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Healing Ground: The Church as Compassionate Community through the Healing Process of Grief

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Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

HEALING GROUND: THE CHURCH AS COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITY THROUGH THE HEALING PROCESS OF GRIEF

Written by

GALEN GOBEN

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

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HEALING GROUND:  
THE CHURCH AS COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITY 
THROUGH THE HEALING PROCESS OF GRIEF 

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER 
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE 
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT 
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE 
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY 

BY 
GALEN GOBEN 
DECEMBER 2019
ABSTRACT

Healing Ground:
The Church as Compassionate Community
through the Healing Process of Grief

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2019

The inevitability of death and the constant reconstruction of life required by loss subjects humanity to grief. The Church has too often failed to acknowledge and address this fact. Pastors are not trained adequately in grief and loss leaving them little to offer the bereaved. Pastors are forced to share platitudes and to abdicate their pastoral and teaching roles in the company of death and loss. Consequently, many bereaved persons feel isolated when support is most needed. Social support for the bereaved is vital. A compassionate presence providing comfort is often lacking.

This project is designed to provide training in contemporary grief understandings to pastors and invested lay persons for the purpose of creating compassionate communities of healing. Forest Lawn is uniquely positioned to provide this training due to a long history of active community engagement. This project also examines the lack of adequate and available training for pastors. The on-coming wave of the death of the Baby Boomers, the rapid increase in cremation, and the change in death rituals among this generation are further reasons to institute this project.

The project will provide a basis for appreciating the role and power of grief as a healing process. This will be shown by providing an awareness of the attachments human beings form and the threat to those attachments we face in the reality of death. Death and grief become the seed for the transformed life through the process of silence, lament and resurrection.

The training will be comprehensive; persons involved will be exposed to the most recent theories on grief, theological insights on death and spiritual growth, the varieties of grief expressions, strategies of bereavement care, a look at their own death awareness and strategies for their own self-care.

Content Reader: William G. Hoy, D. Min.

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DEDICATION

To the grieving people who have taught me about grief by sharing their stories and inviting me into intimate spaces in your life…the space where love and grief entwine.

To God…who called to my heart and is teaching me to listen.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are so many people that I’d like to thank who have been vital to me and this work. I mention Forest Lawn first because my position there, as Grief Support Director is very rare in mortuaries and cemeteries. It has been a joy to partake in this ministry that is made possible by your belief in the importance of this work. I also want to thank Doug Gooch for providing me with the historical material and access to the files. Doug, your knowledge of the history of Forest Lawn has been very helpful.

I also wish to thank members of the Association for Death Education and Counseling. ADEC is my professional home. So many of you have made yourselves available to me for consultations, queries, and interviews and your wisdom is folded within this work. I am grateful to Rev. Dr. Harold Ivan Smith – your suggestions and references always seemed to come at the right time; Rev. Brenda Atkinson – for checking up on me, listening to me, and laughing with me; and Dr. J. William Worden – for sharing your life’s work and including me in the Worden group. Rev. Dr. William G. Hoy has been my mentor, coach, sounding board, and friend. Much of what I know and trust in the area of grief has been shaped by you, Bill.

Dr. Richard J. Follet will have my eternal gratitude. Richard, you have taught me English grammar, at least more than I knew, as you have proofread these and so many other pages I have written. Thank you so much for your words of faith and encouragement: “Just keep writing. You are doing important work.”

To Vicky Dan for being available so many times these past six years. Vicky, to be able to step away to work on this and know that Neill was safe and in good hands allowed me to concentrate and not be distracted.

I also wish to thank Rev. Dr. Joseph McGowan. Joe, your spiritual guidance has been essential to me. You have helped me to learn to trust the Holy Spirit through an inner knowing that has been a Sherpa all along the way.

To my family: I could write so many pages and ways that you have made this possible. You have been my collaborators. Chris, you read and critiqued my papers strengthening them. Jeffrey, you put up with hours of conversation around the dinner table and shared your joy and humor to rebuild me. Neill, you have grounded me each
day. “Bye, bye” and “HI!” have planted my feet in love and gratitude. Louise, your patience, companionship, encouragement, prayers, and love are the pillars of my work. Without those I would not have accomplished such a project. I am so proud of you and of our family. My deepest love and respect to each of you. Thank you.
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PART ONE
FALLOW GROUND—THE CONTEXT OF LOSS
INTRODUCTION

Three months into my first parish ministry experience at First Christian, Althea, a longtime member of the Church, died. I had not been to her house to meet her. The first opportunity to meet any member of the family was in the midst of the very troubling time of grief. Knowing enough to meet with the family, we sat down in her home so that I might learn about Althea. General information about her, the family tree, a few important dates, and a story or two was about all the grieving daughters were able to contribute.

With this meager material, I was to put together a service and write a eulogy. Being my first funeral as the officiant I had little to guide me.

Personally, there were only two funerals in my history of which I was even aware. When I was a child, the Children’s Choir Director died unexpectedly. I remember discussions around the house about my attendance since I sang in her choir. In the end, I was not allowed to go. I believe my parents decided that I should be protected from such sorrow and grief. The other funeral was for Memom, my father’s mom. She died when I was eleven and we traveled from Texas to Arizona to attend. Being eleven, I did not pay much attention to the service. My most vivid memory is of my dad leaning against the car looking like a lost little boy with his head down and a blank expression on his face. These images I cannot forget are my only memories about the funeral. Needless to say, my silo of personal experience was not to be of much help.

As the training ground for ministry, seminary was not much help either. My internship was as the youth director at a large United Methodist Church where I was compartmentalized. I was neither presented an opportunity to participate in a funeral nor was I asked to shadow the Senior Pastor as he made pastoral calls upon a grieving family.

1 All names in this paper have been changed, unless otherwise noted and used by permission.
It did not occur to me, or my supervising pastor, to have conversations about what to do concerning a death in the congregation. No one thought to follow up with a family after a funeral. Again, my storehouse of experience was empty.

There was no Disciples of Christ worship book to fall back on, being the Free Church denomination that we are. Digging through my seminary worship class notes, I found the Funeral Order of Service I had created for my final project. I took what meager information I had gleaned about Althea, plugged in some scriptures that I felt were hopeful, gathered my favorite hymns I thought I would like to have at my funeral, and pasted it together. I at least had something that I could present on the day of the funeral.

