

November 2024

BROADCASTER

A magazine of Worship Anew



*Though I walk
through the valley...*

FINDING UNDERSTANDING
IN YOUR TIME OF GRIEF

Worship Anew

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Worship Anew
5 Martin Luther Drive
Fort Wayne, IN 46825
(888) 286-8002

*Worship Anew engages
and equips aging adults
with resources to live a
full and abundant life in
Jesus Christ.*

EDITORIAL STAFF

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Executive Director

ASHLEY WIEHE
Director of Communications

THOMAS MOLL
Director of Content &
Innovation

SHEILA BANKS
Communications Specialist

ELIZABETH PULS
Copy Editor

PEYTON SWEET
Content Specialist

*Cover Photo Provided
Every year, the Spira family would drive
Paul's red Mercedes convertible in the Annual
Woodhurst Neighborhood Association Fourth
of July parade. In his absence, the parade
was held in his honor this past year.*

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A Special Edition on Grief

As a ministry to aging adults and their caregivers, Worship Anew frequently receives prayer and care package requests for individuals grieving the death of a loved one. Many mourn the loss of a spouse or other loved one, while others suffer the pain of losing an adult child. These losses don't just hurt. They can have detrimental effects on the physical, mental, and spiritual health of the people most directly affected.

Thankfully, as Christians we do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. As Paul wrote in his first letter to the church in Thessalonica, "we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him" (4:13-14, NIV). At Worship Anew, we recognize how critical it is to remind grieving individuals that they are not alone, that they are loved by those around them, and that hope that is found only in Christ.

In this special edition of the *Broadcaster*, we are solely focusing on grief and the challenges it brings — both immediately and in the years to come. We hope that in the pages of this magazine, you will find some answers and resources to help you or someone you know through one of life's most trying times.

In Christ,

Your Friends at Worship Anew

The Lord Is My Shepherd A Psalm of David.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness

for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,

they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Psalm 23 ESV



Redeemed Before His Throne

Finding Hope in Christ Amidst Grief



Matthew F. Leighty

Matthew F. Leighty
Executive Director

November is often a time filled with reflection and remembrance. It is particularly significant as we observe All Saints' Day, a time to honor and remember all the saints, known and unknown, who have gone before us in the faith.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 (ESV) reads, "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep." This essential scripture reading reassures us that death is not the end for believers.

Over the years, I have attended many funerals and visited with those who have lost loved ones. A frequent comment is how unimaginable it must be for those who do not believe, and what a profound comfort it is to have the assurance of salvation and the peace of the resurrection through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

These moments of grief, great sorrow at the loss of our loved one who we will miss, are such natural and healthy parts of our lives.

Jesus shares a comforting message in Matthew 5:4 (ESV): "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Yet, can someone reject the comfort that comes from the Lord? I have a dear loved one who, through suffering and loss, has hardened their heart toward God. Questions can

sometimes become all consuming. Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people? Why did He take my loved one from me so early? This often happens when despair festers in our hearts or when we place those loved ones and the grief we carry above our relationship with Christ Jesus, our Lord. It is in these moments that we must look to Christ and His power to overcome our deepest sorrows.

Consider the farmer in spring, planting seeds in the ground. To a young child, it might seem like the seeds are lost, buried in the soil, never to be seen again. However, the farmer knows this is not the end. With time, care, and the right conditions, those seeds will sprout and grow into beautiful crops. The farmer has hope and faith in the process of growth and renewal.

Similarly, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 shows us that death is not the end for believers. Just as the farmer trusts in the transformation of seeds into crops, Christians believe in the resurrection and eternal life through Jesus Christ. This belief provides comfort and hope, even in times of grief.

In the August 2023 *Broadcaster* magazine, I explored C.S. Lewis' "A Grief Observed," a compassionate book focusing on the mourning and loss Lewis experienced at the passing of his wife. Through raw and honest reflections, Lewis delves into his sorrow, questioning his faith and grappling with the pain of loss, ultimately finding a path to healing in the arms of our redeeming Savior.



But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 ESV

A book that gave me encouragement when my father had terminal cancer and eventually passed away was “Handbook of Consolations” by Johann Gerhard. Written in the 17th century, this timeless work offers spiritual comfort through keen theological insights and transformative scripture references, providing solace and strength to those near death’s door.

Gerhard shares: “The Apostle Paul says that Christ was made ‘the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep’ (1 Corinthians 15:20, ESV). Accordingly, by God’s arrangement, the offering of the first fruits followed the harvest. Similarly, the harvest of the universal resurrection follows the first fruits of the Lord’s resurrection. Christ is our head and what goes before in the head will follow in the members.” We look forward to when we will be gathered into glory with Christ and all believers.

Both books can be wonderful sources of encouragement for those who are grieving and for those who care for them, offering profound insights and compassionate guidance through the journey of loss.

The most important thing in this life, especially when it comes to grief, is to know the love of Christ and to keep him first and at the center of our lives. This love assures us that we will spend eternity with our loved ones and, best of all, with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This eternal perspective provides the ultimate comfort and hope, transcending the pain of our earthly losses.

As we navigate this difficult journey of grief, I encourage you to explore the resources we offer at Worship Anew. Whether you are personally grieving or supporting someone who is, our ministry supplies the encouragement we find in God’s Word, which provides the ultimate comfort and hope in the promises of Christ Jesus our Lord.

“My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less”

LSB 575

***My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;
No merit of my own I claim
But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.***

Refrain:

***On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.***

***When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In ev’ry high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil. [Refrain]***

***His oath, His covenant and blood
Support me in the raging flood;
When ev’ry earthly prop gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay. [Refrain]***

***When He shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh, may I then in Him be found,
Clothed in His righteousness alone,
Redeemed to stand before His throne!
[Refrain]***

Grief Q&A

In our pain and grief, we begin to ask questions to help us cope. We have gathered some of those questions and researched those answers. If you ever have questions about your grief, please reach out to us at editor@worshipanew.org, and we will strive to answer those questions for you.

Is this normal?

Short answer, yes. Everyone experiences grief differently. According to Stanford University, “Your grief reactions may cause you to experience such intense or unusual emotions, or even no emotion, and you might worry you’re somehow ‘not like other people.’ Everything from experiencing major upheaval and pain to feeling numb and disassociated can all be ‘normal’ aspects of a grief response. It’s more important to understand this range is possible, and it’s OK to seek support or help.”

How long will my grief last?

Everyone experiences their grief differently, and there’s no set timeline to say that your grief will fade in a month or even a year. Stanford explains this well: “Healing after a loss is a process that can feel like a roller coaster of emotions. There may be gradual improvements that are interrupted by setbacks. How long this grieving process might take for you can also be influenced by other factors in your life at this time.” The best advice is to take your time with your grief and let yourself process it at your own pace and not by the expectations of another person. “You will likely find that as time passes that the pain lessens, and you return to earlier levels of functioning, both in your personal and professional life,” according to the Hospice Foundation of America (HFA).

Does everyone go through the same “stages” of grief?

