

THE JOURNEY OF GRIEF - PART ONE

3 SESSION

SINCE THE DEATH OF YOUR LOVED ONE, you've started a journey. It's not a trip you planned, but it's a trip you must take. Several factors will shape your journey, and you can take intentional steps to point yourself in a healthy, healing direction. So, put on your hiking boots, get out your compass (Bible), and with the help of God and other people, you can avoid getting lost in the deep woods of grief.

After viewing the video, taking part in discussion, and completing your **FROM MOURNING TO JOY** exercises, you'll discover:

-  Helpful goals to set on your journey of grief
-  How to deal with those who try to rush you through your grief
-  How long the journey of grief typically lasts

VIDEO OUTLINE

Use this outline to write down important concepts, encouraging words, or questions you have while viewing the video.

YOUR JOURNEY OF GRIEF

Does a new normal mean forgetting? (Psalm 23:4)

It's unique

Why it's unique

"Turning to Him is the best thing you can do." –Phil Sasser

Finding comfort

GOALS FOR YOUR JOURNEY

1. Acceptance

2. Turn to God (Psalm 63:1)

3. Express your emotions

4. Establish a new identity

ADVICE FOR YOUR JOURNEY

Don't rush

People will try to rush you

“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” –God (Hebrews 13:5b)

Dealing with those who rush you

SURPRISES ON THE JOURNEY

You may feel relief or joy

Your pain may get worse

Ambushes of grief

SURVIVING YOUR JOURNEY

Don't numb your pain (Isaiah 55:2)

Take your time

In this week's From Mourning to Joy exercises ...

Susan didn't have anyone she could honestly share her emotions with. She found this made her grief process last even longer. Find out how to work through some important goals of grief.

"The more you keep your emotions inside, the more they'll come out." –Dr. Robert DeVries

HOW TO WRITE A GRIEF LETTER

People mean well in their attempts to help you, but sometimes their efforts make things harder for you. It's helpful to write your friends and family what we call a "grief letter" so they can provide help that's best suited to you.

HOW TO WRITE A GRIEF LETTER:

1. Briefly describe your experience and your feelings.
2. Let people know what they can expect from you.
3. Tell them what they can do and say that you'd find comforting, and what's not comforting to you.
4. List specific, practical needs they can help with.

WHEN WRITING YOUR LETTER, REMEMBER:

- Share only your immediate needs. As your needs change, you can send or share a new letter.
- People won't be offended if you tell them exactly how to help you. They will appreciate your clear instructions. It takes the guesswork out of serving you.
- If you don't tell people what you need, you risk not being cared for and/or receiving unwanted help.



H. Norman Wright shares this sample grief letter in his book *Recovering from Losses in Life*.

Dear Friend (family, pastor, fellow workers ...),

Recently I have suffered a devastating loss. I am grieving and it will take months and even years to recover from this loss. I wanted to let you know that I will cry from time to time. I don't apologize for my tears since they are not a sign of weakness or a lack of faith. They are God's gift to me to express the extent of my loss, and they are also a sign that I am recovering.

At times you may see me angry for no apparent reason. Sometimes I'm not sure why. All I know is that my emotions are intense because of my grief. If I don't always make sense to you, please be forgiving and patient with me. And if I repeat myself again and again, please accept this as normal.

More than anything else I need your understanding and your presence. You don't always have to know what to say, or even say anything, if you don't know how to respond. Your presence and a touch or hug lets me know you care. Please don't wait for me to call you since sometimes I am too tired or tearful to do so. If I tend to withdraw from you, please don't let me do that. I need you to reach out to me for several months.

Pray for me that I would come to see meaning in my loss someday and that I would know God's comfort and love. It does help to let me know that you are praying for me. If you have experienced a similar type of loss, please feel free to share it with me ...

This loss is so painful, and right now it feels like the worst thing that could ever happen to me. But I will survive and eventually recover ...

Thank you for caring about me. Thank you for listening and praying. Your concern comforts me and is a gift for which I will always be thankful.

