

LINDELL RECOVERY NETWORK

# GRIEF

*Living at Peace with Loss*

---

KEYS FOR LIVING LIBRARY





# THE LINDELL KEYS FOR RECOVERY HANDBOOK

## *50 Topics for a Transformed Life*

### Addiction and Recovery

- Alcohol & Drug Abuse
- Anorexia & Bulimia
- Codependency
- Gambling
- Habits & Addictions
- Overeating
- Sexual Addiction
- Workaholism

### Crisis and Trauma

- Abuse Recovery
- Domestic Violence
- Sexual Assault & Rape Recovery
- Suicide Prevention
- Trials
- Verbal & Emotional Abuse

### Thoughts and Emotions

- Anger
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Fear
- Forgiveness
- Grief
- Guilt
- Hope
- Identity & Self-image
- Loneliness
- Rejection & Abandonment
- Self-Worth
- Stress
- Temptation
- Worry

### Attitude and Character

- Lying vs. Truthfulness
- Perfectionism
- Rebellion
- Sexual Integrity
- Stealing

### Counseling and Coaching

- Boundaries
- Conflict Resolution
- Decision Making
- Purpose in Life
- Reconciliation
- Success through Failure

### Marriage and Family

- The Blended Family
- Divorce
- The Dysfunctional Family
- Marriage
- Parenting

### Faith and Apologetics

- Assurance of Salvation
- The Bible
- Evil & Suffering ... Why?
- God: Who is He?
- Jesus: Is He God?



*The Thoughts and Emotions Series*

# GRIEF

*Living at Peace with Loss*

**KEYS FOR LIVING LIBRARY**



Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are taken from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NKJV) are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

## **GENERAL DISCLAIMER**

The information contained in this resource is general in nature and is not intended to provide or be a substitute for advice, consultation or treatment with a duly licensed mental health practitioner or other medical professional. This resource is intended to provide practical faith-based guidelines for balanced living and is not a replacement for medical advice. Professional services should be pursued whenever necessary and/or appropriate. By utilizing this resource, individuals acknowledge that Hope for the Heart (HFTH) and the Lindell Recovery Network (LRN) are not providing direct clinically-oriented mental health treatment or therapy, and that it does not create a therapeutic relationship between any individual and HFTH or the LRN. Individuals who use this resource also agree to indemnify and hold harmless, HFTH and the LRN, its licensees, affiliates, and assigns, as well as the officers, agents, and employees of HFTH and the LRN, and its licensees, affiliates, and assigns, from and against any and all liability, loss, damages, costs, charges, legal fees, recoveries, judgments, penalties, and expenses, which may be obtained against, imposed upon or suffered by HFTH and the LRN. Additionally, certain views and opinions expressed in this resource may be those from sources other than HFTH or the LRN and do not necessarily represent the views of HFTH or the LRN, nor imply an endorsement by HFTH or the LRN. All rights are reserved worldwide and no part of this resource may be reproduced in any form (print or electronic) without the expressed written permission of Hope for the Heart.

Copyright © Hope for the Heart

ISBN: 978-1-7924-0346-0

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Published in the United States of America

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**A Personal Note** ..... 1

**Introduction** ..... 3

## Definitions

What Is Grief?..... 9

What Is Mourning? ..... 10

What Is Chronic Grief? .....11

What Is Unresolved Grief? ..... 12

What Is Grief Work? .....13

What Is God’s Heart on Grief?.....14

## Characteristics

How Do You Know Whether You Are Grieving? .....21

What Are Characteristics of Chronic Grief? .....23

What Are the Stages of Healthy Grieving? ..... 24

What Are the Side Effects of Severe Grief?.....26

## Causes

Why Do Losses Cause Grief?..... 35

What Are Causes of Chronic Grief? .....38

What Complicates the Grieving Process? ..... 42

What Is the Root Cause of Unprocessed Grief? ..... 44

How Can You Find Comfort When Grieving? ..... 47

## Steps to Solution

Key Verses to Memorize .....	55
Key Passage to Read .....	56
How to Have a Transformed Life .....	57
How to Learn Acceptance—Your Hope for Healing .....	60
How to Establish Guidelines for Healthy Grieving .....	63
How to Apply Dos and Don'ts of Healthy Grieving.....	67
How to Let Go and Say Goodbye .....	69
How to Address Unresolved Grief .....	71
How God Can Use Your Grief .....	75
How to Answer Questions regarding Grief.....	77
How to Build Up the Bereaved.....	89
How to Help the Grieving .....	92
How to Find and Share Comfort.....	93

## Scriptures to Memorize.....99

## Endnotes & Bibliography ..... 105

# A PERSONAL NOTE

*from Mike Lindell*

My passion is to see people recover from addiction! And that's why I'm proud to partner with author June Hunt and Hope for the Heart, and so excited to use the *Keys for Living* as part of the Lindell Recovery Network. People everywhere are struggling with addictions, wounds, and challenges in life. They need hope. They need help. And the *Keys for Living* provide that hope and real answers from God's Word.

This is the best material I've seen in biblical counseling and caregiving . . . with over 100 topics that speak to almost every presenting problem. There's nothing else like them. They take God's Word and apply it to life's challenges.

The *Keys for Living* are exceptional and outstanding resources for those who need help in overcoming the obstacles they face, and above all, to find Christ.

Read this book. Share it with others. Ask God in prayer to make it real in your life.

May God bless you as you do it!



Mike Lindell

Lindell Recovery Network



# INTRODUCTION

I have felt intense grief . . . a penetrating grief that cannot be escaped or denied. I know what it's like to feel *unexpected grief*—those times when grief catches me off guard, particularly when, out of the blue, a painful memory floods my mind, raining tears upon my soul.

How well I remember traveling to Indiana to speak at a conference that began with a buffet dinner. As I was standing in line, I noticed a younger woman attentively serving the plate of an older woman with a walker. I couldn't help but notice the tender affection between this mother and daughter. Immediately, a wave of grief swept over me. Tears filled my eyes . . . I quickly left the room . . . I cried.

Simply put, that mother-daughter scene evoked precious memories of my mother and me. My mother had died just four weeks before. Never again would I have the privilege of serving her, seating her, sitting with her. Never again could I hug her, kiss her, hold her. Oh, how I missed her!

Unexpected grief can occur anytime and anyplace—especially when we see something that reminds us of the one so dear to our hearts, the one no longer in our lives.

Grief visits us at unexpected times. Like the time I walked into a card shop, saw a bird's nest, and suddenly my eyes filled with tears. I had to turn and walk out of the store.

Again, sorrow had flooded my soul. Although over a year had passed since my mother's death, the moment I saw the bird's nest, I grieved for her. She loved what nests represent: security, family, intimacy.

Once for Mother's Day, I designed a bracelet for her that contained the birthstones of my three siblings that I closely nestled together inside a gold nest. Whenever I found a bird's nest (which was rare), I would get it for her, and she would be utterly delighted. That day, in that card shop, I had found another endearing nest . . . but this time, it was too late. And my heart grieved.

Periodically you, like me, will go through seasons of grief. And after

we lose someone or something immensely meaningful to us, we can expect moments of unexpected grief.

No matter the heartache, realize that God is with you in the midst of your grief. And when you allow Jesus Christ to have control of your life, you can truly live at peace with your loss.

I've learned that even in our grief, there is hope. The Bible says, "*Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning*" (Psalm 30:5). Because of God's great love for us, we can find healing from devastating losses, and we can have faith that the future holds new and promising hope.

June Hunt  
*Founder, Hope For The Heart*

# GRIEF

## *Living at Peace with Loss*

Seeing a daughter help her mother to the car, watching a dad play catch with his son, or observing a couple holding hands—these are everyday occurrences. But if you have just lost your parent, your child, or your spouse—these everyday experiences can trigger sudden, intense, overwhelming sorrow.

Grief can catch us off guard with memories and emotions that we may want to escape or deny. But healing is possible. Even in our grief, there is hope.

Why are people so drawn to Jesus . . . especially when their hearts have lost all hope? Why do they assume He will sympathize with their sorrows? Why would He grieve over their griefs? The answer is simple: Jesus was no stranger to grief.

If you have lost someone—or even something meaningful—you will experience a season of sadness and grief. In these times, Jesus offers you comfort. He sympathizes with your sorrow. When you're in pain, He offers you His peace.

*“We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*

(HEBREWS 4:15–16)



# DEFINITIONS



---

*“God has a plan  
for you during  
your season  
of sorrow.”*



Just days before His own death, Jesus traveled to the grave of Lazarus to comfort his two sisters in their loss. Jesus was not only deeply moved, but He also wept with Mary and Martha.

It may seem paradoxical that Jesus—the Son of God, the one who turned water into wine, the one who multiplied the loaves and the fishes, the one who ultimately raised Lazarus from the dead—did not avoid grief in His own life. But the prophet Isaiah foretold that Christ would be . . .

*“A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”*

(ISAIAH 53:3 ESV)

## What Is Grief?

When our loved ones are with us, we are constantly *adding* to our relationships. We create new memories and experiences. We share time and space, and our stories blend together. We make new friends, grow our families, visit new places, try new foods, and share good and bad times.

But when a loved one dies, we experience *loss* in our lives that creates a void. Gone is the making of new memories and experiences reminding us of what was lost. Grief is an expression of loss.

*“Joy is gone from our hearts;  
our dancing has turned to mourning.”*

(LAMENTATIONS 5:15)

**Grief** is the painful *emotion* of sorrow caused by the loss or impending loss of anyone or anything that has deep meaning to you—a person, position, possession, plan, power, or purpose.

### Grief Facts:<sup>1</sup>

- Grief is a process.
- The deeper the emotional attachment, the deeper the grief.
- Grieving has no set time frame. It can last for months or even years.
- God longs to heal our hearts when they are filled with grief.

*“You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy” (JOHN 16:20).*

**“Grief”** in the New Testament is the Greek word *lupe*, which means “sadness, grief, heaviness, sorrow.”<sup>2</sup> When Jesus told His disciples that He would soon be betrayed and killed . . .

*“The disciples were filled with grief” (MATTHEW 17:23).*

**Grief** is a God-given emotion that increases with knowledge about the sorrows of life.

*“With much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief” (ECCLESIASTES 1:18).*

**Grief** begins in your heart as a natural response to a significant, unwanted loss.

*“My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen on me” (PSALM 55:4).*

## What Is Mourning?

Throughout the pages of God’s Word, you will find every expression of human emotion, including grief. King David mourned over the loss of his son. Job mourned over the loss of his children. Naomi mourned over the loss of her husband and two sons whose wives, Ruth and Orpah, also mourned. As Jesus went to the cross, the Bible says . . .

*“A large number of people followed him,  
including women who mourned and wailed for him.”*

(LUKE 23:27)

**Mourning** (also called grieving) is the process of working through painful sorrow following a significant loss.

*“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted”* (MATTHEW 5:4).

**Mourning** is a normal, healthy process that lasts for a period of time. God uses mourning to help us recover from deep distress and sorrow.

*“You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy”* (PSALM 30:11).

**Mourning** evokes compassion and expressions of comfort from others. Jesus and many others came to comfort Mary and Martha when their brother, Lazarus, died.

*“Many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother”* (JOHN 11:19).

**“Mourning”** is sometimes translated from the Greek *pentheo*, which means “to grieve, mourn, wail.”<sup>3</sup> The Greek word *klaio* is also translated as mourning and means “to sob, wail aloud, bewail, weep”<sup>4</sup>

*“When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there”* (JOHN 11:31).

## What Is Chronic Grief?

While we grieve, we often don’t want to talk about our grief or let others see our sadness. Not wanting to appear weak or become a burden to others, we sometimes mask our emotions.

Yet if we delay sharing our sorrow, our healing will also be delayed. If we are going to be authentically “real,” we need to share the truth about the heaviness in our hearts. If we develop chronic grief, we can be emotionally stuck and we need to be set free.

*“Out of my distress I called on the LORD;  
the LORD answered me and set me free.”*  
(PSALM 118:5 ESV)

**Chronic grief** is emotional sorrow experienced over a long period of time as the result of not accepting a significant loss or not experiencing closure of that loss.<sup>5</sup>

*“My life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away”* (PSALM 31:10 ESV).

**Chronic grief** (or incomplete grief) can also be an unresolved, deep sorrow experienced over a long period of time and is characterized by *misconceptions* that result in a failure to move through the grief process.

– **Misconception:** “My grief will never end.”

**Correction:** You will mourn for a season, and then your grief will end or greatly diminish as it is processed.

*“There is . . . a time to mourn and a time to dance”* (ECCLESIASTES 3:1, 4).

– **Misconception:** “If I cry, that means I’m not strong.”

**Correction:** Jesus was strong, yet He wept after Lazarus died.

*“Jesus wept”* (JOHN 11:35).

– **Misconception:** “If I feel deep sorrow, I must not be trusting God.”

**Correction:** God invites you to share your sorrow with Him and trust Him through it.

*“Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge”* (PSALM 62:8).

## What Is Unresolved Grief?

Have you seen someone smiling, yet within their smile you recognize sadness? Have you heard someone laughing although you know they are in pain? When you see forced smiles and hear half-hearted laughter that continues over time, it may be unresolved grief.