Grief does not come in a predictable set of stages, according to HFA. As they explain, “People may have different ‘styles’ of grieving. Some people may express their grief verbally, or cry easily; other people may channel their grief into activity. All of these responses are normal; how we grieve is not a measure of how we love. ... Most of us experience grief like a roller coaster: there are ups and downs, good days and bad days. There are no universal stages of grief; each of us has our own personal pathway as we experience loss.”

My routine and how I act has changed since my loss. Is this normal?

This is a normal question to ask. “Each of us is affected by grief in our own way. ... In most cases, these strange actions and thoughts are temporary. They gradually fade and disappear as you continue your journey through the mourning process,” according to HFA. However, please seek out a grief counselor or a support group if you feel this is too far beyond your norm.

What is “ambush grief”?

According to GriefShare, “An ambush of grief is a situation in which something, an event, a person, a place, a smell, almost anything you can think of triggers a memory of your loved one, which leads to an emotional reaction.” Essentially, you are unexpectedly hit with your grief when you are not expecting it. Someone may say something, you may hear a song on the radio, or come across a shirt in a store that they used to wear. Small things can have a big impact. Know that they will happen, and it's ok to feel grief in those situations.

What are anniversary effects or grief triggers?

“A grief trigger (such as ambush grief) can be anything that causes a strong reminder of your loss or loved one. Anniversary effects refer to the common experience of feeling amplified grief on special occasions such as holidays, birthdays, or the anniversary of your loss,” according to Stanford. Know that those special days and anniversaries that you shared with your loved one will be hard, especially those first couple of years. “We recommend that people working through grief to be intentional about planning to set aside time for remembrance on important occasions. Grief triggers are normal, and it's OK that the memories of your lost one live on,” Stanford writes.

How do I get over my loss?

“Regaining your balance after a major loss is a process of slowly integrating a new reality into your life rather than a ‘getting over’ a hurdle,” according to Stanford. Help is available during this time of loss. See page 23 for a list of resources or seek out a mental health professional in your community.

Is it wrong to be comforted that they are no longer in pain?

HFA writes, “Many grieving people find great comfort in having had the opportunity to say ‘goodbye’ to the person who died, or realize there is little they could have done to prevent the loss. Grievers who have good social support or a strong sense of spirituality often face grief with more resilience, and studies show that is not uncommon.”

How can I cope with a crisis of faith or purpose following loss?

Know that God is always with you and will be with you through this loss. Stanford writes, “A well-known description of grieving speaks of a ‘walk through the valley of the shadow of death’ from Psalm 23 (ESV). ... Even familiar terrain looks and feels different when covered in shadows and enclosed by cliffs. When we grieve, familiar ground shifts under us, and we find ourselves in a new landscape. Even when our friends and family members are nearby, they may seem far away or that they're not paying attention to our loss. We may lack the energy to make or carry out plans. For some, loss may prompt deep spiritual questions: Why do bad things happen to good people? How can I redeem the loss I am feeling? What would the one I'm remembering want me to learn from their life? How can I honor them in my own life? The answers will come slowly, they have no prescribed timetable, and each of us will have a different response. This is the time to make time for simply being a mourner.”

The Language of Grieving

A brief guide to comforting a grieving friend or loved one

*By Chandrama Anderson, MFT
Connect2 Marriage Counseling*

The Language of Grieving Guide covers both words that offer comfort, and words, while well intentioned, may be resented by or stifle the grieving person or make the journey through grief more difficult.

Acknowledge the Loss. Saying nothing, or pretending the death didn't happen hurts the person.

Show that you care. Immediately following a death, a bereaved person needs to have the death acknowledged, to have empathy, care and support offered, and most importantly, to hear words that allow them to feel whatever they are feeling at the moment. Sharing stories and memories of the person that has died — and using his or her name, whether in person or in a note — are greatly appreciated.

Allow the grieving person to take the lead in conversations. To help comfort someone, keep in mind that it's helpful for the bereaved to talk with you as they normally would. Laughter is okay, too.

The Narrative of Grieving is the story told by the bereaved person of the death of a loved one. The goal and intent of the Narrative of Grieving is for the bereaved to try to make sense of the death. Often, the bereaved need to tell their stories repeatedly as they work through their grief and mourning.

Remember the loved one. Whether one is an acquaintance or a close friend, talking about the person that has died helps for two reasons: first, because the bereaved often feel isolated, and secondly even though their loved one is dead, it helps to know that he or she has not been forgotten. This could be as simple as, "I was thinking about you and your wife the other day, and that she taught you about gardening." Often asking permission makes a discussion less awkward for the person consoling the grieving person, "Is it okay with you if I talk about your wife once in a while?"

The journey through grieving has no road map or timetable. Over time, people close to the bereaved become part of a support system as the journey through grief progresses. Being with the bereaved and asking something as simple as, "How are you feeling today?" honors the bereaved in the process of grieving. Remembering and talking about the loved one on important dates such as birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays, brings solace and comfort to the bereaved.

Avoid religious platitudes. While saying, "It was God's will," may comfort some people, this statement and other religious platitudes may deny permission for the bereaved to feel what they feel — if it's fine with God, then it's supposed to be fine with me.

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What to say

(and Not say) to *Comfort your Friend or Loved One*

words that *do* comfort

Do Say:

I can only imagine how much pain you must be feeling.

You look great ... how are you feeling today?

How about if I bring you dinner on Tuesday?
(Make specific offers.)

I don't know what to say, but I know this must be very difficult for you.

I'm so sorry.

This is one of the things in life that can't be explained.

You've been through a lot; over time you'll feel better than you do now.

This must be a bewildering and complicated time. It must be hard for you.

It seems so natural to cry at a time like this.

Was your mother ill for a long time?

If I were in your shoes, I think I'd feel that way too.

One of my favorite memories of your daughter is ...

How do you feel when you're alone?

Do you feel like talking for a while?

Tell me about your (be specific about their loved one).

Without her, what is your life like?

I'm thinking of you, and I want to help.

When do you miss him most?

I'm here for you, whatever you're feeling right now.

Can decisions about your future wait?

I know you will always love your daughter.

words that *do not* comfort

Do Not Say:

I know just how you feel. (You can't know exactly; and it won't ring true.)

You look great ... you must be feeling fine.

Let me know if I can do anything.

(Above all, don't pretend it didn't happen.)

Oh, how awful.

Why are you torturing yourself by going over and over this?

Time will heal you.

Think of all you have to be thankful for.

He wouldn't have wanted you to be sad.

Just be happy that she's out of her pain.

Be strong; you're holding up so well.

He lived a long life. Now he's in a better place.

Keep busy.

You shouldn't still be feeling this way.

Try not to think about it.

You must get on with your life.

This is a blessing.

Now you have an angel in heaven.

Feeling that way won't help a thing.

You'll get married again.

You can always have more children.

‘Bring with him those who have fallen asleep’

The meaning of All Saints’ Day

All Saints’ Day was established on November 1 in the 700s as a way to recognize those who have died in the faith. Early on in church history, festivals were established to honor martyrs whose blood grew the church and were inspirations to Christians to remain in the faith amid persecution. It’s a day to hold up the “normal” believer who has died as an inspiration — someone who has remained faithful to their savior, Jesus Christ.

All Saints’ Day is also a way to remember that death doesn’t have the last word. Jesus has conquered death and the grave.

