

Journey Through Grief

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to all who have suffered the grief and pain of loss.

G-Grace

R-Resilience

I-Inner Healing

E-Embracing Memories

F-Faith and Hope

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All scripture was taken from the following translations:

King James Version

New King James Version

Introduction

Through my journey with thousands of people as a hospice and hospital Chaplain I have walked along side of family members and friends that have experienced loss both with sudden loss and those that have known that the death of their loved one is impending.

Either way loss is a part of life and in reality, no one is fully prepared to adapt to life that will no longer be the way they have lived for many years. It is my prayer that I can assist the reader to make progress in the grief journey and come through it with a sense of new purpose. I have used the acronym for grief to help with a healing path that will bring wholeness for your life.

We will discover a fresh approach in these pages to experience a spiritual, emotional, and physical transformation with renewed faith and purpose.

Chapter 1

Grace in Grief

So, what is grief? It is an emotional feeling of pain, hurt, or heartache felt with loss. It can be death, addiction, divorce, failed business venture, home, financial security, independence, status, mental ability, pet, physical health, a job, a missed opportunity, financial loss, an end of a relationship, role in life, sense of safety/security, suicide, treasured possessions, or a loved one physically moving out of the area. This can include past loss, current loss and impending future loss.

What can we learn by going through everyday life challenges and struggles? Is it possible to adapt, adjust to and even grow and become a more vibrant person as we learn to navigate our life journey with the losses in life that no one wants to have to experience? Yes, it is possible! I have been asked on numerous occasions, "Chaplain how long does a person grieve?" I have heard some say as long as it takes, others say it never ends that grieving is constant, it will always be with me. Others say in time things will be normal. This is not true as loss leaves a void in our lives, but the greater

question is what will a changed life, held by God look like as I am processing my grief?

The healing path needs to be growth not a status quo or decline with losses in life. Dr. Kubler-Ross in 1969 worked with her terminally ill patients during death and dying. She produced the different stages of grief with her patient's death as they came to terms with their own mortality. Later these stages were applied to friends and family that were going through a similar experience coping with their own loss.

As I share Dr. Kubler-Ross' five stages of grief, they are not meant to be in a particular order or to explain everything about how you process your grief. It is meant to help explain emotions that you might feel and help validate your grief feelings, so you will not think I'm the only person that has felt the pain of loss and I am all alone. As I share the five stages of grief I will share from my own experience and from a pastoral perspective.

1. **Denial** – I have had people say to me, I can't believe this is happening, it seems like a bad dream. I don't want to face this, what am I going to do? How will I go on? This is too unbearable for me to

manage. Denial is a protective defense mechanism to survive in the middle of a life crisis.

I was with the doctor helping with a code blue/death, and the family member saw us coming through the window in the door and they took off running outside from the ER waiting area. Family ran after them and brought them back inside to hear the news that they already suspected was true. In these times I have had people share later with me they knew the Lord was close to them even though it did not seem like it in the moment.

Psalms 34:18 *“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”*

At some point as the emotions are being processed and reality sets in, life will not be the same and the truth of loss is accepted.

2. **Anger** – is an outward emotion that allows us to direct the pain towards the loss and our anger looks for a scapegoat. Examples can be it's the doctor's fault; it's others they should have been here with me when I was

hurting and going through my loss, I'm mad at God, how did He allow this to happen to me. Anger is not a terrible thing; it's an emotion of the healing process. **Psalm 30:5** *"For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning."*

I know a person that took his anger of loss and redirected his life to honor a loved one while making a positive change for others. His father was a runner, and the father was killed by a distracted driver. Each year they have a fund-raising event. They are working to change the law to bring awareness through education and legal enforcement to reduce distracted driving. Their goal is to help others, so they don't have to feel the pain of loss.