*“Even in laughter the heart may ache,  
and rejoicing may end in grief.”*

(PROVERBS 14:13)

**Unresolved grief** occurs when a person has reason to grieve and needs to grieve, but does not grieve.<sup>6</sup>

**Unresolved grief** may be seen through negative behavior patterns. Examples include: distancing from others, using mood-altering substances like alcohol or drugs, or engaging in mood-altering behaviors like gambling or compulsive spending.

**Unresolved grief** can be addressed by walking through the grief process and facing each painful loss.

*“The LORD says, ‘I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you’”* (PSALM 32:8 NLT).

## What Is Grief Work?

Do you feel as if your grief will never end—that your loss is a continual source of sorrow? Moving through the grief process takes time and commitment to stay the course until healing occurs. Working through your grief is not easy; it’s often hard. Be assured, God has a plan for you during your season of sorrow. He will bring comfort in your pain and give you the strength to persevere.

*“My comfort in my suffering is this:  
Your promise preserves my life.”*

(PSALM 119:50)

**Grief work** involves a step-by-step process through which a grieving person walks in order to reach a place of emotional healing.<sup>7</sup>

*“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life”* (PSALM 138:7).

Healthy **grief work** will culminate in:<sup>8</sup>

- **Accepting** that the past will always be in the past
- **Accepting** that the present can offer stability and significance
- **Accepting** that the future can hold new and promising hope

Grief work can be difficult, but God is with you every step of the way.

*“I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand  
and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.”*

(ISAIAH 41:13)

## What Is God’s Heart on Grief?

Grief is common in our broken world. When we face a significant loss in our lives, it is natural to feel heartache and to mourn. But in our grief, God is near. He sees our pain, understands it, and walks with us every day. God’s Word shows that we don’t grieve without purpose or without His presence.

*“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”*

(PSALM 46:1)

**God empathizes** with your grief because He has experienced grief Himself.

*“He [Jesus] was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief” (ISAIAH 53:3 NLT).*

**God is with you** in your grief.

*“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (ISAIAH 41:10).*

**God sees** your grief and suffering.

*“You, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand” (PSALM 10:14).*

**God hears** your cries and listens to you in your pain.

*“The LORD has heard my weeping” (PSALM 6:8).*

**God wants** you to process your grief with Him.

*“Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken” (PSALM 55:22).*

**God wants** you to have hope even in your grief.

*“Dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope” (1 THESSALONIANS 4:13 NLT).*

**God wants** to give you joy even in your grief.

*“You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing. You have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy” (PSALM 30:11 NLT).*

**God wants** to comfort you with His presence.

*“I, yes I, am the one who comforts you” (ISAIAH 51:12 NLT).*

**God wants** to comfort you through others.

*“God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus” (2 CORINTHIANS 7:6).*

**God wants** to comfort you with His Word.

*“I have suffered much; preserve my life, LORD, according to your word” (PSALM 119:107).*

**God wants** to use your grief to comfort others.

*“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4).*

**God will** one day wipe away your tears—and there will be no more death or mourning or grief.

*“He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever”*  
(REVELATION 21:4 NLT).

## Faith of the Bereaved C. S. Lewis (Part I)<sup>9</sup>

In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, C.S. Lewis takes his readers through a wardrobe to a world of witches and a heroic lion named Aslan. In *Mere Christianity*, he takes his readers through an intellectual sparing match with some of the toughest arguments against Christianity. But after his beloved wife, Helen Joy, dies of cancer, Lewis candidly takes his readers through the dark, empty hallways of despair in *A Grief Observed*.

The level of anguish and grief Lewis experiences and shares surprises some readers. He writes about God’s seeming absence amid his grief . . .

. . . where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms [of grief] . . . go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become. There are no lights in the windows. It might be an empty house. Was it ever inhabited? It seemed so once . . .

Lewis’s writing strikes a somber note, similar to many psalms in Scripture—full of anguish, anger, and unanswered questions . . .

*“How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?  
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and  
day after day have sorrow in my heart?”*

(PSALM 13:1–2)

And . . .

*“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from saving me,  
so far from my cries of anguish?  
My God, I cry out by day,  
but you do not answer, by night,  
but I find no rest.”*

(PSALM 22:1–2)

*A Grief Observed* mimics the psalms of lament in many ways. They raise hard questions. They express difficult feelings. They don't always resolve in a nice and neat way. But that's the point. Grief isn't nice and neat. It's messy. Grief can feel so overwhelming that it can cloud our ability to hear from God. Lewis writes . . .

I have gradually been coming to feel that the door is no longer shut and bolted. Was it my own frantic need that slammed it in my face? 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 the 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.

Although Lewis's grief seems to have hindered his ability to hear from God, Lewis did not stop knocking on heaven's door. And that's what faith does—it turns *to* God, not *away* from Him.



# CHARACTERISTICS



---

*“When your heart  
breaks over  
a great loss,  
intense grief  
can affect  
every area  
of your life.”*



Grieving is a process—an often unpredictable process. It affects not only your emotions but your physical, mental, social, and spiritual life as well. And grief doesn't follow a clear-cut schedule. The grief over the death of a significant person in your life—especially a parent, spouse, or child—doesn't go away after a few days, weeks, or even months. Grief can last for years.

Everyone grieves differently, but everyone must grieve in order to heal. In his grief, King David turned to God for help. His words show how grief affected every area of his life—for years—and also how God, in His mercy, was with him.

*“Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress;  
my eyes grow weak with sorrow,  
my soul and body with grief.  
My life is consumed by anguish  
and my years by groaning;  
my strength fails because of my affliction,  
and my bones grow weak.”*  
(PSALM 31:9–10)

## How Do You Know Whether You Are Grieving?

When we initially experience a significant loss, we can plunge into depths of grief and have difficulty “coming up for air.” Then eventually, after we surface, we simply tread water, not swimming toward a real destination. When you feel engulfed with grief, realize that God is your deliverer. He will keep you from drowning in the depths of despair.

*“He reached down from on high and took hold of me;  
he drew me out of deep waters.”*  
(PSALM 18:16)

To evaluate whether you are grieving, place a check mark (✓) next to all that apply to your situation:

- Do you feel alone and isolated?
- Do you feel that you are just mechanically going through the motions of life?
- Do you feel resentful toward God for allowing your loss?
- Do you ask, “Why?” over and over again?
- Do you feel overwhelmed, not knowing what to do or where to turn?
- Do you feel emotionally distraught because of your loss?
- Do you frequently dream at night about your loss?
- Do you daydream about your loss?
- Do you feel angry or bitter over your loss?
- Do you have difficulty forgiving those who caused your loss?
- Do you see life as an empty struggle without much reward?
- Do you feel helpless, knowing how much others must also be grieving?
- Do you wonder what kind of God would allow your loss?
- Do you view God as uninvolved and lacking compassion?

During your time of grief, you may be confused about your feelings toward God, but always remember . . .

*“The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble.  
He cares for those who trust in him.”*  
(NAHUM 1:7)

## What Are Characteristics of Chronic Grief?

Allowing yourself to be open and honest about your sorrow takes great courage. For some, the reality of personal pain has been buried so deeply that the ability to experience real grief is blocked. People do many things to camouflage or ignore their grief so that they don't have to acknowledge it and work through it.

As a result, they have unhealthy, chronic grief, which can be a barrier to emotional maturity. This unresolved sorrow blocks the comfort that Christ wants to give us.

*“Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.”*

(MATTHEW 5:4)

### Chronic grief can be:

**Inhibited** grief—denial of grief

“This is not really happening.”

**Isolated** grief—selective remembering

“I refuse to think about that car accident again.”

**Insulated** grief—reduced emotional involvement

“I’m not going to open myself up to being hurt this way again.”

**Intellectualized** grief—rationally explaining events

“It could have been worse.”

**Inverted** grief—returning to immature ways of responding

“I can’t believe it! I just threw a temper tantrum like I was a child.”

**Immortalized** grief—inability to let go of the loss

“He will always be a part of everything in my life.”

*“My eyes are dim with grief.  
I call to you, LORD, every day;  
I spread out my hands to you.”*

(PSALM 88:9)

## What Are the Stages of Healthy Grieving?

Emotional complications occur when we block the natural process of grieving. Perhaps you've issued your own personal reprimands: *I need to get my act together! I have to snap out of it. I should be handling this better!* These self-condemning thoughts reveal unrealistic expectations about grieving and an inability to understand the grief process and the slow journey of restoration.

While stages of grief do exist, they are not necessarily progressive or sequential.<sup>10</sup> In truth, people do not go through all the stages of grief in a predictable fashion. Every person is unique in their grieving process.

Some stages may be experienced with varying degrees of intensity, some may be missed, and some stages may be repeated. Give yourself permission to experience the varying, inconsistent stages of grieving. Trust God to restore your life and lift you up from the depths of despair with renewed purpose in life.

*"The LORD upholds all who fall  
and lifts up all who are bowed down."*

(PSALM 145:14)

### Crisis Stage

This initial stage can typically last a few days or a number of weeks. In this stage of grief, you will mechanically go through daily activities and experience many of the following symptoms:

Anxiety/fear

Appetite/sleep loss

Confusion/forgetfulness

Denial

Distracted/difficulty concentrating

Disturbing dreams  
Exhaustion  
Feeling trapped  
Shock/numbness  
Uncontrollable crying

*“My eyes will flow unceasingly, without relief.”*

(LAMENTATIONS 3:49)

### Crucible Stage

This stage can last for months or a few years, perhaps even for a lifetime if the grief is not resolved. This time of sorrow can feel all-consuming and will often be accompanied by many of the following characteristics:

Anger/resentment  
Anguish  
Appetite/sleep loss  
Bargaining with God  
Depression/sadness  
Guilt/false guilt  
Helplessness/lethargy  
Impaired judgment  
Loneliness/isolation  
Longing/intense yearning  
Low self-worth  
Self-pity/victim mentality

*“My soul is in deep anguish.  
How long, LORD, how long?”*

(PSALM 6:3)

## Comforted Stage

This stage accepts the loss, leaving it in the past. This stage not only accepts that the present offers stability, but also accepts that the future offers new and promising hope. As this time approaches, the following characteristics will become more and more apparent:

- New ability to leave the loss behind
- Increased compassion toward others
- Greater contentment in all circumstances
- More acceptance of others
- Deepened humility before others
- New patterns of living
- Fuller dependence on the Lord
- Renewed hope for the future
- Growing appreciation of others
- Restored purpose in life

*“Come and hear, all you who fear God;  
let me tell you what he has done for me.”*

(PSALM 66:16)

## What Are the Side Effects of Severe Grief?

When your heart breaks over a great loss, intense grief can affect every area of your life—physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. The effects of this intense grief will vary in degree, ranging from mild to severe, depending on where you are in the grieving process. While you may not experience all the effects, most people do experience some of them.

Realize that these effects of grief are common as you work through the process and face the pain of your loss. But be assured, God is with you in this journey.

*“You hold me by my right hand.  
You guide me with your counsel,  
and afterward you will take me into glory.”*

(PSALM 73:23–24)

### **Physical Effects**

- Exhaustion
- Headaches
- Lethargy
- Loss of appetite/indigestion
- Sleep disorders
- Stress-induced illnesses

### **Emotional/Mental Effects**

- Depression and anxiety
- Difficulty concentrating/thinking clearly
- Dreams about the deceased
- Forgetfulness and disorganization
- Guilt/anger/blame
- Thoughts of self-destruction/suicide

### **Social Effects**

- Antisocial behavior
- Awkwardness
- Escape behaviors  
(excessive drinking, drugs, travel, shopping, gambling, sex)
- Excessive busyness
- Loneliness and withdrawal
- Tension in existing relationships

### **Spiritual Effects**

- Anger at God
- Doubting God’s love, fairness, and faithfulness

- Fear of God and dread about the future
- Questioning why God allowed the loss
- Struggling to pray or read the Bible
- Withdrawal from church or spiritual activities

*“Come to me, all you who are weary  
and burdened, and I will give you rest.”*

(MATTHEW 11:28)

## Faith of the Bereaved C. S. Lewis (Part II)<sup>11</sup>

Like grief, faith can be messy—not always neat and tidy. Faith is not always a mountaintop experience. Sometimes it leads to walking through the valley of the shadow of death. Sometimes it brings your broken cries and questions before the Lord. And as Lewis continually pours out his heart and his hurt, he begins to sense God’s presence. He writes . . .

When I lay these questions before God I get no answer. But a rather special sort of ‘No Answer.’ It is not the locked door. It is more like a silent, certainly not uncompassionate, gaze. As though he shook His head not in refusal but waiving the question. Like, ‘Peace, child; you don’t understand.’

Death and heaven raise many questions and difficult feelings, especially for the bereaved. Bring them to the Lord. He can handle your questions, your emotions, your thoughts, your fears, and your sorrows. He encourages us to pour out our hurting hearts to Him, however broken they may be. The Bible says, *“Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge”* (Psalm 62:8)

The Bible, and in particular the Psalms, is filled with people courageously expressing their difficult feelings. They serve as a model to us for what it looks like to come to God when we feel angry, bitter, confused, depressed, grieved, fearful, or hopeless. C.S. Lewis understood this. His grief and that of the psalmists remind us that no matter what we’re feeling, God invites us to give Him our burdens . . . *“Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved”* (Psalm 55:22).