I had no idea how to be with the bereaved. I was neither mentored nor trained. My personal experience was non-existent. I was called to shepherd a community to be their pastor and guide. Yet, in the most common of human experiences called loss, death, and grief, I was completely unprepared to lead, guide, or comfort the bereaved. The people in my poor congregation were like sheep without a shepherd (Mt 9:36).2

The saddest part of this story is that it is a common one. Pastor Stephen recounted that during his first year in his first church he officiated eighteen funerals. His Southern Baptist seminary had not given him the resources or the tools to serve in this vital and life enhancing art of ministry.3 Chaplain Carolyn has a Master of Divinity degree from an accredited seminary in Southern California and a Doctor of Ministry from a second one. She has participated in multiple units of Clinical Pastoral Education in a variety of

2 All scriptures are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

3 Personal conversation with Pastor Stephen Blankenship, Church of the Foothills, Tustin, CA. April 27, 2019.
settings. In all of these venues, she had not been exposed to detailed instruction in grief and its impact.\(^4\)

Following a death, family meetings are called, gathering those who are closest to the deceased. Information is shared about the doings of life; birth date, graduations, degrees, and careers as well as the locations lived and the family relationships are part of the standard obituary, common to the living of a life. Some of what is shared is the being of life. These are the gifts, eccentricities, characteristics, challenges, loves, and delights of a person. To an untrained pastor it is only material necessary to create a service. Yet with one who has ears to hear (Lk.8:8), these are the seeds scattered on soil that is plowed and ready to grow something new in a relationship impacted by death. Many pastors have limited understanding that the doing and the being aspects of the deceased are healing when shared among and interpreted by their survivors. Even as the phrase, “Now you can’t use this in the service” is uttered, a family is renegotiating their relationship to the deceased.

Being unprepared to care for grieving persons can leave a pastor with anxiety when the family cannot think of any scriptures or hymns or songs that are meaningful to the deceased or to themselves. Judgment by a pastor can be swift in wondering how a person could not know something that would seem to be noteworthy and should therefore be easy to locate. These are easy judgments and easy standards when one is unaware of the cognitive overload families experience. This overload is potentially so great that memory and recall are often casualties of grief. Many a pastor, especially one not closely attached to the deceased, might not be cognizant of the difficulty people may have in planning a funeral or memorial service due to the reality that such planning forces them

\(^4\) Personal conversation with Chaplain Carolyn Fortner, Glendale, CA, April 4, 2019.
to face. It is a reality that death has come to this person, which takes time and practice to fully imagine and integrate.

Meeting in Althea’s home, we were surrounded by a lifetime of relationship. Physical items, given and received, touched and treasured by her, bore her spirit and a tiny piece of her being. These items bore the ability to link Althea’s immediate family, and her church family, to the now fragile connection we felt to her. Yet familiarity that such items could be useful in linking the living to the dead is often missing from a pastor’s advice and planning. This fails to support and strengthen the continuing bonds which remain as the deceased now resides with that ever-expanding cloud of witnesses (Heb12:1).

Somehow, I comprehended, at least a little bit, the funeral ritual as a presentation of the Gospel, especially at the sorrow-full time of death. Yet, I did not grasp that connecting the deceased’s life story to the Gospel was vital for the rebuilding of trust in a God who claims to be with us even as one feels so alone with grief. That came later. I learned that pointing out the importance of Althea’s life within the whole scope of the Gospel displays the presence of God, yesterday, today, and tomorrow. That awareness becomes a signpost to the survivors that God’s presence was with the deceased, is with them today, and will remain with them tomorrow and beyond. God’s presence stands within this disrupted time to bring order to the chaos (Gn 1:1-3).

In more than twenty-five years of pastoral ministry, I have learned many hard-earned lessons. Unfortunately, those whom I have served have paid a significant price for those lessons. They have taught me by their looks, their words, their comfort, and forgiveness where I have faltered. The twelve years when I have been deeply immersed
in the world of thanatology have taught me much of the biopsychosocial landscape of
grief and loss. Making this information available to pastors and caring lay persons could
make for a place of healing and a ministry fashioned after Jesus (Jn 11).

Families would have been better served had I been better prepared. Pastors called
to step into the breach caused by death and filled with grief can be more comfortable and
less distracted if taught about the height and depth of the human experience of loss. How
much better for the sheep to have a shepherd “who shall go out before them and come in
before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in” (Num 27:17) as they wander in
the alien landscape without their loved one?

The image of my dad standing alone against the car with the look of being lost
spread across his face is vivid. No one came to soothe him. No one came to comfort him.
No one came to condole with him as he began the process of digesting what it meant that
he was now an orphan. My prayer for him, and for others who stand alone in their
loneliness, is the prayer of the Psalmist:

Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted.
Relieve the troubles of my heart,
and bring me out of my distress.
Consider my affliction and my trouble,
and forgive all my sins. (Ps 25: 16-18)

An empathetic pastor can be the hands and feet of Christ present with the afflicted in the
loneliness of their loss (Jn 14:18). A caring pastor, knowledgeable of the multiplicity of
ways that grief assails a person and produces pain within their life, can normalize their
trouble as the fruit of a life privileged to love. A pastor trained in the arts of presence,
silence, and lament can ease the troubled heart, guiding the distressed in the landscape of
loss.
The need for this kind of training and information is great. As referenced above, too many seminaries and Bible colleges are more concerned with doctrine and teaching while they give little notice to this pastoral art. This leaves too much to chance expecting one who has the title of pastor should therefore know how to be one. But God provides different gifts to different people to fulfill the wholeness and ministry of the Body of Christ (Eph 4:11). However, because someone is not gifted as a pastor does not mean she cannot learn to be capable and confident when comforting the bereaved, an experience guaranteed to occur. By learning, she can be prepared to provide the attention a grieving person deserves.

Another element that is left to chance is the social spread of the Five Stages of Grief. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross’ misapplied work on death and dying has long-ago entered the world of grief.\(^5\) It is so taken for granted as the order and structure of the process of grief that one does not even consider it or is aware of it.\(^6\) This grief schema is still being taught and highlighted as the almost universal way that people grieve. There are consistent and significant inadequacies with the model, as will be pointed to later in the literature review. There are newer and more helpful models that need to be communicated to those serving the bereaved.

My father’s bewilderment at the death of his ninety-year-old mother is neither unusual nor worrisome. The powerless feeling that we humans encounter when we stand before the bereaved scanning our minds for something helpful to say is neither unusual


\(^{6}\) I asked a group of master’s level Child Life Specialists to talk about some of the emotional expressions of grief. “Anger.” “Denial.” “Bargaining.” “Depression.” were the first four answers that I received. University of La Verne Child Life field trip to Forest Lawn – Glendale, May 6, 2019.
nor worrisome either. What is usual and worrisome in these situations is the number of pastors and lay people who succumb to the impotence that death exposes within us and decide to say something anyway in an effort to fix or remove a person’s pain. A question often asked of me is what one should say to a grieving person. The answer is less than satisfying for many – “I am here to be with you.” It is unsatisfying because it does not fix the pain, remove it, or suppress it. This answer is uncomfortable because it means the person enters into the pain of the other’s grief. However, this answer is healing because it honors the pain and promises to abide; it incarnates presence and comfort.