We are called as Christians to encourage each other with the words of 1 Thessalonians 4:14 (ESV), that, “through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.”

May you be encouraged this All Saints’ Day that one day you will sing, with all the saints, praises to Jesus. Your voice will join the voices who have cried out to God for all generations!





Worship Anew in November

Year 2024 | Series B



The Great Reversal

November 3, 2024 – All Saints Day**Rev. Paul Shoemaker**

All of us were destined to spend our eternity apart from God. Because of Christ Jesus and His suffering, death, and glorious resurrection, a great reversal of our fate has taken place. By God's grace we are now saints and true believers who are destined for heaven.

*Sermon Text: Matthew 5:1-12**Readings: Psalm 149; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12*

When Picking Up Sticks ...

November 10, 2024 – Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost**Rev. William Mueller**

First Kings 17:8-16 brings us to the encounter of the prophet Elijah and the unnamed widow at the town of Zarephath. In this meeting, the Lord provides a miracle to care and support His people. Perhaps you feel like this widow. You're picking up sticks and expect nothing good to come. But wait upon the Lord!

*Sermon Text: 1 Kings 17:8-16**Readings: Psalm 146; 1 Kings 17:8-16; Mark 12:38-44*

Don't Give Up

November 17, 2024 – Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost**Rev. Dr. Thomas Ahlersmeyer**

Christians face two major temptations — placing too much faith in things that don't last and giving up on the one thing that is eternal. When you are tempted to invest your hopes and dreams in the things of this earth, fix your eyes upon Jesus and don't give up!

*Sermon Text: Mark 13:13**Readings: Psalm 16; Hebrews 10:19-25; Mark 13:13*

Praise the King

November 24, 2024 – Twenty-Seventh Sunday after Pentecost**Rev. Dr. Walter Maier III**

In the Book of Revelation, the Apostle John presents us with a glimpse of the reign of Jesus Christ. Revelation 1 shows us that this King is almighty and that He is coming again on Judgment Day. The result is that we joyfully praise Christ the King.

*Sermon Text: Revelation 1:4**Readings: Psalm 93; Revelation 1:4-8; Mark 13:24-27*

'I BET YOU WON'T FORGET THIS'

A new voice in a heavenly body

By The Rev. Jeff Teeple

Getting older is not for the faint of heart! It can be tough to accept the changes in our bodies. Parts don't work like they used to, and even with the best care and amazing medical advances, not everything gets better. The Bible reminds us that this is a part of life: 1 Peter 1:24 (NIV) says, "All people are like grass ... the grass withers and the flower falls."

But, thanks be to God, that's not the end of the story. The Bible also tells us that in heaven, we will be transformed, and everything will be healed.

St. Paul talks a bit about our bodies here and in heaven in 2 Corinthians 5. He calls them our "earthly tent" and our "heavenly dwelling." The body in this life — which is a precious gift of God — is mortal. But the body we will have into eternity will be resurrected and made alive on the Last Day. "Therefore," Paul says, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV).

I often think of these words when I attend funerals or recite the Creeds: "I believe in ... the resurrection of the body." I look forward to the day when we will be reunited with loved ones, friends, and all the saints who have gone before us in heaven.

But as comforting as those words are, they can sometimes be hard to fully grasp. When we see the decline in our bodies, it can be difficult to imagine them being resurrected and restored.

In moments like these, I think of Helen, a dear member of our congregation who is now with Christ in heaven.

For years, Helen was a faithful servant of the congregation and community. She was a gentle woman, but at the same time Helen was an impressively strong lady even in her times of illness.

The first memory I have of Helen was from a meet-and-greet at our congregation in the early days of my ministry there. Some people introduce themselves, and their names quickly leave your head. Some people have unique names and that makes it a little easier to remember.

But Helen had a tracheotomy, which meant she had a tube in her throat to help her breathe. She also used a speaking device, called an electrolarynx, to help her talk. The device made her sound like a robot.

That night she looked me square in the eyes, put the device to her throat, and said in that mechanical voice, "My name is Helen. I'll bet you won't forget this. Will you?" I remembered Helen from that moment on!

In fact, she always introduced herself the same way: "This is Helen Miller calling ..." she would say on my voicemail. It always struck me as funny. Because of the electrolarynx device, there was no doubt or confusion who it was when Helen left her message. Even still, she always gave me her name: "Pastor, this is Helen."

"Therefore," Paul says, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come!"

2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV



Helen was a child of God. In baptism, she was made alive in Christ and Christ in her. So, Helen has been given true life — Jesus' eternal life. And that is life without sickness, injury, fear, confusion, concern, worry, regret, mistakes, sadness, or fatigue.

Like all Christians, when she died here on earth, Helen was given complete healing. That is the miracle of God's healing!

But we go back to St. Paul's words, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." Clearly, that verse speaks to our lives as baptized children of God here on earth. But it also gives us a glimpse of what life in heaven will be like.

When I think about what life in heaven will be like, Helen's mechanical voice sticks in my head. You see, I can imagine pretty well what Helen must have been like before all this settled into her life — she was probably the same driving force behind projects and had the same nurturing, caring heart. But I can't imagine what her voice sounded like. I didn't know her before the surgery that forced her to use the device. Was her voice low or high? Sing-songy or a little monotone? Did she tend to speak quietly or loudly? Did she enjoy singing?

So, when I think about the miracle of God's healing, I believe that Helen is fully restored. She has her voice back in heaven! She joins together with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb!"

And that reality will be most remarkable to me when I see Helen in heaven someday. Because when Christ welcomes me home, I will hear a voice — clear and true — and it will say "Pastor, this is Helen. I bet you won't forget this."

The Rev. Jeff Teeple is the senior pastor at Peace Lutheran Church in Fremont, Ind.







The Face of Grief from Different Points of View

Family shares their individual perspectives on their loss

The car sat empty at this year's parade. "MISS YOU PAUL", it read instead. Grief can leave us with holes and empty spots in our lives. Some people are confused and angry. Others find solace in friends and family while others internalize their feelings. Some shed tears; some do not. Some join counseling groups while others begin journaling.

Grief is not a "one size fits all" model. Grief is personal. There is no set timeframe or way that you "should" grieve.

In the following pages, you will read about a family who lost their patriarch. The Rev. Paul Spira was the pastor of Peace Lutheran Church in Fort Wayne, Ind. He passed on December 14, 2022, after a brief illness. He left behind a wife, two children and their spouses, six grandchildren, and many other friends and family. The family grieves and continues to grieve today, but all in their own way.

The following is a perspective of their grief and how they have uniquely processed their loss in the past two years.

continued on page 16



The Spira family gathers for Thanksgiving for a family photo, one of many to come which does not include their husband, father, and grandfather.

continued from page 15

CARYL, WIFE

My husband, Paul, was the pastor of our church for 13 years before retiring in 2020. He was 62 when he passed away in the hospital.

In May 2022, our daughter's family became our main focus as her husband, Ted, left on a 10-month deployment as an Army Chaplain. Keeping their house maintained and helping out with their four children had occupied much of our time.

Our son is a parish pastor (married with two children) and my husband was both a father and pastor-mentor to him. Our son was trying to balance his own parish preparing for Christmas services, while driving back and forth to Fort Wayne when Paul was hospitalized. Losing my husband when we all depended on him for **so much** was really, really hard.

