How can I help? What can I do?” Sometimes we do not receive support, because we turn away willing friends with non answers. Consider the following list of ways people could love you during this season of grief. Mark the ones that fit you and your situation well. Be prepared to give an answer to your friend’s willingness to serve you.

- Bring a meal and be willing to stay to have dinner with me.
- Ask me how I’m doing and don’t let me get by with “I’m fine.”
- Offer to do some household chores and let me help so we can talk.
- Send me an e-mail about how you’re praying for things I’ve shared with you.
- Check in with me around holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries.
- Give me a hug and be glad to see me.
- Don’t stop telling me about your life and letting me serve you too.
- Share good memories or photographs you have of my loved one.
- Be patient with me if I share the same story multiple times.
- Remember the dates of my medical visits (especially if applicable to the grief event).
- Remember my interviews and appointments (if grief results in job changes or legal situations).
- Go for a walk with me so I can exercise and we can talk.
- Pick me up for small group or church.
- Let my children play with yours or at your house.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Having this network of friends is an important part of the grief journey. Often we (and they) make the process of offering support more complicated than it is. Comfort is not primarily found in what is said or done, but in having people who care enough to be present. Knowing that whatever comes up, emotionally or situationally, you won't have to face it alone is the biggest part of comfort.

"We are comforted, but not by knowing the stages of a predictable process. We are comforted by a person: Jesus: And because of this, we can comfort each other... What meant the most to grieving persons were not the words I said, but the face of my presence with them in their sorrow (p. 16)." Paul Randolph in "Grief: It's Not About a Process; It's About the Person" from *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Winter 2005).

As you interact with these friends, here are some important things to avoid.

1. Avoid saying "I'm okay" or "I'm fine." If this is not true, it will impair their ability to care for you. If it is true, give them more information about what is going better so they can join in your encouragement.
2. Don't feel like your answers have to be a little better every time you see them. Change doesn't occur on an uninterrupted incline. Don't give in to the temptation of thinking you're going to disappoint them if you admit you're not doing as well as you were last time.
3. Pray honestly; not "spiritually." Prayer is an easy time to become fake and cliché. It can be refreshing and strengthening to pray honest prayers to God in the presence of another person. That is what a large number of the Psalms are – honest, public prayers during seasons of suffering.
4. Avoid those who think they can cheer you up. The journey through grief is about more than being happy again. If that is someone's primary focus at this stage, then they are likely not the best companion for this journey.
5. Don't hurry yourself. Hopefully this study will provide structure so that you have an idea of what is "next" but it contains no pacing guide. Trying to measure the process is most often counter-productive. If you "gave yourself" two months to grieve, how would you know if you were half way there in one month? Chances are, pace would become a distraction from the process.

## 5. Ceremony

Funerals are more than a cultural norm. They play a significant role in preparing us for the journey of grief ahead. As you enter the funeral, do not view it as a hassle to be endured, but as an important part of the process.

"It should be remembered that funeral rituals do serve such useful functions as helping survivors accept the reality of death, receive the support of friends, get practical help during the time of readjustment, and experience the peace and presence of God... A carefully planned, worshipful funeral service can facilitate the grieving process (p. 358)." Gary Collins in *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide*

There are many losses for which we do not have ceremonies: miscarriage, infertility, job loss, health, innocence at the hands of abuse, or divorce. We can see the significance of a well planned funeral, by examining how the lack of a formal ceremony adds to the difficulty of the grieving process.

- Friends ask about the baby or job frequently and the grief is forced to be retold sporadically.
- We brace against seeing friends because we don't know if they know and what they might ask.
- The reality of our abuse seems easy to question because so many people live as if it never happened.
- Friends share news related to children, health, abuse, or jobs and have no idea that it is hard for us to hear.
- It is easy to question the quality of friendships because I'm hurting and they're not doing anything.
- It feels like nobody else has experienced what I'm going through, because experiences this big have events.
- I feel more alone when I'm alone because even close friendships inadvertently become a way of escaping reality.
- Friends start to explain my mood fluctuations based on other causes, which makes it harder to be close.
- When nobody I can see understands, it become harder to believe God, who I can't see, understands.
- I can begin to resent or feel distant from church, because my needs aren't being met there.

Hopefully the benefits that emerge from a funeral are becoming more evident. This may make some losses more painful because they lack an event or ceremony. Appendix A is designed to help provide a grieving ceremony for the loss of an unborn child. But not all grief is conducive for a ceremony. Appendix B is meant to help you think through how to apply these materials to losses that were not directly related to a physical death: the loss of innocence, the loss of a dream, the loss of stability, or the living death of divorce.

## 6. Decision Making

Grief doesn’t happen in a vacuum. We never get to deal with “just grief.” Because of the degree of change that grief brings with it, there will always be other things to do, prepare for, or plan. This means that preparing for grief requires thinking through how and when important decisions will be made.

“At a time when the grieving person feels least able to handle extra pressure, there is usually an increase in things that have to be done, including the submission of claims for insurance, consolidating and changing names on bank accounts, paying extra bills connected with funeral and hospital expenses, meeting with lawyers concerning the deceased person’s will, changing names on legal documents such as the mortgage or car title, informing the provider of pensions or the Internal Revenue Service, and even handling daily hassles like the tap that starts leaking or the lawn that isn’t mowed. All of this can create considerable frustration and put additional stress on the grieving person (p. 351).” Gary Collins in *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide*

**Reflection:** What else is going on in your life right now? What challenges were you facing before this season of grief? What new challenges or decisions has this grief experience brought into your life?

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**Evaluate:** Review through your list above and, using the chart below, divide the items into five categories based upon when the item must be addressed: (1) this week, (2) this month, (3) next three months, (4) next six months, and (5) a year or more. If possible, have a trusted friend think through this evaluation with you. As a rule, the longer you can delay a decision during the grief process, the clearer your thinking will be. It is good to give yourself space/time to recover without making decisions that will serve as memory triggers for this difficult season of life.

Time Frame	Decisions to Make
This Week	
This Month	
Next 3 Months	
Next 6 Months	
A Year or More	

It would be a false notion to believe that if you prepared yourself in these six ways and were “a strong enough person” that grief would be easy (or even easier). God gives you more grace than that. God is not evaluating you to see how you perform during this season. God wants to comfort his children by preparing them for the journey ahead. Let Him.

“Grief is an agony for anyone, any age, any maturity, any faith. Grief takes time. It is a process of letting go of something familiar and taking hold of something in the future (p. 26).” Judy Blore in “How to Help a Grieving Child” from *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Winter 1998).

### Encouragement Focus (PREPARE):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Are you taking care of yourself physically?
- Are you allowing others to help carry your burdens during this season of grief?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your grief to your encouragement partner.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 2

### "Identifying the Pieces of My Story"

ACKNOWLEDGE the specific history and realness of my suffering.

**"I will look at my life and acknowledge what has happened as my history.  
I will not try to move forward out of a false history or with no history.  
I trust that God can and will redeem what is and what has been.  
Evidencing my faith in God I acknowledged my specific history to [name].  
This brought great fear [describe] and then relief [describe]."**

**Memorize:** Psalm 31:9-10,14-15 (ESV), "Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away... But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutor!" As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- Psalm – These words were given to you by God to speak back to God because He knew you would need them.
- "Wasted from grief... spent with sorrow" – God does not expect you to be "strong enough" to handle this alone.
- "Soul and body" – Grief is more than an emotional experience. Physically and spiritually grief is draining.
- "But I trust" – "But" implies that the psalmist's trust is emerging even as facts exist that would tempt him to doubt.
- "My times are in your hands" – The psalmist begins by turning to a truth that is beyond doubt – the matters that bombard him are beyond his control and ultimately influenced by the hand of God.

#### Teaching Notes

"We kissed her cheek and straightened her sheet as if she were there. We simply didn't know how else to act (p. 2)." Paul Tripp in *Grief: Finding Hope Again*

"Denial is used to block out the unthinkable, but it brings with it the fear of the unknown since you are denying the reality of what happened. As denial lessens, the pain begins to settle in; and as it does, the fear of the unknown diminishes (p. 10)." H. Norman Wright in *Experiencing Grief*. "Denial is a common initial grief response. I believe that this initial response can be a grace of God, allowing our bodies and physical brains to catch up, to adjust (p. 24)." Bob Kelleman in *God's Healing for Life's Losses*.

"Part of the grieving process is putting your loss into words. Talk to a friend or family member about your grief. If you are not ready to talk to someone, make a list of the different ways you are grieving. Go ahead and remember the good times... Grieve for the dreams that never came true... Allow yourself to feel the emotions and sadness and put it into words. As you do this, remember that God is listening to you (p. 6)." Winston Smith in *Divorce Recovery: Growing and Healing God's Way*

"But when Jesus weeps, we see that he doesn't believe that the ministry of truth (telling people how they should believe and turn to God) or the ministry of fixing things is enough, does he? He also is a proponent of the ministry of tears (p. 4)." Tim Keller in "Truth, Tears, Anger, and Grace" from *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Fall 2001).

"Death doesn't wait till the end of our lives to meet us and to make an end. Instead, we die a hundred times before we die; and all the little endings on the way are like a slowly growing echo of the final *Bang* before that bang takes place (p. 26)." Walter Wangerin in *Mourning into Dancing*.

### Embedded Study

Too often we hear the word "denial" and we think it means simply the willful resistance to acknowledging an obvious fact. When you're in the midst of denial, you wish it were that simple and overt. The question, "How do I live as if they are really gone?" is not a simple question.

Overcoming denial involves more than admitting certain facts are true. It requires living wisely in light of the reality we acknowledge. This is often why we stay in denial even after we admit the facts – we don't know what living wisely looks like in our new world after our loss.

Even when it is destructive, we should not think of denial as something we are "doing wrong" as if we should just "stop it." Denial is a failure to incorporate painful events into our life story. With that said, let's look at several expressions denial can take. Those listed at the top of the page create little life disruption. As you move down the page, the forms of denial become more problematic.

- **The continued use of present tense verbs.** We talk about what they "like" instead of "liked." We catch ourselves and blush. This simply reveals that our loss has not sunk into our natural vocabulary.
- **Waking up and later remembering they are gone.** We start our day and come to a point where we would interact with our loved one – it may be as simple as rolling over – and then we're struck afresh with the reality that they're not there. Another example of this style of denial might be setting the dinner table for one more person than is now needed.

One of the ways that we progress through these first two characteristics of denial is repetition. Too often we are embarrassed by or apologize for the frequency with which we tell the same stories during grief. But this is merely how we incorporate these new facts into our story. Judy Blore does an excellent job of describing this in the grief of children, but it is equally applicable to the grief of adults.

"Grasping that someone you love has died takes a great deal of repetition before you get your mind around this truth (p. 27)... One of the child's biggest needs is to seal the person in her memories so she doesn't forget. This is accomplished by telling and retelling stories about him (p. 29)." Judy Blore in "How to Help a Grieving Child" from *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Winter 1998).

- **Resisting the sadness that would come with their loss.** Initially we may not feel the weight of sadness we would deem appropriate. Joseph Lehmann explains why this is. The point of concern is when the sensation of sadness does not return after the initial time of shock.

"As in the case of a physical wound, the shock of the injury itself often provides a certain immunity to pain (p. 18)." Joseph Lehmann in "Believing in Hope" from *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Winter 1998).

But sometimes our numbness transitions from natural to intentional. We refuse to feel. We become non-responsive to the emotional stimuli of life. We begin to trade short-term relief for long-term disruption. How's that? Emotions cannot be compartmentalized. You cannot turn off one emotion (grief) without disrupting the others (joy, love, peace, anxiety, hope, anger) because emotions are interconnected.

It is during the transition out of natural numbness that this temptation arises. Shock has protected us for a period of time. When feelings (emotions) begin to return the transition from non-sensation to sensation overwhelms us and we try to shut off the emotions. This type of struggle is most prevalent for those who generally live highly compartmentalized lives.

- **Focusing exclusively on caring for others who are grieving.** This is the most practical form of denial. We become a doctor instead of a patient. It's a double win – you get the satisfaction of helping others (maybe even their appreciation) and you don't have to face your grief. Or, at least, it's a win until reality crashes in and nobody understands why you're struggling because your loss was "a long time ago."

It is natural to want to control an unpleasant experience, especially one like grief which so easily permeates every area of life and relationship. Grief's in-road to every area of our life is love. What parts of our life does love touch? It makes sense (in an unhealthy way) to try to bless others without allowing them to impact us; service becomes a distraction that protects us from vulnerability with others or God. It's safer. Bob Kelleman warns against this type of life-management that seeks to control life.

“When we honestly face our hurt, it can feel overwhelming. And when we’re overwhelmed with life, regardless of our personalities, we basically have two choices. We can try to manage life on our own... Or, we can surrender control of our life to God (p. 41).” Bob Kellemen in *God’s Healing for Life’s Losses*.

- **Using sleep, food, drugs, work, or activities to distract from grieving.** In this form of denial it is easy for an individual to develop major life imbalances or an addiction. Denial becomes more than not allowing the truth to sink in or a numb emotional affect. Denial mutates into a lifestyle predicated upon escaping the unpleasant. When this occurs the domino effect can become severe.

In order to avoid this temptation we must see that grief is good and enriches life. In avoiding grief we diminish life. Robert Veninga, Gerald Sittser, and C.S. Lewis testify to this truth.

“There’s a good reason for entering fully into one’s sorrow. Once you have experienced the seriousness of your loss, you will be able to experience the wonder of being alive (p. 19).” Robert Veninga in *A Gift of Hope*.

“Ultimately it [the unwillingness to face one’s pain] diminishes the capacity of their soul to grow bigger in response to pain (p. 47).” Gerald Sittser in *A Grace Disguised*.

“A live body is not one that never gets hurt, but one that can to some extent repair itself. In the same way a Christian is not a man who never goes wrong, but a man who is enabled to repent and pick himself up and begin over again after each stumble – because the Christ-life is inside him, repairing him all the time, enabling him to repeat (in some degree) the kind of voluntary death which Christ Himself carried out (p. 63).” *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis

With these things being said, it is important to remember that denial is not a bad thing (at least not at first and in its milder forms). It is natural and, even, a part of the grace of God. God created our minds in such a way that they naturally assimilate life-altering changes at a pace that we can endure. Denial becomes unhealthy when it moves from being natural to being willful; from being a reaction to being a lifestyle.

### How Do I Acknowledge?

We’ve established that denial is not always willful and can be good. But denial is not the place where we want to stay. So the question becomes, “How do we begin to acknowledge the specific history and realness of my loss in a healthy way?” A good way to start is by putting on paper what you have lost.

As we look at acknowledging our loss, we must begin to realize that all grief is not triggered by death. And physical absence is not the only thing being grieved when our loss is triggered by death. Gary Collins does a good job of delineating the breadth of experiences that can begin a grief journey.

“Grief is a normal response to the loss of any significant person, object, or opportunity. It is an experience of deprivation and anxiety that can show itself in one’s behavior, emotions, thinking, physiology, interpersonal relationships, and spirituality. Any loss can bring grief: divorce, retirement from a job, amputation, the departure of a child to college or of a pastor to some other church, moving from a friendly neighborhood (or watching a good neighbor move), selling one’s car, losing a home or valued possession, the death of a pet or plant, loss of a contest or athletic game, health failures, and even the loss of one’s youthful appearance, confidence, or enthusiasm (p. 345).” Gary Collins in *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide*.

From this point forward in the study, you will be asked many reflective questions. These are meant to help you piece together your story and regain a sense of meaning and direction in life. The early questions may not feel like this. Questions like the ones below may only help you put your pain into words and see new dimensions of your grief. But this is an important part of the journey. Taking the time to answer each set of questions will help you transform this material from “another Bible study” to your personal chronicles of a journey through pain to hope.

**Question:** Who or what have you lost? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Person    \_\_\_\_\_ Health    \_\_\_\_\_ Innocence    \_\_\_\_\_ Trust    \_\_\_\_\_ Finances    \_\_\_\_\_ Other:

**Question:** What roles did this person or thing play in your life? Take the time to consider how one loss can express itself in several forms of grief. As you go through this study, the intent is for you to see that the comfort of God takes on as many unique expressions as your grief.

- Relationship (parent, spouse, friend, child): \_\_\_\_\_
- Support (emotional, financial): \_\_\_\_\_
- Part of Identity: \_\_\_\_\_
- Part of Future Plans: \_\_\_\_\_
- Part of Daily Life: \_\_\_\_\_
- Element of Relationships: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Acknowledging a loss goes beyond the factual level. People often speak of knowing that painful events are real, but not feeling as if they happened “in my world” or “to me.” These events are experienced more as something that we read in a book or saw on television than something we experienced in first person. Grief feels like something that belongs in a history book more than a personal biography. Experiencing grief at this distance prevents us from accessing the grace of God that is available for our loss.

**Exercise:** This exercise will be one you will refer to several times throughout the rest of this study. So you will want to take the time to do it well and may add to it as you go through future chapters. This may take several pages. Write out the facts of your loss chronologically (in the order in which those facts occurred). You can do this as bulleted points. This list of facts should start with the beginning of your relationship with your loved one. Grief is a response to the loss of something good, so grief usually has a happy beginning. Continue through your current circumstances and add significant events as they occur on your grief journey.

If you are having trouble experiencing your grief as something that happened to you, this list will be helpful. Review your list from the beginning and note when you get to a point where the events you are recording no longer feel like “your story” but merely facts on the page. This will alert you to where acknowledging facts needs to become part of your personal story. Being aware of this point and the events you are incorporating into your story will help you make better application of the materials to come.

**Common Fears:** Exercises like the one above can often trigger two common fears. First, we may begin to fear losing a memory of our loved one. H. Norman Wright speaks of when and how this fear begins to emerge.

“Many who grieve are upset even more when they discover some of the memories of their loved one begin to fade... One of the new roles you take on after the loss of your loved one is becoming their historian (p. 66).” H. Norman Wright in *Experiencing Grief*.

This material is not merely written to help you process your grief, but to help you capture what is good in who or what you lost. This study is designed to help you find rest (both from God’s comfort and understanding the experiences commonly associated with grief) from that fear rather than just pushing through it.

Second, if our loss was traumatic (this will be defined better in chapter 3), we may fear being overpowered by our memories. If this is you, then know it is wise to work through these materials slowly. The “magic” is not the Bible studies, reflective questions, and exercises, but in finding your safety and identity in the One True God who loves you and cares for you in the midst of your grief. God is patient with you on this journey. When we forget this our grief becomes multiplied by the experience of guilt and pressure.

### Grief Evaluation

Below is an evaluation to help you see (acknowledge) how you are doing with the different challenging experiences that grief brings. At this stage in the journey, it is tempting to begin comparing your loss with others. Inevitably, we begin to think, “Others have it so much worse than me. Why am I down?”

Resist the urge to compare your loss with the loss of others. Just because Person A got hit by a truck does not mean that Person B’s knee surgery hurt any less. The purpose of acknowledging the history and realness of your grief is not to give you a tool to downplay your loss (that would be another form of denial). The purpose is to help you identify the terrain that you will walk with the Good Shepherd (Psalm 23; John 10:1-21).



**Instructions:** Read the following descriptive statements. As you read them, consider your response to your recent loss or losses. If your grief is not for a physical death, some of these questions may not apply directly and this will affect the scoring at the end of this evaluation. Mark the answer that best fits how you respond:

(N) almost never, (R) rarely, (S) sometimes, (F) frequently, or (A) almost always

For the most accurate results, ask one person from each major sphere of your life (i.e, home, work, social, church small group, etc...) to complete this survey on your behalf and compare results.

Additional copies of this evaluation can be found at: [www.bradhambrick.comgriefseminar](http://www.bradhambrick.comgriefseminar).

1. I have a hard time accepting that my loss really happened.	N	R	S	F	A
2. I accidentally use present tense verbs to speak of who/what I lost.	N	R	S	F	A
3. When I remember my loss it is fresh, like it just happened.	N	R	S	F	A
4. I try not to be sad.	N	R	S	F	A
5. I distract myself from grief by caring for others.	N	R	S	F	A
6. I have parts of my life or home I refuse to change.	N	R	S	F	A
7. When I think about my loss I get angry.	N	R	S	F	A
8. I am more short-tempered with people now than before my loss.	N	R	S	F	A
9. I am cynical or ambivalent about things I enjoyed before my loss.	N	R	S	F	A
10. My relationship with God has become more cold or distant.	N	R	S	F	A
11. I take a "functional" approach to life with things I enjoyed before my loss.	N	R	S	F	A
12. I find myself bracing against life or people letting me down.	N	R	S	F	A
13. It is harder to trust people because I might lose them.	N	R	S	F	A
14. I avoid making plans because life now feels uncertain.	N	R	S	F	A
15. My general level of anxiety is higher than what is normal for me.	N	R	S	F	A
16. I try to avoid being alone.	N	R	S	F	A
17. I am second guessing decisions more than what is normal for me.	N	R	S	F	A
18. I dread the morning because I have to get through the whole day.	N	R	S	F	A
19. I dread being alone and feel like my friendships are different now.	N	R	S	F	A
20. I feel "broken" and like no one would want to be with me.	N	R	S	F	A
21. I think having fun with others would betray the one I lost.	N	R	S	F	A
22. My life feels empty and meaningless now.	N	R	S	F	A
23. I fear getting close to someone again because I don't want to lose them.	N	R	S	F	A
24. I am getting in too close, too quickly in relationships to counter my grief.	N	R	S	F	A
25. My days, weeks, and months have lost any sense of rhythm.	N	R	S	F	A
26. Planning is something I have stopped or don't know how to do.	N	R	S	F	A
27. I no longer have dreams, hopes, or ambitions for the future.	N	R	S	F	A
28. I have stopped keeping a budget and bills are overwhelming.	N	R	S	F	A
29. I am facing major decisions that I do not know how to make.	N	R	S	F	A
30. I no longer enjoy the things I did before my loss.	N	R	S	F	A
31. I am not sleeping well or in a normal sleep cycle since my loss.	N	R	S	F	A
32. I am experiencing frequent headaches.	N	R	S	F	A
33. My eating habits have become less healthy or my appetite has changed.	N	R	S	F	A
34. I have been sick more frequently since my loss.	N	R	S	F	A
35. I am fatigued even when I get my normal amount of sleep.	N	R	S	F	A
36. I am frequently experiencing an upset stomach or constipation.	N	R	S	F	A
37. I am unsure how to introduce myself or talk to new people.	N	R	S	F	A
38. I don't feel like I know who I am anymore.	N	R	S	F	A
39. Decisions that once seemed obvious are hard to make now.	N	R	S	F	A
40. I don't know what "group" of people I belong to now.	N	R	S	F	A
41. I am questioning beliefs that I have held for a long time.	N	R	S	F	A
42. I don't know how to define what makes me productive or useful now.	N	R	S	F	A
43. I have begun to use food, work, or hobbies in unhealthy ways.	N	R	S	F	A
44. When I feel down because of grief I use alcohol or drugs.	N	R	S	F	A

45. I have become (more) avoidant of unpleasant emotions or conflict.	N	R	S	F	A
46. I have allowed a new relationship to take the place of grief.	N	R	S	F	A
47. I am keeping myself so busy I do not have time to think about grief.	N	R	S	F	A
48. All I want to do is sleep.	N	R	S	F	A
49. I fantasize about being with my loved one in heaven.	N	R	S	F	A
50. I wish I could die.	N	R	S	F	A
51. I have made plans about how I would kill myself.	N	R	S	F	A
52. I have a specific plan for how I would kill myself.	N	R	S	F	A
53. I have the things necessary to kill myself.	N	R	S	F	A
54. I am planning to take my own life.	N	R	S	F	A

**Key to Survey Scoring:** Give yourself one point for an “S” response, two points for an “F” response, and three points for an “A” response. If your total score matches the total number of questions, that is an area of concern. If your total score exceeds or doubles the total number of questions, it is a significant concern. If your total score more than doubles the total number of questions, it should be considered a life-dominating struggle.

**Grief and Depression:** Depression is not one of the nine expressions of grief listed below, because of the significant overlap in the two experiences. Depression also contains elements of anger, fear, loneliness, and identity transition. One way (helpful, although incomplete) to think of grief as “depression triggered by loss.”

➤ Questions 1-6: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 6 questions)

This set of questions describes grief that is disrupting life through **denial**. This means that the reality of your loss has not been acknowledged in a way that allows you to take the rest of the journey of grief in a healthy way. If your loss is more than one to two months in the past, this is a reason for concern.

➤ Questions 7-12: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 6 questions)

This set of questions describes grief that is disrupting life through **anger**. Grief is a response to something that was wrong. People were not made to die. Health was not made to break. Relationships were not made to be abused. These are products of the Fall. Anger is an appropriate response. Anger as a response within grief (John 11:38 – the Greek for Jesus being “deeply moved (ESV)” is speaking of anger) should not be confused with sinful anger in response to a desire not being fulfilled (James 4:1-3).

➤ Questions 13-18: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 6 questions)

This set of questions describes grief that is disrupting life through **fear**. Grief brings many kinds of uncertainties. It also reminds us of the brevity of life. In the face of grief we ask many questions about the purpose of life and whether our life is accomplishing anything of eternal significance. These are intimidating realities and reflections. Unless this fear begins to impair one’s ability to live effectively, then it should be considered a natural response to the magnitude of grief.

➤ Questions 19-24: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 6 questions)

This set of questions describes grief that is disrupting life through **loneliness**. Grief is often because of the loss of a significant relationship and grief always changes relationships by changing the griever. Loss often affects our willingness to trust or love others. So for obvious and less obvious reasons, one struggle that often accompanies grief is loneliness.

➤ Questions 25-30: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 6 questions)

This set of questions describes grief that is disrupting life through **life disruption**. Grief changes (directly and indirectly) our finances, schedule, social relationships, decision making process, and many other facets of life. We are forced to adapt to these changes while carrying the burden of heavy emotions. For many people this personal chaos inside an emotional firestorm is overwhelming.

➤ Questions 31-36: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 6 questions)

This set of questions describes grief that is disrupting life through **health impact**. Grief is an extremely stressful process and season of life. One of the significant effects of stress is that it suppresses our immune system. The body cannot give more energy to grieving without taking those resources from somewhere else. Unless this is understood a grieving person can feel like they are under severe oppression when they keep getting sick in the midst of their grief.

➤ Questions 37-42: (Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 6 questions)

This set of questions describes grief that is disrupting life through **identity transition**. We tend to define ourselves by the people and things we love. Often these things come with “titles”: parent, spouse, pastor, banker, athlete, achiever, successful, etc... When these are lost or redefined, we can struggle with our sense of identity. This does not mean that everything we loved was an idol. It does mean that we must learn to love and serve God in ways or roles that are new to us.

➤ Questions 43-48: (Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 6 questions)

This set of questions describes grief that is disrupting life through **escapism**. It is not bad to avoid pain. It is bad to avoid pain in a way that creates greater pain or life disruption. It is wrong to avoid unpleasant experiences if the lessons we must learn through them are essential to a healthy, God-honoring life. If you scored high on escapism, then you need to look carefully at what you are running to as you run from the pain of grief.

➤ Questions 49-54: (Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 6 questions)

This set of questions describes grief that is disrupting life through **suicidal thoughts**. Grief naturally brings death to our mind. Someone or something that we loved dearly is now on the other side of eternity and we would like to be with them. That is not irrational. However, if you score high on this scale, then you need to speak with a pastor or counselor immediately. Until you can do so, contact family or friends to stay with you, do not consume alcohol or drugs, and separate yourself from objects with which you could harm yourself. While your feelings are understandable, your solution is not. There is hope even if you cannot find it right now.

**Post-Traumatic Stress:** Many forms of grief can overlap with post-traumatic stress. If you are experiencing any of the following symptoms three months or longer after your loss, you may want to seek counseling for PTSD as you process the grief of your loss.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Intrusive recollections of the events surrounding your loss.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Recurrent dreams associated with your loss.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Flashbacks where you feel like you are re-experiencing the events surrounding your loss.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Intense distress when you experience things that remind you of your loss.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Feelings of detachment from others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Difficulty concentrating at your normal levels.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Hypervigilance – always looking for what is about to go wrong

**Encouragement Focus (ACKNOWLEDGE):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Am I avoiding the pain of facing my grief in ways that will create more pain?
- Have I been able to share with you who/what I lost and the roles they played in my life?
- Prepare: Am I maintaining balance in the six areas of preparation from chapter one?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your grief to your encouragement partner.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 3.

### "How Has My Life / Story Changed?"

UNDERSTAND the impact of my suffering.