For the bereaved or for those approaching death, bring whatever you're feeling before the Lord. Pour your heart out to God and bring your questions and feelings to Him as an act of trust, faith, and obedience. God will not be shocked or surprised. Answers to some questions can be found in His Word. But more important than the *what* and *why* behind pain is the *Who*.

We may not receive *all* the answers to our questions in this life. But we have God—His presence, His power, and His peace. He invites us to come to Him, regardless of how we feel. And we have His Word. We have His promise that in heaven, our pain will melt away, our questions will be answered, and our tears will be wiped away as we live in the light of His love.

*“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,  
‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people,  
and he will dwell with them.*

*They will be his people, and God himself  
will be with them and be their God.*

*“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.”*

(REVELATION 21:3–4)



# CAUSES



---

*“The Lord longs  
to help you work  
through your  
heartache.”*



Sometimes grief comes unexpectedly—a loved one dies from a car accident, sudden illness, or is a victim of a fatal crime. Other times, you know grief is coming. Perhaps a spouse or parent receives a terminal diagnosis and you begin grieving even before their death occurs.

Yet, in either case, whether expected or unexpected, you grieve because of the loss. The person you've loved and who has loved you is gone. They've filled your life with joy, love, and meaning. They've been a significant part of your life. You've relied on them and they've relied on you to meet various needs and to be there for each other.

Simply put, you grieve because you love. Now that they're gone, you grieve not just because you miss them but because you love them. Grief is an expression not just of loss but of love.

When Jesus went to visit Mary and Martha, whose brother Lazarus just died, the Bible shows how Jesus's grief expressed His love.

*“When Jesus saw her weeping,  
and the Jews who had come  
along with her also weeping,  
he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.  
‘Where have you laid him?’ he asked.  
‘Come and see, Lord,’ they replied.  
Jesus wept.  
Then the Jews said,  
‘See how he loved him!’”*  
(JOHN 11:33–36)

## Mary, Mary, Mary The Virgin Mary's Story<sup>12</sup>

Taken from: HOW TO HANDLE YOUR EMOTIONS  
Copyright © 2008 by Hope for the Heart, Inc.  
Published by Harvest House Publishers.  
Used by permission.

Grief is an emotion that touches everyone. Even the very names of familiar people in the Bible are associated with sorrow: *Job* means “he who weeps or cries.” *Jabez* means “pain.” *Myra* means “pour out, weep,” and *Mary*—a derivative of *Mara* or *Marah*, means “trouble, sorrow, bitter.” Three of the Marys mentioned in the Bible each encounter and experience grief in profound ways, and we’ll read more about their experiences in the pages to come.

First, let’s consider the Virgin Mary. She was highly favored and chosen by God from among all women to be the mother of the Messiah. What an incredible opportunity to serve the Lord . . . but at what cost? Pregnant by the Holy Spirit, she is awed and astonished that the incarnation is occurring within her womb—God the Son is taking on flesh—but she feels grieved over what is happening around her. Murmuring, whispering, and condemnation are coursing through this close-knit community as word gets out that Joseph’s fiancée is pregnant.

Those who have watched the seemingly moral Mary grow up have no idea that from her womb the Savior would be delivered—One who would save them from their sins. Even Joseph considers ending his relationship with Mary until an angel assures him, in a dream, that she has not been unfaithful.

As Mary’s belly swells over the nine-month period of pregnancy, so does her “mother’s heart,” and one must wonder if she grieved over the circumstances surrounding the birth of her son. If only Jesus could have been birthed at home, or at the home of a friend—someplace warm, someplace welcoming

and fitting for such an important arrival. Instead, “she wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7 NIV 1984). On the night of His birth, the Son of God was set down in a feeding trough for animals.

But there would be far greater grief in the future. When the eight-day-old Messiah is presented by his parents at the temple, Simeon speaks the following words directly to Mary:

*“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many . . .  
so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.  
And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”*

(LUKE 2:34-35)

And indeed Mary’s soul is pierced on the day she watches her son’s hands and feet being nailed to a cross and his side being pierced by a sword. This was the very reason He had come into this world. But three days later, Mary’s soul overflows with joy upon hearing that Jesus, the Son of God, has risen from the dead!

## Why Do Losses Cause Grief?

Everyone has inner needs for love, significance, and security.<sup>13</sup> When one or more of these needs is not met, we naturally feel a sense of loss, which in turn causes grief.

**Unmet Need → Sense of Loss → Feeling of Grief**

Throughout our lives we will experience numerous losses. Although we need to feel the pain of our losses, we do not need to be controlled by them. Instead, we must rely on God’s promise that He will meet our deepest inner needs for love, significance, and security. The Bible says,

*“My God will meet all your needs according to  
the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”*

(PHILIPPIANS 4:19)

### Loss of Love

- Loss of a family member (spouse, parent, unborn baby, child)
- Loss of coworker
- Loss of a beloved pet
- Loss of a close friend
- Loss of a romantic relationship
- Loss of a pastor, mentor, or role model

**Great Trial:** “I’m still in agony over the death of my husband, and I feel empty, alone, and unloved—like I’m only half a person.”

**God’s Truth:** God understands your loss, and His love is always with you.

*“I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love.*

*Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,  
neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—  
not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love.*

*No power in the sky above or in the earth below—  
indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us  
from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

(ROMANS 8:38–39 NLT)

### Loss of Significance

- Loss of status, title, authority
- Loss of freedom
- Loss of hopes and dreams
- Loss of respect/reputation

- Loss of shared memories and history
- Loss of purpose

**Great Trial:** “I’ve lost everything that gives my life purpose, and I feel like my life doesn’t matter.”

**God’s Truth:** As long as you are alive, your life has purpose.

*“The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;  
your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.”*

(PSALM 138:8 ESV)

### Loss of Security

- Loss of companionship
- Loss of home
- Loss of health (physical abilities)
- Loss of job
- Loss of finances
- Loss of family environment

**Great Trial:** “I’ve just experienced the greatest rejection of my life, and I feel hurt and all alone, overwhelmed with nothing and no one to hold on to.”

**God’s Truth:** People may reject you, but the Lord will not.

*“I have chosen you and have not rejected you.  
So do not fear, for I am with you;  
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you and help you;  
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”*

(ISAIAH 41:9–10)

## What Are Causes of Chronic Grief?

When we experience grief, our hearts and spirits can get stuck in sadness. Rather than facing our pain, we bury it, thus delaying emotional healing.

The Lord longs to help you work through your heartache. He can help you step out of sadness and put you on a new path with a new hope.

*“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.”*  
(PSALM 25:4–5)

### MARY, MARY, MARY Mary Magdalene’s Story<sup>14</sup>

Taken from: HOW TO HANDLE YOUR EMOTIONS  
Copyright © 2008 by Hope for the Heart, Inc.  
Published by Harvest House Publishers.  
Used by permission.

Mary Magdalene waits engulfed in grief as her Lord is publicly humiliated and hung on a cross. A cruel, perplexing end to the story, she thinks . . . a fatal final chapter, because she has experienced—and witnessed—so much of Jesus’ love and power. His death seems all the more painful.

Jesus delivered Mary Magdalene from demon possession, commanding seven evil spirits to leave her. Eventually she would leave her home to travel with Jesus and support His ministry. She had witnessed miracle after miracle, one act of love after another, so to now watch Jesus as He is condemned to a criminal’s death sends Mary spiraling downward into grief and despair. And yet by His side she faithfully remains, even after He is buried in the tomb (Matthew 27:61).

At dawn on the first day of the week, she and Mary, the mother of Jesus, go to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body with spices. Upon arrival, they find the tomb empty. A wave of grief sweeps over Mary Magdalene as she describes what she encountered to the disciples: "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" (John 20:2)

Peter and John then run to the tomb to confirm Mary Magdalene's story. Afterward they "went back to their homes"—everyone except Mary Magdalene, who "stood outside the tomb crying" (John 20:10–11 NIV 1984).

A man then startles her by asking, "Woman . . . why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" (John 20:15 NIV 1984) Mary Magdalene doesn't recognize the man until He utters her name—"Mary."

And as with Mary, the mother of Jesus, the indescribable light of joy pervades the darkness of grief as Mary Magdalene exclaims to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord!" (John 20:18).

### Common Misconceptions about Mourning<sup>15</sup>

**Fallacy:** "Mourners need to stay busy and focus on being happy to keep from thinking about their loss."

**Fact:** While it's helpful in the grieving process to be productive and to find joy, ignoring a loss is counterproductive. Mourners need both to *face* and to *feel* their grief. The Bible uses this compelling word picture to help us understand.

*"Singing cheerful songs to a person with a heavy heart is like taking someone's coat in cold weather or pouring vinegar in a wound"* (PROVERBS 25:20 NLT).

**Fallacy:** “Mourners need to move to a new home as soon as possible.”

**Fact:** Following the death of a loved one who lived at home, it is generally considered wise to not make any major changes for one to two years. Moving to a different home may be appropriate, but only for the right reason at the right time. Before making a major decision such as moving, ask the Lord for His wisdom—He will provide it.

*“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you” (JAMES 1:5).*

**Fallacy:** “Mourners should keep their grief to themselves.”

**Fact:** Staying away from those who grieve is like withholding medicine from a sick person. Doing this keeps them from the comfort, help, and support you could give. God wants you to empathize with those who are mourning.

*“Mourn with those who mourn” (ROMANS 12:15).*

**Fallacy:** “Mourning is not for men.”

**Fact:** Grief is not related to gender. It impacts both men and women though they may express their grief in different ways. The Bible shows that men mourned the loss of Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

*“Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him” (ACTS 8:2).*

**Fallacy:** “Mourners need a major change in their life.”

**Fact:** Radical changes may only add stress and could cause greater insecurity. The desire for certain changes will come, and beneficial change will take place when the time is right.

*“Those who are wise will find a time and a way to do what is right, for there is a time and a way for everything” (ECCLESIASTES 8:5–6 NLT).*

**Fallacy:** “If you really love someone, you will grieve that person’s loss forever.”

**Fact:** Grief has a definite beginning, and with God’s help, it can diminish over time. You can love forever, but you don’t have to grieve forever. David described how his grieving came to an end.

*“Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning” (PSALM 30:5 NLT).*

## MARY, MARY, MARY

### The Story of Mary, the Sister of Martha and Lazarus<sup>16</sup>

Taken from: HOW TO HANDLE YOUR EMOTIONS  
Copyright © 2008 by Hope for the Heart, Inc.  
Published by Harvest House Publishers.  
Used by permission.

Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, is well acquainted with the grief that accompanies death even before the crucifixion of Christ occurs.

Lazarus was among Jesus' closest friends. When he fell deathly ill, Mary and Martha knew precisely to whom they needed to send word: "Lord, the one you love is sick." (John 11:3). They assumed that Jesus would immediately head for the small village of Bethany and heal Lazarus on the spot. But He delays his visit by two days and responds, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it" (John 11:4).

Yet, Lazarus does die.

When Jesus finally arrives in Bethany, Lazarus has been buried for four days. Martha eagerly greets her Lord and Savior as He approaches, "but Mary stayed at home" (John 11:20).

Martha proceeds to make great declarations of faith, telling Jesus that she knows even now He can restore her brother: "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" (John 11:27 NIV 1984).

Mary, on the other hand, finally goes to Jesus and collapses at His feet, unable to bear the weight of her grief. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:32). When Jesus sees Mary's tears and those of others all around Him, He is "deeply moved in spirit and troubled." He then asks, "Where have you laid him?" (John 11:33-34).

Jesus instructs that the stone at the entrance to the tomb be removed, then looks up and prays, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” Jesus then directs his attention to the tomb and, in a loud voice—one that rings with supreme authority—commands, “Lazarus, come out!” (John 11:41–43).

Wrapped in strips of linen grave clothes, Lazarus emerges from the tomb . . . and Mary’s great grief is suddenly transformed into immense gratitude and joy as her Friend and Savior demonstrates His power and affirms His faithfulness even when all hope seemed gone.

## What Complicates the Grieving Process?

What makes grieving difficult is not just the loss of a loved one but all the changes that accompany the loss. Depending on the type of loss, there are numerous and often significant changes that can occur. These changes can extend or intensify your grief.

When you experience loss and all the changes that come about as a result of it, remember that God is your *constant* companion.