This is the information that must be taught to the shepherds of the field. The plea of the bereaved to those providing support is to be a comfort, an incarnate presence in their loss. To do so with integrity and wisdom is to be aware of other models beyond the simplistic and oftentimes hurtful outline of the Five Stages of Grief. It is also to understand the complexity of each human being and the life circumstances that have brought them to the moment of anguish resulting from the death of their loved one. The factors that make up that anguish are multiple with each fragment providing its own essence to the grief of loss.

The goal of this project is to train Christian pastors and interested or invested laypersons in contemporary understandings of grief for the purpose of shaping their Christian community to be compassionate agents of healing. Pastors are the leaders. Pastors need to learn and know this material as leaders of the congregation. Certainly it is crucial to train lay leaders also. Invested is a good word to describe the type of person sought. Many people are interested in grief. However, their interest is in healing their own losses. These are the people who upon learning of another person’s loss will go to be
with them, yet upon hearing the first bit of the story are immediately sharing how they have handled their own grief. Such people are not helpful to the bereaved. Invested people are those who “furnish others with power.” These are people who feel a pull toward supporting others, providing them with the power to manage their grief by their presence.

As the Grief Support Director for Forest Lawn Memorial Parks and Mortuaries, I am in relationship with pastors and churches from Woodland Hills in the north and west to Long Beach in the south and stretching out to Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley in the east. Such a wide expanse would preclude bringing pastors together for the kind of in-depth training envisioned. Therefore, this pilot project will be limited to churches in the Burbank and Glendale area, which is served by two Forest Lawn locations: Glendale and Hollywood Hills.

The training will consist of eight weeks and be comprehensive in scope. The groundwork will be set with a brief history of grief through the psychological arc from Freud to the current context based in continuing bonds. The next two sessions will provide an overview of grief exploring the idea of the assumptive world, normal grief, grief in children, types of death, and other factors in a person’s grief. The last part of these sessions will explore trauma and its impact on grief as well as complicated bereavement in an effort to provide awareness of issues and knowledge of when to refer a person for therapy.

Kübler-Ross’ Five Stages of Grief will be reviewed for both its strengths and weaknesses, contrasting her model with two more recent models, the Dual Process and the Tasks of Mourning. Ensuing sessions will go over attitudes and strategies for

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supporting bereaved people followed by theological insights providing a different point of view of the meaning and purpose of death and grief. The final session will combine exercises looking at each person’s Personal Death Awareness and closing with work on self-care for involvement in this emotionally challenging work.
CHAPTER 1:
WHAT HAVE WE HERE – FOREST LAWN & THE COMMUNITY

Death and loss are life-long companions with human beings. Yet many people in
the church are afraid to access the healing experience of grief. A significant reason for
this is access to contemporary grief information is sorely lacking in the Christian
community. My hope is to provide a bridge across the chasm of loss so that pastors and
other lay individuals can help lead people from the land of loss to the land of new hope.
Forest Lawn, with its long history of community involvement and its practice of being a
strong community partner, is an ideal place from which to bring this kind of training to
the Christian community. Such preparation will become increasingly vital due to two
factors: the coming of the end of lifespan for the population wave known as the Baby
Boomers and changing funeral practices that are moving from public ritual to private
convention.

Forest Lawn’s History of Community Involvement

On New Year’s Day in 1917, Dr. Hubert Eaton wrote down The Builder’s Creed.
It was his outline and vision for the type of cemetery he wanted to create in Forest Lawn.
It was a dramatic vision. He imagined:
...Forest Lawn as different, as unlike other cemeteries as sunshine is to darkness, as eternal life is unlike death. I shall try to build at Forest Lawn a great park, devoid of misshapen monuments and other customary signs of earthly death, but filled with towering trees, sweeping lawns, splashing fountains, singing birds, beautiful statuary, cheerful flowers, noble memorial architecture with interiors full of light and color, and redolent of the world’s best history and romances.

I believe these things educate and uplift a community.

Forest Lawn shall become a place where lovers new and old shall love to stroll and watch the sunset’s glow, planning for the future or reminiscing of the past; a place where artists study and sketch; where school teachers bring happy children to see things they read of in books, where little churches invite, triumphant in the knowledge that from their pulpits only words of love can be spoken; where memorialization of loved ones in sculptured marble and pictorial glass shall be encouraged but controlled by acknowledged artists; a place where the sorrowing will be soothed and strengthened because it will be God’s garden. A place that shall be protected by an immense Endowment Care Fund, the principal of which can never be expended—only the income there from used to care for and perpetuate this Garden of Memory.

This is the Builder’s Dream; This is the Builder’s Creed.1

There are two themes important for this project as evidenced in Eaton’s Creed. One theme is that Forest Lawn is to be a place for all segments of life. Forest Lawn is not to be only a cemetery. Lovers young and old, artists, teachers, schoolchildren will find a place here. Forest Lawn is not for endings only. It is about planning and reminiscing, learning and creating, love and sorrow embraced. Beginnings and endings are held together for the benefit of the community. A second theme is the basis of Eaton’s vision in his conception of his Christian faith. Eaton pictured Forest Lawn as “God’s Garden” because “I believe, most of all, in a Christ that smiles and loves you and me.”2

Both of these, faith and benefit to the community at large, are deeply entrenched in Forest Lawn’s ethos.3 Eaton purchased Jan Styka’s “The Crucifixion,” a massive

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1 John F. Llewellyn, Birth of a Cemetery: Forest Lawn Memorial Park (Glendale, CA: Tropico Press, 2018), 243-244.
2 Ibid., 243.
painting (195’ X 45’), and built a cathedral-like building to house and display it with hourly showings. He built a museum to exhibit bronze sculptures, stained glass that came from European Cathedrals, and world treasures. Eaton brought replicas of Renaissance art treasures to Glendale. All of these occurred before travel and access to such artifacts was as easy as they are today. Memorial Day events began at Forest Lawn in 1915 and the first Easter Sunrise Service was held in 1921. Both services continue today. Direct educational experiences have also been part of Forest Lawn’s history. Schoolchildren have learned about Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo and were treated to Aztec dancers and a lecture by Montezuma at the Plaza of Meso-American History.

One ingredient of this community outreach unique to Forest Lawn is the position of Clergy Services and Grief Support Director. It is rare that a mortuary or cemetery will provide such aftercare services to the community. Forest Lawn began offering grief services in 1987. Rev. Ron Beams began an annual series of seminars to inform the public about grief. The two seminars, Understanding Grief and Making It Through the Holidays, made up the bulk of the program for many years, often receiving most of their publicity through churches.