3. **Bargaining** – it usually begins with a prayer or positive affirmation if the circumstances change the way I want them to be, then I will make changes to my life, or we question was there more I could have done? If only I had prayed harder or if I had gotten there sooner

maybe there was a different medical treatment that could have been done. Why in the middle of our loss does bargaining emerge? Several reasons are my impending loss is too hard to handle, or our love is trying to hold onto what we are not wanting to lose; our mind is grasping for meaning, fairness and an order to a situation that looks and feels hopeless. During our loss our faith feels weak but it's a sign of our deep love meeting deep pain. Just hold on to what the Psalmist says in **Psalm 34:18**, *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."* The Lord Jesus came to heal your broken heart and restore you knowing you did your very best during your life struggle.

4. **Depression-** It's a time of feeling hopelessness. Some may say what's the use, there is no hope or how can I go on? With an elderly person the reality of mortality sets in. Am I next? I don't want to socialize, go out, or get back to a different type of living with my loss. Will things ever get better? This includes appetite changes, feeling confused and

disoriented, changes in sleep patterns, current health issues worsening, and difficulty in making decisions. This is not clinical depression but feelings of coping with loss. There is a Bible promise in **Matthew 11:28-29** *Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

In Jesus' time a yoke was the apparatus where two animals have their head and shoulders harnessed to work together as a team. They trained oxen and would team a grown oxen with a young ox to work in the fields. The message is that the young ox is really walking along side of the big ox and is not really doing much of the work. Team up with Jesus and He will take the biggest share of the load. Walk with HIM and depression will become manageable and a sense of new life and purpose will ease the loss you're feeling.

5. **Acceptance** – is not that we are okay with the pain of our loss. It's about I am affirming resilience without denying the pain. It's assurance that God will walk with you for what is next in your life. Healing will not erase the memory, but you will begin to embrace the memories as time marches on and memories become a part of your journey with your loved one living within your heart. It will be a time of telling stories of memories in a fresh new way honoring their life lived past, present and the expectation of reuniting with them in the future.
- Revelation 12:4** *“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”*

God's grace will be with you as you progress with processing your grief. It's not a straight line it will come in waves; at times it will be a roller coaster with high highs and low lows. It's a sacred journey where the natural and spiritual collide. Feelings of being left alone and then looking into eternity knowing that there is a better place called Heaven. Your loved one has gone before you and is having a family

reunion, fellowshiping, and worshipping God their creator.

In conversations with making bereavement contacts as Chaplain family members remind me; they miss their loved one but would not want them back. They comment they are in a better place, and they are no longer suffering illness, loss of their spouses, siblings, children, and long-term friends. They are reunited throughout eternity. This is the hope of our salvation.

Chapter 2

Resilience Through Pain

Why the pain with loss you may ask? It is an honest and truthful question. If your love is deep, then the pain will be deep. It is normal to experience this pain and it's not popular to share with others to feel the pain in the depths of your souls.

When it comes to loss and pain, others attempt to take away the pain. People will make comments such as: "God needed another flower in His garden, in time things will get back to normal or they're in a better place." These are attempts to ease your pain or fill the silence. Nobody likes death and the pain it brings is very difficult to deal with.

Have you heard of the saying there is an elephant in the room? Everyone avoids bringing it up or talking about it. Everyone knows it's there but it's taboo to acknowledge it. Go ahead and acknowledge the pain and talk about it. When you go through the pain there will be newness, greater depth, and resilience in your life on the other side. The definition of resilience is the capacity to

withstand or to recover quickly from difficulties, toughness.

“Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.” – Psalms 25:4-5

Let's break down this scripture and look at Bible steps to get through grief and come out on the other side with our wounds beginning to heal.

Psalms 25:4, Show me Your ways- is to acknowledge God as you go through your loss and He will show you, His ways. Meaning, Lord, I have a great need, a void in my life from my loss. I'm wrestling with life. Who am I? God, who are you? Give me truth in the moment of losing my way. I need you more than ever before.

Teach me Your Paths- I need your grace. I feel alienated from You and I feel disconnected, all alone with my loss and my pain. Only You can fill this void. I come to You in deep sorrow and confess my shortcomings and accept your grace.

Guide me in Your truth- Lord, today I allow You who is all truth to lead me into releasing

my shortcomings, failures and my own human frailty depending totally on You.

