

## SESSION 5: ALLOWING GRIEF

*What is the purpose of grief? When is grief healthy and helpful? When is it not?*



### SHARE A PRAYER

Open the session with prayer requests and a prayer.

### INTRODUCTIONS

Last week's homework was to read then write about Christ-like characteristics, and how you might have grown in Christ-like characteristics since experiencing loss.

- **Does anyone want to share what they learned from that reflection? Did anything surprise you?**

### BEHIND THE SCENES

Today's session focuses on grief, a natural and healthy response to death, loss, and/or a broken relationship. Webster's dictionary defines "grief" as:

- keen mental suffering or distress over affliction or loss; sharp sorrow; painful regret

In the Jewish tradition, the closest family members (the spouse, parents, siblings, and children) sit "shiva" after a burial service. For seven days, the mourners stay home and sit in low stools commemorating "feeling low" at the loss of their loved one. They try to refrain from work (including housework) and focus on their loved one in prayer and conversation. After shiva, there is a secondary mourning period for the next 30 days in which the mourners can return to work but don't participate in their typical social activities, giving themselves time to ease back into normal routines.

Within the Christian faith, nowadays we have a funeral service, visitors, phone calls, and cards— then often try to return to normal life. Sometimes we allow time and effort toward grieving loss, but most times the bereaved are overwhelmed by logistics (e.g., medical costs, funeral arrangements, insurance policies, house guests, and/or mounting bills). Within a state of



## THINK-PAIR-SHARE QUESTIONS

- **How have you grieved for what you lost? Where do you feel you are within the five stages of grief now?** (Check all that apply. The stages can occur in any order.)
  - Denial** – "I feel fine."; "I'm O.K." "This can't be happening to me."
  - Anger** – "Why me? It's not fair!"; "How can this happen to me?"; "I blame \_\_\_\_\_."
  - Bargaining** – "I'll do anything for \_\_\_\_\_."; "I will \_\_\_\_\_ if \_\_\_\_\_"
  - Depression** – "I'm so sad. Why keep trying?"; "I miss my loved one." "I'm so alone. No one understands me."
  - Acceptance** – "It's going to be okay." "This is not the road I would have chosen, but I will do the best I can with it."

## FAITH WALK

Before and after Jesus' crucifixion, the disciples were faced with overwhelming loss and regret. **Read Mark 14:12-31.**

In the days that followed, each disciple responded to loss in his own way and exhibited different stages of grief:

- **Peter** felt deep shame for denying he knew Christ in His final hours.
- **John**, the only disciple to have witnessed the crucifixion, may have suffered post-traumatic stress symptoms (e.g., hypervigilance, nightmares/flashbacks, emotional numbness).
- **Thomas** was in disbelief that Jesus died then was resurrected.
- **The other disciples** huddled in sadness, wept, and isolated themselves (fearful that they too might be imprisoned). They likely felt deep anger and injustice that Jesus had been taken from them.
- **Judas** took his own life, overcome by his remorse for betraying Jesus' whereabouts to the chief priests.

After Jesus' resurrection, the disciples were privileged by one gift most bereaved probably most want—to talk to and be comforted by the one they lost. In the moments that Jesus walked the earth after his death, he was able to sincerely reassure the disciples and give them the strength they needed to carry on.

**Read John 20:19-22.**

- **What were the first words Jesus spoke to his disciples after his death?**
- **Why do you think he wished that for his disciples?**

- **Why was his concluding statement about forgiveness important and necessary for the disciples grieving process?**
- **Why was it important to Jesus that his disciples recover from their grief?** (Read John 21:15-16)

Jesus had big plans for his disciples. His lifetime had prepared them for their mission to carry on Christ's words and build the Christian church—and now His death and guidance after would prepare them to continue the work they had started together.

## **HOMEWORK**

Write an answer to these two questions:

- If what you lost could revisit you, what would it tell you? What would it wish for you?
- If you could sit with Jesus, what would he tell you? What would His wish be for you? (See John 14:1 and Matthew 5:4 for hints)

### **FROM BROOKS**

***If you could sit with your parents again, what do you think they would say to you and wish for you?***

*We were a very loving and affectionate family. So the first thing they would tell me is that they loved me and were proud of me. They would tell me how much they love my wife, Julea and their two grandchildren.*

*I think they would be a little dismayed at how, at times, I've allowed myself to get stuck and not move forward. But I also believe they would see how some of these times have allowed me to grow and to mature and how the lessons from those times will be valuable in doing the work that is ahead of me.*

*Mostly, I think they would want me to live out, joyfully, the life that God has planned for me and our family. The years I spent being angry and bitter were wasted years. The times that I let what happened to them and to me and Leslie bring me down, or keep me depressed, could have been spent doing so much more. I believe that the greatest honor and respect I can show for them is to not get so bogged down in the past and what happened to them that I don't take advantage of the life God gave me. I show them my love and respect for the upbringing they gave me by making the most of my life and following God's plan for it.*

## FROM RICHARD – THE PEACE THAT JESUS GIVES

By Richard B. Douglass, Date Unknown



Jesus always had the right word of comfort to give to people. Many times all he had to say was, “Stop being afraid.” He told his followers this when they were bothered about providing for their financial needs. He told them this same thing when they were trembling with fear during a storm at sea. These were the words of assurance he gave to the exiled disciple John when he appeared to him in Revelation, chapter one.

You see, Jesus understands people. He knows that you and I so easily become afraid. We live in the “age of anxiety.” Many people pass their life away in a state of “quiet desperation.” We have all sorts of fears. We are afraid of what people think about us. We fear loss of security. We dread old age. We are terrified of death. Jesus knows all of this, and He promises peace to those who have faith in Him.

In chapter one of the Bible book Revelation, we see a beautiful scene. An old man named John has been exiled to a small island. He is away from everyone he loves, and his only crime is faith in Christ. Suddenly, he has a vision of Christ. Jesus says to him, “Do not be afraid any more. I am the First and the Last; yea, the ever-living One. I once was dead, but now I live forever and ever. I carry the keys of death and eternity.”

In these words John is told, “Don’t be afraid of life.” This idea strikes us like a pile-driver. So many are afraid to live. Some are so much afraid that they kill themselves, some by degrees, some suddenly. Some develop little “escapisms.” Some just force themselves to make it through today with the desperate hope that tomorrow will be better. To these frustrated people Jesus says, “Do not be afraid any more.”

Jesus next reminds John not to be afraid of death. John is told that Jesus carries the keys of death. John realized what this meant. Jesus had locked death up in prison. Now it was powerless. But still people fear death. When the signs of age become evident, we try to push the hands of the clock of time back. For young and old alike, there is a chill down our spine when we realize we too will die.

There is only one real cure for this fear. It is a life-changing and vital faith in Christ. When we have this, we know that because Christ conquered death that he will enable us to do it too.

John is now told that he does not need to be afraid of eternity. Jesus not only has the keys to death, but also eternity. There is nothing in the vast unknown of eternity that a believer in Christ needs to fear.

People always fear the unknown. When men were drawing maps of the world before it was fully explored there were unknown areas. On the maps men placed such words as “here be dragons.”

There is much that man does not know about the area beyond this life. So we fear it. But the believer in Christ can still hear him saying, “Do not be afraid any more.” He still has the keys to eternity.

Man’s fears center in these three great areas. But fears melt when faith comes. It is replaced by the peace that Jesus gives.

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