Threatening winter weather and the height of Christmas season made it a difficult time to plan for a funeral. But we needed closure. Our solution was to hold the funeral service at the church on December 22 for our immediate family and our congregation. In spring, we would have a memorial service

Paul and Caryl Spira pose for a photo together. They were married for 36 years.

after Ted returned from deployment and our extended family and friends could attend. Later, we would inter Paul's ashes back home in Wisconsin.

After getting through the funeral, my next priority was to create a happy, meaningful Christmas celebration for my daughter and her young kids. Since a winter snowstorm was approaching, we hunkered down at my house for the long weekend and did the best we could. Amazon helped us accomplish the gift part. Christmas Eve service brought tears of joy and emotion, as we missed hearing Paul's beautiful tenor voice in the choir. But, we were where we needed to be.

What's next? Our church was

holding its first 13-week GriefShare session in January. I couldn't wait to get started, mainly because it was a dreary January in Fort Wayne, Ind., and I needed a reason to get out of bed. I'm an extrovert. I need to be with people.

I strive to put the best construction on everything and stay positive and upbeat. Losing my husband, my best friend, and daily companion would be the most difficult part of navigating my new life. I've known grief from losing grandparents, parents, and friends. ***But that grief was very different than what I now faced.***

I don't know how I would have survived the winter without



GriefShare. I wanted to be with those who understood. While all of our situations and grieving were unique, there's still the common bond of a life-changing experience of loss. I was familiar with GriefShare through the video "Surviving the Holidays," which our church viewed during a November Bible class. I attended that class when I was grieving the loss of **my dad** who died in July at age 91. ***Little did I know then, I would also lose my husband before the holidays.***

A friend gave me a journal to write in, as it helped her when she lost her parents. I'm a checklist kind of person, so the first thing I did was make some lists. Here is how I tackled the next 20 months. With a separate page for each, I wrote down my:

- ▶ Fears & Challenges: Putting these in writing helped me develop a plan on tackling them.
- ▶ Friends for Help or Support: Who to call for advice on house maintenance; needing a friend.
- ▶ Gratitude List: List the things I have instead of looking at what I lost.
- ▶ Ministry Opportunities: How can I help others; what is my purpose now?
- ▶ Accomplishments: An ongoing list to see the progress I've made.

I didn't want to feel abandoned by everyone after time had passed and everyone else got on with their daily routines, so I was ready to contact people who had offered to help or go out to lunch. Admittedly, this is easier for me as an extrovert. I'm always looking to add new friends to this list, developing connections with others, especially those who have lost their spouse. What has helped me is finding individuals who have a shared interest in something that I like to do.

Four months after my husband died, I received a call from Worship Anew as they were looking for a part-time receptionist. I was restless and wondered how I would feel fulfilled and have purpose. God took care of that! I soon discovered how many phone calls came from Worship Anew listeners who had lost their spouse and were updating records and mailing information. I was able to share the words, "I understand how hard that is." I felt I was in the right place at the right time.

My hardest time is being home alone in the afternoon or on a weekend. That's when that lonely feeling sets in. I've tried to anticipate those times and come up with other places to be and things to do. On the flip-side, I've also noticed when I use busyness as an excuse to fill the void, I become exhausted. I'm trying to learn quiet time is not a bad thing.

My new normal means something is different, but I'm not forgetting Paul. I still get hit with waves of "ambush" grief. I try to recognize the triggers and anticipate them. Since music was a big part of our life, unexpectedly

hearing certain songs is my most frequent trigger. Early on, I broke down in the grocery store, realizing how different it is to shop for only myself and bypass sale items of Paul's favorite foods.

Deciding when and how to go through your loved ones possessions is also an ever-moving target. My initial approach was to give things to people for which they would have special meaning. That made it much easier and helped me feel I was preserving Paul's memory. Now, I only go through the cleaning out process when I'm in the right mood to do it and then it's OK.

I've stayed active in church and have developed a more intentional approach to Bible study. I try to be more sensitive to other peoples' needs. I've always been a hugger. I now appreciate getting hugs just as much as giving them.

I try to not let grief identify me. After year one, I attended another 13-week GriefShare. The videos and workbook

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Each year, the Spira family came together to drive Paul's red Mercedes convertible in the neighborhood Fourth of July parade.



Pastor Paul Spira, “Boobah,” smiles in a photo with two of his grandchildren.

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were updated, which made it new again. Our group included both previous and new attendees.

I still miss Paul every day, but I can see my progress. Positive thoughts lead to positive thinking. God is good.

LIZZY, DAUGHTER

Deployment bingo cards are real — anything that can go wrong will.

In April 2022, my husband, Ted, left for a 10-month deployment as a chaplain in the U.S. Army Reserve. It felt like everything that could go wrong — house, car, sickness — did, and that was before my dad got sick.

I was home alone with four kids under 8 years old, two of whom were still in diapers. I had a part-time job and a four-bedroom house to manage. We hired a neighbor to mow, my beloved sister-in-law to help me clean, and some amazing babysitters stepped in to give me some breathing room each week.

We survived a stomach bug that ran through the whole house in a week, potty training, and the death of my 91-year-old grandpa, Roy, in Wisconsin. Ted missed our youngest son’s first steps and Grandpa’s memorial service. It was a difficult year. In November, my dad, who my kids call their “Boobah,” was hospitalized with a lung infection. On December 14, my dad, the Rev. Paul Jerome Spira, received the salvation promised to Him by his Risen Savior, Jesus Christ.

While this SHOULD have been the worst year of my life, somehow, by the grace of God, it wasn’t. The Church — not just my own congregation, but the Church with a capital-C, surrounded my family in sacrificial ways I never imagined.

When it became clear, that pending a miraculous healing, my dad was not going leave the hospital, my daughter’s godmother hopped on a flight from Atlanta to spend a week with us, pausing her doctoral studies at the end of the semester.

Deaconess Carolyn Brinkley, who coordinates military support at the Fort Wayne Seminary (and who also attended seminary with my dad), sent me a care package that included a pocket hymnal and a Kantorei Christmas album, which was recorded back in the early 2000s when my dad was a tenor. I could hear his voice when I played it.

I received cards in the mail from complete strangers who had heard through their church’s grapevine of our situation. A friend I haven’t spoken to since high school got her whole Ohio church together to write me cards. Suddenly, my Facebook page was flooded with loving, thoughtful comments from people all over the country who knew my dad and who he impacted in his ministry — more than he could ever have imagined. I knew my dad was a great man and a great pastor, but I had no idea just how far-reaching God permitted his short ministry to be.

I had just started a new job at my kids’ school. Our congregation is

one of the association churches, and my dad was a pastor on campus until his retirement. I texted our faculty group chat asking for prayers because those people KNEW my dad. Our new principal, who was just starting her Call to our school, told me to take as much time as I needed. She showed up the day after my dad died with four giant squishmallows for my kids — each one had something special to hug. My daughter's kindergarten teacher let her sit in her teacher chair. My kids were in a unique environment where it wasn't just "August's grandpa" who died but "Pastor Spira" — the faculty and the student body felt the hole themselves.

