



Bible Fellowship

Grief Handbook

Introduction

“My eyes fail from weeping, I am in torment within, my heart is poured out on the ground.” (Lamentations 2:11) Grief is a

very intense feeling. Even though it is “just a feeling,” it is as real as the floor under your feet, or the trees in the park. Grief can also be intensely painful: just as painful as dropping something heavy on your foot. Grief and pain of loss occur as a result of an attachment we have for someone – a mate, relative, child, parent, friend or others. The cycle is attachment, separation and grief. Because an attachment does not occur suddenly, neither will the abatement of grief, nor that feeling of emptiness or numbness. It can take years to get over a loss and for most of us life will never be the same.

In Genesis we are told that God grieved, and His heart was filled with pain (Chapter 6). It states in the Gospel of John after the death of Lazarus, “*Jesus wept.*” Grief is associated not only with sadness and pain, but also anger (because of feelings of desertion or anger at God for allowing something bad to happen), depression, torment and guilt. Grief is a feeling or a cluster of feelings. Grief can be intense and can include a variety of emotions as well as combinations of emotions, e.g., anger and guilt, fear and sadness. Grief and grieving are mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments. Many of the Psalms, the Book of Jeremiah and Lamentations contain verses about individual and also community grieving.

Grief can be very stressful and cause physical symptoms (insomnia, dizziness, loss of appetite, shortness of breath, trembling, irregular heart beat), but grief can be easier to bear with the love and support of friends, family and church groups. Talking can be healing. No matter the age of the loved one lost, we still grieve deeply. Whether you lose a child or a grandmother, grief can be unbearably painful. And no two people experience grief in the same way; each experience is unique. We all have different reactions to a loss.



Whether we admit it or not, we all love to control and manage most things in our lives: bills, health, relationships, children, where we live. But grief is not something that can be controlled or managed. Out of nowhere, it sweeps down on us like a cold wind. And it comes and goes as it pleases.



“There’s a hole in the world in the place where he was. Now there is nothing.” This was written by a man of faith who had lost his son in a mountain climbing accident. Although the man was suffering terribly, his faith gave him strength to survive. And it is by faith that we know and believe that God is sovereign and we are in His Hands. This is a joy and a blessing! To believe and be committed to Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith, is essential for our survival during times of loss. The fact that we suffer during and after a loss does not mean we lack faith. Don’t forget, Jesus wept. It is natural to grieve. Paul’s statement in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 doesn’t say we don’t grieve, but that we grieve with the hope of salvation. Suffering and sadness are going to happen, but **we** have a place prepared for us. We know the rest of the story.



It is important to remember important to remember that each person will grieve differently and each will go through stages or phases* of grief, and each on his or her own schedule. As stages of grieving are discussed, please be aware that this process will vary from person to person, male to female, age to age. These phases/stages don’t necessarily occur in the order presented. Some could be skipped and some will reoccur.

- **Anger/Resentment** – People ask, “Why me?” “Why would God allow this to happen?” They blame others; they blame themselves. They feel guilt – “if only,” “I should have.”

*Kubler-Ross On Death and Dying. There are a number of variations of these.

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- **Denial** – The impact of a loss can be devastating; it is usually felt physically as well as spiritually. “Why is the world still turning?” “This cannot happen!” “How can life just go on?”
- **Yearning** – Dwelling on the past, turning back the clock.
- **Acceptance** – Dealing with the reality of the loss.
- **Growth/Healing** – Managing one’s life constructively. Healing does not mean that the loved one is forgotten, but rather can be fully remembered with manageable pain. Our society is more adept at covering up pain than it is at growing through it.

For a Christian, death marks the completion of our earthly journey and the beginning of our heavenly journey. The life of the person is to be celebrated and honored. Whether death occurs after a long illness or suddenly, the loss is still shocking. Even with long illnesses and after having said “good bye,” or “I love you,” or “I forgive you,” the loss can be devastating. And for some, it can go on for an extended period. The reality for those left behind is sadness, pain and sometimes depression.

Someone once asked a man who had lost his 6-year-old daughter years earlier when the pain had stopped. His response was, “It didn’t and it never will.” It might be a sound, a smell or a song, but the memories can come flooding back and be overwhelming for years after the loss.



What You Can Do Personally to Minister to Those Who Have Experienced the Loss of a Loved One.

We **cannot** rescue, but we **can** listen, pray for and with, and help accomplish tasks at hand. We should help those who have lost loved ones to feel and rely more on the comfort of *our presence*, with less emphasis on the comfort of *our words*.