**"I used to fear my grief and would not look at it,  
so I expected myself to live as if my loss never happened [describe].  
I can see how my loss has affected me [describe].**

**It was wrong to interpret the impact of suffering as sin or weakness.  
God is more gracious than that and I must agree with Him and not my fears.  
The impact is starting to make sense and help me see life differently [describe]."**

**Memorize:** Psalm 102:2-7 (ESV), "Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress! Incline your ear to me; answer me speedily in the day when I call! For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace. My heart is struck down like grass and has withered; I forget to eat my bread. Because of my loud groaning my bones cling to my flesh. I am like a desert owl of the wilderness, like an owl of the waste places; I lie awake; I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop." As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- Psalm – God gave you these words to speak to Him. He knew you would need them and wants to care for you.
- "Do not hide" – Suffering makes God feel far away and like he doesn't care. The psalmist felt it too.
- "My heart is struck down" – Grieving well does not mean we are unmoved throughout the experience.
- "I am... I am..." – Grief is more than an emotional struggle. It is an identity crisis. Who am I now?
- "I lie awake" – Night time was hard for the psalmist too. God heard him in the dark and he hears you too.

#### Teaching Notes

"It's not just the loss of your loved one that is so painful. It's all the other losses that occur because of this one. The way you live your life, love, sleep, eat, work, and worship are all affected. Often the death of your loved one brings up not just grief for what you lost but also for what you never had or never will have. There is a loss of the present as well as the future (p. 24)." H. Norman Wright in *Experiencing Grief*.

"I think I am beginning to understand why grief feels like suspense. It comes from the frustration of so many impulses that had become habitual. Thought after thought, feeling after feeling, action after action, had [my wife] for their object. Now their target is gone... So many roads lead thought to [my wife]. I set out on one of them. But now there's an impassible frontier-post across it. So many roads once; now so many culs de sac (p. 55)." C.S. Lewis in *A Grief Observed*

"The death of a child is likely the most tragic of griefs as it appears so unnatural to the life cycle. The impact of a child's long-term illness and death has profound impact on the marital relationship. Studies found that in cases where the children were hospitalized, 70 to 90% of those marriages resulted in separation or divorce (p. 370)." Sharon Hart May in "Loss and Grief Work" in *Caring for People God's Way* edited by Tim Clinton, Archibald Hart, and George Ohlschlager.

"A child will also revisit the event of death and the ensuing grief as she matures. At each stage of emotional and cognitive development, she understands the universe with more maturity. As she does so, she will also seek to understand this important event better. This means that two things are true about helping a grieving child. First, the task is never finished until the child reaches adulthood. Second, everything you say now is a building block for a more mature understanding later (p. 27)." Judy Blore in "How to Help a Grieving Child" from *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Winter 1998).

### Embedded Study

The most common way to "understand" grief is to think of it in terms of stages (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance) developed from the research of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. While useful, stages miss much of the personal significance that is present in grief. Stages may prepare us for what is probable (which means not everyone will follow the same path), but they do not help "me" understand or process that pain of "my grief."

In this study we will focus more on story and journey than stages. These concepts are meant to capture more of the personal, messy, and non-sequential nature of grief. Grief changes the way we view life, interact with people, the meaning we attach to things, our levels of trust or security, and our sense of identity. When people or things that we love and rely on can be removed from our life, we can begin to question everything.

This changes the way we commonly classify grief. Grief is more than an emotional struggle (like depression, anxiety, guilt, etc.). Grief contains so many changing emotions that the experience itself has to be more than an emotion. Grief is more foundationally a struggle of identity. Who am I now? How has my loss changed me? How will I relate to other people? What is different about me and what is the same? Notice how Winston Smith describes one element of the story-change that occurs during the grief of a divorce.

"Your marriage gave you a roadmap for the future. Your life seemed predictable (p. 6)." Winston Smith in *Divorce Recovery: Growing and Healing God's Way*

As you seek to understand the impact of your grief in this chapter, the discussion will focus upon how different factors can influence the meaning you place on your grief. In chapter four we will examine common ways these factors can be tailored into a destructive story—one that is emotionally or relationally crippling and makes God seem mean, powerless, or irrelevant. In chapter six we will examine how the Gospel gives healthy meaning to your grief without minimizing its pain.

It is here we will begin to introduce a phrase that will capture much of our objective in this study: clean grief. With this language we are comparing grief with a physical injury comparable to a cut. We cannot make such a wound heal, but we can keep it from becoming infected and, thereby, assist the natural, God-ordained healing process. The "infections" that can come with grief are the destructive interpretations we place on the experience. In this chapter we will begin to ask the kind of questions from which we make these interpretations.

**"Understand":** It is important to clarify what "understanding the impact of my suffering" does and does not mean at this point. Understanding will not mean knowing "why" you experienced this loss. It does mean that you can see the number of ways that this loss is affecting you, grasp how those influences are connected with your loss, and continue to trust God as you see how He will bring comfort and redemption in the midst of your grief.

### What Determines Impact?

The place to begin is to understand the factors that determine how a particular loss will impact you. Use the list below to begin to piece together influential aspects of your loss. Consider these reflections as gathering the raw materials you will need for chapters four and six. The explanations given to each question are not meant to be exhaustive, but enable you to reflect more effectively on each question.

1. **Did you have time or reason to anticipate your loss?** The finality of grief is startling enough without it catching us off guard. Without time to anticipate our loss, we can easily begin to feel as if even perceived peace is not safe. We begin bracing against impending loss, trying to protect ourselves from being taken off guard again. When there is time to anticipate our loss, it is easier to assimilate our loss into a cohesive life story.
2. **What type of loss did you experience?** Was your loss personal (a relationship) or material (a job); tangible (a home) or symbolic (respect with peers)? Different types of losses do not mean that some are more real than others. The same loss may have any combination of aspects. For instance the loss of a spouse would be personal (i.e., life partner, lover, friend), material (i.e., salary), tangible (i.e., an empty bed), and symbolic (i.e., certain Christmas traditions no longer able to be practiced). It is helpful to classify your loss because thinking through these categories helps us see the various dimensions of the loss we are grieving.
3. **What kind of support system do you have?** Loss can highlight, whether good or bad, the quality of your network of friends and family. Can you talk about your loss? It may be that certain losses, or aspects of the loss, are "acceptable" to talk about and others are not. Are you willing to talk about your loss with your friends? Does insecurity or fear on your part project an unwillingness to listen upon your friends? Do you interpret reaching out to others as being a burden and, thereby, multiply the pain of grief by guilt-ridden isolation?

If you are married, how has this loss affected communication within your marriage? Are you drawing closer together in your sorrow or are you isolating yourself? Does awkwardness in communication fuel the pain or bitterness regarding a general lack of communication? Times of grief are important times in a marriage. They will be seasons when the marriage is either significantly strengthened or significantly weakened.

4. **What was the age of the person you lost?** Were they "too young to die" or "in the prime of life"? Had "life not really begun" or was "death a relief of their suffering"? Were they older, younger, or near the same age as you or someone you love? These things impact how we incorporate a loss into our life story. No loss is easy to take, but some disrupt the narrative of our expectations more than others. Deaths that are younger than us erode our sense of control and security in life's predictability. Deaths that are close to our age bring the finality of life to our attention more.
5. **How old were you at the time of your loss?** Children have a hard time understanding the finality of death. As we get older, we begin to see death not only as a tragedy but also a personal possibility. This changes the emotional experience. It is often around times of grief that we are forced to consider the stage of life we are in and whether we are where we thought we would be. Our level of life accomplishment can become a significant variable in how we interpret our experience of guilt.

"The child will express his distress in ways that are appropriate to his age and personality. For example, a child's attention span is short – the younger the child, the shorter the span. This means that a child will not grieve for an extended period of time. Instead, he will grieve, play, return to grieving, and play again (p. 27)." Judy Blore in "How to Help a Grieving Child" from *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Winter 1998).

6. **How do you generally handle painful emotions?** Withdrawal. Fear. Distraction. Denial. Anger. Whatever our general tendencies are will likely re-emerge during grief. Grief aggravates many of our emotional and relational bad habits. We may have known we should approach painful emotions differently, but we could get away with not changing during lesser emotional disruptions. As we seek to grieve well, we will have to allow God to grow us in these areas. It is important not to confuse this growth with "why" you lost your loved one. That would make God cruel. But is also important to remember that you will not grieve clean unless you allow God to remove these infectious responses to painful emotions.
7. **What other losses have you experienced and how much time has passed?** Grief has a kind of emotional gravity; it attracts the memory and sensation of previous losses. If those previous losses were processed and grieved cleanly, then this is a benefit to your current experience. If not, then it means that many lies that were reinforced through emotionally intense experiences will have to be unlearned.

Both the number of losses and proximity of losses affect the impact of grief. A child may lose both parents within months or a parent may lose their spouse near the same time a child goes away to college. There are also times when a certain time of year becomes associated with multiple losses. For instance, Thanksgiving may be associated with a miscarriage, death of sibling, and learning of a spouse's affair over a five year period. These kinds of overlapping grief affect grief's impact and should be taken into consideration.

"It's common for a major loss to activate memories of earlier losses. And if those early losses weren't grieved over, the residue of accumulated pain may come back along with your current pain (p. 39)." H. Norman Wright in *Experiencing Grief*.

"Unresolved grief can cause serious emotional, mental, physical, spiritual, and social disruptions. The bereaved person becomes highly sensitized to any possible potential loss, real or imaginary, while he or she tries to continue functioning on the surface (p. 523)." N. Abi-Hashem in "Grief Therapy" from *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling* edited by David Benner and Peter C. Hill.

8. **How has this loss affected your social environment?** If you lost a spouse (death or divorce), how does it affect your interaction with couple friends? If you lost a child, how does it affect your relationship with other parents? If you lost a job, how does it affect your friendships with people from work? Each relationship we have influences other relationships. No loss only trips a single domino. How a loss affects our relationships becomes a major factor in how we interpret the loss.

"It feels like there's an empty house both inside and outside of you... Loneliness comes in only one size—extra large...Loneliness brings with it another feeling of not belonging... You may feel like a fifth wheel and even isolated at times (p. 36)." H. Norman Wright in *Experiencing Grief*.

9. **What significant events surrounded your loss?** Whether they are relevant to your loss or not, these events will likely take on meaning or add to the meaning of your loss. We can typically create meaning between grief and surrounding events in three ways: (1) regret, "If only grandma had lived two more months, she would have gotten to see her first great grandchild;" (2) association, "We were supposed to go the beach. I'm not sure I'll ever see a beach again without think about dad;" and (3) cause and effect, "I cheated on my taxes. I wonder if that is why God took my brother."
10. **What was the cause of your loss?** Illness. Natural disaster. Drunk driver. Suicide. Undetermined. Do you feel powerless before the cause (i.e., fear driving after dark because of loss related to a drunk driver) or angry enough to attack the cause (i.e., M.A.D.D. Mothers Against Drunk Drivers)? Does the absence of a cause make you feel like your life story is missing a page (i.e., lack of an explanation)? Did the one you lost play a role in his/her death (suicide or irresponsibility) so your grief for them is mixed with anger at them?
11. **What was your level of emotional stability before your loss?** Was life hectic and this is "the last thing I needed"? Was life starting to come together and "now I lost all momentum"? Was life stable and "at least I am able to focus on grieving well"? Grief will accentuate the situational and dispositional emotions in the life of each person. It is important to evaluate "how well you are grieving" on the basis of where you started the process from rather than against an ideal expectation.

"Handling grief may also be more difficult for people who are insecure, dependant, anxious, unable to control or express feelings, prone to depression, or living under stress (p. 349)." Gary Collins in *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide*

12. **How was the loss discovered and how was it reported to you?** There is a big difference between finding someone dead and learning of their death indirectly three weeks after the funeral. Was the person who told you compassionate, callous, or rude? Did you get the news from a stranger or a friend? How information enters your life impacts how easy it is to assimilate that information and the meaning given to it.
13. **Was there a body that allowed for closure?** Losses that do not involve a body are often harder to grieve. It is easier to wonder if they might still be alive, or, in the case of prenatal deaths, the grieving rituals are often truncated. In these cases where bodies are disfigured (i.e., car accident) the presence of a body can also make the grieving process more difficult. This is also why grief not triggered by death (i.e., divorce, abuse, or chronic pain) presents unique grieving challenges.
14. **Were those involved at peace with God, self, family, and others?** The emotional toll can be more intense when death finds those we love without their relationships in order. The temptation to engage in "if only" thinking becomes more intense. Guilt, regret, and fear can become the dominant themes by which think about our loss. These lead to a sense of powerlessness that can lead us to be passive or hyper-corrective in other areas of life.

"Self-recrimination is an unproductive activity: it keeps our focus on self so that we cannot focus on Christ (p. 24)." Judy Blore in "How to Help a Grieving Child" from *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Winter 1998).

15. **What are your beliefs about death, suffering, and eternity?** Many of us do not form our beliefs about death or eternity until we are face to face with grief. When we try to interpret an experience with the experience, it gives enormous power to the emotions of the moment. Could you put your beliefs about these things into words before your loss? What are you tempted to believe about these things in light of your loss? It is often better to phrase your thoughts about these things in the form of questions during the early part of grief so that you do not begin to crystallize your pain into beliefs. These larger questions will be examined in more depth in chapters four and six.

**Read Numbers 20:1.** The loss of a loved one is a significant event. Notice that Moses, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, considered it noteworthy to mention the death of his sister (Miriam) before the tragic events at Meribah (Numbers 20:2-13). Scripture consistently displays and says that the death of a loved one is a significant event. God does not expect us to be able to "just move on." Psalm 116:15 goes so far as to say, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." God takes notice of these moments of loss in a special way. We may be tempted to think that since the world keeps spinning that God is unmoved, but that is merely our pain interpreting our grief. God often "interrupts" the narrative of Scripture to note the funeral of one of His people.

**Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-11.** Notice that Paul did not want the Corinthians to be ignorant of the impact his suffering had upon him. He shared in raw terms that his suffering had "utterly burdened" him to the point he "despaired of life itself." Paul did not try to be strong for the church he planted. He knew it was better for him (and them) if he were honest about the impact of his suffering. Paul's honesty allowed his Corinthian friends to pray for him honestly (v. 11) and would give more credence to his words when he spoke to them about suffering (2 Cor. 4:16-18, 11:16-33, 12:1-10). It was actually Paul's regular practice to use his transparency about life's struggles as a part of his ministry (notice how Paul concludes his treatment of anxiety in Philippians 4:9).

**Read Romans 8:26-28.** Often in difficult times we skip directly to verse 28 to find assurance that God is still in control. But God wrote a preface to those words of comfort. In that preface is a reminder that the Holy Spirit puts our suffering into words for God to understand even when we cannot. God searches the depths of our hearts in our hardest times, because He is a loving Father who wants to know his children (not just tell them "everything is going to be okay"). If you are overwhelmed by these 15 questions, take heart. God is present and able to understand what you are presently unable to put into words. It is this preface to verse 28 that gives us precedent for steps four through six of this study and gives us hope that those steps are possible.

### Other Impacts of Grief

We have already asked many questions about our loss as we have prepared for the journey ahead. However, there are other common ways that loss impacts our lives. Those questions have focused on the facts surrounding our loss, our situation, our typical responses to painful events, and our beliefs. However, we want to understand more than our loss, we want to grasp how that loss may impact us. Below is a description of five ways grief's presence often impacts our lives.

If we do not understand our response we tend to think something is wrong with us. The fear of this thought exacerbates the experience and often drives us away from the Christian community God has provided to share the load. Just being able to point to this page and say to a friend, "That is the part of my grief that is troubling me most now," should help alleviate some of the tendency towards fear or isolation.

1. **Loss of a sense of time.** Relationships and routines often help us tell time more than watches and calendars. The loss of relationship and routine adds to the disruption of grief. While we recognize our setting, it is hard to feel like we know where we are. Our space and time does not make sense or feels like it fits without the one that I lost. When you take one dominant character or role out of your life it feels like your living in a different story.

You may be late for or forget things that were parts of your regular routine. Just keeping up with day to day life may take much more energy, because you have to think about the details much more than before your loss. You may feel silly for repeatedly asking what time, day of the week, or even the month it is. This is common and not something you should be embarrassed or feel awkward about.

2. **Short term memory loss.** The brain can only do so much at one time. Processing the significance, permanence, and implication of your loss is taking much of your cognitive capacity. In the same way that your computer runs slower when it's running a system scan, your memory is weaker when your mind is processing grief. This can be very unsettling for people.

"A frequent perception of the normal grief-stricken individual is, 'I'm losing my mind.' This fear of disorganization threatens one's self-confidence and is perhaps the most debilitating aspect of grief (p. 520)." J.A. Larsen in "Grief" from *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling* edited by David Benner and Peter C. Hill.

Rest in knowing that this impact is not permanent or long-term. Anxiety regarding this change will only make the problem worse. This is another reason why it is wise to simplify your life as much as possible and refrain from non-essential decisions while grieving.

3. **Changes in relationships.** This has been alluded to previously, but can be a major complicating factor in the grieving process. In addition to the changes in relationship, your interpretation of those changes is powerfully important. Often people are tempted to equate the loneliness of grief with now being a "social misfit." This serves to add to the social and emotional isolation.

"Children often interpret death, especially the death of parent, as a form of rejection... Children are sensitive to any signs of adult insecurity and need to know that they will not be forsaken (p. 356)." Gary Collins in *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide*



**List:** The ways you have (rightly and wrongly) interpreted the social changes resulting from your loss:

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Place an asterisk (\*) besides those interpretations that are having the biggest impact on your life.

4. **Guilt.** Grief is a result of suffering – wrongs in the world that we did not cause but still negatively affect us. Often there is not one to blame for the suffering, or if there is they resist taking responsibility. This creates a vacuum of responsibility and explanation that is hard to accept. Our tendency is to fill that vacuum with some form of guilt-laden thinking. H. Norman Wright describes seven ways we can do this in his book *Experiencing Grief* (bold print only, modified and adapted from pages 40-42).
  - a. **Taking responsibility for the loss.** "If only I had only made them go to the doctor, noticed a symptom, or made an extra visit to know there was a problem." There are any number of ways that we could change the events preceding our loss. It is a short trip from could-have (possibility) to should-have (responsibility and guilt) to would-have-made-a-difference (convinced history would be different). This is an unhealthy way to fill the explanation vacuum which tries to make our choices more significant than God's sovereignty over history.
  - b. **Not spending enough time together.** "If only I had taken more time just to be with them, then this loss wouldn't be so hard." The word *enough* is a guilt-laden word. Use "enough" in an evaluative question with any good thing (prayer, time with kids, Bible study, time with spouse, etc...) and you will be left feeling guilty. We always want to have spent more time having done good things. God honors our finiteness more than we do. He made us to live in a world of limited time and resources. His expectations of us match the world He created for us to live in.
  - c. **Unresolved issues in relationship.** "If only I had addressed our differences, forgiven them, or not said anything to begin with." Death has a way of making relational sin feel like a permanent mark. We must remember that forgiveness is something we receive from God. In eternity our loved one has a perspective on the unresolved issue which makes it a non-issue for them. We want to learn from our tardiness (if the possibility of change was in our power) but not become emotionally trapped within it through guilt.
  - d. **Survivor's Guilt.** "If only it had been me instead of them." These were the very words of David when he heard of the death of his rebellious son Absalom in 2 Samuel 18:33, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom. Would I have died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" In this desire we find God's heart for us (John 15:13). But their death and our life is not a choice we made and we should not create an emotional world in which it is a choice we could unmake.
  - e. **Not recovering from guilt "right" or quickly enough.** "If only I were not so sentimental, weak, or stupid, I would be able to grieve right and be over this already." If we cannot beat ourselves up for being responsible, then maybe we can account for the pain of grief by blaming ourselves for not grieving correctly. At least that would give us something we are doing wrong to make sense of the disruption in our life. But this would make grief either wrong or a timed race. It is neither.
  - f. **Time of reflection over life – failures and purpose.** "If only I were doing something more worthwhile with my life." Death causes us to reflect on life. If we are not a part of some great life purpose, then that disappointment can become the focal point of the intense negative emotional experience of grief. The negative energy of grief wrongly attaches (they are unrelated) to our sense of failure or lack of purpose and makes an intense guilt experience. We must remember that attempts to motivate ourselves by guilt will be short-lived and crushing. It is only when we are motivated by God's glory and our delight in His grace that we can sustain a sense of purpose that will be satisfying.
  - g. **A way of punishing myself to prove my love for my loved one.** "If I stop grieving, does that mean I have stopped loving or remembering them?" This is a particularly ensnaring guilt-grief loop. To the degree that our grief dissipates our guilt proportionately grows. Grief is only one expression of love, and not the only one you have left. Ultimately, we love our deceased friends best by advancing the kingdom of which they are now fully a part. In so doing we complete their joy and delight their Delight.

**Question:** How are you using "if only ..." thinking to get around grief? How does this make you feel guilty for the suffering of grief? How does a sense of control or explanation make it seem worth the guilt?

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- 5. **Relief.** This can be a response to grief that is hard for people to process. As H. Norman Wright says in *Experiencing Grief*, “One of the secret feelings of grief is relief (p. 58).” This can be true when the person lost was experiencing significant suffering, required a high level of care, or if they were an abusive person. In these cases the relief that comes with their passing can be mistaken for having wanted them to die. While this makes sense, it is not sound logic. Just because someone feels relief after they vomit, does not mean they wanted to or enjoyed vomiting. The relief often speaks to the nature of the situation more than the character of the grieving person.

**Question:** Looking back over the previous five points (and three chapters) what have you felt in light of your loss? The list of emotions may feel too long to write, but taking the time to put it into words can be an effective way to get your mind around what you are going through and further prepare yourself to share with friends who can share your burden.

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**Read Isaiah 53:3-5.** Consider all that you have learned about grief and your loss in these first three chapters. See Jesus as “a man of sorrow, acquainted with grief (v. 3)” and as the one who “bore our grief” and “carried our sorrows (v. 4).” Often when we experience intensely negative emotions we view God as far away and aloof to our experience. We will explore this tendency in more detail in chapter four. For now, pause and see that you are not alone on this journey. Your companion is the Son of God Himself. Not only is He with you, but He knows this path personally and is willing to walk it again with you. You have a companion Who both loves you and knows the way.

**Read Job 3:11-12, 16, 20, 23; 7:20-21; 9:29; 10:2,18; 13:14, 24; 19:22; 21:4, 7; 24:1; 27:12.** In these verses you will find that Job asks God “why?” 21 times. Many of these questions carry a tone of anger, fear, or doubt. Too often we believe that God expects us to understand our suffering and grief without experiencing any emotional turbulence. Do not take the previous reflection on Isaiah 53 to mean that because you have an experienced and loving guide that this should mute your emotions and questions during the grieving process. Like Job you may not get an answer to your questions. But by continuing to cry out to God you remain connected to hope. Trust that, like Job, your questions no matter how raw will not preclude you from continued living in God’s blessing (Job 42:10-17).

“God is often silent when we prefer that he speak; and he interrupts us when we prefer that he stay silent... It means that we worship a God who is often mysterious—too mysterious to fit our formulas for better living (p. 135).” Craig Barnes in *When God Interrupts*

**Encouragement Focus (UNDERSTAND):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Have I honestly looked at the factors that contribute to how this loss is affecting me?
- Am I being open about the relational and emotional changes my grief is generating?
- Prepare: Am I maintaining balance in the six areas of preparation from chapter one?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your grief to your encouragement partner.

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## Chapter 4.

### "The Darkest Part of My Journey"

LEARN MY SUFFERING STORY which I use to make sense of my experience.

**"I formed beliefs [define] about myself, life, and God from my grief.  
I lived out of those beliefs [describe] because they were all I knew and they 'worked.'  
Those beliefs became the guiding themes of my life story.  
Putting those beliefs into words scares me [describe why].  
I reject that life story and am committed to learning how my life fits into  
God's great story of redemption."**

**Memorize:** Psalm 22:1-2 (ESV), "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest." As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- Matthew 27:46 – These words also entered Jesus' story. They are one of the common themes of a fallen world.
- "Forsaken me" – Grief makes it feel like God has turned His back on us.
- "So far" – More than back turned, grief makes it feel like God is walking away from us.
- "Do not answer" – When God does not end the pain of grief it is easy to believe He is not hearing our prayers.
- "No rest" – In the storm of grief it easy to think God is a liar for not keeping His promise (Matt. 11:28-30).

#### Teaching Notes

"As we struggle with the ache of loss, the grip of our grief imposes a kind of relational paralysis. Perhaps grief is a true reflection of hell, where the ache of losing God and all good, including the good of community, will be endless. Be that as it may, a most painful part of the pain of grief is the sense that no one, however, sympathetic and supportive in intention, can share what we are feeling, and it would be a betrayal of our love for the lost one to pretend otherwise. So we grieve alone, and the agony is unbelievable (p. 144)." J.I. Packer in *A Grief Sanctified*

"Meanwhile, where is God?... You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become...Why is He so present a commander in our time of prosperity and so very absent a help in time of trouble?... I have gradually been coming to feel that the door is no longer shut and bolted... The time when there is nothing at all in your soul except a cry for help may be just the time when God can't give it: you are like a drowning man who can't be helped because he clutches and grabs. Perhaps your own reiterated cries deafen you to the voice you hoped to hear... After all, you must have a capacity to receive, or even omnipotence can't give (p. 53-54)." C.S. Lewis in *A Grief Observed*

"Numerically, there are more psalms of complaint and lament than psalms of praise and thanksgiving... A mood of faith trusts God enough to bring everything about us to Him (p. 33)." Bob Kellemen in *God's Healing for Life's Losses*.

"It is an act of faith to bring that complaint to him in the pattern of these psalms. Your faith in God should never silence you in the dark hours of grief. Rather, this is when we begin to understand how deep, rich, and sturdy God's love for us really is (p. 9)." Paul Tripp in *Grief: Finding Hope Again*

"You are not exactly who you were. The person you lost was part of your identity. You were someone's mother or aunt or spouse or brother. You continue to be that person in your heart and memory, but there's a vacant place where your loved one stood (p. 22)." H. Norman Wright in *Experiencing Grief*

### Embedded Study

At several points in the study you have probably begun to question God, doubt Him, be angry at Him, or wonder if what you think about Him really makes any difference. We’ve brought many painful pieces of grief to mind. When we look at it, we naturally ask, “Where does ‘the buck’ stop?” It stops with God (or whoever, whatever is in control... if anything is).

It has been said that animals divide between herbivores (those eating plants) and carnivores (those eating meat), but the humans are verbivores – we live off of words, or, more accurately, off of the meaning we give to life through words. This is why we’ve emphasized the themes of story, journey, and identity so much. They are how we “digest” life.

“No one is more influential in your life than you are, because no one talks to you more than you do. You are in an unending conversation with yourself. You are talking all the time, interpreting, organizing, and analyzing what’s going on inside you and around you (p. 56).” Paul Tripp in *A Shelter in the Time of Storm*.

We are now going to explore how we give meaning to all the facts, experiences, influences, and changes we have unpacked in the first three chapters. It is by giving meaning to these things that we will “process” our grief – for better or worse, healthily or unhealthily. Trying to make meaning of death requires that we wrestle with things beyond this life. Just as making sense of a tadpole becoming a frog requires considering things outside the pond.

“The life of the most insignificant man is a battlefield on which the mightiest forces of the universe converge in warfare—this elevates the status of the lowliest and least person on earth (p. 108)!... Suffering has no meaning in itself. Left to its own, it is a frustrating and bewildering burden. But given the context of relationship, suffering suddenly has meaning (p. 127).” Joni Eareckson Tada & Steven Estes in *When God Weeps*.

But we must not think that this requires us to think only “nice,” theologically precise thoughts about life, death, and God. We do not approach this search for meaning as an academic exercise – like a scientist looking for the cure for cancer – but in an intensely personal way – like a cancer patient asking, “Isn’t there anything that can be done?” In order for the meaning to be satisfying or healthy it must emerge from asking the question as we are living the question – raw.

With this in mind, this chapter will ask dark questions; questions for which there are no “good” answers, only honest answers. Recognize that it is not irreverent to ask God painful questions full of honest emotion when a storm of suffering engulfs us. The fact that we bring God our questions honors Him. God knows the limitation of our mind, heart, and body. God hears them like a parent whose child is screaming because of a doctor’s shot – while the scream may sound and be meant as defiance and doubt it is an expression of faith in the parent’s love and the parent’s willingness to help if something could be done.

