




# COMPLICATING FACTORS

## IT'S BEEN WEEKS SINCE YOU'VE SLEPT THROUGH THE NIGHT.

You can't remember the last time you smiled. And you can't concentrate long enough to follow a box-mix, blueberry muffin recipe. Grief can be complicated, and it is relentless. Not only do you have to deal with the pain of your loved one being gone, but you face many other symptoms day and night that people around you don't realize you're struggling with.

By viewing the video, being part of the small group discussion, and completing the FROM MOURNING TO JOY exercises, you'll begin to see:

-  How traumatic experiences affect grief
-  How to deal with nightmares and flashbacks
-  How your thinking affects your emotions

## VIDEO OUTLINE

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

### TRAUMA

Its effect on grief

### TRAUMA SYMPTOMS

Flashbacks

"A great way to deal with trauma is by staying in the present." -David Bueno Martin

Dealing with flashbacks

Nightmares

## **TRAUMA & MULTIPLE DEATHS**

---

Grieve each loss

Share your story

## **TRAUMA OF SUICIDE**

---

Shame

Share your pain

“Is my loved one in heaven?”

## **TRAUMA OF MURDER**

---

Unique challenges

Go to God

“When you share that shame and guilt in community, that helps you heal” –David Bueno Martin

## YOUR THOUGHT LIFE

---

Soil for healing (Proverbs 23:7)

Destructive thoughts

### Destructive Thoughts

“God’s not good”

“God’s not loving”

“God’s not powerful”

“It’s my fault”

“Life is meaningless”

“I can’t do this”

“I’m all alone”

“There’s no hope”

Self-talk (Philippians 4:19, Psalm 43:5)

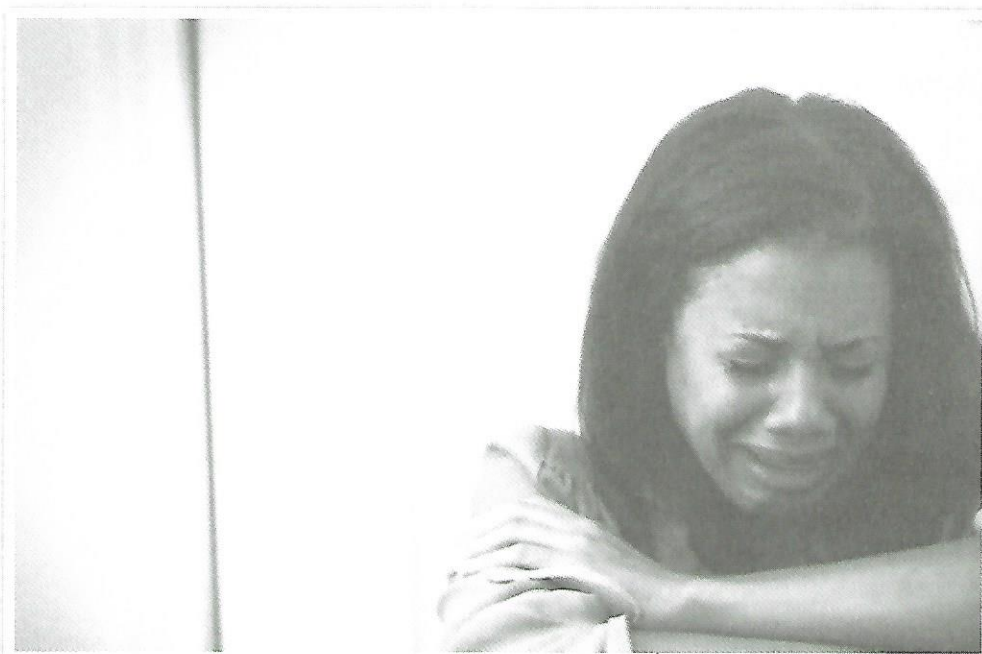
### In this week’s From Mourning to Joy exercises ...

Iris came to a negative conclusion about the circumstances leading up to the deaths, that she convinced herself was true. Find out how to control your negative self-talk and replace it with truth, which leads to hope.