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4 Forest Lawn Memorial-Parks, “Around the Parks” Fall/Winter 1995. This newsletter promoted “…the eighth annual Getting Through the Holidays seminar.” There were three seminars provided in different locations.
In 2002, Anita Wallace, LMFT and then the Grief Support Coordinator, began Memorial Candle Lighting Services hosted by Forest Lawn.\textsuperscript{5} These services, modeled after what are known as Blue Christmas or Longest Night Services, were designed to support bereaved families in the community during the Christmas holiday season. Then in 2014, I began an annual grief symposium in partnership with a local seminary to furnish pastors one-day training on a difficult subject within grief. Some of the nation’s leading experts on suicide (Dr. John R. Jordan and Dr. Karen Mason), trauma (Dr. Harold Ivan Smith), assisted death (Dr. Louis Gamino), and death of a child (Rev. Dr. Janie Ito) have presented significant information. Forest Lawn’s partnership and sponsorship with Claremont School of Theology and Azusa Pacific University’s Center for Vocational Ministry have made these offerings easily accessible for a wide variety of clergy. Forest Lawn’s Grief Support Department, by providing training, education, and grief services, is positioned to offer this project. By offering this project a critical need for pastors and the community will be addressed. Programs that provide in-depth and high-quality training in grief are rare.

**Community Based Grief Support Programs and Trainings**

A substantial portion of the position of Grief Support Director is to furnish referrals for the bereaved. Hospitals and hospice programs are a major source of bereavement programs in the community. Nonprofit organizations formed around grief administer support and a number of churches make use of a program called GriefShare. Also available are internet based options and groups offered by therapists.

\textsuperscript{5} Forest Lawn Executive Council: December 3, 2002 minutes. The first mention of the Candle Lighting services is December 11, 2002.
If offered, hospital based programs are available through the Spiritual Care Department. Such is the case at St. Joseph’s Hospital and Medical Center in Burbank, which offers no training component, only a bereavement support program. The bereavement support program, facilitated by a chaplain, is an eight-session closed group offered three times year. A different model, based at Adventist Health – Glendale, is Beyond Loss Bereavement Ministry, a program housed at the hospital. This is a comprehensive organization that maintains bereavement groups as well as operating bereavement training programs. The training is two days for a total of thirteen hours at a cost of $395.00. It is designed to teach the attendee how to facilitate bereavement groups.

Hospice programs are required to provide bereavement services to a patient’s family for thirteen months after death. Some hospices refer to bereavement organizations in the community and some conduct their own services. In the Burbank and Glendale area, there are no bereavement support programs or trainings offered by hospice.

Our House Grief Support Center, with locations in West Los Angeles and Woodland Hills, is an example of a non-profit grief organization. Our House offers a variety of bereavement support for groups ranging from elementary school age to adults. It also offers a comprehensive training program through a three-day experience for a total of twenty-one hours at a cost of $545.00. The training’s focus is explaining the grief process while exploring one’s own grief as it influences working with the bereaved and

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6 Personal phone call with Chaplain Devorah McDonald, May 23, 2019.

applying interventions to support a grieving person. It is important to note that the training at Beyond Loss and Our House are secular in nature with limited attention to grief and spirituality.

Some local churches provide grief support programs in the community. Roman Catholic congregations often maintain a ministry to the bereaved. This ministry gives assistance with planning vigils, funerals, and interments as well as the companionship of aftercare. While some are available to the community at large, most of them are for the members of the parish. GriefShare is the most recognizable bereavement support program offered by churches to the community. In a thirty-mile radius from Burbank, the variety of churches that use GriefShare, include Calvary Chapel, Presbyterian, Four Square, Lutheran, Independent Christian, Baptist, Congregational, United Church of Christ, Non-denominational or Community Churches, and Roman Catholic. Congregationally based grief programs are support programs only. GriefShare’s Leader’s Guide provides primary direction on the how-to of developing, marketing, and administrating the program.

**Availability of Courses of Study for Grief Training**

For a pastor seeking education about grief, she can look to a university or community college, local seminary, or specialized trainings. A survey of what is available and what is covered follows.

Southern California is home to world-class universities. Additionally, California has an extensive community college system. What is offered at the University of

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Southern California, the University of California, Los Angeles, and California State University, Northridge is one course available to Master’s level students in Social Work at USC. Looking next to the community college level, I surveyed Glendale Community College, Los Angeles Valley College, and Los Angeles Pierce College. Here again there is nothing offered in the area of grief, death, and dying, not in Psychology, Nursing, Gerontology, or Social Work.11

Turning to seminaries or bible colleges, which would be a logical place for a pastor to seek education in the area of grief, I looked through Fuller Seminary, Azusa Pacific University, and Claremont School of Theology. Fuller offered two opportunities. “Grief, Loss, Death and Dying” looked at these topics as “major crises of life.”12 This class along with the other offering, “The Ethics of Life and Death,” which focused on the ethical concerns surrounding the biomedicalization of contemporary life, was available as an elective to fulfill a pastoral care requirement for the Master of Divinity. Investigating class offerings in spirituality, eschatology, and ritual, I found no mention of grief and the role it plays in these important themes.

Azusa Pacific University offers two classes available to Master of Divinity students. “Introduction to Pastoral Care and Counseling” is a survey class designed to


touch on a number of areas necessary to pastoral ministry. The other is called “Pastoral Servant Leadership.” This class deals with a broad range of pastoral issues. Worship, conflict, baptism, Lord’s Supper, and funerals are among the topics. Dr. Rob Muthiah, professor of this class, brings the class to Forest Lawn to expose students to a mortuary experience. During the field trip, I provide a very brief overview of grief and caring for the bereaved. This is all the material on grief that the students receive.

Claremont School of Theology offers a class for pastoral students titled “Spiritual Care and Counseling for Death, Dying and Bereavement.” A range of lenses on the topic is wide and up to date as evidenced by the required reading list that includes Worden, Wolterstorff, Bonanno, and Doka & Martin. Like Dr. Muthiah, Dr. Heidi Park brought the class to Forest Lawn once for a tour of the mortuary’s planning center to expose the students to a valuable aspect of their pastoral ministry.

Many Christian traditions see Bible institutes as the pathway into pastoral ministry so I explored how these students are prepared for the important ministry of walking among the bereaved. Two schools in Southern California, California Graduate School of Theology, in Garden Grove, and Los Angeles Bible Training School are representative of this trajectory. California Graduate School of Theology offers one class on Christian counseling. In their description of PT553 Christian Counseling, counseling

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14 GMIN518 Pastoral Servant Leadership, Fall 2014 course syllabus.


16 TSC 3032/4032 Spiritual Care and Counseling for Death, Dying and Bereavement, Fall 2014 Course syllabus.
is defined as a “necessary element in Christian ministry” and as a “crucial task.” Yet no mention of grief is made to inform the student of the significant role of grief in the life of a parishioner. At Los Angeles Bible Training School, fifty-one classes are offered to prepare the student to be a pastor. Two of them are “Pastoral Theology” and “Biblical Counseling.” Pastoral Theology is a course in homiletics. In Biblical Counseling, the student is taught “how to use the Bible as one’s sole counseling tool.” The use of only one lens to counsel any situation is less than optimal. To do so without being in conversation with contemporary understandings of human nature is dangerous.

