

Grief Guide for FBC Leaders

What is Grief?

Grief is the physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental response to loss experienced by human beings. Grief is a strong, sometimes overwhelming experience for people, whether they've lost a loved one, received difficult news, or lost something else of significance. In the late 1960's, psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross developed what is now widely-known as the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. You can read more about each stage of grief [here](#).

What is Anticipatory Grief?

Anticipatory grief is the grief experienced before the loss of a loved one, or another significant loss. This type of grief can feel like an "in-between" space as we both hold on to a loved one and prepare to let go following their death. When we experience anticipatory grief, we can feel more worried or irritable. Anticipatory grief can be especially relevant for senior adults who are more frequently experiencing the death of loved ones and friends; it can feel like "everyone is dying." Our congregation feels anticipatory grief as we face uncertainty and change after the death of our pastor. Signs of anticipatory grief include: sadness/tearfulness, fear, irritability/anger, loneliness, a desire to talk, anxiety, guilt, concern for the loved one who is dying, and physical problems (i.e. sleep difficulty or memory problems). You can read more about anticipatory grief [here](#).

What is Complicated Grief?

Under certain circumstances, the process of grief can be more complicated. Grief can be complicated by:

- A loss that is sudden or traumatic
- Our relationship to the loved one lost (relationships in which more positive or negative emotional energy was invested during the life of the deceased require more energy in the grief process)
- Multiple losses

People experiencing complicated grief might find themselves feeling numb or having a hard time carrying on with regular duties while saddled with their sense of loss. Due to the coronavirus, people are experiencing complicated grief at higher levels; the loss of our normal ways of gathering and supporting each other changes our grief experience.

How Long Does Grief Last?

Grief can last for months or years. Grief does not necessarily go away; it changes. As time goes on, some people experience more acceptance and less of the other grief stages. The stages of grief are cyclical in nature and are experienced differently by each person; grief is not a linear process. A person may feel angry one day and numb the next. The process of grief, and the thoughts, feelings, sensations, and questions that come along with it, cannot be controlled. Suppressing grief can lead to other complications.

How do we approach grief from a Christian perspective?

Christian faith can be a source of comfort and hope for the grieving person. Even Jesus wept and experienced heartbreak. Grief is a part of being human and does not mean we are unfaithful. A keyword for Christians who grieve is compassion. Compassion for self and compassion for others. A bedrock of Jesus' teaching and ministry was compassion. When grieving, it is important for all people, including Christians, to allow themselves to experience the pain and loss of grief, even as they seek comfort and healing in Christ. When you listen to a person who is grieving, hold nonjudgmental space for their grief and have compassion for them. While we rejoice in the hope of eternal life with God, grief is an expression of love.

Grief Conversation Guide

Conversations with family and friends during times of grief are sacred and memorable. In Bible teaching or small group conversations following Doyle's death, people may be ready to talk and have plenty to say. Giving people lots of space to process is not a waste of time. Here are some helpful questions for facilitating conversation in times of grief, if you need conversation starters:

Questions:

1. When we lose someone we love, we have all kinds of feelings. Sadness, anger, panic, denial...sometimes we feel numb. How are you feeling today, as you think about Pastor Doyle and his family?
2. When we lose someone we love, we often think about our memories of that person. What memories are you thinking about today of Pastor Doyle or church? What memories do you wish you could have made with Pastor Doyle?
3. What special qualities or talents endeared you to Doyle? What are going to miss most about him?
4. When we lose someone we love, we often have questions. We think about death and wonder what it is like. We think about heaven and wish we could know more about what happens after we die. What questions about grief, death, or heaven do you have today as you think about Pastor Doyle?
5. What thoughts, actions, scriptures or prayers bring you comfort when you are feeling angry, sad, or anxious? (i.e. journaling, writing a letter, lighting a candle, prayer walking, etc.)
6. Grief is cumulative. Do you have other griefs on your mind that it would be helpful to share?

Please know that we are praying for you and are here for you. Do not hesitate to reach out to talk or pray together.

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