

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Support group

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you,
and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:28-30

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

Matthew 5:4

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton support group!

Navigating grief and mourning can be one of life's most challenging journeys. This group is for anyone who carries a heavy heart, whether you are Catholic or not, and whether your heart aches because of the loss of a loved one or any other challenging circumstances. Most participants are attending because they lost a loved one, therefore, we will frequently address this topic; yet our primary goal is to provide a compassionate and understanding environment where everyone can share their experiences and find faith filled support. We will be walking this journey together, a step at a time. Let us lean on each other and find strength together, remembering that while we may carry heavy hearts, we are never alone, God is always with us.

On a personal note, I wish to thank you for allowing me to be able to gather with you as we receive the solace and consolation that comes through faith. Thank you for your trust and for your willingness to share your feelings at a time when you feel frail:



At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror,
but then face to face.

At present I know partially;
then I shall know fully, as I am fully known.
So faith, hope, love remain, these three;
but the greatest of these is love.

(1 Corinthians 13: 12-13)



Remember that acknowledging your grief and sharing with others is a sign of strength,
not weakness!

Depression, confusion, anxiety, loneliness, anger, and all the feelings listed in the introductory prayer are very common among those who grieve and carry a heavy heart. We will address them in the course of our cycle of meetings.

Let us begin by focusing on **Faith, Hope** and **Love**, as they are fundamental pillars not only in the context of grief, but also for life in general.

Even though the “Mystery of Faith” transcend our understanding, trusting in God brings immense solace and comfort. Particularly when facing difficult times, scriptures that speak of Faith, Love, Hope, and the resurrection in Jesus are fundamental to stay strong (for specific Biblical References, see appendix B, pg 120). They serve as guiding principles that help us navigate challenges and joys. They provide a spiritual and emotional anchor for those who are grieving, helping them to navigate their pain with a sense of purpose, anticipation, and connection. Walking together through this cycle of meetings, we will gain strength in faith, hope, and love. So, I would like to share a few words on Faith, Hope and Love: cardinal values and foundations of the group, its structure, and the guidelines.

We’ll begin with a prayer written by Sister Connie Kramer, a Sister of Providence from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. In this prayer, Sister Connie expresses the wide range of emotions that accompany grief and a heavy heart, offering each one to God and asking that they be transformed and lightened through the gifts of Faith, Hope, and Love. Please read each line slowly, pausing to reflect on each emotion as it touches your own life and viewing it through the lens of faith.





A Prayer

By Sister Connie Kramer **

When I am in shock, please God help me to just keep breathing.

When I am numbed out, please let others reach in to touch my heart.

When I am in denial, give me the grace to accept what is true.

When my faith is shaken, please God remind me of your love for me.

When I am anxious, remind me you are with me on my journey.

When I am full of fear, remind me I am not alone on my grief journey.

When I am frustrated, help me to calm down and ask for insight.

When I am confused, let your Spirit give me clarity in your time.

When I have lost my direction, let me know the path you wish me to take.

When I feel guilty for what I did or failed to do, let your grace of forgiveness fill my spirit.

When I feel shame, let me not judge myself harshly.

When I have regrets, let me learn from my past and move on.

When I feel some relief, help me feel grateful and not guilty.

When I am lonely, help me to reach out and share my feelings with others.

When I feel isolated and lost, find me.

When procrastination paralyzes me, help me to do the next right thing one minute, one hour, and one day at a time.

When I feel stuck in any way, do for me what I cannot do for myself.

When I am angry, grant me the grace to face the fear beneath my anger.

When I have allowed self-pity to fill me, help me to find reasons to be grateful for what I still have in my life.

When I am stuck in painful memories of the past, give me the graces I need to forgive and be forgiven.

When I am in agony, hear my cry to you for help.

When I am faced with the reality that my deceased loved one will never come back in this life, let me experience their presence in a new way.

When I resist change, give me the willingness to make life-giving choices.

When I am jealous, give me the grace to accept my own grief journey.

When I am depressed, lead me to life-giving action.

When I am tempted to despair, give me some reason to have hope.

When I feel an emptiness in my soul, fill me with your abiding Presence.

When sadness consumes me, help me to be grateful for my good memories.

When I have lost my future, help me to trust that you will give me a future full of hope, if I come to you with all my heart.

When my grief makes me feel very tired, help me to be gentle with myself.

When "grief triggers" cause unexpected "grief bursts," let me be patient with myself and do what I need to do.

When I am tempted to believe grief is the problem, help me let it become my teacher and part of the solution in learning how to move on in my life.

When I have lost my identity, may I find a new identity with your help.

When I have lost meaning in my life, give me the grace to go on.

When I don't know how to pray, let your Spirit pray in and for me.

When I am emotionally overwhelmed, teach me to breathe in your Love.

When I want to hold my loved one, God please hold us both in your heart.

When I forget that in death life is changed not ended, remind me that your Spirit will help me continue to develop an enduring bond with my loved one.

When I want to talk to my loved one, let me say what I need to say and trust that I will be heard.

Amen.

** (The complete title of this prayer is "Prayer for suicide loss survivors". Sister Connie gave the permission to change the title since the feelings she describes are felt by all who are grieving and carrying a heavy heart)



FAITH:

For we live by faith not by sight (2 Corinthians: 5-7)

Everything is possible to one who has faith (Mark 9:23)

Faith is the epicenter, the hinge, and the compass of our life. It anchors our beliefs and values, providing a core foundation for our decisions and actions. It acts as a hinge, enabling us to navigate through life's challenges and transitions, offering stability and direction. And it serves as a compass, guiding us morally and spiritually, pointing us towards the truth.

Holding onto faith during difficult times and grief is deeply personal and meaningful. Faith provides a source of strength, comfort, and hope when we are faced with challenges that seem insurmountable. There's no one-size-fits-all approach to coping. Everyone's journey with faith and grief is unique, but for many, faith is a cornerstone that helps navigate through the darkest moments of life.

Faith provides hope, resilience, and belief that there is meaning and purpose even in the midst of pain and loss. It helps us find the courage to keep moving forward and to eventually find peace and healing. So, yes, keeping faith alive during tough times is an immense source of solace and perseverance. Yet, it is not always easy for everyone to keep strong in our faith when struggling with grief and loss. At those times, our faith can become stronger; or it can tremble. No matter what, when grief threatens to overwhelm us, leaning on our faith helps us find meaning and purpose even in the face of loss. **So, do not let grief crack your faith, rather let your faith forge your grief.** Yes, this is not easy to do, particularly by ourselves. We cannot walk through grief

alone: we need to let our faith community help us seeking the solace than only faith in Jesus Christ can bring.



HOPE:

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13)

“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.”
(1 Peter 3:15)

Suffering, difficulties in life, and the unknown are often inexplicable. Hope, founded on Faith in God and the grace of the Holy Spirit, is our anchor throughout the incomprehensible, the ups and downs and the storms of life.

Is it easy to stay strong in Faith and continue hoping when grieving? No, not for everyone! Yet, we should always try, always choose to believe and to hope. Many Saints went through a “dark night of the soul” as St John of the Cross calls it, yet they navigated through it, in hope. Their example is a model for us to follow.

When grieving the loss of a loved one, belief in God and in the concept of resurrection is indeed profoundly comforting. The belief in an afterlife, a continuation of the soul beyond death, provides solace by offering the hope of reunion with loved ones who have passed away. It also provides a sense of meaning and purpose in the face of loss, believing that there is a greater plan, a divine purpose at work, and eternal life. Father Jim Lee, Pastor at St Michael Parish in Olympia, once said during a homely: “.... There is a phrase we will hear in the prayer of committal at the end of Mass that sums up the beauty and meaning of a funeral Mass: Into your hands, Father of mercies, we

commend our brother/sister in the sure and certain hope that, together with all who have died in Christ, he will rise with him on the last day.”

“In the sure and certain hope” that the words of the first reading are true, “the souls of just are in the hands of God, and no torment shall touch them.”

The sure and certain hope as St. Paul wrote, “None of us lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself. For if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord; so then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s. For this is why Christ died and came to life, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.” (Romans, 14:7-8)

We gather in the sure and certain hope that Jesus is present with us – right here and now standing on the shore of our lives. We gather in the sure and certain hope that Jesus is risen from the dead, has conquered the darkness of sin and death and is the dawn of eternal life with God and all the Saints. We gather at funeral masses and at support groups in the sure and certain hope that Jesus has prepared an eternal wedding feast for all those who believe and follow Him. Emptiness: maybe that is how your heart feels right now. Yet with God’s help and our desire to trust in Him, everything changes. From emptiness to abundance. ...”

So, yes, a faith filled hope is necessary to overcome grief and difficulties of life. Believing that Christ accompanies us in every step of our life gives us strength and fuels hope. Particularly, the hope we find in the resurrection is essential to finding solace when grieving the death of a loved one.

Hope in the Resurrection signifies:

- **Victory Over Death:** The resurrection of Christ is central to Christian hope. It signifies victory over death, offering assurance that death is not the end but a passage to eternal life.
- **Reunion with Loved Ones:** The promise of resurrection provides the hope of being reunited with loved ones who have passed away, offering significant comfort during grief.
- **Eternal Life:** The hope of eternal life with Christ brings a perspective that transcends the temporal sufferings and trials of this world. It encourages believers to look forward to an everlasting life free from pain and sorrow.



LOVE:

For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you. (Isaiah 54:10)

Love is the virtue of all virtues. It is the filter through which all virtues, feelings and thoughts should go through. His gifts, starting from the gift of life, are an expression of His love. God's love radiates to us, and therefore we should radiate love to others. Love endures. Grief is an expression of love. The deeper we love, the deeper we grieve.

Love requires trust: Trust in God and trust in those we love. Therefore, sharing our thoughts and feeling with those we trust, regardless of the specific source of their grief, is crucial. While many may indeed join a support group due to the loss of a loved one, grief can stem from various sources, such as the end of a relationship, the loss of a job, or even major life transitions. By welcoming anyone who carries a heavy heart, the group fosters inclusivity and empathy, recognizing that grief takes many forms and can arise from a multitude of experiences.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life,
neither angels nor demons,
neither the present nor the future,
nor any powers, neither height nor depth,
nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us
from the love of God
that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 8:38-39

Grief and emotional struggles are complex and multifaceted, and everyone's journey is unique, just like each person's fingerprint. During the course of the cycle of meetings, participants get to know each other, encouraging each other to pray together and share their stories, emotions, and coping strategies, knowing they are among those who understand and empathize with their pain. This sense of community and understanding can be immensely beneficial for healing and resilience, regardless of the specific circumstances of each person's grief.

By fostering an environment of openness and understanding, the group can become a place where people feel truly heard and supported, regardless of the specific challenges they're facing. This not only validates diverse experiences of grief but also allows for a richer exchange of perspectives and coping strategies among members. Ultimately, it helps build a stronger faith, as well as a sense of community and solidarity among those who are navigating difficult times together.

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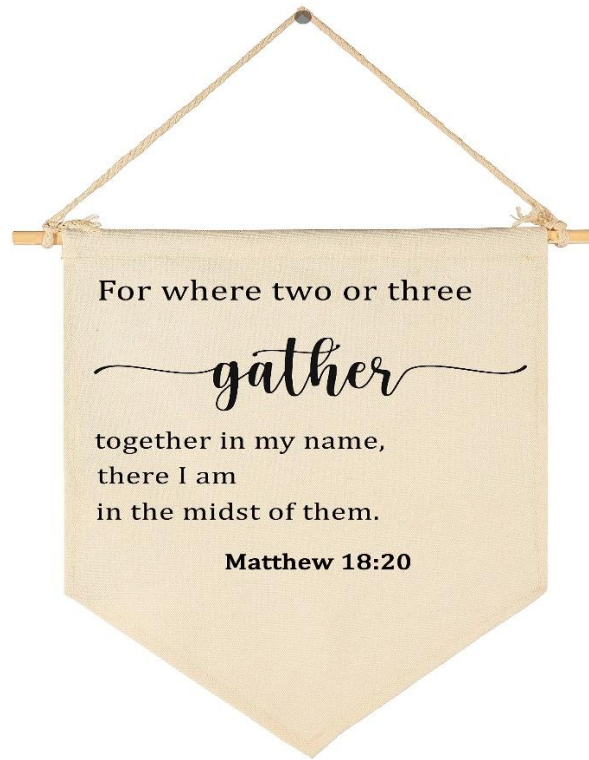
I hope and pray that by participating in this cycle of meetings, you will find the comfort and the peace of heart that only God can provide through His immensely infinite love, and the courage to move forward, trusting that He will lead you in each and every step of your path.



Psalm 18: 1-2

**I will love thee, O LORD, my strength.
The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength,
in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high
tower.**





GROUND RULES

This group meets weekly and cycles of meetings are offered throughout the year and are held once a week, for eight weeks at a time.

Participation is open to anyone, Catholics and non-Catholics, carrying a heavy heart due to any type of loss including—but not exclusively—the loss of a loved one.

Each meeting is designed to help assist and guide you during your own process of carrying a heavy heart. We will spend the bulk of each meeting sharing and listening to each other's stories in complete confidentiality. One of the goals of this grief support group is to create an environment in which the members can freely discuss and explore a wide range of thoughts and feelings. This is a mutual responsibility that we all commit to while keeping each other in prayer.

As a participant in the group, you have a dual responsibility:

1. **To talk about your own experience.** The key to recovery from grief is your ability to talk about the reasons and circumstances of your heavy heart, your feelings of sadness, confusion, loss, abandonment, anger, or whatever your true feelings are. Remember, feelings are neither right nor wrong; they just are!
2. **To listen to others:** each person must listen non-judgmentally, neither attempting to resolve issues nor giving advice. This is not a time for deep or extended discussions; nor is it a forum for other agendas.

To attain our objective, please follow these rules:

1. **Faith Based:** This is a FAITH based support group, not a therapy or counseling group. The intent of this group is **not** counseling or therapy and it is **not** designed to “fix” or resolve issues. It will enable you to share your thoughts, concerns, and feelings in a safe environment knowing that you are loved by God and by each other as connections develop among you.
2. **Confidentiality:** Whatever members share within the group remains confidential. If you share with others outside the group, talk only what you have learned about yourself. Do not refer to people’s names or identifying characteristics outside the group.
3. **Closed Group:** Membership for this group will stay the same throughout the eight weeks to create continuity and allow members a chance to build trust and connection with each other. Therefore, no new members will join the group after the third meeting.
4. **Time:** Be conscious of the amount of time you are using during meetings to share and actively work on the concerns that brought you to the group,

along with any new concerns of yours that may arise while you are a member.

5. **Sharing:** You may choose to share or at times remain silent. Simply say “pass” if you do not feel like sharing.

6. **Respect:** Everyone grieves in their own unique way and the context for each person’s loss is different. It is important to respect the other members’ rights to their own feelings and thoughts as they navigate grief. Please respect that you may be in a different place in your grief journey than other members of the group. Individuals respond to loss and change in different ways and at different times.

7. **Confrontation:** Confrontation or putting someone on the spot is discouraged. This is a support group not a therapy group. All members make their own decisions about what to do with their individual experiences in the group.

8. **Cross talk:** Cross talk while another group member is sharing is discouraged. This means while someone is sharing, you do not offer comments or feedback while they are speaking. Actively listening without interrupting the one who is sharing is the most compassionate and healing response we can offer.

9. **Advice:** Avoid giving unsolicited advice, feedback, or taking on the responsibility to “fix” another person’s situation unless personally asked.

10. **Shared Space:** The facilitator will aim to create a shared space allowing each of you time to express yourselves.

11. **Diversity:** While there are common elements of grief, no two people are the same and no particular strategy will work for everyone all the time. Take what works for you, and let go of what does not serve you. Similarly, offer what works for you knowing it may not work for others.

12. **Faith Journey:** Be aware that every participant is on a unique faith journey, whether in terms of their religious denomination or the stage they are at in their relationship with God.

13. **Acceptance:** Cultivate an attitude of acceptance (non-judgmental acceptance) for yourself and others.

14. **Self-Care:** Allow yourself the time to grieve at your own pace and take care of yourself between meetings.

15. **Tears:** Tears are a normal expression of grief: do not repress them! Groups also enjoy times of joy and laughter.

16. **Punctuality:** Plan your arrival so we can start and end on time.

17. **Attendance:** Make every effort to attend each session and if you must miss a session, or decide not to continue, let the facilitator know.

18. **Withdraw:** If you feel that this group doesn't meet your needs and wish to stop attending, please inform the group leader. The other participants have shared personal information with you and deserve to know if someone decides to leave.

19. **Guidelines:** Do NOT read the entire book at once; please read only the sections assigned to you.

20. **Donation:** A free-will, one-time donation of \$30 is suggested, but not required, to cover the cost of materials.

*Some of the content from these guidelines came from:

Information for Group Clients, by Robert A. Berley, Ph.D., C.G.P., as well as *Group Rules* from the Edina Coalition for Grief Support.

Understanding Your Grief Support Group Guide, by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

How to Facilitate a Grief Group, by Heart House Hospice, Mississauga, Ontario <https://hearthousehospice.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/RunningAGriefGroupToolkit.pdf>

Adjustment

These meetings are a process designed not to eliminate or negate the pain or confusion of grief, but to guide the process of mourning and transform the grief into an intentional, peaceful, acceptance of a new, possibly even joyful, way of life.

Reflect on these points and questions:

1. The first meeting is always the hardest one because you do not know the other participants and you get to hear/share their burden and grief. By the second and third meetings, you start feeling the bonding among group members. You will also realize that you are here to seek support, but your presence is also supporting the other participants.
2. What are your expectations at the end of this cycle of meetings? Please take time to think about it and share if you wish. We will ask this question again at the end of the cycle of meetings to check if your expectations were fulfilled.
3. Our conversations will be geared to open up your heart and understand and learn to deal with stumbling blocks so that you can better navigate grief with the guidance of faith.
4. Feel free to empty your heart of everything that makes it heavy and causes you grief no matter how long ago it happened.



Sharing Your Story

Each person's losses are unique, and each person's grief is different. However, almost everyone has one thing in common: TEARS.

Tears have the uncanny ability to express both extreme sorrow and intense joy. Hopefully our tears will help us bridge that gap between the sorrow surrounding our loss and the hope of a renewed sense of joy.

It also must be noted that not everyone weeps easily; some do not weep at all except during the initial stages of their grief process. We will learn that there are many ways to grieve, but for most people, the most important one is telling your story over and over until there is no urgent need to tell it again.