“You want to tell yourself truth.” –Julie Ganschow

# POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Sometimes traumatic experiences can leave you suffering from what medical professionals call post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. How do you know if you're suffering from PTSD? Only a doctor can tell you that. But we asked psychiatrist Dr. Avak Albert Howsepian and certified trauma specialist H. Norman Wright to share with us some common symptoms.



**Q:** What type of experience would be considered a traumatic experience that could result in PTSD?

**Dr. Howsepian:** To have post-traumatic stress disorder, [you must have been exposed to] a traumatic experience, which is an experience that involves an exposure to death, or the threat of death, or serious injury, or sexual assault. Those kinds of things can be experienced in multiple ways. One might be the victim of an assault or a threat of death. One might be a witness, seeing someone else assaulted or someone else die. Or someone might hear about the death of someone by way of a violent act or an accident, or learn in intimate detail aspects of someone else having been traumatized in some way; that counts as a traumatic experience.

**Q:** What are some common symptoms of PTSD?

**Dr. Howsepian:** The symptoms of PTSD that complicate normal grief include flashback experiences, nightmares, avoidance of reminders of the trauma, negative changes in someone's mood or how they think about themselves or the world, not being able to relax easily, not being able to concentrate, difficulty sleeping, startling very easily, feeling irritable and aggressive. These symptoms have to last at least one month, and they have to be significantly distressing to the individual or interfere significantly with some important aspects of their life.

**H. Norman Wright:** Disruptive sleeping patterns, tremendous irritability, snapping at people, and impatience. Hypervigilance, where you're really on

edge and you're scanning the environment. Intrusive thoughts, where all of a sudden that thought comes in and you're replaying it in your mind. You also have what we call the startle response, where a sound or a sight can trigger you because it's reflective of what you experienced, the screeching of brakes, the dropping of books on the floor with kids in school and it sounds like a gun going off again.

Q: What are some differences between symptoms of bereavement and symptoms of PTSD?

Dr. Howsepian: Symptoms more central to post-traumatic stress disorder than to bereavement: aggression, self-destructive activity or thoughts, and fear about feeling safe in the world.

Q: Why are some people embarrassed to admit they have PTSD?

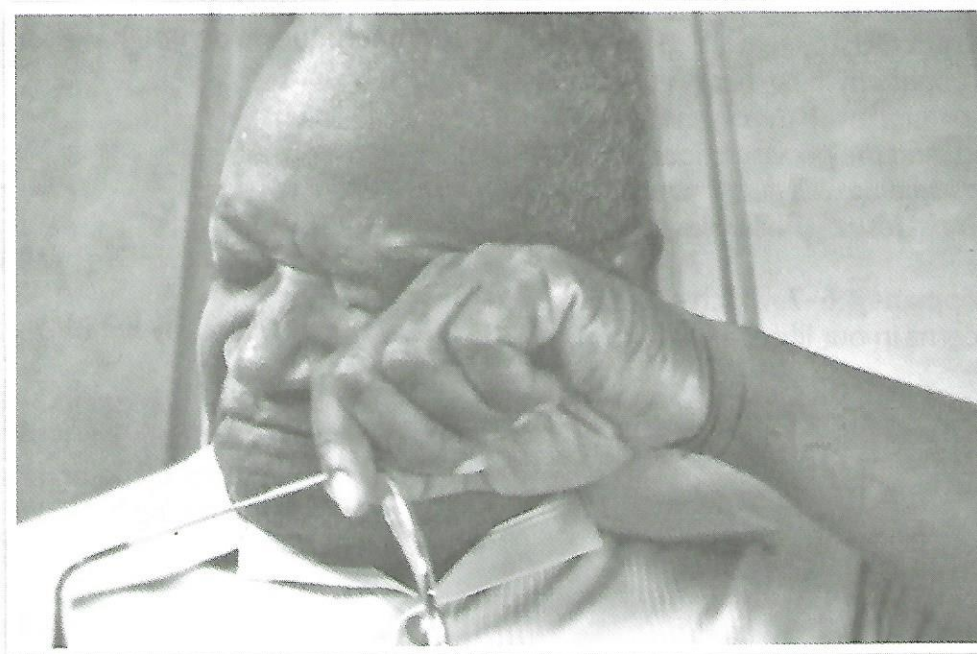
Dr. Howsepian: PTSD has, in many respects, a significant social stigma, in part because the person [doesn't] have injuries that others can readily see. With PTSD it appears as if the individuals who claim to be suffering from that condition have nothing wrong with them at all; they seem in every respect quite healthy. So one might attribute their PTSD to

a certain kind of internal weakness that they might have and stigmatize them for that reason. This becomes all the more important in the context of combat where individuals are expected to act in a way that's quite courageous, to be in control, and to be strong. And then in that context if someone suffers a trauma that results in PTSD, they might even think of themselves as having been a coward or having been weak.