As discovered, some training in grief and bereavement is available to local pastors but only in larger seminaries and if they are enrolled in the seminary’s degree program. So a local pastor in ministry has few options to receive grief training to be a more effective, caring, and knowledgeable shepherd. The primary options and sources for such education are certification programs and the internet.

Two well-marketed programs that show up under a Google search of Christian bereavement programs are From Grief to Gratitude Grief Coach and Joy Restoration Grief Coach. From Grief to Gratitude is a seven-week webinar program costing just less than $1,000.00. The sessions administer instruction that evidences knowledge of contemporary grief understandings. There is recognition of the uniqueness of grief, the need for “rituals of remembrance,” and “integrating loss;” the website also advocates

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helping clients “embrace meaning” and the idea of legacy as a part of moving forward. Joy Restoration Grief Coach is a nine-week program that costs $1,697.00. It is offered through the Christian Coaching and Counseling Academy. Selling points for the program include “Business start up and growth training,” “…templates and checklists to start your business,” and “You will learn to help someone reduce suffering from 5-8 years, often down to a matter of months;” among the topics that the training covers are “Identifying stages of grief,” “Characteristics of coachability and uncoachability,” and “How to survive early stages of bereavement.”

Seeking secular training in support of the bereaved of their congregation, a pastor is directed by Google to The Grief Recovery Method and The Center for Loss and Life Transition. The Grief Recovery Method is learned in a four-day on-site training at the cost of $2,195.00. Some of the topics of the training are “The Grief Recovery Method Principles, Concepts of Recovery, How Incomplete Loss Occurs, Identifying Incomplete Losses, Grief Recovery Counseling Skills, Teaching Role Sets, and Development of Completion Exercises, and Practical Application Training.” Clearly, the focus is on unhealed grief or complicated bereavement.

The Center for Loss and Life Transition provides several trainings. “Comprehensive Bereavement Skills Training,” the foundation of their program, is a four-day on-site training that costs $895.00. Some topics covered are the North American

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context of grief, attachment, grief misconceptions, the “tenets of ‘companioning’ versus treating,” and “unique influences on grief.”

These four programs help identify many of the possibilities as well as the vulnerabilities of the bereaved. We recognize the value of support that those who grieve need in the idea of companioning and coaching someone through his or her journey. The individuality of grief is acknowledged in its uniqueness and the contextual nature of grief. Its transformative qualities are admitted with the ideas of meaning, legacy, and ritual.

However, the dangers of bereavement are also on display. Grief is marketed as a condition or pathology to recover from and complete. If the person does not respond to the coach, is it the griever’s problem due to uncoachability and not the possibility of trauma or complicated bereavement? Grief is a stage-based experience and can be moved through quickly by applying particular principals and mindsets. Grief is a commodity around which a business can be built.

The business of offering such training is evident. People should be paid for their knowledge, expertise, and time (Rom. 4:4), but the cost of such registration is often prohibitive for many pastors and congregations, which does not take into account travel and per diem expenses for the on-site trainings. As denominations and congregations decline, there is less and less budget available for extras like continuing education and special instruction, however valuable it may be. Such decline often means less to pay for

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23 Joy Restoration Grief Coach markets itself as providing the potential for coaches to develop a “6-figure practice.” The program is presented with scent of Christianity by quoting scriptures from the Amplified and Living Bible versions, accessed May 24, 2019, https://pccca.org/joy/.
a pastor’s salary or honorarium, meaning that more pastors are bi-vocational. This leaves less available time for weekend or on-site trainings.

These circumstances point to the need for grief training that is cost-effective, valuable, available, and affordable. It is a need that is destined to become more critical and to grow. Socially, we are being approached by a growing tsunami of death. The Baby Boomers are on the cusp of their generation’s experience of dying.

Death in the Near Future and the Social Changes Accompanying It

As Clergy Services Director, one of the responsibilities I maintain for Forest Lawn is what is called the Clergy Call List, a directory of clergy to provide services for families who do not have someone to officiate for their loved one. This list is made up of clergy from different faiths as well as many Christian expressions. During the last five years, I have received regular calls from many of the Protestant clergy who have been on the list for fifteen to twenty years saying they are not called as much anymore.

The explanation includes two important factors. First is a demographic trough through which we are moving. The second is the increase in cremation and the changing rituals surrounding the disposition of the human body. Simply, there are fewer people born to die and fewer people choosing to have a traditional funeral or memorial service.

There were approximately fifty-five million people born in what is called the Silent Generation, people born between 1924 and 1945. The Great Depression and World War II were dominant factors that depressed birth rates, either by necessity or proximity. Approximately seventy-six million people were born in the Baby Boom Generation of
1946-1964. This age of optimism fed the Post-War boom in birth rates as well as economics.

Currently we are in the middle of the Silent Generation’s dying and the Boomers are tiptoeing into the front edge of theirs. This demographic trough is still in a downward trending trajectory. With current life expectancy, mathematics reveals that the Boomers will begin their dying in earnest at about 2030.24

The other factor to account for is the rise of cremation as the preferred form of disposition of human remains. According to the Cremation Association of North America, the national rate of cremation in 1999 was about 25 percent.25 In California the rate of cremation was 47 percent.26 By 2017, the national rate had increased to 51.6 percent27 and the rate in California had grown to 63 percent.28 These rates are expected to continue to increase until it reaches “nearly 80 percent by 2035.”29 Cremation is growing in part because cremation affords options for the survivors. There are options for urns,

24 Figures for life expectancy are based on calculations used by the Social Security Administration of 84 years for males and 86.5 years for females, accessed May 25, 2019, https://www.ssa.gov/planners/lifeexpectancy.html.


28 Private email from Armand Voskanian.

options for splitting remains, options for disposition, and options for scheduling.

Cremation makes it easier to schedule someone’s death into our busy twenty-first century life, at least on the part of services. Funeral director Thomas Lynch writes

> As a people we have thoroughly embraced the notion of cremation as an exercise in simplicity and cost-efficiency. But we remain thoroughly distanced from the fire itself and all its metaphors and meaning, its religious and ritual significance as a station in our pilgrimage of faith. For Christians, in particular – who along with secular humanists, account for most of the nation’s increase in cremation – this disconnect is even more telling.³⁰

The increase in the rate of cremation is indicative of this disconnect and the social desire to move through one’s grief in the simplest and most efficient manner.