What You Can Do Personally to Minister to Those Who Have Experienced the Loss of a Loved One

- Pray – Pray for and with, especially with.
- Listen – Listen with your ears, your eyes and your heart. Lady Bird Johnson once wrote, “People must be given the opportunity to hurt out loud.”
- Love – Be a loving companion.
- Sincerely Care – Be aware and warn against destructive behaviors, e.g., drinking, overworking, over or under eating. Be aware of any new physical problems like anxiety and fatigue.
- Comfort – Acknowledge the secondary losses -- partner, friend, companion, accountant and others.
- If appropriate, get the person to talk about his or her loved one. How did you meet? What sports did they like? What hobbies did they have? There can also be questions relating to pictures in the home, etc.
- After the funeral, be sure and continue praying, calling and visiting, as well as inviting them out. Many people do just fine until all the activities stop. When it gets quiet and people start reflecting, then things can get really sad.
- Encourage and allow the bereaved to say “no” when asked to do something they do not want to do.
- Encourage them to do what they want to do.
- Encourage them to exercise and eat well.
- Encourage them to write down the pros and cons of important decisions.
- Make a list for the bereaved of things that need to be done, and help with the prioritization and/or delegation of items to accomplish the list, if they are agreeable.
- Allow the person to work through the bereavement process at his or her own pace and in his or her own way. Be careful of using the words “should” and “shouldn’t.”
- Use common sense and be sensitive in helping and deciding what to suggest. What may be “pushy” to one person may be desperately needed for another.



What You Should Not Do

- Don't tell people to be strong and not cry. (John 11:35)
- Don't think that grieving shows a lack of faith. (Genesis 6:6)
- Please don't think it's God's will, or God's plan. Trying to make sense out of a tragedy is often impossible. Saying it's God's will is not a good plan on our part. We cannot possibly understand God's will or plans, but we do know several things about God -- He loves us perfectly and He grieves with us as we suffer.
- Don't tell people you know exactly how they feel.
- Don't tell people that it's all in their heads.
- Know that God gave us tears and they are a very important part of the healing process. Don't be uncomfortable during or with this process.

What You Can Do As A Bible Fellowship Class

- You can call and visit at the home.
- You can take food, flowers, stamps, thank-you cards or send cards.
- If you are organizing the class to provide food (certain members covering certain days), be sure to:
 - 1) Call to determine if it's OK.
 - 2) Determine the number of people to be served.
 - 3) Determine the days of coverage.
 - 4) Also consider the fact that there are comfort foods proven to be more popular over the years such as casseroles, chicken, ham, vegetables and desserts to name a few. Spicy dishes and salads are not as popular, or digestible.
 - 5) Keep a record of who helped and who brought what so "thank-you" notes can be sent.



What You Can Do As A Bible Fellowship Class

- If your group is house sitting during the services, or at the house in some other capacity to help the bereaved, you can assist by coordinating the food and its arrangement, calling friends and relatives, handling or helping to handle funeral arrangements, running errands, loving, caring and picking up family members from the airport.
- Offer to stay at the house during the funeral for both security reasons and helping with food and drink preparation for the return of the family.
- If the family meal is served at the church, your Bible Fellowship class should provide vegetables, desserts, salads, etc. The class will also host the family; setting-up, serving and cleaning-up. For additional information, contact the Heights' Bereavement Minister by contacting our Administrative Receptionist at 972.238.7243. **The church will provide a ham, rolls, cups, plates, utensils, coffee, and tea.**
- Offer to help write or mail "thank you" cards. The bereaved may want to write something on a card for the whole class.

If you have experienced a loss, what is it like?

We recently sent out the following survey with questions for some of our members at The Heights who had lost loved ones. The responses are in composite form.

1. *What were the most helpful things someone did for you at the time of your loss?*

Meals and food were the most frequent responses. "There are so many things to do and you just don't have the energy and focus". "Just having someone there and having them say, 'I'm so sorry' meant so much." "Taking care of medical paperwork, even helping with expenses." "In addition to food, someone thought to bring toilet paper. With an influx of visitors, that turned out to be helpful. Someone else took my daughter to buy an appropriate dress for the funeral and took my mother-in-law to get her hair done. Those were practical things that took place within 2 days. Later the most helpful thing was assisting



with my children. My children were young and wanted to continue all of their activities. I didn't always have the energy, but there were friends who made it their job to pick them up and take them, so they were able to maintain their routines."

2. *What were some of the least helpful, maybe even frustrating?*

"Going away after a visit and not coming back or calling."
"Avoiding me and avoiding talking about my loss." "Asking too many really personal and financial questions."

3. *Did someone, while meaning well, do something that hurt you?*

"Saying it was God's Will that my loss occurred." "Not calling or wanting to talk about anything meaningful."

4. *Was there a really critical period in your grieving process, a time when you really needed the right kind of help?*

"It took a whole year for me to get my feet on the ground."
"Right after the funeral I realized that I was all alone and that it was up to me to finish raising our children. It was one of the loneliest times of my life." "Right after my loss, I was really depressed. Going back to work and staying busy helped." "I would say it is important to check in about a month after the funeral, after the out-of-town guests have gone home, the kids are back in school and reality starts to set in."

5. *Did you feel those around you understood what you were going through?*

The answers were both yes and no. Yes, "through the cards, food, flowers and telephone calls." "There were people who encouraged me, made wonderful comments expressing love and care." "In the midst of my grief there were people who could make me laugh and help me forget just a little." Some responses were "no." "There were only a few people who I felt had any idea of what I was going through."