Q: Can a person recover from PTSD?

Dr. Howsepian: Most people with PTSD resolve their PTSD. It's only a minority of PTSD cases that become chronic, so the brain can heal, and in most cases it does heal to some degree. And if we take the notion of post-traumatic growth seriously, there are times when the brain heals in a way that's even better, more robust, and stronger than it was prior to the trauma.

If you think you're suffering from PTSD, don't feel ashamed. Find help. Reach out to your doctor or a Christian psychologist or Christian psychiatrist to find help.





**IRIS: "NOTHING GOOD HAPPENS"**

*Iris's mom died from complications due to alcoholism. Iris's experience affected her view of herself and God. "I was nineteen years old and I would be like, 'Mom, can you stop? You're going to kill yourself.' It was like talking to a wall. I felt like I wasn't worth it for her to live. The same thing with my boyfriend, I'm like, 'Stop doing what you're doing.' If I was worth it, he would [stop]." Instead, he ended up getting murdered. "I feel like I pray, and nothing good happens. Everything you can think of bad has happened to me. So I'm to the point, 'Why would God love me? He don't love me.'"*

Like Iris, you're drawing conclusions about your situation. Your tendency will be to repeat them in your mind to the point that they affect the way you think about God and your expectations

for the future. This is why it's important that you draw accurate conclusions about your grief experience. Otherwise, negative self-talk will deepen your negative emotions and keep you from having peace and hope. This week you'll learn how to monitor your thinking, renew your mind, and experience hope.

**DAY  
1**

**A peace that transcends understanding**

"Peace" is not just a warm, content feeling. The Bible talks about a peace that is able to protect your heart and your thoughts.

**GOD'S MESSAGE TO YOU**

*"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 4:6-7)

1. According to Philippians 4:6-7, which situations, worries, and concerns in our life are we to bring to God?

2. What is the result of consistently choosing to trust God with your anxieties (see Philippians 4:6-7)?

3. What requests do you have for God right now?

**CONSIDER THIS**

*"How can I not be anxious?"*

- *I make a decision not to be anxious.*
- *I take [my anxieties to God] with great intentionality, focus, and determination.*
- *I just keep coming back and coming back.*
- *I thank Him ahead of time for the outcome.*

*"God says, 'I promise I will protect you both mentally and emotionally.'" -Dr. Crawford Loritts*

## TALKING TO GOD

God, help me to bring my anxieties to You as soon as they surface, choosing this positive step instead of wallowing in worries. Please protect my mind and my heart with Your peace by keeping me in close connection with Christ.

DAY  
2

### What are you focusing on?

How to experience peace: focused reliance upon the Lord.

#### GOD'S MESSAGE TO YOU

*"You [God] will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!"*  
(Isaiah 26:3 NLT)

1. What types of negative thoughts have been recurrent for you?
2. According to Isaiah 26:3, how do you find rest and peace?
3. Write ideas of ways to keep your thoughts fixed on God.

#### CONSIDER THIS

*"Whenever my mind is really on Jesus, it can't be in turmoil; peace will come. The problem is learning how to stay our minds on Jesus, but there's a goal there, and we need to reach for it." –Lorraine Peterson*

## TALKING TO GOD

God, I can't keep my thoughts fixed on You without Your help. Again and again, as my focus wanders down paths that are unhealthy, please direct me back to Your promises and Your love.

DAY  
3

### Monitor your thinking

Find out how to take control of your thoughts.

