

THE POWER OF FACING YOUR FEARS



GRIEF COURSE

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Grief Course

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Week 5

"No one ever told me that grief felt so much like fear." C.S. Lewis (Opening words of A Grief Observed).

Grief Feels Like Fear

Grief feels like fear because fear, in a sense, becomes our reality – our worst nightmare come true. Grief and fear are linked together. Grief leaves us reeling in uncertainty. We think if we live right then God will do right by us. When the worst happens, we question who we are, and where is God? Why me?

Physical Symptoms Can Accompany Grief

Grieving people feel anxious about their own health and the safety of other loved ones. Anxiety causes fear and worry can cause physical symptoms. One week after Jackie died, my daughter Jessica, 7 years old at the time, was experienced terrible pain in her abdomen. Carrie and I thought, *"Oh no, not again!"* She would bend over in pain from her stomach cramps. She would cry because the pain was so intense. We took her to the hospital, the same one Jackie received treatment at, to see what was wrong.

After a battery of tests, the doctor said, "Mr. and Mrs. Page, there is nothing physically wrong with your daughter. It was all in her head, in reality in her stomach. Jessica was having a difficult time process the hurt and pain from losing her sister. If you swallow your emotions, your stomach keeps score. This is what happened to Jessica after the loss. The pain got worse at night. This was the time they would see each other and talk themselves to sleep in the same bedroom. After a couple of weeks, the stomach pain went away.

Healthy Fear and Unhealthy Fear

Fear can be healthy. It is programmed into our nervous systems and gives us the survival instincts we need to keep ourselves safe from danger. Primal fears help us survive. A lion in the bush should be feared. Stoves are really hot, and knives are really sharp.

Fear is unhealthy when it makes you more cautious than you really need to be to stay safe, and when it prevents you moving forward in your grief, as a result you get stuck. The goal is not to necessarily eliminate fear but to integrate it.

Types of Fear Accompanied by Grief

- Fear of it happening again
- Fear of being abandoned by God and others
- Fear of not grieving correctly
- Fear of vulnerability
- Fear of never being happy again
- Fear of the unknown
- Fear of change
- Fear of death

What We Run from Pursues Us – What We Face Transforms Us

What we resist, persists. What we run from pursues us. What we face transforms us. The transformation is found in the rubble of our grief and pain.

It's natural to want to run from pain and disconnect from it. We are predisposed biologically to avoid pain. Contrary to what some people believe, intense pain from grief is not like touching a hot stove. When you're in intense grief it's like a hot stove has fallen on you. No wonder we want to avoid those feelings. Yet, there is wisdom within when we feel safe and have support that knows how to go through this intense pain. In grief we need connections with others. We must honor the pace of our grief. We will continually revisit grief throughout our life. Grief lasts longer than you think. In fact, grief never ends because our love never ends. We never got to experience Jackie's graduation from high school, teaching her how to drive, walking her down the aisle for her wedding, having a grandchild from her, etc. I never dreamed we'd experience grief in a profound way recently at Jessica's wedding as Jackie was Jessica's honorary Maid of Honor. This was extremely gratifying for me but at the same time painful.

As human beings, we can't take all the pain in one day. We touch the pain (hot stove) and then we need a break. Respect the wisdom and timing of your grief process. I've learned that it's not my job to move people along quickly in their grief. They should go at their own pace.

This adage is so true regarding grief. When we turn and embrace it, we can be surprised. Grief does not have to be all-consuming.

Buffalo Run into Storms

Grief is a storm in our lives, maybe the biggest storm we will ever face. The only choice that we have is how we respond to storms. And more specifically when we respond to those storms.

Colorado is known for the world-famous Rocky Mountains. Many people don't realize that the state of Colorado is divided nearly exactly in half: the western part of the state is the great Rocky Mountains and to the eastern part of the state is the great Kansas Plains. Because of this unique landscape they have the Rocky Mountains and the Plains. Colorado is one of the only places in the world that has both buffalo and cows.

When storms come, they nearly always come from the West and roll out towards the East. Cows can sense that a storm is coming from this direction. So, a cow will try to run East to get away from the storm. The only problem is cows aren't very fast. So the storm catches up with them rather quickly. Without knowing any better, the cows continue to try to outrun the storm. But instead of outrunning the storm, they run with the storm, maximizing the amount of pain, time, and frustration they experience from that storm. We as human beings we do the same with the storms in our lives, including loss and grief.

