




GRIEF AND YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

5 SESSION

YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN SURPRISED to find that some of your relationships have changed after your loved one's death. People you thought would remain close have drifted away; people you didn't know well before have come closer. Dealing with relationships can be confusing during grief. But relationships are crucial to your healing.

As you view the video and complete your **FROM MOURNING TO JOY** and **MY WEEKLY GRIEF WORK** exercises, you'll have a more focused understanding of:

-  How the death of a loved one affects your friendships
-  Why solitude can be a blessing and a curse
-  How to deal with friends who don't understand your grief

VIDEO OUTLINE

Use this outline to write down important concepts, encouraging words, or questions you have while viewing the video.

GRIEF & RELATIONSHIPS

Family members grieve uniquely

Intense loneliness

No one understands

"Communication needs to be, first of all, loving." –Carla

Don't isolate

Benefits of solitude

No excuse to be rude

Jealousy

Friendships change

Why friendships change

STAY CONNECTED TO OTHERS

Create boundaries

Make new friends

"Sometimes we have high expectations of how people are going to be." –Sheila

Expect offense

Be merciful (Ephesians 4:32)

Dealing with “truth”

In this week's From Mourning to Joy exercises ...

Barbara struggles with feelings of loneliness, even while surrounded by other people. You'll find suggestions on ways to deal with loneliness and how time alone and time with others can help you.

“The truth is that God can equip other people to care for us.” –Carla

CARING FOR GRIEVING CHILDREN



Perhaps you feel you can barely keep your own life together, much less take care of someone else. But your children need you. Yes, it is difficult to care for your children when you're grieving, but these suggestions will help.

Be authentic – Your kids are watching you for direction on how to handle their own grief. Model for them that it's okay to cry, be sad, and talk about your loved one. Also model, with authenticity, how to walk through grief: that means doing your grief work, and most importantly, turning to God.

Children grieve intermittently – Unlike adults, children will experience strong emotions, but then take a break. The next thing you know, they're playing, laughing, and having fun. Recognize that your child is grieving and be there to help, but also allow your child to be a child.

Your children may not grieve the same way you do – Just because your children do not express grief as much or in the same way as you does not mean they aren't grieving deeply. "Provide opportunities for them to express themselves. Acknowledge whatever it is that they're feeling. When they're asking you to leave them alone, respect that; and when they're asking you to be close, try to be there for them," advises David Bueno Martin.

Give truthful, age-appropriate responses to your children's questions – "You need to give as much information as the children can handle according to their age level, and you've got to be honest," says H. Norman Wright.

Be on the lookout for abnormal behavior – It's normal for school grades to suffer, eating habits to change, and for a child to be sad. But if your child begins behaving erratically—particularly in a way that's counter to his or her personality—consider seeking the help of someone experienced in helping children in grief. If your child begins talking about committing suicide, immediately seek the help of a professional who is trained in helping suicidal people.

Get help – Your child is your responsibility, but it's helpful to ask a relative, family friend, or youth/children's pastor to spend time with your child and help the child deal with his or her grief. This will give your child someone else to talk to about his or her feelings. It will also give you the opportunity to get some rest and deal with personal issues; then you'll be better able to focus on your child when you are back together again.

Clarify family roles – If a member of the immediate family dies, make sure everyone knows his or her expected roles in the family now. For instance, don't put an unnecessary burden on a male child to be the "man of the house" and somehow take on the role of the deceased dad. Allow the child to be a child, and be clear about that.

The online video "How to Help Grieving Children" offers many more suggestions on how to care for your grieving children. View this video at www.griefshare.org/children.

BEING HONEST WITH YOUR COMFORTERS



In an attempt to comfort you, many times people will say or do things that have the opposite effect. Most people are well-meaning, but they do not know how to react to you or how to best help you.

The solution to this dilemma is for you to be honest about your feelings with people and to communicate your needs and concerns—this can be done in person or in a letter. Often, the best time to communicate is before you end up in an uncomfortable situation with a well-meaning, but clueless, comforter.

THEY WON'T KNOW UNLESS YOU TELL THEM

“If somebody is trying to walk alongside of you after a significant loss,” says Dr. Robert DeVries, “this person has no clue about how you feel, what you think, what you need, and what you want. The only solution is to tell them.”

H. Norman Wright says that for those people who are trying to rush you through grief, it is best to say, “I appreciate what you’re trying to do, but my grief is going to last probably twenty times longer than most people expect. It’s going to be more intense. Let me cry; let me feel the way I’m feeling. I would deeply appreciate it. To help you understand me, here’s a little book on grief, and by reading this, you’ll have a better idea of what’s going on within me.”*

“It’s so important to be honest with people,” explains Elsa Kok Colopy, Christian speaker and author. “Many times we feel like we need to cover up our bad feelings, cover up our sadness, cover up our grief for the benefit of others. You don’t have to do that. You can express what you need.”

* One suggestion of a book to give to others is *Grieving with Hope* by Samuel J. Hodges IV and Kathy Leonard.