#### GOD'S MESSAGE TO YOU

*"We take captive [bring under control] every thought to make it obedient to Christ."* (2 Corinthians 10:5b)

*"Blessed is the one ... whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law [God's words in the Bible] day and night."* (Psalm 1:1–2)

1. Based on 2 Corinthians 10:5b, what can you do with thoughts that are contrary to God's truth?
2. To control negative self-talk, you have to counter it with God's truth. For instance, if you feel alone, you have to remind yourself *the truth is* God says He is with me (Psalm 34:18). If you are inappropriately blaming yourself for the death, remind yourself *the truth is* God determined how long my loved one would live (Psalm 139:16). What can you do to remind yourself what God says is true about your situation?
3. One way to keep God's truth on your mind is to *meditate* on Scripture. To meditate means to reflect upon or contemplate. Based upon Psalm 1:1–2, how often does the psalmist meditate on God's Word?

*"God created us with more than our emotions." –Dr. Stephen Viars*

## CONSIDER THIS

*"If I allow myself to think, 'No one can relate to this. I'm really alone in this,' that's a lie. The truth is, God can equip other people to care for us."* –Carla

## TALKING TO GOD

God, my negative self-talk can really bring me down. Help me to speak truth to myself, Your truth. I want to get into Your Word and learn what truth really is.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

- It's not true.
- It does not build you up or help you grow.
- It exaggerates the impact and extent of legitimate problems.

**DAY  
4**

### Renewing your mind

Change comes when we renew the way we think. When we renew the way we think, we see things from a different perspective.

## GOD'S MESSAGE TO YOU

*"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."* (Romans 12:2)

1. Which thought pattern sounds more like you?

- I miss my loved one so much. I cannot possibly go on. It's the end of the world for me.
- I miss my loved one so much. I'm not sure how I'm going to be able to cope, but with God's help I can make it through each day one painful step at a time.

2. In order to renew your mind, or transform the way you think, you need to look at the situation from a different perspective, in light of the bigger picture of eternity and in light of God's truth.

Write down a feeling you've been struggling with on the lines below.

I feel \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_

---

On the next line, prayerfully write down a truth from God that you've learned.

But, the truth is, \_\_\_\_\_

---

## CONSIDER THIS

*"When I have irrational, disturbing, negative thoughts, I can replace them with the truth of God in His Word."*

–Dr. Elias Moitinho

## TALKING TO GOD

God, please help me day by day to renew my mind by reading Your Word and by applying it to my negative thinking.

**DAY  
5**

### Finding hope

Hope does not come from getting better, but from getting to know God better and learning what His plan is for eternity.

## GOD'S MESSAGE TO YOU

*"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope."* (Romans 15:4)

1. Romans 15:4 shares two things that work together to bring hope. Fill in the blanks below.

\_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ = Hope

*"There are some things that just aren't productive to think about."* –Bryan



2. Based upon the truths presented in Romans 15:4, what practical steps can you take to produce hope?

### CONSIDER THIS

*“Our whole relationship with the Lord is based on the fact that the good hope—the hope that we know where we’re going, we know what’s been done for us—is what keeps us going because we know the accomplished end.” —David*

*“Immerse yourself in the Word. Find out that God really does intend all of these things, ultimately, to come together for your good.” —Dr. Robert DeVries*