What buffaloes do is very unique in the animal kingdom. Buffaloes wait for the storm to cross right over the crest of the peak of the mountaintop. And as the storm rolls over the ridge, buffaloes turn and charge directly into the storm. They run at the storm and by running at the storm, they run straight through it, minimizing the amount of pain, time, and frustration they experience from that storm. This is a great metaphor for all of us who have experienced loss because even though our losses are different, all of us face storms.

We don't get to choose whether or not we have storms. The only choice that we have is *how* we respond to those storms. Which direction are you heading?

Our Choice: Chasing Daylight or Running Toward the Darkness?

Poet, John Donne, makes a point that although east and west seem farthest removed on a map, they eventually meet on a globe. What therefore appear as opposites, east and west, in time come together, if we follow one or the other long enough and far enough.

Jerry Sittser wrote, "The quickest way for anyone to reach the sun and the light of day is not to run west, chasing after the setting sun, but to head east, plunging into the darkness until one comes to the sunrise."

We have the power to choose the direction our lives will head; will we run from our loss or face it the best we are able? Darkness from grief is inevitable and unavoidable, so maybe it would be best to walk into the darkness rather than trying to outrun it? To allow my experience of loss to take me on a journey wherever that may lead, and to allow myself to be transformed by my suffering rather than to think I could somehow avoid it. It's your choice in terms of which way you turn.

A Fear I Needed to Overcome

I took two weeks off from work after Jackie died, not nearly enough time to process the pain of her loss but there was some conflict at church I needed to come back to deal with. When I returned to work, I took a detour each day to the church, so I wouldn't pass by the radiation center where we had a bad experience with Jackie. The day after my conversation with Jerry Sittser about embracing my pain and facing my fears, I drove up Bell Road and came face-to-face with the radiation center, stared that sucker down, and drove the extra two blocks to work. After embracing my feelings and standing up to the fear, I never took a detour to work again.

Affirmations to Combat Anxiety and Fear

Your words are more powerful than you think, they can hurt but can also heal. If you're struggling with grief, anxiety, fear, panic attacks, depression, and sleep problems, you can use Bible verses and daily affirmations help us experience the peace of God. Scriptural affirmations for anxiety and fear brings comfort and helps us regain our strength, discard negative thoughts, develop a positive mindset, stop anxiety, and calm our hearts and souls.

10 Biblical Affirmations That Help Calm Anxiety and Fear

Through God's word, we are reminded that He loves us, and He is with us. Repeat these Bible-based affirmations and believe them in your mind, heart, and soul.

1. I cast all my anxieties and cares on the Lord who loves and cares for me.

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for us." (1 Peter 5:7)). Just throw it on him and let him carry your burdens. Jesus said we could cast all of our cares on him because he cares for us! There is nothing we are going through that we cannot cast on the Lord.

2. I trust God's love and power for my life. I let go of all negative emotions of fear.

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." (2 Timothy 1:7)

3. I will not worry about the future. God knows His purpose for me and will fulfill it.

"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)

4. The Lord hears me and answers me when I call Him.

"I prayed to the Lord, and he answered me. He freed me from all my fears." (Psalm 34:4)

5. God comforts me in my mourning. I will express my grief to God.

"Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted." (Matthew 5:4)

6. When I feel anxious, I take refuge in the Lord Jesus Christ where I feel safe and protected.

"He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler." (Psalm 91:4)

7. I am anxious for nothing. I pray to the Lord, and I experience the peace of God.

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)

8. I will remain strong and courageous during difficult times for Christ Jesus is with me wherever I go.

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9)

9. God's love is greater than my fear. I am totally and perfectly loved, so fear disappears.

"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love." (1 John 4:18). Fear knocked at the door. Love answered and no one was there. Love is the antidote for distrust. Choose to continue to love even if you've been disappointed or hurt. My relationship with God is now changed after the loss of my daughter, but I continue to trust Him. I don't expect God to *fix things* anymore. I now pray, "Help me to love whatever happens." I'm willing to risk again to love because God's love is greater than my fears.

10. I do not have to be afraid because God will uphold and strengthen me.

"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10)

Anxiety and fear can be detrimental to our daily lives, health, and general well-being. Fortunately, affirmations based on Bible verses are a powerful tool to embrace the truth of God and find inner peace, strength, and courage. Remember that the love of God can heal an anxious heart. Thus, perform these positive declarations on a daily basis to let go of fear and anxiety and live in peace.

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