“The irony of questioning God is that it honors him: it turns our hearts away from ungodly despair toward a passionate desire to comprehend him (p. 150).” Tremper Longman in *The Cry of the Soul*.

**Question:** What do you think the Bible teaches about expressing our pain, sadness, fear, or anger to God?  
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**Question:** How do you think about God’s involvement and response to you in the midst of your loss?  
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“We must never distance the Bible’s answers from God. The problem of suffering is not about some *thing* but *Someone*. It follows that the answer must not be some *thing*, but *Someone*... Besides, answers are for the head. They don’t always reach the problem where it hurts—in the gut and in the heart (p. 124).” Joni Eareckson Tada & Steven Estes in *When God Weeps*.

### Themes of Our Suffering Story

How do we get from experience to story? We begin to summarize our experience in thematic statements. Whether we verbalize these statements or just feel them to be true, these themes become the basis of how we prepare for the future and interpret the present. These themes make some experiences highly relevant and others “exceptions to the rule.” These themes begin to define who we are, who God is, and what we should expect from others or life. We will look at this journey from experience to story again at the end of this chapter.

We are going to look at seven unhealthy themes that we can use to make sense of our loss: (1) God is not good, (2) God does not care, (3) God is not able to help, (4) I deserve this, (5) relationships hurt, (6) life is meaningless, and (7) evil wins. Our goal will not be to refute or debunk each theme. At this point, we just want an honest, accurate understanding of what is going on in our mind and heart. Besides picking these themes apart now would give the impression that we could reason our way out of grief.

Instead of refuting, our goal will be to examine what makes each theme so tempting to believe and to display God's compassion in wanting to free you from the bondage of each theme. God does not approach us in our grief as a theology professor grading our belief system. God approaches us as disoriented, lost children who are trying to navigate a reality that is more complex than we can understand. Ultimately death requires an eternal perspective to understand and as finite creatures we don't have that.

As you study these seven themes realize you may interchange them or use them in combinations. There is no reason to ask, "Which one (singular) am I?" One or two themes may be dominate for you, but as you read try to see when you may use each one to make sense of your loss. As you progress on your grief journey different unhealthy themes may come to the forefront of how you tell your story.

You may also find that each theme may correlate with the classic emotions of the grief stages (anger, bargaining/questioning, depression). You may find your emotions change as you use a different theme to make sense of your loss. In the midst of the emotions, it can be hard to recognize how your emotions are correlating with your changing themes of interpretation. Do not let that make it feel like you are failing. Recognize that our emotions respond to our beliefs, and that just because the emotions we feel in response to our loss are real does not mean that the interpretation upon which those emotions are founded are true.

"Sometimes you may feel anger at the one who died. Survivors sometimes feel deserted or victimized... Often anger comes because we feel out of control, powerless, or victimized (p. 44)." H. Norman Wright in *Experiencing Grief*.

As you go through this section, it is particularly important to enlist the support of a Christian friend, mentor, or support group. If not, you inadvertently reinforce beliefs and their corresponding emotions that you truly don't believe. When you say something false out loud to another person who cares for you, it is easier to recognize the distortion than when the same thought just echoes in your own mind. The presence of a companion on this section of the grief journey can help you be honest (an important part of the process) without giving into despair.

1. **God is not good.** I look at my loss and conclude, "If God did this, then He is not good. I cannot look in my experience and find anything good, so how could I conclude anything else?" This theme just tries to connect the dots – bad experiences in a bad world means there is a bad God.

But there could not have been something so good that we would grieve its loss if God were not good. Our grief confirms God's goodness. As God's creation we were capable of love and in God's creation there was someone worth loving. This would only be possible if God were good.

Try not to feel rebuked or debated in these words. That is not their intent. We are trying to warm to the possibility of hope on this step not make the whole journey. On this step you are not trying to be convinced of a new interpretation, but merely beginning to see that a healthier and more accurate interpretation does exist.

How have you been tempted to interpret your loss as if, "God is not good"?

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2. **God does not care.** It is a callous adult who rips a stuffed animal from the arms of a child and watches the child cry. That is often how grief feels. Something precious that provided security and identity has been ripped from our grasp and we are left to cry. How could God be caring and allow this?

While grief may feel like heaven has ruthlessly taken hostage of someone or something we love, we must not forget we were not ultimately made for this world. Death is more like the parent who requires the child to leave their stuffed animal at home, so it will not be lost on a trip of running errands. This image implies more purpose in the timing of a death than is intended, but its primary purpose is to convey that heaven is where God makes good things permanent rather than hiding them from you.

As we tell the story of our suffering it will begin to reveal what we consider to be permanent, safe, and home. How we define these things goes a long way towards determining if God is considered trustworthy. As you examine how your suffering is tempting you to make sense of life, recognize that your natural instincts on these matters may not serve you best.

How have you been tempted to interpret your loss as if, “God does not care”?

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**3. God is not able to help.** If I feel I am in danger and need a gun to protect myself, but you have no gun to offer me, then it is easy to conclude that you cannot help. But there are many other forms of protection you may be able to offer. However, the more convinced I am that a gun is my only means of protection, the less profitable I will view any further interaction with you.

Similarly, in our grief we just want our loved one back or the pain to stop. We have defined “help” (in a very rational way, I might add), but our definition may blind us to other forms of help that God is providing. This should not be taken to mean that our desired form of help is bad, but only caution us against using our definition of help to write our life story as if God were impotent.

As we tell the story of our suffering it will also begin to reveal what we consider good and beneficial. How we define these words will determine whether we view God as “for us” and active in our situation. Resist the urge to reduce this to a question like “God took [blank], so I would learn what?” That makes it sound as if death is optional and God’s involvement based upon a mathematical equation that must balance. Rather begin looking for answers to a question like, “Where and how can I find God’s presence in the midst of this suffering?”

How have you been tempted to interpret your loss as if, “God is not able to help”?

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**4. I deserve this.** Once we let God off the hook, we try to get on it. We may do so through superstitious beliefs about our attracting hardships and it being “bad luck” for us to like something or get close to someone. Or, we might begin drawing cause-and-effect connections between particular sins we’ve committed and our loss.

This theme is so tempting because it gives us a sense of control. We can remove ourselves and remove the “bad luck.” We can learn to not sin in that way and, thereby, not have to face grief again. While the burden of guilt is intense in this story, the seeming potential for self-protection is great enough to make it an appealing story line.

However, it is not in our power to trade grief for guilt. One of the most destructive theme changes in our suffering story is when we try to make it a sin story. When we do this, we begin to seek God’s forgiveness (seeing Him, now, as against us) rather than God’s comfort. With time, this twist makes the first theme (God is not good) seem much more plausible, because we can never please God enough (in this fourth theme) to make our suffering stop.

How have you been tempted to interpret your loss as if, “I deserve this”?

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**5. Relationships hurt.** If I only grieve because I love, then maybe love is the problem instead of grief. Love is the Trojan Horse that allows grief into my world, so relationships are dangerous and should be avoided to prevent this pain from returning. If I am not successful eliminating the symptom of grief, then maybe I need to attack the root of love.

This “cure” is truly worse than the disease. Although, this can be hard to see when the grief is impacting your world in all the ways we have discussed in the first three chapters. In reality, relationships are part of the cure. Isolation results in more losses that would compound your current grief. That intensifying pain, within this fifth theme, would push you further into isolation. Soon you would be living a life of grief.

This theme is probably the truest of the seven we will examine. But it takes a part of the story, the part you are living in right now, and makes it the whole story. Relationships are also healing, nurturing, sanctifying, enjoyable, and an

expression of God’s nature (Trinity). When you are prone to use this theme to interpret your suffering story, you will not refute it but you can place it in context.

How have you been tempted to interpret your loss as if, “Relationships hurt”?

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**6. Life is meaningless.** If every other way I have thought about is wrong, then maybe there is no “right” answer. Maybe I am driving myself crazy and elongating my pain by chasing something that doesn’t exist. People spent years trying to find the formula to create gold out of common metals (alchemy) and that never worked. Maybe I am doing the same thing in trying to understand my loss.

Mental and emotional exhaustion can make this theme very appealing. There is some value in this theme – it allows us to quit treating grief as a riddle than has to be solved. The danger is when we allow this relief from solving a riddle to introduce cynicism or despondency through the theme “life is meaningless.”

Suffering, by definition, does not obey the law of cause and effect. Suffering (theologically speaking) is when we experience bad things that are not the direct consequence of our sin. But God’s great story of redemption is larger than personal sin. All creation will be redeemed and is currently groaning for redemption (Rom. 8:22). In order to avoid the perils of this theme of meaninglessness, we must interpret our suffering in a context larger than our life. That is particularly hard when our life is requiring more than we feel like we have to give in the moment.

How have you been tempted to interpret your loss as if, “Life is meaningless”?

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**7. Evil wins.** I give up. The problem is that I kept trying to make this a story with a happy ending, one where good wins. I was wrong. The simplest solution was right after all. There was a meaning for my suffering, but it was the meaning I feared most. My whole faith and hope for life was built on the belief that good would triumph over evil. I’ve lost more than a loved one. I’ve realized I was living a lie.

With this theme we would move from exhaustion and cynicism to full-fledged despair. Up is now down. Hot is now cold. Hope is now the phantom and fear the reality. This is a common response to death. After Jesus’ death the disciples interpreted their grief in the same story. Until Jesus’ resurrection any other interpretation was just a promise and something hoped to be true.

This theme ultimately will take us into the very heart of God’s Gospel story for our grief. If evil wins, then all the other six themes are true. But God does not rush you to this hope. God wants to bring you to it at a pace you can bear. In addition to that, God wants you to mourn your loss free from these false themes, because God cares for you and wants to honor the love you shared with the one you lost. That is why step five (mourning) precedes step six (learning your Gospel story).

How have you been tempted to interpret your loss as if, “Evil wins”?

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**Read Psalm 88.** This is the darkest psalm in the entire Bible. It fully embraces the destructive themes described above. Read the words of Paul Tripp as he describes how we can find hope from the fact that God inspired such dark words to be included in Scripture.

“Psalm 88 gives us hope in our grief precisely because it has no hope in it! It means that God understands the darkness we face. He is right there in it with us, “an ever-present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1). The Lord of light is your friend in darkness. The Lord of life stands beside you in death. The Lord of hope is your companion in your despair. The Prince of Peace supports you when no peace can be found. The God of all comfort waits faithfully near you. The Source of all joy is close by when death has robbed you of joy (p. 5).” Paul Tripp in *Grief: Finding Hope Again*

**Read Matthew 15:32-16:12.** Notice how the disciples interpret Jesus' words and actions (16:7) in light of their recent experiences (16:5) rather than what Jesus was doing in their lives (15:32-16:4). Jesus had to point out the larger context of their lives in order for them to understand his words and actions (16:8-11). Only then were they able to understand (16:12). Grief is a time when our recent experience overpowers everything else that God has and is doing. As you reflect on how these seven themes distort the story by which you make sense of suffering, know this is a common experience. It happened to the twelve men who spent the most time with Jesus right after he did a miracle. Jesus was patient in nurturing them and God will be patient in nurturing you.

**Read Romans 5:1-5.** Notice that Paul begins this discussion of suffering by reminding his readers of the grace of God and the actions of God through Christ to actualize that grace (refuting themes 1-3). Then Paul goes on to talk about how suffering is used by God to accomplish good and should not result in shame (refuting themes 4-7). But the fact that Paul addresses these themes reveals that these are some of the most common lies Satan would use to intensify our suffering. Consider this chapter like cleaning a cut. There is still healing that needs to be done and that will take time. But by removing these infectious themes from the wound you are following the instructions of the Great Physician who takes great care in ministering to his children.

### From Facts to Themes to Story

How do we develop experience into a story? The answer to this question is very personal. While we may all interpret life according to similar themes or combination of themes, the way we move from events to story can be quite unique. The stories themselves are as unique as we are.

Rather than me proposing a model of story development that seeks to capture the thought process of every person, it would be better to provide a guided, inductive tour of how you have moved from experience to story. Start with the material you wrote in chapter two detailing the chronological facts of your loss.

You marked a point where you felt like the facts became "unstoried." Look at the facts beyond this point and reflect on the materials from this chapter.

- How you have already begun to make sense of them with the seven themes above?
- Which of the seven themes do you naturally gravitate towards?
- Is this gravitation new with this grief or a tendency you have had for a while?
- How have these themes distorted your interpretation of new life events not directly related to your grief?
- How have these themes caused you to reinterpret past events in light of your recent loss?
- What phrases or thoughts capture your preferred theme(s)? How often do you say them to yourself or others?
- What kind of things do you find yourself naturally arguing with in the words and actions of others?
- Who or what has become more and less trusted during your grief?

As you reflect on these questions, it should help you see how you have (or are) moving from facts to story. If you do not like what you discover, do not be alarmed. The fact that you can see the destructive themes as "not good," means that the destructive themes do not have the place of dominance in your heart and mind.

Here the struggle of pastor and counselor Bob Kellemen as he talks about wrestling with the themes of his suffering story during a time of grief.

"I was surviving again, surviving though scarred. I was not and never again would be that same naïve young Christian who assumed that if I prayed and worked hard enough, God would grant me my every expectation. My faith was not a naïve faith; it was now a deeper faith—a faith that could walk in the dark (p. 54)." Bob Kellemen in *God's Healing for Life's Losses*.

**Read Mark 9:14-28 (focus v. 24).** Here a father is wrestling with a life and death situation for his son. In the midst of the situation he begins to doubt the power of God (v. 22). The theme of "God cannot help" begins to interpret the father's experience. Jesus sees this interpretation as the greatest danger for the father (v. 23). The father prays, "I believe; help my unbelief (v. 24)!" This was enough to unleash the power of God. The father could not honestly say he had completely let go of the destructive theme. Jesus did not ask the father to reach this level of certainty or to live in denial of his emotional state. This is all God asks of you as well. Know the destructive themes that Satan would use to cut you off from grieving with hope (1 Thes. 4:13), and when you feel those themes emerge pray, "I believe; help my unbelief."



**Read Ruth 1:1-22.** This first chapter of Ruth captures well how far we have come so far on this grief journey. Naomi has acknowledged the facts of her loss. She has lost her husband and both sons (v. 1-5). The implication for her was not only grief, but also poverty. Whether the motive is love or self-protection through isolation, Naomi’s response is to care for others and isolate (v. 8-9). She begins to interpret her experience through the theme that God is against her (v. 13). This interpretation that she even wanted to change her name from Naomi, which means pleasant, to Mara, which means bitter (v. 20). While she does not know what she has done wrong, she believes that this calamity must be her fault and that her circumstances are God’s testimony against her (v. 21). We see that God heard Naomi’s suffering story (or else it would not be recorded in God’s Word). We can see from the rest of Naomi’s story that while her emotions were very real, the interpretations upon which they were based were false. God did not give Naomi another husband or child, but God did work mightily to provide care for Naomi and Ruth which would result in the family line of King David and, ultimately, Jesus.

**Encouragement Focus (SUFFERING STORY):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Can I identify the destructive themes by which I am tempted to make sense of my loss?
- Am I aware of the times and ways in which I am tempted to use those themes to distort my circumstances?
- Prepare: Am I maintaining balance in the six areas of preparation from chapter one?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your grief to your encouragement partner.

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## Chapter 5.

### **“The Journey Is About More Than the Destination”**

MOURN the wrongness of what happened and receive God’s comfort.

**“I am willing to agree with God emotionally about my loss.**

**I can see that God does not just want me to ‘get over this’**

**but to ‘love me through my loss.’ [describe difference]**

**I will accept that ‘blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Matt 5:4)’**

**as expressed by God’s loving me personally through this group.**

**Mourning my suffering with God and this group has changed me [describe].”**

**Memorize:** Ecclesiastes 7:2-4 (ESV), “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting for this is the end of all mankind and the living will lay it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Better” – Mourning is better because it fits the occasion (Eccl. 3:1-8) and honors the good gift from God you lost.
- “Feasting... laughter” – This passage does not condemn feasting and laughing (Eccl. 7:14).
- “House of mourning” – Mourning always hits “home” because it is always linked to things that we love.
- “The end... lay it to heart” – Mourning is a time we remember that we were not ultimately made for this world.
- “By sadness... made glad” – The sadness of grief is not minimized, but is seen as the pathway to honest, lasting joy.

### Teaching Notes

“Death is the enemy of everything good and beautiful about life. Death should make you morally sad and righteously angry... It is biblical to treat death as the sad, unnatural thing it actually is (p. 4)... In times of death, Christians should be sadder than anyone else. We know how sin brought death into the world. We mourn not only for the loved one we have lost, but also for the fact that death continues to destroy... God doesn’t call you to stifle your grief when you are crushed. He doesn’t expect you to hide behind religious clichés and theological platitudes. God approves your tears (p. 8)!” Paul Tripp in *Grief: Finding Hope Again*

“[Referencing John 11:35] If you knew you were about to turn everything around, would you be drawn down into grief, entering into the trauma and pain of their hearts? Why would Jesus do that? Because he is perfect. He is perfect love. He will not close his heart even for ten minutes (p. 4).” Tim Keller in “Truth, Tears, Anger, and Grace” from *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Fall 2001).

“We all need to learn to say goodbye, acknowledge the pain that is there for us so we can eventually move on to another hello. When we learn to say goodbye we truly learn how to say to ourselves and to others: Go. God be with you. I entrust you to God. The God of strength, courage, comfort, hope, love is with you. The God who promises to wipe away all tears will hold you close and will fill your emptiness. Let go and be free to move on. Do not keep yourself from another step in your homeward journey. May the blessing of our God be with you (p. 7-8).” Joyce Rupp in *Praying Our Goodbyes*.

“And so it is in our sadness that we discover a new aspect of God’s character and reach a new understanding of Him that we could not have known without loss. He is acquainted with grief. He understands. He’s not trying to rush us through our sadness. He’s sad with us (p. 51).” Nancy Guthrie in  *Holding on to Hope*.

### Embedded Study

No matter how “clean” our interpretations or how pure our story, the sadness of grief will remain. It will hurt because someone precious is missing. Mourning (which has been happening before we named it as “step five” and will continue to happen through step nine) simply acknowledges that we will never “master grief” to the point that it does not hurt.

Sometimes Christians can believe (or at least feel) as if any negative emotional experience is a lack of confidence in God or a violation of the command to rejoice always (Phil. 4:4). We know this is not true because the sinless Son of God wept at the death of his good friend Lazarus (John 11:35). In addition to Jesus’ example we have commands to weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15).

In this chapter we are going to examine the sadness of grief, the painful sense of unchanging absence. In this step, we are going to explore what it means to walk through this sadness (Psalm 23:4) rather than around or away from it. In many ways the first four chapters have prepared you to mourn your loss in its entirety (both physical and symbolic aspects of the loss) with less emotional distractions from unhealthy themes. But even “clean grief” is not a muted grief.

**List:** From your experience to this point on your grief journey what events, people, sounds, activities, settings, topics of conversation, or other things have been triggers for moments of more intense mourning. Taking the time to list these things will help you prepare for this chapter and the materials for chapters seven and eight.

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### A Celebration through Tears

There are many definitions of mourning, but I will still add my own to the list. Mourning is the celebration of a good gift from God expressed through sadness because of its absence and a residual aching for its return at the time when all things will be made right in the new creation.

**Question:** What was good, special, or unique about the person you lost and the relationship you shared?

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**Reflection:** Do you feel free to celebrate those good things through tears? Does the sadness of mourning make your grieving feel like something other than a painful celebration of what God gave you for a time? How does this mindset (celebration through sadness) towards mourning change your perspective on the experience of grief?

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**Question:** What prevents you from believing that God agrees with and joins you in your grief?

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**Read Isaiah 61:1-4.** Israel is mourning the loss of the great city of Jerusalem and its temple. Notice that God recognizes their grief as the celebration of something that was good and agrees with them. God’s agenda is to restore to them what was lost in Heaven. God is not offended by their grief. God sends Isaiah to let Israel know that the painful longings of their hearts are good and that he intends to fulfill those desires in a way that grief will not be able to touch again. In the mean time, God’s words to them are words of comfort – not to erase the experience of grief, but to validate it.

A similar portrait of this face of God can be found in C.S. Lewis’ depiction of Aslan in the *Chronicles of Narnia* series. In the first book in this series, *The Magician’s Nephew*, Digory finds his way into Narnia on the day of its creation searching for a cure for his dying mother’s cancer. Digory inadvertently introduces sin (in the form of a witch) into the new world of Narnia and then faces Aslan. Conversation with the Great Lion (representing Christ) turns from the witch to Digory’s dying mother.

"But please, please - won't you - can't you give me something that will cure Mother?"

Up till then he had been looking at the Lion's great feet and the huge claws on them; now, in his despair, he looked up at its face. What he saw surprised him as much as anything in his whole life. For the tawny face was bent down near his own and (wonder of wonders) great shining tears stood in the Lion's eyes. They were such big, bright tears compared with Digory's own that for a moment he felt as if the Lion must really be sorrier about his Mother than he was himself.

My son, my son,' said Aslan. 'I know. Grief is great. Only you and I in this land know that yet. Let us be good to one another.'" C.S. Lewis in *The Magician's Nephew*

## Grief and Time

Psalm 13: I might be the universal prayer of grieving people, "How long, O Lord?" We want to know how long it will (or should) take. When will it be over? Am I on pace? Can I do this any faster? What steps do I need to take to help the process along? God, if there is a lesson I need to learn, please tell me what it is so I can be done with the sorrow.

But then we might begin to feel guilty. We might not want the sorrow to leave. The sorrow is all we have left of our loved one. If we felt better, would that mean we loved them less? Would it dishonor the relationship that we shared? Would people think I was callous? What would my life look like after I finished grieving? I never wanted to see my life without my loved one in it. I'd rather not think about it. Maybe grief is better than post-grief.

It is common to play ping-pong between these two experiences. You are not going crazy or losing your mind. But for the moment your goal is not to answer those questions. Your goal is to honestly experience the pain of this loss and life transition. Engaging the sadness of this season without knowing what is on the other side is a powerful expression of faith in God's care for and protection over you.

God does not give you a pacing guide. God gave you Himself. With this in mind your goal is to balance two things as you mourn: (1) do not give yourself a time limit on your grief, and (2) give yourself permission to stop mourning without feeling guilty.

**No Time Limit:** If you give yourself a time limit to experience grief, you will start doing emotional math (which never works). If I give myself two months to mourn, then I should be  $\frac{1}{4}$  finished in two weeks,  $\frac{1}{2}$  finished at one month, and  $\frac{3}{4}$  finished in six weeks. I like that. It gives me something to work towards and I should be able to tell where I am in the process. As you will see below, the ebb and flow of grief will not cooperate with any "schedule." If you try to pace your grief, the result will be that you always feel like you're not "doing it right" and your grief will be compounded by a sense of guilt or failure.

**Permission to Stop:** If you do not give yourself permission to stop, then relief will trigger a sense of condemnation. You will never feel like you have been sad "enough" to honor your loved one well, because any ending to grief will feel like an insulting declaration of how loved or lovable they were. "Enough" is a slave word when making any emotional appeal. It tries to force us to put a finite value on an eternal soul. It also compels us to honor an eternal relationship within the limits of a finite human body which is deteriorated by the stress of grief.

What are some realistic expectations for grief? As long as you promise not to do any emotional math, we can talk about that. The time allotments below come from the counseling experience of H. Norman Wright (*Experiencing Grief*, pages 69-70; bold text only). This outline focuses on the difficult emotional or physical effects of grief.

**3 Months – Numbness Wears Off:** It takes a while for a major loss to feel real. During this time, the grief will likely feel fresh as it sinks in... again. As reality sets in your emotions may feel very cyclical or repetitive.

**6-9 Months – Stress Impacts Immune System:** The body will hold up for a little while before it starts showing the signs of additional stress it endured during the time of grief. Physical lethargy and emotional downs, which come with a depressed immune system, can feel like a setback to whatever emotional progress has been made. This time range will be affected by your level of health prior to grief and your care for your body during grief.

**1 Year Anniversary – Grief Often Returns at Initial Level:** There will be many emotional triggers which call back memories of your loss around this calendar date. The magnitude of being bombarded by these triggers takes many people off guard. If this is an intense time for you, it should not be considered a "set back."

**18 Months – Episodal “Grief Bumps”:** During this time it is common to have times of peace disrupted by episodes of grief. Often these bumps will have clear triggers (a special date, someone tells a story about your lost loved one, etc...), but these may also include unprovoked memories accompanied by sadness. So long as you do not socially isolate, experience sleep impairment, or avoid responsibilities, these “bumps” should be considered normal and a part of healthy grieving.

**2 Years – Total Recovery from a Natural Death:** A natural death is the passing of someone at an expected point in the life cycle in a way that is considered common – a child losing a grandparent, an adult losing a parent, or an elderly person losing a sibling or friend. “Total recovery” is not the absence of sadness, but the ability to control one’s emotions (instead of your emotions controlling you) and enjoy memories of your loved one. This will be defined more in chapters seven and eight.

**3 Years – Total Recovery for a Traumatic or A-Typical Death:** An a-typical death involves the passing of someone at an unexpected point in the life cycle – a child (born or unborn) or an adult “in their prime.” A traumatic death involves a means of passing and would include a car accident, murder, suicide, bizarre accident, and similar causes of death. The time line for recovery from a traumatic or a-typical death can vary widely and the additional guidance from a counselor or support group is often beneficial.

As you reflect on these general guidelines regarding grief, do not fall into the temptation of thinking you can “wait it out” or let “grief wear off” alone. Isolating yourself during this time would only elongate and exacerbate the experience. Your church small group should be a place where you find encouragement and support during this time. We have included Appendix C to provide guidance to small groups on how to care for one another over the full journey of grief.

**Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.** Take note of the number of things there is “a time to” in this passage that relates to this season or mourning in your life: to die (v. 2), to heal (v. 3), to weep (v. 4), to mourn (v. 4), to embrace (v. 5), to lose (v. 6), and to love (v. 8). Scripture does not seek to rush any of these experiences, but says that each one has and – by inference – should be given their time. As you mourn, even as you look at a journey that may be longer than you anticipated, know that your Father is patient with you on this journey. Notice also that the things listed above do not exclude other, seemingly opposite, things from being on the list: to plant (v. 2), to build up (v. 3), to laugh (v. 4), and to dance (v. 4). Mourning may be long, but it need not be chronic.

## Grief & Good-Bye

We want closure, but we don’t want to say good-bye. This is another aspect of the common emotional tug-of-war that goes on within the grieving process. This tension is often made worse by the words that we often use to describe “progress” in the grieving process. These phrases too often seem disrespectful to our loved one or condescending towards our experience: moving on, getting over it, or putting the past in the past.

If the language we use to describe “progress” in grief does not honor our loved one, then we will either resist mourning or feel guilty about it. The story-language we have used to described grief allows for more honoring verbiage to describe progress. As we progress, we are merely writing the next chapter in our lives. These new chapters will be richer and more meaningful as a result of our loved one’s presence in our life. No one has been erased from the story, but there are “pages” and purposes yet to be fulfilled.

It may still be hard to make this transition. One thing that many people have found helpful is writing a good-bye letter. A letter can capture many of the conversational nuances you enjoyed in the relationship and allow you to talk about the past, present, and future. The letter below is an expanded version of a sample letter written by H. Norman Wright in *Experiencing Grief* (pages 73-74).

Dear [name],

This is a strange letter. I never planned to write to you after your death. I didn’t intend for you to go. There are many things I never planned to do, that I am now learning to do. I am sure you are proud. But your leaving has left a painful hole in my life. I don’t like the empty grieving feeling I have inside.

I miss you. I miss it all – your voice, your presence, your laughter, the way you raised your eyebrows, your stubbornness. You know what else I miss? Your dreaming out loud. I miss our dreams and the future we won’t have together. I feel cheated. This was not the time for you to die. Or it wasn’t the time I thought you should. I am having to learn to look at the calendar again. It is hard to look forward and not just count how many days or months have passed.

I've cried buckets of tears over you. I've cried for me and raged at you and God and me and everyone else who still has someone. I've wanted you to come to me, and I wish I could come to you. I don't like being alone. Oh, I know there are others around, but they aren't you! I am still accepting that enjoying others is not replacing you. I almost feel guilty for the moments I don't actively miss you and I know that is not what you would want.

It's been months. I've stabilized now. I'm learning to rest in the hope that someday we will see each other again. I'm taking a big step now by taking baby steps to embrace the next chapter of my life. I feel strange saying this to you, but you went away, you were taken from me, but I have been holding on to you. Now I'm letting you go to live life again.