*“The LORD your God will personally go ahead of you.  
He will neither fail you nor abandon you.”*

(DEUTERONOMY 31:6 NLT)

### The following issues can affect the grieving process:

**Logistics**—dealing with immediate concerns surrounding a loss (phone calls; funeral plans; writing an obituary; notifying insurance; processing a will/probate; coordinating meetings, work schedule, childcare, meal planning)

**Housing/property/finances**—dividing assets; cleaning out a home; having to relocate; dealing with insurance payments or status, hospital bills, funeral expenses, taxes, debts, adjustments to change in income

**Busyness**—being consumed by daily life and responsibilities to the extent that you do not have adequate time to process your thoughts and emotions

**Support system/remaining family**—not having people who can comfort you and be there for you; adjusting to new family dynamics; handling conflicts

**Circumstances surrounding the loss or death**—not recognizing how the unique circumstances of the loss or cause of death will impact survivors (for example: grieving over a miscarriage, suicide, drug overdose, terminal illness, violent death, sudden or accidental death, losing multiple people at once)

**Length/type of relationship**—not understanding how the duration or type of relationship can intensify the grief (parent/child, spouse, grandparent, friend, church member, coworker/boss, pet, student/teacher)

**Memories**—being confronted with memories of your loved one (often in unexpected ways or at unexpected times) through various people, places, songs, meals, smells, etc.

**Emotional complexity/inexperience with grief**—not knowing what to do with the depth and range of emotions or what to expect or how to cope

**Spiritual needs**—not having a spiritual foundation or community to understand and process grief

**Physical needs**—neglecting physical needs (sleeping, eating, exercising, etc.)

**Regret/guilt**—wishing you had said or done something differently before the loss; feeling responsible for wrongdoing toward the person you've lost

**Denial/refusal**—living as if the loss has not occurred; choosing to ignore the loss

*“The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;  
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge.”*

(PSALM 18:2)

## What Is the Root Cause of Unprocessed Grief?

In the early stages of grieving, you might feel as if you are merely going through the motions. A variety of time-sensitive tasks can keep you moving forward for those first few hours, days, and even weeks. But when everyone else returns to their own daily lives, your days can remain overshadowed by your loss.

You could pack away your pain and pretend all is well, or you could surround yourself with sorrow and stay stuck in sadness. Either situation is understandable because the work of processing grief is often difficult and painful.

Whether in denial or relentless mourning, you might soothe your sorrow for a time, but failing to deal with your grief can increase the burden of your bereavement over time. When you begin to truly process your grief, you will ultimately find the comfort that can heal your hurting heart.

*“Now let your unfailing love comfort me,  
just as you promised me.”*

(PSALM 119:76 NLT)

### 3 Inner Needs

We all have three inner needs: the needs for love, significance, and security.<sup>17</sup>

**Love**—to know that someone is unconditionally committed to our best interest

*“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you”* (JOHN 15:12).

**Significance**—to know that our lives have meaning and purpose

*“I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me”*  
(PSALM 57:2 ESV).

**Security**—to feel accepted and a sense of belonging

*“Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge”* (PROVERBS 14:26).

### The Ultimate Need-Meeter

#### What do our inner needs reveal about us and our relationship with God?

God did not create any person or position or any amount of power or possessions to meet our deepest needs. People fail us and self-effort also fails to meet our deepest needs. If a person or thing could meet all our needs, we wouldn't need God! Our inner needs draw us into a deeper dependence on Christ and remind us that only God can satisfy the longings of our hearts. The Lord brings people and circumstances into our lives as an extension of His care, but ultimately only He can satisfy all the needs of our hearts. The Bible says . . .

*“The LORD will guide you always;  
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land  
and will strengthen your frame.  
You will be like a well-watered garden,  
like a spring whose waters never fail.”*  
(ISAIAH 58:11)

All along, the Lord planned to meet our deepest needs for . . .

**Love**—*“I [the Lord] have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness”* (JEREMIAH 31:3).

**Significance**—*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”* (JEREMIAH 29:11).

**Security**—*“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged”* (DEUTERONOMY 31:8).

Our needs for love, significance, and security can be legitimately met in Christ Jesus! Philippians 4:19 makes it plain, *“My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”*

#### **WRONG BELIEFS:**

— **Unresolved Grief**

“I should be able to handle the losses in my life without having to experience and work through deep pain and grief.”

— **Chronic Grief**

“My grief is more than I can bear. If I give in to it, I’m afraid it will consume me.”

#### **RIGHT BELIEF:**

“Grief is a normal process that I must experience to grow emotionally and spiritually and to resolve the losses in my life. My hope is in Christ, my Savior, who provides the grace I need in my grieving process.”

*“Let us then approach God’s throne  
of grace with confidence,  
so that we may receive mercy  
and find grace to help us  
in our time of need.”*  
(HEBREWS 4:16)

## How Can You Find Comfort When Grieving?

Grief is an inescapable part of life. We all experience it at one time or another. However, you never have to endure grief alone. God wants to comfort you and give you hope, not only in your grief but for all eternity. Even in seasons of deep pain and loss, Christ Himself offers you His eternal comfort.

*“May our Lord Jesus Christ himself  
and God our Father,  
who loved us and by his grace gave us  
eternal comfort and a wonderful hope,  
comfort you and strengthen you  
in every good thing you do and say.”*  
(2 THESSALONIANS 2:16–17 NLT)

### 4 Points of God’s Plan

Whether you’re trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you’ve done or what’s been done to you, there is hope. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will receive His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

*“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord,  
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,  
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*  
(JEREMIAH 29:11)

### 1. God's Purpose for You: *Salvation*

- What was God's motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, *"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him"* (JOHN 3:16–17).
- What was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"* (JOHN 10:10).

### 2. The Problem: *Sin*

- What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God's standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, *"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway"* (ROMANS 7:18–19 NLT).
- What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, *"Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God"* (ISAIAH 59:2). Scripture also says, *"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (ROMANS 6:23).

### 3. God's Provision for You: *The Savior*

- Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (ROMANS 5:8).
- What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (JOHN 14:6). The Bible says, *"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved"* (ACTS 16:31).

#### 4. Your Part: Surrender

- Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”* (MATTHEW 16:24–26).
- Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your “good works” as a means of earning God’s approval. The Bible says, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (EPHESIANS 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you’ve humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

“God, I want a real relationship with you.  
I admit that many times I’ve chosen to go my own way  
instead of your way.  
Please forgive me for my sins.  
Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross  
to pay the penalty for my sins.  
Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.  
Change me from the inside out and make me the person  
you created me to be.  
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”

## What Can You Now Expect?

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . .”* (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word  
and believes him who sent me  
has eternal life and will not be judged  
but has crossed over from death to life.”*

(JOHN 5:24)

## Faith of the Bereaved Zig Ziglar (Part I)<sup>18</sup>

Known for his wit, enthusiasm, and optimism, Zig Ziglar's upbeat motivational seminars and books have impacted—and continue to impact—millions of people across the world. Speaking on leadership, sales, success, family, and faith, his clever one-liners, high energy, and positivity made him one of the most sought-after speakers of all time.

But what happens when the world's most famous motivational speaker suffers tremendous loss—the loss of a beloved daughter? What could be positive at such a tragic time? Where does anyone find motivation in such a sorrowful season? How do the grieving gather the energy to get through the day?

The answer is found in Jesus Christ. He alone offers solace and hope in the face of death.

On May 13th, 1995, after a long battle with pulmonary fibrosis, Ziglar's oldest daughter, Suzan Ziglar Witmeyer, died at age 46. Ziglar wrote about his grief experience in his book, *Confessions of a Grieving Christian*. His trademark wit and one-liners are not as predominant in this book as in his other works. Instead, the reader glimpses a heart full of grief. He writes about the first few days after his daughter's death . . .

When the full impact of our loss hit home, it seemed that everything moved in slow motion. It seemed to take forever for anything to happen, for us to say what we wanted to say and to do the things we needed to do . . . those first few nights after Suzan's death were nights we thought would never end. We were in shock and time stood still . . . the tears flowed freely and deeply. A river gushed from the depths of our souls.

For Ziglar and many others who experience grief, even the assurance of heaven does not eliminate the pain of loss. The pain is real. But the assurance of heaven allows the bereaved to have a sense of peace and even joy amidst the sorrow of loss. Ziglar writes about the peace he and his family received from the Lord . . .

I truly do not know how people without Christ, or without the certainty that a loved one knew Christ, can handle the pain of grief . . . my family had peace of mind because Suzan believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as her Savior, and she lived her life with the expressed purpose of worshiping and loving the Lord. My family is able to walk, talk, and sleep with the complete assurance, based upon God's Word and its promises of eternal life, that Suzan is with the Lord and that we will spend eternity with the Lord and with her.

Complete assurance. That is the difference that Christ makes in the aftermath of death. The apostle Paul wrote about this hope and assurance . . .

*“But we do not want you to be uninformed,  
brothers, about those who are asleep,  
that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.  
For since we believe that Jesus died  
and rose again, even so, through Jesus,  
God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep . . .  
and so we will be with the Lord forever.  
Therefore encourage one another with these words.”*  
(1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-14, 17-18, ESV)



# STEPS TO SOLUTION



---

*“God never intends  
for grief to  
define your life.”*



Change is hard—especially change that accompanies a loss. Depending on the loss, there can be significant logistical, physical, and financial adjustments to make—not to mention the spiritual and emotional impact a loss can have on you. It can all feel overwhelming, like you’re walking in the dark.

But in your loss and pain, God is working in your life to produce change—to transform your sorrow into joy, your distress into comfort, your despair into hope. God has a plan for you even in your grief. He wants to comfort you, give you hope, and be a light in your journey toward healing.

*“You, LORD, keep my lamp burning;  
my God turns my darkness into light.”*

(PSALM 18:28)

## Key Verses to Memorize

God is the God of *all* comfort. He can comfort you through His Word, through others, through sweet memories, warm meals, or a walk on a sunny day. But most of all, He can comfort you with His presence. It is an immense encouragement to know that God not only understands your grief, but He is with you *in* your grief. He enters into your pain and carries you through the grieving process each day. Over time, as you receive comfort from God, He will use you to comfort others.

*“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,  
who comforts us in all our troubles,  
so that we can comfort those in any trouble  
with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”*

(2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4)

## Key Passage to Read

Jeremiah, known as “the weeping prophet,” authored the book of Lamentations, in which he laments the pain of immense loss. His sorrow, however, is followed by his hope, which can be your hope when you feel you are drowning in a sea of grief.

### Lamentations 3:19–26

- <sup>19</sup> *“I remember my affliction and my wandering,  
the bitterness and the gall.  
<sup>20</sup> I well remember them, and my soul  
is downcast within me.  
<sup>21</sup> Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:  
<sup>22</sup> Because of the LORD’s great love  
we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.  
<sup>23</sup> They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.  
<sup>24</sup> I say to myself, ‘The LORD is my portion;  
therefore I will wait for him.’  
<sup>25</sup> The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,  
to the one who seeks him;  
<sup>26</sup> it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.”*

The Lord lifts my downcast soul out of the sea of despair ..... vv. 19–21  
The Lord’s great love and compassion for me never fail ..... v. 22  
The Lord’s faithfulness comforts me daily..... v. 23  
The Lord is all I need; I will wait for Him. .... v. 24  
The Lord wants all of my hope to be placed only in Him. .... v. 25  
The Lord’s goodness is evident to me when I seek Him ..... v. 25  
The Lord will enable me to wait for His deliverance. .... v. 26

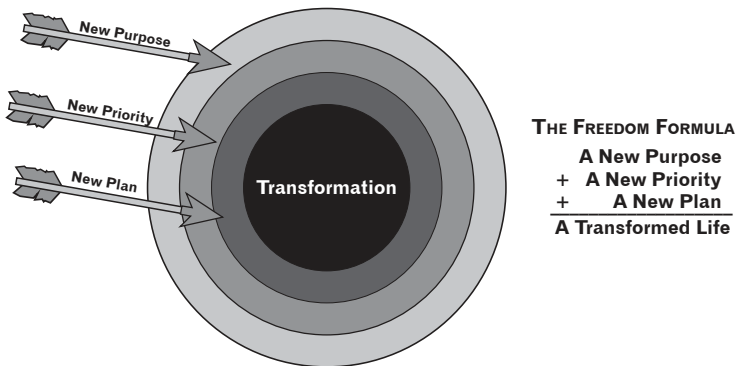
## How to Have a Transformed Life

God never intends for grief to define your life. In your grief, the Lord desires to comfort you—He collects your tears (Psalm 56:8 NLT) and promises to wipe them away (Revelation 21:4). Even in the midst of a broken world and in your own brokenness, God can do something extraordinary.

Not only can He comfort you and ease your sorrow, but He can use your grief to shape you into the character of Christ. In your grief, He also desires to transform your life. He wants to give you a new purpose, a new priority, and a new plan—a transformed life. This life reflects the character of Christ.

*“Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person.  
The old life is gone; a new life has begun!”*  
(2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 NLT)

### Reaching the Target: Transformation!



### Target #1—A New Purpose

**God's purpose for me** is to be conformed to the character of Christ.

*"Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (ROMANS 8:29).*

— "I'll do whatever it takes to be conformed to the character of Christ."

### Target #2—A New Priority

**God's priority for me** is to change my thinking.

*"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (ROMANS 12:2).*

— "I'll do whatever it takes to line up my thinking with God's thinking."

### Target #3—A New Plan

**God's plan for me** is to rely on Christ's strength, not my strength, to be all He created me to be.

*"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (PHILIPPIANS 4:13 NKJV).*

— "I'll do whatever it takes to fulfill His plan in His strength."