On Fridays during the school year, my dad would drive from the south side of town 20 minutes north to pick up my two older kids and take them to school to save me one day of getting four kids out the door by 7:25. He jokingly called himself the "Boobah Uber," which gradually shrunk down to the "Buber." At about 7:10 on Friday mornings I'd get a text that would simply say "BOTW" — "Buber on the way." It was a treasured time for the older kids getting their own Boobah time, and I know he

enjoyed this small sacrifice, as well.

There was a gentleman at our church named Jerry Branstrator, who had served as an elder and close friend of my father throughout his ministry. From his hospital bed, my dad asked if Jerry would be our new chauffeur. He was an early riser, and my kids knew him from church. He became our Branbuber. He continued taking my kids to school each Friday for the remainder of the school year until Ted got home. He also replaced my broken storm door — a task my dad had intended to do while my husband was deployed but never got to.

We elected not to have Ted come home when my dad died. We imagined it would be too hard to have their Daddy home and then leave again so soon after losing Boobah.

When Ted got home that spring it was such a blessing. I had been told by other military friends that the re-acclimating period would be challenging. I had been doing everything by myself for so long the temptation was either to dump it all on the other parent ("Welcome back! Do some laundry!") or keep doing

everything myself. This time was even harder because, while we had had a few months to get used to the space left from my dad, Ted had to feel it all at once: see my dad's chair in his living room, his red Mercedes convertible, his tenor in the church choir.

We held a proper memorial service for my dad after Ted returned so he could be a part of it. We lovingly called it "funeral part II." My brother Ethan, the pastor at Lord of Life Lutheran Church in Westfield, Ind., preached at this memorial, and Ted led the graveside committal when we eventually interred my dad's ashes in Milwaukee, Wis., with the rest of our family.

Now nearly two years later, my kids still often say they miss Boobah. Peter, who was only 18 months when my dad died, still asks when we will see him again. He has heard the answer so many times that it's become liturgy: "When we get to heaven or when Jesus comes back, whichever comes first." I try to go out of my way to tell them stories about their Boobah, and they love looking at old pictures on my phone.

I wish I had taken more pictures of my kids with my dad. As a mom I'm always taking pictures of my kids, but I need to be more intentional about getting the adults in their lives in the shots, too.

My relationship with my mom has changed as we work more intentionally to take care of each other. I find myself getting frustrated when others take their loved ones for granted. I started therapy to help process and manage the many stresses in my life.

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The family joins together for a photo at the church.





Pastor Paul Spira was a pastoral mentor as well as a father figure to his son-in-law, Ted.

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I will always miss my dad this side of heaven, but I have learned a lot about the grief process and this new club I never wanted to be in. I better understand grief's challenges and have made unlikely friendships with people I've encountered who are also on this journey. And while we will never not be sad, I also am so thankful for the opportunities to witness the faith my dad modeled for me when I do talk about his death.

His sermon mantra was always, "Give 'em Jesus, baby!" We prayed for an earthly miracle while he was sick, but God gave him the miracle of salvation, which is SO much better.

TED, SON-IN-LAW

I still have the last email that my father-in-law sent to me. Paul was not only my wife's father, but he was also my mentor as I entered the pastoral office, both as a field work supervisor and then as an ever-present sounding board as I

navigated the first few years in the ministry. He was a true father to me and a true friend. He sent the email from his hospital bed, and although he was fighting for his life, he still reached out to offer words of consolation and encouragement during a very challenging time in my ministry, quoting the words of Scripture and pointing me to the promises of Jesus.

His death was heartbreaking and difficult to bear, and the grief was compounded by the

fact that I was thousands of miles away, as well as occurring so close to Christmas. And yet Paul, ever the faithful pastor, continued to encourage me with the Word of God even after he had gone to be with his Savior. In his last email, he had directed my attention to Psalm 18 (ESV):

"I love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and 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, and I am saved from my enemies. The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction assailed me; the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears."

Paul helped me bear my own grief

in the same way that he had helped so many other people during his ministry, by directing my attention to the unfailing love of God and to the hope of eternal life that we have in Jesus Christ.

I eventually printed out his email and taped it to the inside of my Pastoral Care Companion. His proclamation of the Gospel still continues to comfort and inspire me as I strive to carry on the work that he had so faithfully carried out: declaring the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation that can only be found in our Lord, Jesus Christ.

ETHAN, SON

In the 20 some months since my dad's death, well, I'm not sure there's a good way to encapsulate the journey.

I've gone through waves of anger. Sometimes it's been toward God for allowing all of this to happen. Sometimes I've directed it toward those well-meaning folks in my life who try but fail to comfort. A few times it's been centered on the doctors or nurses, as if they somehow missed something (I'm rather ashamed to admit). The biggest struggle is when it comes through the mirror, as I accuse myself for not enjoying the time we had more.

We could walk through this same pattern with my sadness, emptiness, lethargy, as well as the times where hope, contentment, and dare I say, thankfulness have peered in on the story. But you get the point. It's been a journey.

However, the most significant parts of the journey haven't been navigating these emotions.

No, the feelings, good or bad, come and go. At times they fade in slowly, and at times, they ambush. They

might persist for the day, hijacking everything on my mental agenda, or catch me off guard for only a moment. The cure might be silence or talking, tears or smiles. But the one thing they all have in common is that they do, in fact, go away eventually.

But the hats I wear stay.

Adjusting to life as a son without a father, a father without my kids' grandfather (or Boobah as they knew him), and a pastor without my mentor and own pastor — these are things that I see as worth sharing.

No matter what journey you've been on with grief, similar or vastly different from my own, I know the one area we overlap is that adjustment to the same life that's forever changed.

For me, the three roles listed above are the areas that I still work through daily.

When my dad died, our daughter was 18 months old, the youngest of his six grandchildren. I can remember when she was a newborn, my parents came to visit, and he asked me, when we were one-on-one, if it felt different having a daughter.

I could tell from his proud smile and voice that it did for him, that there was something so special about having a son and something equally special yet wholly different in having a daughter. But in that moment, she was a newborn (and admittedly, my wife and I are not natural baby people). Compared to her older brother, it felt like pretty much the same newborn routine of eat, sleep, and poop, with a trip to the pediatrician seemingly every other day. I gave an answer somewhere in the middle, acknowledging that

Paul smiles as he holds two of his grandchildren.

it was a little different, but also that I just had a hard time feeling the weight of it since she was so young.

Then, maybe a month or two after his death, our toddler daughter flipped the switch. Overnight, she burst with unique personality, the verbal explosion, and all the amazing skills and traits that fill up iCloud storage with video after video from proud parents. It was also in this massive leap in development that she chose to become daddy's girl. I wouldn't trade it for the world.

Until recently, the fact I never got to tell him "I get what you meant" was tough. It wasn't until this past summer, as our daughter turned 3, that the ambush came, and I fully dealt with it. More than 18 months after we sang him off to heaven, I broke down crying and began telling my wife all these details. It wasn't easy to get out, but something happened once that grief was in the open. I'm not the one who can do descriptive justice to the shift.

What I can say is that since then, every moment when my heart overflows with and for my precious little girl, I feel a connection with my

own dad that I never shared during his life. Do I wish that I could tell him I get it now? Of course. But I can't make that happen. Yet, within that same role in life, I've found a deeper connection to my dad despite his absence.

