



**SCHOOL OF GRIEF**  
— DR. DAVID PAGE —

THE SCHOOL OF GRIEF COURSE

**WEEK 1:**

# Understanding Grief Models of Grief

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SHEPHERDCHURCH

# Week 1: Understanding Grief / Models of Grief

## What is Grief?

Grief is a natural response to any loss. It's brutal and personal. It's an intense emotion we experience after a significant loss. Grief is a multifaceted sensory experience that normally manifests itself in physical pain, numbness, hopelessness, loneliness, and deep sorrow.

In a word, grief is *change*. Loss brings changes into our lives, usually ones we didn't want. Grief is the recognition of that change, but it's also the loss of a connection. At its core, grief is love; it's love for whatever we had that is now gone. Love endures forever.

## The Weight of Grief

Grief is weight. The word comes from the Middle English *gref* and the Latin *gravis*, both words meaning heavy. A common adjective people use in speaking of grief is unbearable. Grief is a burden you bear, a heavy weight you learn to carry.

## Bereaved

A bereaved person is one who has a relative or close friend who has recently died. The Old English word *bereave* means to rob. The word implies we've been robbed or stripped of someone or something, often suddenly and unexpectedly, and sometimes by force.

## Don't Compare Your Grief

Don't play the grief-comparison game. The problem is if you win, you lose. Comparing grief merely based on the type of loss is a mistake that leaves people feeling less than and not deserving of the same kind of support. The worst kind of loss is your loss.

## Timeline for Grief

We know there is no timeline for grief because no two people experience grief the same way, yet the simple timeline below can help us gauge necessary interventions.

Anticipatory grief - Grief that comes before the death or loss.

Acute grief: Grief right after the death or loss occurs.

Early grief: The first two years of grief.

Mature grief: Grief for the rest of our lives.

## Types of Grief

- Delayed - Grief we don't feel in the moment because of shock or busyness
- Disenfranchised - Any grief we judge or minimize
- Ambiguous - Grief that's hard to recognize because your loved one is still alive
- Anticipatory - The grief that comes before a death
- Inconclusive - There is no body to grieve (frozen grief)
- Complicated - When painful emotions don't improve with time and are very severe
- Collective and Public - When we grieve as a group an event or public figure
- Traumatic - Combines trauma with bereavement or grief responses

- Masked - Grief that lurks beneath the surface, disguised by coping mechanisms and survival instincts. Feelings of emptiness or numbness. (i.e. miscarriage)
- Cumulative - Multiple losses during a short period of time and/or unattended grief
- Secondary Loss - Other losses that accompany grief besides the primary response

### **Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD)**

PGD is a newly recognized mental health condition where, following the death of a loved one, intense yearning and grief symptoms persist for over a year in adults (six months for children) and significantly impair daily functioning. It involves debilitating "stuck" emotions, such as severe longing, identity disruption, and emotional numbness, that exceed normal bereavement.

### **What's the Distinction Between Grief and Grieving?**

Grief is that overwhelming emotion that comes over us like a wave after our loss. The feeling is so intense, we want to know when it will be over. If you think the waves of grief will stop at some point, you will be sadly disappointed and think something is wrong with you when they don't. The waves will decrease in frequency and intensity over time, but they will never completely go away.

Grieving, on the other hand, is the process of change that occurs after our loss. We are faced with a problem when we lose someone or something dear to us. We now need to figure out how to live in a world without that someone or something. Grieving is a form of learning; it's learning how to carry the absence of our loved one with us and learning how to navigate our new existence on earth.

### **What's the Difference Between Grief and Mourning?**

Grief is what's going on inside us, while mourning is what we do on the outside. The internal work of grief is ongoing, that's why I refer to it as our grief journey. Mourning, on the other hand, is an outward sign of our grief.

### **Rending a Garment in Grief**

In biblical times it was common for Jews to mourn by tearing their clothes. It's natural to get angry when someone or something is snatched out of your life. Rending one's garments was a tangible expression of grief and anger in the face of death. For example, David tore his clothes when Saul and his beloved friend Jonathan were killed (2 Samuel 1: 11-12).

Why did he do that? Because in an agrarian society, clothing was a very valuable commodity. Clothes were time-intensive and expensive so most people in those days had a very limited wardrobe. People who tore their clothes were showing how upset they felt inside. Damaging one of their most expensive possessions reflected the depth of their emotional pain. This idea was magnified when people chose to put on sackcloth after tearing clothes. Sackcloth was a coarse and scratchy material and was extremely uncomfortable. As with tearing their garments, people put on sackcloth to externally display the discomfort and pain they felt inside.

## **Grieving with Hope**

All of us will grieve at some point in life, but believers grieve slightly different than the world, because we can have hope even in our deepest times of sorrow. The Bible affirms the importance of grief and instructs Christians how to grieve.

The Apostle Paul tells us believers will grieve and have their share of trials, tragedies, and difficult losses. You don't get excused because you are a follower of Jesus. Paul said, "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. For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died ... So, encourage each other with these words." (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14,18 NLT).

We often think of death as a departure, but for believers in Christ it's an arrival. Death is the doorway by which you can leave the limitations and pains of this world to enter the heavenly realm and be given the gift of eternal life. The grave is an entrance into new life. It's a door not a wall. Death is not saying a last "good-bye" but rather saying, "See you later." We grieve differently, yet honestly and openly, because we look forward to going to heaven, seeing Jesus, and being reunited with our loved ones who have gone before us.

Death isn't the worst thing that can happen to us; rather, for believers, death leads to the best possible scenario. Paul said, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain... I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" (Philippians 1:21,23).