### My Personalized Plan

As the Lord uses this period of grief to produce the character of Christ in me, **I will . . .**

**Recognize** my grief

- Know the stages of grief
- Share my pain with another
- Openly express my emotions

*"I am exhausted and completely crushed. My groans come from an anguished heart. You know what I long for, LORD; you hear my every sigh" (PSALM 38:8–9 NLT).*

**Realize** my insufficiency

- Acknowledge my grief and pain to God
- Admit I am powerless to carry the grief alone
- Ask God to help me experience His strength in my weakness

*“But he [Jesus] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I [Paul] will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 CORINTHIANS 12:9–10).*

**Relinquish** control

- Recognize God’s rightful, sovereign control over my life
- Give my dreams and desires to God
- Trust God’s plans for me

*“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight” (PROVERBS 3:5–6).*

**Respond** to God’s grace

- Spend time in God’s Word
- Allow the Lord to meet my emotional needs
- Recognize that God loves me and has not deserted me

*“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze” (ISAIAH 43:2).*

**Rebuild** my life

- Acknowledge the “new normal” in my life
- Stay active in church and be involved in the lives of others
- Recognize that God wants to use me in new ways

*“The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast” (1 PETER 5:10).*

## How to Learn Acceptance— Your Hope for Healing

Grief affects your past, present, and future. Working through your grief will therefore involve connecting to the past, accepting the present, and adjusting to the future.<sup>19</sup> The work of *accepting the reality* of your unwanted loss may consume all of your energy, but your efforts will succeed when you have the right focus.

Rather than trying to feel what others want you to feel, focus on God. Pray, “Whatever you want me to feel and whatever you want me to do is my desire. My commitment is to be the person you want me to be through this season of sorrow.”

*“Trust in him at all times, you people;  
pour out your hearts to him,  
for God is our refuge.”*  
(PSALM 62:8)

### Accept Your Past

**Accept that the past will always remain in the past.**

- **Pray:** Seek God’s help in embracing your grief.

*“The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles”* (PSALM 34:17).

- **Recall:** Think back on your loss, then write and complete the following sentences.
  - ♦ “I remember these significant events and memories . . .” (List both good and bad.)
  - ♦ “I look at these photographs and recall . . .” (List memories, good and bad.)
  - ♦ “I am grieving over . . .” (List all.)

*“These things I remember as I pour out my soul”* (PSALM 42:4).

- **Weep:** Allow yourself to shed tears.

*“My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God”* (JOB 16:20).

- **Complete:** As you review, beside each event on your list, write the word *past*, which confirms, “I will be content to leave the past in the past.”

*“Godliness with contentment is great gain”* (1 TIMOTHY 6:6).

- **Memorize:** Write down the following verses to memorize from Psalm 119.

- v. 28—*“My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word.”*
- v. 50—*“My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.”*
- v. 107—*“I have suffered much; preserve my life, LORD, according to your word.”*
- v. 156—*“Your compassion, LORD, is great; preserve my life according to your laws.”*

- **Give thanks:** Thank God for all He has taught you from the past and trust how He will use your past in the future.

*“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”* (1 THESSALONIANS 5:18).

## Accept Your Present

### Accept that the present offers stability and significance.

- **Choose:** Live one day at a time.

*“Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own”* (MATTHEW 6:34).

- **Prioritize:** Put the Lord at the center of your life.

*“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness”* (MATTHEW 6:33).

- **Ask:** Go to God with your specific questions. (Make a list.)

*“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God”* (PHILIPPIANS 4:6).

- **Thank:** Give thanks to God for providing everything you need for life.

*“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness”* (2 PETER 1:3).

- **Praise:** Give God praise for His promise to never leave you.

*“God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’”* (HEBREWS 13:5).

- **Focus:** Concentrate on the joy and satisfaction of helping others. (Make a list.)

*“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ”* (GALATIANS 6:2).

## Accept Your Future

### Accept that the future offers new opportunities.

- **Believe:** Rest in the plans that God has for your future.

*“I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’”* (JEREMIAH 29:11).

- **Know:** Your sorrow and grief will not be wasted.

*“It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees”* (PSALM 119:71).

- **Commit:** Have the courage to surrender.

*“Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans”* (PROVERBS 16:3).

- **Depend:** Have faith in God, though you cannot see Him.

*“We live by faith, not by sight”* (2 CORINTHIANS 5:7).

- **Expect:** Hold on to the truth that God will fill the void in your life.

*“I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope”* (PSALM 130:5).

- **Trust:** Remember the Lord’s everlasting love for you.

*“I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation”* (PSALM 13:5).

## How to Establish Guidelines for Healthy Grieving

God created you with a body, mind, and soul. While these parts of your life are different from each other, they also affect each other. King David shows how grief impacted everything about him, saying, *“Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also”* (Psalm 31:9 ESV).

Similarly, your grief can impact you emotionally, physically, and spiritually. All of these areas need to be considered when you are going through the grieving process. Thankfully, God’s Word addresses the whole person and offers encouragement and hope.

*“Everything that was written in the past  
was written to teach us,  
so that through the endurance  
taught in the Scriptures  
and the encouragement they provide  
we might have hope.”*  
(ROMANS 15:4)

### Emotional Guidelines

**Cultivate a strong,** sensitive support system.

Having people around you who genuinely care about you is essential—people who accept you wherever you are in the grieving process and who encourage you to share your feelings with them.

*“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another”* (PROVERBS 27:17).

**Cultivate the freedom** to cry.

Expressing emotions honestly, openly, and as frequently as needed is vital to walk through grief in a healthy, productive way.

*“Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy”* (PSALM 126:5).

**Cultivate a plan** for socializing regularly.

One thing that can help you feel good about life, even while mourning, is attending social activities and interacting with others on a regular basis.

*“I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete”* (2 JOHN 12).

**Cultivate a trustworthy**, honest confidante.

Being able to be yourself with someone and share your struggles, your troubled thoughts, and your shifting emotions—and still be accepted and affirmed—is healing to the soul.

*“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up”* (ECCLESIASTES 4:9–10).

**Cultivate the release** of resentment.

If you have unresolved issues such as anger or hostile feelings regarding your loss, take time to list your reasons for resentment. Journaling can bring to the surface buried emotions. Choose to forgive by releasing each offender and the pain of each offense into the hands of God.

*“Lord, You know the pain I have felt over (situations ). I release all that pain into Your hands, and as an act of my will, I choose to forgive and release (person’s name ). Thank You, Lord Jesus, for setting me free.”*

*“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you”* (COLOSSIANS 3:13).

## Physical Guidelines<sup>20</sup>

**Get sufficient** rest.

Grieving can disrupt your sleep—some get too much and others don’t get enough. Getting sufficient rest during the grieving process is often a challenge, but doing so is critically important to the body.

*“In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety”* (PSALM 4:8).

**Drink plenty** of water.

Your sense of thirst may go undetected during the grieving process. To prevent dehydration, water is essential, especially in the dry season of grief. Keep your body hydrated by drinking enough water.

*“Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well” (3 JOHN 2).*

**Eat a balanced**, nutritious diet.

Avoid skipping meals. Eat balanced, nutritious meals and avoid “junk” foods and alcohol.

*“He gives food to every creature. His love endures forever” (PSALM 136:25).*

**Exercise** regularly.

Exercise has numerous benefits. It helps relieve stress, can provide a sense of accomplishment, and promotes overall good health.

*“Physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (1 TIMOTHY 4:8).*

**Go outside and enjoy the** sunshine.

Taking a walk outside or sitting in the sun is another natural way to fight feelings of sadness.

*“Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun” (ECCLESIASTES 11:7).*

## Spiritual Guidelines

**Develop a purposeful** prayer life.

The grieving process provides a strong impetus for deepening your relationship with God. Have candid conversations with God about your thoughts and feelings. Listen to Him and lean on Him for comfort and reassurance.

*“I gave an account of my ways and you answered me; teach me your decrees” (PSALM 119:26).*

### **Develop a longing** for eternity.

Grief forces us to face eternal matters. One of the most helpful and hopeful truths is to realize that God has a plan for us to live eternally with him in heaven, where we will never again experience grief. Grasp God's promise of living eternally!

*"Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth' . . . I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. "He will wipe away 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'" (REVELATION 21:1, 3-4).*

### **Develop a positive,** practical perspective.

Maintaining a positive attitude based on the practical application of spiritual truths during the grieving process will help sustain you through the darkest valley and the deepest loss.

*"Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (PHILIPPIANS 4:8).*

### **Develop a sense** of peace about the past.

Resolve any unfinished business regarding the past. Ask God's forgiveness for any failures on your part and extend forgiveness for any failures on the part of others. Then let the past go and embrace the present and the future God has planned for you.

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 JOHN 1:9).*

### **Develop a plan** for memorizing Scripture.

God's Word is powerful and will create new life in you and restore joy to your heart, peace to your mind, and hope for your future.

*"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17).*

## How to Apply Dos and Don'ts of Healthy Grieving

Throughout the psalms, David shows us what to do with our grief and other difficult feelings. He brings his raw, honest feelings to God. He cries out to God. He questions God. He tells God how his grief and suffering affects him physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. As David processes his grief before God, he often recalls God's faithfulness to him. He remembers God's promises. By the end of many psalms, David expresses a renewed trust in God.

David shows us that instead of running away from God in our grief, we can run to God. That's a mark of healthy grieving. There are other steps to take—and things to avoid—that will help you in the grieving process.

*“Commit everything you do to the LORD.  
Trust him, and he will help you.”  
(PSALM 37:5 NLT)*

**Don't** let self-pity dominate your thoughts.

**Do** seek peace through contentment.

*“I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances” (PHILIPPIANS 4:11).*

**Don't** become consumed with regret.

**Do** learn from and accept the past.

*“Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance” (PROVERBS 1:5).*

**Don't** ignore memories and feelings—both positive and negative.

**Do** allow yourself to feel your emotions and to reflect on your memories.

*“I thank my God every time I remember you” (PHILIPPIANS 1:3).*

**Don't** isolate yourself.

**Do** seek the support of others and look to the Lord to meet your needs.

*"Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you"* (ISAIAH 46:4).

**Don't** compare your circumstances to the circumstances of others.

**Do** focus on what God wants you to do in *your* situation.

*"Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground"* (PSALM 143:10).

**Don't** busy yourself with distractions in an effort to avoid your grief.

**Do** set aside time to process your grief through prayer, journaling, conversations, etc.

*"The Lord said to her, 'My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her'"* (LUKE 10:41–42 NLT).

**Don't** make major decisions while grieving.<sup>21</sup>

**Do** establish priorities and seek wise counsel.

*"The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways"* (PROVERBS 14:8).

**Don't** define yourself by your grief.

**Do** find your identity in Christ.

*"Listen to the LORD who created you. . . . The one who formed you says, 'Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine'"* (ISAIAH 43:1 NLT).

## How to Let Go and Say Goodbye

The disciples are grieved. Jesus has just told them that He is going to return to the Father, and they don't want to let go and say goodbye.

To some, His mission seems incomplete. They are focused on an earthly kingdom rather than a heavenly one, but Jesus assures them His work soon will be finished and it is actually for their benefit that He leaves. Jesus reassures: *“Very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you”* (John 16:7).

Jesus encourages His disciples to be hopeful by describing the coming ministry of the Holy Spirit.

*“When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.*

*He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears,  
and he will tell you what is yet to come.*

*He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive  
what he will make known to you.”*

(JOHN 16:13–14)

Sometimes those who are grieving have difficulty letting go of the pain and saying goodbye. One way to help you let go is to write a “goodbye” letter to your loved one.<sup>22</sup> After you've written the letter, place an empty chair in front of you and imagine that the person you've lost is sitting in the chair, ready to hear whatever you need to say.

### Letting Go

Say what you need to say using the following prompts:

**Look back** and verbally reflect on the history you've shared and what was lost. Acknowledge that history as a permanent part of your past.

“As I think about \_\_\_\_\_, I know it is part of my past.”

**Express** any unfinished business regarding the past and resolve any remaining issues or feelings, bringing them to closure.

“I acknowledge my feelings of \_\_\_\_\_ and release any negative feelings, choosing instead to hold on only to the positive memories.”

**Resolve** hurt feelings, regrets, and resentments. Forgive and release your pain to God. (You may find the help of a trained professional beneficial as you walk through this process.)

“Lord, as you have forgiven me, right now I forgive (name) and leave him/her in your hands.”

**Leave** the past in the past and stop making it a part of your present . . . or future. Put it behind you and leave it there.

“Please forgive me for dwelling on the past. Today, I commit to putting the past behind me and focusing on the future.”

Allow these words from the book of Job reflect the disposition of your heart:

*“You will surely forget your trouble,  
recalling it only as waters gone by.”*

(JOB 1:16)

## Saying Goodbye

Your “goodbye” letter might include some of the following:

**Express** gratitude for the relationship you had with your loved one and what you learned.

“God, thank you for this relationship and the memories we shared. I also thank you for the relief I have in letting go, saying goodbye, and embracing the future you have for me.”