WRITE A GRIEF LETTER

H. Norman Wright suggests that you write a grief letter (see page 24) to pass out to your comforters, which will help them know how to best relate to you during this time. “In that letter you identify here’s what I’ve experienced, here’s what’s going on with me, and here’s what you can expect from me. You don’t have to try to fix me. Let me cry, and I’ll recover in my own timing. Here are the best things for you to do.” You then identify what you need from people in the letter, and pass this out or send it in an email. When people ask, “How are you?” simply respond, “Thanks for asking, here ... this will explain it better than I can.” This is a positive action you can take to help your comforters, and ultimately, to help you!

Take a moment to think about situations you’ve experienced where your would-be comforters were insensitive in their attempts to help you. Now, in response to those situations, what do you wish your comforters would have done differently? What do you wish they understood about your grief? What helpful advice could you give to your comforters?

WHAT YOU MIGHT SHARE WITH YOUR COMFORTERS

Here are ideas of needs or concerns you might want to communicate to people around you:

-  Please talk about my deceased loved one.
-  Be a quiet listener, and let me talk about my loved one and share memories.
-  Ignoring my grief does not make it go away.
-  If I am sad, let me be sad. Do not try to cheer me up. It’s important for me to feel the emotions I am feeling.
-  Sometimes it may appear that I’m functioning fine and that I’m doing well. Understand that outward appearances can be deceiving.
-  Don’t make comments about next year being better or time healing my wounds; my concerns are focused on the here and now.
-  Understand that I can’t do everything I used to do in the past, but don’t hesitate to invite me to do things anyway.
-  Let me cry if I need to. You don’t have to say anything—just hand me tissues and be there for me.
-  Understand that grief can go on for a number of years. There is no established time limit.
-  Please don’t make judgments about how long it’s taking me to grieve.
-  Other ideas:

The advice in this article, and any further ideas that you have, would be wonderful for your friends and family members to know. It would make things a bit easier not only for you, but also for your comforters. Make a point to practice being honest with people around you and to be assertive in communicating your needs.

FROM MOURNING TO JOY

ENCOURAGEMENT AND COMFORT FROM GOD'S WORD

Session Five - Grief and Your Relationships



BARBARA: "I COULDN'T GO BACK"

"I live in a small community. We've lived there since the seventies; the kids grew up there. My husband was very friendly, and when he passed, everybody knew it. I walked in the cleaners right after he died, and they all started crying, and it threw me totally. I couldn't go back there again.

"It's wonderful living in a community where everybody knows you, but it's very hard. Even though I have people around me, it's not the same thing. I still think about how alone I am."

Feelings of loneliness can occur whether you're by yourself or surrounded by other people. In this week's **From Mourning to Joy**, you'll find suggestions on how to deal with loneliness and the value of both time spent alone and time spent with other people.

DAY
1

God is close to you

Have you ever stood in the middle of a group of people and felt utterly alone?

GOD'S MESSAGE TO YOU

"The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." (Psalm 34:18)

1. At what moments have you felt farthest away from God? Why do you think this is?

2. During your journey of grief, when have you felt closest to God?

3. What does Psalm 34:18 indicate you should expect of God as you deal with your broken heart and crushed spirit?

CONSIDER THIS

"God comes closer at these times because He knows we are so compromised in our ability to even affirm the things we know." –Susan Lutz

Plan a weekend or a day, or just thirty minutes, to go someplace where you can be alone with God, perhaps to the lake, beach, mountains, or a local park. Talk with God about what's going on. Let Him ache with you, cry with you, and comfort you.

"It's good to share with someone who's experienced similar things." –Barbara

TALKING TO GOD

God, my spirit is crushed, and my heart is broken.
Sometimes I can't feel You, but I know You are
here. I will cling to that truth and
be comforted by it.

**DAY
2**

Dealing with loneliness

To help us deal with loneliness, God gives us Himself (His presence) and He puts us in community with other people.

GOD'S MESSAGE TO YOU

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up." (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

1. What is the benefit of spending time with supportive, caring people, according to Ecclesiastes 4:9-10?
2. According to Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, what is the consequence of isolating yourself from other people?
3. What should you be doing to demonstrate that you believe the truths of Ecclesiastes 4:9-10?

CONSIDER THIS

"We are made for community."
—Ruth Graham

"There will be lonely nights and lonely moments, but realize God is always there. [He is] Emmanuel, which means 'God with us.'" —Sabrina D. Black

TALKING TO GOD

God, shutting myself off from other people will only prolong my grieving and make my loneliness worse. Help me to step out and rebuild old friendships and make new friends, too.

**DAY
3**

The benefits of being alone

Solitude, when used to spend intentional time alone with God, is important.

GOD'S MESSAGE TO YOU

"You will fill me with joy in your [God's] presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." (Psalm 16:11b)

1. We need to spend time with God in order to heal. According to Psalm 16:11b, what are some benefits of spending time in His presence?
2. What is the difference between isolating yourself from others and spending productive time alone with God?
3. In light of today's exercise, going forward, how will your time alone look different now?