I have our history together, memories together, and a rich life because of you. You blessed me well, so well in fact it's hard to enjoy those blessings without you. Thank you. I'm letting you go, but I will never leave you. You are a part of me. I will have to let you go many more times. I know that. I miss you. I love you. You are never forgotten.

Love,  
[name]

**Notes About Good-Bye Letters:** It is important not to lose your voice when writing a letter of this nature. The above example is given merely as a sample of something few of us have read or written. As you write a good-bye letter (if you decide that is beneficial for your grief journey), think about the three time tenses below. Each tense comes with question prompts that are not meant to be comprehensive.

- **Past:** What did you not get to say or talk about that want to put into words? What do you miss and want to be able to affirm one final time? What do you realize about the past that did not fully "click" with you until now?
- **Present:** What are the challenges you are facing? What are you having to learn to do? What parts of life are you seeing differently in their absence? How is life different?
- **Future:** What future dreams are you grieving? What emotions, other than grief, do you experience when you plan without them in it? How does your time together make your future a richer more enjoyable life?

**Read Acts 20:36-38.** Paul was particularly close with the church of Ephesus. In these verses we see the tearful farewell when all involved assumed Paul was leaving to be martyred. We see Scripture speak of the deep sorrow that comes with earthly departure – "there was much weeping... being sorrowful most of all because of the words he had spoken, that they would not see his face again (v. 37-38)." No one in this interaction tried to contain the sadness because "the lost souls of men and heaven are worth any sacrifice." They did not doubt this truth. But they were losing the sweetness of a dear and deep friendship. It hurt. Tears were the best way to celebrate the rich blessing of God that was about to be tasted for the last time this side of eternity.

"The principle is simple; when words are most empty, tears are most apt (p. 106)." Max Lucado in *No Wonder They Call Him Savior*

## Grief & Comfort

Many people resist mourning because they wonder, "What's the point? What good will it do? It won't bring my loved one back and it's painful. Why would I do that?" These are honest questions and unless we answer them mourning can feel like a sadistic exercise (trying to gain pleasure or relief through the infliction of pain).

Any honest assessment of grief will acknowledge that the comfort from mourning does not result in the elimination of pain or sorrow. Comfort in the midst of grief does not mean removing us from the context of our pain. Our loved one is still gone and we still wish they were not. Rather comfort involves God planting Himself in the context of our pain to give us hope and as a promise of His complete redemption of all things.

"Comfort experiences the presence of God in the presence of suffering—a presence that empowers me to survive scars and plants the seed of hope that I will yet thrive (p. 53)." Bob Kellemen in *God's Healing for Life's Losses*.

Mourning is a necessary transition and buffer between (A) understanding our loss in terms of an exclusively suffering story of tragedy and (B) beginning to understand our loss through God's redemptive story. If we tried to make this transition without allowing our emotions to resonate with the real loss, it would either be a spiritualized form of denial or the change would occur at a pace in which the recovery would do as much damage as the loss. Time itself does not heal all wounds, but time is an important element in the recovery from any significant loss.

It is through the experience of mourning that we see how God cares for us. Without this step it would be easy to think that God only cared about us getting better rather than realizing God cared for us personally. A coach wants an injured athlete to “get better” so that he can get back on the field of play and help the team. A father wants his child to get better because he loves his child. For the coach, speed is of the essence. For the father, the best outcome for his child is the primary concern. God is a loving Father who allows time for our grief journey to be completed.

Therefore, mourning is not primarily an activity that brings comfort (as if mourning was a skill to master or step to accomplish) but rather the freedom to mourn that brings comfort. In this freedom to mourn, we come to a point that we are willing to release our loved one, as well as ourselves, to the care of our Father who has proven His trustworthiness in how He responded (and is responding) to our grief.

Bob Kellemen helps us understand this picture of comfort better as he examines the history of the word “comfort.” As you read “another” first think of God and secondly those in your small group, church, and other friends.

“Originally, comfort meant *co-fortitude*—being fortified by the strength of another. Being *en-couraged*—having courage poured into you from an outside source. That outside source is Christ and the Body of Christ (p. 53).” Bob Kellemen in *God’s Healing for Life’s Losses*.

The quotes below further demonstrate aspects of mourning, its benefits, and how the involvement of others is important to experience the restoring effects of mourning. Use them to reflect further on the importance of mourning in your grief journey and help you identify other people that would be good to involve in this part of your journey.

“One of the most important things we can do is just to be there. Our presence speaks louder than words. There are two things we need to take them every time we go – hope and a tender, listening heart. Sitting quietly with them is more comforting than preaching sermons to them (p. 43).” Deborah Howard in *Sunsets*

“Silence covers wounds before the cleansing has occurred (p. 14).” H. Norman Wright in *Experiencing Grief*

“Because grief is a social event, it cannot be resolved in isolation. Those who grieve must be willing to risk sharing their pain, and those who minister must be willing to risk the discomfort of being with the persons in their pain (p. 520).” J.A. Larsen in “Grief” from *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling* edited by David Benner and Peter C. Hill.

“We are here not just to weep but to rub hope and love into our tears (p. 2).” Tim Keller in “Truth, Tears, Anger, and Grace” from *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Fall 2001).

**Encouragement Focus (MOURN):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Have I resisted the urge to view mourning negatively: as a sign of weakness or lack of trust in God?
- Do I have realistic expectations for mourning: avoiding time pressure or guilt for mourning relief?
- Prepare: Am I maintaining balance in the six areas of preparation from chapter one?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your grief to your encouragement partner.

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## Chapter 6.

### "My Loss Story in His Story"

LEARN MY GOSPEL STORY by which God gives meaning to my experience.

**"I have already told you how my loss shaped my life [review step 4].**

**Letting go of that story, identity, and set of beliefs left me with only God.**

**It was good to begin rebuilding my life from that solid foundation.**

**Now I am beginning to understand my life with God and the Gospel at the center [examples from previous list reinterpreted]."**

**Memorize:** John 11:23-26 (ESV), "Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life, Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord; I believe you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.'" As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- "I know...last day" – What Martha believed about Jesus seemed very far off from where she was at the moment.
- "I am" – What Jesus offered Martha was Himself. There was no answer to give meaning to suffering outside Him.
- "Do you believe this?" – Our suffering story begins to be reinterpreted as we understand Jesus more fully.
- "I believe" – Martha was not resistant to believing, however her experience of grief continued... but with hope.
- "Who is coming" – Even in Jesus' first coming his solution for grief was only "made sure" while not yet fulfilled.

#### Teaching Notes

"In so far as this record was a defense against total collapse, a safety valve, it has done some good... I thought I could describe a *state*; make a map of sorrow. Sorrow however, turns out to be not a state but a process. It needs not a map but a history (p. 68-9)." C.S. Lewis in *A Grief Observed*

"Every time someone dies, it reminds those watching that God's work is not yet complete. Because of sin, death entered the world. Only when sin is completely defeated will death cease to be part of the equation... As you weep, know this: the One who weeps with you is not content for things to stay as they are. His death was a cry and his resurrection a promise. The living Christ will continue to exert his power and you will grieve no more (p. 6)." Paul Tripp in *Grief: Finding Hope Again*

"Death is, in fact, what some modern people call 'ambivalent.' It is Satan's great weapon and also God's great weapon: it is holy and unholy; our supreme disgrace and our only hope; the thing Christ came to conquer and the means by which He conquered (p. 125)." C.S. Lewis in *Miracles*.

"That is what I love about the Psalms. They put difficulty and hope together in the tension of hardship and grace that is the life of everyone this side of eternity. It is not hard to recognize the environment of the Psalms. The Psalms live in your city, on your street, in your family. The Psalms tell your story. It is a story of hope and disappointment, of need and provision, of fear and mystery, of struggle and rest, and of God's boundless love and amazing grace (p. 7)." Paul Tripp in *A Shelter in the Time of Storm*.

"Why doesn't God tell us more about heaven? The children in the workshop concluded, 'It's a surprise!' We then talked about the surprise party He is preparing for all who love Him. Jason got his invitation earlier than the rest of us. But we are invited as long as we have Jesus in our hearts. He will let us know when it is our turn to come to the party (p. 30)." Judy Blore in "How to Help a Grieving Child" from *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Winter 1998).



### Embedded Study

There are two competing narratives for our grief: God's and Satan's. Every experience surrenders to an interpretation. Our interpretation of grief will influence how we understand past, present, and future events. It reinterprets the past when we think things like, "Maybe God is not who I thought he was. Maybe life does not operate the way I thought. If I had [blank] to do over again, I would do it differently." It reinterprets the future as we apply what we learned (accurately or inaccurately) from our grief experience to make "wise" or "common sense" choices.

As we enter into this chapter, however, we have to be careful to understand what we are seeking to accomplish. Challenging wrong interpretations of grief will not end grief or make it go away. In this case, right "answers" will not necessarily result in pleasant emotions of relief and joy. It will allow for a clean grief preventing your loss from becoming an entry point for foundational lies that change your identity, definition of safety, or sense of purpose in unhealthy ways. These are the changes that would result in a residual disruption of life after the sorrow of grief has passed.

In this chapter we will look at five questions that shape our suffering story: who am I, who is God, what is death, is love worth grief, and what am I living for? We will look at them in light of grief. Our goal is not to provide a comprehensive theological answer, but to provide the foundational framework for a healthy understanding of grief.

### Who am I?

The link between grief and identity has already been alluded to many times in this study. To this point, we have merely stated that our sense of identity changes during the grief journey. The three points below are a continuation of the reflections made about identity in earlier chapters. Here you should begin to understand these changes in identity as a part of God's redemptive purpose in your life (Phil. 1:6).

#### Temporal

We are eternal creatures in a temporal world. We were made for Heaven and live on earth. Therefore, our life on earth will end. We put so much into living (literally, all that we have) that it is easy to forget this. Death gets our attention and causes us to look up from our toils. When the fact that life has an end becomes a reality to us, it changes the way we interpret the middle (where we are now). This shock is not bad, but it can be very unsettling.

**Read Psalm 39:4-7.** Notice that David is asking for the perspective that grief imposes. David wants the wisdom that comes with realizing that the burdens and pressures of this world are not his ultimate reality or final *resting* place. We can see that in verses 2-3 that realization gave him a healthier perspective on anger and in verse 6 a healthier perspective on money. But the main thing this perspective did for David was to remind him that eternal people in a temporal world must take hope in an eternal God (v. 7).

**Question:** How has the experience of grief forced you to face the temporal nature of life and what changes is this making in your life choices or values?

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#### Relationally Changing

Relationships come with roles. Roles impact identity, shape choices, affect other relationships, and influence the rhythms of life. Death disrupts all of that. We still have the same general life mission (i.e., to know God and enjoy Him forever, to love God and love others, etc...) but one or more of the most frequent recipients or contexts of that mission is now absent. How we respond to these changes will be one of the more lingering impacts of our grief.

**Read I Corinthians 12:12-26.** This passage supports the idea that relationships shape our identity. Indirectly, this passage also challenges a tendency we all have – to expect one person to serve as the entire Body of Christ for us. This is especially tempting with a spouse, parent, or child. It is wrong to think that God takes someone away because we may have over-relied upon them. But even without over-relying upon someone for our identity and emotional support, when we lose a major figure in our life, the need to have a relationship with the larger Body of Christ in order to maintain stability.

**Question:** How has your loss changed your relationships? How are you seeking the Body of Christ as the place where God intends to minister to and eventually heal that void?

## Under the Curse of Sin

Death is the consequence of sin (Gen. 3:3, Rom. 6:23). But the impact of this truth goes beyond personal death for personal sin. While this truth technically answers the, "Why is this happening to *me*?" question, it only reframes the question to, "Why is this happening to *us*?" Grief is an intensely personal experience in all the ways we have explored. However, death is not personal in that it does not play favorites or pick on certain individuals. When we personalize death we make it our intellectual and emotional quandary to solve rather than God's enemy to conquer on our behalf.

When considering the effects of sin upon the world during a time of grief, it is easy feel a sense of condemnation. But without an understanding of the Fall, death does not make sense. There would be no reason why people *must* die. As you consider this part of how the gospel story makes sense of grief, allow the words of James Petty to protect you from personalizing this truth (grief as a bi-product of the curse of sin) in a destructive way.

"While we may find it difficult to assimilate this strong medicine for human pride, it need not be overwhelming when we use the doctrine within the pastoral purpose for which it was revealed. I must say again that theological truths, no matter how biblical, must be used in a biblical way. They are not bullets that one can shoot in any direction, but only in the directions revealed by Scripture (p. 69)." James C. Petty in *Step by Step*.

**Read Romans 8:18-25.** When we grieve we experience the curse of sin, not as a sinner experiencing personal consequences, but as creation moaning against the effects of the Fall. Our moans agree with God that death is wrong! Our grief is an "eager longing" for God's full redemption of all things (v. 19). We feel the unwilling subjection to futility (v. 20). We feel the intense pains of anticipating the new life to come (v. 22). In grief, we see that life presents a problem that is larger than we could ever solve on our own.

**Question:** How has groaning against grief caused you to see the need for a solution the size of Jesus' death on the cross as necessary to resolve the predicament of a world scarred by sin?

## Who is God?

Grief raises many questions about God. We see our need for God and aspects of God's relevance to our life in unique ways when death enters our world. Simple truths like "God is love" take on a fuller, although also more painful, meaning when we consider death. We also come to see the practical relevance of God's transcendence (being unique from us) and the incarnation as we seek to make sense of grief.

### Loving

It is important to remember that we are God's children (1 John 3:1-2) and we, like all children, are maturing into what we were meant to be. Children do not like letting go of things they've grown attached to (i.e., a blanket, a stuffed animal, a special shirt). But because of love, parents are willing to endure their children's grieving and require them to let these things go. Particularly special things usually get placed in a position of honor (i.e., framed or a shadow box). Similarly, we were not made for this world, so in love God places our loved ones in the place of our full maturity and eternal residence – Heaven.

"Our call to suffer comes from a God tender beyond description. If we do not cling to this through life's worst, we will misread everything and grow to hate him (p. 40)... God must be at the center of things. He must be in the center of our suffering. What's more, he must be Daddy. Personal and compassionate. This is our cry. God, like a father, doesn't just give advice. He gives himself (p. 125)... To know God is to be free from the incessant need to understand exactly what he is doing before you place confidence in him (p. 131)... I found him [God] after I let go of what I thought he should be (p. 155)." Joni Eareckson Tada & Steven Estes in *When God Weeps*.

**Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.** Paul is encouraging those who grieve (v. 18). He does so by demonstrating that Jesus' ultimate act of love is the means by which God will restore what is broken (v. 14). The interval between our loved one's passing and our reunion does not negate God's love. It is painful and this is why Paul uses the word "encourage" in the

present (representing continuous action) imperative (a command representing necessity) tense. God knew the interval would be painful and provided his Body – the church – to love during that time. In the same way that a parent who knows that giving up a special blanket will be hard will look for ways to comfort their child in the process.

**Question:** The church (nor anyone else) will never replace your loved one, but how have you seen God’s love displayed to you through His church or other ways?

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**Outside of Time**

We often struggle to understand God like a fish struggles to comprehend a bird. The fish exists inside of water and is limited by water’s presence. A bird does not know these limits. We exist inside of time and are limited by time. God does not know these limits. We sometimes struggle to see God as loving because He lives free from time. We live as if this moment is all there is. God lives in the full reality of our reunion with our loved one.

**Read Revelation 1:8, 21:6 and 22:13.** Notice the repeated message. God is the beginning and the end. He is not limited or measured by anything. This is the only way God could inspire the book of Revelation to be written. There is hope in this. We may feel like we are drowning in the pool of our grief, but God is not a lifeguard who has to swim to our rescue. His feet always touch the bottom and, because of this, He can carry us through any trial. We may feel swallowed up by time without our loved one, but God is experiencing the certainty of our reunion as you read these words. Your story has a sure ending and a faithful Author.

**Question:** How do these truths bring comfort in the midst of your grief?

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**Incarnational**

When Jesus took on flesh, He did not just enter our world, He also stepped into time. Jesus bridges the gap of everything that may have made God seem detached in the previous reflection. God does not just see your reunion. Jesus chose to put on your shoes. Jesus cried (John 11:35). Jesus begged for a miracle that did not happen (Matt. 26:36-45). Jesus felt the searing pain of the severing of His most intimate relationship (Matt. 27:45-46). Jesus did not redeem us from a distance. Jesus took on the full human experience (not just sin, but also the suffering of grief) so that we would know that he is able to “save to the uttermost” and that he can intercede for us with an accurate knowledge of our experience (Heb 7:25).

“Only Christianity tells us that God has suffered (p. 8).” Tim Keller in “Truth, Tears, Anger, and Grace” from *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Fall 2001).

**Read Hebrews 2:14-18.** Jesus put on flesh to do battle with death. He fought death on its home turf. Jesus did not just conquer death as the penalty for our sin. But in taking on flesh Jesus became like us “in every respect (v. 17)” which would include knowing the “fear of death” (v. 15). The angst that you feel in facing the death of your loved one is a major trial. Jesus became human so that He would be able to relate to you (v. 18). Only God could be both outside your experience enough to offer certainty of its resolution and inside your experience enough to offer understanding and His personal presence.

**Question:** How often have you wondered if anyone could relate to your experience of grief? What comfort does it offer to know that God is “in you” in your experience and has taken on the full experience of human suffering, including grief?

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**What is Death?**

Until we face grief, death can be thought of as just “the end” or what’s left after everything is over. We can be content to understand death like we understand indoor plumbing (assuming you are not a plumber). But once death causes grief to flood our living room, we have to know more than “it’s there.” We have to make sense of it in a way that helps us alleviate

the crisis we are in. At this stage in your journey, the reflections below should help you begin to incorporate your loss into your story in healthy God-honoring way.

### Real

Movies slowly fade to black when they are over with soft music playing. Most of them (the good ones anyway) build to a climax and then have an ending with most of the plot lines resolved. Death is more real than that. Often there is no fading but only a rude intrusion. Before grief, death may have seemed like a tame and distant hypothetical reality. After grief, death seems wild, near, and possible.

After grief our world-view is more real. What we must learn to rest in is that our protection is found in God and the Gospel more than a predictable future. For someone strapped financially, car trouble can feel like the brink of bankruptcy. After grief life can feel equally out of control because of the impending reality of death. In light of this must we learn to rely on God's protection in a way we never had to in our innocence (which was not a bad thing).

**Read Acts 17:24-28.** Notice how Paul articulates the realness and nearness of God in this passage in contrast to our frequent experience – feeling our way towards God in the dark trying to find Him (v. 26). Despite our experience, it is in God that we live and move and have our being (v. 27). It is God who gives us breath (v. 25) and death is neither stronger than God to steal our breath away nor sneaky enough to snatch it away without God's knowing. God is more real than death in the same way that diamonds are more real than chalk. When death is no more, God will still be. During grief our temptation is to think the opposite – that death is more real than God.

**Question:** How has grief made death more real and active reliance upon God more necessary in your daily life?

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### A Door

From our current perspective death feels more like a wall than a door; a barrier more than a passage. When we view death as a barrier, then we interpret grief as God keeping something from us. The barrier image also carries with it the sense of death being "the end." When we rightly view death as a passage then we see our loved one's passing as God inviting them to a better place and it carries the sense of "graduation."

In this sense, we become like parents sending their children to college, to get married, or to be missionaries. We know this transition means we will not enjoy them as we were able to before, but that this change is the marker of an exciting new stage in their life. Parents are legitimately sad for their children's absence, but the same sense of finality does not loom. In grief, therefore, we are forced to believe in the reality of Heaven as much as we believe in the reality of earth.

**Read Luke 16:22.** Notice that Jesus says when the poor man died he was carried to heaven by angels. In this parable, both the poor Christian and the rich non-Christian continue to exist, have conversation, show concern for their loved ones, and exhibit all the functions of personhood. Death was not the end of life, but a transition to a different life. We must realize that we talk about death in the same way we talk about the sun rising and setting. We are describing the experience from our perspective even though the real thing (earth circling the sun; in Heaven we are more alive than on earth) is different from our words.

**Question:** How does the image of death as a door give you room for sadness while maintaining a sense of hope?

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### A Defeated Enemy

During grief we realize that death, the result of sin's presence in the world, is an enemy we could never defeat. Its mere presence in our life causes us to wither emotionally. How much more helpless would we be when death touches us personally? Death is not just sad. It is a scary reminder of our future without Christ. While death is a door, it would be followed by a bottomless pit unless this foe was vanquished on our behalf.

This is precisely what the Christian faith is all about. At the cross Jesus conquered death. Now death can be the door to Heaven rather than the black hole of Hell. The remains of death are a reminder (and caution against) the severity of sin and, more emphatically, a demonstration of how far the love of God will go to redeem His children. In bringing redemption, Jesus plunged into death and the Father experienced grief. Grief became part of God’s story so that it could mean something different in our story.

“God’s great story of redemption has much to say about your story of grief (p. 2).” Paul Tripp in *Grief: Finding Hope Again*

“Jesus Christ knew and made a deliberate choice. He knew that the only way to interrupt Lazarus’s funeral was to cause his own. The only way to bring Lazarus out of the grave was to bury himself. The only way he could get Lazarus out of death was for him to be killed (p. 8).” Tim Keller in “Truth, Tears, Anger, and Grace” from *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Fall 2001).

**Passage I Corinthians 15:24-26 and 53-57.** Death is an enemy (v. 26) and we are right to hate it. It was unleashed by sin, but conquered by love. We live in the time between death being redefined by God’s victory at Calvary, and death being eradicated by Christ’s return. The damage that death does is the activity of a spiteful enemy in retreat. The damage is real and hurtful, but in spite of it we can still sing the songs of victory (v. 53-54); our Conqueror has been victorious (v. 56).

**Question:** How has your experience of grief expanded your understanding of the magnitude of what Christ accomplished on the cross?

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### Is Love Worth Grief?

This is one of the big narrative questions of grief. If love can hurt this bad, is love worth it? In grief we see that love is not just a pleasurable experience, but a personal sacrifice. Love can exact a toll that we did not expect to pay. We begin to wonder if self-protection is not a better option than relationships which inevitably require vulnerability. While there is only one healthy answer to this question, during grief it is normal to consider writing the rest of our life story without such vulnerability.

#### Yes!

Love is worth it. Yet the journey we have been on should make those words more than a platitude. We now know the cost of what we are saying. “Love is worth grief” is the battle cry of anyone who would strive to be Christ-like. However, after grief, this assent is more sober than sentimental. We now know that to love someone means more than to enjoy their presence, it also means accepting the pain of their absence.

When we are tempted to surrender to the negative story line (love is not worth grief) we must look at how that traps us within ourselves. Safety by isolation is its own prison with the cruel warden of fear. The willingness (i.e., risk) to love is the key to the cell and a power the warden cannot resist. It is a magnet that calls others to your side so you will not have to fight alone. Love provides the assurance that you will not bear love’s cost alone when times of grief return. Love is worth it.

**Read Hebrews 12:1-3.** How did Jesus remain convinced that love was worth it? What was the “joy set before him” (v. 2) that allowed him to endure the cost of loving? It was the fuller community of heaven bringing greater glory to God. We see this in part by the fact that Jesus did not quit relating to people after his resurrection (I Cor. 15:5-8). We see this in the culminating scene of redemption as salvation results in more relationships not less (Rev. 7:9). We see this in the summary of Christ’s life (“the law of Christ”) in the continued willingness to bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2).

**Question:** How has tasting grief made your other relationships more real, rich, or full? How has it caused you to see the inherent sacrifice of friendship? How has the necessity of relying on Christ in order to be a friend become more real to you?

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### What Am I Living For?

Death gives us a better perspective on life. It changes the questions we ask and the goals for which we strive. Death places our successes and failures in a different context. It alters the meaning we give to a “good day” or a “bad day.” It is these

types of changes that may have the biggest impact on our life story. How we makes sense of these changes, assimilate them into our life, and persevere in light of their implications will be a large factor in determining whether our grief is healthy and God-honoring.

**Purpose More than Idolatry**

This is another point where it is tempting to interpret every change we make in light of grief as a reason for guilt. Because of the emotional intensity that surrounds everything associated with grief, grief experienced as guilt becomes very intense too. It can be easy to assume that every point of clarity or refinement grief brings to our sense of purpose is evidence of how “off” our life was before. We can begin to identify everything we loved as an “idol.”

While we may find things that were too important to us, idolatry does not need to be the only explanation for changes in our sense of purpose. Changes after grief can be like other areas of spiritual maturity. If you have been a Christian for a while, hopefully you have experienced time when you came to realize a new aspect of the Gospel. This does not mean you were a heretic before, but that the miracle of God’s grace was far more relevant than you realized. A gap may have been filled as much as an error was corrected. This new insight may change significant parts of your life and choices without repentance being needed. You experience more of what God intends for you without a sense of condemnation for prior ignorance. This is often what the lessons we learn in grief are like.

Chapter nine of this study will be the place where we will try to articulate and apply many of these lessons. Before then, however, there are several steps of the grief journey ahead. The goal in this reflection is to prevent you from interpreting the positive changes that happen in your life as a result of grief as a reason for guilt.

**Read John 9:1-7.** Here we find the disciples trying to making meaning of suffering. Their instinct is to ask a guilt question – who sinned? Jesus points out that suffering is not necessarily the result of sin (v. 3). But that suffering does always point us to and clarifies our need for Jesus (v. 5). Hopefully the early part of this study has helped you avoid multiplying grief by guilt in the early stages of your journey. The goal here is to remind you that just because you grow in your walk with God as a result of grief this should not be interpreted as “what God was trying to teach you” as if that was His “reason” for this season of grief. That interpretation of your story would only move the guilt we avoided in the early part of your journey to the end. The reason we have made a big deal about grief being a form of suffering is to say there is no guilt to be felt.

**Question:** How are you beginning to see changes in your life purpose? What things are becoming more or less important? How is God already using these changes to bring about a greater freedom in your life?

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**Summary Reflection:** As you have worked through this chapter what would you say are the most important aspects of your story that you are beginning to see differently? As you begin to embrace those things as the accurate interpretation of your loss, how do you anticipate that changing your experience of grief?

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**Encouragement Focus (GOSPEL STORY):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Have I been able to avoid feeling guilty as I have allowed God to reinterpret key elements of my grief?
- Am I able to identify the specific times in my life when I most need to allow these new interpretations to penetrate my thinking and emotions?
- Prepare: Am I maintaining balance in the six areas of preparation from chapter one?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your grief to your encouragement partner.

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## Chapter 7

### "Where is 'Better' on This Journey?"

IDENTIFY GOALS that allow me to combat the impact of my suffering.

**"I can now see that innocence and powerlessness are not the same thing. I used to think 'it was not my fault;' was the same as 'there is nothing I can do about it.' My old suffering story came with a way of life that I lived. The new story, identity, and beliefs that come with the Gospel allow me to actively live differently without giving into the old false shame or regret. I can change [describe how] without a sense of condemnation [describe why]."**

**Memorize:** Lamentations 3:20-24 (ESV), "My soul remembers it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.'" As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- "My soul remembers" – It is normal to remember. To expect to live as if nothing happened would be non-human.
- "Bowed down" – With the memory of a loss, sadness will accompany it even when grieving is healthy and clean.
- "I call to mind" – Even Jeremiah had to remind himself of aspects of God's character he was tempted to doubt.
- "New every morning" – This "calling to mind" was something that Jeremiah had to do regularly, even daily.
- "Your faithfulness" – This is the first time in the passage Jeremiah directly addressed God ("you"). As he engaged the false interpretations of his suffering, Jeremiah was able to regain his more personal connection with God.

### Teaching Notes

"It is something altogether different to say His grace is sufficient for today when tomorrow holds no hope of any significant change (p. 21)." Joseph Lehmann in "Believing in Hope" from *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Winter 1998).

"One of the things you can do is to demonstrate how to be sad and to hope and trust at the same time (p. 29)." Judy Blore in "How to Help a Grieving Child" from *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Winter 1998).