We are using the imagery of “gathering” or “harvesting” our tears as opposed to “wasting” or “ignoring” all of them. The underlying thesis is that the tears, as well as grief itself, are positive and helpful factors in our recovery. If we can imagine our tears as raindrops watering the scorched earth of sorrow and pain, we can see them nurturing and nourishing recovery and growth.

Because of that, we want to view them positively as a means of transforming our pain into peace.

**If the key to healing is talking,
the keystone is a rock-solid foundation of confidentiality.
It must be understood by everyone
that nothing leaves the room
which assures all of us that
our privacy will be respected.**



Our Lady of La Salette, pray for us.

We can use the acronym for **TEARS** as a reminder of the role our tears play:

Trust that tears are good for you.

Expect them. Tears are unpredictable and often uncontrollable.


Allow your tears to flow freely.

Remember fondly with your tears.

Share your tears with the whole world by transforming them.

This coming week:

- **Write down your expectations for your time with this group.**
 - **Read Grief 101 (distributed by facilitator)**
 - **Fill the Self Care form and date it (appendix A)**
 - **Do not be hard on yourself.**
- **Do a “little” something good for yourself every day of the week.**



Pope Francis highlights that the world today has lost the capacity to “cry with the heart.” He continues: ““We must not be ashamed of crying, on the contrary, the saints teach us that tears are a gift, sometimes a grace, a sign of repentance, a liberation of the heart.” “Mary teaches us not to be ashamed of tears.” Crying means “opening up to the good Father and also to our brothers.” It means “allowing ourselves to be moved by the wounds of those we meet along our way; knowing how to share, to welcome, and to rejoice with those who rejoice and to cry with those who cry.” However, he noted society in our time has lost this capacity of crying “well,” that is “with the heart” as Mary did, or as St. Peter did when he repented. This is why Pope Francis said to the members of the Pastoral Community of Our Lady of the Tears - we should ask God to grant us “the grace of crying.”



**Every day I need you, Lord, but today especially,
I need some extra strength to face whatever is to come.**

**This day, more than any other day,
I need to feel you near me to strengthen my
Courage and to overcome any fear.**

By myself I cannot meet the challenge of the hour.

**We are frail human creatures and we need a Higher Power to sustain us in
all that life may bring.**

And so, dear Lord, hold my trembling hand.

Be with me, Lord, this day and stretch out your powerful arm to help me.

May your love be upon me as I place all my hope in you. Amen.

Pope Saint John XXIII.

Session One

ACQUAINTED WITH GRIEF

Introductions

Prayer: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Gracious God, Comforter of those who mourn, we thank you and praise you for all the goodness in our lives. Send Your Holy Spirit to be with us as we seek your healing, as we share our own painful stories, and as we make new friends in this group. Thank you for the promise of everlasting life through the suffering, death, and resurrection of your own beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Redeemer, now and forever. Amen.

Scripture: I Corinthians 13: 4-8

Love is patient; love is kind. Love is not jealous, it does not put-on airs, it is not snobbish. Love is never rude, it is not self-seeking; it is not prone to anger, neither does it brood over injuries. Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices with the truth. There is no limit to love's forbearance, to its truth, its hope, its power to endure. Love never fails.

Grief, Bereavement and Mourning

Grief: internal feelings and emotional response to external events. It is typically described as the process by which we adapt to a loss.

Bereavement: (to be torn apart) the acknowledgment of the reality of facts

Mourning: the public expression of internal feelings

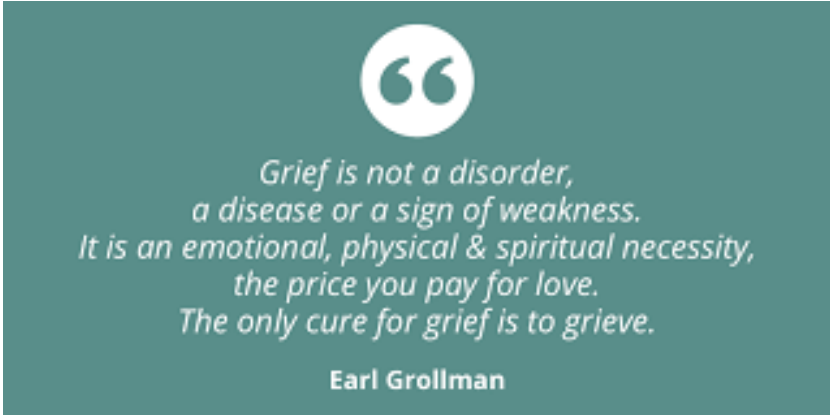
"**Grief** is the *protest* of our body, mind and spirit to the loss we have experienced, the severity of which will be determined by the value that we have placed upon our attachment. There is one loss, however, which causes the most severe of life's *protests*: the death of one whom we have loved. It is in the irreversibility of that final loss that the protest of grief causes the greatest separation pain"...."In grief, a God who created life comes to our aid again, not to spare us from the effects of grief and the pain of separation that are absolutely necessary but to bring us to another spiritual level through a process which we call mourning"...."

"... **Mourning** is the prerequisite for healing. In fact, mourning itself is actually the beginning of a critical journey where grief is acknowledged, felt, understood and expressed.

To mourn is to feel the loss at every level of our existence. Is it frightening?

Yes, but mourning means that we are fully alive"

(Dr. Patrick M. Del Zoppo, *Mourning: The Journey from Grief to Healing*)



Grief as a Form of Protest

Grief is part of life, and it covers a broad range of experiences: death or illness, the loss of a friendship or relationship, divorce, moving, switching jobs, losing your faith, and more.

Our minds, bodies, and spirits truly *protest* a loss of something or someone we love when we experience grief. It marks the end or change in a familiar pattern of behavior; we refuse to let go. Grieving is a process that requires acknowledging our feelings.

Grief is...

- ... a protest to loss
- ... a normal response to loss
- ... a natural part of life
- ...an individual journey
- ...a process

- ... multi-faceted
- ... painful
- ... exhausting
- ... temporary
- ... yours alone
- ... “all about you”

Add Your Own...

Our hearts rip in half; our minds go crazy; and our spirits tumble into a whirlwind of confusion. Sometimes we give up, totally exhausted and confused by our inability to get a grip on life again, sometimes we pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and keep going. In extreme cases, this exhaustion can result in death unless intervention occurs.

Grief doesn't wait. "Protest" doesn't wait. It is here and it needs to be dealt with one way or another. You cannot go around grief, or under grief, or over it. The only way to go through grief is to go *through* grief.

Grief is a protest which must be recognized, faced, experienced, overcome, and resolved. The process of facing this protest is called grieving or mourning. Because grief is so painful, it is often viewed as something that is only negative. In actuality, grief is a very positive and psychologically healthy state even with the pain. When grief is confronted in a healthy way, it can allow us to resolve many issues and is part of what makes us human.

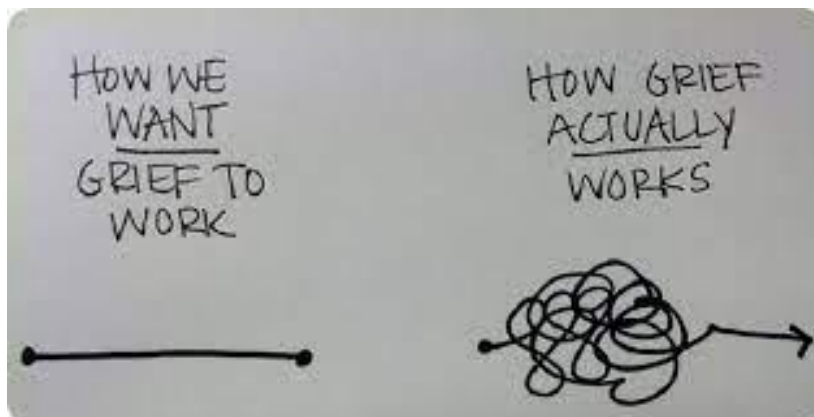
It is necessary to immerse ourselves in the pain of grief to heal from it no matter what our grieving pattern is. It is like an infection which must be lanced; severe pain precedes the healing and must exist in order to recognize the need for healing.

Some experts in the field use the analogy that grief is like a third-degree burn...extremely painful, it takes a long time to heal. When a burn occurs, we must clean it and take care of it to avoid infection, disease and minimize the inevitable scarring.

Grief is not...

- ...a choice you make...
- ...an option...
- ...a disease ...
- ...an emotion...
- ...something you “just get over” ...
- ... linear...
- ... “healed by time” ...

Add your own



Your Story

1. What would you like the group to know about you? If you wish, please share what you believe is important for us to know about you, joyful and sorrowful.

2. How did you and your family grieve when you were growing up?

3. Tell us what your life is like now. How would you describe grief with an image?

“Grief is not linear. It’s not a slow progression forward toward healing, it’s a zigzag, a terrible back-and-forth from devastated to okay until finally there are more okay patches and fewer devastated ones.”

— Lisa Unger, [Beautiful Lies](#)

Ponderings...

What does the Church say about death? “The Christian meaning of death is revealed in the light of the *Paschal Mystery* of the death and resurrection of Christ in whom resides our only hope. The Christian who dies in Christ Jesus is ‘away from the body and at home with the Lord.’ (2 Cor 5:8) *Catechism of the Catholic Church (cited hereafter as CCC) #1681.*

Supportive Scripture: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (*John 11:26*).

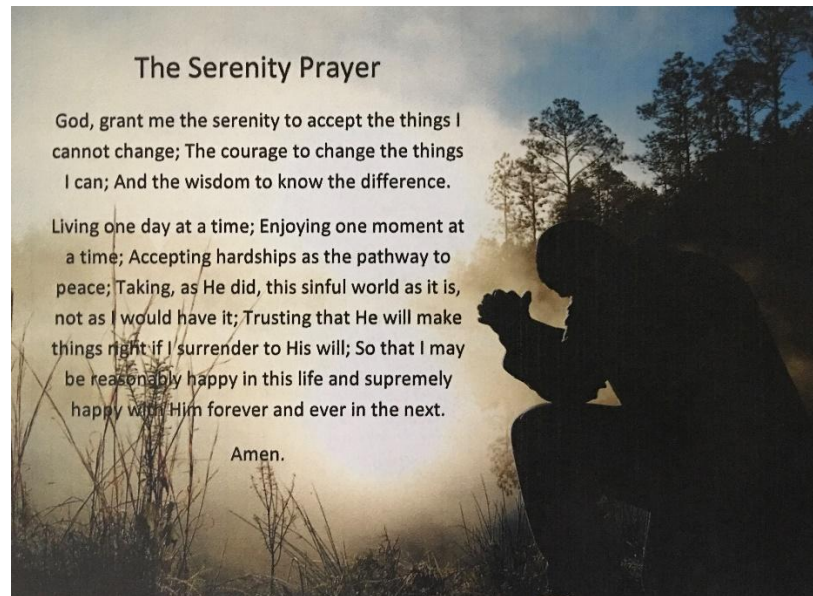
Practical Suggestions:

1. Make a list of things that ***absolutely must be done*** and then ask as many people as possible to help you do them now.
2. Do not make major decisions now, unless needed.

Prayerful Suggestion:

1. Take quiet time for prayer, meditation, and reflection. If you feel you cannot pray, perhaps prayerful music will help you relax with God.

Homework: Do something good for yourself this coming week and share it with the group!



Serenity Prayer is a prayer attributed to the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971) in 1943. However, Winnifred Crane Wygal wrote an earlier version in 1933



A Word about Journaling

One of the greatest values of a journal is to be able to look back at it after a period of time to see what you had written in the early days of grief. Sometimes one finds the only words they were able to write were “Angry! Angry! Angry!” or something similar. Do not be concerned about such sentiments, spelling, or grammar, just jot down whatever you are feeling, thinking, and doing.

“Writing in a journal is a good way to discover and articulate what you are going through...Journal keeping can also be a form of prayer...Journaling allows you to get an overall picture of yourself, your rhythms, your direction, and your insights into the specific events of your daily existence and their accompanying emotions. Articulating this story of what has happened to you ... is a vital tool in moving yourself to the point where you can begin to heal.”

Sr. Mauryeen O’Brien, *The New Day Journal from Grief to Healing*. Used with permission Copyright ACTA Publications (800) 397-2282, www.actapublications.com

Session Two

Carrying a Heavy Heart



Prayer: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Heavenly Father, we thank you and praise you for creating each one of us so differently. Our emotions, minds, behaviors, thoughts, and yearnings are each so unique. Help us to realize the differences in the way that we grieve together. Be with us as we continue on our journey of mourning. Give us the strength and courage to face our losses, to work through our grief, and someday find peace and happiness once again. All of this we pray in Jesus' Most Holy Name. Amen.

Scripture:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light
(Matthew 11:28-30) NIV

The emotions and feelings that grief brings into your heart do not disappear by avoidance. In fact, they grow roots and fuel negative emotions and habits.

Do not be afraid to genuinely respond to those who are asking how you are feeling. After a while, when you feel like you have talked to everyone who asks you (this is called “syndicating our sorrows”), seek a few very close friends with whom you can talk over your thoughts and feelings regularly.

Just verbalizing a thought or feeling out loud helps to refrain from negative and destructive emotions building up. Hearing your own self sharing your thoughts and the response of those with whom you share will also help you have a more objective and realistic understanding of where you stand in your journey.



LET ME GRIEVE THE WAY I NEED TO.
I don't need to be rushed.
I DON'T NEED
TO MEET EXPECTATIONS
PUT ON ME BY OTHERS.
I NEED TO DO THIS MY WAY.
THIS IS MY JOURNEY.

TRUE, YET....

...**TALK** ABOUT YOUR STORY!

Grieving is like walking in a dark tunnel.
Remember that you are seeking the light!
*Thinking about what you will not do again is called “counting your losses.”
The antidote is “counting your blessings,”
and at this point of transition in the grief process,
it is extremely important that you do both.*

The Value of Talking

1. Talking about our sorrow helps release tension and dissolve the pain of the grief experience. Each time we talk about a painful experience, our pain is eased just a little more.
2. Talking has therapeutic value. First, it is cathartic. Through verbalization, our feelings of loss, loneliness, guilt, anger, and hostility are brought to the surface of our consciousness where we can deal with them.
3. Talking provides us with insight, which enables us to see more clearly our real feelings and problems.
4. Finally, the talking process establishes a wholesome relationship with the person in whom we confide.

(Your Healing Journey Through Grief, Stanley Cornils)

What other values do you see in talking?

Do you find it difficult to talk about your grief? If so, why?



Blessed are those who
mourn, for they shall be
comforted
(Mathew 5:4)

Grieving requires Choice

We do not choose our grief; however, we have choices within grief and we can decide how to cope. We can choose to:

- ✓ Do nothing and stop trying to cope to the point of not caring for our own health—eating poorly, failing to exercise, alcohol abuse, missing medication and more (Dr. Colin Murray Parkes labeled this “Broken Heart Syndrome.”)
- ✓ Simply freeze in time, staying in a phase of conservation and withdrawal, in fear and with a wrong sense of guilt of forgetting the past.
- ✓ Choose to move on, to renew and to live.

The Scriptures stress and repeat that God will give us strength to go through hardships and He will shield us from what we are not able to endure. Choosing to move on is very difficult and it is a path that cannot be taken without faith in Him.



I love you, O LORD, my strength.
The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my
deliverer,
my God, my rock in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my
stronghold.
I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be
praised,
so I shall be saved from my enemies.
(Psalm 18:1-3)

Your Story

1. Share what is hardest to face and to deal with? What are your most common feelings? What do you do to embrace and/or manage them?

2. How would you describe your relationship with God?

3. If you lost a loved one, what qualities of your relationship with your beloved do you find also in your relationship with God?

Ponderings...

What does the Church say about the unity of love?

“One cannot honor another person without blessing God his Creator. One cannot adore God without loving all men, his creatures. The Decalogue brings man’s religious and social life into unity” (CCC #2609).

Supportive Scriptures: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remains in my love” (NIV, John 15:9).

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

Practical Suggestions, if you lost a loved one:

Think of other people who also feel grief over the same loss you are suffering. Reach out to them. Ask them what their most difficult and most joyous memories are.

In any circumstance:

Unless needed, do not make major decisions, such as selling your house or moving, for at least a year. **Do** consider your options, plan ahead and seek advice.

Prayerful Suggestion:

At the back of this workbook, you will find a “Gratitude List” (page 138) Write down five things you are grateful for that happened today. They don’t have to be grandiose events! Simple and little “things” that brought joy to your heart. Try to add to the list daily. Make it a daily routine!

Food for Thought:

“Often the test of courage is not to die but to live.” (Alfieri)

“The crosses which we make for ourselves by a restless anxiety as to the future are not crosses which come from God.” (Anon)

Session Three
SUFFERING AND HOPE

God of Life,

**There are days when the burdens we carry chafe our
shoulders and wear us down,
when the road seems dreary and endless,
the skies gray and threatening,
when our lives have no music in them,
and our hearts are lonely,
and our souls have lost their courage.**

**Flood the path with light, we beseech thee, Lord.
Turn our eyes to where the Heavens are full of promise.**

Amen

(St. Augustine, father and Doctor of the Church, 354-430)





Universal Suffering

Suffering and grief are part of the human experience. No matter where we go, people go through suffering for many different reasons—death, injury, illness, abuse, bankruptcy, crime, loss of job, etc. regardless of the wealth, poverty, or education of the community.

Even though difficult times and death are normal, it does not feel normal when it happens to us, to our family, or to our loved ones. Hardships and death are part of life yet they take life out of us. Time stops as we freeze in numbness or disbelief at the loss, regardless of whether or not it was expected, especially when it comes to the death of a loved one, because death is so final.

Have you ever asked yourself the following questions? If so, what has been your answer?

How do you make sense of the crosses you bear?

Have you ever felt those times when the cross you're carrying seems heavier than it should be? Much heavier than you can bear?

Have you compared your cross to the ones of other people?

If God is all-powerful and all-good, why do bad things happen?

Do you seek a response to these questions through Faith?

Very common questions include:

“Why did God make this happen to me?”

“Why did God take my husband/wife/parent/child from me?”

“Why did God cause the flood/hurricane/earthquake?”

Usually, these questions are followed by faulty conclusions:

“I was not a good enough person/husband/wife/parent/friend....”

“God is angry with me.”

Or the worst possible conclusion: “It’s God’s will!”

If you struggle with this question, this explanation may help:

So often we tend to blame God for somber events, especially when things do not go our way. Don’t think of God having anything at all to do with these tragedies.



Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?

Bad things happen because of...