"There are times that being alone with God is the only way to unburden your soul." —Julie Ganschow

CONSIDER THIS

"Bonhoeffer, the great martyr in Germany, said, 'If you desire community, seek solitude. If you desire solitude, seek community.' Both are crucial."

–Dr. Larry Crabb

TALKING TO GOD

God, I want to use my time alone to help myself heal. Please remind me to pray and to think helpful thoughts when I'm alone. And guide me to Scriptures and books to read and reflect upon.

**DAY
4**

People say hurtful things

Sometimes your friends can say some insensitive things. How does God want you to respond? His answers might surprise you.

GOD'S MESSAGE TO YOU

"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."
(Luke 6:36)

"Pray for those who hurt you." (Luke 6:28b NLT)

"Those who are kind benefit themselves, but the cruel bring ruin on themselves." (Proverbs 11:17)

1. When someone said something hurtful to you, how did you respond?
2. What does the Bible say is the best way to respond (see Luke 6:28b, 36)?
3. According to Proverbs 11:17, when you respond to someone who has said something hurtful, who is most affected by your response?

CONSIDER THIS

"Nobody gets it right all the time, and someday I'll be the one who will say or do something a little odd, unhelpful, and I'm going to need their forgiveness."

–Carla

TALKING TO GOD

God, most of the people who comfort me have no idea what I am going through. Give me the strength to be patient with them and not put too high of expectations on them. Since You are the source of comfort, please guide me to people who can help me.

**DAY
5**

The desire for physical touch

"I miss just sitting there holding hands."
–Barbara

It's important to set boundaries and to find healthy, God-pleasing ways to help satisfy your desire for physical affection.

GOD'S MESSAGE TO YOU

"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body ... Therefore honor God with your bodies." (1 Corinthians 6:18, 20b)

1. According to this passage, what should you do if you find yourself tempted (by your own thoughts or by the actions of another) to do something sexually immoral—whether you're sharing your grief with a person of the opposite sex, watching television, surfing the net, out on a date, or any other situation outside of a marital relationship?

"My feelings [about dating] started changing because of loneliness." –Stephen

2. Write down specific boundaries you will set for yourself to help you resist sexual temptation.

CONSIDER THIS

“Make sure you’re through your grief before you even start dating anybody, because you’re just asking for trouble.” –Mike

“One of the reasons I’m intentional to keep my conversation with any man brief is that I want to be wise to protect certainly his relationship [with his wife] but also to protect my own heart from wanting a false security. The lie is that I can have what I imagine. The truth is that God is sovereign and He decides what we have and what we don’t have.” –Carla

TALKING TO GOD

God, I miss that physical touch and reassurance so much. Please help me to find ways to satisfy my need for a touch that please You.

BARBARA: LOOKING BACK

“One day I was sitting in my office and one of the associate pastors came in and sat down and said, ‘I haven’t talked to you in a while. How are you doing?’ It gave me a feeling that I could actually talk to him about it, and I didn’t realize I needed that. I felt he actually was caring, and I was able to share. I thanked him for doing that.

“I have known people who have lost someone, and I [used to] say, ‘How are you doing?’ But I’m saying it and walking at the same time, so people get the message that you’re there, but you’re not there. I’m seeing that more now since I’ve had a loss, that I did the same thing to other people. Sometimes all you need is someone you believe really cares about you and what’s going on in your life.”

NEXT SESSION

Bring your toughest questions and emotions to God. He can handle it.

MY WEEKLY GRIEF WORK

Session - Five

PERSONAL CHECKUP - TRACK YOUR HEALING PROGRESS

Place a check in the box identifying how you're feeling. Insert words to explain why.

	REALLY BAD	OKAY	PRETTY GOOD	GREAT
EMOTIONALLY				
PHYSICALLY				
SPIRITUALLY				
RELATIONALLY				

JOURNAL TOPICS - MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL

Choose one or more ideas below, or choose your own topic. We encourage you to use a separate notebook for your weekly journaling.

- Write a grief letter to your friends and family (see instructions on page 24).
- Where is God in your loneliness? Write a letter to God telling Him about your struggles with loneliness.

MOVING FORWARD - PRACTICAL STEPS TOWARD HEALING SIGNS YOU'RE EXPECTING TOO MUCH FROM YOUR COMFORTERS

Expecting other people to know what you need, what you want, or what to say to you, without any direction from you, can harm relationships. Check any statements below that have been true for you.

- I expect my comforters to know what to say without any guidance from me.
- I expect them to know what I need without me telling them.
- I expect them to place me as the center of attention when I want them to.
- I expect them to understand the way I grieve.
- I expect them to fill voids in my life that only God can fill.
- I expect them to remain silent if I engage in harmful behaviors to numb my pain.

COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR COMFORTERS

Show your care for others by making it easier for them to care for you ...

Let them know what you want them to say, and what not to say.

Give them a list of your specific needs (see last week's My Weekly Grief Work, page 41).

Give them a grief letter (see page 24).

Have mercy on them and forgive them, just as God has extended mercy and forgiveness to you.