Similarly, as a pastor I treasured that I could rely on my dad's wisdom and experience as a second career minister. Admittedly, my first four and a half years of ministry that my dad got to witness were marked by many unfortunate twists. In short, I went from a church plant that never got traction to an associate role that within the first 12 months saw the senior pastor, congregation president, and children's ministry director all leave over deeply unfortunate and different circumstances.

I had no business becoming the sole pastor of a congregation, let alone the skills to help that same congregation through deep hurt and betrayal (while also sifting through my own same feelings). But instead of spending my remaining words telling you the beauty of

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God's redeeming plan through the bleakest circumstances — something I suppose is good to hold on to given the context of you reading this — it will suffice to say that my dad was a huge reason (behind the scenes) that our church family stayed in tact and on mission for Jesus.

While no crisis has approached those levels in ministry since, I still found no shortage of reason to call up or text my dad for pastor-to-pastor advice. In fact, the last text exchange we had before his death was him giving me encouragement on a Sunday morning (not an uncommon occurrence).

He ended the text with "Give 'em Jesus, baby!"

Since his death, the footer on every sermon outline and manuscript I've preached has those same words across the page. My wife had them stenciled above my writing desk where I do sermon prep.

Four days after leaving his hospital room for the final time, I was in the pulpit again. My role as pastor continued, even without my mentor. But, it had changed. And while I shed many tears on the sacristy floor between services those first few months, the truth is that change in my same role has been something Jesus has used for His kingdom and glory.

Now, I did mention a third role: Continuing my role as a father without my kids growing up knowing my own father. To be honest, that's

where the journey is still too dark to get into. To this day, I still struggle with the thought of our kids not hearing his voice from the pulpit, his wisdom in conversation, and feeling the hugs that only come from a proud grandpa. In a way, I've made peace with the fact that this will always be a struggle for me, but God may not be done there.

In the end, this is just a snapshot of my journey in grief. It is not the whole picture and hardly begins to fulfill the scope of sorrow and growth, but it is, in part, a reflection of the life God has granted me.

As for your journey, there can be darkness and light, anger, and relief. You may have felt frozen in time as the world moved on, but you stayed in the hospice room. You may have spent every moment in motion to avoid grief catching up to you.

If I have any advice from all this, it would be leaning into what St. Paul wrote in Romans 8:28 (ESV), "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

The promise is not all things will be good or even made good. But through God, all things will work for good. For me, that took close to a full year to feel and believe. Results will vary.

But the promise and love of God in Christ Jesus is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. So cast your anxieties on the one who cares for those crushed in spirit and blesses those who mourn.

Lean into Jesus ... baby!



The Rev. Paul Spira, and his son, the Rev. Ethan Spira, smile together for a photo.

Resources for Processing Grief

Resources are available around the country and in your own community for help during your grief. We encourage you to reach out to one of these organizations if you are in need.

PRACTICAL RESOURCES

GriefShare

GriefShare is an organization that produces resources and connects people to groups where grief can be processed. It's for everyone who is grieving the death of a loved one, no matter if that loved one is a spouse, parent, child, friend, sibling, coworker, or other relative. GriefShare groups cover topics such as loneliness, fear, anger, regrets, relationships, and hope. Groups are free to join but some ask for a small fee to cover the cost to the participant guide. Find a GriefShare group near you or join a virtual group at griefshare.org.

Local Hospitals and Funeral Homes

Many hospitals and funeral homes can point you to grief resources. Some host grief support groups and may have counselors on staff who can help you know what to expect as you go through the grieving process.

SPIRITUAL RESOURCES

Stephen Ministries

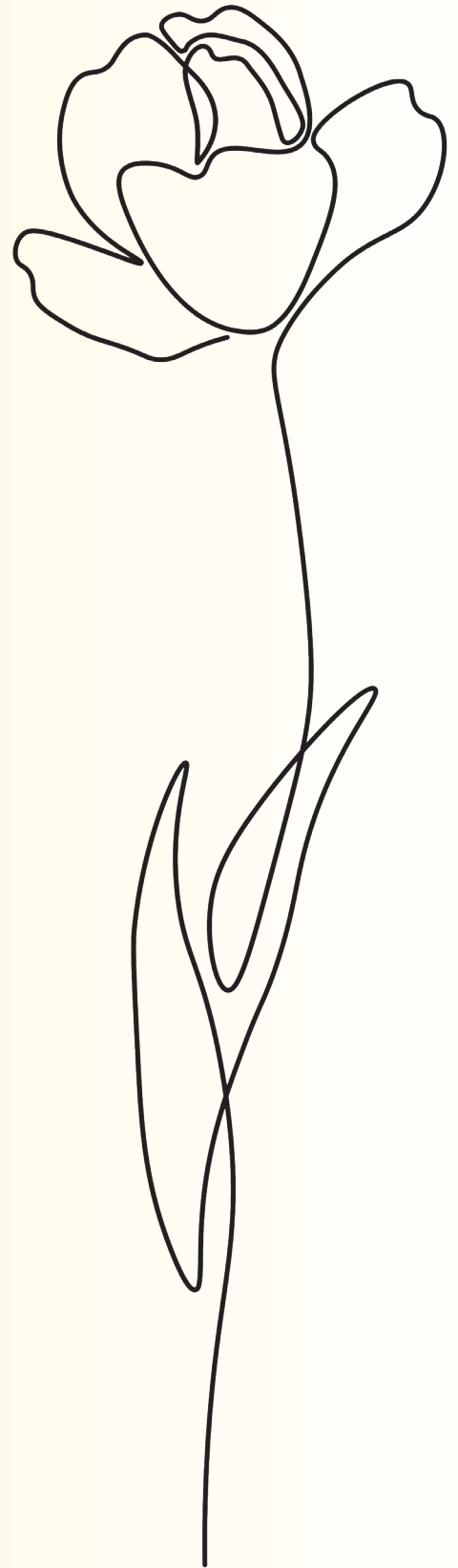
Stephen Ministries is a not-for-profit Christian education organization that produces training resources. Stephen Ministry does not have a connection to one denomination, but many Lutheran churches have Stephen Ministers who are congregation members trained to provide one-to-one care to those experiencing a range of issues, including grief. Talk to your local congregation to see if they have a Stephen Ministry program.

Local Congregation

While not every congregation has a Stephen Ministry program or may not host GriefShare groups, many have their own programs to care for those who grieve. Reach out to your church and ask what resources they have for those who are grieving. Your congregation may not have all the resources you'll need on your grief journey, but you will be equipped with the greatest gift, the hope that we have in Jesus Christ.

“Hope When Your Heart Breaks”

This book is a very practical guide for Christians to process their grief. It's written by the Rev. Michael Newman who currently serves as president of the Texas District LCMS. We've shared a chapter of this book on page 28 of this magazine, but this book has many more resources available to you.





Planning a funeral when grief seems overwhelming

Funeral planning in the midst of a loss can be overwhelming. While trying to grieve, you are asked questions about arrangements, flowers, headstones, caskets, and a slew of other decisions that have to be made within a few short days of the death of your loved one. The choices are a lot to handle, especially as you are trying to honor your loved one's last wishes. Jarod Steffen, funeral director for Fairhaven Funeral Home and Cremation Services in Fort Wayne, Ind., offers advice for those needing to plan a funeral, especially during a time of grief.