1. Decisions we make ourselves. For instance, if we chose to smoke cigarettes and are diagnosed with cancer 40 years later, don’t blame it on God. This is a consequence of a decision that we made.
2. Decisions which other people make which we have no control over. If a person decides to drive after drinking, there may be terrible consequences.
3. The results of natural processes. For instance, the aging process, natural disasters, a genetic tendency to inherit certain diseases.
4. Mystery that we cannot comprehend.



Most tragedies happen for at least one of the four reasons listed below. When none of the first three reasons apply, we must simply accept the fact that sometimes we can find no logic and no rational explanation—just mystery. This is when we must “let go and let God.”


When grieving the loss of a loved one, the fourth category, mystery, includes the fact that as Christians, we believe that death for believers is the *ultimate* healing. When he or she enters Paradise, all tears are wiped from their eyes, they see God face to face, and common questions are answered, questions which we never find adequate answers for in this lifetime.

**Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. ([Proverbs 3:5](#))**

The mystery of God and the mystery of human suffering are braided together and the question of “Why suffering exists?” finds its answer in Christ’s transformation through love. This is why it is so important to hold on to our faith and to do so with a humble heart.

Suffering is not optional. The only way to overcome it is with the help of God. Reading Sacred Scriptures and writings from the Saints is very helpful in answering the questions on suffering and God’s presence in the midst of pain.

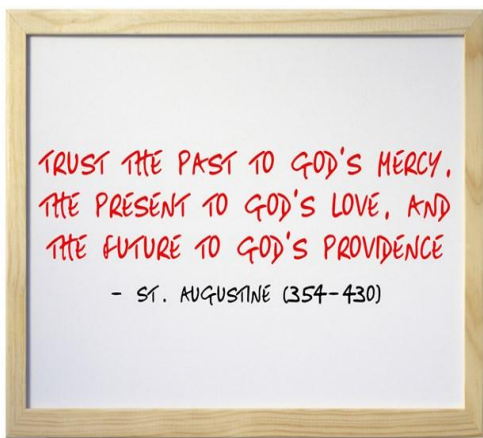
In good and bad,
we always need to
rely on God:
“For
from Him
and
through Him
and
for Him
are all things”
(Rom 11:36, NIV)



The Bible offers constant reinforcement of the importance of holding on to our faith when suffering. Here are some passages:

- ✓ “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23).
- ✓ *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life”* (Jn 3:16).
- ✓ “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).
- ✓ *“Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life”* (Rev. 2:10).
- ✓ “No temptation—has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it..” (1 Cor. 10:13, NIV)

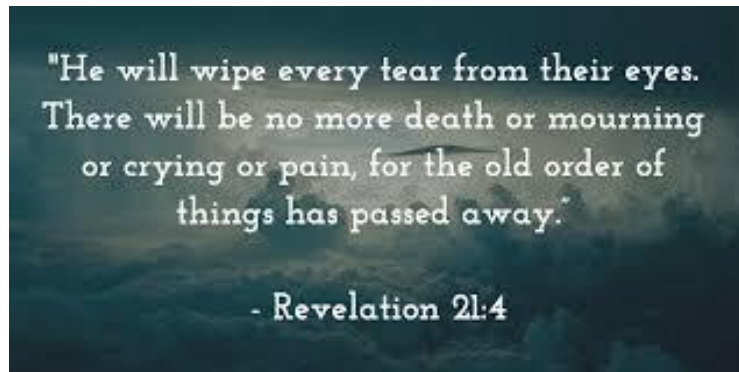
All Things Work Together for Good



Find comfort in the words of a retired pastor who said “I have suffered many losses during my life—losing my parents in an automobile accident when I was in seminary, losing a five-year-old nephew to leukemia, and my youngest sister to breast cancer. I used to spend many hours wondering why God would allow these tragedies. I knew that he did not cause them, but why did he permit

them to happen? These were all very good people who had long lives ahead

of them. I finally decided that, like it or not, as a man of faith, I must put my trust in God. I *choose* to believe that whatever has happened, whatever will happen, has God's permission and blessing. This is the only way I can make sense of the Scripture verse: 'In all things God works for the good of those who love him'" (Rom. 8:28).



Near Misses: Why me?

The question "Where was God when I needed him?" is a common one we ask ourselves when facing challenges. Instead of complaining that God could have prevented sad events, ask if God hadn't been true to his promise of sending his angels to keep guard over all of us for many, many years. How many near misses were there that we don't even know about? How many car accidents were prevented by the timing of a few seconds? How many illnesses or accidents were nipped in the bud?

Are you aware of it?

Look back at your own life: God continuously protects you. Most of the times we are not even aware of what God and our Guardian Angel shields us from. God is in control.

Are you aware of it?

This is my stance today.
In spite of my questions
and doubts,
I *choose* to be
a person of faith,
a person of hope.
I *choose* to believe...
and I *choose* to
acknowledge the
power and strength of
Christ operating within
us as we rebuild our
lives.

Turning Point

Even with anger, confusion, disappointment, and profound sadness (all of which Mary probably felt also), we have two choices:

1. We could let it burn and churn within ourselves, futilely searching for answers.

or

2. We could try to adjust to the present situation and move forward with the help of God.

Christian Hope

Hope has always been a necessary element for growth, stability, healing, recovery, and restoration. Dr. Del Zoppo quotes Elie Wiesel in his book *Mourning: A Journey from Grief to Healing*: “Hope is not given to us to begin; that privilege is God’s alone. But it is given to us to *begin again*—and we do every time we choose to defy death and side with the living.”

The most evocative description of faith in the New Testament is found in Hebrews 11:1, where faith is heralded as the “assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Jesus said that he came to give us a full and abundant life. Life cannot be abundant or lived to the fullest if it lacks the element of hope. The joy we know and savor would not be experienced as fully if it were not contrasted with our sadness, tears and doubts.

We have come to a point in our lives where we can look back and see that the faith, the experience, and the knowledge that we have gained over a lifetime is for a specific purpose, which continues to unfold. This, the Paschal mystery, the cycle of dying and rising in our own lives, is coming full circle. Now we are beginning to understand the rhythms of the “whys and whats” of the various pathways our life journeys have included, all of which underline the power of hope.

“When Bad Things Happen to Good People”

In 1981, Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote a book entitled *When Bad Things*

Reasons People Give for Suffering in Rabbi Kushner’s book, all of which he rejects.

1. Suffering comes as a punishment for our sins.
2. Suffering is for some greater, undefined purpose.
3. Suffering cures us of our faults and makes up better people.
4. Maybe it is a test.
5. It will free us and lead us to a better place.

Happen to Good People as a response to the death of his 14-year-old son. In the book, he describes reasons people give for suffering and common ways that people attempt to make sense of their losses when they are grieving, all of which he rejects.

Rabbi Kushner’s Conclusions

1. “God does not cause our misfortunes. Some are caused by bad luck, some are caused by bad people, and some are simply an inevitable consequence of our being human and being mortal, living in a world of inflexible natural laws.”
2. “We will simply have to learn to live with it, sustained and comforted by the knowledge that the earthquake and the accident, the murder and the robbery, are not the will of God, but represent that aspect of reality which stand independent of His will, and which angers and saddens God even as it angers and saddens us.”

What Does the Church Say About Faith and Suffering?

1. Perseverance in Faith: “To live, grow and persevere in the faith until the end we must nourish it with the word of God; we must beg the Lord to increase our faith (Cf. *Mk* 9:24, *Lk* 17:5; 22:32) (CCC #162).
2. “...Even though enlightened by him in whom it believes, faith is often lived in darkness and can be put to the test. The world we live in often seems very far from the one promised us by faith. Our experiences of evil and suffering, injustice, and death, seem to contradict the Good News; they can shake our faith and become a temptation against it.” (CCC 164).
3. “It is then we must turn to the *witnesses of faith*...Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. (*Heb. 12: 1-2*)” (CCC #165).



***“Jesus did not come to explain away suffering, or to remove it.
He came to fill it with His presence.”***

***Paul Claudel
French dramatist, poet and diplomat***

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. "Why did God make this happen to me?": how frequently do you ask yourself this question when something good happens? Can you share a time?

2. Reflect upon times in our life when "good" came from challenging situations

3. How are you dealing with understanding the reason for your cross?

4. Reflect on times in the past when you felt God intervened in protecting or saving your life and/or a loved one's life.

5. Do you have hope? Please explain by giving examples and sharing when and why you do or don't have hope.

Ponderings...

What does the Church say?

Hope is defined as “the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit” (CCC #1817).

“The virtue of hope responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man; it takes up the hopes that inspire men’s activities and purifies them so as to order them to the Kingdom of heaven; it keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude” (CCC #1818).

Scripture:

2 Corinthians 12:8-9—“Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it (the thorn in my flesh) away from me. But he said to me ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’”

Colossians 1:24—“Even now I find my joy in the suffering I endure for you. In my own flesh I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, the church.”

Food for Thought:

“God does not want us to live in darkness. In the 23rd Psalm, we read, ‘I walk through the valley of death...’; it does not say that we stay there!” ...*Valli Leone, an Isaiah lay presenter.*

Practical Suggestions:

1. Set aside your search for answers for a while. They can be searing and burning up your energy, all of which you need now.
2. If you cannot set these aside now and have questions concerning the meaning of events which are draining you of energy or distracting you from your “grief-work,” make an appointment with a priest or spiritual director.

3. If you are having a faith crisis, many grief therapists suggest that you set aside, for the moment, any questions concerning your faith until you have worked through some of your other grief issues.

Prayerful Suggestions:

1. Pray! Let God know how you feel.
2. Thank God for the unknown protection you have received.
3. Write down five more things that you are grateful for on your gratitude list.

Reflection for Session IV: *“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope. But do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear...”* St Peter, 3:15

Reflect on your hopes: Are you able to give an explanation for the hope that is within you, the hope that springs from faith?



There is an appointed time for everything,
and a time for every affair under the heavens.
A time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to uproot the plant.
A time to hurt, and a time to heal;
a time to tear down, and a time to build.
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance.
A time to scatter stones, and a time to gather them;
a time to embrace, and a time to be far from embraces.
A time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away.
A time to rend, and a time to sew;
a time to be silent, and a time to speak.
A time to love, and a time to hate;
a time of war, and a time of peace.
God has made everything appropriate to its time.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8,11a

Session Four

BROKENNESS



Prayer: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Mary, Undoer of Knots, pray for me. Mother, Undoer of Knots, generous and compassionate, I come to You today to once again entrust this knot [Mention your request here] in my life to you and to ask the divine wisdom to undo, under the light of the Holy Spirit, the tangles and hardships of my life.

Scripture:

“We are afflicted in every way possible, but we are not crushed;

full of doubts, we never despair.

We are persecuted but never abandoned; we are struck down but never destroyed.”

II Corinthians 4: 8-9

“Broken things are precious.

We eat broken bread because we share in the death of our Lord and his broken life.

Broken flowers give perfume.

Broken incense is used in adoration.

A broken ship saved Paul and many other passengers on the way to Rome.

Sometimes the only way the good Lord can get into some hearts

is to break them.”

- Fulton Sheen

STRESS, CRISIS, TRAUMA

Ground Zero

Our reactions to traumatic events are often similar to the ways in which we react to the death of our loved ones. For instance, what was your first reaction to hearing or seeing on television the events of the terrorist attacks on September 11th? Many people were numb with disbelief. Yet, reactions to grief vary. There are different scales to define the stages of grief (see appendix C)

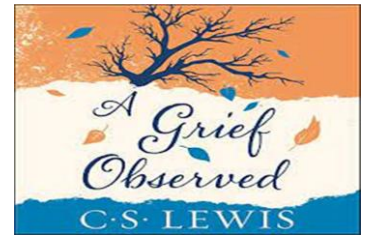
**Thinking that you are going crazy
is NORMAL!!!**

When the events of September 11th occurred, all we could see were the ruins and the rubble of Ground Zero, the remains of the trauma, and at this early stage of grief after losing a loved one...that is all we can see...the ruins and the rubble.

When the reason of our grief is caused by the loss of a loved one, even if the death of your loved one was expected after a long illness or if your loved one was quite elderly and had lived a long life, there is still a sense of shock. Death feels so final!

Many times, the terms stress, trauma, and crisis are confused. These terms describe the events and the responses, and it is important to understand their similarities and differences.

- Stress happens when we are overwhelmed and we are stretching our own abilities. However, it is



“No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing.

At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be about me. I dread the moments when the house is empty. If only they would talk to one another and not to me”

also true that the psychological literature talks about what is called "eustress," which is known as good stress-stress that stretches us but does not overwhelm us. So, when we talk about the stress of grief, it might overwhelm us at times but not always. In fact, overall, the process of mourning can be a positive stress experience IF done with good support, education, and faith, which is what you are doing.

- Crisis happens in circumstances that disrupt our ability to stay balanced.
- Trauma happens when we experience events that cause us to feel afraid, overwhelmed, out of control, and broken.

Grief can be caused by and causes any if not all of these responses to a difficult event.

The following article from the US Department of Veteran affairs titled "Grief: Different Reactions and Timelines in the Aftermath of Loss" concentrates on the loss of a loved one but also fits any other reason of grief:

"After loss, there is no specific way of grieving that is right or wrong, and there is not a 'normal' length of time to grieve. While everyone experiences grief differently, there are many common grief reactions:

- **Physiologically:** grief may disrupt sleep patterns, cause changes in stress hormones and health, and lead to physical symptoms such as weakness, trouble breathing, restlessness and immune system changes.
- **Emotionally:** strong feelings of sadness, loneliness, fear, anxiety or resentment and anger can occur. Some people who are in mourning may feel a sense of guilt when they start to re-engage in activities and relationships as if they are somehow betraying the person who died.
- **Mentally:** the bereaved person may have trouble accepting the loss, difficulty concentrating and making decisions, changes to their sense of identity, or the belief that their future is disrupted. They may sometimes avoid thinking about the loss while at other times they may be unable to

stop thinking about it. They may find themselves making special efforts to include the person's memory in their life. They may fear forgetting the person who died or fear losing fond memories of their time with that person.

- **Socially:** the bereaved person may experience loneliness, boredom, social withdrawal, lack of confidence, emotional sensitivity (or feeling "overemotional"), self-consciousness, as well as difficulties developing new relationships.

While these reactions are common after the loss of someone close, the extent to which they occur depends on many factors. The nature of the relationship with the deceased, the grieving person's personality style, and typical coping strategies and the environment in which the person works or lives can all play a role.

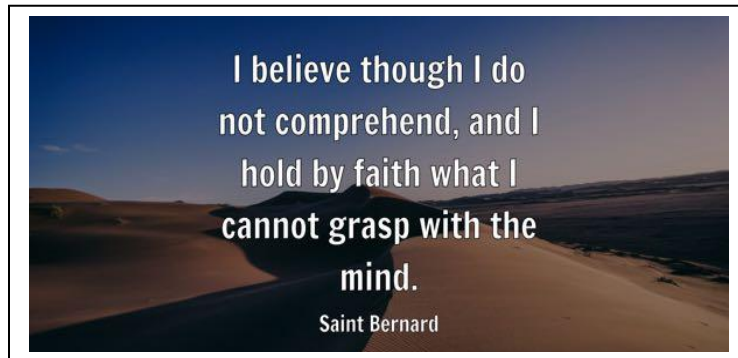
Some people do not appear to need to grieve as deeply as others even for those they most love.

In addition, the bereaved can sometimes feel as much relief as sorrow especially when the person who died had been suffering or in pain.

Not only do we ache all over with physical responses to this "protest" to our loss, but we are convinced we are surely losing our mind. We are often confused or disoriented; we forget everything. We think to ourselves that insanity becomes more and more of a possibility. We cannot remember anything; we cannot concentrate longer than a few minutes.

A flood of various feelings and thoughts rage within us, and we may have some serious issues with our faith. The most important thing to remember about any of these symptoms is that they are normal and eventually will go away, IF we choose to face, admit, and work on them.

Please rate yourself on the "Reactions to Grief" list of symptoms found on the next page so that you will be able to refer to it in six months and a year from now to see how you are progressing in your recovery from your loss (date your scores!).



REACTIONS TO GRIEF

If you have experienced any of these symptoms, please rate the degree of severity at the present time (in the past two weeks). If any symptoms persist intensely, be sure to consult your personal physician. Save this workbook and rate these symptoms again after six months and a year from now.