**Acknowledge** your present situation with all of its changes and the reality that you cannot live in the past, understanding that God will now meet your needs in new ways.

“I know this is a new chapter in my life. Things will change, but God is with me every step of the way.”

**Accept** the fact that your relationship will always be a part of you. Affirm that it is time to move forward with your life.

“I accept my past and now choose to move forward with my life.”

**Start** a new chapter. Express any final sentiments that need to be said—gratitude for the way your life has been enriched and sorrow over your loss—then focus anew on what God has for you ahead, and embrace His peace.

“As I say this final farewell, \_\_\_\_\_, I am so thankful for the life we shared. I accept today as a new beginning, promising to make the most of every day God gives me from this day forward.”

Let these words of Isaiah resonate in your heart as you anticipate all the good things God has for you in the days ahead:

*“See, I am doing a new thing!  
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?  
I am making a way in the wilderness  
and streams in the wasteland.”*

(ISAIAH 43:19)

## How to Address Unresolved Grief

Healthy grieving involves addressing past losses. This can be difficult but it puts you on the path toward healing. To help you process any unresolved grief in your life, consider completing the following “Grief Time Line.”<sup>23</sup> As you do this exercise, remember that God is with you every step of your journey.

*“The LORD himself watches over you!  
The LORD stands beside you  
as your protective shade.”  
(PSALM 121:5 NLT)*

## Grief Timeline

**Draw** a long line representing your life.

**Divide** the time line into three sections—childhood, youth, and adulthood.

**Draw** short lines extending from the time line and write short phrases by each line that describe significant life events, such as:

- Birth of siblings
- Change of school
- Lost friendships
- Loss of pet
- Abuse (verbal, emotional, physical, sexual, spiritual)
- Graduation
- Broken engagement
- Abortion
- Job loss/new job
- Death of loved ones
- Marriage
- Miscarriage/childlessness/infertility
- New baby
- Legal troubles
- Incarceration (yourself or a loved one)
- Relocation
- “Empty nest” (children leave home)
- Separation/divorce
- Financial loss
- Birth of grandchildren
- Illness/injuries
- Retirement

**Determine** whether there are any disappointments or significant events or losses over which you have never grieved or have not finished grieving.

- Abandonment
- Failures
- False accusations/betrayal
- Rejection
- Unjust criticism
- Unrealized dreams or goals

**Discover** the source of your masked pain through honest prayer.

### Prayer for Discovery

“Dear God, I come to you for help.  
Please calm my heart.  
Show me where I need healing.  
Bring to my mind any buried pain.  
Surface any hidden hurt and the  
circumstances that caused it.  
I ask you to help heal my wounded heart.  
I know that you have the power  
to make me whole and set me free.  
In Jesus’s name, Amen.”

**Define** the painful events over which you need to grieve by using specific statements.

- “I am grieving over . . .”
- “I was humiliated when . . .”
- “I felt abandoned by . . .”
- “I was really hurt when . . .”
- “I’ve been determined to never let (name circumstance) happen again.”

*“I am weary in my moaning” (PSALM 6:6 ESV).*

**Decide** now to allow deep, genuine grieving over your losses.

*“Heal me, LORD, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise” (JEREMIAH 17:14).*

**Defuse** the power these events have over your emotions by sharing your feelings with a trusted person and especially with God.

*“Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you” (PSALM 55:22 ESV).*

**Deepen** your dependence on the Lord to set you emotionally free.

*“In my anguish I cried to the Lord, and he answered by setting me free” (PSALM 118:5).*

### Sample Timeline (Woman, age 55)

Life Stages	Age	Events
<b>Childhood</b>	—	Birth
	1	— Father abandoned family, parents divorced
	5	— Mother remarried, stepfather abused me
	6	— Started school, brother born
	8	— Moved to new city, new school
	10	— Moved again, new school but no friends
<b>Youth</b>	13	— Started junior high school
	15	— Moved to new house
	17	— Graduated from high school
	17	— Cousin killed in auto accident
	18	— Grandmother died (only person I could count on)
	18	— Started college
<b>Adulthood</b>	19	— Married to leave home, daughter born

Life Stages	Age	Events
	22	– Pregnant, husband left, son born
	23	– Divorced, ran away, new job, new city
	25	– Attempted suicide
	27	– Remarried, father and two uncles died
	31	– Gave life to Christ, became a Christian
	37	– Daughter graduated high school, left for college
	42	– Daughter returned pregnant and unmarried
	43	– Became a grandmother
	45	– Son graduated and moved out, daughter married and moved out, empty nest
	48	– New job, new career
	52	– Husband lost business of 20 years
	52	– Mother moved in with us
	53	– Home foreclosure, more financial problems
	55	– Mother died (my best friend)

## How God Can Use Your Grief

While grieving is a difficult process, God can use it for His purposes. When we feel an emptiness in our hearts due to our loss, God longs to fill our hearts with His presence and His peace. Draw near to God. He has a plan for your grief. Over time, the Lord will use your grief to produce changes in your life and in the lives of others.

*“The plans of the LORD stand firm forever,  
the purposes of his heart through all generations.”*

(PSALM 33:11)

## God can use grief and suffering to . . .

### **Cause** you to cry out to Him

*“I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy, I pour out before him my complaint; before him I tell my trouble. When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who watch over my way” (PSALM 142:1–3).*

### **Speak** to you in your pain

*“Those who suffer he delivers in their suffering; he speaks to them in their affliction” (JOB 36:15).*

### **Give** you an opportunity to trust Him

*“Let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good” (1 PETER 4:19 ESV).*

### **Develop** dependence on Him

*“The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help” (1 TIMOTHY 5:5).*

### **Comfort** you with His presence

*“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (PSALM 23:4).*

### **Show** His strength in your weaknesses

*“I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 CORINTHIANS 12:9–10 ESV).*

### **Produce** endurance, character, and hope

*“We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (ROMANS 5:3–5 ESV).*

### **Teach** you to love others as Christ loves

*“Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ” (EPHESIANS 5:2 NLT).*

**Make** you a conduit of comfort to others

*“[God] comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 CORINTHIANS 1:4).*

**Bring** glory to God

*“Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 CORINTHIANS 4:17).*

## How to Answer Questions regarding Grief

When you're grieving, you may experience sadness, numbness, shock, confusion, anger, or exhaustion. No matter what you feel, Jesus comes and meets you at your point of need.

When Lazarus died, Jesus visited two grieving sisters, Mary and Martha. Both came to Him with the same cry, *“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died”* (John 11:21, 32). Although they said the same thing to Jesus, He replied to each of them differently. With Martha, the Bible says that Jesus saw her weeping and, in turn, He wept. With Mary, Jesus replied by giving her hope-filled truth, saying, *“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die”* (John 11:25–26).

God ministers to us personally, meeting our unique needs. If you have difficult questions, God will guide you to find hope and truth in His Word. If you simply need to weep, the Lord will weep with you and carry your burden. He meets you at your point of need.

*“Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior,  
who daily bears our burdens.”*

(PSALM 68:19)

## Grieving: Dealing with Anger toward God

**Question:** “I have immense anger toward God for taking my child from me when he was the joy and the delight of my life. I don’t know why He would do this. What do I do with all this anger?”

**Answer:** The loss of a child can produce profound, unspeakable grief. There is probably no greater sorrow than the loss of a child. In the natural order of life, one assumes that children will outlive their parents, not the reverse. Death is an awful reality in our broken world. God gave us relationships to enjoy and appreciate, but our suffering is immense when those cherished relationships end.

During such a significant loss, feelings of anger and confusion toward God are common. In fact, many people in the Bible express their anger and confusion to God. Perhaps the two most common questions asked can be summarized as “How long must I suffer?” and “Why did God allow this?”

When it comes to the specific *reason* as to why God allows a specific tragedy to happen, the Lord often does not reveal it. The Bible says, “*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever*” (Deuteronomy 29:29).

Instead of giving a reason for the tragedy, God offers something more—Himself. Over and over, the Lord points suffering people not to a *reason* but to *Himself*. The Bible says that He is a loving Father, full of compassion, who understands our pain and who carries our sorrows. As difficult as it may be, you can trust Him.

You can talk with a pastor to help you through this time, and God also invites you to process your grief and anger with Him. He knows you’re angry. He also knows you’re hurting. You may not ever know the specific reason for your loss but

you can be sure of this: God is with you. He understands the depth of loss because He experienced it as well. He offers you comfort and the hope of eternal life for you and your son. You can take comfort in trusting God to act in perfect love, mercy, and grace. The Bible tells of David's hope after his own child died.

*"Can I bring him back again? I will go to him,  
but he will not return to me."*

(2 SAMUEL 12:23)

## Grieving: Lack of Faith

**Question:** "I have been told that the death of my young daughter from cancer was a result of my lack of faith. Could this be true?"

**Answer:** Absolutely not. Your daughter did not die because of a lack of faith. Sadly, in our broken world, unspeakable tragedies happen. The Bible is filled with stories of people who had tremendous faith yet experienced suffering and loss. The apostle Paul prayed three times that his "thorn in the flesh" would be removed, yet God did not remove it. Paul's suffering was not because of a lack of faith and neither is yours. Know that in your suffering, God is not punishing you but He extends grace to you.

*"He [The Lord] said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you,  
for my power is made perfect in weakness.'"*

(2 CORINTHIANS 12:9)

## Grieving: Loss of a Godly Parent

**Question:** “I’m having a hard time getting over the death of my Christian father. What can I do?”

**Answer:** Take comfort in knowing that your father is in heaven and that you will see him again because of your own faith in Christ. Consider what you can do to honor his memory. The greatest way you can honor your father is to live out your faith in Christ and reflect His character. Your dad’s greatest joy would be for you to follow in his godly footsteps, to live a Christlike life, and to grow in your faith. Such a life would honor both your earthly father and your heavenly Father.

*“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”*

(3 JOHN 4)

## Grieving: Dealing with Anniversary Depression

**Question:** “For the past several years I’ve become depressed during the time of year when my wife died. Why does this happen, and what can I do to stop it?”

**Answer:** You are experiencing what is commonly referred to as “Anniversary Depression,” a yearly recurring reaction to a past loss or trauma. This involuntary depression correlates to the anniversary date of your loss and usually lasts for a limited period of time. Because you know when your depression may recur, you might plan ahead. Establish a time to process some of your grief with a wise, caring friend or counselor. Embrace that time in remembrance of your loved one. Visit your loved one’s grave or a favorite place you used to go. Acknowledge your heavy heart and

ask the Lord to ease your sorrow. You can also choose to create *new* memories around that date.

- Plan a trip with someone special around the time of the anniversary.
- Go to a seminar or workshop to help keep your focus on the Lord and His Word.
- Attend a social event so that you will not be alone, or invite loved ones for dinner at your home.
- Give loved ones a special remembrance in your wife’s honor (a poem, a picture, or a possession that belonged to her).
- Initiate a project in honor of her life.

*“The memory of the righteous is a blessing.”*

(PROVERBS 10:7 ESV)

## Grieving: Experiencing Guilt

**Question:** “Why do I feel guilty over the loss of my loved one?”

**Answer:** Guilt is often felt during the grieving process. There are three common reasons why you might feel guilt after a loss.

**Guilt related to surviving**—Some experience “survivor’s guilt” because they are alive and their loved one is not. This often occurs when there is a car accident or sudden death. It can also occur when a spouse dies and the remaining spouse feels that they should have died first. Remember that God has determined the number of your days and that as long as you have breath, He has a plan for you. *“LORD, remind me how brief my time on earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered—how fleeting my life is. . . . And so, LORD, where do I put my hope? My only hope is in you”* (Psalm 39:4, 7 NLT).

**Guilt related to regret**—Sometimes guilt is related to something you said or did (or neglected to say or do) while a loved one was alive. Depending on the situation, this can create true guilt or false guilt.

- **True guilt** occurs when you said or did something that was sinful and wrong. The feeling of guilt is God’s way of showing you your need to apologize and seek forgiveness. Understandably, you cannot apologize to a person who is no longer living. But the Bible shows that any sin is first and foremost against God (Psalm 51:4). Seek God’s forgiveness. He is faithful to provide it and able to help you process the guilt you feel. King David wrote, *“I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, ‘I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.’ And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone”* (Psalm 32:5 NLT).
- **False guilt** occurs when you blame yourself for something even though you committed no wrong. It can also occur when you continue to blame yourself after confessing and turning away from actual wrongdoing. God does not want you to live with the burden of false guilt (or with the continued burden of true guilt). Turn to God and seek His peace: *“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:6–7 NLT).

**Guilt related to healing**—When you begin to heal from your loss and move forward with your life, you might experience guilt. It can feel “wrong” that you are able to continue your life and activities without your loved ones. It can feel as if you are dishonoring their memory or the relationship. Remember that God can heal your broken

heart. The fact that you're able to heal and move forward is not dishonoring your loved one; it is a testament to God's work in your life to heal and to help you in this new chapter of your life:

*"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."*

(PSALM 147:3)

## Grieving: Godly Sorrow vs. Worldly Sorrow

**Question:** "I was in an inappropriate relationship that ended and I can't stop feeling sad. Even though I now see that the relationship was not what God would want for me, I've become obsessed with losing this person and this relationship. Is there ever a time when you should not grieve a loss?"