### TALKING TO GOD

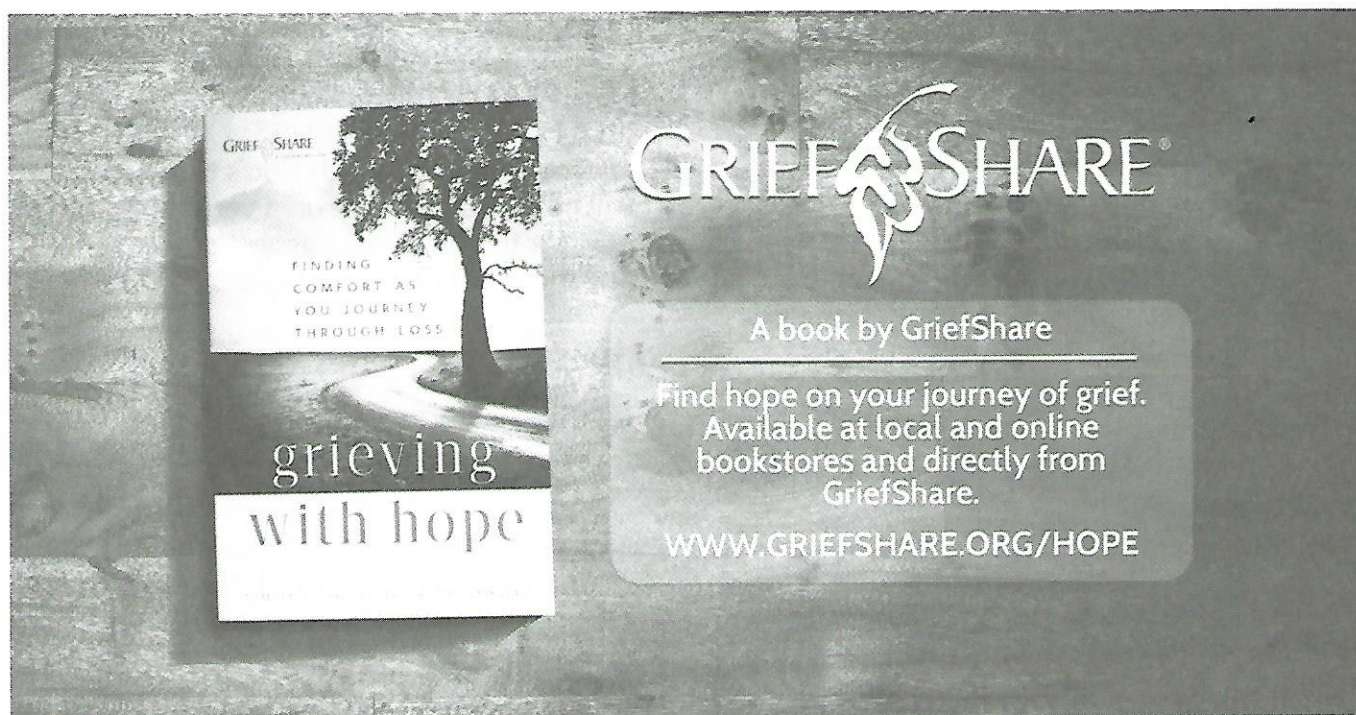
God, I want to have Your kind of hope for my daily life. Help me to remember that You promise something better than what I feel and see around me.

## IRIS: LOOKING BACK

*“Reading God’s Word has helped me out a lot. It helps me understand more about life, what to expect out of God, and what God needs to expect out of you; how to deal with issues, pain, [and] suffering; and why God would take you through so much stuff in your lifetime. He brings you closer to Him basically. I feel everything I’ve been through has just brought me closer to God. The more I trust God, the more I see Him coming through for me, which makes me want to trust God more.”*

### NEXT SESSION

Discover how to avoid becoming stuck in grief.



**GRIEF SHARE**

A book by GriefShare

Find hope on your journey of grief. Available at local and online bookstores and directly from GriefShare.

[WWW.GRIEFSHARE.ORG/HOPE](http://WWW.GRIEFSHARE.ORG/HOPE)

*“It’s important to speak the truth despite how you feel.” —Dr. Crawford Loritts*

# MY WEEKLY GRIEF WORK

## Session - Eight



### 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 (non-mailed) letter to the person you are angry at. Give these emotions to God.
-  If you're having trouble getting a negative image of your loved one's death out of your mind, think of a beautiful, precious memory of your loved one to replace it. Describe this positive memory/image of your loved one in great detail.

### MOVING FORWARD - PRACTICAL STEPS TOWARD HEALING HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND CORRECT WRONG THINKING

Meditating on Scripture (reflecting on what the Bible says) will equip you with God's truths to counter wrong thinking patterns. Below are some questions that will help you meditate on a verse of Scripture. You can use these questions for any Bible verses you choose. (Or, for this week, we suggest you read Psalm 139.

When you're done, reflect on the chapter using the questions below as prompts.)

1. What promises are in these verses?
2. Why would God want me to know what's in the passage I just read?
3. How is what I've read contrary to the way I tend to think?
4. What do these verses reveal about God's character?
5. What would it look like if I applied the truths in this passage, or obeyed what it's instructing me to do?