Scale: 1 = Slight

2 = Moderate

3 = Intense

(Date: _____)

(Date: _____)

(Date: _____)

Now

6 Months

1 Year

Physical Reactions to Grief:

1. Fatigue/exhaustion	_____	_____	_____
2. Sleep disturbance	_____	_____	_____
3. Underactivity/over activity	_____	_____	_____
4. Change in appetite	_____	_____	_____
5. Digestive Problems	_____	_____	_____
6. Nightmares	_____	_____	_____
7. Muscle tremors/twitches	_____	_____	_____
8. Startle reactions	_____	_____	_____
9. Headaches	_____	_____	_____
10. Dizziness	_____	_____	_____
11. Muscle aches	_____	_____	_____
12. Vomiting	_____	_____	_____
13. Rapid heartbeat	_____	_____	_____

14. Deep sighing	_____	_____	_____
15. Tearfulness	_____	_____	_____
16. Weight gain/loss	_____	_____	_____
17. High blood pressure	_____	_____	_____
18. Lowered immunity	_____	_____	_____
19. Shaky voice	_____	_____	_____
20. Other	_____	_____	_____

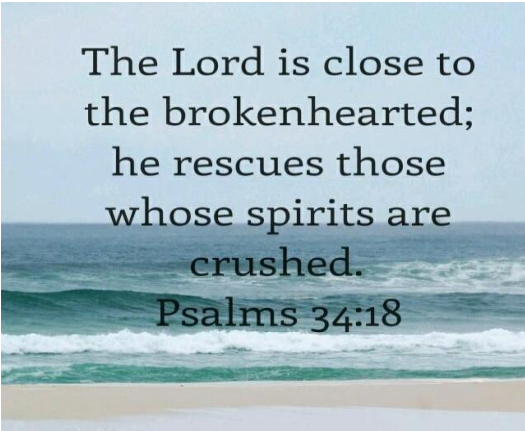
Scale: 1 = Slight 2 = Moderate 3 = Intense

	Now	6 Months	1 Year
Cognitive Reactions:			
1. Difficulty concentrating	_____	_____	_____
2. Difficulty solving problems	_____	_____	_____
3. Flashbacks of the loss	_____	_____	_____
4. Difficulty in making decisions	_____	_____	_____
5. Memory disturbance	_____	_____	_____
6. Worrying	_____	_____	_____
7. Isolation/withdrawal	_____	_____	_____
8. Preoccupation with the loss	_____	_____	_____
9. Lowered attention span	_____	_____	_____
10. Slower thinking	_____	_____	_____
11. Naming familiar objects/people	_____	_____	_____
12. Language errors	_____	_____	_____
13. Forgetfulness	_____	_____	_____
14. Loss of creativity, productivity	_____	_____	_____
15. Mental blocks	_____	_____	_____
16. Preoccupation with past	_____	_____	_____
17. Thoughts of death or suicide	_____	_____	_____
18. Other	_____	_____	_____

Scale: 1 = Slight	2 = Moderate	3 = Intense	
	Now	6 Months	1 Year
Emotional Reactions:			
1. Guilt	_____	_____	_____
2. Feelings of helplessness	_____	_____	_____
3. Emotional numbing	_____	_____	_____
4. Overly sensitive	_____	_____	_____
5. Dread	_____	_____	_____
6. Sadness	_____	_____	_____
7. Amnesia for the event	_____	_____	_____
8. Fear/anxiety	_____	_____	_____
9. Withdrawal/isolation	_____	_____	_____
10. Self-doubt	_____	_____	_____
11. Moodiness	_____	_____	_____
12. Hypervigilance	_____	_____	_____
13. Loneliness	_____	_____	_____
14. Shame	_____	_____	_____
15. Anger which may be manifested by:			
a. Scapegoating	_____	_____	_____
b. Irritability	_____	_____	_____
c. Frustration w/bureaucracy	_____	_____	_____
d. Violent fantasies	_____	_____	_____
16. Other	_____	_____	_____

Scale: 1 = Slight	2 = Moderate	3 = Intense	
	Now	6 Months	1 Year
Spiritual Reactions to Grief:			
1. Anger with God	_____	_____	_____
2. Guilt	_____	_____	_____
3. Unforgiveness	_____	_____	_____
4. Inability to pray	_____	_____	_____
5. Search for meaning	_____	_____	_____

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| 6. Questions for God | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 7. Unable to attend church | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 8. Questioning of faith | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 9. Angry with church | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 10. Angry with priests | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 11. Decreased spirituality | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 12. Abandonment by God | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 13. Distrust of tenets of faith | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 14. Uncertainty of everlasting life | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 15. Other | _____ | _____ | _____ |



Depression:
 People sometimes experience a period of mild to moderate depression following exposure to a stressful event or tragic loss.

<p style="text-align: center;">Loss/gain in weight Insomnia Lethargy/low energy Social withdrawal Difficulty concentrating</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Persistent sad mood Isolation Intrusive thoughts (See your doctor if any of these symptoms last for several weeks.)</p>
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Healing – A Choice Adjustment – A Choice

For those of us who are grieving, there are now irreversible losses which no amount of faith can reverse in this world. The world we knew no longer exists. We cannot return to yesterday or yesteryear.

For emotional and spiritual healing to occur, we must acknowledge the reality of our losses. This is what the grieving process is all about. It is not until we can acknowledge the reality and face the finality of our losses that we can choose to move on to acceptance or adjustment.

Adjustment is a choice.

We can choose to recover and regain our strength after traumatic life events.
Or we can choose to remain in the ashes.

God tells us in Scripture: “See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction...
This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses.
Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.
For the Lord is your life...”

Time alone does not heal, especially if we choose to keep the wound open and festering. We could choose to focus on death, but God urges us to focus on life.

We have the assurance that God journeys with us in our pain and in our sadness. Our faith allows us to survive, live *through*, and live *with* pain, mystery, and loss and come out on the other side—Resurrection! Life has not ended even though it has changed.

Acceptance and adjustment are necessary for our spiritual and emotional healing as individuals. However, acceptance is not mere resignation. Acceptance means openly acknowledging that because of our losses (and secondary losses resulting from the primary loss) our worlds are no longer the same. With this knowledge and acceptance, we can move forward. We can make adjustments to accommodate a new and changing world for ourselves.

“People are like stained glass windows; they sparkle and shine when the sun’s out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is light within.”
-Dr. Elizabeth Kubler Ross

Perhaps herein lies the wisdom of the Serenity Prayer (see appendix C)—in knowing what changes we can make, what changes we cannot make, and having the wisdom to know the difference. Life will not be the same, but it will be life. It will be different, but with a God of love and mercy beside us, it can be a full life.

Valuable Side of Grief:

With all of these negative reactions, it is important to realize that there may be valuable results, also.

-
- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 1. Relief | 6. Surprise—find so much support |
| 2. Joy that person is no longer suffering | 7. Discovery of inner strength |
| 3. Increased faith | 8. Renewal of old friendships |
| 4. Reconciliation of family | 9. Laughter in humorous moments |
| 5. Strengthening family or friendship bonds | 10. Making new friends |

Particularly when stressed, worried, or carrying a heavy heart, we tend to focus on the dark parts of our lives rather than the bright parts. When we focus on the obstacles, we do not see the full picture. This does not mean we do not give some energy to the dark parts, but we also focus on the good in our lives.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Where were you on September 11th? What were your reactions then? Were there any similarities to your reactions to your personal grief?

2. Can you remember another time in your life when you experienced any of these symptoms? How did you handle these symptoms then? What worked and what did not?

3. Is there any one symptom that is bothering you more than others? Why?

4. Have you expressed your thoughts and feelings about God to God and to others? How? If not, what do you plan to do about those thoughts and feelings? Why?

5. Do you feel that there is any part of you that simply does not want to get on with the process of adjusting and healing? If so, please tell us about it?

6. Is your grief shaping your faith or is your faith shaping your grief? Why? How?

Healing Service

Participant #1:

Gracious God, Creator of All the World, we thank you and praise you for being present to us at this time of sorrow. Thank you for walking with us in our pain, in our loss, in all of the symptoms of grief that we may be experiencing. We ask your healing hands to touch us now as we prepare to go forth for another week. Send your angels to guide and protect us. Help us to taste and see your goodness, O Lord.

We ask in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Participant #2:

A reading from St. Paul to the Corinthians. “We are pushed hard from all sides. But we are not beaten down. We are bewildered. But that doesn’t make us lose hope. 9 Others make us suffer. But God does not desert us.

We are knocked down. But we are not knocked out.”

(NIV, II Corinthians 4: 8-9).

Everyone:

Share what you would like the group to pray for you this week.

Closing Prayer:

Loving God,

O Lord, we call upon You in our time of sorrow, that You give us the strength and will to bear our heavy burdens, until we can again feel the warmth and love of Your divine compassion.

We know that your love for us is beyond understanding.

Be mindful of us, comfort us and have mercy on us while we struggle to comprehend life's hardships.

We ask this in the name of your son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you forever and ever. Amen.

Ponderings...

What does the Church say about illness, suffering?

“Illness and suffering have always been among the gravest problems confronted in human life. In illness, man experiences his powerlessness, his limitations, and his finitude. Every illness can make us glimpse death...

“...By his passion and death on the cross Christ has given us a new meaning to suffering: it can henceforth configure us to him and unite us with his redemptive Passion” (CCC #1500, 1505).

Scripture: “Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.”
Is. 40: 1.

Practical Suggestions:

1. If you have not yet done so, rate your symptoms on the list in this chapter.
2. Give yourself permission to vent your feelings about these symptoms in healthy ways such as prayer, writing, talking, exercise, meditation.
3. Write down the specifics of what you are seeking from the Lord at this time of your life. Define the healing that you are seeking.
4. Recall times when sacraments, prayer, or scripture played a big part in healing in your life or in the lives of others.
5. Add five more items to your “Gratitude List.” (*Have you gotten to “beautiful sunrises” or “chocolate ice cream” yet?*)

Prayerful Suggestions:

1. Ask God to help you come to accept the areas in your life that need healing. Pray to God, ask for healing.
2. Read Psalm 121 and, if possible, memorize the last line. “The Lord will watch over your coming and going, both now and forevermore.” Repeat this whenever you are feeling anxious or fearful.

Homework: Relax, read, pray, and savor the “little” things that God continuously pours on your life. Take good care of yourself.

Session Five

STUMBLING BLOCKS

Opening Prayer:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Gracious God, we ask you to transform our pain, our losses,
and our confusion into wisdom and acceptance.

We ask you to help us overcome any stumbling blocks
that obstruct or prolong the grieving process:
help us transform them into stepping stones.

We ask you to help us to deal with our unforgiveness of others
and to seek and accept our own forgiveness.

We ask this through Jesus,
who in his life showed mercy and forgiveness to all.

Amen.



“The difference between stepping stones and stumbling blocks is not in the event itself but how you think about it and what you do after it. Every failure and setback can become part of your success or an excuse for quitting or failing. People who develop the discipline of positivity are both happier and more successful.”

(Michael Josephson)

Stumbling Blocks

What are some of the stumbling blocks we might face in coping with our grief? What may be prohibiting or prolonging the process of healing? Denial? Unforgiveness? Anger? Anxiety? Powerlessness? Regrets? Resentment? The sense that our faith is not strong enough?

Unforgiveness

Of all of the behaviors named above, unforgiveness is one of the most serious spiritual stumbling blocks to the healing process. Sometimes hurtful events may occur surrounding the death involving our loved one where family members or friends may need to be forgiven or we may need to be forgiven ourselves. It is sometimes difficult to admit the need for forgiveness because doing so affirms our humanity, the fact that we are not perfect, and the fact that we make mistakes.

We might have many regrets about things we said or didn't say, things other people or our loved one said or didn't say, did or didn't do and so on. How many of us wouldn't like to relive the memories that bring unforgiveness? For those who lost a loved one, are there events that bring you unforgiveness?

Regrets and Resentment

Perhaps we carry guilt along with our regrets surrounding our loved one's death: "I am so sorry that we had this huge argument the night before he died," or, "I really hurt my mother-in-law the last time I spoke with her. I am so sorry."

Sometimes, this guilt is what we call inappropriate guilt. For instance, when people say, "I am so sorry that I was not at my loved one's bedside when he died." Despite the fact that the person had spent many days and nights at the hospice or hospital and had just gone home to get some rest. Guilt is inappropriate here.

Some examples of resentment are: “I will never forgive that doctor under any circumstances!” or “After what she/he said, she/he is the last person on this earth that I would ever consider forgiving!”

Forgiving: For Your Own Sake

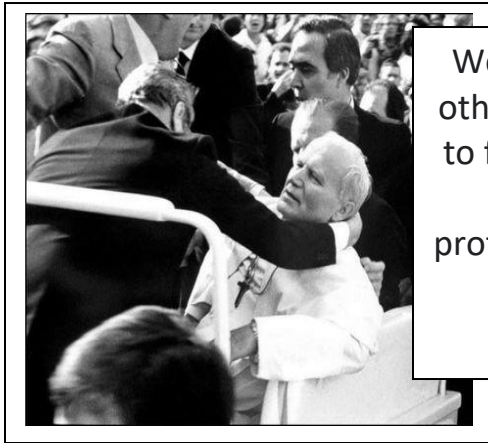
Our inability to forgive takes its toll on us physically, emotionally and spiritually. Not forgiving someone takes a lot of energy! And, as we all know, we are the ones hurt by our hatred and/or anger. In many cases, the person we need to forgive is not even aware of our unforgiveness or of the need for forgiveness in the first place!

When we forgive someone from the heart, we are doing ourselves a great favor! Harbored resentments, anger, hurt feelings—even when they are justified—poison our own system. Festering under the surface, these hurts become more and more painful. Eventually they come to a head and either burst or their poison spreads to other parts of our lives or bodies. Physicians tell us that pent-up anger often leads to stroke, heart disease, depression, and self-anguish.

The trick is to forgive from the heart, not from the head, since the latter only leads to the same resentments and anger continuing to resurface. We think we have forgiven someone and find that we resent them even more in the long run.

When we *cannot* forgive someone in our hearts, we must turn to God and ask God to forgive that person for us, since we are unable to do so at this time. “Father in Heaven, forgive the nurses who were so careless.” “Father, forgive John for his angry words when his brother needed him.” Our God is a merciful God.

“Forgiving the Unforgivable”



We all need to be forgiven by others, so we must all be ready to forgive. Asking and granting forgiveness is something profoundly worthy of every one of us,"

Saint John Paul II, Pope

Riding in his Popemobile across Piazza San Pietro on May 13, 1981, Pope John Paul II was shot by Mehmet Ali Ağca, who had escaped

from a Turkish prison after receiving a life sentence for murdering a journalist. Ağca fired four shots with his pistol with two shots striking the Pope in his lower abdomen, and two more in his arm and finger. There were two other people who were shot and survived. The first words of the almost mortally wounded Pope were words of forgiveness for his attacker.

Ağca had an accomplice, Oral Çelik, who was supposed to set off a bomb, but fled the scene instead. Both Ağca and Çelik were captured and arrested; and Ağca was sentenced to life in prison. In 1983, Pope John Paul II visited him in his prison cell and spent time with him praying and talking. The Pope stayed in touch with Ağca's family during the years and in 2000 requested his pardon. The request was granted.

“Forgiveness is above all a personal choice, a decision of the heart to go against the natural instinct to pay back evil with evil.”

Saint John Paul II, Pope



What forgiveness is and is not:

Forgiveness is a gift to us and to those around us.

Forgiveness is an act of our free will.

Forgiveness requires energy, perseverance, and humility.

We do not have to feel forgiving to forgive.

Forgiveness means I let go of the desire for revenge.

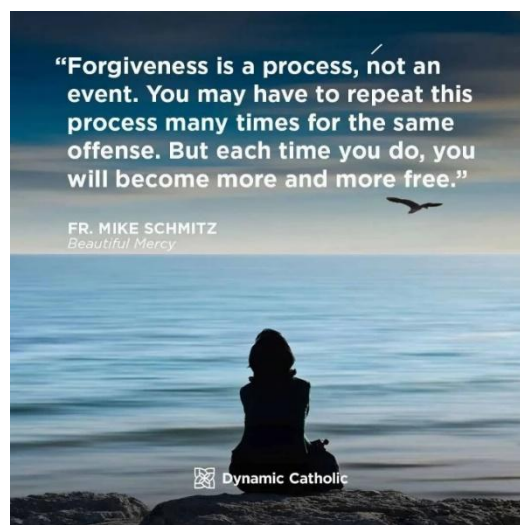
Forgiveness seeks restoration of the relationship, even in death.

Forgiveness does not ignore the hurt, or ignore painful unmet needs, or gloss over anger.

Forgiveness does not mean “forgive and forget.”

Forgiveness does not erase the memory of the hurt, but it gradually drains the memory of the pain surrounding the hurt.

Without forgiveness, healing will not occur.



“To withhold forgiveness is to take poison and expect the unforgiven to die.”
Saint Augustine

Forgiveness—An Act of the Will

Forgiveness is an act of the will. Often forgiveness does not result in immediate change in our feelings. However, repeated decisions to choose to forgive often result in a gradual change in our feelings toward that person. The quality of our forgiveness is not measured by our feelings, but by the firmness of our decision to forgive.

“Forgiveness isn’t about accepting a wrong, it’s a choice to let go of the weight of the wrong so as to live in freedom as a child of God.”
Bishop Barnes

The Sweetness of Reconciliation

Forgiveness just involves one person; reconciliation involves two or more people. When we truly repent and say we are sorry to God, there is no such thing as God dismissing or ignoring our apology. There is no such thing as long-term resentment or anger on God’s part. God always forgives.

Why? Because God loves us unconditionally. When we say we are sorry for offending God or others, including ourselves, God does not reject us. God forgives us and rejoices with us.

Unconditional love is the beauty and sweetness surrounding the story of the Prodigal Son. The father loves the wayward son unconditionally and the fatted calf is slain for a feast. “My son was lost, but now is found” (see Luke 15:11-32).

Reconciliation with God is a two-way street. The good news is that if you move even an inch toward reconciliation, God will meet you more than half-way and encourage you to come the rest of the way.

“God never tires of forgiving us,
but we sometimes tire of asking Him to forgive us.
Let us never tire of asking God's forgiveness.
He is the loving Father who always forgives,
who has that heart of mercy for all of us.”
Pope Francis

Emotional Core Wounds

Grief can bring difficult events and memories from the past back to the surface. These soul scars can be difficult to heal because we have hidden those parts of ourselves for so long or because we did not want to face confronting grief and suffering. Particularly, difficult wounds inflicted on us during our early childhood years, called emotional wounds, tend to be suppressed as a defense mechanism.

Common signs of emotional wounds are very similar to signs of grief. In fact, when grief strikes us and we are carrying emotional wounds, they intermingle and grief brings the wounds back. The most common symptoms are depression, anxiety, anger outburst, isolation, change in interests, lacking enjoyment from life, and change in personality. In his book “Be Healed,” Dr. Bob Schuchts shares his own journey of healing (his father's infidelity, his parents' divorce, his older brother's drug addiction), his subsequent periods of struggle with God and faith, and how he found inner peace and healing. He shares practical tools for remaining Christ-centered, focusing on Jesus as “the life-giving and ever-present physician of our souls,” while recognizing our wounds and seeking spiritual, emotional, and physical healing.

Forgiveness, Regrets, Core Wounds and other stumbling blocks:

Let us ask ourselves these questions:

- ✓ Are there people or circumstances surrounding the reasons for our heavy heart that you need to forgive? ...doctors, nurses, other professional people? ...family members? ...God? ...yourself?
- ✓ Are there any of your own words or actions that you regret?
- ✓ Are there any words or actions of others that you resent?
- ✓ Do you have Emotional Wounds? Have you faced them? How do you cope with them while grieving?

“Every man has his own share in the Redemption. Each one is also called to share in that suffering through which the Redemption was accomplished. ... Thus each man, in his suffering, can also be a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ.”

(Bob Schuchts, [Be Healed](#))

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Consider forgiveness, resentment, and regret toward you or others. Can you recall times you were able to overcome those feelings? If so, How did you do so? How did it feel?

2. Are there people in your life whom you need to forgive? Or are there people in your life who need to forgive you? What do you do about that?

3. If you could go back to when your heart began feeling heavy, would you like anything to have been done differently? Please explain.

4. Think about those reaching out and supporting you while you were carrying your cross. Have you expressed your gratitude to all of them? If not, why?

5. Is there one thing more than any other that you regret and wish you could do over? How would you do it differently? Can you let go of this regret? How?

Ponderings...

What does the Church say?