"Times of deprivation, ill health, and even war don't preclude the need for pleasure; on the contrary, such seasons accentuate the need to find and perhaps rediscover the simplest pleasures of all (p. 184)." Gary Thomas in *Pure Pleasure*

"The griever encounters four often difficult and time-consuming tasks: to accept the reality of the loss, to feel and consciously admit the pain of the loss (this includes untangling oneself from the ties that bind one to the deceased), to adjust to an environment in which the deceased person is missing, and to form new relationships. The last stage seems to be the most difficult because people feel both guilty and insecure about reinvesting their energies in new relationships (p. 347)." Gary Collins in *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide*

"Grievers seek comfort. But where do they find it? The Bible reminds us that all true comfort has its source in the Lord (2 Cor. 1:3-4). In grief, we often seek our other comforts: memories, material things, distractions (TV, CD player, exercise, reading, crafts, work, food, people). They all provide some measure of comfort but none can fill the one place where grief causes us to feel so empty – our hearts (p. 9)... When you grieve, you are vulnerable to temptations you would normally resist. The enemy of your soul attacks in your weakest moments (p. 10)." "Paul Tripp in *Grief: Finding Hope Again*

### Embedded Study

Goals and grief can be hard concepts to mesh. We wish they got along better. We want to be able to say, "I have Saturday open so I plan to get half my grief out by journaling, looking at pictures, having an extended time of candid prayer, crying several times, and then updating my good-bye letter to capture the progress I've made during the day." But thinking of goal setting as a time table or schedule, will become extremely frustrating and ineffective.

Also, if we think of goal setting as "overcoming" grief, then we will have a sense of failure whenever grief returns around special occasions, triggered by a song or quote, or randomly interrupts our day. This is why we say we are identifying goals to "combat the *impact* of my suffering." Grief is something we experience rather than conquer. Therefore, we will grow from it rather than eliminate it.

We did not cause grief, so we cannot "uncause" it. Grief is not a character defect or sin, so we cannot "put off" grief. Grief is part of our story and because of that there will be times when its significance continues to impact our life. Our goal in this chapter is to further understand what healthy grief is, what healthy grief looks like, and what we can do to "grieve well" during some of the difficult times ahead.

The material for this chapter will be divided into three sections: (1) What does it mean to "progress"? (2) How to prepare for predictably hard times? (3) How to respond to unpredictably hard moments?

### What Is Progress?

In many ways, we have talked about how to get "there" without defining where "there" is. This has been intentional. In order for grief to be healthy the journey must be valued as much as the destination. This is the opposite of a "fake it until you make it" approach. We have tried to protect the value of the journey by waiting until this step to discuss specifically what progress looks like.

The points below attempt to create a portrait of healthy grief. Do not read this list as pass/fail test, but as a series of markers for your journey. They are not meant to be in a sequential order of how they might emerge in the grieving process. For each point that you can already mark, praise God and share this encouragement with those who have walked with you. For those points that you cannot mark, allow them to be added to the goals for the journey ahead. Many of these items are modified and adapted from *Grief Share* materials on what "moving on" means (bold text only, page 79).

- **Progress does not mean that you can or should forget.** "You just need to move on," is bad advice (if it can even be considered advice). As you progress, you should find that you are in more control emotionally when you do remember your loved one. You are able to take a deep breath and decide whether this is a time when it is possible or beneficial to spend time remembering.
- **Progress does mean that you are able to enjoy good memories.** Appendix D on "Healthy Ways to Capture Memories" will help you find ways to make it easy to access these good memories. Once you are confident that each memory that you have can be made permanently available (much of the emotional disturbance of grief is a fear of losing these memories), it can enable a significant gain in emotional control.
- **Progress does not mean that you no longer feel pain because of your loss.** If we treat grief like an addiction, then we equate pain or sadness with a relapse. This is an inaccurate comparison. While sorrow after a loss may feel life-dominating, it is not wrong. The key element in progress related to emotional pain is that you begin to feel less helpless or alone when it comes.
- **Progress does mean you experience a lessening of the pain.** You should begin to identify a decrease in the intensity, duration, and/or frequency of the pain associated with your loss. Grief pain that remains at or near its original intensity for longer than 3-6 months is most often associated with destructive interpretations of the loss or has post-traumatic qualities. Reviewing the materials in chapter four and six with a mature friend, G4 Group, or counselor would be advisable if the pain is not decreasing.
- **Progress does not mean that you believe life is fair or understand "why."** Suffering, in general, is not fair and resists a satisfying answer to "why" questions. If you are locked into wanting to know "why" or to making life seem fair, this will trap you in your grief. Any answer you create will either produce guilt, make God to be a villain, or distort a healthy definition of "fair." Even natural death in old age is not fair in the way we often frame the question – "Why do other people's children get to keep having a grandmother and my mother has to die?" Any answer that starts with "because" will try to impose order and equality where it does not exist. Progress requires accepting that our current fallen world does not operate that way.



You can continue your journey in this area by becoming more aware of when you are asking "broken questions." A broken question is one that lead you in the direction of an unhealthy answer (i.e., "How can I get away from everyone who might remind me of or ask me about my loss?"), searching for an answer that does not exist (i.e., "What did I do that was so bad that God would take my loved one to punish me?"), or contains an inherent contradiction (i.e., "Can I cry long enough that I wake up and this just be a bad dream?").

- **Progress means you can accept the different aspects of your loss.** Single parent. Fatherless. Parent without a child. Returning to work. Retirement delayed. Moving in with children. Being a widow. Change in social circles. Dream made impossible. Progress in grief can be stifled when we refuse to accept (emotionally or volitionally) changes that accompany our loss. We begin to fight reality, so there is no way for us to win, but we keep fighting anyway. Anger and exhaustion begin to amplify our grief.

**List:** Make a list of "things I don't want to accept." Even writing them down makes them a bit more real. Sharing your list with trusted friends for prayer and feedback can be another step towards accepting these realities.

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- **Progress means remembering your loved one realistically.** We all have good and bad traits. But after someone passes we tend to "saint" them – making them perfect in our memory. When we do this it can trigger many unhealthy emotions that keep us locked in our grief. If the implication of one of their mistakes still affects us, we have to create an alternative (untrue) explanation for what went wrong and why. If someone makes a negative comment about them, we will get angry. Or we may begin to measure ourselves by what we remember them to be and feel consistently inadequate. Their "sainted" character begins to shape our categories of good and wise more than Christ. Only when we remember them accurately do we truly love them (as opposed to loving a figment of our imagination) and draw from their life the lessons that God would use them to teach us.
- **Progress means you feel free and have a growing desire to form new friendships.** Both guilt and fear can inhibit forming new relationships during grief. It is important to view this as the pursuit of a healthy life rather than replacing your loved one. The latter distorts the formation of new relationships in many ways. If this is difficult for you, start by making a list of healthy social settings that interest you. Recognize it may take a while for these relationships to feel comfortable. If you are struggling in this area, you will be inevitably comparing these relationships with what you had before. You will have to be willing to allow each relationship to be its own instead of saying, "It's not like what I had with [name of person lost]."

It is important to note that this recommendation to form new relationships does not include dating after the loss of a spouse. If you have lost a spouse, it is wise to allow the grieving process to reach a healthy resolution (at least one year, if not two per our discussion of "grief and time" in chapter five) before beginning a dating relationship.

- **Progress means you feel free and have a growing desire to try new things.** This is where you continue to be a growing you. Their story was a part of your story. Their absence may make your continued growth (expanding and deepening your understanding and usage of the skills and passions God has given you) seem less enjoyable. However, the more your life atrophies, the less positive, meaningful influence their life has on the world. Hebrews 11:39-40 indicates that part of our reward in Heaven will be determined by the residual impact our life has through those we blessed. By continuing to live and pursue the things that God has made you passionate about to advance God's kingdom you are adding to the legacy of the one you love.
- **Progress means you are growing in your walk with God.** Grief is an extended time of looking backwards (into the past). Progress in grief means that our head begins to turn towards those things that God still has set before us. Beginning to embrace the mission God has to accomplish in the remainder of our story is what re-ignites the actions that feed our walk with God – prayer, Bible study, ministry, etc... We begin to see that God never left us even when our focus was predominantly on our loved one. When our focus is primarily upon the one we lost, it is easy to think that God (and our friends) have been lost too. We don't see God because we are staring at our void. If this part of progress is hard for you, you might begin by thanking God for hearing all your painful prayers and giving you Psalms like the ones we've studied to help you put your experience into words.

**Read I Peter 1:6-9.** The letter of I Peter is often referred to as the Job of the New Testament. It is a book that deals with suffering as its primary subject and seeks to offer hope and encouragement to its readers. In this passage Peter speaks of

being "grieved by various trials (v. 6)" and speaks of our relationship with Christ in ways that now parallel your relationship with your loved one "though you [do] not [see] him, you love him, though you do not now see him, you believe in him (v. 8)." As we *progress* through life (aging) and our Christian life (maturity) more and more of the things we love will begin to meet this description. In order for this temporal life to have any meaning and for hope to be more than positive thinking, there must be an eternity. In Peter's letter he reminds his readers of this many times and in many ways. "Progress," as described above, will require you to embrace your Christian beliefs in ways that were not possible before your loss.

### Predictably Hard Times

When we prepare for unpredictably hard times the word most commonly associated with this activity is "dread." While dread is a fairly negative word, there is a positive side to dread. The dreaded thing doesn't catch you off guard and you have the opportunity to think through how you will respond. Admittedly, this cup may only be ¼ full, but when it comes to identifying healthy goals in the journey through grief, it an important point to remember. This is not to minimize the dark side of dread – anticipation of a painful event increases the amount of life disruption that event brings. However, using the opportunity to prepare for predictably hard times in the grief journey helps not only to alleviate the pain of a given event but also decreases the life disruption that comes from dread.

It is important to remember that, no matter how well prepared, you will not control the predictably hard times. If your goal is to control these occasions, then your "failure" to do so will only add to the sense that your life is out of control and compound the negative messages of your suffering story. Your goal on these occasions should be to continue to grieve the loss by celebrating a good thing through tears and to look for ways to reinforce the gospel story that gives your suffering meaning.

If you have trouble thinking of what these dates may be, look at the "Recording Important Dates" section in Appendix C. These dates or seasons should help you identify the times that can be predictably hard. Depending on your loss some dates may be harder than others and there is nothing wrong with that. Below is a collection of ways to prepare for these dates. Other than the first three items, do not treat them as a recipe to be followed, but as a buffet. Take what is most helpful for a particular difficult time and the unique significance it bears.

- **Have a plan for the day.** To wake up and not know how you are going to get through a difficult day is a miserable experience that sets you on the brink of drowning in despair from the moment your eyes open. The misery of such a day will make you question how many of these kinds of days you can bear. Living will quickly be reduced to surviving. Having a plan for the day allows you to see progress or movement along a predetermined path in the midst of a painful experience. It reinforces the message that you do have a voice and influence in your life. You will realize "by God's grace you can do this" even though it is painful. The plan should not be a minute-by-minute itinerary, but it should include an hour-by-hour plan from waking to bedtime.
- **Start the day.** The mindset of sleeping until I have to wake up launches the day with a defeated mindset. There is nothing wrong with sleeping in, but avoid starting the day with an escapist mindset. Have a healthy breakfast to prevent a sluggish metabolism from adding to the difficulty of the day. If weather and setting permits, get outside early in the day to prevent being indoors from creating the sense of being closed in.
- **Begin and end with God.** As a simple principle, the greater our need for strength the quicker we should turn to God. When we neglect prayer during grief we reinforce the lie that God is tired of hearing from us about our loss. If you go for a morning walk, use this as a time of prayer. Reading one or more of the Psalms or bold texts listed in Appendix E, "Bible Readings on Grief," would be a good place to focus your Bible study. The less you pray the more you are trying to handle grief on your own. Talk with God as the One who will never leave you or forsake you (Josh. 1:5). Prayer is a way we can interpret our loss in light of God's care rather than interpreting God's presence (or perceived absence) out of the pain associated with our loss.
- **Take time to remember.** You are still grieving, and grief is a highly repetitive process (like most things related to our emotions). As you read the Psalms, Scripture's most emotion-laden literature, you will find that they are repetitive. The goal of the Psalms is not merely to document a truth, but to help you assimilate and experience the reality of truth in the midst of various life contexts. This is why they utilize so much repetition. You might set aside time during this day to read some of your favorite stories about your loved one in your journal. Reading positive memories can allow there to be some levity and sweetness in your remembering. Setting aside as amount of time help contain (somewhat) the time of remembering.
- **Plan an activity that celebrates the day and honors your loved one.** This might involve having the meal they would most enjoy on that given day. Maybe you devote time to serving an organization that was important to

your loved one. Perhaps you could give a gift that they would have given (could be a sentimental or humorous gift) or participated in to someone they would have interacted with on that day. This is a way to highlight that your life is richer and, by God's grace, the world is a better place because of the life of your loved one.

- **Don't try to do too much.** This list itself could become a burden. Every item could be expressed in a dozen different ways and finding comfort could become exhausting. It is important to remember that each item is meant to facilitate your journey, but that completing this "check list" is not your journey. As we've already noted, grief is physically taxing, so taking time to rest is part of the grieving process, especially on predictably hard days.
- **Make sure you have some time with people.** Grief feels lonely. Being alone magnifies this sense of loneliness even if being with people does not nullify grief. Think in terms of a scale of one to ten with ten being the most mild hurt and ten being the most severe.  $10 \times 10 = 100$ . In this equation the first ten represents the pain of grief and the second ten represents the pain of isolation. Together they max out our emotional pain tolerance. However,  $10 \times 1 = 10$ . In this equation grief is still a ten, but the pain is shared through relationship. While it may still feel like "a ten" it is less crippling than it would be in isolation. It might be a phone call, getting together for lunch, going for a walk, or some other interaction. But it is wise on a predictably hard day to interact with friends God has placed in your life.
- **Use this as a time to reflect on "progress,"** especially remembering accurately or savoring good memories. Our response to predictably hard days can show our progress as much as (if not more than) our ability to string together a series of "good days." It is easy to equate the emotional turmoil of an anniversary or birthday as "failure" or "regression." That is not the case. The measure we should use to determine progress in grief is not how sad we feel (that will fluctuate on significant days and memorable settings), but (1) the level of hope we are able to maintain as we face good days and bad days, and (2) how this difficult day compared to similar difficult days. This is why the first year is so hard. We lack a baseline of comparison, so all difficulties feel like a complete disaster.
- **Begin to think through new or modified traditions.** Traditions hold a lot of the "power" of special occasions. They are the postcard images we hold in our mind of what make these occasions good. Often a loss changes the traditions; the day feels "ruined." The previous traditions should be honored in conversation, but the new roles within old traditions or new traditions should be embraced without feeling that these changes are dishonoring the original traditions. Because "new tradition" is a contradiction in terms, it may take a while for the affection towards these to develop, so do not allow this delay in enthusiasm or attachment to make you think "I guess we didn't do it right" or "our idea was a bad one."

Predictably hard times do not have to be a date on the calendar. They can also be an activity or task: changing a bedroom, selling a car, or going through the things he/she collected. If we are not careful the pain of these kind of activities, can leave us frozen in time. Everything outside continues in the flow of history, but this piece of our life gets stuck on the day before our loss. The suggestions below are meant to provide some guidance on these activity-based predictably hard times.

**List:** What predictably hard activities or tasks are you are currently facing or have been avoiding?

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- **Identify elements of your suffering story that are attached to the activity.** Often as we engage these tasks we hear strong echoes of the lies we identified in chapter four and sought to replace in chapter six. For this reason, it is wise to reflect on what false interpretations a task may tempt us to embrace again. If not, it will be much easier to accept those alternate story lines as "the reality" of this activity. In that emotional state, because the activity is necessary and the pain is real, it becomes much easier to assume that the old messages are true.
- **Meditate on 2 Corinthians 10:4-5.** In light of the previous point, this passage applies as much to how we respond to suffering as it does not to how we battle sin. As you resist the themes of your suffering story in the moments most prone to these interpretations, you are taking every thought captive and continuing to know God for who He really is (v.4). Knowing God for who He is, is the only way to "grieve as one who has hope." As you go into these predictably hard activities, recognize that there is an adversary who would delight to use these moments to reintroduce the destructive themes of your suffering story (v. 5).
- **Decide on your long-term memory plans first.** Before you pack, give away, or redecorate anything decide how you intend to store your memories: journal, scrap book, picture album, memory box, etc... (see Appendix D for a description of possibilities). This will help you decide what to keep. A picture of their car and a couple of representative stories of how much they loved it in a scrapbook might make selling the car feel less like you were giving a piece of them away. Keeping a favorite wooden cooking spoon in a memory box can make giving away the

other kitchen items more emotionally tolerable. Knowing how you will remember makes these decisions seem less random or disrespectful.

- **Decide whether you want to complete the task alone or with others.** This may vary from task to task. Look through your list above and mark with an asterisk ( \* ) those items for which it would be wise to allow others to come alongside you in these efforts. You have had family, friends, or small group members who have said, "Let me know if you need anything." This is the time to call them and say, "You said to call if you could help me with my grief. I am going to [name task] and it would be helpful to have someone with me as I did it. Would you be available?" While you complete the task their presence will give you someone with whom to share the stories that come to mind and to encourage you if themes of the suffering story become prominent again.
- **View this activity as a passage not a chore.** A chore (like spring cleaning) cheapens the significance of the task being completed for your grief journey. A passage recognizes that this activity is a part of a major transition in your life. While the task maybe something you have done and will do many times, this occurrence has a meaning that is distinct from the others. Unless we recognize this distinction we will feel stupid, weak, or too sentimental when the task causes emotional upset. Or we may avoid the activity until we are "ready" to do it and by "ready" we would mean "able to complete the task without getting upset."
- **Start with smaller changes.** This can be particularly important when the grief is for the loss of someone who lived in your home. Changing their spaces can feel like erasing them from the family. For example, you might make changes to the home already planned (i.e., rearranging furniture, replacing carpet, or painting walls) in other rooms before changing the function of their bedroom. You might have an updated family picture taken before you move existing pictures from the wall to your memory box. These pre-steps reveal the kind of changes that would have happened in your family inevitably and show that the larger changes are not an affront to the memory of your loved one.
- **Give things no longer needed to support a cause important to your loved one.** This is way to foster a continuation of your loved one's dreams and passions. Pictures, letters, and stories of how these contributions blessed others and advanced the cause can be added to your memory box, journal, or scrapbook. It can allow you to see that the impact of your loved one continues. In their example and continued influence, you can be encouraged to continue to make an impact in the areas for which God has given you a passion.
- **Write a letter about what you are doing and why to relax repetitive internal conversation.** You may find yourself saying the same things to yourself or your loved one many times as you engage in a predictably hard activity. This is common. Writing is often an effective way to release ourselves from the tendency to repeat something mentally. These letters may also become tangible ways to review your progress as you reread them and notice the change in tone, content of questions, and focal points of your thoughts.
- **Allow yourself to enjoy the changes guilt-free.** Any joy during grief can feel wrong. When we validate this feeling of guilt as accurate, we are embracing the "I deserved this" story line of guilt. We are transforming grief into a form of penance or self-abasement. We often say, "[Name of loved one] would not want you to feel that way," and we are correct and right to say this. But there is more. Guilt over enjoyment is not just a story with which our loved one disagrees, it is a false story – a story (version or interpretation of your life) that God is not telling. Part of the grief journey is to transition from our lost loved one being the focal point and interpretive center of life back to God being the focal point and interpretive center of life.

### Unpredictably Hard Moments

If only all our hard moments were predictable, we would feel less crazy. We would feel more prepared to re-engage life. The world would feel like a safer place to live in again. But there are times when grief hits out of the blue. We have hard moments when, even after reflection, we cannot explain why.

"The problem is that the longer we live, the more we know that there is little around us in this fallen world that's truly stable... In our quest for stability, we attempt to stand on an endless catalog of God-replacements that end up sinking with us (p. 33)." Paul Tripp in *A Shelter in the Time of Storm*.

Our response to these unpredictably hard moments are the times when grief can lead to some of its most destructive and unhealthy choices. We begin trying to create stability and relief for ourselves. We begin to believe that everything outside of our control is dangerous and a potential threat. We begin to live to not be hurt again. We begin to seek or create our own rock, refuge, or hiding place from life rather than seeking those things in God.

“Waiting refuses self-rescue (p. 65)... The opposite of waiting is meeting ‘needs’ now, taking matters into my own hands now, and acting as if I’m my only hope (p. 66)... Worship is wanting God more than wanting relief. Worship is finding God even when you don’t find answers. Worship is walking with God in the dark and having Him as the light of your soul (p. 99).” Bob Kellemen in *God’s Healing for Life’s Losses*.

**Psalms to Read:** Psalms 2, 5, 7, 11, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 25, 27, 28, 31, 32, 34, 36, 37, 40, 42, 43, 46, 52, 57, 59, 61, 62, 64, 71, 72, 89, 91, 92, 94, 95, 118, 119, 141, 142, 143, and 144 all speak of God as our rock, refuge, or hiding place. As you look at these Psalms, do not take them as a simple reprimand – “This is how I should be thinking.” As you read each Psalm reflect on the context that causes the psalmist to call out to God as his rock, refuge, and hiding place and look for parallels to your experience in these unpredictably hard times. Remember that God put these Psalms in His Word, because He loves us and knew we would need them. Receive them as God’s letters to you in these scary moments of unpredictable grief. See and hear in the frequency of these themes (40 of the 150 Psalms contain one of these the images of God)how much God wants to be your rock, refuge, and hiding place during these times.

**Question:** What attempts as self-rescue are you tempted to attempt in your grief?

- Unwillingness to talk about my loved one or the pain of my loss
- Stoic or emotional unresponsiveness to hard times
- Deep depression as an emotional barrier to life and relationships
- Guilt to provide a pseudo sense of control over hard moments
- Antisocial behavior to rebel against or punish life seeming to be unfair
- Moodiness as I succumb to each theme of the suffering story that comes to my mind
- Isolation to protect myself and/or others from my pain
- Getting too close too fast in other relationships to distract myself or fill the void
- Staying very busy so that I do not have to face my grief
- Impulsivity because relationship that brought order to my life is now gone
- False display happiness to meet the perceived expectation of others and/or God
- Alcohol or drugs to numb the pain
- Suicidal thoughts
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Reflection:** How do the attempts at self-rescue reinforce or respond to themes in your suffering story?

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Because unpredictable hard times are unpredictable, we cannot prepare or lay out a strategy for them like we have other challenges in this chapter. However, there are two things we can do. First, we can resolve not to face these unpredictably hard times alone. When these times come, share them with your counselor, mentor, or small group. Second, we can identify the themes of our suffering story that trigger to re-emerge during these unpredictably hard times. While you cannot directly control the frequency or intensity of these struggles, this exercise will help keep the grief “clean.” Keeping these unpredictably hard times as “clean” as possible is how the frequency and intensity of such struggles are decreased.

**Encouragement Focus (IDENTIFY GOALS):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Am I thinking about “progress” in my grief journey in a way that is healthy and realistic?
- Am I engaging with my predictably hard times in a wise and pro-active way?
- Am I responding to unpredictably hard times in a way that fosters continued progress?
- Prepare: Am I maintaining balance in the six areas of preparation from chapter one?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your grief to your encouragement partner.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 8

### “Beginning to Live the Rest of My Story”

PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me.

**“Some of my grief related to my loss remains [describe] but it defines me less and less.**

**But I am also experiencing more of what God has for me.**

**I never knew life could include [list of experiences] again.**

**I see now that God was not withholding these things from me, nor did I forfeit them.**

**I am learning to enjoy them without the guilt, fear, or guardedness.**

**I have come to realize that ‘healthy’ means more than the absence of grief.**

**I am learning to trust and enjoy God in the rise and fall of my circumstances.”**

**Memorize:** 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 (ESV), “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Now” – This verse applies to each moment you call “now.” There is no need to fear God’s comfort will expire.
- “Who loved us” – Responding to God’s love is the fuel for perseverance and why Satan causes us to question it.
- “Eternal comfort... comfort” – God understands that even eternal comforts needs to be applied repeatedly.
- “Good hope” – During this step we become convinced again that our hope is more than wishful thinking.
- “Work and word” – As you enter this stage of grief, there should be a renewed balance in serving for others and being cared for by them.

#### Teaching Notes

“Sometimes grief is so powerful that it feels like you died too... But, remember, though you are surrounded by death, you still live. Your soul needs to be fed. Your heart needs to be encouraged. Don’t quit. Don’t give up. Don’t let go of the good habits of faith that shaped and strengthened your relationship with Christ before your loss (p. 13).” Paul Tripp in *Grief: Finding Hope Again*

“But this is tantamount to arguing that God is like the husband who gives his wife a new toaster for their anniversary when she was expecting a romantic trip for two to a bed and breakfast. No matter how much she may need a toaster, she is unlikely to see it as a deep expression of her husband’s love... God had offered me genuine comfort in good faith, but I had failed to appreciate them as such. If this is true, then God’s comfort is not relative, but absolute, with discrete characteristics which we can learn to recognize (p. 23).” Joseph Lehmann in “Believing in Hope” from *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Winter 1998).

“Suffering is always an opportunity to focus on the only treasure that will last forever and never disappoint you or fade away (p. 8).” Winston Smith in *Divorce Recovery: Growing and Healing God’s Way*

“By praising I can still, in some degree, enjoy her, and already, in some degree, enjoy Him (p. 71-2).” C.S. Lewis in *A Grief Observed*

“You are secure not because you have control or understanding. You are secure even though you are weak, imperfect, and shortsighted. You are secure for one reason and one reason alone: God exists and he is your Father (p. 31)... The temptation, in times of waiting, is to focus on the things we are waiting for, all the obstacles that are in the way, our inability to make it happen, and all of the other people who haven’t seemed to have had to wait... All of this increases our feeling of helplessness, our tendency to think our situation is hopeless, and our judgment that waiting is futile (p. 48).” Paul Tripp in *A Shelter in the Time of Storm*.

### Embedded Study

New and normal are words that do not belong together. But that is precisely what step eight is all about, establishing a new normal. For most of us, at this stage in our journey, we still do not want a new normal. The residual grief in our heart still longs for the old normal. If this conflict exists within you, do not let it pull you backwards on your journey. It is not hypocritical to pursue a new normal against your heart's desire when reality insists that you must.

Even if you are optimistic about this new normal, a new normal is scary. It is unknown. It is relatively permanent. It soon will be the part of your life that occurs without thought or reflection. The disruption of this new normal will be what triggers your next pilgrimage through grief. If you are intimidated by this step, do not let that convince you that you have not completed the prior steps adequately.

The phrase "new normal" seems to imply more intentionality than it actually requires. You do not need a spreadsheet with seven columns and twenty-four rows to itemize and color-code what your expectations of life will be by activity, relationship, and season. As you grieve well and clean, a new normal will happen. A big part of this chapter will be devoted to identifying the defining marks of this new normal so you can be comforted as this occurs.

The chapter will also include two other sections. First, we will look at how this new normal assimilates into your life story. This will be a place for you to summarize what you learned and how you have grown over the course of this study.

Second, guidance will be provided to help you think through how to prepare to transition from your current G4 Group, counseling relationship, or mentor relationship into general small group ministry of the church for continued encouragement and growth. You are about to enter a new season of transition: from healing to living. These materials are meant to provide guidance on what "healthy" looks like after grief.

### Marks of a New Normal

The marks below are not portraits of what your new normal will look like. Each life is unique, so trying to create a list that would capture the new normal of every person would be impossible. Rather, the marks below capture the emotional, relational, and spiritual development that should be occurring as a healthy new normal emerges. Many of these points are modified and adapted from H. Norman Wright's book *Experiencing Grief* (bold text only, pages 79-80).

As you read through this list, do not view it as a to-do list. That would be the equivalent of a teenager reading about puberty as something he/she must accomplish. As you grieve well, you will find these things happening in your life. Begin by marking with an asterisk ( \* ) those items that you have already seen occurring during your journey. This should be an encouraging testimony of God's grace in your life and give you confidence that those things that have not yet emerged will do so.

1. **Grief Changes from Burden to Treasure:** Part of what makes grief hard is how it causes us not to want to think about the one we love, because of the pain these thoughts bring. This change feels offensive within us. We resent feeling reticent towards someone we previously were drawn to. As we reach this stage in our grief journey, thinking of our loved one can again be a source of joy. Memories are not as painful. While they may bring sadness, that sadness begins to be outweighed by the satisfaction or encouragement these memories now bring.

**Read James 1:2-4.** This season of grief has definitely been one of the "various trials" (v. 2) of which James speaks. How do we count it joy? Not because we are glad for our loss, but because we rejoice to have had the privilege of loving someone so special and having our life enriched by them. The lessons we learned from them and the character we developed with them is part of what God uses to bring us to the point of being "complete" (v. 4). A life without grief would have been a life without love.