Therefore, we grieve with hope. Our hope doesn't nullify our grief; rather hope puts grief into an eternal context. The biblical approach to grieving is a hopeful. It's hope in the person, resurrection, and love of Christ that allows us to find comfort even in our pain.

## **Metaphors and Illustrations of Grief**

### **Grief is Like Peeling an Onion**

Grief is a lot like peeling an onion, it comes off one layer at a time and you cry a lot. Just like there is no right or wrong way to grieve, there is no right way to peel away the layers. The days between a death and the funeral service are like the paper-thin outer skin of an onion that comes off easily and blows away in the wind. That's when the bereaved person is in shock and is surrounded by family and friends trying to bring comfort. The funeral is often the climactic event in the care of the family as the bereaved have their grief witnessed. Once that superficial outer skin is removed, then the real grieving process begins in three identifiable layers: reality, reaction, and reconstruction.

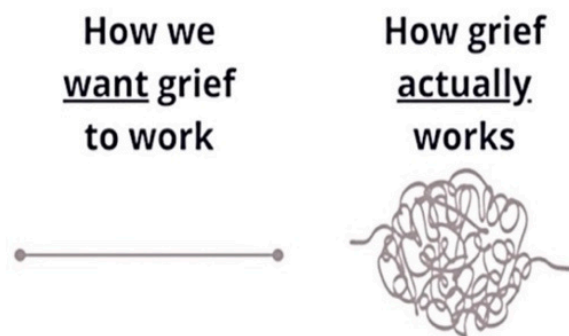
### **Grief Can Feel Like Being Crushed by a Boulder**

Grieving is hard work; some of the hardest work you'll ever do in your life. Kay Warren shared with a group of grieving women that the loss of her son felt like a gigantic boulder that fell from the sky and crushed her to the ground, completely devastating her.

Kathy, a close friend of Kay, shared that someday, that boulder would become the size of a rock she could hold in her pocket and carry with her. It will never go away entirely, but it won't always feel like it's crushing her.

### **Grief is Messy**

Grief is a tangled ball of emotions. It's messy, traumatic, confusing, and overwhelming. It can make you feel like you're going crazy and question your faith. It doesn't color within the lines. The diagram below illustrates how we want grief to work and how it actually works.



### **Ocean Waves of Grief**

Going through the grief process is like being caught in a set of big waves. Waves of anger, doubt, denial, sadness, depression, helplessness, and confusion come crashing down on us.

### **Kintsugi (“Golden Joinery”)**

In Japan, there is an ancient art form called Kintsugi. It's the art of repairing broken pottery and mending the cracks, chips, and breaks with gold.

The philosophy behind it is to honor the breakage as part of the history of the object, rather than hiding the past.

The cracks, chips, and breaks are literally filled with a gold and lacquer mix. Instead of discarding the broken object, the past is highlighted and honored.

### **MODELS OF GRIEF**

Models of grief are guidelines of what people may experience when grieving. There is no one way to grieve, and people move through a variety of stages of grief in various ways. The stages aren't meant to tuck messy emotions into a neat package.

## **MODELS OF GRIEF**

### **Elisabeth Kübler Ross (“On Death and Dying”)**

Five Stages of Grief (DABDA): Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance.

### **David Kessler (“Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief”)**

Kessler argues that it's finding meaning beyond the five stages of grief that can transform grief into a more peaceful and hopeful experience.

A Guide to Finding Meaning:

Meaning is relative and personal

Meaning takes time. We may not find it until months or even years after loss

Meaning does not equal understanding.

Even though we may find meaning, it still isn't worth the cost of losing someone

Meaning does not negate loss

Only you can find your own meaning

Meaningful connections will replace painful memories

Create meaning that remembers the loss and honors the life

### **Rick Warren (“Getting Through What You’re Going Through”)**

Six Stages of Grief:

- Shock
- Sorrow
- Struggle
- Surrender
- Sanctification
- Service

### **William Worden (“Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy”)**

Four Tasks of Grief:

- To accept the reality of the loss
- To process the pain of grief
- To adjust to a world without the deceased
- To find an enduring connection with the deceased while embarking on a new life

### **Eric Lindemann (“Symptomatology and Management of Acute Grief”)**

Grief Work Theory:

- Emancipation from bondage to the deceased
- Readjustment to a new environment in which the deceased is missing
- The formation of new relationships

Grief is work:

- It's important, necessary and exhausting work
- It requires time, resources, effort and energy and cannot be hurried along
- It is the only way a heart can begin to put the pieces back together

## **Post-Traumatic Growth (Tedeschi and Calhoun)**

Post-traumatic growth (PTG) is a theory that suggests that people can experience positive change after experiencing trauma. It was developed by psychologists Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun.

PTG includes new understandings of oneself, the world, and how to relate to others.

5 Domains of PTG:

- New Possibilities
- Personal strength
- Spiritual change
- Improved relationships
- Greater appreciation for life

Continuing Bonds Theory of Grief (Klass, Silverman & Nickman) (Cherishing Bonds)

This theory suggests that instead of completely detaching from a deceased loved one, people can create a new relationship with them that can continue throughout their lives. This theory challenges the idea that grief involves progressing through different stages to achieve detachment.

**David Page (“The School of Grief: A Guide to Finding Hope, Meaning & Purpose After Loss”)**

**The Seven Needs of the Grieving:**

- To have your grief witnessed
- To feel your feelings
- To release your burden of guilt
- To face your fears
- To grow larger through loss (To not get over it but to grow into it)
- To turn your pain into purpose
- To hold onto the hope of heaven

In week 2 we will learn the best and worst things to say to those in grief, including tips for talking to grieving people, and how to respond to people in pain.



The School of Grief Course taught by Dr. David Page is a joint effort between Shepherd Church and The School of Grief.