**Answer:** Yes. While it is understandable that you feel a measure of sadness at the loss of a relationship—even one that wasn't good for you—it's important that you keep your focus on what God has for you. The Lord does not want you to continue to dwell on this inappropriate relationship to the point of turning your grief into an obsession, which in essence becomes an idol. Not only would that be ignoring God and His will for your life, it would be like reopening a wound over and over again and never allowing it to heal.

In terms of grieving over sin, the Bible explains the difference between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow. *"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death"* (2 Corinthians 7:10).

When you grieve *godly sorrow* over a sin you have committed, you realize your sin offended God, affected your relationship with Him, and possibly hurt others as well as yourself. When you turn away from that sin in repentance,

you move toward God and His will for your life. God delivers you from that sin (“*leads to salvation*”) and you don’t look back yearning for it again (“*leaves no regret*”).

You might experience *worldly sorrow* over the loss of something you needed to lose, like a sexually immoral relationship, a harmful addiction, or a prideful prize in the form of a material possession/position/power. Focusing your attention exclusively on mourning sinful losses can become an idol in your heart. Excessive grief for something or someone that God wants removed from your life keeps the door open to the festering effects of sin, rather than healing and hope.

Consider the plight of Samuel. After the Lord rejected King Saul due to his disobedience, Samuel mourned over Saul, and delayed anointing David—God’s choice to replace Saul as king. The Lord made His point clear, “*How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel?*” (1 Samuel 16:1). In this instance, mourning over this loss prevented Samuel from moving forward with God’s plans.

Instead, God wants you to replace wrong thinking with right thinking and to close the door on grieving sinful losses in your past.

*“Now I am happy, not because you were made sorry,  
but because your sorrow led you to repentance.  
For you became sorrowful as God intended.”*

(2 CORINTHIANS 7:9)

## Grieving: Six Months Later

**Question:** “It has been almost six months since my loved one died and instead of getting better, I seem to be getting worse. What is wrong with me?”

**Answer:** The truth is that your grief during this time is completely normal. Although many people are not aware of it, the sixth month after the loss of a loved one is typically the most difficult time.<sup>24</sup> An unexpected tidal wave strikes and sends you reeling just when you begin to think you have a handle on your grief.

As you deal with this second wave of grief, realize that at six months the reality of your loss sinks in on a deeper level. This is because you begin to see how the loss affects various areas of your life. Memories are triggered at unexpected times and in unexpected ways. Relationships and activities feel different without your loved one. In short, you begin to understand what life is like without your loved one in your daily life.

Remember that God often brings about healing over a period of time rather than instantaneously. You are in the grief process. While you are presently experiencing great sorrow, trust God to fill you with joy and peace.

*“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

(ROMANS 15:13)

## Grieving: Remarriage for the Widowed

**Question:** “My husband died some time ago and now a man from church would like to take me out to dinner. Will I be dishonoring my husband’s memory if I go?”

**Answer:** No. You are not dishonoring your husband’s memory if you begin to have feelings for another man. Proceed wisely and biblically, especially making certain this man is dependable and that both of you share the same, solid, spiritual foundation—faith in Christ. The Bible says,

*“A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives.  
But if her husband dies, she is free to marry  
anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.”*

(1 CORINTHIANS 7:39)

## Grieving: Explaining Death to a Child

**Question:** “How do I explain death to a child?”

**Answer:** Depending on your child’s age and maturity, you’ll need to explain death in terms they will understand.<sup>25</sup>

- Be honest about the finality of it. If they are told that their loved one is asleep or went away, they will naturally expect the loved one to wake up or return at some point.
- Be mindful of changes in behavior, sleep patterns, and shifting emotions. Let them know that it’s normal to experience feelings of sadness, confusion, anger, and fear.
- Remind them that the loss is not their fault and that they are not being punished for the loss. For example, a son might believe his dad died because he was mad at his dad. A sister may have said something mean to her brother and now feels responsible for her brother’s death. Assure them that the death has nothing to do with their behavior.
- Allow them to ask questions. Be clear, simple, direct, and truthful in your answers. Use this opportunity to begin conversations about heaven and spiritual matters as appropriate for their age.
- The most important thing to do is to comfort them by being there for them and letting them know they can talk with you about the loss.

*“As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you.”*

(ISAIAH 66:13)

## Grieving: Death of an Unbeliever/Unknown

**Question:** “My loved one died and I’m not sure if they knew the Lord. What can I do?”

**Answer:** Your concern about your loved one reflects God’s own desire for all people to know Him and to be saved (1 Timothy 2:3–4). God extends the free gift of salvation to everyone, but they have to receive it by faith. Remember that the decision about salvation is a personal one for each of us—we cannot make the decision for another person. We also must not presume to know the matters of a loved one’s heart. But know this: Even if they come to the Lord in their final moments on earth, like the thief on the cross (see Luke 23:40–43), the Lord will give them eternal life and receive them into heaven. There are, however, situations where we just don’t know the spiritual condition of our loved ones.

These situations can create intense emotions. Talk with a trusted Christian friend or Christian counselor. Joining a biblically based grief recovery group may also be helpful.

Above all, seek the Lord in prayer—be honest with what you’re feeling and continue to trust Him. The Bible says, “*Trust in him at all times. Pour out your heart to him, for God is our refuge*” (Psalm 62:8 NLT). Know that God is the “*God of all comfort,*” and He extends His comfort to you in the most difficult times (2 Corinthians 1:3).

## Grieving: Terminal Illness/Impending death

**Question:** “My mother died after a long battle with cancer. I don’t seem to be grieving in the same way I did when my father suddenly passed away from a heart attack. Why is this grief so different?”

**Answer:** The manner in which you lose a loved one can greatly impact the grieving process.

For a loss due to a long-term illness, the grieving process begins before the loss and continues afterward. You live with the reality of the impending loss and are able to confront the loss sooner. This can lengthen the grieving process but also affords the opportunity to make the most of the remaining time you have with your loved one. It also allows time for you to prepare for end-of-life decisions and arrangements. What can make this type of grieving more difficult is that you suffer your loss incrementally, especially if your loved one's health declines over time.

In the case of a sudden death, you may feel forced into the grieving process. Shock and disbelief are common in these situations. You might be completely unprepared to deal with all of the logistical decisions to be made following a death. You may not have the opportunity to say goodbye. You expected to have more time. Whereas a long-term illness can allow you to prepare for the loss, a sudden death can thrust you into the grieving process

Remember, your relationships are unique and the manner in which you experience each loss is unique, so the grieving process will also be unique. Just because you grieve differently with each loss doesn't mean that your experiences of grief are right or wrong or that your grief is any more or less meaningful. Though the experiences of grief may be different, embrace the grieving process and look to the Lord for comfort and peace.

*"Look to the LORD and his strength;  
seek his face always."*

(PSALM 105:4)

## How to Build Up the Bereaved

Words wield a lot of power. They can hurt or they can heal. When Jesus begins His public ministry teaching in synagogues, He creates quite a stir. His audience buzzes with excitement, and there is a collective response to Jesus: “*All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips*” (Luke 4:22).

Gracious words—these are the kind of words needed to build up the bereaved, to provide encouragement and hope.

*“Let everything you say be good and helpful,  
so that your words will be an encouragement  
to those who hear them.”*

(EPHESIANS 4:29 NLT)

When someone experiences a devastating loss, God can use you to comfort and encourage others. Understand that each loss is unique and that your words have the power to hurt or heal. Carefully consider your words as you seek to offer encouragement.

### What You Can Say

#### Death of a Parent/Grandparent:

**Don’t** say, “At least your (parent/grandparent) lived a good, long life.”

**Do** say, “I know he/she loved you and would be so proud of you.”

#### Death of a Child:

**Don’t** say, “At least you have other children.”

**Do** say, “Your son/daughter was very special. I always loved the way he/she . . .”

### Death of a Spouse:

**Don't** say, "A lot of people remarry at your age."

**Do** say, "I valued his/her (character trait or ability)."

### Death after a Long Illness:

**Don't** say, "She's much better off now."

**Do** say, "I admire the way you encouraged and helped her."

### Divorce or Separation:

**Don't** say, "He was never good enough for you."

**Do** say, "The Lord is here for you, and so am I."

### Loss of Job:

**Don't** say, "You'll find a better job in no time."

**Do** say, "I feel for you and will pray with you during this time of change."

### Loss of Limb:

**Don't** say, "Be thankful. You could have died."

**Do** say, "The adjustment will be difficult, but you can do it. You can count on my help."

### Loss of a House:

**Don't** say, "It's just a house. It can be replaced."

**Do** say, "I know you have many memories in your home. I remember . . ."

### Loss of a Pet:

**Don't** say, "You can always get another pet."

**Do** say, "Your dog was a wonderful companion. I know you will miss him."

### Loss of a Friend:

**Don't** say, "You'll make other good friends."

**Do** say, "A friend is a treasure. I know he/she meant a lot to you."

### Loss as a Result of Any Tragedy:

**Don't** say, "All things work together for good!" (even though that is ultimately true).

**Do** say, "I don't know why this happened, but I do know the Lord will stay close to you. One particular scripture that helps me is Psalm 34:18, *'The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.'*"

When comforting someone who just experienced a loss, communicate sympathy ("I'm sorry.") and support ("I'm here for you."). If you've been through a similar loss, you can communicate compassion and understanding but be careful not to overshare and lose sight of *their* loss. Keep the focus of your words on them. Remember . . .

*"A word fitly spoken is like  
apples of gold in settings of silver."*

(PROVERBS 25:11 NKJV)

## How to Help the Grieving

Your words can build up and comfort the grieving, and your actions can show your love and care. When someone is grieving, they may be too overwhelmed to deal with everyday responsibilities in addition to the emotional impact of the loss. Acknowledge their loss immediately and let them know as soon as possible that you are available for them. Because they often won't ask for help, find helpful things to do without being asked. They will usually appreciate small acts of kindness and support.

*"Let's not merely say that we love each other;  
let us show the truth by our actions."*

(1 JOHN 3:18 NLT)

Consider these practical suggestions for reaching out to others with the compassion of Christ:

**Pray.** Remind yourself to pray regularly *for* the grieving and, as appropriate, pray *with* them.

**Be there.** Don't feel the need to fill the silence. Sometimes the most meaningful way to show compassion is simply to be present. Offer a hug when appropriate.

**Listen.** Give the one grieving opportunities to talk about the loss. Expect tears and emotional extremes. Accept emotional or verbal responses without judgment.

**Offer to help with phone calls.** Depending on the loss, there may be a lot of phone calls to make. Offer to help answer phone calls and relay information, if needed.

**Bring a meal.** Cook a warm meal and deliver it to the one grieving. Use disposable containers if possible. Be aware of any dietary needs/restrictions or allergies.

**Run an errand.** Offer to go to the grocery store, post office, dry cleaners, etc.

**Send gift cards.** Buy them a gift card for a restaurant, grocery store, movie theater, online store, etc.

**Send a card or flowers.** Immediately following the loss, send a card or flowers to let them know you're thinking of them. Stay in touch by writing a letter or sharing a story or memory.

**Encourage a change of scenery.** Take them out to lunch, dinner, shopping, or just for a walk.

**Travel with them.** Offer to drive them somewhere or join them in running errands so they are not alone.

**Help around the house.** Offer to clean, mow the lawn, do laundry, etc.

**Offer to house-sit, babysit, take care of pets.** This can help the grieving person get some rest or attend to errands or personal responsibilities.

**Gather information and identify help network.** Depending on the loss, you can help find available jobs, houses, or services. Reach out to others who may be able to help the grieving individual or family as well.

**Show hospitality.** Depending on the loss and your availability, open up your home as a place for people to meet, have a meal, or spend a night.

*“When God’s people are in need,  
be ready to help them.  
Always be eager to practice hospitality.”  
(ROMANS 12:13 NLT)*

## How to Find and Share Comfort

How true the saying, “All sunshine makes a desert.” God knows that if you never experience the storms of life—if rain clouds never release their water—you will never see flower gardens grow. The storms of sorrow should never be wasted.

The Lord can use your grief to help you grow in the areas of sympathy, empathy, compassion, understanding, perspective, and wisdom. Shared heartaches and shared losses forge a connection that can be a great source of comfort. Renewed hope and healing can powerfully impact those experiencing pain and sorrow. By God’s design, the experience of grief will ultimately enrich your heart and life. Grief can help you grow.

When Paul wrote about the troubles he faced, he explained that God comforts us and, in turn, uses us to encourage others when they are suffering. He wrote that God is the “*God of all comfort*,” showing that He doesn’t comfort sparingly, but abundantly.

*“Just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ,  
so also our comfort abounds through Christ.”*

(2 CORINTHIANS 1:5)

### **Finding Comfort** *(an acrostic on comfort)*

**C—Call on the God** of all comfort.

*“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort”* (2 CORINTHIANS 1:3).

**O—Open your heart** to God’s purpose for your grief.

*“Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth”* (PSALM 86:11 ESV).