(Revell, 2006)

FROM MOURNING TO JOY

ENCOURAGEMENT AND COMFORT FROM GOD'S WORD

Session Three - The Journey of Grief - Part One



SUSAN: "I FELT LIKE I WAS ALONE"

"When I lost my mother, it was like becoming an orphan. She was my last close living relative. I felt like I was alone in the world. Being the only caregiver for Mother, my life had been wrapped up in taking care of her. When she had passed, a lot of that was immediately gone. I felt like I didn't have any purpose. I had no one to talk to, to get out some of my feelings. My friends didn't want to hear about it anymore, so I would throw a mask up to try to act like everything was okay."

If you hesitate to be honest about your emotional state, if other people are rushing you through grief, or if you have fears about your future, you'll find it helpful to work through the ideas and strategies in this week's study.

DAY 1

Express your emotions

Expressing your emotions can be scary. But God will comfort you when you do. *"It's good to talk it out. You will get through to the other side."* –Susan

3. Why do you think God wants you to know that Jesus is more than a great moral teacher, savior, or miracle worker—but that He is also a comforter?

GOD'S MESSAGE TO YOU

"He has sent me [Jesus] ... to comfort all who mourn."
(Isaiah 61:1b-2)

1. Are you allowing yourself to express your grief? Why or why not?

2. According to Isaiah 61:1b-2, what is one reason God sent Jesus?

4. We've suggested a few ways you can experience Jesus's comfort. Add your ideas to the list.

a. Reading the Bible.

b. Listening to others share how God has helped them heal.

c. _____

d. _____

"I wore a mask to try to hide my feelings." –Susan

CONSIDER THIS

If you're not sure how to release your emotions, consider the following suggestions:

- Write down your story of grief.
- Tell others how much your loved one meant to you and how your grief is affecting you.
- Read sympathy cards or watch a video of the funeral to help release pent-up emotions.
- Make a scrapbook or photo book of your loved one.

TALKING TO GOD

God, I know I have to release these emotions in order to heal. Help me to grieve honestly over the suffering and sorrow in my life and in this world, and then to seek, anticipate, and accept the comfort You have for me.

**DAY
2**

Accept the reality of your loved one's death

A goal of grieving you learned on this week's video is to face the reality that you are here and your loved one is not coming back.

GOD'S MESSAGE TO YOU

"The LORD said to Joshua ... 'Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready ... because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.'"

(Joshua 1:1b-2, 6)

1. As Moses's successor, Joshua inherited the huge responsibility of leading the Israelite nation. Before God instructed Joshua on what to do, what did He remind him of (see today's Bible verses)?

2. Why do you think it was important for Joshua to accept the reality that Moses was dead in order for him to move forward with what God had for him?

3. Why is it important (and painful) for you to accept the reality that your loved one is dead?

CONSIDER THIS

"I had to tell myself that I lost my father and he was gone, and that was the first real step towards grieving for me." –Amy

SEASONS CHANGE

"When you make your way through grief, you don't leave that person behind. You bring that person with you, where your memories of that person and your thankfulness for that person [become] a happy experience and not filled with so much pain." –Susan Lutz

TALKING TO GOD

God, my loved one is no longer here. I don't like it and I don't want it, but I recognize that it's true. Help me to do the tough work of grief in order to make it through.

**DAY
3**

Develop a new identity

"Who am I without my loved one?"

Now that your loved one is gone, you will have to figure out who you are now. But there are some things that will never change.

"I came to realize I had never really grieved my dad." –Susan

GOD'S MESSAGE TO YOU

"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1a)

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand." (John 10:27-28)

1. If you are a Christian, according to 1 John 3:1a what are you also?

2. In John 10:27-28, Jesus calls His followers His sheep. What does Jesus give His sheep?

3. When Jesus says no one will snatch His sheep/followers out of His hand, He means their relationship with Him is secure. If you're a Christian, how does it encourage you to know your relationship with God is stable, secure, never at risk (despite the changes you're dealing with)?