> Yet cremation is not the driver of the desire toward simplicity and efficiency nor is it responsible for these social changes. However, it is symptomatic. The distance we keep from the metaphors, meanings, and the religious and ritual significance is expressed by the change in the use and form of funeral and memorial services. Cremation assists in facilitating that change. Once, based in religious rituals and traditions, now with the disengagement of religiously affiliated persons from the meaning and purpose of the funeral coupled with the rise of religiously unaffiliated persons for whom a religious service is meaningless, this is no longer the case. Thomas Long writing about Christian funerals says, “American Christians, along with the rest of American culture, have become increasingly confused and conflicted about healthy ways to commemorate death. Funeral practices are in a windstorm of change, and old customs are being abandoned right and left.”³¹

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Death customs are understood to be costly, depressing, strictly religiously focused and constricting. They bear this negative connotation because individuals do not understand their purpose. And some people believe that a service makes for more difficult grieving. Society understands less and less the purpose of the funeral is, as Lynch says, “to get the dead where they need to go and the living where they need to be.”

These factors have led to a decline in the number of funeral or memorial services.

What is true is that a meaningful funeral is the first step in a healthy grieving process. A lack of knowledge and understanding of the role of grief as a healing and renewing process is leaving us diminished and anxious with a growing dread of the great chasm of grief that we are approaching.

I believe that these factors will create a great need for prepared and compassionate pastoral care. Yet the lack of grief training available to pastors and the looming quantity of death will leave pastors and the Church unprepared. With our approach to the chasm of death and grief the Church will have the opportunity to be an agent of healing for a deeply bereaved world. This project’s goal is to help local pastors and churches become a part of that healing (Lk 9:1-2).

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CHAPTER 2:
LITERATURE REVIEW

The dual worlds of theology and psychotherapy are often located in parallel universes. Each is skeptical of the other. Each often only views the world from their own perspective, cancelling a depth of insight that is to be gained from conversations one with another. This is especially true as it relates to God’s amazing creation, the Human Being. The following literature review will yield open ground for that conversation.

Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross’ seminal work *On Death and Dying* laid the groundwork for grief in popular culture. Its popularity defines the grief process for many people. It is included in this review because it is important for pastors to understand from where we have come. Dr. J. William Worden’s *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy* has been instructive providing an overall basis for grief for clinicians. His work dips deep into the complexity of our human experience of grief. It is included as a basis for comprehending grief and as a plumb line to evaluate other resources. Two Christian-based grief programs, Beyond the Broken Heart and GriefShare will be reviewed. Beyond the Broken Heart is published by Cokesbury, the United Methodist publishing house; Cokesbury would be a prime source for United Methodist and some other mainline churches to search for resources. GriefShare is the most popular Christian bereavement program available. For these reasons they are reviewed. To help reframe
what are categorized as difficult or negative emotions, the work of Miriam Greenspan in *Healing Through the Dark Emotions* will provide a basis for seeing the light in the dark and difficult places that grief often takes the bereaved. The ability to be comfortable in the process of reframing is a crucial skill for persons providing bereavement support. Greenspan’s work will assist in moving that direction. Attachment theory is the most current way of understanding the seeds of an individual grief experience. Dr.’s Phyllis Kosminsky and John R. Jordan’s book *Attachment-Informed Grief Therapy* will hold up a critical lens to view the soil from which grief springs. As a very recent book it will provide significant exposure to this area of contemporary grief theory. The review will conclude with Jennifer H. Wortmann and Crystal L. Park’s journal article “Religion and Spirituality in Adjustment Following Bereavement: An Integrative Review.” Wortmann and Park’s work will expose bereavement caregivers to a wide view of the variety of ways religion and spirituality impact bereavement.

*On Death and Dying* by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

Qualitative research in a cancer ward conducted by Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and four seminary students became the material for this famous and meaningful book. These seminary students were seeking to understand death as the greatest “human crisis.” Through interviews with terminally ill individuals, Kübler-Ross and the students discerned a multi-step process, or stages, through which the terminally ill traveled. According to Kübler-Ross, as the dying processed this knowledge they moved from stage to stage. Their research became the very important book *On Death and Dying* published in 1969. The book was among the first to demystify death, bringing it out of the shadows.

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and into general conversation. Kübler-Ross helped the general population to understand that “in our unconscious, death is never possible in regards to ourselves. It is inconceivable for our unconscious to imagine an actual ending of our own life here on earth.”\textsuperscript{2}\textit{On Death and Dying} was a national bestseller among non-fiction books, which is strange considering the topic and our human avoidance of it.

Kübler-Ross devotes individual chapters in describing five different emotional stages people pass through on their way to their death: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. These stages, and the ease of remembering them in the acronym \textit{DABDA}, moved into popular culture. Soon \textit{DABDA} was being applied to the human experience of grief. I remember in the mid-1970s learning of this system in my United Methodist youth group as we talked about grief indicating how quickly this system moved into popular culture. Within approximately five years, the concepts were being taught to Junior High students. The model helped society to understand and navigate the mysterious experience of death and grief. Her work provided an opportunity to grasp and manage an often-unmanageable situation by beginning to see a process to the experience. Denial we learned was not necessarily negative because it helped us ease into and move toward acceptance. We learned that moving through one’s grief was not an act of will.

Yet scattered among the harvest of wheat this system grew were also weeds. There are significant concerns. Kübler-Ross never intended this system to be used as a model for grief. Discerned from those moving toward accepting their own imminent death these stages had little to nothing to do with the process of grieving. This has been a difficult obstacle to move beyond because of the wide dissemination of \textit{DABDA}

\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., 2.
throughout popular culture. As such overlaying this model on grief has created a set of problems.\textsuperscript{3} Another problem is people succumb to their own internal expectations of where in the stages they are, where they think they should be, and how they think they should be responding. J. William Worden suggests that “there’s a tendency for the novice to take the stages too literally.”\textsuperscript{4} The chaotic nature of grief juxtaposed with the expectations of sequential stages can create internal conflict that drains away energy better used to support and care for one’s own self. Such conflict is unnecessary and potentially detrimental.

Similar is the concept of depression. In Kübler-Ross’ schema, depression is a necessary and significant part of the grief process.\textsuperscript{5} Yet, fifty years beyond its description, the societal relationship to depression is significantly different considering the wide marketing and use of anti-depressants. If depression is an important and necessary stage for one’s grief, according to Kübler-Ross, and depression can be alleviated through medications, the question of whether grievers can be assisted in moving through that stage in a less painful way by the use of anti-depressants can be asked. In the place of complicated mourning, anti-depressants may be a helpful approach in stabilizing a griever. In the case of normal grief, the addition of anti-depressants will interfere with the griever’s progress.

The field of thanatology is grateful to Dr. Kübler-Ross for the courage she had in seeking to understand the human experience of coming to terms with one’s own death. It

\textsuperscript{3} Charles Corr at the annual conference of the Association for Death Education and Counseling, meeting in Atlanta, GA, April 9-13, 2019, presented a paper examining the wide range of academic and professional textbooks that still use the five-stages of Kübler-Ross as the model of grief and bereavement.


\textsuperscript{5} Kübler-Ross, \textit{On Death and Dying}, 21.
was groundbreaking work. To conduct her research, there were many obstacles she had to confront, many barriers to overcome. We should also be grateful that the work was as popular as it was. It gave society permission to speak about dying and death. It gave us language to begin to connect our experiences with each other. As thanatologists, we are now responsible for addressing the necessary misconceptions that her work has harvested.

**Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy by J. William Worden**

Grief is an intricate and composite matter, full of relationships and elements that mediate a person’s experience. Pastors would do well to understand, or at the very least be familiar with, the multiplicity of factors that come to bear upon and create a person’s very real experience of grief. J. William Worden’s *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy* is readable, accessible, and relevant. While written for clinicians, it will be a valuable resource to guide a pastor as she cares for the congregation. In essence, Worden takes the readers’ hands and walks them through the recipe for grief. In doing so, he divides the experience into distinct chapters laying the groundwork for grief, debunking the pathology of grief so many individuals fear, describing what is normal, and flagging what might signal a complicated bereavement.

John Bowlby’s attachment theory is the foundation of this work. Worden discusses the basics of his theory, on which Bowlby wrote over 900 pages, in three pages giving the pastor enough to understand the origins of a person’s grief and why it is so potent. This moves directly into the normalization of grief, a very significant learning for pastors to understand. Laying out the broad reality of grief and its impact upon a person

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through one’s emotions, cognitive expressions, physical sensations, and behaviors will be like a Rosetta stone to the pastor who will very quickly see many of these experiences in the congregation, now with validity and reasoning behind them.

In response to a variety of grief schemas, Worden developed his own model called the Tasks of Mourning.\(^7\) The four tasks provide structure to the mourning process responding to the deficiencies of Kübler-Ross and other stage and phase models. These deficiencies rest in the sense of passivity that the concepts of stage or phase imply. For Worden, tasks “impl[y] that the mourner needs to take action and can do something. Also this approach implies that mourning can be influenced by intervention from the outside.”\(^8\) Significantly, the Task Model provides a sense of agency for each bereaved individual, restoring a modicum of control. The bereaved is not captive to the whim of grief (subject to the intensity and fragmentation that grief brings upon a person, yes – but not captive). For the church and pastors, this model offers an appreciation that they can be significant in the healing that takes place through the support and presence offered to the bereaved.

Worden’s treatment of the Mediators of Mourning is also significant to understand.\(^9\) Each mediator plays a role in the individual nature of a person’s grief. Knowing who died and how they died are important; however, these are not the only mediators. Among other mediators are the perceived quality of the attachment to the deceased and the style of that attachment. What expectations the family’s culture or heritage place upon the bereaved also flavors a person’s grief. To varying degrees and

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\(^7\)Ibid., 40.

\(^8\) Ibid.

\(^9\) Ibid., 59-76.
within each circumstance these mediators will prepare a map for pastors as they are present with and care for the grieving. To be aware of the mosaic of factors that influence grief creates a humble stance in relationship to the grief of parishioners. Such intricacy can lead one to avoid answers. Added to this is Worden’s treatment of a variety of special losses.\textsuperscript{10} Suicide, sudden and violent deaths, a child’s death from SIDS or stillbirth or what is called a socially negated loss where the griever is often not allowed to grieve or the death bears a social stigma are detailed. This knowledge deepens the dimensions of the manifold nature of grief. It also provides a diagram to the places where the pastor can bear good news, bind up the broken hearted, and bring release to the captives (Is 61), not with words but with compassionate presence.

Much of the material will carry the pastor far deeper than is necessary. The beauty of this material is that it will furnish, for the astute pastor, information to discern when the issues and concerns surrounding a particular grief are beyond their expertise. The work of grief therapy with specific techniques, and Worden’s addressing of complicated mourning will be a blessing to a pastor providing information that will make the decision to refer someone for outside help pastoral and caring. Pastors are not qualified to be everything that the church and its members need (1Cor 12:4-7).

A final essential chapter that Worden includes surrounds the pastor’s own grief and the importance of self-care.\textsuperscript{11} Pastors are taught to model their ministry after Jesus, who “came not to be served, but to serve” (Mk 10:45). Often going along with that is the rest of verse that says, “and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Awareness of one’s

\textsuperscript{10} See “Chapter 7: Grieving Special Types of Losses” in Ibid., 183-216.

\textsuperscript{11} Chapter 9 is devoted to the grief and self-care necessary for the work of caring for bereaved persons. See Ibid., 251-259.
own grief and mortality can be a buffer for a crucifixion syndrome that many pastors unconsciously bear. It is necessary to understand one’s own losses and how they are triggered by losses in the congregation. A good regimen of self-care is indispensable for a healthy pastor.

Worden’s book contributes good insight and information about grief. The references at the end of each chapter are extensive. Any chapter would provide outstanding opportunities for pastors to grow and develop their grief awareness. Especially for pastors whose grief knowledge consists of little more than the death of someone followed by a series of stages, Worden’s book redefines grief as a unique and individual experience based in love and relationship.

*Beyond the Broken Heart* by Julie Yarbrough

Julie Yarbrough’s book *Beyond the Broken Heart: A Journey Through Grief* is based in her experience of the death of her husband.12 Yarbrough uses her story as the universal story of grief. Yarbrough supplies some good and relevant information about the general nature of grief. Her analogy of grief as a trip in a car and you the bereaved do not get to drive is as helpful as I have heard.13 She also expresses an awareness of the paradox of grief’s universality and individuality. She invites the reader into the early fog-like experiences of grief. “At first, you deny grief, mercifully shrouded by shock, fatigue, and numbness.”14 Then she ventures onto the raw edge of early grief as she walks...

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12 I must note that her husband, the Reverend Dr. Leighton Ferrell is the pastor who received me into membership of the First United Methodist Church of Richardson, TX. The irony of this is not lost on me. Nor is the incredible smallness of the world and our interconnectedness.


14 Ibid., 15.
through the anger, worry, fear, and suffering of a griever. All of these she notes are common emotional experiences of grief. This is truly helpful as she normalizes these for the reader.

The Leader’s Guide is a useful resource. The instructions given for creating a bereavement group, how to lead such a group, one’s preparation for each session being based in prayer, and the encouragement for the leader to engage in self-care throughout the series of sessions are strong and to the point. Of special note is her admonition to the leaders “to provide spiritual care and nurture for those who grieve in the safe community of a small group. This is your ‘work and word’…”15 A safe community and the care and nurture provided there are foundational experiences for the bereaved in their journey. Such encouragement directing leaders to those components and away from providing answers or fixing those in the group are important to anyone feeling called to support the bereaved.