A meeting to plan funeral arrangements typically happens a day or two after a death. Generally, after the death of a loved one, a funeral home will try to schedule the arrangements meeting either the next day or the following day. The immediacy of the arrangements is due to the fact that many family members and friends are coming to town after they hear of a passing and so earlier arrangements are encouraged. However, the funeral home can work with you if you are needing more time.

There will be a lot of decisions that need to be made to plan the funeral. In planning a funeral, you will be asked a number of

questions, but to start you will need to decide if you are having a burial or a cremation. This decision will guide the rest of your planning, which will be personalized to your circumstances. From there, the funeral planner will walk you through the other decisions — type of casket or urn, flower arrangements, memorial folder, calling service, etc. The funeral home will also ask you about the person who has passed. They will need to know information for the death certificate as well as for the obituary.

“We try to guide people,” Steffen said. “We have certain processes we present, and we try to take off as much as we can from families.”

Take someone trusted with you to the funeral arrangements meeting. In the time of grief, many want to be surrounded by their friends and family through the whole process. However, in planning the funeral, this is not advisable. For the funeral arrangements meeting, bringing fewer people is the best decision as this is not time for public grief but instead a time to plan that time to gather with friends and family. During grief, you may find that you are more tired, have brain fog, or are experiencing depression in addition to your sadness. In this time, decisions can be difficult to make, even small ones. Bringing someone who you trust to the planning appointment will take the stress off of you during this difficult time.

Use a funeral home to plan the funeral. This may seem obvious, but many times, individuals will want to plan a gathering or a memorial service on their own. They think that this would be more intimate or save them money, but as stated earlier, grief changes our physiology for a short while. It causes one to not think clearly. Planning a gathering can be difficult under normal circumstances, and these are not normal circumstances. You have a lot on your plate during grief; planning a service should not be something that you have to do on your own.

“There’s a lot of other things that people need to worry about other than just the logistics of the funeral,” Steffen

said. “If we can come in and handle some of those logistics, it frees families up to handle some of the personal details that we can’t handle. It also allows people to grieve easier.”

Pre-planning a funeral removes some of the stress during a time of grief. The best advice for removing the stress of planning a funeral is to pre-plan. For most funeral homes across the country, this service is offered free of charge. A pre-planning counselor will work with you to discuss your wishes for your funeral (essentially all of the elements discussed above) and then will document these items to share with your family. It is recommended that you discuss your wishes with your family before your appointment so that you can know their opinions. Following the appointment, you are given literature and documentation that lists out your wishes for your funeral.

You are also afforded the option to prepay for your funeral. The option allows families to lock in certain service prices. This money is then put into a trust and paid to the funeral home at the time of the services. Also, since the money is put in a trust, it is protected if the funeral home ever goes out of business or a family decides to move, and it can easily be transferred.

“Pre-planning provides peace of mind and a lot of comfort to families,” Steffen said.

“We try to guide families depending on where they’re at. Different families have different requests, and they have different price points. Funeral homes will do their best to come alongside the families.”

~ Jarod Steffen, funeral director for Fairhaven Funeral Home and Cremation Services in Fort Wayne, Ind.



THE STAGES OF GRIEF

One size does not fit all

By Kirk Reber

Grieving is a natural response to loss, and it's something we all experience at various points in our lives. Whether it's the loss of a loved one, a change in health, or other significant life events, grief can feel overwhelming. For some, these experiences can be especially poignant as they may coincide with retirement, the loss of peers, or shifting roles within the family. Understanding the stages of grief can help in navigating these complex emotions while maintaining an awareness of personal mental health and wellbeing.

The stages of grief, as identified by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. It's important to remember that these stages are not linear; they can come and go, and not everyone will experience all of them.

Denial is often the first response to loss. It acts as a buffer, helping us to cope with the initial shock.

Denial might look like insisting that everything is fine or avoiding conversations about the loss. For instance, after losing a close friend, one might avoid going to places they frequented together, feeling that acknowledging the absence makes it too real. While denial can provide a temporary emotional break, persistent denial can lead to anxiety disorders, as the avoidance of reality prevents proper emotional processing.

Anger can arise when the reality of the loss sets in. It's a natural reaction to the feeling of helplessness that often accompanies grief. Many people might feel anger toward doctors, family members, or even themselves, wondering why the loss occurred or if it could have been prevented. For example, someone might feel frustration toward a healthcare provider for not being able to prevent a spouse's illness, or even anger at themselves for not identifying symptoms earlier. This

stage can sometimes be associated with heightened irritability or even depressive symptoms, as the intensity of anger can mask deeper feelings of sadness.

Bargaining is characterized by thoughts of "if only" and "what if." This stage often involves negotiating with oneself or with God, wishing for things to be different. Seniors might find themselves reminiscing and wishing they had done things differently, such as spending more time with a loved one. Bargaining reflects the desire to regain control in a situation that feels uncontrollable, and it's a stage that can sometimes be linked with feelings of guilt and regret, also contributing to generalized feelings of anxiety.

Depression in grief is not just sadness; it can include a deep sense of emptiness and withdrawal from regular activities. For older adults, this stage might involve losing interest in hobbies, neglecting self-

It's important to remember that these stages are not linear; they can come and go, and not everyone will experience all of them.

care, or feeling as though there is no point in continuing usual routines. This stage can be particularly challenging as it may intertwine with other life circumstances, such as health issues or social isolation. Prolonged depression can develop into clinical depression, especially if the individual does not seek support or if it exacerbates existing mood disorders like mild or major depression.

Acceptance is not about being “okay” with the loss; rather, it’s about acknowledging the hurtful reality and being intentional in discovering ways to heal. Acceptance might look like finding new routines, seeking joy in small things, or sharing memories of the loved one without overwhelming

sadness. Acceptance can bring a sense of peace, allowing one to reflect on the past with fondness while still finding purpose in the present. However, if acceptance is forced or if someone feels pressured to “move on” too quickly, it can lead to feelings of unresolved grief, where lingering sadness or a sense of incompleteness persists.

Grief is personal, and there is no right or wrong way to experience it. It’s crucial to give yourself the time and space to process emotions at your own pace. Maintaining connections with others, seeking support from grief counseling, pastoral counseling, or support groups, and engaging in activities that bring comfort can all contribute

to emotional healing.

Remember, it’s okay to ask for help and to express your feelings, whether they are of sadness, anger, or even moments of joy as you remember what was lost. Psalm 34:18 (NIV), which says, “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit,” reminds us of God’s presence and comfort during these times of sorrow and loss.

You are not alone. Grief, though challenging, can also be a journey of personal growth and transformation.

Kirk Reber is the executive director of Cross Connections Counseling Ministry in Fort Wayne, Ind.

FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF



DENIAL



ANGER



BARGAINING



DEPRESSION



ACCEPTANCE



Feelings When You're Angry

From "Hope When Your Heart Breaks: Navigating Grief and Loss"

[The Shunammite said to the prophet Elisha,] "As the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." (2 Kings 4:30 ESV)

DECEIVED?