“Nothing causes us to so nearly resemble God as the forgiveness of injuries.”
St. John of Chrysostom

Supportive Scripture: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” *1 John 1:8-9*

Practical Suggestions:

1. If you are truly concerned that you need to apologize to someone or ask forgiveness, write a thoughtful letter to that person.
2. Be kind to yourself at this time. Do not be too hard on yourself. You may be operating out of an exaggerated sensitivity.

Prayerful Suggestions:

1. God has forgiven you. In what ways have you not forgiven yourself?
2. Stop beating yourself up. If negative thoughts or feelings of inappropriate guilt beckon, just “don’t go there.”

Food for Thought:

“God created us *without* us: but he did not will to save us *without* us.”
St. Augustine

“To err is human, to forgive divine.” *Alexander Pope*

“For the religious person to do wrong is to defy his King; for the Christian, it is to wound his Friend.” *William Temple*

“The greatest fault is to be conscious of none.” *Thomas Carlyle*

“I see no fault that I might not have committed myself.” *Goethe*

Homework:

1. Add five more items to your Gratitude List. (Favorite vacation memories, your grandmother, dishwashers, computers?)
2. If you lost a loved one, consider writing him/her letter.

Session Six

FAMILY / COMMUNITY

Opening Prayers:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
God of Life, we thank you for all the assistance
and strength you have given us so far.
Yet, there are days when the new burdens we carry are so heavy that
we need help from you and our friends and family.
You have promised that you will always be with us, and we trust that
you will be at our side now during this time of sorrow and loss.
We ask confidently in the name of your beloved son, Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns now and forever.
Amen.

Scripture: “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 NIV



(The Mystic Nativity, Sandro Botticelli, 1500-1501)

Secondary Losses

While we are all aware of our primary loss, we may not realize that we also have secondary losses. Sometimes we can name them and sometimes they are somewhat elusive. The more obvious ones are relational in nature. These are losses such as actively being someone's wife or mother, husband or father, brother or sister, or friend.

If the son you lost was a star player on the Little League team, that special role and its recognition are gone. If your father was the president of the bank, the social standing and privileges that came with his position are no longer yours to share. You will always remain the father of that star athlete or the daughter of that bank president, yet the living relationship you once had with them has ended — even though love and memory remain.

Other examples of secondary losses:

- **Social losses** may include not being part of a couple anymore or not being involved in particular activities and the social implications that go with it, your desire not to be with people socially, or your desire to stay at home alone.
- **Intellectual losses** may include loss of clear thinking, loss of memory, loss of concentration, or loss of interest.
- **Physical losses** may include loss of energy, sleep, appetite, exercise, or health, etc.
- **Spiritual losses** may include loss of faith, loss of trust in God, loss of security of church membership, or loss of ability to pray.
- **Emotional losses** may include loss of a sense of emotional stability, loss of ability to love deeply again, or loss of sense of peace, well-being, joy, and/or trust. A common example is the feeling that you will never laugh again.

The pain of the primary loss is often compounded with a variety of secondary losses that also must be worked through in the grieving process.

Independence, Dependence, and Interdependence

As you are learning to live while grieving, you may be experiencing periods of independence, dependence, and interdependence.

Most people cannot stand being alone, at least not for very long. *Independence* is sometimes seen as a mask worn as a defense mechanism or protective shield.

The opposite, *dependence*, has the potential to create unhealthy relationships with others and with yourself. Some people who are grieving become so dependent on other people that they begin to lose their own life and eventually their own spirituality. This can develop into something known as “learned helplessness”: when others insist on doing *everything* for the one who is grieving. In some cases, the griever quickly realizes how easy life has become and chooses to be dependent for the rest of his/her life. This is not healthy. A little bit of dependence is good for the soul, but life-long dependency is unnecessary. A person can regress in skills and health if he/she is not challenged to take on some responsibility. In this context, we are not speaking of people who are physically, mentally, or emotionally incapacitated and rely on others for care.

Dependence can also involve prescription drugs so use caution when taking them. Many side effects of dependencies on drugs such as sleeping pills or anti-depression medication can mimic a mild incapacitation (such as memory loss, confusion, etc).

(If you experience any of these symptoms seek medical advice).

PEOPLE NEED PEOPLE

Independence has been defined as someone saying, “I don’t need anyone; I can stand alone on my own two feet.”

Dependence is defined as someone saying, “I can’t stand alone at all; I must constantly lean on you!”

Interdependence is when people say, “I need you and you need me; let’s lean on each other!”

Interdependence in relationships is the healthy medium between independence and dependence. It can be one of the most important goals during your period of grieving but has the potential to be difficult to establish due to the self-centered nature of the grieving process.

All About YOU

The grief process, by definition, is all about you! It is about how *YOU* are going through *YOUR* grief. As the old gospel hymn says, “You’ve gotta walk this lonesome valley; you’ve gotta walk it by yourself; nobody else will walk it for you. You gotta walk it by yourself!”

No matter how many books you read, how many support groups you attend, or how much professional counseling you receive, **YOU** are the only one that can work through your grief. Participating in a support group provides some direction along the bumpy road ahead. Yet remember that **YOU will only get out of it what YOU put into it.**

Beginning to look outside of your own self-centeredness is one of the turning points in grief indicating that you are moving ahead from the intense acute grieving state. When we are in this state, we tend to be so consumed by the pain of grief that we often cannot see others around us.

Come Ye Disconsolate
By St. Thomas Moore (1779–1852)

COME ye disconsolate, where'er ye languish;
Come, at God's altar fervently kneel;
Here bring your wounded hearts,
here tell your anguish:
Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot heal.
Joy of the desolate, Light of the straying,
Hope, when all others die, fadeless and pure:
Here speaks the Comforter, in God's name saying,
“Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot cure.”
Here see the Bread of Life; see waters flowing
Forth from the throne of God, pure from above:
Come to the feast of love; come, ever knowing
Earth has no sorrow but heaven can remove.

Do Unto Others...

It is a blessing to have family and friends around you who will see you through your grief in the long run. One of the ways this is able to happen, especially when it comes to other family members, is by recognizing **their** grief and being there for them through their grief long term.

Instead of applying superficial Band-Aids to the emotional wounds of those who are grieving the same loss you are experiencing, find yourself being more concerned about how *they* are doing on their grief journey. Their cares and concerns become your cares and concerns, and vice versa. Remember that they are also grieving the same loss.

Widows and Widowers, particularly, have said that their “loss of tunnel vision” was a turning point for them as they realized how much their children were hurting too. This is not to say that we were insensitive to the needs of others in the early stage of grief, but while we cared greatly about them, we hurt so badly that there was little we could do for them.

Ask for Help

Though emotional support is extremely important when a loss has occurred, sometimes getting practical assistance is needed to reduce stress and feelings of being overwhelmed. When grieving the loss of a loved one, particularly when we lose family members, we also lose certain functions that they fulfilled for us. Not only do we lose “jobs” such as paying bills, taking care of the car, raking the leaves, etc., but also relational functions such as being and having someone to talk to, someone who took us to the grocery store, or someone we could often visit and enjoy.

GRIEF IS LOVE

*The deeper the love, the more intense is the grief.
Grief is an expression of love, which everyone experiences in life. Therefore, there is no “cure” for grief. We need to “Care for” and attend to it.*

We must be able to ask for help freely, despite others' expectations regarding our independence.

We cannot grieve alone. We need help when we experience grief. Sometimes that support is needed right away, and other times it comes later, after the initial impact has passed and life begins to slow down.

Why then is it so hard to ask for help when grieving?

1. In a society where individualism is highly regarded, asking for help can be perceived as a sign of weakness.
2. There is a certain stoicism that is valued in society, particularly in military culture.
3. Sometimes we need to "stay strong" for others.
4. Cultural and traditional background.
5. Personality.

**It is important to allow for grief and to model it, yet
how can that happen if we don't recognize it as grief?**

(Source: <https://complicatedgrief.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Managing-Bereavement-Around-COVID-19-HSPH.pdf>)

If you feel that you are not progressing through the grief process, do not hesitate to consult a counselor for an evaluation to see if he/she thinks that you would benefit from counseling sessions. There are counselors who specialize in grief management and specialized support groups are also available, ranging from Alzheimer's victims' families to military widows to parents of murdered children. Also, clergy and trained pastoral counselors are available through the Church along with spiritual directors.

"Carry your cross on your back and take it as it comes, small or large, whether from friends or enemies and of whatever wood it be made.

The most intelligent and happiest of men is he who, knowing that he is doomed to carry the cross throughout life, willingly and resignedly accepts the one God sends him."

Saint John Bosco

Choose Positive People Around You

Ideally, family and friends will surround us with love and assist us in our needs when grief strikes us. However, this assumes all families get along with each other, all families live nearby each other, and all friends can attend to the needs of our hearts when grieving. Distance and dynamics with family and friends make a difference! Additionally, the stress of grief and death breaks families and friendships apart as often as it brings them together.

Therefore, if you have friends and families that you can count on, do not take it for granted! If not, be aware that you are not the only one that experiences this. In any case, notice and accept compassion from those you are not expecting to be lending a helping hand.

Additionally, while seeking friendship, trust, and help around you, try to delegate tasks as evenly as possible across people that really care and want to help. Stay away from unenthusiastic people that may agree to help when asked but have a negative attitude. This will ultimately lead to more stress.

“Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also...
I am the way, and the truth, and the life...”
John 14:1-7

Virtue is nothing without the trial of temptation for there is no conflict without an enemy, no victory without strife.

Pope St. Leo the Great

“Do not grieve over temptations you suffer. When the Lord intends to bestow a particular virtue on us, He often permits us first to be tempted by the opposite vice. Therefore, look upon every temptation as an invitation to grown in a particular virtue and a promise by God that you will be successful, if only you stand fast.”

Saint Philip Neri



negativity bias is the psychological phenomenon by which humans pay more attention to and give more weight to negative rather than positive experiences or other kinds of information.

People have an instinctual tendency to give more importance to negative experiences than to positive or neutral experiences. This is a survival mechanism that has been engrained in our DNA since the beginning of time. In some people, it is more accentuated than in others. Step away from them, at least while your grief is very rough. Sometimes this might be very difficult because of your relationship with them. To get stronger, you need to choose people that you can depend on to lift you up by pointing at the good around you, praying with and for you, and who won't add more pain to your already heavy heart.

...And Lead us Not into Temptation

Temptation can lead to sin, but it is not sin. All human beings face struggle, and fight against temptations. Even Jesus was tempted, but he never sinned. Wrongdoing and transgression require forgiveness; temptation needs redemption and deliverance. When grieving and carrying a heavy heart, it is easier to fall into temptations, whether *external*, temptations that happen to us beyond our control, or *internal* temptations that arise out of our *own desires*. Some of the most common temptations grieving people face are:

- Self-pity
- Doubt
- Addiction
- Indifference
- Envy
- Complaining
- Despair
- Impatience
- Irritability
- Pride
- Selfishness
- Fear

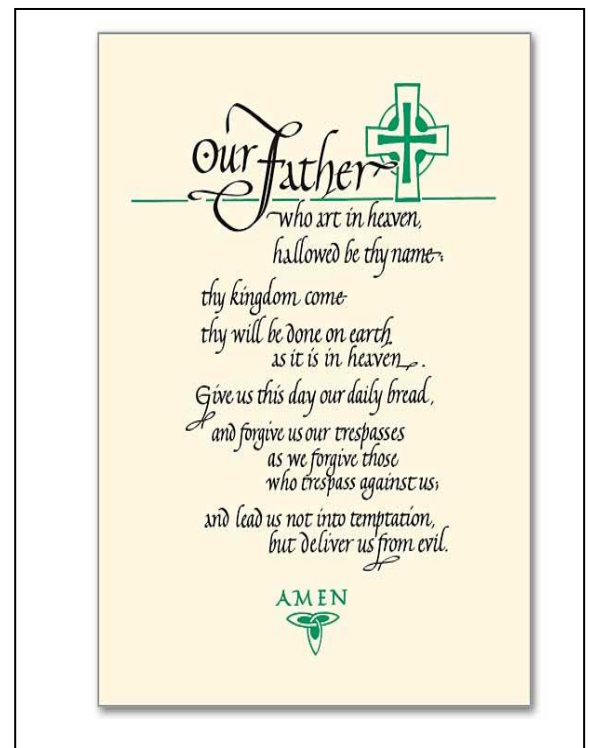
It is important to distinguish between the normal human experience of grief in all its facets and becoming trapped in those emotions. Sorrow, doubt, fear, and even spiritual dryness can accompany loss and are not sinful in themselves. If someone becomes stuck, this may be due to an intense grief and/or mental health struggle (which is not sin) or, at times, a resistance to grace and healing that could involve a lack of trust in God.

Sadly, some people feel judged as though they lack faith when they experience these struggles, especially when they are labeled “temptations.” As a result, they may hesitate to voice their doubts or fears. Others dismiss their pain as “self-pity,” when in fact they may be experiencing the real sorrow, or even depression, that follows loss. Many were raised to equate tears with weakness, and so they hide their grief rather than bring it into the light. At the same time, it is also true that one can fall into genuine self-pity, which turns inward and resists hope.

The Church recognizes that grief encompasses a wide range of emotions that are not sinful and should be expressed in healthy ways.

Again, it is crucial to know temptations are inevitable (Matthew 18:7), and they are not sinful in themselves: they become a sin when we manipulate, cultivate, yield to, and linger on them. Prayer when temptation occurs allows us to rely on God who will give us the strength and the wisdom to resist and escape the desire to sin.

It is equally crucial to talk about our temptations. Quoting St Francis De Sales: “A temptation disclosed is a temptation half vanquished.”



However, when temptation is driven by a physical or chemical imbalance, medical advice must be sought.

The Role of Sacraments

Our faith community has so many resources to help us through the healing process: sacraments, scripture, prayer, and the community of believers.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is extremely beneficial in the healing of anger, resentment, and sinfulness. Without forgiveness, healing and salvation cannot occur. The Latin root word of salvation is *salve*, as in a salve that we put on a wound to aid the process of healing.

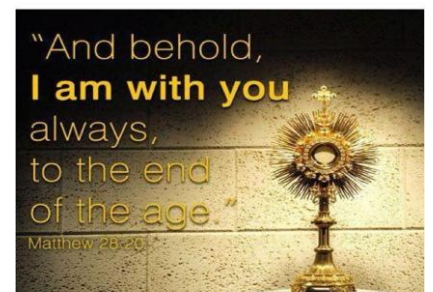
The Sacrament of the Eucharist and the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick are also extraordinary spiritual tools in the process of healing. With the Eucharist, we are strengthened for the journey with the bread of heaven. With the Sacrament of the Sick, we are gently and mercifully blessed and anointed specifically for healing.

Healing does not depend on our faith; it depends on God's power and our will to trust Him.

God chose to heal the centurion's servant who had no religious faith at all but did trust in the authority of Jesus. Jesus later remarked, "He had more trust than all of the Israelites."

Sacraments and prayer are very positive roads leading to healing. Even if miraculous healing does not occur, we have the healing presence of God in our midst, in our mind, and in our memory.

And it is this God of Presence that we seek in healing through prayer, sacraments, word, a community of saints, both living and dead who are a "cloud of witnesses" surrounding us in our every moment, a blessed Mother who watches over us, and a God who never leaves our side; Emmanuel—"God With Us."



"God never promised us a rose garden." ...
"What God did promise us was that he would be with us until the end of time."

Cardinal Sean O'Malley
when installed as bishop of
Palm Beach

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Name some of the secondary losses you are experiencing. How are they affecting you? How do you react to them?

2. Are there tasks that you need to ask other people to help you with now? How do you feel about this? Will you accept to have things done their way instead of your way? Will they be able to teach you how to do these tasks yourself when you are ready?

3. If you lost a loved one, what role do you miss most about him/her?

4. If you lost a loved one, what role do you miss most about him/her?

5. Have you taken advantage of community support such as hospice counseling, other counseling, other support groups? Can you recommend any to members of this group?

6. Adjustment is a choice. Are you ready to make that choice? Or do you need more time? What is the greatest challenge to your adjustment?

7. Reflect on your faith community and your church: how much do they mean to you?

8. What are some short-term goals you can make to help you “re-enter” or “re-organize” your life? Are there important decisions that you should put off now? Are there decisions that you feel you can make comfortably?

Ponderings

What does the Church say about community?

“We believe in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church; and we believe that in this communion, the merciful love of God and his saints is always attentive to our prayers.” *(Paul VI)*

Scripture Readings:

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” *Acts 2:42*

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

Prayerful Suggestions:

1. If you are Catholic, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is available regularly in local parishes. We invite you to consider celebrating that healing sacrament.
2. If the Sacrament of the Sick is not offered regularly in your parish, speak with a priest about administering it to you during this time of intense grief.
3. The Sacrament of Eucharist is offered daily and on weekends here in our parish and in local parishes. Please come.

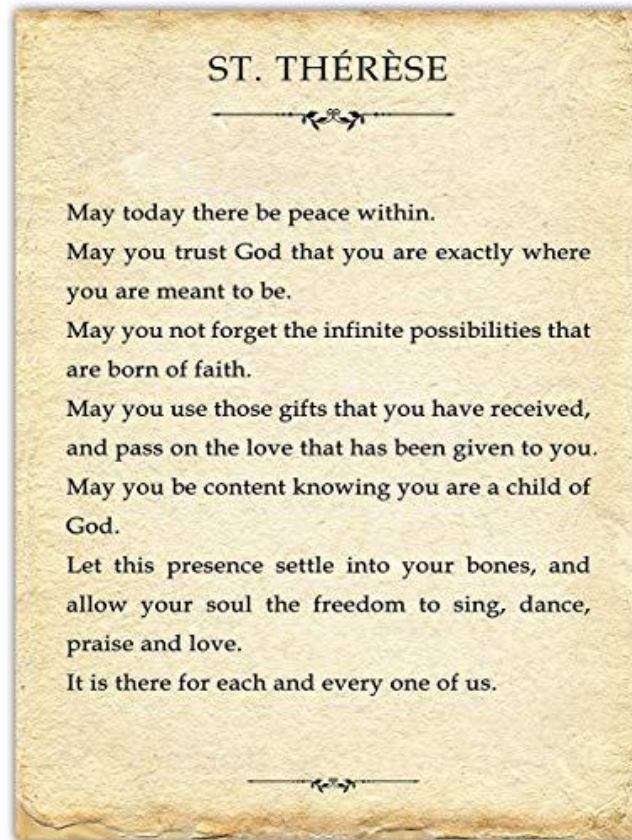
Practical Suggestions:

1. Ask a relative how they are doing. What can you do for them or others who are also grieving the loss of your loved one?
2. If there are other decisions which do not need to be made immediately, set a date in the future when you will think about these.
3. Take some time for yourself this week to “play.” Go to a movie, or take a walk, or play golf, or go out to dinner with friends.