For You are my God, my Savior- Today I'm realigning my life to follow You. To walk in a new beginning from this moment forward allowing You to be number one in my life. I lay down my life to serve others and be free from loss and let You fill my life with your direction and purpose. Amen!

My Hope is in You-Hope keeps me anchored to You, Father God. I know You are in my past, present and future. I hold fast to You, my hope, without wavering for You are faithful to Your promises.

Chapter 3

Inner Healing

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” — Psalm 147:3

There is the pathway of life all of us encounter because life is life and we are all subject to loss and pain. A broken heart and wounds of life add up and when loss comes in, it's a radical life changing way. This road is a journey that comes without us knowing it is coming our way.

Other times life builds up one challenge and one loss at a time and becomes unbearable to handle. When it comes it must be felt and experienced with or the opportunity for healing will never come. I've been asked, “why does my pain hurt so much, it seems to be too much to handle or will I ever get through it.”

What are some of the signs that will slow or stop us from inner healing? Here are a few examples of slowing the progress of grief's healing work to begin.

“I will never get over grieving it will last forever.”

“I am just going to stay busy with activities so I can get my mind off the pain.”

“If I create distractions, then I will not have to face my loss.”

“I do not want to attend a grief group if I do then I admit I am struggling with my loss. Plus, I do not want to be around others because my grief is personal and it's private. I will deal with my loss my own way it's not public.”

So, unless I admit that I need to look within and bring the healing presence that comes from drawing close to my Creator I will forfeit inner healing from taking place.

Loss is a time for redirection, but it only comes by looking into the mirror and coming to grips with the pain that I avoid. Just remember you're not alone. God can and will bind up and heal your wounds. Tell Him the wounds that you feel so He can bring healing to your emotions and pain that you're experiencing. Sometimes it feels like He is pouring warm oil over you.

A great way to tell Him is to make a list of the pain and loss you are feeling. A relationship loss, illness, sense of safety, finances, how my identity is changed, loss of spouse, loss of a

parent, loss of a child, loss of a grandchild, loss of a pet, loss of the caregiver role, loss of being a productive employee, loss of traveling, loss of attending church or civic activities, loss of traveling, or missing out on a birthday and holiday traditions. Inner healing begins with a living truth that is as old as the universe God created. This is an understanding that God has a mission and purpose revealed in centuries past. It is written in the scriptures below.

Jesus had a mission spoken ahead of time in **Isaiah 61:1-3** to reveal His purpose and mission to bring salvation and inner healing.

*“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me,
Because the LORD has anointed Me to preach
good tidings to the poor; He has sent
Me to heal the brokenhearted, To
proclaim liberty to the captives, And the
opening of the prison to those who are bound;
2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,
And the day of vengeance of our God; To
comfort all who mourn, 3 To console those who
mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes,
The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of
praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they
may be called trees of righteousness,*

The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.”

These verses are proclaiming Christ coming and His mission on earth to be the Savior of the world.

Luke 1:16-19 *He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. ¹⁷ And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: ¹⁸ “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; ¹⁹ To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”*

The ultimate healing takes place with accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior.

Prayer: *Jesus, I ask you to forgive me of my sins. You are my Lord and Savior now. Come and live in my heart. I believe You arose from*

the dead and with my mouth I confess you as my Savior. Thank you for saving me! Amen!

As a new believer the Lord will help you work through your loss and grief. The Lord is near the broken hearted and He will bind up the wounds of your loss and pain and heal you from within.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I come to You today and ask You to heal me from within and today is a new day to where I give You permission to remove the pain of loss and hurt. Fill this void as You only can as my Creator and Lord. Amen*

Chapter 4

Embracing Memories

Embrace timeless memories of the heart. The greatest thing we have in life is our memories. Time passes each day, months, years, decades, quarter of a century then a half a century and beyond. How did it go by so fast? **James 4:14** says *“What is your life it appears for a little time, and it vanishes away”*. The time comes as we grow older, we have more behind us than what lies before for us. There are several scriptures on remembering how the Lord has worked in our life.