2. **Energy Level Returns to Normal:** For so long life felt foreign. Everything required effort, thought, and intentionality. Decisions were big, immediate, or highly memorable. Conversations were heavy, serious, or awkward. Sleep was hard, interrupted, or an escape. That is an exhausting way to live. With the establishment of a new normal you are coming out of that way of life. Rest can be rest again. As your life becomes more rested again, rejoice in this as an indicator of God's faithfulness during this difficult journey.

**Read Isaiah 40:27-31.** You have likely felt disregarded by God (v. 27) and this added to the exhaustion (v. 30), but you have waited faithfully for God and are experiencing His renewal (v. 31). It is after journeys like grief that we realize how much our energy level is a gift from God. We so often take it for granted as "ours" but even in our prime (v. 30) we can be wasted away by life without God.

3. **Decision Making Becomes Easier:** Decisions are not simply made on the basis of principles. They are influenced by relationship and the direction of life. During grief both relationships and direction get disrupted. As the new normal is established, they return in new forms. This is part of the wisdom we gain from difficult experiences. We do not just gain more or better principles for decision making. We learn the actual value of the people and things that contribute to godly decision making so that we become less distracted by the malfunctioning of lesser things.

**Read Isaiah 46:3-4.** It is in the reality of this passage that clear and wise decision making exists. During grief we gain a first person experience of God's promises, "I will carry you... I will bear... I will save (v. 4)" and realize how much this has been happening since our birth (v. 3). This reality provides the stability of God's care and the direction of God's glory for good decision making. Further, having come to this knowledge through suffering, we know ourselves better and are able to make decisions more clearly within the passions with which God created us (Psalm 37:4).

4. **Appetite and Sleep Cycle Return to Normal:** When we lose one object of delight it can serve as a drain from the others. During grief, even if we use food as comfort, the anticipation of a good meal is usually absent. In the same way sleep becomes an escape or a necessity rather than an energizing blessing. Life becomes reduced to surviving, so essential tasks become merely life maintenance. As the new normal sets in, we are able to appreciate afresh that God has designed the essential parts of life to be enjoyable.

**Read Psalm 4:6-8.** During grief we were the ones who asked the question of verse 6. Now we bear the testimony of verses 7 and 8. We see that enjoying a good meal and the ability to enjoy good sleep are very God-dependant blessings. We now can savor them for what they were meant to be all along. Verses 7 and 8 would be good passages to memorize and use in your prayers before meals and before bed.

5. **Able to Enjoy Time Alone:** Solitude has long been recognized as an important discipline in the life of a Christian (see Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* chapter 7, pages 96-109). During grief this restorative exercise becomes a painful reminder that we are not with our loved one. At this stage the gift of solitude is returned to us as a blessing and we are better able to treasure this gift for the blessing it is. If you struggle being alone, then consider reading Richard Foster's chapter on solitude. It contains several pages reflecting on the benefits of solitude during a "dark night of the soul."

**Read passages about Jesus and solitude:** Matthew 4:1-11, 14:13 and 23, 17:1-9, 26:36-46; Mark 1:35, 6:31; Luke 5:16, 6:12. In His full humanity, Jesus regularly sought solitude as a source of strength. How much more would we need to do the same? It is during this time of establishing a new normal that it would be wise to evaluate how healthy and balanced your practice of spiritual disciplines are. It may be a while before life is as moldable again. If you are unsure what this would look like, then either Foster's book or Donald Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* would be very a useful read.

6. **Begin Looking Forward to Events:** Grief is a time when we focus a great deal of our attention considering the past. Important dates feel like they are sneaking up on us (forgetting) or looming over us (dreading). The present and future feel like they are "in the way" for a while. As a new normal sets in, planning can be an enjoyable activity again (at least to the degree it was before your loss). This is a primary indicator that you have accepted your loss and are beginning to live again. It does not mean that you cease remembering your loved one, but that you can look to the future with anticipation and joy.

**Read Philippians 3:12-16.** This passage is often misapplied during grief. Paul is not laying out a principle of forgetting the past or living in denial about painful events. In Philippians 4:9 Paul asks this church to remember how he handled his unpleasant experiences of anxiety while with them. In Philippians 4:12 Paul remembers being "brought low" and being hungry or in need. The principle is simply that the pain of our past should not become a mental block to pursuing the mission of our future. At this stage in the process you should begin to sense that turning of perspective within your own heart.

7. **Able to Use Your Experience to Comfort Others:** Initially, getting close to someone else's grief might have only served to magnify our own. In the early stages of grief, we can become pain or sorrow saturated. We are sorting through own experience frantically trying to get to the surface. Now we have experienced God's comfort in a way that makes the grief of others less threatening. We can relate to their pain and have a real sense of empathy to let them know God will not allow them to drown in their sorrow. We do not have answers for all their questions—their grief journey may have features ours did not—but we have a testimony about the Shepherd of their journey and what it was like for us to walk with Him through our valley of the shadow of death.



**Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-5.** Notice the time lapse implied in this passage. God comforts us. He is our Father of mercies and God of all comfort in any affliction we face. Pause, with no time table for how long this part of the process lasts. So that we can testify to God's comfort to others in whatever affliction they face. The pause is essential to the comfort. If we think God has put us "on the clock" to get "a return on His comfort investment" in us, then we would not feel like we had much comfort to offer. Once we experience God's patience before the "so that" (v. 4) we begin to share abundantly in Christ's comfort (v. 5).

8. **Freedom to Worship Returns:** During grief, heaven can feel like a barrier from your loved one more than the destination of your reunion. This can serve as a mental and emotional block for our worship. Raising our voice to heaven becomes a painful reminder of a fresh distance that has been created by death. As the gospel story becomes the foundation for our new normal, we realize our grief only served to draw our attention to this distance in a more personal way. In worship we begin to celebrate that there is hope for this chasm to be closed, because without the gospel we would be this far from God and every loved one with no hope for a reunion. Our affection for our loved one gets drawn into our appreciation for the gospel.

**Read Psalm 13.** This Psalm traces the journey of many in grief from when worship is hard and painful (v. 1-4) to when it becomes a source of joy and strength again (v. 5-6). Be reminded that God put this Psalm in His Word to comfort you where you are on this journey. It is the psalmist's reflection upon his salvation (v. 5) which allows him to sing and see that God has dealt bountifully with him (v. 6). This is because it is the gospel where we see God more than agreeing with our disdain for the distance death creates and bringing an ultimate remedy to the enemy of death.

9. **Sense of Humor Returns:** Proverbs 14:13 can be the testimony of many in grief, "Even in laughter the heart may ache, and the end of joy may be grief." We feel like grief will be the end of our joy and laughter. Life seems to have lost all irony in its finality. But we serve a God who used joy as His motivation to conquer death (Heb. 12:2). Our God truly gets the last laugh (Psalms 2:4) and our laughter can echo His victory. Without the gospel any laughter after grief would be a form of denial. In light of the gospel, our pain becomes what is temporary (2 Cor. 3:16-18) and our joy is eternal. The return of our sense of humor then becomes an expression of healthy faith rather than an unhealthy distraction.

**Read Psalm 30:5.** God does not use his victory over death as a cause to forbid our grief. God is not a temperamental, insecure king who only allows happy people in His presence. God allows us to mature—not only in character, but also in our emotions—into what He has made for us to be. We find repeatedly in Scripture that God did not become impatient with our grief just because He conquered death.

10. **New Relationships are Built:** New does not mean better than or a replacement for your loved one. During the early stages of grief you may be interacting with people, without building relationships. Friendships may emerge from those interactions, but initially you're surviving. This is why forming new romantic relationships during the first year of a significant grief event is unwise. It is as the new normal begins to settle in that you can begin to enjoy knowing people and letting them know you. At this stage in the journey you should find that you are relating to others as a person rather than out of your experience of loss.

**Read Proverbs 27:9.** This proverb connects new friendships with the presence of joy (previous mark of perseverance in grief). It connects the sweetness of friendship with "earnest counsel." The kind of friendship that should be developing are those who were willing to walk with you during your time of grief and got to know you well enough to speak timely words of encouragement from God's truth into your life. The raw state of grief provides a context in which meaningful and authentic friendships can emerge.

11. **Experience Peace Even During a "Grief Spasm":** Often the emotional disturbance that comes with a grief spasm is strongly correlated with the impatient realization that the journey isn't over yet or fear that we are grieving wrong. Patience with the grief spasms and confidence that what can be done is being done (chapter 7) are big parts of experiencing peace during these times. This stage in the process does not mean that grief is over. It should mean that this loss is no longer experienced as a threat to your emotional well being.

**Read Job 42:7-17.** Notice that God restored to Job double of everything he had in Job 1:1-5 except for the number of children. If Job did the math, this had to result in a few grief spasms. Each of his earlier children had birthdays. His latter children must have had mannerisms that called up memories of his first children. But Job's long journey with God through grief allowed Job to experience these moments differently, so that it could be said of him not merely that he was old, but that his days were "full" (v. 17).

12. **Appreciate Your Growth Because of Grief:** It is one thing to acknowledge growth. It is another thing to appreciate it. Our goal here it to be able to say, “God has been good to me in my grief and has done good things in me through my grief.” One big obstacle to this testimony is when we link our suffering to our growth with the word “because.” It sounds like this, “Because I needed to grow, God put me through grief.” This assumes that God triggered the loss for the purpose of producing the outcome. While God is in control of all things, Scripture does not substantiate this logic. God promises to bring good from suffering; we too often interpret this as the “why” of our suffering. Resist the urge to over-interpret the good God accomplishes and thereby vilify His kindness towards you.

**Read Job 42:1-6.** At the end of the book, Job does not know “why.” Yet he can see that God is good and has been good to him in spite of Job’s great losses. Verse 5 summarizes Job’s journey well. Job wanted answers he could hear with his ear and make sense of his suffering. Job got to see the character and redemption of God and received a peace that passes understanding (Phil. 4:7). At the end of our journey of grief we may not have answers to all the questions we wanted. Job didn’t. But we will have come to the place where the answers we do have to the questions of who we are, who God is, and what makes life livable are sufficient to sustain our hope.

### Writing Your New Narrative

At this point in your journey, with the new normal settling in, you are at a place to see your story come together to a single, meaningful narrative again. This does not mean deciphering the “reason” for your loss, but to understand the pieces of your life as parts of one larger story.

To help with this assimilation return to the exercise you did in chapter 2 where you listed the facts of your loss chronologically. Expand this list in two ways. First, make a list of the significant events of your life that occurred before this loss. Second, add those events that have transpired in your life since you completed chapter 2. Once this is complete, read through the journey of your life as one large story.

With this in mind return to the five questions we asked in chapter 6 and summarize what you have come to know through the course of this study.

**Who am I?**

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**Who is God?**

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**What is death?**

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**Is love worth grief?**

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**What am I living for?**

This question will be the focal point of chapter 9. So while you can begin to think about it now, know that you will given more guidance on how to think through this question.

## Preparing for Transition

This third section of chapter eight may feel like a change of pace. That is because it no longer has grief as its focal point. This section asks the question, "What should my life begin to look like now that it's not focused on recovering from grief?"

**Make sure you are in a small group.** Trust takes time. The baton of trust will soon be passed from your G4 Group or mentor to the more regular ministries of the Body of Christ. The primary location in which this occurs is small groups. The lessons (cognitive and emotional) that God has taught you in the course of this study have been enhanced, protected, and applied largely because of the relationships in which you learned them. The same thing is true for the next (and all other) lessons that God has for you.

This is why it is wise for you to begin getting plugged into a general small group if you are not already. If you need help identifying which small group would be a good fit for you, talk with your G4 Group leader, mentor, or a church pastor.

Many of our small group leaders have attended this training on "Taking the Journey of Grief with Hope." They care about the subject and are familiar with the content. We can help you find one of these groups if that makes you more comfortable. It would be completely at your discretion whether to share with the leader why you chose their group.

**Learn accountability and encouragement on a broader scale.** Walking through this material with someone else may be the first time you have experienced ongoing, Christian accountability and encouragement. Accountability is not just for life-dominating struggles. It is part of God's definition of "healthy." People who do not have relationships in which they are honest about their struggles, seeking accountability and encouragement are people who are becoming "unhealthy."

As you move from a G4 Group or mentor relationship focused primarily upon grief to a general small group, you may wonder what accountability and encouragement will look like now. The seven points below are meant to guide you in the kind of relationships you are looking to form with your small group.

1. Voluntary – Accountability is not something you have; it is something you do. You must disclose in order to benefit from the relationship. Hopefully, the positive experience you have had going through this material will encourage you to remain transparent and vulnerable.
2. Trusted – The other person(s) is someone you trust, admire their character, and believe has good judgment. You are encouraged to join a small group now so that you can build this trust before graduating from your G4 Group or mentor relationship.
3. Mutual – Relationships that are one-sided tend to be short-lived. In the small group you will hear the weaknesses and struggles of others as you share your own. You will help carry their burdens as they help carry your burdens (Gal. 6:1-2).
4. Scheduled – Accountability that is not scheduled tends to fade. This is why small groups that meet on a weekly basis are an ideal place for accountability to occur. Everyone knows when to meet and has a shared expectation for how the accountability conversations will begin.
5. Relational – We want spiritual growth to become a lifestyle not an event. This means that we invite accountability to be a part of our regular conversations not just something that we do at a weekly meeting. It should mean that there are times when we are doing accountability and don't realize it.
6. Comprehensive – Accountability that exclusively fixates on one subject tends to become repetitive and fade. It also tends to reduce "success" to trusting God in a single area of life.
7. Encouraging – Too often the word "accountability" carries the connotation of "sin hunt." When that is the case accountability is only perceived to be "working" when it is negative. However, accountability that lasts should celebrate growth in character as fervently as it works on slips in character. This means asking each other questions about discouragement in addition to questions about temptations.

**Have a plan for future study.** We walk forward. We drift backwards. For some time now you have been a part of an intentional, structured process. If you leave that structure without a continued plan for deepening your understanding and application of Scripture to the struggles of life, you will regress. Ephesians 5:15-16 calls us to intentionality because of a recognition that time minus direction equals decay not healing.

Appendix E and F are designed to provide you with materials to develop a future study plan. Appendix E contains a list of Scriptures that discuss the subject of grief. You may want to devote your daily time of Bible reading and reflection to these passages in the coming months.

Appendix F provides an annotated bibliography (list of books with a content summary) of resources that make a good extension of this material. These resources address grief, grief in children, miscarriage, infertility, suffering in general, divorce recovery, depression, and heaven. You can trust that these materials will share the same commitment to the Bible, the Gospel, the church, grace, and a comprehensive understanding of the human condition you have found in this study.

**Make a formal transition plan.** Write out your transition plan. List the things that need to be in place before you “graduate” from your G4 Group or mentor relationship. List the important practices you have begun in this study that you will need to maintain. Write out what the “yellow flags” (don’t wait for the red ones) would be that you should address seriously if they appear.

Review your plan with your G4 Group or mentor. Get their input on what needs to be added to the plan. In consultation with them, decide what aspects from that list need to be brought into the accountability conversation with your new small group before you graduate.

**Encouragement Focus (PERSEVERANCE):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Do I have an accurate assessment of what marks of a “new normal” are present and absent in my life?
- Have I thought through and begun to enact an effective transition plan?
- Prepare: Am I maintaining balance in the six areas of preparation from chapter one?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your grief to your encouragement partner.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 9

### "Living the Rest of Your Story"

STEWARD all of my life for God's glory.

**"God has shown me great grace; grace greater than my grief.  
I am learning what it means to live out of my new identity in Christ.  
That has pushed me to ask the question,  
'How can I be a conduit of God's grace to others?'  
As I have sought God, examined my life, and consulted with fellow believers,  
I believe this [describe] is what it looks like for me to steward God's grace now."**

**Memorize:** I Peter 4:19 (ESV), "Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good." As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- "Those who suffer" – This passage will apply to every person many times in the course of their life.
- "God's will" – Hopefully, at this stage in your journey you can read this without hearing it as God's punishment.
- "Entrust their souls" – Life is a choice between entrusting our souls to God or seeking to protect ourselves.
- "To a faithful Creator" – If you made it to this point in the study, you have many evidences of God's faithfulness.
- "While doing good" – Without a returning sense of mission, suffering would drain our vitality for engaging life.

#### Teaching Notes

"My sorrow now feels less an oppressive weight, more a treasured possession. I can take it out and ponder it, then put it safely and carefully away (p. 79)." Testimony of an anonymous woman in *Experiencing Grief* by H. Norman Wright.

"After a close partnership and marriage of twenty-seven years, learning to walk alone again was no easy task... It took me many years to learn that no man on this earth can satisfy the deepest longings of a woman's heart. Only One can do that. He is also the only one who can help me live with that deep hole, that deep pain in my heart... The pain is still there. He hasn't filled it up yet, but he has made a bridge over it. I can live with it now and I can stand on this bridge and reach out to others (p. 43-45)." Ingrid Trobisch in "Let the Deep Pain Hurt" *Partnership*

"There is no doubt in my mind that God is right now equipping you for future opportunities when others are afflicted in this way! We are all 'comforters-in-training' (p. 64)." Paul Tautges in *Comfort Those Who Grieve*.

"Suffering reduces us to nothing and as Soren Kierkegaard noted, 'God creates everything out of nothing. And everything which God is to use, he first reduces to nothing.' To be reduced to nothing is to be dragged to the foot of the cross (p. 136)... To believe in God in the midst of suffering is to empty myself; and to empty myself is to increase the capacity...for God. The greatest good suffering can do for me is to increase my capacity for God (p. 137)." Joni Eareckson Tada & Steven Estes in *When God Weeps*.

### Embedded Study

At the end of chapter 8 we began to discuss the question, "What am I living for?" That is an essential question in our grief journey. Unless we answer it, our past will remain brighter than our future, and we will be set up for despair. With a question like this, however, you will be doing most of the writing in this chapter.

The goal is that you would find things that you could engage as passionately as you engaged your loved one. This is not a form of replacement, but a necessity of enjoying life. Being passionate about something now does not in any way diminish your love for them then. In effect, you are unleashing more of what they loved in you. You can rightly imagine your loved one with God in heaven saying, "See, that is what I loved about then all along. Now they are getting more of an opportunity to impact the world with the gifts and passions You put in them. I love getting to watch them serve You in Your presence. It is glorious!"

**Read Luke 11:24-26.** This is a terrifying warning about comforting suffering without that comfort resulting in serving God's purposes with your life. Comfort alone does not satisfy the human heart. In the absence of mission, life becomes purposeless. This lack of purpose is often experienced as a form of depression. When depression sets in after we have done all we know to do in grieving well, then we truly begin to believe that there is no hope. If we lose hope, then the last state truly is worse than the first.

**Read Ephesians 2:8-10.** In this study we have traveled through the Gospel (v. 8-9) to good works (v. 10). The nine steps are merely the Gospel in slow motion. Then nine steps show us God's general pattern for redeeming and restoring our suffering. We are not now exiting the Gospel in order to do good works, but cultivating the fruit of the Gospel. Paul says that there are "good works" that "God prepared" for every believer and that these should define our daily lives ("that we should walk in them") (v. 10). There are answers to the questions you will be asked next. You have the confidence that comes from the promises of Scripture that God has a design for your life and wants you to know what it is.

As you read through and answer the next nine questions, remember God's patience and timing. There will be some aspects of God's design that you can engage in immediately. But there may also be ways you want to serve God that will require you to be more mature or be equipped before you are prepared to fulfill them. The main thing is to begin to have a vision for life that involves being God's servant and actively engaging that vision where you are currently equipped.

**I. Am I willing to commit my life to whatever God asks of me?** This is a "do not pass go" question. If your answer is "no," it will bias the answers you give to each subsequent question. Do not get lost in guilt or pretend that it is "yes." Rather, identify the obstacle. What aspect of your suffering story (chapter 4) makes this sacrifice seem too risky?

Are there specific things you believe God is asking of you? Be sure to record your thoughts on this question before reflecting on the subsequent questions.

**2. What roles has God placed me in?** The first part of being a good steward of one's life is to fulfill one's primary roles with excellence. When Paul says in Ephesians 5:17 that we are to "understand what the will of the Lord is," he goes on to describe God's design for each of our major life roles (spouse, parent, child, and worker in 5:22-6:9).

**3. What are my spiritual gifts?** Stewarding your life for the glory of God involves utilizing the spiritual gifts God has given you. God gives spiritual gifts that coincide with the calling He places on each individual's life. Read Romans 12:1-8 and I Corinthians 12:1-30. If you need further assistance discerning this, talk to a pastor about taking a spiritual gifts inventory.

**4. For what group of people (age, struggle, career, ethnic, etc...) am I burdened?** From God's earliest covenant with people His intention was to bless us that we might be a blessing to others (Gen 12:2). By investing your life in those you have a burden for, it allows you to be other-minded and find joy in it.

**5. What am I passionate about?** At this point in the stewardship evaluation, you can begin to see Psalm 37:4 fulfilled in your life. There is a level of vulnerability involved in being passionate again, but allow yourself to express faith in God through this vulnerability and pursue the life He has for you.

**6. With what talents or abilities has God blessed me?** These need not be spiritual gifts. Read the amazing description of abilities God gave Bezalel and how he used those abilities to serve God (Exodus 31:1-11). Think through the skills and expertise you have accumulated in your life.

**7. What are my unique life experiences?** Both pleasant and unpleasant experiences should be listed. We are sometimes tempted to think that God can only use the good or spiritual experiences of our lives. God is glad to use our successes (Matt. 5:16), but God also delights in displaying His grace by transforming our suffering from flaming darts of Satan meant for our destruction to bridges of ministry carrying many people to life in Christ (2 Cor. 1:3-5).



**8. Where do my talents and passions match up with the needs in my church and community?** We should seek to steward our lives in cooperation with our local church. God’s way of blessing and maturing those we serve is through the Body of Christ, the church. By identifying where your gifts, burdens, passions, and abilities fit within or expanding your church’s ministries, you are maximizing the impact your service can have on those you are seeking to bless and protecting yourself from discouragement through isolation.

**9. How would God have me bring these things together to glorify Him?** This is not a new question, but a summary question. Look back over what you have written. Talk about it with your Christian friends, family, mentor, or pastors. Dedicate a time to prayerfully ask God to give you a sense of direction. Then begin serving as a way to steward your life for God’s glory.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Matthew 5:4

**Encouragement Focus (STEWADING):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Are there necessary changes I have omitted that would prevent me from graduating this G4 Group or mentor relationship?
- Is there advice, counsel, or training I should seek before seeking to enact those things I believe God is calling me to do?
- Prepare: Am I maintaining balance in the six areas of preparation from chapter one?

## Appendix A

### Memorial Ceremony for an Unborn Child

Grieving the loss of an unborn child can be particularly difficult. No one else had the privilege of knowing your baby and, therefore, many of the rituals of grief (i.e., sharing pictures or stories of how the lost loved one touched other's lives) cannot be engaged. Because no one else knew their baby, parents often try to take this journey of grief alone.

What follows are suggestions for how to honor your lost child and facilitate your own grieving process. Do not consider this appendix to be a recipe to be followed directly, but as a collection of ideas to take what best applies to your situation. Some families who lose their baby may choose not to utilize a service like this one. A small group or church family should be considerate of the family's wishes when offering to help in this way.

The suggestions recommended below will be incorporated in the memorial service outlined at the end of this appendix.

**Name Your Baby:** This will be important for not only the memorial, but for the on-going grief process. This will allow you to reference your child in future conversations (which is healthy). Without a name, you and others will be more likely to begin to live as if the loss never happened within a matter of weeks. Parents may change the name they intended to call their child without feeling as they are dishonoring their baby. The goal in naming the baby is to accept the loss as real, not to say that nothing has or can change.

**Write a Good-Bye Letter:** With many losses we see death coming and get to say good-bye. With miscarriage there is both surprise and your child would not have been able to hear your words. A letter allows you to put your initial grief into words which can be heard by family and friends at the memorial. It allows you to process these early experiences of your grief and to feel more understood.

**Memorial Box:** This is not a casket, but a place to keep some precious things (i.e., blanket, small toys, birth/death certificates, ultra sound pictures, good-bye letter, notes from friends, your grief journal, etc...). A memorial box can allow your child to always have a place of remembrance in your home without the "enshrinement effect" that comes with having a room devoted to your lost child.

**Get a Grief Journal:** You will have many thoughts and experience many emotions in the coming months. You may fear forgetting what you are thinking and feeling, because it is all you have left of your baby. A journal is a healthy place to capture those thoughts and emotions. One option many mothers have found helpful is *Mommy, Please Don't Cry* by Linda DeYmaz. This journal also serves as a place to gather your thoughts so that you have an answer when friends, family, or small group members ask, "How are you doing?"

**Don't Rush the Memorial:** Planning and conducting the memorial is an important part of the grieving process. It confirms that this is a real loss, one to be acknowledged by those who love you, and that there is a journey of grief ahead. It is during the planning and conducting of a memorial that denial can wear off and a network of friends be established to support you in the weeks and months ahead.

**Plant a Tree / Garden:** Often with a miscarriage one of the difficulties in the grief process is that there is nowhere to go and grieve or to place flowers on your child's birthday and other special occasions. Planting a tree can provide you a place to go and remember. It also provides a visual reminder of the passing of time and personal growth as you see the tree mature. If a family chooses to plant a tree or garden, this would determine the location of the ceremony and would need to be in a place where the property would not be sold or outside a home from which the family planned to move.

**Create a Time Capsule:** It can make the memorial seem more like a real funeral if there is something to bury. With the planting of a tree, you might also bury a time capsule with a copy of your good-bye letter, toys you had purchased, medical bracelets/papers from the DNC visit, a list of the dreams for this child you are surrendering to God, or other memorable items.

## Planning the Memorial

As you plan the memorial, remember this is not a means to an end, but a part of the grief process. Taking the time to plan a memorial confirms the reality of your grief. You did not just have a medical procedure. You lost a child, and it is right to grieve.

Planning the ceremony is a time of very beneficial conversation with your spouse and children. Often families are not sure how to talk to one another, what is acceptable to say or feel, or when to bring up the subject. If this ice is not broken, grief becomes stifled for everyone. Planning a ceremony is a good way to open the lines of communication. The outline below should help facilitate these conversations. Each member of the family can feel free to say what he/she likes and dislikes without fearing they may be insulting another family member's idea.

The guest list is also important. It is wise to invite more people than you think will come. The memorial is a way to announce your loss so that you do not have to face as many excited "how's the baby?" questions in the weeks ahead. Also, by inviting people to the memorial, you will feel less pressure to "act normal." Having a ceremony declares that normal has been disrupted in a significant way and that it will be a while before normal returns.

## A Memorial Ceremony

Note: Use this section as a suggestion and not a template. Make it your own. The material below is merely meant to give you something to build from at a time when it is hard to concentrate and there are so many other things on your mind.

Officiate: Ask a pastor or small group leader to conduct the memorial. Your role should be to participate in the memorial; not to try to lead it.

Preparation: Depending on what elements of the service you use, some preparation may be needed. It is fine to ask friends and family to help with digging the hole for the time capsule, preparing food for a follow up meal, or handling childcare.

### Opening Scripture & Prayer:

Psalm 139:13-18 (ESV), "For you formed my [may choose to use the child's name throughout the Psalm reading] inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. How precious to me are your thoughts O God! How vast is the sum of them! If you count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you."

Lord, we come to you with broken hearts because Your Word is true. [Name] was fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful and we longed to know them in [name's] life. You knew [name] intimately from conception and know him/her even now. We come because we will not get the privilege of knowing [name] this side of heaven and that hurts us.

- Words of prayer for family
- Words of prayer for mother
- Words of prayer for father
- Words of prayer for siblings
- Words of prayer for grandparents and extended family present

Lord, we do hold your thoughts as precious even when we do not understand them. We admit we cannot understand this and it pains us. We ask that You would comfort us with the knowledge that when we are awake thinking about [name], that [name] is awake with You. Amen.

### Reading of Parent's Good-Bye Letter:

This can be done by the family standing together, one member of the family, or by the memorial officiate on behalf of the family. After reading the letter the family can place the letter (and any items of significance referenced in the letter) in the time capsule to be buried.

### Reading of Words from Others:

The family might ask certain other people to write their thoughts and reflections to be read at this time. If so, it would be wise to have these pieces written out to ensure they are fitting for a memorial service. At the conclusion of reading each of these the individual would have two copies of his/her statement. First, the individual would walk to the parents/siblings and give them a copy for the memory box. Second, the individual would go to the time capsule and place a copy there.