**This week, do something new that you have never done before, and do something old that you have set aside since you started grieving.
Add some more items to your Gratitude List.**

Session Seven

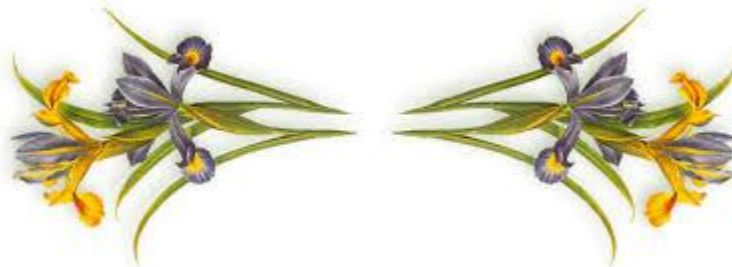
QUESTIONS ABOUT GOD, THE PAST and THE PRESENT



Scripture:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

(Philippians 4:6-7) NIV



Questions about God

Grief is the comprehensive physiological, spiritual, and emotional response we have to any major loss in our lives. Way too frequently, we do not realize that death is not the only reason for grief. When our heart becomes heavy, we tend to be oblivious of the signs of grief and their depth. We try to convince ourselves that all is good, until grief strikes us and we question God and Faith.

When things are going well, many people tend to have no desire to pray to God or reflect upon the importance of faith in their life. A common consequence of grief is questioning God and pondering about faith. The way we face this instinctual inquiry will lead us to grow in faith or lose faith. Here are some common questions:

- Where is God?
- If God is good, why is God silent? Why did God....?
- Will God help me carry my heavy heart and heal it?
- Do I have faith? If so, is grief strengthening or weakening it?
- If my faith is shaken, will God help me build it back?
- Will God help me forgive?
- What questions do you ask God? How do you talk to Him? How does He respond?

And he said, “Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a light silent sound. And when Eli’jah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him, and said, “What are you doing here, Eli’jah?”

1 Kings 19:11-13

Some people get angry with God. This is an emotional response to things that are causing us pain that we cannot understand or explain. These feelings of anger come from the heart, and we can choose to transform them into healing prayers that would bring us closer to God and nourish inner peace.

If you are angry with God, talk to Him as you would talk to your best friend or a family member when a disagreement occurs. If you do not address the topic, animosity and misunderstanding grow roots. Even Jesus felt His father's abandonment when on the cross and he addressed his final words to Him knowing in his heart that God always hears our cry.

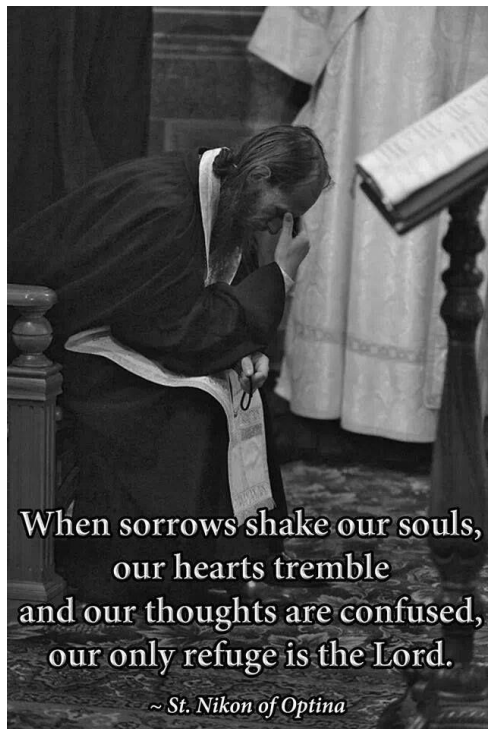
My God, my God,
why have you forsaken me?.....
For he did not despise or abhor
the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me,
but heard when I cried to him.

(Psalm 22)

May our Lord
Jesus Christ himself,
and God our Father
who has given us his love and,
through his grace,
such ceaseless encouragement
and such sure hope,
encourage you.
and strengthen you,
in every good word and deed.
2 Thessalonian 1:16-17

**“For those of us who are seeking the
consolation of the Lord,
we must seek first the Lord of
consolation.”**

- Are you able to be a good listener?
- Are you able to listen to God, to those around you and to your own feelings? If so, are you able to listen in order to understand?
- Are you able to focus on what unites us rather than what divides us?
- Are you able to notice and savor the positive around you?
- Are you able to get out of yourself and your bubble?



Tough questions about the past and the present

Your feelings are real and you need to allow yourself to feel what is happening when it is happening and not ignore it. Common questions about the past and present you may ask yourself include:

- ✓ Do I struggle to reconcile the past with the present?
- ✓ Will I forget if I forgive?
- ✓ Will I forget the past if I live the present and move into the future?
- ✓ Is it wrong to enjoy myself in the present and make plans for the future?

- ✓ Who am I now?
- ✓ Why should I move forward?
- ✓ Why and how can I get over these feelings of confusion, anger, loneliness, numbness, etc.?
- ✓ What have I done wrong?
- ✓ Why doesn't anyone understand?
- ✓ What should I say when people ask how I am doing and if I need anything?
- ✓ Why is the world moving forward when I feel such pain inside?

What are your questions about the past and present?

What are you doing about it? How do you respond to these questions? Do you seek to find an answer? Or do you avoid it? Is prayer the filter to your answers? Or is prayer an obstacle to your answers? Are you avoiding God, people, places, and activities out of fear of grief being triggered?

I am not made or unmade by
the things
which happen to me
but by my reaction to them.
Saint John of the Cross

Avoiding pain is a human survival skill and it is helpful especially when grief strikes us. However, to gain understanding, perspective, and tolerance for the pain of grief, we need to allow ourselves to feel it and face it in the present.

Creative Responses

When trying to make sense of what is causing our grief, it is important to find positive expressions of grief, to get in touch with our emotions, and to avoid bottling feelings up.

This is not easy to do and sometimes it seems to be an impossible mission. Grief is disorienting. Grief is painful. Grief swallows all your energy and even things you loved to do are not interesting anymore. Grief brings up a tornado of feelings and an onslaught of secondary losses. Grief requires adjustment at a time when you feel empty and in the dark and you feel like you lost your groove. Because of that, it is crucial to:

- Turn to your own best coping skills
- Turn to what you do best when crises occur
- Rely on, ask, and listen to friends and family to guide you.
- Pray

The future starts today, not tomorrow. -Saint John Paul II, Pope

Here is a selection of the most common ways to cope with our losses:

Art, Poetry, Music, Hobbies: It is known that art brings light to your inner feelings and allows the unspoken to take form whether it is something you enjoyed in the past or something new.

Reading/Research: It is understood that many people lack the concentration or ability to read and understand what you have read early in the grieving process. However, reading is one of the best forms of cognitive “grief work” you can do for yourself. “Information seeking allows the griever to understand and validate one’s responses and to assess possible strategies to adapt to loss,” (*Martin and Doka, 135*).

Planning and Organizing: Mourners may plan or participate in various events or in fundraisers for charities which reflect the nature of their grief.

Writing: As discussed earlier, there are many benefits to writing or journaling. Some choose to write poetry; others simply write their feelings or find it helpful to record memories of their loved ones.

Life Review: Writing a review of your life is helpful for healing. This does not have to be a biography geared for publication. It can be as simple as a brief outline of your life. You might ask other people to contribute to this life review by sharing their stories about you. This will help you maintain a perspective of your life journey.

To have courage for whatever comes in life – everything lies in that.
St Teresa of Avila

When you encounter difficulties and contradictions, do not try to break them, but bend them with gentleness and time.
St Francis De Sales

Be patient with all that is unsolved within you and try to love the questions.
The point is to live everything. Do not seek answers that cannot be lived, but love the questions, and perhaps without knowing it you will live your way into the answers.
Rainer Maria Rilke

And most of all.... pray! Prayer, sacraments, and rituals, such as lighting a candle, are healing. Prayer is crucial! Besides its efficacy, it practices a behavior that allows you to feel some control in a time when you feel you have no control. Pray novenas for strength, consolation, or comfort. Spend time asking the Blessed Mother's intervention. When possible, come to church, "BE" in church, "BE" in His presence, praying before the crucifix, the statues or the Stations of the Pascal Mystery, the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. As painful as your suffering is now, it is comforting to meditate on the glories of the Cross. The latter is an especially beneficial form of prayer as you contemplate the death of Jesus. In your grief you also are experiencing the Resurrection.



Aside from their spiritual value, contemplative prayer and meditation are also healthy forms of prayer for focusing, centering, and breathing.



If you have lost
the taste for prayer,
you will regain
the desire for it
by returning humbly
to its practice

Saint Paul VI, Pope

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS:

- ✓ When discerning ways to positively cope with your grief, ask yourself what you used to do that does not seem to bring joy to you now. What is the reason? Is it disinterest, avoidance, or something else?
- ✓ Whether your faith trembles or not, make prayer a priority in your daily life.
- ✓ Pick something simple that you can restart or start anew.
- ✓ Be intentional.
- ✓ Train yourself to pray and focus on gratitude daily.
- ✓ Schedule time to do something good for yourself and for prayer approximately at the same time every day

I command you:
be strong and steadfast!
Do not fear nor be dismayed,
for the LORD, your God,
is with you wherever you go.
Joshua 1:9

Reflection Questions

1. What do you think are your strengths? Your qualities? What are others thinking your strengths and qualities are?

2. Name three major challenges resulting from your grief. What have you done about them? If you lost a loved one, what would your loved one want you to do?

3. What are some of the small goals you can establish for yourself as you begin the adjustment to life?

4. What hobbies/interests/talents could you return to or explore in order to find some refreshment and peace during this time of grief?

5. If you lost a loved one, share your experience of going somewhere or doing something that reminded you of your loved one.

Ponderings...

What does the Church say?

“The Eucharist is the ‘source and summit of the Christian life.’ (LG 1 1) ‘The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works for the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch’ (PO 5)” (CCC 1324).

Scripture: “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35).

Practical Suggestions:

1. Think ahead to an important day in your life that is coming next (a holiday, your loved one’s birthday, anniversaries, etc.) If you lost a loved one, plan a ritual to celebrate and remember your loved one on that day, even if you only celebrate it yourself.
2. Choose to express your grief differently. Try something new, or renew an old goal, interest or hobby.
3. Add favorite memories to your “Gratitude List.”

Prayerful Suggestions:

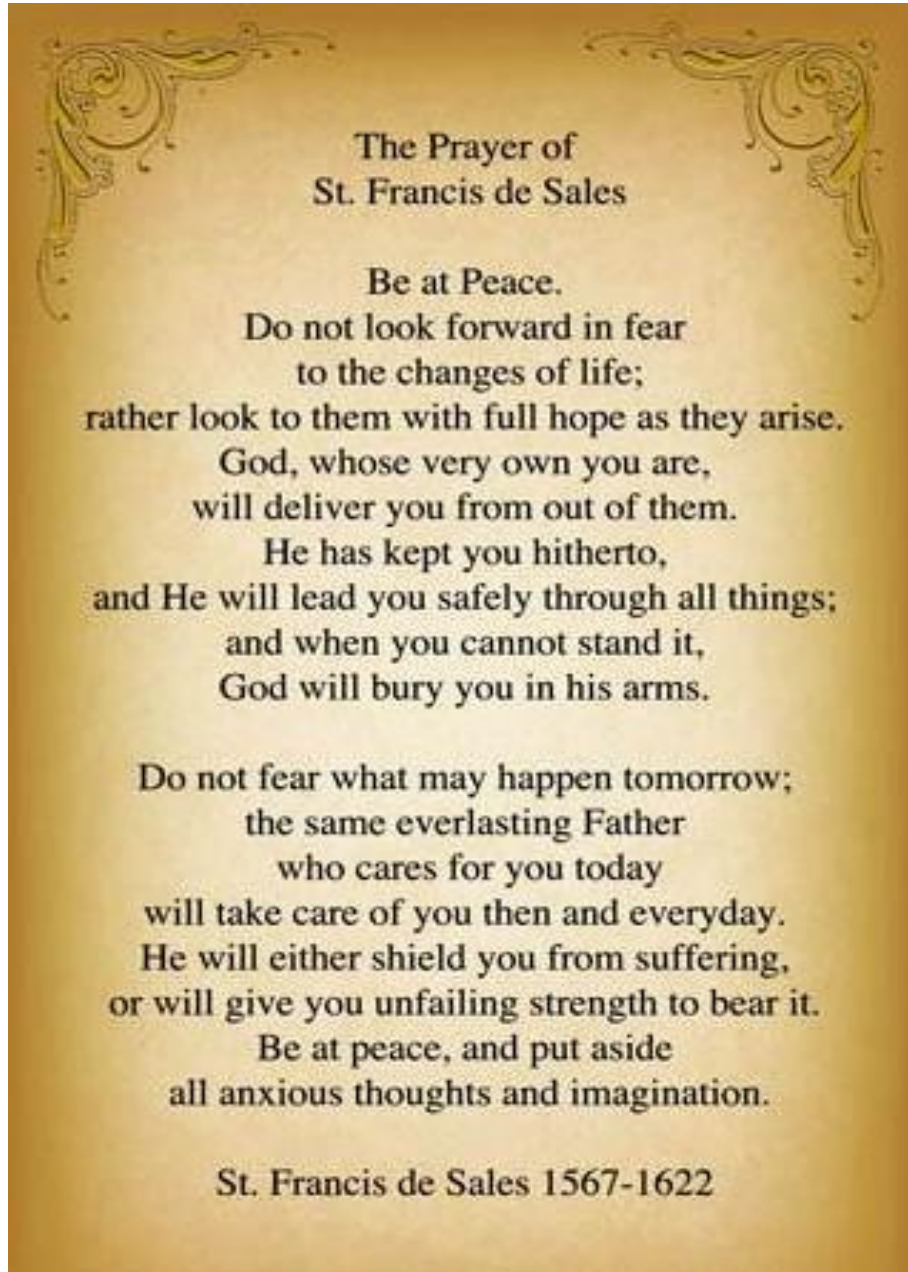
1. “The more habitual the realization of God’s presence, and of our presence to Him in all our activities, the more constant is our prayer” “Indeed we must grasp that it is not by using many words that we shall get our prayers answered, but by purity of heart....Prayer therefore should be short and pure”
St Benedict

Food for Thought:

“There is only one thing worse than speaking ill of the dead, and that is not speaking about the dead.”—*Anonymous*

Homework for Session #8: Reflect on your strengths and qualities. Ask your friends and families what your strengths and qualities are. *Write them down!*

Session Eight
THE FUTURE and “MOVING FORWARD”



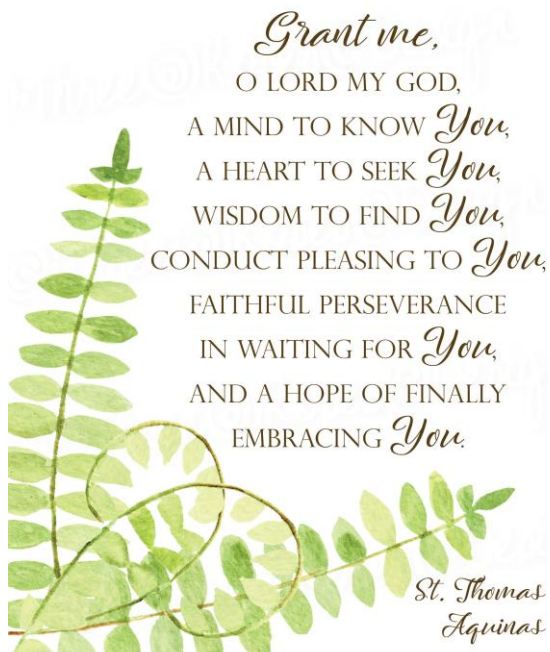
Scripture: “The LORD is the eternal God, creator of the ends of the earth.
...They that hope in the LORD will renew their strength, they will soar as with eagles’
wings. They will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint.” (*Is. 40: 28, 31*)

Where We have Been

We have talked extensively about the importance of faith in life, particularly while grieving. While doing so, we have been working on the four major tasks in the grieving process:

1. **To acknowledge and accept the reality of the loss.**
2. **To experience the pain of grief.**
3. **To adjust.**
4. **To move forward with life.**

We know too well that life does not stop when we encounter challenges. In fact, there are times when we are amazed that life goes on so normally with people driving their cars, going to work, taking their children to school, going to the grocery store, playing golf, bowling, etc.



The bills need to be paid, cooking and preparing meals are still necessary. If you are employed, you still need to get up every morning and go to work. If you're not, you must find meaningful activities to fill the days of loneliness and grief.

Through all of this we think to ourselves, "How can everyone else be so normal? Doesn't everyone around me know how much I am struggling and hurting?"

Toward the end of his life, Robert Frost was asked to sum up everything he had learned about life. His reply was "In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life: it goes on."

The challenges and grief that disrupt happiness are part of life. Likewise, as happiness and blessings are poured on us, they fill our heart with joy as they too are part of life!

How we face good and bad events, and how we choose to respond plays a crucial part in the outcome. The blending of each circumstance and our response will forge our life.

Where You've Been

As we review the past few weeks and months, we are at a point of departure as we envision more changes ahead.

If you are grieving the loss of a loved one, you will never forget your loved one; however, you will find that you are not thinking constantly of him or her as time progresses. Little things no longer lead to a meltdown of tears. You delight in hearing stories that recall your loved one fondly. You feel better. You don't hurt as much. You, who entered "no man's land" when you lost your loved one, are now standing on more familiar turf and you are managing. You are coping and you are becoming much more confident in moving forward.

You will begin to experience your loved one in a different yet very intimate and special place in your heart. You will have a totally different relationship from when he or she was alive, but, nevertheless, it is still a real relationship. You are joined together with your loved one spiritually.

Jesus never said, "I heal you."
He always said:
"Your faith has healed you."

In order to "cure" your grief, you need to care for it.

You must CHOOSE to:

- Hold on to your faith and take advantage of all the ways it can support you (groups, sacraments, adoration, etc.)
- Accept your loss.
- Walk through your loss.
- Talk about it.
- Break it open and reflect on what are the hardest stumbling blocks.
- Be aware of your strengths and qualities.
- Remember: Anger poisons you!
- Notice what is good and positive around you, and...*be grateful!*

You may find yourself communicating with your loved one. This is not unusual behavior. Sometimes when you speak to them, they may answer you in your heart. Sometimes, you may feel that you actually experienced them in the flesh, in an experience that is so real that you will swear that they were at your side. Other times, you may experience them in your dreams. No, you are not crazy! These experiences are real to you. Consider them blessings. Some people never experience these consolations; you are blessed.