Psalm 143:5-16 *“I remember to think about the many things You did in years gone by. Then I lift my hands in prayer because my soul is a desert, thirsty for water from You.*

Psalm 9:1 *“I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will recount all of Your wonderful deeds.”*

It is healthy for us when we begin to cherish our memories. It is a sign that after time when we dwell on our loss the pain in our life is more bearable. As the Psalmist wrote, our soul is a

desert, and I am thirsty for You. As we give thanks to the Lord and recount His wonderful deeds life begins to take on a new meaning, a new peace and comfort let us now share about our loss and take our loved ones within our heart as we live each day.

When a memory reminds you of stories from the past we begin to share with others in the moment, and we feel that void in our heart being filled with new joy as if they are there with us. There are times where you will hear their voice in your mind or you will relive a memory.

When holidays and birthdays come you will find yourself making their special meal or making their favorite cake. You might even go to their favorite restaurant where you both enjoyed eating. The pain will begin to turn into joy for the time you had together. It is a blessing from the Lord and a new gratefulness from Him carries you through the loss and it is restored with memories embraced.

My encouragement to you is to take it one day at a time. Beginning to explore the depths of your soul and to allow the memories to bring

you to the place of acceptance that your loss has become filled with a fresh awareness I'm moving forward with life but not alone. It is filled with memories of my loved ones.

Live a life your lost loved one would be proud of and continue to make a difference where you are. Make your life a testimony of their life in you. This gives you meaning and purpose to continue and forms a legacy of their life.

Chapter 5

Faith and Hope

Paul shares with the church in Corinth that our earthy tent is destroyed, meaning our body has no more life in it. Our spirit and soul return to the Lord and we are in our eternal house that is in heaven.

2 Corinthians 5:1: *“For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.”*

Knowing there is comfort and peace for our loved ones brings us to a place of hope and faith. We put our trust in God to continue our lives with a new outlook. We are called to live our destiny knowing our loved one is truly home. We move forward with new strength and purpose. God will lead and guide us.

There is a scripture the Bible tells us about the thoughts of God.

Jeremiah 29:11 NKJV, *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

Jeremiah wrote this to the children of Israel who were in captivity due to their own disobedience of not placing the God of Israel first place in their life. God's mercy is continually desiring for us to make Him first. Today is a wonderful time to realign your life and purpose to serve and let God direct your path to give you a future and a hope.

I have a remarkable story that includes people I worked with who became hospital volunteers. One person had retired from the hospital as a unit clerk for twenty-eight years. After two years she came to the place where she felt her life had become stagnant. She had more time on her hands than she knew what to do with and she needed purpose. She came back to the hospital as a volunteer at the front desk where patients and family come for outpatient surgery. She greets all that comes in, assists with their check-in for surgery and takes them back to pre-op. She goes the extra mile by getting coffee, cream and sweeteners for family waiting for their loved ones.

There is an entire group just like her that volunteer their time and give back to the community. What a terrific way to reach out to others at a time of stress and anxiety. The

volunteers are there to bring comfort and support. There is nothing better to bring clarity and direction to your life than when you add to others' lives and not think of your own lack.

Jesus shared in **Matthew 22:37-39** the two greatest commands. They are to love God with everything you have and then to love your neighbor as yourself. You will find that no matter what loss we face, meaning and purpose can only be found in loving the Lord Your God with everything within you and taking His love and giving it to others.

My prayer for you today is to have faith and hope the Lord will direct your life in a new and fresh way. He will move you beyond your pain and have Him fill the void and allow you to continue with life knowing your loved one's memory is lived through you.

I share three things at the close of a celebration of life service or funeral. Number one always keep them in your memories. Number two if you do not know Jesus as your Lord and Savior consider asking Him into your life. Number three live your life to the fullest on this side of heaven so when your time comes you can know that your life here on earth

counted. Amen! Let's end with this beautiful scripture in Revelation.

Revelation 21:4: *And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*

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