**M—Meditate on God’s Word** and allow Him to speak into your sorrow.

*“I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways”* (PSALM 119:15).

**F—Face your emotions honestly**, allowing yourself to feel the full range of emotions.

*“I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning”*  
(PSALM 38:6).

**O—Obtain comfort** from others God sends into your life.

*“When three of Job’s friends heard of the tragedy he had suffered, they got together and traveled from their homes to comfort and console him”*  
(JOB 2:11 NLT).

**R—Reflect God’s love** and care to others around you.

*“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God”* (ISAIAH 40:1).

**T—Trust in the Lord** to give you strength and help you through the grieving process.

*“The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me”* (PSALM 28:7).

## Faith of the Bereaved Ziglar (Part II)<sup>26</sup>

Grief is just as common to believers in Christ as anyone else. It's not that Christians don't grieve, but that Christians don't grieve without hope. Paul makes it clear that believers will spend eternity with Christ and those brothers and sisters in the Lord who have gone before us and will come after. We have complete assurance of this from the Lord. And as Paul says, this truth is specifically meant to encourage us amidst our grief.

So, it is certainly acceptable and right to acknowledge the loss. For Ziglar and many who grieve, we are left with photos and memories. Christmas, holidays, and other special days are different. Even normal daily activities are altered. Ziglar would catch himself weeping during a television show because a scene reminded him of Suzan. A hymn at church would trigger a memory and his loss would return to the forefront of his thoughts. But the same hymn would also give him hope and comfort.

I believe [grief] brings us to the stark realization of two things: First, grief brings us to the point of realizing the vastness of our love, and of God's love for us . . . grief is perhaps the most profound way of expressing love. The intensity of grief is directly related to the intensity of love. The more we love a person we have lost, the greater our grief. Second, grief puts us into a position to trust God alone for our healing and restoration.

The bereaved sometimes yearn for just one more moment with their loved one . . . one more meal, one more afternoon at the park, one more evening outside, laughing and talking late into the night. Even just one more phone call. Ziglar missed Suzan's laugh. He missed the way she confidently referred to

herself as “your favorite child.”

And although one more meal or another afternoon would give Ziglar great joy, he possessed greater joy knowing that Suzan entered heaven into the presence of the Lord and that he himself would spend eternity with them both. Ziglar saw the silver lining in the cloud of grief, “the truth is, no matter how long we had shared life with her on earth, the time would have been too short. The bright silver lining to our grief lies in the fact that we will have eternity with her, and that eternity will have no dark clouds in it.”

That assurance resonates much more than “one more” of anything! Because of Christ, Ziglar will reunite with his daughter in eternity. And that knowledge brings peace and hope even amidst grief. But it did even more than that. Ziglar’s hope motivated him to share his faith with others . . .

Knowing that Suzan is with the Lord and is in a far better place than she ever experienced on this earth has done a great deal to energize my efforts to share my faith with more people. How I long for every person to have that assurance about the loved ones who precede him in death! How I long for that truth to apply to every person who dies!

You too can have that assurance today by putting your trust in Jesus Christ for your salvation. The resurrection of Jesus shows that death does not have the final word. Jesus does. And His word is this: *“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?”* (John 11:25-26 ESV).

Believe Him. He alone can guarantee full assurance of life after death. He’s the only one who can give you lasting hope

and joy amidst your grief.

*“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word  
and believes him who sent me  
has eternal life and will not be judged  
but has crossed over from death to life.”*

(JOHN 5:24)



# SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE



---

*“First seek the counsel  
of the LORD.”*

(1 KINGS 22:5)



God's Word offers the hope and promise of a changed life. The Lord will renew your mind—transforming the way you think, act, and live—as you saturate yourself in His Word. In the following questions, the bold-faced words serve as prompts to help you more easily memorize the verses related to this topic. May God's truth come alive to you, flourish in you, and flow through you.

Who can I **call for help**?

*"LORD my God, I **called** to you  
**for help**, and you healed me."*

(PSALM 30:2)

Does anyone **see my trouble and grief**?

*"You, God, **see** the **trouble** of the afflicted;  
you consider their **grief** and take it in hand.  
The victims commit themselves to you."*

(PSALM 10:14)

How long will **weeping stay** a prominent part of my life?  
Will I ever feel like **rejoicing** again?

*"**Weeping** may **stay** for the night,  
but **rejoicing** comes in the morning."*

(PSALM 30:5)

How can I **find rest for my soul**?

*"Yes, **my soul**, **find rest** in God;  
my hope comes from him."*

(PSALM 62:5)

Can my **broken heart** ever **heal**?

*“He **heals** the **brokenhearted**  
and binds up their wounds.”*

(PSALM 147:3)

How can I stop feeling so **downcast**  
and **disturbed** within my **soul**?

*“Why, my **soul**, are you **downcast**?*

*Why so **disturbed** within me?*

*Put your hope in God,  
for I will yet praise him,  
my Savior and my God.”*

(PSALM 42:11)

How can I **not dwell on the past**?

*“Forget the former things; do **not dwell**  
**on the past**. See, I am doing a new thing!  
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?  
I am making a way in the wilderness  
and streams in the wasteland.”*

(ISAIAH 43:18–19)

Can I have any **consolation** in my **unrelenting pain**?

*“I would still have this **consolation**—  
**my joy in unrelenting pain**—that I had  
not denied the words of the Holy One.”*

(JOB 6:10)

**Will my grief ever turn to joy?**

*“You will weep and mourn  
while the world rejoices.  
You will grieve, but  
your **grief will turn to joy.**”*  
(JOHN 16:20)

What happens when **God comforts us in all our troubles?**

*“The Father of compassion and the **God**  
of all comfort . . . **comforts us in all**  
**our troubles**, so that we can comfort those  
in any trouble with the comfort we  
ourselves receive from God.”*  
(2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4)





# ENDNOTES & BIBLIOGRAPHY





## ENDNOTES

1. Scott Floyd, *Crisis Counseling: A Guide for Pastors and Professionals* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2008), 79–80, 93.
2. James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), s.v. “grief,” #G3077.
3. Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible*, s.v. “mourn,” #G3996.
4. Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible*, s.v. “mourn,” #G2799.
5. H. Norman Wright, *Crisis Counseling: What to Do and Say During the First 72 Hours*, updated and exp. ed. (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1993), 154–156.
6. Wright, *Crisis Counseling*, 154–156; H. Norman Wright, *Recovering from the Losses of Life* (Tarrytown, NY: Fleming H. Revell, 1991), 70–76.
7. Wright, *Crisis Counseling*, 158–159.
8. Wright, *Crisis Counseling*, 159–166.
9. Quotations from this section are taken from C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York, NY: Harper One, 1961), 5–6, 46.
10. For more on stages of Grief, see John A. Larson, “Grief,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*, 2nd ed., edited by David G. Benner and Peter C. Hill (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 519–520; D.K. Switzer, “Grief and Loss,” in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, edited by Rodney J. Hunter et al. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 473–474; Wright, *Crisis Counseling*, 156–158.
11. Quotations from this section are taken from C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, 69.
12. June Hunt, *How to Handle Your Emotions* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2008), 209–210.
13. For more on the three inner needs (or longings), see Lawrence J. Crabb, Jr., *Understanding People: Why We Long for Relationship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 17–18, 124–127; Robert S. McGee, *The Search for Significance: Seeing Your True Worth through God’s Eyes*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 6–11, 21–24.
14. Hunt, *How to Handle Your Emotions*, 212–213.
15. Adapted from Glen W. Davidson, *Understanding Mourning: A Guide for Those Who Grieve* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 15–19.
16. Hunt, *How to Handle Your Emotions*, 215–216.
17. Crabb, *Understanding People*, 17–18, 124–127; McGee, *The Search for Significance*, 6–11, 21–24.
18. Quotations from this section are taken from Zig Ziglar, *Confessions of a Grieving Christian* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 32–33, 53–54.
19. Wright, *Crisis Counseling*, 159–166.
20. For this section, see Davidson, *Understanding Mourning*, 24–27.

21. Wright, *Crisis Counseling*, 161.
22. Wright, *Recovering from the Losses of Life*, 91–110.
23. Adapted from Charlotte A. Greeson, Mary Hollingsworth, and Michael Washburn, *The Grief Adjustment Guide: A Pathway through Pain*, Faire & Hale Planner (Sisters, OR: Questar, 1990), 200–202.
24. Davidson, *Understanding Mourning*, 59.
25. Wright, *Crisis Counseling*, 168–171.
26. Quotations from this section are taken from Zig Ziglar, *Confessions of a Grieving Christian* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 5–6, 173–174, 176, 178, 188, 233–234.
27. Hunt, *How to Handle Your Emotions*, 193–194.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Clinton, Tim, and Ron Hawkins, eds. *The Popular Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2011.
- Collins, Gary R. *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide*. 3rd. ed. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007.
- Crabb, Lawrence J., Jr. *Understanding People: Why We Long for Relationship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013.
- Davidson, Glen W. *Understanding Mourning: A Guide for Those Who Grieve*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1984.
- Floyd, Scott. *Crisis Counseling: A Guide for Pastors and Professionals*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2008.
- Greeson, Charlotte A., Mary Hollingsworth, and Michael Washburn. *The Grief Adjustment Guide: A Pathway through Pain*. Faire & Hale Planner. Sisters, OR: Questar, 1990.
- Hunt, June. *Counseling Through Your Bible Handbook*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2008.
- Hunt, June. *How to Handle Your Emotions*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2008.
- Hunt, June. *Seeing Yourself Through God's Eyes*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2008.
- Hunter, Rodney J., H. Newton Malony, Liston O. Mills, and John Patton, eds. *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*. Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1990.
- Larson, John A. "Grief." In *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*, 2d ed, Edited by David G. Benner and Peter C. Hill. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999.
- McGee, Robert S. *The Search for Significance: Seeing Your True Worth through God's Eyes*. 2nd ed. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003.
- Rhea, Carolyn. *When Grief Is Your Constant Companion: God's Grace for a Woman's Heartache*. Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 2003.
- Robinson, Haddon W. *Grief: Comfort for Those Who Grieve and Those Who Want to Help*. Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1996.
- Wright, H. Norman. *Crisis Counseling: What to Do and Say During the First 72 Hours*. Updated and expanded ed. Ventura, CA: Regal, 1993.
- Wright, H. Norman. *Recovering from the Losses of Life*. Tarrytown, NY: Fleming H. Revell, 1991.





# Hope for the Heart

... presenting God's Truth for Today's Problems

## **Our Partnership**

We are honored to partner with **Lindell Recovery Network**—to encourage, equip, and empower others with the truth of God's Word. What a joy to see lives changed as we share His hope—together!

## **A Legacy of Hope**

Special thanks to author, broadcaster, and biblical counselor **June Hunt**, founder of Hope For The Heart, for her years of research, writing, editing, and guidance in developing the *Keys for Living Library*.

## **Anchored to a Solid Foundation**

God's Word is our sure and steady anchor, the foundation of our ministry and all our resources. We are grateful to God for His 30+ years of guidance and enabling us to impact the world with His truth that sets people free.

## **Resources for the Continuum of Care and Ministry**

We present biblical hope and practical help through our print and digital resources (over two million books sold), radio broadcasts, and podcasts. Likewise, our counseling services and seminars, the International Christian Coaching Institute (ICCI), the Lifeline to Hope caregiver training program, credentialing and certifications, and a global outreach that touches over 60 countries in 36 languages and on 6 continents—are all designed to help people have a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD,  
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,  
plans to give you hope and a future.’”  
(Jeremiah 29:11)*

To learn more about Hope For The Heart, our ministry, resources, and initiatives, call 1-800-488-HOPE (4673) or visit [HopeForTheHeart.org](http://HopeForTheHeart.org).

**[www.HopeForTheHeart.org](http://www.HopeForTheHeart.org)**



# GRIEF

## *Living at Peace with Loss*

How do you cope when a deep or tragic loss leaves you feeling empty, angry, or alone? Healing is a journey, and while there are no shortcuts through the process of grief, God promises not to leave you in the valley of despair. God wants you to place your seasons of sorrow in His hands. He promises to take you from pain to peace and into the light of a new tomorrow. These *Keys for Living* will teach you to navigate the stages of grief, how to find comfort, and how to help others overcome loss. Are you ready to let go, say goodbye, and find peace from the losses in your life?

### KEYS FOR LIVING LIBRARY



*"First seek the counsel of the LORD."*  
(1 Kings 22:5)

Life is full of challenges, but there is hope. The *Keys for Living Library* provides biblical truth and practical help for more than 100 topics to help you overcome difficulties, grow in maturity, and move forward in life. In each of the 100+ Keys, you'll discover God's wisdom and guidance in a simple format:

- *Definitions* help you understand the topic from God's perspective.
- *Characteristics* give insight into the different aspects of the topic.
- *Causes* shed light on the underlying issues related to the topic.
- *Steps to Solution* show you how to be transformed and walk in freedom.

Jesus said, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"* (John 10:10). Our prayer is that God will use these *Keys for Living* to encourage, equip, and empower you with His life-changing truth.