Where You're Going



And now these three remain:
faith, hope and love.
But the greatest of these
is love.
(1 Corinthians 13:13)

People question the length of time it takes to finish the grieving process. It is different for each person, but most experts agree that many people take at least two to five years to go through the whole process. Grief is a long-term process; the good news is that it doesn't hurt as much as it did in the beginning.

Remember:

You are not alone in your grief, and you cannot grieve alone.

“Most bereaved individuals eventually come to terms with their grief and carry on with their lives in healthy and productive ways. However, total resolution of mourning, in the sense of completely and permanently finishing it and never being touched again by some element of the loss, usually never occurs.”

Therese Rando, Treatment on Complicated Mourning

Reflection Questions

1. What are the “little things” that help you throughout the day?

2. Who do you rely upon the most? Is it a healthy relationship? Based on interdependence? Please explain and give examples.

3. In what ways are your strengths and personal qualities helping you move through the obstacles that arise in your grief? Please Explain.

4. Are you able to let go and let God, while taking action? Please explain.

5. Are you able to add new to the old? How?

6. Are you able to enjoy each drop of happiness and each blessing in light of the fact that your loved ones (alive and deceased) would love to see you happy? How?

Ponderings...

“Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him”

(Ps. 128:5-6)

Practical Suggestions:

1. List the “sheaves” you will be carrying at the end of this cycle of meetings.
2. During this grieving process and as it continues, are you touching people’s lives with goodness, with faith, with charity?
3. If you have not yet done so, please consider volunteering for a charity of your choice, perhaps one connected with the reason for your grief.

Prayerful Suggestions

1. Continue your gratitude list forever and get it out and read it whenever you are feeling blue. Always add a date when you add something to your list!
2. Begin each day with a morning prayer such as, “Lord, there is nothing that can happen today that you and I can’t handle together.” Or, “Lord, open my eyes so that I do not miss the grace of this day!”
3. Reach out to someone who is grieving. Be there for them.

Food for Thought

“There is nothing permanent except change.”-Heraclitus

“Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of overcoming it.”-
Hellen Keller

“Those who don’t know how to weep with their whole heart don’t know how to laugh either.”-Golda Meir

Homework: Be at peace. Walk in faith. Be grateful.

Evaluation Form

Hoping this cycle of meetings alleviated the burden of your grief with the help of our faith, we ask you to please take a few minutes and fill out this evaluation form. Your input will be a blessing, helping to improve and implement grief support for others in need. **Please bring it back at next meeting.**

1= Not helpful; 2 = Moderately helpful; 3 = Very helpful
--

1. Learning about the grief process and manifestations of grief.
1 - 2 - 3
2. Being able to share my feelings with others, and the roots of my grief.
1 - 2 - 3
3. Having a better understanding of how grief impacts your life and your relationship with family and friends.
1 - 2 - 3
4. Finding comfort in sharing my emotions and feelings through a faith centered support group.
1 - 2 - 3
5. The support group deepened my faith and helped me understand the importance of faith, particularly in moments of hardship.
1- 2 - 3
6. What were your expectations and were they fulfilled?
7. What would you do to improve the next cycles of meetings (lengths of cycles, group format and structure, handbook and handouts, faith centering and support, etc....)?

Session Nine
God is our strength



**O God, when all is in darkness
and we feel our weakness and helplessness,
give us the sense of your presence,
your love and your strength.**

**Help us to have perfect trust
in your protecting love
and strengthening power;
so that nothing may frighten or worry us.**

**Living close to you,
we shall see your hand,
your purpose, your will
through all things.**

(St. Ignatius of Loyola)

Scripture: God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear,
though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging..

(Psalm 46:1-3) NIV

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

Psalm 46:1-3

We have come to the end of this cycle of meetings, so let us reflect on both the group and personal experience.

Whatever brought you to participate in this group, it is important to wrap up what we discussed, and think about what is next. To do so, look back at the chapters we discussed together, pause and reflect on what has been helpful during these weeks together, and reflect on the outpouring of God's love in this and all seasons of our life.

Whatever the reason you carry a heavy heart and particularly if you lost a loved one, it is crucial to focus on the Paschal Mystery and Resurrection. Jesus won over death, and he did so for us with the promise of resurrection to eternal life for all of us. As hard as it is, focus on the words of St Paul: "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55-57). Can you do that?

Jesus' resurrection is true and it is an immense source of hope. Yes, accepting and embracing a mystery is not easy. Yet by believing in the incomprehensible and inscrutable of the Faith and Resurrection and by letting faith permeate our being and our feelings, our life can indeed be transformed!

As Saint Peter writes, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last

time. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1Peter: 3-9)

Yes, the mystery of faith—especially the mystery of the Resurrection—is indeed both a profound gift and an unfathomable reality. It's a gift that transforms everything, and yet, like any true mystery, it remains beyond our full understanding.

The paradox of faith is that while we may never fully comprehend it, we experience its effects in our lives.

When we reflect on the Resurrection, we see not just a historical event, but a living truth that shapes who we are. Indeed, it is a mystery that brings vast and infinite gifts:

1. **The Gift of Hope** – Jesus' resurrection assures us that death does not have the final say. The ultimate mystery we face in life—our mortality—has already been overcome. This hope is not just for an afterlife, but it changes the way we live today. We can live with courage, knowing that suffering and death are not the end of the story. Christ has shown us a way through, and we are invited to walk in that light.
2. **The Gift of Reconciliation** – The resurrection is the reconciliation of all things to God. It shows us that no matter how broken we may feel, we are never beyond the reach of God's love and grace. This message of forgiveness and peace with God is transformative—it heals relationships, brings healing to our hearts, and frees us from the burdens of guilt and shame.
3. **The Gift of New Life** – As St. Peter writes, we are "born anew to a living hope" through Christ's resurrection (1 Peter 1:3). This is not a one-time event but a continual renewal of life in us. We are invited to live with the power of that resurrection now, experiencing new beginnings even during life's challenges. Each day is an opportunity to live as people of resurrection—people who know that life, grace, and mercy can triumph over the darkest parts of human experience.
4. **The Gift of Faith** – Faith itself is a gift from God, and it is a participation in the mystery of God's love. The more we engage with the mystery of the Resurrection, the deeper our faith can grow. It's not something we can "solve" or "figure out" in the traditional sense, but it is something we can enter into, live

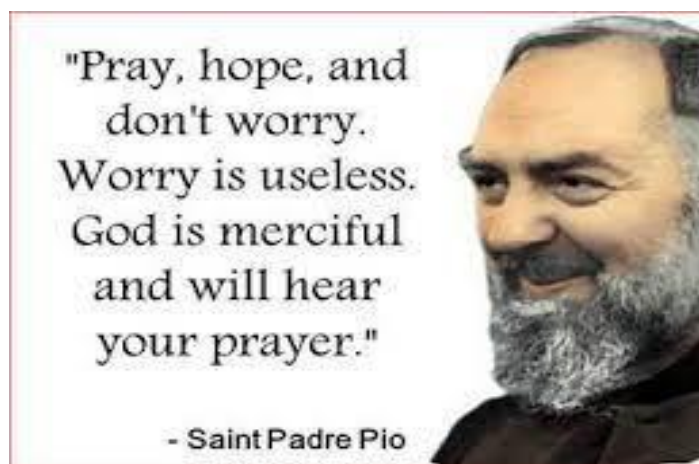
within, and be shaped by. Faith is the means by which we continue to encounter God's love, which is made manifest most clearly through Jesus' death and resurrection.

5. **The Gift of Community** – When we embrace the Resurrection, we're not only embracing a personal hope but also entering into a communal mystery. The Church itself is born out of the death and resurrection of Christ. Through our shared faith, we experience the power of the Resurrection in the way we support one another, pray for one another, and grow together in faith.

Ultimately, the resurrection opens us to a relationship with a God who is both near and far, both personal and transcendent. The mystery of faith—especially the mystery of Jesus' resurrection—is vast, infinite, and beyond our complete comprehension. But as we reflect on it, we experience its transformative power in our hearts and in our lives.

Faith and Resurrection are a mystery we should live into and reflect upon, not a problem we dissect and solve, and in that living, we receive grace upon grace.

If you find yourself marveling at that mystery, you're not alone, it's something that has drawn countless hearts over millennia to worship, ponder, and seek deeper understanding. And in each act of faith, we discover that God's love is more abundant than we could ever fully grasp!





QUESTIONS about the FUTURE

It is important after processing your grief, to project yourself into the future. Ask yourself the following questions:

- **What has been most helpful during these weeks together?**
- **What have I learned from the chapters we discussed?**
- **How do I want to move forward? Do I have a plan? What is it?**
- **How do I see myself in six months? In 1 year? 2 years?**
- **What do I want my future to be like?**
- **What change do my loved one wish to see in me?**
- **What do I choose to let go?**
- **What do I choose to start anew?**
- **What painful memories can I transform into loving ones?**
- **What can I learn while carrying this cross?**
- **What am I afraid of? Why?**
- **How have I grown?**
- **Who is the new me?**



QUESTIONS about FAITH

- How strong is my faith?
- Did my faith help me? Did my faith grow? How?
- Do I trust God in grief?
- Do I experience anger toward God? Why?
- Do I pray? How frequently?
- Do I pray only when I need help? If not, what do I pray for?
- What does it mean for me to really love God?
- What does it mean for me to really depend on or trust God?
- Am I able to feel God's presence amid my grief and sorrow?
- Am I grateful? And if so, how do I express my gratitude?
- How important is my faith community for me?
- What blessings and outpouring of God's love can I reflect on?
- How will I continue to focus on the Paschal Mystery and Resurrection?

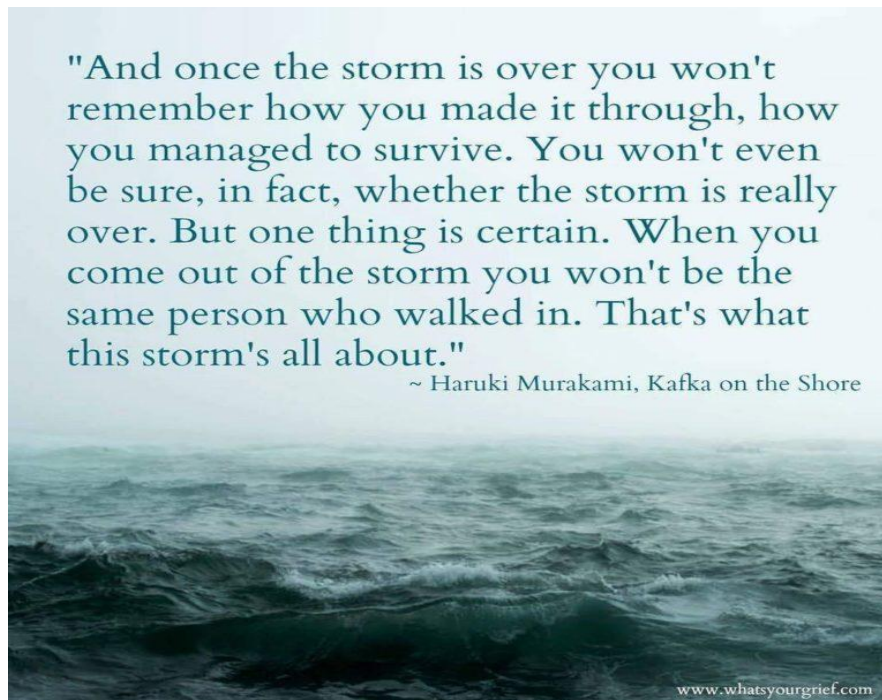
- **How will I carry forward the hope of the resurrection into my life?** In practical terms, how can the reality of Jesus' resurrection transform my day-to-day life?

Taking time to pray and reflect on these things regularly can strengthen the sense of living hope through the resurrection. If possible, write down your responses to each question and date them, so that when you read them again in the future it will help you assess where you are in your grief.

Even in the hard moments, trust that faith can transform your pain, your doubts, and your heart, bringing you closer to God's promise of eternal life. You've already taken a meaningful step by being part of this group, and from here, you can continue growing in faith, hope, and love. Let us continue to keep each other in prayer.

"And once the storm is over you won't remember how you made it through, how you managed to survive. You won't even be sure, in fact, whether the storm is really over. But one thing is certain. When you come out of the storm you won't be the same person who walked in. That's what this storm's all about."

~ Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*



www.whatsyourgrief.com

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Remember that after darkness comes the light;
after the storm the calm; after the night, the day.
And for those of us who lost a loved,
do not forget that life is changed, not ended.

- ✓ **Grief is an expression of love:** Once again, remember that the deeper the love, the deeper the grief. LOVE should also encourage us to move forward. When true love with compassion and understanding fills our soul (instead of anger or negative feelings), we can transform our loss. This is where FAITH plays a crucial role in our lives! “The biggest blessing I received during my experience, was my understanding of faith.....” (page xviii and xix of “Transform your Loss” by Ligia Houben)
- ✓ **Give yourself care in order to cure yourself:** Your loss will transform you, but YOU can transform your loss! You can transform your pain into an opportunity for spiritual growth. You can redirect your life into something that has more meaning, becoming a better person. This will benefit you and those around you.
- ✓ **Be Patient:** “It took ten years to realize it was a blessing.” For God, a moment is a million years, and a million years—a moment. We live in a society where everything is in a hurry and immediate results are expected. If not, we get impatient. GRIEF TAKES TIME! If we rush, we fail (consider the example of the pianist

Pray as though everything
depended on God.
Work as though everything
depended on you.
ST. Ignatius

Faith is to believe what you
do not yet see;

the reward for this faith is
to see what you believe.

— ST. Augustine

“The accidents of life
separate us from our
dearest friends,
but let us not despair.
God is like a looking glass
in which souls see
each other.
The more we are united to
Him by love,
the nearer we are to those
who belong to Him.”

“We must often draw
the comparison between
time and eternity,
This is the remedy of all
our troubles.
How small will
the present moment
appear when we enter that
great ocean.”

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

wishing to be famous but never practicing). Slow down and do not be anxious for conclusions.

- ✓ **Reintegration:** It is important to realize that you need to reintegrate into your regular daily life and take control of your life again. Be hopeful, confident, grateful and positive, yet objective. One door opens another one. To realize your goals, you need to find a purpose in life and think of the meaning of what you achieve.
- ✓ **Transform your anger and frustration:** try to see through the eyes of appreciation, compassion, growth and love. Be humble. Be faith filled. “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39).
- ✓ **Surrounding yourself with positive people** will be an immense source of strength
- ✓ **Interdependence:** give and take. Balancing accepting help and taking charge is easier to say than to do. But give it a try. If you have a passive attitude, if you choose not to be actively moving forward, you will stay in the situation you are in now. *Is this what you want? Is this what your loved ones want?*
- ✓ **Define specific targets and write them down.** This will help you not to backslide!!!!
- ✓ **BE GRATEFUL.... EVERY day!**
- ✓ Most of all: **Do not forget to PRAY!** “Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you.” (Saint Ignatius). Choose, talk, examine, and plan; and all of this with prayer. The difficult situation you are experiencing now can inspire you to be more grateful, and more helpful to those in need. Your example can help others to open up. Do not give up and remember that “Faith is to believe what you do not yet see; the reward for this faith is to see what you believe” (Saint Augustine).

What Recovery Means

Following is a list of items that indicate a high degree of recovery. The first seven are suggested by John James and Frank Cherry in *The Grief Recovery Handbook*. The remaining ones have been gathered from other sources and are listed by Stanley Cornils in *Your Healing Journey Through Grief*.

1. *You are feeling better.*
2. *You are managing your grief through self-direction.*
3. *You find new meaning for living without the fear of future abandonment.*
4. *You are able to enjoy fond memories without having them bring painful feelings.*
5. *You can acknowledge that it is okay to feel bad from time to time.*
6. *You are able to forgive others when they say or do things that you know are based on their lack of knowledge about grief.*
7. *Your ability to talk about your loss is in fact helping another person to get through his or her loss.*
8. *You find new opportunities and priorities which you formerly overlooked.*
9. *You have become aware again of the loved ones you still have.*
10. *You are committing yourself to living more fully and meaningfully.*
11. *You are gaining a new and increased awareness of the precariousness of life and its brevity.*
12. *You are learning not to put off the important things you can say and do today.*
13. *You are becoming aware of any unfinished business in your life.*
14. *You are enjoying an increased family commitment and unity.*
15. *You have developed a greater personal growth and an increased interest in spiritual things.*
16. *When you imagine that the person you have lost seems to be moving farther into your memory, it's a sign that you have been climbing the steps of mourning successfully.*

What Recovery Does *Not* Mean

Stanley Cornils (*Your Healing Journey Through Grief*) offers this list with the caveat that total resolution of grief is a false goal and usually does not occur.

Recovery does ***not*** mean:

1. *You will forget your loved one.*
2. *You will no longer have a relationship with your loved one.*
3. *You are always going to be happy and never experience pain.*
4. *You will not experience the bittersweet combination of feelings that holidays bring.*
5. *You will not be touched by certain reminders, songs, smells, special locations.*
6. *You will not painfully wish that your lost one is present at important events or milestones*
7. *You will not mourn any more, but will not mourn acutely.*



Looking behind I am filled with gratitude.
Looking forward I am filled with vision.
Looking upwards I am filled with strength.
Looking within I discover peace.

Q'ero Apache Indians

Reflection Questions

1. Did your thoughts, behavior and feelings change since the beginning of this cycle of meetings? How?

2. Have you discovered growth or adjustments, which you never dreamed were possible? Please explain and give examples.

3. What do you have to say to the group now? Can you see changes in any participant since the group started to meet?

4. Name some short-term goals and long-term goals for the future.

5. Last but no least: Do you feel you grew stronger in faith? How does this feel?

APPENDIX A

Self-Care Assessment Worksheets

Self-Care Assessment: The following worksheet for assessing self-care is not exhaustive, merely suggestive. Feel free to add areas of self-care that are relevant for you and rate yourself on how often and how well you are taking care of yourself. When you are finished, look for patterns in your responses. Are you more active in some areas of self-care? Do you tend to ignore others? Are there items on the list that haven't even occurred to you? Listen to your internal responses and dialogue about self-care and take note of anything you would like to prioritize moving forward.