### Planting of Tree and Time Capsule:

Officiate: Throughout Scripture we find that God encourages His people to make places of remembrance for burial of loved ones. We find in this the tenderness and mercy of our God. God was not content to merely bring [name] to Himself in heaven, but He also is concerned to care for [mom's name, dad's name, sibling by name] until they are reunited with [name] in the presence of Jesus.

When we lose an unborn child, families often do not receive the grace of God that comes from a place of remembrance. As those who love and care for [mom's name, dad's name, sibling by name] we wanted to make sure that was not the case for them. We will be planting a tree in memory of [name] (say a few words about the type of tree or location where tree is planted if either has particular meaning).

[Looking at family] God wants you to have a place to remember. He cares for you. And we, as your family and friends, want to be an extension of his care for you in the weeks and months ahead. Having a place to grieve is not all that you will need. You will need to know that you do not have to grieve alone or in silence. We want to be the Body of Christ to you on this journey and sharing your tears will be our privilege.

[Looking at attendees] The [last name] family will be keeping a memory box of precious items from [name's] life. I would encourage you in the days and weeks ahead to write out how God has used [name], the shared experience of joy over pregnancy and grief over miscarriage, and how the [last name] family's example has strengthened your walk with the Lord. These letters will be precious reminders of the impact [name] had and a confirmation that he/she was as real as their pain testifies. As they are stored in their memory box, these letters will become the fond stories they re-visit like the stories you retell with your family about lost loved ones.

Plant tree and time capsule. [For this time having a song selected – whether played/sung live or on CD – to allow for a worshipful meditation and prevent silence from making an awkward distraction before the end of the service.]

### Closing Scripture & Prayers:

Mark 10:13-16 (ESV), "And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.' And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them."

Lord, we are grateful for this picture of what [name] is experiencing as we gather. Our loss and grief is made bearable and has hope because of Your love for children. We also come to you as children. In moments like these our world seems bigger than we can handle and we strongly sense our need for our Father's protection. There are things we cannot explain to our children and we ask them to trust us. This is an experience we cannot understand and so we express a child-like faith that is full of questions and emotions.

We pray a special protection over the hearts and minds of [mom's name, dad's name, sibling by name]. Give them a special awareness of your presence and care in the coming days. Amen

[Officiate: Give instructions of how the memorial will conclude.]

## Appendix B

### Applying the Grief Seminar to Losses Not Caused by Death

Often it can be hard to recognize grief as grief, because of the absence of a death. Major losses can be caused by many other life changes than someone dying. But this difficulty goes well beyond the challenge of rightly labeling an experience. When we do not recognize the grief element in a major loss or life transition, we begin to try to make sense of that experience and overcome its fallout in ways that are not suited for the difficulties that lie ahead.

That is the purpose of this appendix – to prepare you to apply the materials contained in this study to grief experiences that are not the result of the death of a loved one. Throughout this study you will find language that refers to the loss of a person (i.e., loved one, him, her, spouse, child, parent, etc...). If your loss was not a person, then these references may give you the impression that these materials do not apply to you.

However, the major experiences, changes, and challenges of grief are similar enough that once you begin to see how grief disrupts your identity and story, you should be able to apply this material to losses that do not involve the loss of a person. The important thing for reading these materials is (1) that you recognize your loss as a grief event and (2) that you are able to articulate what you have lost so that when you read the personal language in this guide, you naturally think of your loss.

This appendix will examine grief not triggered by death in four categories: the loss of innocence, the loss of a dream, the loss of stability, and the living death of divorce. These categories are not mutually exclusive, but they should help you think through different aspects of a grief struggle that is not triggered by someone's death.

#### Grief & the Loss of Innocence

This grief is usually related to some form of abuse. In abuse, trust (a key element of innocence) is redefined from a positive quality that blesses a relationship to a dangerous activity that is now akin to naiveté. When that happens something precious is lost, but we often view this experience exclusively as a wound to be healed and overlook that it is also a loss to be grieved.

As you read and seek to apply these materials to the loss of innocence (or the other three categories), it may be helpful to find a physical object that represents the innocence that you lost. It could be a picture of you at the age just before the abuse occurred. Perhaps it is a picture of father or mother who is safe. Maybe you pick something more symbolic like a pillow to represent sleep without nightmares.

Regardless of the object, use it to remind you that you are grieving the absence of something good. In grieving lost innocence, it is easy to get lost in the powerful emotions and memories surrounding the violation that occurred and miss grieving the loss for the innocent person to whom they occurred. If we do this, we silence our grief and magnify our pain; we get distracted from the grief (our present task) and fixate on the violation (a past experience we cannot change). This leaves us trapped in a period of time we cannot change rather than allowing us to embark on a journey of grief by which God can give new meaning to our loss.

As you embark on this grief journey, recognize that healthy trust may be the most difficult and confusing aspect. The interaction you have with your G4 Group, mentor, or counselor may be the most uncomfortable, yet beneficial, part of the journey. The redemption of innocence lost requires the willingness to embrace trust a blessing again.

A major theme in the journey that is ahead of you is seeing that Christ's righteousness allows you to experience a sense of cleanness and innocence that was taken from you. As a Christian, God does not see you as defiled, and He invites you to see yourself through His eyes. Surrendering to Christ as Lord doesn't just mean doing whatever God says, it also means allowing His perspective to have the final say on our life.

Do not feel rushed by that last paragraph. It may feel very far away. But that is why you are "Taking the Journey of Grief with Hope." The purpose of this section is merely to help contextualize this study for your loss so that you are able to see how grief applies to your past hurt.

### **Grief & the Loss of a Dream**

The loss of a dream can emerge from a variety of experiences: infertility, divorce, job loss, chronic pain, a rebellious child, mid-life crisis, or anything else that prevents you from doing or having something very important to you. In the midst of these kinds of situations we often become so consumed with managing the details of life that we forget there is a loss to be grieved.

When we forget to grieve the loss of a dream, we are left with a nagging feeling that the experience was incomplete, but have no clue what is left to be done. After all, we managed all the details as best we could. What more could life want from me? But there still doesn't feel like there is "closure" (whatever that word means).

In the loss of a dream, closure most often means grieving. In these situations, the theme of "story" in grief which you will find in these materials can be particularly helpful to the grieving process. Your loss affected your future more than your past. You may have painful dreams unfulfilled more than painful memories flooding your mind. You feel like you are walking into grief more than you are walking away from it.

Your loss was part of how you built your future in your mind. Now you feel like a character without a story more than a story with a character (i.e., loved one) missing. Chances are you resist and even resent having to write a new story. This is the loss you are grieving – the loss of a good story (i.e., dream) having to be rewritten.

A major theme in the journey ahead of you will be trusting God as the ultimate Author of history. Based upon your good dream, God has failed and forfeited His role. Having dreams, goals, or ambitions may now feel impossible or painfully vulnerable. However, it is through the journey of grieving your loss that you gain the courage to embrace a story again. It is through honestly engaging with these fears, disappointments, hurts, and anger on the journey of grief that you can begin to see God for who He truly is again.

### **Grief & the Loss of Stability**

If the loss of innocence is past tense grief and the loss of a dream is future tense grief, then the loss of stability is present tense grief. This grief might include an elderly parent surrendering independence to live with children, a fire destroying your home, a natural disaster hitting your city, or a criminal intrusion into your life. In these experiences the fear and anger over the violation or interruption often cause us to overlook the grief experience.

Often the grief over lost stability (present) is closely related to grief over the loss of a dream (future). It is the grief of divorce's impact on my kid's school performance more than a grief related to the possibility of growing old alone. It is the grief of struggling to pay this month's bills, rather than unattainable dream of being VP in this company. It is the grief that drains the motivation to continue in rehab rather than that of the grief of understanding my life story as one that will include chronic pain.

With the loss of stability, the theme of "identity" which you will find in these materials on grief may be particularly helpful. To acknowledge my loss of stability often requires a significant change in my self-perception. However, unless we are careful this change can be a time when many lies and self-deprecating concepts enter our sense of identity.

Once you get through the initial shock of the loss of stability, then this grief process begins to closely resemble the grief related to the loss of a dream. The important thing to remember is that as you deal with the logistical and emotional fallout from your loss of stability, that this is a loss to be grieved and your processing of this event will likely feel incomplete until you have done so.

## **Grief & Living Death**

One of the common descriptions for the experience of divorce is "living death." There is a union and family which dies, but each member of that family (spouses, children, and grandparents) remain alive to observe the slow, painful death and try to figure out how they are to relate to one another. In many ways grief is easier when the person or thing that you lost is not constantly coming in and out of your life or sending messages that have to be interpreted.

As you go through these materials on grief, you may need to give more attention the sections on grief triggers or unpredictably hard times, and rely less on the general guidelines given to the time frame for grief. Grieving a divorce is less orderly than other grief experiences.

You may also find that the experiences of anger and guilt are more pronounced in grieving a divorce than in other grief experiences. In your suffering story (chapter four), it may be harder to weave out the themes of "I deserve this," "relationships hurt," or "evil wins" from your grief. The fact that there is rarely an "innocent party" in a divorce will make the discernment between sin and suffering a more necessary task than in other forms of grief.

Thinking through the changes in relationships will be more involved than with other forms of grief. Most of the same dynamics that are discussed in this material will exist, but with an additional level of complexity. For instance, related to couple friends as a single person will still be different and awkward, but, after a divorce, maintaining friendship can feel like choosing sides for your friends. Overt conversations about these changes are wise.

A major theme in your journey through grief will be patience and reliance upon God. Coming to the same challenges over and over again (i.e., the pain of a weekly visitation schedule, having to decide about holidays, hearing "updates" on your ex-spouse from friends, etc...) will trigger grief regularly. You might ask several key people to pray Colossians 1:9-14 on your behalf regularly, especially verse 11 where Paul asks for "all endurance and patience with joy" for his Colossian friends.

Another theme in your journey will be the resistance of taking on "divorced" as your identity. Whenever we struggle with one thing for an extended period of time, we have a tendency to embrace it as who we are. As you move through the section on learning your gospel story, make sure that you see that divorce is not the defining chapter of your life.

## Appendix C

### Small Group Care Plan for the Whole Journey

Caring for a friend facing a significant loss is something that we (as friends and church members) often start well. We bring meals and try to make sure the mundane burdens (like mowing the grass) are handled. But too often this ends after a couple of weeks, and when the care ends the grieving individual often feels like it is no longer acceptable to speak of their loss. The length of our care often becomes the unspoken time table for how long grief is socially acceptable to talk about.

Our care can be an immense blessing when we care well for the duration of the grieving process. The purpose of this appendix is to equip a small group to care for its members after a significant loss in a way that facilitates healthy grieving and demonstrates the present, patient love of Christ through His body, the church. Our goal would be to ensure that when their season of grief comes, every member of a small group would be able to echo this testimony:

"Reading back through journal entries made a decade earlier... I realized I had faced my greatest fear in life—to love and then to lose someone—with my faith intact. My wife's death confirmed rather than threatened my faith because everything that followed conformed to what I had been taught to expect. My church family rallied to my aid, swamping me with love and care; my co-workers expressed deep sympathy and shouldered my responsibilities until I could return to work, and above all God made His presence and His comfort known in special ways (p. 14)." Joseph Lehmann in "Believing in Hope" from *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Winter 1998).

#### A Standard Beginning

During the first couple of weeks the goal is simply to be a compassionate presence and to serve your friend by providing the mental-emotional space to process all the changes in his/her life. Your involvement at this stage is very practical, but with the awareness that practical involvement will likely create the opportunity to listen to where your friend is in that moment.

As a small group you will want to:

- Create a plan for who can bring meals for the first 1-2 weeks.
- Find out if there are household chores or lawn work that can be alleviated.
- Attend funeral
- Be aware of appointments (medical, legal, etc...) and provide support for these as needed.

#### Recording Important Dates

A significant loss has more than one significant date. For instance, in caring for someone who lost their spouse you would need to be aware of more than the date he/she died. You would also want to know birthday, anniversary, when they may have been planning a special get away, Father's/Mother's Day, etc... During the first year there will be more of these dates and special form of contact should be added on these dates to the care plan below.

In the second and third year, several of these dates will be points that you will want to let your friend know you remember the occasion. The tone of these interactions do not have to be somber. It often encouraging and freeing for someone to know that their loved one is not forgotten (there is a great of burden that comes with being someone's sole-rememberer).

Someone in the small group will want to get the dates for the following occasions and share them with the group as needed or appropriate. Making a note or two about what your friend remembers or liked best about these dates with their loved one can be an effective way to care more meaningfully in the future.

- Birthday of Deceased: \_\_\_\_\_
- Due date for the unborn: \_\_\_\_\_



- Date of Death: \_\_\_\_\_
- Anniversary: \_\_\_\_\_
- Relevant or Favorite Holidays: \_\_\_\_\_
- Planned or Annual Trips / Events: \_\_\_\_\_
- Special Time to Loved One (i.e., Start of Hunting Season): \_\_\_\_\_
- Important Life Marker for Loved One (i.e, Start of School): \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Advice for Grief Journey Companion:**

The care plan below discusses someone serving as a “Grief Journey Companion” (GJC). This is a member of the group who will take the time to study through this “*Taking the Journey of Grief with Hope*” seminar with their friend. The GJC does not need to see themselves as a counselor, but as companion who ensures their friend does not have to travel this difficult terrain alone.

It is recommended the grieving friend and GJC meet every other week during the first five to six months of grief. In between meetings each person would watch the videos and study the material in this notebook. Between meetings the GJC would send their grieving friend messages of encouragement or prayers regarding the material being studied.

In addition the GJC would:

- Be available for phone calls when grief is particularly intense.
- Help the individual decide what to share with the small group during prayer times.
- Communicate needs to the small group.

**Building a 12 Month Care Plan**

The concept and some points of this care plan were adapted from Paul Tautges’ book *Comfort Those Who Grieve*.

Be sure to add to this care plan interaction on the special dates recorded above. While completing a chart like this may seem a bit formal, without it grief care tends only to last for a relatively short time or becomes the responsibility of only one person within the group.

Write the date of loss \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

When?	Date	What?	Who?
Week 1	Week of _____ / _____	Bring Meals Help with household chores Attend Funeral	Many Small Group Members
Week 2	Week of _____ / _____	Bring Meals Help with household chores	Many Small Group Members
Week 3	Week of _____ / _____	Two phone calls with specific questions* about grief.	_____ _____

Week 4	Week of _____ / _____	Lunch or Dinner Offer to study through “ <i>Taking the Journey of Grief with Hope</i> ” together	Grief Journey Companion (GJC): commits to bi-monthly interaction for the next 6 months. _____
Week 5	Week of _____ / _____	Two e-mails containing prayers or words of encouragement	_____ _____
Weeks 6	Week of _____ / _____	Discuss Step 1 material over visit or phone call.	GJC
Week 7	Week of _____ / _____	One phone call with specific questions* about grief.	_____
Week 8	Week of _____ / _____	Discuss Step 2 material over visit or phone call.	GJC
Week 9	Week of _____ / _____	Send a list of encouraging Scripture and a prayer.	Small Group Leader
Week 10	Week of _____ / _____	Discuss Step 3 material over visit or phone call.	GJC
Week 12	Week of _____ / _____	Discuss Step 4 material over visit or phone call.	GJC
Week 14	Week of _____ / _____	Discuss Step 5 material over visit or phone call.	GJC
Week 16	Week of _____ / _____	Discuss Step 6 material over visit or phone call.	GJC
Week 18	Week of _____ / _____	Discuss Step 7 material over visit or phone call.	GJC
Week 20	Week of _____ / _____	Discuss Step 8 material over visit or phone call.	GJC
Week 22	Week of _____ / _____	Discuss Step 9 material over visit or phone call.	GJC
Week 24	Week of _____ / _____	Phone call letting them know the small group wants to pray for them on the 6 month anniversary of their loss.	Small Group Leader
Week 26	Week of _____ / _____	During group prayer time ask for report on how the last 6 months have been and pray specifically for them.	Group as Whole
Month 7	_____	One point of person-to-person or voice-to-voice contact in which at least two specific questions* are asked about grieving process.	_____
Month 8	_____	One point of person-to-person or voice-to-voice contact in which at least two specific questions* are asked about grieving process.	_____
Month 9	_____	One point of person-to-person or voice-to-voice contact in which at least two specific questions* are asked about grieving process.	_____

Month 10	_____	One point of person-to-person or voice-to-voice contact in which at least two specific questions* are asked about grieving process.	_____
Month 11	_____	One point of person-to-person or voice-to-voice contact in which at least two specific questions* are asked about grieving process.	_____
Month 12	___/___/___	During group prayer time ask for report on how the last 1 year has been and pray specifically for them. The small group leader should talk to the person prior to this evening.	Group as Whole
After	When Applicable	The group should continue to keep up with key dates (i.e., birthday, anniversary, etc...) related to the loss in the second and third year after the loss. A card or phone call on these dates can remind the person they are not alone.	Group as Whole

\* **Specific Questions:** Throughout the care plan it mentions periodic phone calls with “specific questions” about how your friend is doing in the grieving process. It is important to ask questions which give your friend the freedom to speak of his/her grief. Otherwise, they may feel awkward with answering a generic “how have you been doing?” with a reflection on their grief. If they simply say fine, you do not have press for a more involved response but it is good to follow up with, “I want you to know that if you have a rough day, you have someone to talk to.”

The following questions could be asked during these interactions:

- I know it has been [amount of time] since [name] passed, how are you doing? How is it different from where you expected to be at this point?
- Has there been anything that has reminded you of name [name] recently? How do you handle it when things like that arise?
- Last time we talked about your grief you asked me to pray for [blank], how is that going? Is there anything different I should be praying for now?
- Have you thought of any stories about [name] that you’ve wanted to share with someone lately? What kind of things have caused you to think of him/her most lately?
- What emotions has your grief expressed itself in lately? What do you attribute that to?
- I know [name] really enjoyed [blank] this time of year and they’ve been on my mind lately. How about you?

A printable PDF copy of this appendix can be found at [www.bradhambrick.com/griefseminar](http://www.bradhambrick.com/griefseminar).

## Appendix D

### Healthy Ways to Capture Memories

In the end, grief is about how we remember. Memory is powerful. It shapes our lives in many ways. Memory impacts our emotions. Memory shapes the significance we give to current events. Memory influences what we expect from the future. So the effort to grieve well could be reframed as learning to remember in healthy ways.

Too often we try to define "getting over grief" as "moving past" our loss, which implies forgetting or not thinking about our loved one. We rightly resist this conception of grief. But unless we have a healthy alternative, we avoid one error and get trapped in painful remembering.

In this appendix, you should find a list of ways to remember your loved one in a healthy manner. Do not read this as a checklist to complete, but as a brainstorming venue to find ideas that match your preferences and situation. With each suggestion, it is important to remember that you are creating something special rather than sacred. If you venerate your method of remembering, it will add a pressure to do it perfectly and transfer the emotional attachment from your loved one to an object.

When you lose someone dear, you do become, in some sense, their historian. You carry their story, values, and accomplishments to continue the blessing God brought about through their life. But it is important to remember that God promises to equip you for this task in the same way He does for any other task.

**Read Luke 12:11-12.** The context of this passage is different from grief, but Jesus' promise still applies. The disciples were fearful they would not know what to say when they faced persecution. After all, Jesus said things so well and was always able to answer the entrapping questions of his enemies. But they feared freezing up and forgetting all they learned from Jesus. But his promise to their fear was that the Holy Spirit would prompt their memory in the needed moments. That same promise applies to the fear you may feel about forgetting pieces of your loved one's life. Your loved one is with God, and God is with you. There is a sure connection between you and whatever memory would benefit a given moment.

With these things in mind, consider the following suggestions as you develop an approach to remembering your loved one and, thereby, continue on your journey of grieving with hope.

**Personal Journal:** A personal journal simply involves recording your memories in a notebook, on a computer, or with the voice recorder on your phone when they arise. Do not worry about trying to develop a chronological or thematic order. That can often make a personal journal feel forced or like a burden. This is not a biography but a series of snapshots from your memory. This type of tool allows it to feel less like your memories are attacking you out of nowhere and then running off to hide. Each memory, even if painful or sad, becomes part of a permanent bank of memories. You do not have to fear losing them (we've already discussed how fear magnifies grief) because they are recorded. Now each memory can be a welcomed guest rather than a painful intruder.

**Structured Journal:** Many different structured journals exist. Some are meant to help you record your experience with grief. Others ask questions about your loved one for you to write about. If you lost a parent, you might get *A Father's Legacy* or *A Mother's Legacy* journal (which are usually completed by the parent as a gift for their children) and fill in the parts you know. This type of exercise doesn't rely on spontaneous or situationally triggered memory. Such journals can provide a pleasant surprise of how much you remember and give you questions to ask family and friends to learn more.

**Scrap Book:** Part of the grieving process usually involves going through the loved ones things. In this process you will likely find pictures, letters, diplomas, certificates, and other things that capture the story of your loved one's life. Putting these together into a scrap book can be an effective way to review their life in a highly interactive way that facilitates the grieving process. The end product will be something that you can share with those who would benefit from hearing your loved one's story (children as they get older, grandchildren, or others going through grief).

**Memory Box:** As you go through your loved one's things, there will be some precious things that wouldn't fit in a scrap book. If you are not careful, there may be so many of these that space becomes an issue or that their prominence in your home becomes a perpetually painful reminder. Having a box where you keep these things will help you limit the collection to a healthy amount and give you something to get out and peruse on occasions when you want to reflect on their life. Some people like to have a special box made to feel like they are giving additional honor to their loved one and creating a family heirloom.

**Family Gathering:** If your loss was a friend, then the gathering might be with other friends. The objective would be the same; to remember your loved one in a healthy way through shared memory. In combination with some of the ideas above, this can be a sweet time of comfort for all involved. People might read from their journal about unique experiences, share pictures, or talk about items that had significance to the shared loved one.

## Appendix E

### BIBLE READINGS ON GRIEF

*Written by David McKnight*

The following passages were selected based upon two concordance searches. The first was for words that would capture the grief experience: grief, grieve, grieved, grieves, sorrow, groan, groaning, affliction, cry, tears, death, lonely, mourn, mourned, mourns, mourners, mourning, anguish, agony, and despair. The second was for words that offer hope for grief (these passages will be listed in **bold** print): hope, resurrection, heaven, comfort, heard my cry, and heard my people.

You can use your concordance to search for other words in the "grief family." These passages should provide a chronological walk through depictions of grief in the Bible. It might be helpful to get a special highlighter and mark the words and depictions of grief.

These passages are not meant to capture all that the Bible has to say on grief. That would be treating the Bible like an encyclopedia instead of a redemptive novel. But the goal is to provide passages where the discussion of grief is most clear. As you study these passages, reflect on the following questions:

- What principles from this "Taking the Journey of Grief with Hope" study are revealed? A key part of sustained hope and change is remembering what you've learned and this repetition will help with retention.
- How do the expressions of grief in this passage resemble your own?
- Where do I find an expression of godly grief and what does it look like?
- Where do I find an expression of ungodly grief and what do I learn about it?
- What do I learn about how God uses grieving people and the process of redemption that He takes them through?

#### **Genesis 1:1-8**

Genesis 1:1-8

Genesis 16

Genesis 21:8-20

Genesis 23:1-9

**Genesis 24:1-9**

Genesis 50:6-7

Genesis 27:1-41

**Genesis 28:1-17**

Genesis 29:31-35

Genesis 37:12-35

Genesis 38:1-11

Genesis 42: 35-38

Genesis 48:1-7

Genesis 50:1-21

Exodus 12:21-30

**Exodus 16:1-21**

**Exodus 20:1-20**

Exodus 33:1-7

Numbers 14:39-45

**Deuteronomy 4:1-40**

Deuteronomy 31:11-19

Deuteronomy 34:1-8

**Ruth 1:1-14**

**Ruth 2:8-13**

I Samuel 6:17-21

I Samuel 15:34-35

I Samuel 16:1-16

I Samuel 20:30-34

I Samuel 25:1-31

I Samuel 28:1-4

I Samuel

II Samuel 1:1-16

II Samuel 3:26-31

II Samuel 11

**II Samuel 12:7-25**

II Samuel 13:34-38

II Samuel 19:1-8

II Samuel 22

I Kings 8:1-49

I Kings 13:1-32

I Kings 14:1-27

**II Kings 19:14-19**

II Kings 20:1-11

I Chronicles 2:1-4

**I Chronicles 7:20-29**

I Chronicles 10:1-14

**II Chronicles 2:1-12**

II Chronicles 6

**II Chronicles 20:1-12**

II Chronicles 35:20-27

**II Chronicles 36:22-23**

Ezra 10:1-8 (Both)

**Nehemiah 1**

Nehemiah 8:1-12

Nehemiah 9:1-31

Esther 4:1-17

Esther 9:1-22

**Job 2:1-13**

**Job 3:1-10**

**Job 4:1-6**

Job 5:1-20

**Job 6:1-10**

Job 7:1-21

**Job 8:1-13**

Job 9:1-24

**Job 13:1-15**

Job 14

Job 16:1-22

Job 19:1-7

**Job 21**

Job 23:1-7

Job 24:12-23

Job 27:1-11

**Job 29**

Job 30

Job 35

Job 36

Job 38

**Job 41:1-9**

Psalms 5:1-2

Psalm 6:1-7  
 Psalm 9:1-16  
 Psalm 13  
 Psalm 18:1-20  
 Psalm 22  
 Psalm 23  
 Psalm 30:8-12  
 Psalm 31  
 Psalm 33:13-22  
 Psalm 35  
 Psalm 38  
**Psalm 39:1-8**  
**Psalm 40:1-3**  
**Psalm 42**  
**Psalm 43**  
 Psalm 55:1-5  
**Psalm 62**  
**Psalm 65:1-8**  
 Psalm 68:1-20  
**Psalm 69**  
**Psalm 71**  
**Psalm 77**  
**Psalm 78:1-14**  
 Psalm 86  
 Psalm 88  
 Psalm 119:28-168  
**Psalm 130:1-7**  
**Psalm 146:1-10**  
**Psalm 147:1-11**  
**Proverbs 10:27-28**  
 Proverbs 14:1-32  
**Proverbs 23:17-18**  
 Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8  
 Ecclesiastes 7:2-4  
 Ecclesiastes 12  
**Isaiah 12:1-2**  
 Isaiah 24:1-16  
 Isaiah 25:1-8  
 Isaiah 33:1-9  
**Isaiah 40:1-5**  
**Isaiah 49:1-16**  
**Isaiah 51**  
**Isaiah 52:1-12**  
 Isaiah 53

Isaiah 57:14-21  
 Isaiah 60  
 Isaiah 61:1-3  
 Isaiah 63:7-14  
**Isaiah 66:1-14**  
 Jeremiah 6:22-30  
 Jeremiah 8  
 Jeremiah 12:1-12  
**Jeremiah 14:17-22**  
 Jeremiah 16:1-20  
**Jeremiah 29:10-14**  
 Jeremiah 31:1-14  
**Lamentations 3**  
 Lamentations 5:1-5  
 Ezekiel 18:25-32  
**Daniel 4:34-37**  
**Daniel 10:1-3**  
 Hosea 4:1-3  
 Joel 2:1-12  
 Amos 8:1-10  
 Habakkuk 1:1-4  
 Zephaniah 3:14-18  
**Zechariah 1:1-17**  
 Zechariah 12:10-14  
**Matthew 5:1-45**  
**Matthew 6:1-21**  
 Matthew 9:35-38  
**Matthew 28:16-20**  
 Mark 3:1-6  
 Mark 16:9-11  
 Luke 8:25-52  
 Luke 23:1-27  
**John 3:1-15**  
 John 4:40-47  
**John 6:25-59**  
 John 8:30-52  
**John 11:17-27**  
 John 16:1-22  
 John 21:1-19  
**Acts 1:6-11**  
**Acts 2:1-36**  
**Acts 4:1-12**  
**Acts 9:26-31**  
 Acts 10:20-39

Acts 13:1-28  
**Acts 17:16-34**  
**Acts 24:1-21**  
**Acts 26:4-11**  
**Romans 1:1-7**  
**Romans 5:1-27**  
**Romans 6:1-23**  
**Romans 8**  
**Romans 12:1-13**  
**Romans 15:1-13**  
**I Corinthians 15**  
**II Corinthians 1:1-14**  
 II Corinthians 2:1-17  
 II Corinthians 4:7-12  
 II Corinthians 5:1-4  
 II Corinthians 7:1-15  
**II Corinthians 13:11-14**  
**Ephesians 1:11-23**  
**Ephesians 2:11-22**  
 Ephesians 4:25-32  
**Philippians 2:1-11**  
**Philippians 3:1-21**  
**Colossians 1:3-27**  
**Colossians 4:7-18**  
**I Thessalonians 1:1-10**  
**I Thessalonians 3:7-18**  
**I Thessalonians 4:13-18**  
**II Thessalonians 2:13-17**  
**I Timothy 1:1-2**  
**I Timothy 4:6-10**  
**I Timothy 5:1-8**  
**II Timothy 1:1-12**  
**II Timothy 2:11-14**  
**Philemon 1:1-7**  
 Hebrews 2:1-15  
**Hebrews 6:9-20**  
**Hebrews 10:19-25**  
 James 4:1-10  
**I Peter 1:3-21**  
**I Peter 3:13-22**  
 Revelation 1:1-20  
**Revelation 21:1-8**

## Appendix F RECOMMENDED READINGS

**God's Healing for Life's Losses by Bob Kellemen:** This book provides a solid biblical guide to the journey into and out of grief using an eight stage model. In it you will find journaling exercises and reflection questions to help you process and chronicle your journey through grief.