"Yes, they were at a loss also." "Our friends were too



If you have experienced a loss, what is it like?

6. Did you feel there were those who did not? What were their reactions?

“Yes, they were at a loss also.” “Our friends were too young, they just avoided me.” Avoidance seemed to be the most common response.

7. What would you have liked someone to do?

“Just be there.” “Visit and call.” “Listen.” “Listening is the most important thing. You may have to hear the story over and over, but it is so valuable to the person telling it. I was always worried that I was going to ‘use up’ my friends who listened.”

8. What would have been the most meaningful?

“Ask me to go out.” “Ask me to a party, or just come by to visit.” “Attending the funeral service.” “God had been preparing my children and me for some time. It was not easy, but with the prayers, love and support of our church, we felt a real peace about everything.” “One thing that would have taken a big commitment would have been for a man to be a mentor to my son. Since I did not have family in the area, it would have been nice for someone to do ‘guy things’ with him; but it would do more harm than good if the commitment wasn’t long-term.”

9. When would have been the best time to do this?

“Staying close after the funeral.” “The church does a wonderful job in the days immediately after a death. Where we seem to fall short is in the long- term checking on people later. We all live such busy lives.” “It was about 3 weeks after the death that I really got sad and lonely.” “Grief goes on much longer than most people think. There is no magic moment when it’s over. Keeping in touch every few weeks or so shows that you are really in for the long haul.”

10. Additional thoughts

Each Bible Fellowship group is encouraged to jot their additional thoughts here.



We are most fortunate to have a wonderful library at The Heights. Our Librarian and other volunteers are available to assist you in checking out books that have been ordered especially to support the Bereavement Ministry. Our library is located on the second floor across from the Children's Ministry entrance. Most books can be found in the 200s, but a few are in other areas and can be quickly located with a keyword search on the card catalog software or by a volunteer at the Circulation Desk. Please take advantage of this resource and don't forget the city library.



Suggested Resources

(in our church library)

Abiding Hope, by Ann Hagmann. Upper Room Books, ISBN 0-8358-0959-5. Encouragement in the valley of the shadow of death, either by illness, caregiving or employment. Bite-size application of the Psalms. Prayer focuses and suggestions.

All Our Losses, All Our Grievs, by Kenneth R. Mitchell & Herbert Anderson. WJK, ISBN 0-664-24493-9. www.wjkbooks.com Resources for pastoral care. Examines process of grief with illustrations and case histories of individuals these two pastors have experienced.

Answer for a Lost Child, by Forrest "Dusty" Hardesty Robinson. Winepress Publishing, ISBN 1-57921-223-9. Forty-six pages of answers to many hard questions in encouraging parents in matters of salvation of their children, whether they are four or forty, and why does Jesus let bad things happen to us.

As I Journey On, by Sharon Dardis and Cindy Rogers. Augsburg 9-3889. www.augsburgfortress.org Meditations for those facing death. Comforting stories and prayers for the end of life. Dardis is a registered nurse with 19 years' experience in hospice.

At the Death of a Child, by Donald L. Deffner. Concordia Publishing House, ISBN 0-570-04608-4. Words of comfort and hope in 32 pages.



Suggested Resources

Be Not Afraid, by Johann Christoph Arnold. The Plough Publishing House, ISBN 0-87486-916-1. www.plough.com Arnold, a pastoral counselor, tells how ordinary men, women and children found strength to conquer their deepest fears: accidents, acts of terror, illness or dying, loneliness or grief.

Children and Grief, by Joey O'Connor. Revell, ISBN 0-8007-5976-1. Realistic approaches to helping children understand death and deal with grief and a broad range of issues. Has a long list of what "not" to do. Many grief resources are listed at the end of the book.

Conquering the Mysteries and Lies of Grief, by Sherry Russell. Publish America, ISBN 1-59129-724-9. www.PublishAmerica.com Understanding the maze-like journey of grief to help you plow through your mental, physical and spiritual health to get to a life filled with goals and not despair.

Coping With Life, After Your Mate Dies, by Donald C. Cushenbery & Rita Crossley Cushenbery. Baker Book House Co., ISBN 0-8010-5765-5. Some tips and resources for facing head-on decisions that must be made after losing a spouse.

Good Grief, by Granger E. Westburg. Fortress Press 1-1114. www.augsburgfortress.org A 64-page standard resource for people grieving losses. With gentle wisdom and acute insight into human nature, Westburg guides the reader through the stages of grief.

How To Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies, by Therese A. Rando, Ph.D. Bantam Trade, ISBN 0-553-35269-5. Learn to grieve in your own way. A comprehensive resource listing and a chapter on finding professional help and support groups also included.

When Your Parent Dies, by Ron Klug. Augsburg 9-4263. www.augsburgfortress.org A 46-page comforting and helpful book for adults grieving the loss of a parent.



Grief Recovery

There are Grief Recovery Groups in some of our local hospitals. You may come and go in most of them as your schedule allows and as long as you feel the need. We also have informal and informational meetings several times per year, here at The Heights. The Senior Adult Minister will have additional information.