Rate the following areas according to how well you think you are doing.

3 = I do this well (e.g., frequently), **2** = I do this OK (e.g., occasionally), **1** = I barely or rarely do this **0** = I never do this, **?** = This never occurred to me

Physical Self-Care

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eat regularly (breakfast, lunch, and dinner) | <input type="checkbox"/> Exercise |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Get regular medical care for prevention | <input type="checkbox"/> Eat healthily |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Get medical care when needed | <input type="checkbox"/> Get massages |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take time off when sick | <input type="checkbox"/> Take vacations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wear clothes I like | <input type="checkbox"/> Get enough sleep |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do some fun physical activity | <input type="checkbox"/> Do something fun |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Think positive thoughts about my body | <input type="checkbox"/> (Other) |

Psychological Self-Care

- Take day trips or mini-vacations
- Make time for self-reflection
- Have my own personal psychotherapy
- Write in a journal
- Make time away from technology/internet
- Attend to minimizing life stress
- Read something unrelated to work
- Be curious
- Notice my thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, feelings

- ___ Say no to extra responsibilities
- ___ Engage my intelligence in a new way or area
- ___ Be okay leaving work at work
- ___ Do something at which I am not expert
- ___ (Other) _____

Emotional Self-Care

- ___ Spend time with people whose company I enjoy
- ___ Love myself
- ___ Stay in contact with important people in my life
- ___ Allow myself to cry
- ___ Re-read favorite books, re-view favorite movies
- ___ Give myself affirmation/praise
- ___ Identify and seek out comforting activities/places
- ___ Find things that make me laugh
- ___ Express my outrage in social action or discussion
- ___ (Other) _____

Spiritual Self-Care

- ___ Make time for prayer and reflection
- ___ Find a spiritual connection or community
- ___ Be open to inspiration
- ___ Be aware of non-material aspects of life
- ___ Cherish my optimism and hope
- ___ Try at times not to be in charge or the expert
- ___ Be open to knowing
- ___ Identify what is meaningful to me
- ___ Seek out reenergizing or nourishing experiences
- ___ Contribute to causes in which I believe
- ___ Have experiences of awe
- ___ Read or listen to something inspirational
- ___ (Other) _____

Relationship Self-Care

- ___ Schedule regular dates with my partner
- ___ Make time to be with friends
- ___ Call, check on, or see my relatives
- ___ Ask for help when I need it

- ___ Share a fear, hope, or secret with someone I trust
- ___ Communicate with my family
- ___ Stay in contact with faraway friends
- ___ Enlarge my social circle
- ___ Make time for personal correspondence
- ___ Spend time with animals
- ___ Allow others to do things for me
- ___ (Other) _____

Workplace or Professional Self-Care

- ___ Take time to chat with coworkers
- ___ Make quiet time to work
- ___ Identify projects/tasks that are exciting
- ___ Take a break during the day
- ___ Balance my load so that nothing is “way too much”
- ___ Set limits with my boss/peers
- ___ Arrange workspace to be comfortable
- ___ Have a peer support group
- ___ Get regular supervision or consultation
- ___ Identify rewarding tasks
- ___ Negotiate/advocate for my needs
- ___ (Other) _____

Overall, Balance

- ___ Strive for balance within my work-life and workday
- ___ Strive for balance among my family, friends, and relationships
- ___ Strive for balance between play and rest
- ___ Strive for balance between work/service and personal time
- ___ Strive for balance in looking forward and acknowledging the moment

Areas of Self-Care that are Relevant to You

- ___ (Other) _____
- ___ (Other) _____
- ___ (Other) _____

Adapted from Saakvitne, Pearlman, & Staff of TSI/CAAP (1996). Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization. Norton. Adapted by Lisa D. Butler, PhD.

Am I Making Progress?

Elaine E. Stillwell, M.A., M.S. - Rockville Centre, NY

Are there any areas of your heart that need nurturing?

The following checklist will help you set some goals for feeling better.

Allow Yourself:

- Time to cry
- Space to think
- To remember your loved one
- Realistic goals
- To do whatever gives you a moment's peace
- To be imperfect
- To accept offers of help
- To pamper yourself

Force Yourself:

- To do old routines
- To listen to your family
- To do an activity that you used to do

Convince Yourself:

- That each person grieves differently
- That you will get better

Let Yourself:

- Off the hook
- Laugh
- Feel anger
- Tell God how you honestly feel
- Treasure a special friend
- Remember happy memories
- Select what you can handle
- "Wear-out" feelings of anger, guilt and depression

Teach Yourself:

- To take care of yourself
- To learn everything about the grief process
- To set goals
- To turn to life
- to ignore the hurtful comments of others

Talk to Yourself:

- About anything
- About how your loved one would like you to handle things
- Have a dialogue with your loved one

Forgive Yourself:

- We make mistakes
- We're not perfect
- Our loved ones weren't perfect
- They know they were loved

Find Yourself:

(We become different people with different needs.)

- Through meditation
- Through reading
- Through singing
- Through writing
- Through talking
- Through new friends
- Through new hobbies

Indulge Yourself

- Shop
- Nap
- Walk
- Daydream
- Say "I deserve that."
- Set aside special time for yourself
- Don't rush or overwhelm yourself with activities

Express Yourself:

- Tell the story of your loved one
- Tell the world how you feel
- Tell your family how you really feel
- Try new activities
- Find new ways to "reinvest" that special love you shared with your loved one

Forget Yourself:

- Seek out other bereaved persons
- Talk to them
- Share what you've learned—what's given you moments of peace. You'll find "helping is healing."

Give Yourself:

- No deadlines in grieving
- Choose to rebuild your life in a meaningful way
- Keep memories of your loved one alive
- Make your loved one proud of you.

Get busy taking care of yourself and may your efforts bring peace and joy to your heart.

Elaine E. Stillwell

(Elaine is Founder and Chapter Leader of the Compassionate Friends of Rockville, NY; the Coordinator for the Bereaved, Separated and Divorced in the Diocese of Rockville Centre and a former Board Member of the National Catholic Ministry to the Bereaved.)

APPENDIX B

The Grief Process and Trauma

These seven phases are the seven stages of the grief process involved with a major traumatic event such as the terrorist attacks of 911

Seven Stages

1. Shock and Denial.
2. Fear, Panic and Shame.
3. Rage and Helplessness.
4. Guilt and Ambivalence.
5. Focused Anger.
6. Exploration and New Identity.
7. Acceptance.

(Mark Gorkin)

by Mark Gorkin, MSW, LICSW, and published in a Business Know-How blog entitled "Traumatic Stress/Crisis Intervention Technique and Tips," <https://www.zenbusiness.com/blog/crisisint/> February 26, 2014

It is interesting to note how they are both like and different from the classic stages of grief described by three experts in the field of bereavement management.

Four Tasks of Mourning

1. To accept the reality of the loss.
2. To experience the pain of grief.
3. To adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing.
4. To "emotionally relocate" the deceased and move on with life.

William Worden, Ph.D.

Five Stages of Grief

1. Denial
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Acceptance

Elizabeth Kubler Ross

Six "R's" of Grief

1. Recognizing the loss.
2. Reacting to the separation.
3. Recollecting and re-experiencing the deceased and the relationship.
4. Relinquishing the old attachments to the deceased.
5. Readjusting to move adaptively into the new world without forgetting the old.
6. Reinvesting in new relationships.

APPENDIX C

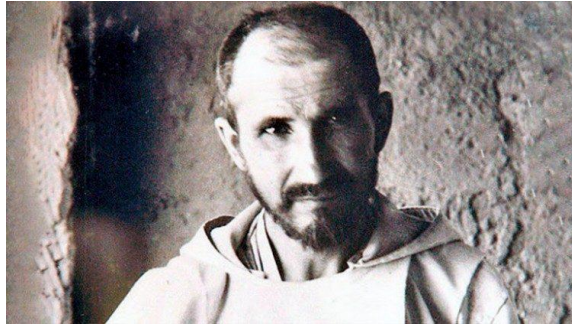
Prayers



MEMORARE

REMEMBER,
O most gracious Virgin Mary,
that never was it known that anyone
who fled to thy protection,
implored thy help,
or sought thy intercession
was left unaided.
Inspired with this confidence,
I fly to thee,
O Virgin of virgins,
my Mother;
to thee do I come;
before thee I stand,
sinful and sorrowful.
O Mother of the Word Incarnate,
despise not my petitions,
but in thy mercy hear and answer me.
Amen.

The actual author of the Memorare is unknown. It has been traditionally attributed to the abbot St. Bernard of Clairvaux from the 12th century. This is possibly because it was championed by *another* Bernard, the French priest Claude Bernard, who used it extensively in his ministry to the poor and to prisoners (including some quite hardened criminals!) in the 17th century.



Prayer of Abandonment

Father, I abandon myself into your hands;
do with me what you will.
Whatever you may do, I thank you:
I am ready for all, I accept all.
Let only your will be done in me,
and in all Your creatures -
I wish no more than this, O Lord.

Into your hands I commend my soul;
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,
for I love you Lord,
and so need to give myself,
to surrender myself into your hands,
without reserve,
and with boundless confidence,

For you are my Father.

--Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916)

Charles Eugène, vicomte de Foucauld de Pontbriand (1858-1916), commonly known as Charles de Foucauld, was a French soldier, explorer, geographer, ethnographer, Catholic priest and hermit who lived among the Tuareg people in the Sahara in Algeria. He was murdered in 1916 This prayer was taken from a larger meditation that St Charles De Foucauld wrote in 1896. In this meditation, he expressed his desire to join with the prayer of Jesus on the cross.

In memory of Oscar Romero (1917–1980)

A Future Not Our Own

It helps now and then to step back and take a long view.
The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a fraction
of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of
saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us.
No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession
brings perfection, no pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the Church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives include everything.

This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one
day will grow. We water the seeds already planted
knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects
far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of
liberation in realizing this.
This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning,
a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's
grace to enter and do the rest.
We may never see the end results, but that is the
difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not
messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.



From Xavarian Missionaries: Oscar A. Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, in El Salvador, was assassinated on March 24, 1980, while celebrating Mass in a small chapel in a cancer hospital where he lived. He had always been close to his people, preached a prophetic gospel, denouncing the injustice in his country and supporting the development of popular and mass organizations. He became the voice of the Salvadoran people when all other channels of expression had been crushed by the repression. This prayer was composed by Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw, drafted for a homily by Card. John Dearden in Nov. 1979 for a celebration of departed priests. As a reflection on the anniversary of the martyrdom of Bishop Romero, Bishop Untener included it in a reflection titled "The mystery of the Romero Prayer." The mystery is that the words of the prayer are attributed to Oscar Romero, but they were never spoken by him.

Serenity Prayer

God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change
the courage to change the things I can
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time,
enjoying one moment at a time.

Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace.

Taking, as he did, the sinful world as it is,
not as I would have it.

Trusting that he will make all things right
if I surrender to His will;
that I may be reasonably happy in this life,
and supremely happy with Him forever.

The Serenity Prayer is credited to American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who composed it in the early 1940s. It was first delivered in a sermon in 1943. While earlier, anonymous versions of similar prayers have been found, later research affirms that Niebuhr authored the version that became widely recognized, especially through its adoption by Alcoholics Anonymous.

Prayer for Good Humor



Grant me oh Lord, good digestion,
and also something to digest.
Grant me a healthy body, and
the necessary good humor to maintain it.
Grant me a simple soul that knows
to treasure all that is good
and that doesn't frighten easily at the sight of evil,
but rather finds the means to put things
back in their place.
Give me a soul that knows not boredom,
grumbles, sighs, and laments,
nor excess of stress, because of that
obstructing thing called "I."
Grant me O Lord, a good sense of humor,
Allow me the grace to be able to take a joke
to discover in life a bit of joy,
and to be able to share it with others.

(St. Thomas More)

... St. Thomas More, Pray for Us ...

Saint Thomas More (1478 –1535) was an English lawyer, humanist, and statesman who served as Lord Chancellor under King Henry VIII. He is famous for writing *Utopia* and for refusing to recognize Henry VIII as the head of the Church of England, leading to his conviction for treason and execution in 1535. He was later canonized as a saint by the Catholic Church and is the patron saint of politicians.



The Mission of My Life

God has created me to do Him some definite service.

He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another.

I have my mission.

I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next.

I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons.

He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work.

I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place,

while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments.

Therefore, I will trust Him, whatever I am, I can never be thrown away.

If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him,

in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him.

If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him.

He does nothing in vain.

He knows what He is about.

He may take away my friends.

He may throw me among strangers.

He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me.

Still, He knows what He is about.

Saint John Henry Cardinal Newman

St. John Henry Newman C.O. (1801-1890) was an English Catholic theologian, academic, philosopher, historian, writer, and poet. He was previously an Anglican priest, and after his conversion to Catholicism, became a cardinal.

I asked God for strength

I asked God for strength so that I could accomplish grandiose projects:
He made me weak to keep me humble.

I asked God to give me health so that I could accomplish great things:
He gave me pain so that I could understand health better.

I asked Him for wealth so that I could have everything:
He made me poor so that I wouldn't be selfish.

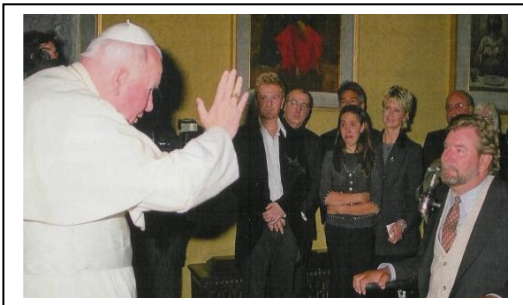
I asked Him for power so that men would need me:
He gave me humiliation so that I would need them.

I asked God for everything so that I could enjoy life:
He left me with life so that I could appreciate everything

Lord, I haven't received anything that I asked for,
but you've given me all that I needed, and You did so almost against my will.

The prayers that I did not pray were granted.

May You be praised: My Lord, among all men no one has what I have.



Kirk Kilgour was a USA Volleyball athlete. He came to play in Series A in Italy in 1973.

Due to a training accident he became paralyzed on his limbs in 1976.

He passed away in 2002 and remains in history for his profound humanity in front of suffering. St John Paul II, Pope at that time, invited him to meet him at the Vatican in Rome, to ask him how he felt about his life as "one of us.", and to recite his prayer during Wednesday audience.

Don't Quit

When things go wrong as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all up hill,
When the funds are low and the debts are high
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest if you must, but don't you quit.

Life is strange with its twists and turns
As every one of us sometimes learns
And many a failure comes about
When he might have won had he stuck it out;
Don't give up though the pace seems slow—
You may succeed with another blow.

Success is failure turned inside out—
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,
And you never can tell just how close you are,
It may be near when it seems so far;
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit—
It's when things seem worst that you must not quit.

For all the sad words of tongue or pen
The saddest are these: "It might have been!"

~John Greenleaf Whittier~
(1807-1892)

John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892) was an American Quaker poet and advocate of the abolition of slavery in the United States. Frequently listed as one of the fireside poets, he was influenced by the Scottish poet Robert Burns. Whittier is remembered particularly for his anti-slavery writings, as well as his 1866 book *Snow-Bound*.

THE OLD FARMER AND THE PRAYER

There once was a preacher that was invited to attend a men's breakfast in East Bell County.

As they all set down, the visiting preacher asks one of the impressive older farmers if he would say grace before they ate.

The old farmer stood, everyone bowed their heads and the old farmer began.

He said, "Lord, I hate buttermilk."

The preacher opened one eye and wondered to himself where this was going.

Then the farmer loudly proclaimed, "Lord, I hate lard!"

Now the preacher was overly worried.

However without missing a beat, the farmer prayed on, "And Lord, you know I don't care much for raw white flour."

Just as the preacher was ready to stand and stop everything, the farmer continued. "But Lord, when you mix 'em all together and bake 'em up, I do love fresh biscuits.

So lord, when things come up we don't like, when life gets hard, when we just don't understand what you are sayin' to us, we just need to relax and wait till You are done mixin', and probably it will be something even better than biscuits.

Amen."

THE BANK ACCOUNT

The 92-year-old, petite, well-poised and proud lady, who is fully dressed each morning by eight o'clock, with her hair fashionably coifed and makeup perfectly applied, even though she is legally blind, moved to a nursing home today. Her husband of 70 years recently passed away, making the move necessary.

After many hours of waiting patiently in the lobby of the nursing home, she smiled sweetly when told her room was ready. As she maneuvered her walker to the elevator, I provided a visual description of her tiny room, including the eyelet sheets that had been hung on her window. "I love it," she stated with the enthusiasm of an eight-year-old having just been presented with a new puppy.

"Mrs. Jones, you haven't seen the room....just wait."

"That doesn't have anything to do with it," she replied.

"Happiness is something you decide on ahead of time. Whether I like my room or not doesn't depend on how the furniture is arranged, it's how I arrange my mind. I already decided to love it. It's a decision I make every morning when I wake up. I have a choice; I can spend the day in bed recounting the difficulty I have with the parts of my body that no longer work, or get out of bed and be thankful for the ones that do. Each day is a gift, and as long as my eyes open I'll focus on the new day and all the happy memories I've stored away, just for this time in my life."

She went on to explain, "Old age is like a bank account, you withdraw from what you've put in. So, my advice to you would be to deposit a lot of happiness in the bank account of memories. Thank you for your part in filling my Memory bank. I am still depositing."

And with a smile, she said:

Remember the six simple rules to be happy:

1. Pray and trust in God
2. Free your heart from hatred.
3. Free your mind from worries.
4. Live simply.
5. Give more.
6. Expect less.



“YOU SEE, SOMETIMES IN OUR LIVES, THE GLASSES WE NEED TO SEE JESUS ARE TEARS,” HE SAID AT A MORNING MASS EARLY IN HIS PAPACY. “ALL OF US IN OUR LIVES HAVE GONE THROUGH MOMENTS OF JOY, PAIN, SADNESS – WE’VE ALL EXPERIENCED THESE THINGS.”

*“IN THE DARKEST MOMENTS, DID WE CRY?”
..... “HAVE WE RECEIVED THAT GIFT OF TEARS THAT PREPARES OUR EYES TO SEE THE LORD?” (POPE FRANCIS)*

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Gratitude List

“Remember the past with gratitude. Live the present with enthusiasm.
Look forward to the future with confidence.”

~ St. Pope John Paul II

Please take a few minutes each day and write down five things you are grateful for.
Add five more each day and include the date. You will be surprised.
Keep this list near you when you are feeling “blue.”

I am grateful for.....

Date

