

Grief is a process, unique to each individual. One day the waves of grief are stilled. The next day or even the next moment the current stirs the soul and the waves of grief begin to break. People who grieve need love and grace as Christ comforts their souls. They need to be surrounded by people who will not criticize, judge or add to their hopelessness. Jesus walked along side the disciples on the road to Emmaus inquiring why they were downhearted. Jesus heard their story, shared hope from the Scripture, stirred their hearts and then broke bread with them (Luke 24:13ff).

Death is so deeply emotional and stunningly final that there is nothing you can do ahead of time to sail through your moment of loss. No matter how unexpected or how predictable, death shakes us to the core. The pain is inescapable. You will hurt. You will grieve. Don't feel guilty or embarrassed if you feel unprepared to face it. There is no way to prepare for what you are going through.<sup>i</sup>

In caring for the grieved we need to be sensitive as we listen, explore, and understand the struggles of unbelief and their need for hope in the midst of their suffering. As gospel counselors we must show how Christ and His gospel truths apply in deeply personal and specific ways so that we can live out the gospel through faith by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **How to think and feel about death's darkness?**

- The cause of death
  - When we talk about why someone died, we usually talk about the immediate reason that they died—accident, old age, illness, a natural disaster. But the Bible deepens our thinking about the cause of death. Paul said in his letter to the Romans, “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Sin is living in God's world and acting as if we are in charge. Adam and Eve were the first people to act like their own gods and disobey the one true God, but each of us has followed in their footsteps. Death is the sad result.<sup>ii</sup>
- Death is called the “last enemy.”
  - Death has a way of making us feel this heart wrenching finality and loss. Death is so wrong and unnatural. Even God's Word could think of no better word for it than “enemy” (1 Cor. 15:25-26). Death is the enemy of everything good and beautiful about life. Death should make you morally sad and righteously angry. It is a cruel indicator that the world is broken; it is not functioning according to God's original design, where life was to give way to life, on into eternity.<sup>iii</sup>
  - When Christians are finally resurrected from the dead and given glorified bodies, the destruction of the last enemy, death, will be complete (1 Cor. 15:42-57).

### **How to live through death's darkness?**

- Death does not have the final word, Jesus' resurrection does.
  - Christ died so that we would no longer have to die. He rose again so that death would be put to death. Every time someone dies, it reminds us that death still lives. But every death also points us to the promise that Christ brings a resurrection once and forever. Through Christ, death has been defeated. One day, life will no longer give way to death. Children will not mourn their parents. Parents will not mourn their children. There will be no widows or grieving friends. Yes, death is an enemy, but the enemy will die. Christ's present reign guarantees this. One day, life will give way to life in eternity.<sup>iv</sup>
  - The last word for the Christian is not death, but resurrection. The last word is life. The last word is mercy. The last word is that God will take us to be with him forever. God's free gift of eternal life stands in stark contrast to “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). God's grace destroyed the destroyer and death was thrown into hell. Because of Jesus life has the last say. Because of Jesus you don't have to experience death as he did. He has already paid for your sins. You will die physically, but rise to life eternal (Jn. 3:16).<sup>v</sup>
- Comfort can be found only in Jesus Christ
  - God's Word reminds us that all true comfort has its source in the Lord (2 Cor. 1:3-4). In grief, we often seek out other comforts: memories, material things, and distractions (TV, CD

player, exercise, reading, crafts, work, food, people). They all provide some measure of comfort but none can fill the one place where grief causes us to feel so empty—our hearts. Only Jesus can provide the comfort that restores your heart---the source of all true comfort. Jesus Christ knows your pain. He went through death himself.<sup>vi</sup>