CONSIDER THIS

"Who am I? What really defines my existence? I want that to be based on something that can never be lost."
–Dr. Stephen Viars

TALKING TO GOD

God, it's time for me to figure out who I really am, to gain some solid footing in my shifting world. I want to know what it truly means to be loved by You, to be Your child, to have eternal life, and how I can live in that constant security no matter what comes my way.

**DAY
4**

I have so many fears

Fears about the future, fears about today, fears for family members, fears about creating a new normal and moving forward ...

GOD'S MESSAGE TO YOU

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging." (Psalm 46:1-3)

1. What can you relate to in Psalm 46:1-3?

2. When your earth has given way beneath you, and the waters are roaring around you, where is God (according to Psalm 46:1-3)?

3. Turning to God for help is an intentional act in times of anxiety. How can you make turning to God a habit when fears come?

"Just hang on to His love." –Susan

CONSIDER THIS

“When I’m in a place of anxiety, I stop and say, ‘What am I dwelling on?’ and it’s all the areas where I’m just not able.” –Sandy Elder

TALKING TO GOD

God, I’m struggling with unbelief and fear. Help me to hold tightly to Your ever-present hand.
Your presence helps relieve my fears.
Keep me safe and strong.

**DAY
5**

When people try to rush you
Don’t let people rush you past the pain.
They are not the authority on your grief.

GOD’S MESSAGE TO YOU

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot ... a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1–4)

1. Describe when you’ve felt rushed or pressured by someone to get through your grief.
2. Based upon Ecclesiastes 3:1–4, what does God think you should be doing during this season of your life?
3. How might these verses from Ecclesiastes help you respond to someone who asks why you are so sad right now and whether or not your happiness will return?

CONSIDER THIS

*“We don’t get through grieving at least until the first anniversary of [the] death. And that’s really fast. Most people, it takes two to three to sometimes even four years to really go through that grief journey.”
–Dr. Susan Zonnebelt-Smeenge*

TALKING TO GOD

God, hold me firmly in Your everlasting arms as I try to face the tough work of grief.

SUSAN: LOOKING BACK

“After Mother passed away, I was fearful about what my future would be. Thankfully, I have come to realize I have people that would be there for me if I needed them, and God has always provided for me; for instance, shortly after Mother passed away, God gave me a job right when I needed it.

“Through everything I’ve been through, Mother’s [death], my dad, loss of job, loss of friends, God has always been there, and He always will be there for me. And I tell myself, ‘Susan, it’s going to be okay; just walk through it, take hold of the people that are willing to help you, and you will get through this with God’s love.’”

NEXT SESSION

Discover things you can do to make your grief journey more bearable.

Time is not the healer of wounds. God is.

MY WEEKLY GRIEF WORK

Session - Three

PERSONAL CHECKUP - TRACK YOUR HEALING PROGRESS

Place a check in the box identifying how you're feeling. Insert words to explain why.

	REALLY BAD	OKAY	PRETTY GOOD	GREAT
EMOTIONALLY	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
PHYSICALLY	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SPIRITUALLY	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
RELATIONALLY	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

JOURNAL TOPICS - MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL

Choose one or more ideas below, or choose your own topic. We encourage you to use a separate notebook for your weekly journaling.

- Write down things you always want to remember about your loved one.
- Write down good lessons you've learned from your loved one and character traits you want to emulate and pass on to others.
- Describe a special memory.

MOVING FORWARD - PRACTICAL STEPS TOWARD HEALING

HOW TO STORE MEMORIES OF YOUR LOVED ONE

One of the goals of grief is to store memories of your loved one. In the space below, brainstorm numerous ideas of ways you can store memories of your loved one. Here are some ideas.

- Send a letter to several people asking them to write down a treasured memory and send it back to you. Have these bound in a book.
- Plan a get-together with family/friends to share stories of your loved one.
- Visit places you and your loved one used to go.
- Make a scrapbook or picture collage.
- Incorporate and pass on character traits you learned from your loved one.
- Do volunteer work or create a tribute in honor of a cause that your loved one had a heart for.