Why did I get my hopes up? Why did I get so involved? Why did I let my guard down? Why did I allow myself to become so vulnerable?

Those may be questions you're asking as your heart aches with loss. You feel betrayed. You feel angry with yourself for being taken in. Or you may be angry with the person who got you into this mess. How could someone raise your hopes and then inflict so much pain? How could someone abandon you? Why would someone take advantage of you and leave you empty, hurting, and alone? It's humiliating and unfair. "Never again," you may say. "I won't go there anymore. I won't let anyone — including God — lead me down a path that will only leave me heartbroken, disappointed, and feeling like a fool. Never again."

It's normal to put up walls during heartbreak. A reaction of anger — at yourself, at someone else, or at a situation — is a natural response. Anger lets you feel your wounds, express your grief, and reassess your boundaries. Anger grabs your heart and drags you into facing your loss whether you want to or not. But anger can be hazardous to handle. Give anger too much leeway in your life, and you can end up lashing out carelessly at people you love. Hold on to anger for too long, and you can end up mired in a festering inner toxicity that withers your heart and robs your soul. So, how can you navigate the anger you feel? What do you do when rage and resentment bring you to tears or begin to boil over into bitterness?

HANGING ON

A woman from Shunem may be the helper you need. She understood the despair and anger of wrenching and unfair loss. She and her husband were blessed with wealth. They extended kindness and hospitality to the prophet Elisha whenever he passed through their region — the region of Shunem. After being blessed by this selfless couple for so long, Elisha wondered how he could repay them. Seeing

that this dear woman had no son, Elisha said to her one day, "At this season, about this time next year, you shall embrace a son" (2 Kings 4:16 ESV).

That may sound like good news, but to this woman, the statement from Elisha struck a sensitive nerve. She replied, "No, my lord, O man of God; do not lie to your servant" (v. 16). She may have been saying, "This is a place you shouldn't go, Elisha. My husband and I have been struggling with this for a long time. This is a sore spot. Don't get my hopes up. I don't think about this anymore."

But by spring of the next year, the woman from Shunem had borne a son. Everything was going fine for years. The boy grew. His parents loved him. The family was close. This was an unexpected dream come true — until one random and crushing day. The beloved son went to visit his father as he worked in the fields around his home. Suddenly, the boy complained of a headache. He was rushed home to his mother, where he sat on her lap until noon. Then the unthinkable and senseless happened: the boy died.

Immediately, the woman went to Elisha. She fell before him and grasped his feet. As his servant tried to push her away, Elisha said, "Leave her alone, for she is in bitter distress" (v. 27). The woman said to Elisha, "Did I ask my lord for a son? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me?'" (v. 28).

She was wounded and angry. She didn't ask for this roller coaster ride of grief. She didn't want to be set up for loss, but here she was. What did she do? Did she stand up and punch Elisha in the nose? Did she give him a tongue-lashing he would never forget? Did she ban him from Shunem and from her house? No, she kept hanging on to his feet and said, "As the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you" (v. 30). She hung on to her only hope.

GOD'S AVAILABILITY

Psalm 4 (ESV) says, "Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. Offer right



sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord” (vv. 4–5). Anger is an emotion, not a sin. But before anger swallows you up and causes you to hurt yourself or others, God offers you a lifeline. You see it in the woman from Shunem. The way to navigate anger is to hang on to your only hope.

God lets you hang on to Him. The Creator of the universe, the Ruler of all humanity, makes Himself available to you. Just as Elisha didn’t shoo away the woman from Shunem, God never closes His door in your face. He never blocks your calls, ignores your pleas, or tells you He’s busy. In fact, He draws you close — even when you are in bitter distress. God invites you to “cast your burden” on Him (Psalm 55:22; 1 Peter 5:7 ESV). That literally means you can throw everything you’ve got at Him — your anxiety, your anger, your worries, your burdens, and your bitterness. Your Savior is the best place to go when you feel like you have nowhere to turn. God loves you — even when you’re not very lovable. You don’t have to lash out at others or yourself; you can hang on to Him for hope. In your anger, you can pray and plead with God. As you fume in wounded distress, you are welcomed by God with open arms to pour out your soul and bring Him your complaints. In your haze of questions and confusion, you are embraced by the One who is your help in times of trouble and pain. Anger is a turbulent and terrible place to reside, but God promises to be your abiding hope in that neighborhood of pain.

Elisha answered the woman’s pain by miraculously raising her son from the dead. You may not be able to go back to the way it was, but God will take you forward in His grace. You may not see the restoration of what you’ve lost, but you will see Him who is the resurrection and the life. After all, as the apostle Paul reassured us in Romans 8 (ESV), “He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?” (v. 32). When you’re angry, you can bring all you’ve got to your Savior and trust in Him. When you experience a gaping hole in your heart, you can hang on. God’s outstretched arm of rescue is reaching out to you right now.

This month’s study text:

He Will Not Forsake His Saints

Of David.

- Fret not yourself because of evildoers;
be not envious of wrongdoers!*
- 2 *For they will soon fade like the grass
and wither like the green herb.*
- 3 *Trust in the Lord, and do good;
dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.*
- 4 *Delight yourself in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.*
- 5 *Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him, and he will act.*
- 6 *He will bring forth your righteousness as the light,
and your justice as the noonday.*
- 7 *Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him;
fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way,
over the man who carries out evil devices!*
- 8 *Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath!
Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.*
- 9 *For the evildoers shall be cut off,
but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.*

Psalm 37:1–9 (ESV)

Reflection Questions:

King David wrote this psalm. What evidence do you see of his struggle with loss that leads to frustration and anger?

What counsel and direction for dealing with anger does David give in almost every verse?

What promises about God’s gracious action stand out to you in this section of Scripture?

PRAY about the ways anger may be affecting you. Ask God to keep you from sin and to strengthen you in hanging on to Him.

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Journaling through your grief

Journaling can help. Journaling can reduce your mental distress. In one study, researchers found those who journaled three days a week over a 12-week period had fewer depressive symptoms and increased feelings of wellbeing.

Journaling can help you stop obsessive thinking. Writing about our emotions and experiences broadens our perspectives and gives us new insight.

Journaling also helps regulate emotions. Brain scans showed people were able to control their emotions better when they wrote about their feelings verses a neutral experience.

Take time to write out your feelings using these journaling prompts below:

- ▶ Today, I am really missing ...
- ▶ I have been feeling _____ a lot lately.
- ▶ When I think about my loved one, I miss this the most ...
- ▶ I do/do not feel comfortable asking for help because ...
- ▶ Describe a memory of your loved one that makes you laugh.
- ▶ Describe a memory of your loved one that makes you cry.
- ▶ What was your loved one's favorite holiday? Meal? Song?
- ▶ If you could tell your loved one about your day, what would you say?
- ▶ List people you can turn to for support.
- ▶ List some activities that make you feel better.
- ▶ Name one thing you could try today to make things easier for yourself. Why do you think this will help?

Study cited by WebMD at www.webmd.com/mental-health/mental-health-benefits-of-journaling



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

BLESSED ARE THOSE
WHO MOURN, FOR
THEY SHALL BE

comforted

MATTHEW 5:4 ESV