### How you can prepare to counsel someone who is grieving

- **Pray, pray, pray for yourself**- Ask God for wisdom as you meet with hurting individuals (James 1:5). Pray all the requisites for gospel counseling: clarity, courage, a breadth and depth of biblical knowledge and gospel love.
- **Review the gospel and some Psalms**– Go through clear gospel passages (Rom. 3:21-26; Col. 1:15-20; 2 Cor. 5:21). Psalms 31 and 71 are helpful to go through and meditate.
- **Listen to the person’s story** - Ask God for humility as you listen attentively to the details and facts of the person’s story (James 1:1). Strive to listen hard and well so you can enter the person’s world, apply Scripture, and speak the word that builds up and gives grace.
- **Remember God does the redeeming** - People don’t change because they went to you for counseling. Furthermore, individuals don’t change just having this one meeting. People change significantly because God is at work in them and you were His instrument of redeeming grace.
- **Give people a vision of hope in the person and work of Christ** – When all is said and done, point them to Jesus Christ, our great Savior and Redeemer.
- **Pray for them** – Pray that Christ would be their hope and comfort during this dark season.

### How grief can be expressed

- **Denial** isn’t necessarily lying but taking in reality in small doses at a time. Sometimes the crisis is too overwhelming to take in all at once.
- **Anger** is not a sin but the expression can be. Anger is a reaction to a deeper feeling such as powerlessness, feeling threatened or fear, etc...
- **Bargaining** with God or others to avoid the reality of the potential loss or experienced loss.
- **Depression** is more than feeling blue one day; it’s a deep sense of hopelessness and despair. It is experiencing the dark night of the soul without God or the glimmer of no hope at all.
- **Acceptance** of the circumstances and hope for a new future.

### Expressions to look for when comforting those who mourn:

Emotional Pain	Gospel Themes/Practices
Abandonment/forgotten by God	Gospel Community
Anger expressed against God & others	Forgiveness
Despair	Hope
Fear/Dread	Love/Prayer
Guilt	Redemption through Christ
Regret	Faith
Self-Pity	Grace
Sorrow/Remorse	Peace
Bondage	Freedom
Revenge	Mercy
Ingratitude	Gratitude
Apathy	Compassion

**Differences between “being social” and giving comfort:**

<b>Being Social</b>	<b>Redeeming/Comfort Care</b>
Controlled conversation	Surrender/Process – God caring through you
Advice giving	Listen to & Explore the Heart, then Proclaim gospel truths
Guide people to “Ought to feel”	Walk beside people as they express themselves
Personal stories	Resources of faith, community, gospel
Focus on external events	Focus on the person
Maintaining a congenial atmosphere	Enter the painful world of the individual
Comfort through avoiding	Comfort through facing
Shared stories, experiences	Invite the person to share their story
Pleasant & positive	Understanding & empathetic
What should be	What is (reality)
Generalizes feelings	Specific feelings & thoughts
Religion	God, gospel, relationship
People in general	Specific relationships

**Bible Passages that bring Comfort:**

Psalm 23	Psalm 55:22	Isaiah 63:9	John 14:1
Psalm 27:5	Psalm 119:50	Matt. 5:4	Romans 8:28
Psalm 42:5	Psalm 138:7	Matt. 10:29	
Psalm 46:1	Isaiah 46:4	Matt. 11:28	

**A Cry for God’s Help:**

Psalm 55:4	Psalm 69:1	Psalm 121	
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**Life After Death:**

John 14:4	John 5:28	John 10:28	John 14:2
Romans 6:23	1 Cor. 15:53	2 Cor. 5:1	1 Thess. 4:13
1 Peter 1:4	1 John 2:25	1 John 5:11	

**Endnotes**

<sup>i</sup> Tripp, Paul David. *Grief: Finding Hope Again*. Punch Press. 2004, 3-4. Direct quotes

<sup>ii</sup> Powlison, David. *Facing Death with Hope: Living for What Lasts*. New Growth Press. 2008, 6-7.

<sup>iii</sup> Tripp, *Grief: Finding Hope Again*, 4.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>v</sup> Powlison, *Facing Death with Hope: Living for What Lasts*, 7-8.

<sup>vi</sup> Tripp, *Grief: Finding Hope Again*. Punch Press, 9-10