

Small Group Ministry
Group Session Plan
Grief and Loss

Opening Words:

As human beings we feel grief whenever we experience a loss - not only that of a beloved to death, but other losses, whether life-disruptive or barely noticeable to those around us: the threat to security and stability that comes with the loss of a job or business; the loss of the familiar when we move from one home to another, whether by choice or forced by circumstance; the loss of both what was and what might have been, when relationships shatter or become estranged; even the loss of our former selves to changes in mind and body that come through accident, illness, or the slow influence of time.

Grief takes many forms: anger, denial, fear, desperate bargaining, confusion and deep sorrow. Eventually, by working with our grief we come to accept the change that loss brings to our lives, and to mend the holes those losses leave in our hearts.

Let us be gentle with each other — and with ourselves --as we explore grief loss and acceptance.

Check-In/Sharing

Topic: excerpts from "Grief and Life" -- from *Nothing Gold Can Stay: The Colors of Grief* by Mark Belletini

Suggestion: Cut the listing into individual slips. Place in a basket that is passed around at the meeting. As each participant selects and reads a notation, allow a moment of silence before the next piece is selected and read. Discussion of the quotes will come after the silent reflections.

Reflections

Although the deaths of those I love have shaped much of my thinking about grief, I am quite aware that loss, as Siddhartha, the Buddha, pointed out millennia ago, is with all of us every day in the flow of our lives.

Grief arises when I lose touch with a friend with whom I used to be close. "We've grown apart" is the common explanation for such events, but that does not mean I do not grieve. Although I cultivate friendships, sometimes they end anyway. We feel grief when leaving a job after years, or even a few weeks, if we liked the work but the new owners downsized us.

We experience grief when a shop or theater we have patronized for twenty years finally closes. We experience grief when something precious disappears: photos destroyed in a house fire or a bicycle stolen.

I have grieved at the end of a job, even if I resigned for good reasons. I have grieved when I have moved. I grieved when I moved away from a congregation I loved for eighteen years. I have grieved when friendships that once flashed brightly simply faded away, our lives taking us in divergent directions.

We feel grief when we lose some aspect of our health: loss of motion due to arthritis, loss of a diet of familiar foods because of an allergy that develops, loss of breast or limb or eyesight or hearing. When the cardiologist told me I had a permanent heart condition due, he theorized, to some virus, I grieved the loss of life without daily pills and regular echocardiograms. When a floater appeared in my eye, large and web-like, I grieved the loss of unimpaired peripheral vision.

In this age when Alzheimer's disease still afflicts, one can experience loss of self too. My dear friend Flip suffered the difficulties of early-onset Alzheimer's, and died at age fifty-eight. But long before that he had lost his memory, and his sense of self, which had been built on the foundations of that memory.

Becoming aware of the smaller or denied griefs in our lives can help us let go of the invisible, and often larger spiritual aches in our tender hearts that sometimes keep us from moving forward for reasons we have not yet named.

Grief holds hands with life. Life holds hands with grief.

Discussion/Questions:

1. Share an experience of loss and grief.
2. Have you thought of grief as related to losses other than friends or relatives? Part of change? Part of letting go?
3. How has the sharing in the group added to the breadth of the concept of grief as a natural part of life?

Check-Out/Likes and Wishes: How was this session for you?

Closing Words:

Grief is not a disorder, a disease or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical and spiritual necessity, the price you pay for love. The only cure for grief is to grieve.

Dr. Earl A. Grollman, Rabbi and author

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Except for the Discussion Questions, the session plan accompanies the Soul Matters Packet,
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