**Grief: Finding Hope Again (booklet) by Paul David Tripp:** This brief booklet seeks to empathize with the life disruption grief brings while offering a perspective on grief that is rooted in the transforming reality of the gospel.

**Experiencing Grief by H. Norman Wright:** A very short book with many chapters, this book offers excellent snapshots of the various experiences and challenges that are common within grief.

**Mommy, Please Don't Cry by Linda Deymaz:** A book written for parents who lost a child before he/she was born. It offers a picture of heaven from a child's perspective and places for mom and dad to record their thoughts and emotions during their shared grief journey.

**A Grief Observed by C.S. Lewis:** This book was written by C.S. Lewis while wrestling with his own grief after the loss of his wife. He wrote the book not as an academic exercise but to help him process the experiences. While bearing the marks of a C.S. Lewis book, it also reveals the candor that grief requires.

**Empty Arms by Pam Vredevelt:** This book offers the experience of Pam as a mother who lost a child to miscarriage and the perspective of Pam the counselor who has walked with many families struggling to maintain their faith and find hope after the receiving the news that their baby has died before he/she was born.

**Putting Your Past in Its Place by Stephen Viars:** Grief is not just triggered by death. Many forms of loss can begin the grief journey. Stephen Viars provides his readers with a good set of categories for thinking through responsibility and response for those grief experiences not caused by death.

**A Shelter in the Time of Storm by Paul David Tripp:** With classic Paul Tripp insight, this book has 52 devotions based on Psalm 27 that examine God's care for His children in the midst of suffering.

**When God Weeps by Joni Eareckson Tada & Steven Estes:** Grief raises some of the most difficult questions to answer about God's love, power, and the presence of suffering in our world. In this book, those questions are discussed from the perspective of one who has suffered greatly in her life.

**A Grief Sanctified by J.I. Packer:** The middle section of this book is a story of how Richard Baxter, Puritan pastor and author, handled the grief of losing his wife. The book begins and ends with reflections from J.I. Packer on the grieving process.

**Divorce Recovery (booklet) by Winston Smith:** Divorce is often referred to as "living death." In this brief book, Winston Smith offers insight into the experience of divorce that would help you apply this material more specifically to the grief of losing a spouse to divorce.

**Depression: A Stubborn Darkness by Ed Welch:** There are many similarities between depression and grief. Ed Welch addresses the subject of depression very well in this book and offers excellent reflections on the experience of depression as a form of suffering in the early chapters.

**Heaven by Randy Alcorn:** Grief raises the question of heaven. As we miss our loved one it can be healthy and spiritually encouraging to think about location of our reunion. In this book, Randy Alcorn answers many questions about heaven while painting a picture of our forever home.

**"The Bible and the Pain of Infertility" (Article) by Kimberly and Philip Monroe:** This article can be found at <http://www.ccef.org/sites/default/files/pdf/monroes-infertility.pdf>. It is written from the personal experience of Phil and Kim. Phil is also a counselor who adds the perspective of a counselor the testimony of a longing parent-to-be.

### Resources for Children

**When Someone Very Special Dies by Marge Heegard:** This resource is used as a visual aid, for a way for children to illustrate their grief. It teaches them about possible feelings and stages they may experience. It will be important for caregivers to reinforce the gospel as you talk about the different illustrations and feelings the child expresses.

**When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death by Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown:** This resource is informative in nature. It explains the different experiences that can accompany grief from a factual standpoint. Caregivers will need to present the biblical framework as they read through this book with their child.

## Appendix G

### Parenting Tips & Family Devotions

*Written by Caroline Von Helm, M.A. and Brad Hambrick, Th.M.*

#### Things for Parents to Remember

When families lose someone significant, it is hard for everyone to process including children. Many times, parents and caregivers of children get caught up in their own grief and, as a result, they have little energy or time left for the children who have been impacted. At times like this, it is important for those close to the family to support and help the grieving caregiver remember their children and needs that might be overlooked.

If you are the parent grieving, ask someone who knows your child well to help you be objective about your child's behaviors and actions. Grief distorts our view of reality and, thereby, can distort our view of our children. We may want to attribute all negative behavior and emotion from the time of loss going forward to grief and this may or may not be the case. Or, we may also go to the other extreme and not see any connection to behaviors and emotions of grief.

Your child will walk through the grieving process differently than you. The pace, manner, and timing of grief may each look different. Being prepared for these differences and knowing how to identify them will be key in helping your child develop good coping skills and process grief cleanly. Some points to keep in mind:

- ❖ **Remember developmentally where your child is** (physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually). A child's brain is not fully developed until after high school, so for this reason alone, their understanding of what has happened will be different from yours, and developing as they mature. Most children have very black and white thinking. They will take our metaphorical or pictorial language literally. If you say, "God took them to be with Him in heaven." Most children will say, "Why is God mean, why would He take someone I love away?" Statements intended to be soften the impact of explaining death can create the type of false beliefs that we are trying to avoid.
- ❖ **It is okay not to have all the answers for children.** We may need to hear that again, "It is okay not to have all the answers for your children." Remember, you do not have all the answers for yourself. Your children need truth and authenticity more than explanations. Sharing your grief process with them is important for them to learn how to grieve cleanly. Be careful that sharing with them does not turn into relying upon them. They are not your sounding board, confidant, or emotional support. Some children will want to take on the role of caregiver for those who are grieving. It is important not to let them assume this role, and let them grieve as children rather than escape through false maturity.
- ❖ **Refrain from sharing details that are not age appropriate.** If the person who died had extenuating circumstances that are immoral or graphic in nature, find ways to be honest but protective of what you tell children. Give the child the general story and then let them ask the questions they have. As they are asking questions, it is okay to tell them you don't know the answer, or answer indescriptively. Sometimes children will ask the same questions over and over. This is normal, and the job of the caregiver is to provide consistent answers to the same questions. For children, this is their way of trying to wrap their minds around what has happened and may happen next.
- ❖ **Children can begin to fear that now everyone in their life may die,** or that they could die. As adults, we can see how this is an exaggeration of the actual threat of death. It is like the child who gets hurt playing baseball and then never wants to play again for fear he/she will always get hurt. But based upon the life experience of the child and largeness of grief's intrusion, this thought pattern is very logical to a child and should not be dismissed as a "silly" childish thought. Asking them questions about what they think, validating that uncertainty is scary, and reassuring that God understands are essential to helping children overcome this fear.
- ❖ **Children grieve in spurts.** Young children (ages 12 and below), will be processing grief one moment and laughing and being silly the next. This is normal, and in keeping with the attention span and information processing styles of children. Like all people (regardless of age), children can only handle so much emotion at a time, so don't push them to grieve, let them do it at their own pace. On the day of the funeral, the child may seem remarkably good and composed, and three weeks later they may fall apart at the grocery store. Be prepared for their grief because it will likely come at unexpected times. Children tend to grieve in times that feel familiar to them and the formal ceremonies of grief that work well for adults are not always the best grief settings for children.



- ❖ **Look for physical signs of grief.** Many children will have an increase in illnesses during grief. Children's eating and sleeping patterns can change, as will as their ability to think clearly or concentrate. Everything that an adult can experience physically can also happen with children.
- ❖ **Look for behavioral signs of grief.** Common behaviors in grief for children are aggression, clinginess, tearfulness at things that they normally are not, separation issues, regression (maturity, skills like potty training, or habits like sucking their thumb), withdrawal from things they normally would like to do, or become the super-responsible child. The latter behavior is one most overlooked by parents and caregivers. It is sometimes a welcomed behavior, especially when the parents or caregivers themselves are having a hard time being responsible. It is important to not let these children assume more than you normally would. Encourage them to be a child.

"Children will generally exhibit one of three behavioral responses to changes in their lives: they will act out, withdraw, or become the responsible manager of the family. Many, including myself, think the third option is the most dangerous. The child who is acting out will get attention, if only a reprimand. The child who is withdrawn will also probably get attention from someone who cares about him. But the third child will more likely be commended for taking on adult responsibilities or excelling in school... Sometime later in life, this house of cards may well collapse of its own weight... Such a child needs someone to come alongside and give him his childhood back so that he can grow to maturity by being strengthened from the inside out (p. 25)." Judy Blore in "How to Help a Grieving Child" from *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Winter 1998).

- ❖ **Help your child name his/her feelings.** Children do not have the vocabulary to vocalize their grief. They cannot connect the experience of numbness, denial, sadness, anger, loneliness, doubt, fear, worry, or guilt with the words that communicate their experience. This can add to their sense of loneliness and insecurity during grief. Sharing with children about your own feelings and journey will help bring them alongside and reduce the likelihood they will get stuck in the grief process. While it is important to help children name feelings, be careful not to tell them how to feel or that they are wrong for feeling a certain way.
- ❖ **Know where the child is spiritually.** If a child has accepted Christ as Lord and Savior, this will be an important time to teach the hope that the gospel brings about death. However, this should only be done if the person who died was a Christian. If it is uncertain whether the deceased was saved, then be honest about the uncertainty but point them back to trusting God to be loving, fair, and just.
- ❖ **Create a memory box of the person who died.** It is very important as a child moves forward in life that they have something they can tangibly go back to in order to remember the deceased. Set aside special things, pictures, and narratives for the child to have. Record memories for them so they do not forget.
- ❖ **Children will grieve at different stages of life as they grow.** If a child loses someone significant (like a parent) early in life, they will grieve the loss at various stages. As a child grows emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually they will revisit the death to gain more and more understanding. As the parent or caregiver, be available to answer questions again, listen, and share your processing with them. Just because you as the adult have cleanly moved on, you may have to revisit time and again for the child. This does not mean the child is not grieving cleanly, just that it may take longer depending on where the loss occurred in development. This is why a memory box and journal are important to keep so the child can read, remember, and see how someone else processed the loss.

## Family Devotions & Parenting Tips

### Chapter One

#### PREPARE yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually to face your suffering.

**Devotion for Mark 10:13-16.** (This passage is found in *The Jesus Story Book Bible* by Sallie Lloyd-Jones starting on page 256.) When you are preparing for the journey of grief the most important thing to remember is that you can always run to Jesus. Grief makes us feel alone physically (someone is missing) and emotionally (no one understands). The truth of the gospel is that Jesus is intimately familiar with death and loss. He understands the pain, loneliness, sadness, and life disruption like no one else can.

God wants us to come to him like children. Children are honest, candid, and accepting of truth, and never afraid to ask for help. This is how we are to be on our journey. In this story, Jesus invited the children to come. They didn't have to look a certain way,

behave a certain way, or do anything to get to see him. As you and your family grieve, remember Jesus called the children to him, and he does the same today. He not only calls the actual children to him, but calls us to be as children.

**Activity:** Affirm your children's questions. Make a list of the things they have asked you. Tell them, "God is glad when we ask Him questions. Even if our questions are sad, confused, or angry, God wants to hear our questions." Hug your children and make eye contact with them as you tell them this. Let them know that it takes courage to ask during a painful time and that while they may feel weak you admire the strength they have shown to ask honest questions. Then remind them, "You don't have to be strong to be loved by me or God, but God is faithful to be with us and give us the strength of His presence in times like these."

Ask your family:

- What did you like about this story?
- What would you like to say to Jesus today about how you feel?
- What would you like to do with Jesus if you could see him?
- Are there any questions you would ask him?

## Chapter Two

### ACKNOWLEDGE the specific history and realness of my suffering

Evaluating and examining the realness of your suffering is a hard step to walk through. For children this step is most effectively accomplished through conversation or expression through play. "Acknowledge" is too abstract of a concept for most children. If they can talk about it or act it out, it is real and the history is being assimilated into their story.

**Devotion for Matthew 6:5-15.** (This passage is found in *The Jesus Story Book Bible* by Sallie Lloyd-Jones starting on page 222.) One of the most important things that can get lost in grief is prayer. It is important to allow your children to hear you pray about your loss and how it is affecting you. This reminds your children they can always talk to God about these people. Even simple prayers like "God, please tell [name] I love them and miss them," can help the child acknowledge the realness of their loss within the context of God's care.

**Activity:** Looking at the Lord's Prayer as an example, it may be helpful for your family to write a family prayer for this time of grief. As you write the family prayer keep the following things in mind:

1. Who are you praying to (v. 9) (Father, God, Creator, Provider, Sustainer, The God Who Sees)
2. What can you praise Him for (v. 10)
3. What do you want from Him (v. 11-12)
4. What are you scared of (v. 13)
5. How can you end with praise

Be honest and real in your prayer, let it be for the whole family, add to it as the family is better able to put their grief into words, and record ways that God answers your prayer or things that you learn about Him. Keep a copy of this prayer for the memory box, for children to see how you prayed during this time.

## Chapter Three

### UNDERSTAND the impact of my suffering

**Activity:** Make the dirtiest feet you can. Find a silly reason to play in the mud bare footed. Having some lighter moments of fun can remind children that the "impact of suffering" is not going to erase all joy, laughter, and color from their lives. Then ask, "Who wants to wash everyone's feet?" As it becomes obvious that this "activity" is becoming a "lesson" follow up with, "Why not?" and "What would be hard or unappealing about washing them?"

**Devotion for John 13:1-20.** (This passage is found in *The Jesus Story Book Bible* by Sallie Lloyd-Jones starting on page 286.) Grief can feel as dirty and unappealing as messy feet. It is a process that no one wants to go through because it is so hard. Going through grief feels very raw, dirty, and scary. No one would choose the road of grief.

Jesus not only washed dirty feet, he walked this road of grief. In this story, Jesus, before his death, washes His disciple's feet. Interesting choice of activities to share with his friends, but the message is great in so many ways. Yes, it is an example of servitude, and how we should be willing to serve, but it is also the statement that he wants us to be clean.

People didn't understand him, or see what He was doing, but he was providing a road of hope. As you walk this journey, the desire is that you will do it as cleanly as possible. In the story it appears the disciples were willing to ignore the dirt on their feet. Often we want to ignore the "impact of our suffering." Children can identify with wanting to ignore dirty things, especially something as overwhelming and unpleasant as grief. Jesus calls our attention to the impact of suffering to cleanse them, not to embarrass or shame us.

Ask your family the following questions (have each person give an answer):

1. What have you been feeling recently?
2. When do you have these feelings the most?
3. What is the worst part of what your family is going through?

Let each person have their answer, validate them, don't minimize or try and tell them they shouldn't feel however they shared. Close with the prayer that your family wrote together.

#### **Chapter Four** **LEARN my suffering story which I used to make sense of my experience**

**Activity:** Take time to evaluate the seven themes as a family, give each person a chance to talk about what it is they are feeling and believing about the loss. Ask, "Do you ever feel like [one of the seven themes]?" The answers to these questions may feel very raw, but these honest, raw emotions set up the family devotion.

**Devotion for Luke 22:39-46.** (This passage is found in *The Jesus Story Book Bible* by Sallie Lloyd-Jones starting on page 294.) The story of Jesus in the Garden is one of the clearest accounts of Jesus' human-ness recorded in Scripture. We see Jesus wrestling with powerful emotions that caused significant physical impact (i.e. sweating drops of blood, v. 44). Jesus is battling to make sense of his suffering as He repeatedly asks if there is any other way.

Jesus confides in his disciples that his "soul was sorrowful to the point of death (Mark 14:34)", this is extreme sorrow – He understands our sorrow, fear, and wanting another way. Jesus sense of His suffering accurately as "God, why have you forsaken me (Mark 15:34)?" so that this theme would not have to be true in our story. Jesus bore what we fear to be true, so he both completely understands and is able to (with great compassion) reassure us that our fears are not true.

#### **Chapter Five** **MOURN the wrongness of what happened and receive God's comfort**

**Activity:** Get a glass bottle of some type, and fill it up with water. At your devotion time, ask your family how many tears they think it would take to fill up the bottle? If your kids get into the question, you can get an eye dropper and count how many drops it takes to fill the bottle.

Ask your child, "Do you feel like you have cried that many? Are there times when you have cried alone; maybe when you're trying to sleep? Does the grief feel stronger when you're alone? Why?" It is good for children to talk about these things, if they have not already. After this discussion, use the devotion below to help bring comfort.

**Devotion for Psalms 56:8,** "You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?" God collects our tears in the way we collect things that are precious to us. Each tear represents a tender moment when God is with us. God counts our tossings each sleepless night like we count things we collect. He is a Father who sits by His children's bedside through their troubled nights.

In John 11:1-36 we find the story of Jesus' good friend Lazarus' death. It tells how his friends told him Lazarus was sick, his delay in getting to see him, and his sorrow when he arrived and experienced the death of his friend. Jesus wept. It brings comfort to know that He knew a loss of someone close, and chose to weep for him. Jesus' example frees us to weep, and Psalm 56:8 lets us know that God cares. Share as a family the times you want to cry the most.

#### **Chapter Six** **LEARN my GOSPEL STORY by which God gives meaning to my experience.**

**Activity:** Make a list of people who have been involved in your grief (i.e. doctors, friends, family, etc...). Talk about what each person did and whether their involvement was helpful or hurtful. Ask, "How has God been involved in our grief? When you think about God during your grief does it help or hurt?"

**Devotion for Mark 15:16-41.** (This passage is found in *The Jesus Story Book Bible* by Sallie Lloyd-Jones starting on page 303.) This is the story of Jesus' crucifixion. As you are seeing the gospel through your experience of grief, it is important to turn back to the Gospel to remember where it all began. There are several participants in the crucifixion that are worth noting.

First are the soldiers, they killed Jesus not knowing He was the Son of God, they confused the crowd by calling him a criminal. Jesus asked God to forgive them because He said they didn't know what they were doing. There will be people and circumstances like this in our grief story. Things that we don't understand, feelings we experience, and people who say things that aren't helpful. Don't let these things change who Jesus has always been in your life. Don't let these people or events define God, let God's word describe and teach you about God.

Second is Jesus. He does not seem like the same man who healed and fed so many. He did so many great things why didn't He stop what was happening? He said He could call angels, why didn't He? The same kinds of questions we ask about the crucifixion, we ask about our grief. Why didn't God heal them? Why didn't ...? What does this all mean? It is OK to ask questions. Questions are a normal part of grief. The same God who had a plan for Jesus' death on the cross has a plan for your grief as well. Part of learning the gospel in your experience is looking at the cross differently. The cross is a grief story. The difference is we know the ending to the cross.

Third is God the Father. Where was He? Did He really just let them kill His Son? Did He really mean for all of this to happen? Did God the Father feel anything that day? There are several physical things that happened which show God was moved. In Matthew 27:51-52, the temple curtain was torn into, the earth shook, the rocks split, tombs were opened, the sky was dark, all evidence that God was moved by what was happening. God the Father was not stoic. In your grief how much do you want to rip the barrier of death, shake the world, tear things up, or hide in the dark? God the Father was defeating the enemy of death (1 Cor. 15:26). God did to death what we feel like doing but can't, so that there can be hope for our grief.

In your devotion time, talk about the people in your grief story. How have they help or hindered the process? How can you get encouragement from the cross? Where do you see God in your story? Where would you like to see God in your story?

## Chapter Seven

### IDENTIFY GOALS that allow me to combat the impact of my suffering

**Activity:** As a family make a list of the days in the next six to twelve months that you think will be particularly hard to face (i.e., holidays, seasons, birthdays, anniversaries, sporting events, or even times of day). Discuss ways that these times can be easier together. Use the tools in Chapter Seven to decide how you will tackle the days.

It is important for children to know that it is okay for these days to be sad on days that are normally happy. For instance, children can feel like they are doing something wrong if they miss a lost family member on Christmas Day. Talking about these things in advance removes the guilt of speaking up when a given day is hard.

**Devotion for Matthew 28:1-10.** (This passage is found in *The Jesus Story Book Bible* by Sallie Lloyd-Jones starting on page 310.) The story of the resurrection is not just the most wonderful story in Scripture; it is the story of Scripture. It is hope, peace, and assurance. The resurrection assures us that when things around us may seem unclear, there is one safety net—the fact, Jesus is Alive.

When we think about our life after grief, it is good to remember this, because it is where we will find refuge on hard days, and celebration on good. The fact that Jesus is alive gives us what we need to face our best and worst days. Because Jesus rose from the dead, we have hope that our loved one will as well. Because Jesus rose from the dead, our losses can seem light and momentary because of hope. We can grieve, but with hope.

Go back through the list of hard days and reflect on that plans you made for how to handle those days in light of the resurrection. Chances are many of those plans do not contain a celebration of the life your loved one is now living. We should grieve our loss, but with the recognition that our loved one is more alive than they ever were when we knew them. Our grief is only waiting because of the resurrection. Waiting is hard, but it is not final.

## Chapter Eight

### PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me

**Activity:** Flip through an old picture album. Look at a favorite vacation or maybe pictures of a beloved pet. Talk about how those memories can make you happy and sad at the same time. You are glad you have the memories; you're life is more rich and full because of them. But you miss those moments as well. This is a good picture (pun intended) of what well-processed grief is like.

**Devotion for Luke 24:50-53.** (This passage is found in *The Jesus Story Book Bible* by Sallie Lloyd-Jones starting on page 318.) At the end of the Gospel story, something very confusing and sad happens for the disciples. They had knowledge that Jesus was alive, but they had to live without Him. The same is true for us in our grief. We may know that our loved one is alive, but we have to live without them.

Jesus was specific in what He wanted them to do – tell everyone about Him, His love, and the Gospel. Through your experience of grief, you have come to know God in a different way than you have before your loss. This is now part of your story, and God wants you to share it. Just like He wanted the disciples to share their experience, He wants us to now share ours.

As a family discuss some of the following:

- What have you learned about God through this study?
- What are some themes that you continue to struggle with?
- How does the story of Gospel change how you view death, and your purpose now?
- What is one thing new you would like to do?

## Chapter Nine STEWARDSHIP all of my life for God's glory

**Devotion for I Peter 4:9,** "Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good." Because we were made for Heaven, grief on earth is not avoidable. We suffer, in part, because God has something better for us. Like children who cry when leaving the playground to go to the beach, we do not grasp what is in store and what is going on. But we learn to trust our Father on the long drive (life) to the beach (Heaven).

**Activity:** Make a list of the lessons each member of the family learned from your loss loved one and the journey of grief. Feel free to laugh and cry as you make the list. Talk about how each time you benefit from one of these lesson or pass them along to someone else you are extending the impact of your loved one's life and "entrusting your soul to your faithful Creator while doing good." Commit to share these times with one another so that the family can rejoice in what God is being faithful to do.

### When to Seek Professional Help for Your Child:

If any of the following behaviors have continued for more than six months, contact your church or medical provider for appropriate referrals:

- ❖ Eating behaviors have not returned to normal
- ❖ Sleeping patterns have not returned to normal
- ❖ Aggression Behaviors are not reducing
- ❖ Separation Anxiety has not subsided
- ❖ Regressive Patterns are not improving
- ❖ There are no signs of grief

Other times when it may be appropriate for you to seek help for your child is when the grief is too overwhelming for you. If you as the caregiver are having difficulty processing it for yourself, much less thinking of your child, providing them with someone to help them process it is essential. Do not wait until you "have it together" to then turn towards your child.

## Appendix H

### JOB DESCRIPTION: COMPANION FOR MOM'S GRIEVING MISCARRIAGE

The grief of losing an unborn or still born child is not only uniquely painful it is also uniquely lonely. At The Summit Church we want to help penetrate that loneliness with hope by being personally available. This is the purpose of the grieving mom companion program.

#### Qualifications for Companion:

- Be a covenant member of The Summit Church.
- Have experienced the loss of a unborn child.
- Able to talk about your loss openly and vulnerably without becoming emotionally overwhelmed.
- Listened to the "Taking the Journey of Grief with Hope" seminar live or by video.
- Read the "Taking the Journey of Grief with Hope" seminar notebook.
- Understand what it means to allow the gospel to speak the emotions of grief as suffering not sin.

#### Expectations of Companion:

- Complete an interview with our ministry coordinators (primary questions provided below).
- Correspond with the freshly grieving mom within 24-48 hours of a match being made.
- Meet with your freshly grieving mom in person at least every other week for the next six months.
- Walk through the "Taking the Journey of Grief with Hope" seminar at her pace.
- Share your testimony of your grief journey as it fits the materials and your freshly grieving mom's situation.
- Be available to correspond via phone or e-mail between in person meetings.
- Help her decide what and how to share her experience with her small group (source of long term support).
- Contact the ministry coordinator when a helping relationship is complete.

#### Questions to Assist Matching:

We want to make every effort pair companions with freshly grieving mothers who have elements of common experience. While we recognize that no two experiences are the same and even common details do not create the same experience, we do believe there is value in this effort. The questions below represent the kind of questions you will be asked in the interview.

- How far into the pregnancy were you when you lost your baby? Did you know the gender?
- Was this your first pregnancy? Second? Last?
- Did the loss of your child alert you to problems of infertility?
- Where there medical complications which caused or because of your miscarriage?
- What was the response of other key people in your life to your loss?
- Have you experienced the loss of multiple unborn children?
- Did you already have a room prepared for your baby and have to deal with repurposing that room?
- Did you have to share with a group of people (i.e., work, church) and experience a change in your social environment?

If there are other unique aspects to your loss you believe we should know, please bring these up in the interview. Thank you for your willingness to be a part of this ministry and to bring the embodied love of Christ to someone who feels very isolated by her loss.

## Appendix I

### What Do I Do Now?

A plumb line of the Summit counseling ministry is, "We don't do events; we create resources." That means you should be asking yourself, "What can or should I do with this information now?"

We have created a series of brief videos that answer that what-now question from several different perspectives. Each of these can be found at:

[www.bradhambrick.com/whatnow](http://www.bradhambrick.com/whatnow)

#### Personal Study or Small Group

Question: I've been to several of the Summit counseling seminars and notice there appears to be a couple of different kinds. You frequently recommend studying them as a small group or with a friend. That seems like a great idea, but since I haven't done that before I'm not quite sure how to start something like that. Do you mind giving me guidance?

#### Pursue Personal Counseling

Question: After attending this seminar I realized I would like to pursue counseling to help me grow in this area. It sounded like there are several different options available. Would you mind explaining to me what those are and how I could connect with the one that best serves me need?

#### Leveraging My Workplace

Question: I've heard rumors that I'm supposed to be able to use the Summit counseling seminars to leverage my workplace for gospel influence. My first impression is that it sounds awkward and intrusive; like I'm telling people they've "got issues" or "need help." But I'm also worried about putting up Christian material that might be offensive to some people who visit my workplace. But I would at least like to hear what you've got to say. How would this work?

#### As a Professional Counselor

Question: I'm a licensed counselor (LPC) and came across the Summit counseling seminars. I'm excited to see the church addressing these kinds of subjects, and I'm curious how you might see someone in my position (or a LCSW or LMFT) using the materials. I can see recommending them to my clients who are open to an overtly Christian aspect to their counseling, but it seems like there could be more uses than just counseling homework. Could you share your thoughts on how those in private practice might use these resources?

Our goal in Summit counseling is to (1) equip the church to care for one another and our community with excellence; (2) provide quality counseling services that allow our people to get involved in the lives of others with confidence – knowing additional, experienced care is available to come alongside them if needed; and (3) create ways for our members and other Christians in our community to leverage their workplace and careers for greater gospel impact in their spheres of influence.

We hope this seminar and these videos give you a vision for how this can happen and stirs a passion in you to be a part of God's work of redeeming and restoring hurting individuals and families.