Yarbrough’s dependence on her story as the universal story of grief, however, is problematic. Worden developed an aphorism to help explain the universal and particular nature of a person’s grief: “Each person’s grief is like all other people’s grief; each person’s grief is like some other person’s grief; and each person’s grief is like no other person’s grief.”16 Yarbrough’s reliance on her story only engages with the first third of Worden’s maxim; she does not engage with the other two-thirds of his wisdom.17 This creates a significant flaw in the grief support program that is evident in both the Leader’s


16 Worden, Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy, 9.

17 Ibid. Worden developed the thought out of a similar statement by Harvard Professor Gordon Allport. Allport taught his graduate students “Each man is like all other men; each man is like some other men; and each man in like no other man” (quoted in Ibid.).
Guide and the Student Handbook. In the student book, each section is introduced by a first-person recount of one of her struggles with her grief. The fact that her husband died of an illness colors what she depicts as the normal journey of grief and leaves out too many others whose loved one died in a different manner. To present grief from this point of view is too narrow of a lens to use upon the complex and multi-textured landscape of grief.

Yarbrough’s need for answers to these common grief expressions lead her and the group leaders down a wrong pathway. The very first line in the introduction to the Leader Guide reads, “To survive and live forward, those who grieve must find answers.”\textsuperscript{18} As detailed in Worden’s book, the complexity of an individual’s grief does not readily lead to answers. Many of the answers a bereaved person seeks are not for the pastor or caregiver to hand over. However, for Yarbrough each of these normal responses to grief is ultimately answered by prayer; “you can defeat anxiety and conquer worry though persistent prayer with thanksgiving, quiet introspection and personal meditation.”\textsuperscript{19} While prayer is a vital grief management tool, it is not a panacea. Prayer in this manner becomes an almost too easy answer for the struggles of the bereaved, especially one whose loss is sudden or violent. To claim defeat for anxiety is potentially to set up someone to struggle.

It is unfortunate that Yarbrough uses only Kübler-Ross’ Five Stages; I wonder if she knew of any other model. Yarbrough devotes only four pages to the model. She writes that these stages, “best describe the clinical structure of dying.”\textsuperscript{20} It is strange to acknowledge this about the model and then use the story of King David’s grief over the

\textsuperscript{18} Julie Yarbrough, Beyond the Broken Heart. 11.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 26.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 40.
death of his infant son (2 Sam 12) to outline how the stages work. Given what she seems to acknowledge and what we know are the deficiencies of the model, I believe it would be better to research other models of grief.

**GriefShare**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, GriefShare is used by a wide variety of churches. It is well-marketed and a leader in the provision of religious based grief support. As such it is important to review the program. *GriefShare Leader’s Guide* imparts immediate awareness of why a bereavement program within a church is valuable. “A few days after the funeral, most of the people surrounding the griever return to their daily routines. They don’t understand the deep, prolonged impact caused by the death of a spouse, child, family member, or close friend.” 21 Their emphasis on the on-going support the bereaved need is a strength of the program. Their encouragement for providing support that is not dispensed by the pastor, or proscribed by her emphasizes the presence of the laity as a means of God’s presence. All this forms a solid base from which to understand the value of social support as the crucial component it is in healing of grief.

Comfort is the foundation of the first five sessions of GriefShare. In particular, Session 3 –The Journey of Grief – Part One does a good job of normalizing the experiences of grief. There is encouragement to “Express your emotions” 22 and to “Accept the reality of your loved one’s death.” 23 Day three of this week points out the

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23 Ibid., 27.
need to “Develop a new identity.” Each is necessary to heal one’s grief. Accepting the reality and developing a new identity echo Worden’s Task I and Task III. The expression of one’s emotions focuses on processing the pain, Worden’s Task II, which is a good place for the bereaved to start the journey. Providing permission to do so opens the door to healing.

However, the shortcomings of this program are significant and need to be addressed. Like Yarbrough, there is a need to provide answers. “The members of your group will have a lot of questions. It’s important they receive answers to their questions and solutions to their problems; otherwise, they won’t heal from their grief.” Answers are the focus of Sessions Six through Nine. However, we cannot give the bereaved answers. Answers handed over from outside one’s own self are destructive. Job’s friends Eliphaz, Zophar, Bildad, and Elihu provided explanations. Job, and ultimately God reject each of their reasoning. Gamino and Ritter are emphatic about providing answers.

[N]o one can construct a meaningful attribution about death based on spirituality for another person. Suggestions can be made, thoughts can be provoked, or question can be posed, but the answer must come from within the client. Trying to force a spiritual meaning for death is both insensitive ethically and ineffective therapeutically.

God’s presence and interaction with the bereaved, not a prescribed doctrinal stance creates the space necessary for the bereaved to discover their own solutions.

24 Ibid.
25 Worden, Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy, 41-44.
26 Ibid., 47-50.
27 Ibid., 45-46.
Answers laid out in the GriefShare model include defining God, working through trauma within the group, and a promise of heaven where you can see your loved one again if you have accepted Christ. Each of these is problematic. The Biblical description of God is multi-faceted not univocal, trauma should not be addressed by an untrained layperson, and promising an afterlife for the purpose of reunification with the deceased is emotional manipulation.

GriefShare, by design, uses grief as an evangelistic tool.

There are many people in your community who are dealing with grief and struggling to make sense of the death of a loved one. They’ve also been confronted with their own mortality…. They are looking for help and often willing to turn to a church to find it. That’s why your GriefShare group can be an especially effective outreach for your church. Moreover, in a section called “God, What is Going On?,” the bereaved person is submitted to “The Reason We Suffer” and “The Reason You Can Have Hope.” Many call this the plan of salvation. In a context of grief, this is manipulation. The emotional and physical exhaustion, the cognitive impairment, and the general diminishment that can come during grief can make people susceptible to manipulation. We as a society are very strict with mortuaries and cemeteries, providing consumer protections to shield people from being taken advantage of during this vulnerable time. Yet against promises of eternal access to one’s deceased loved one, there are no protections. Jesus’ admonition to those who would put a stumbling block before another comes to mind (Mt18:6, Mk 9:42, 

30 Grief Share: Your Journey of Mourning to Joy, Session 6, 60.

31 Ibid., Session 8, 75-83.

32 Ibid., 12, 116-117.


34 Grief Share: Your Journey of Mourning to Joy, xii-xv.
Evangelism through grief is a significant ethical failure. “Ethically conscious grief counselors” say Gamino and Ritter “adhere to a position of pluralism wherein the sensibilities, preferences, and traditions of each individual mourner are respected.”35 Such a position “reflects the fundamental ethical principle of autonomy. Rigidly applying … an external standard of how grieving should progress may constitute a violation of the principle of nonmaleficence.”36 I would suggest that applying an external outcome for another’s grief, in this instance a coerced faith, is also violation of the sense of fidelity between caregiver and the bereaved.

**Healing through the Dark Emotions: The Wisdom of Grief, Fear, and Despair by Miriam Greenspan**

In Worden’s Task Model, Task II is to Process the Pain of Grief.37 Yet, many persons want relief from the pain instead of processing it. Pastors can grow in their own tolerance for and acceptance of what are often considered these painful emotions. Miriam Greenspan in *Healing through the Dark Emotions: The Wisdom of Grief, Fear, and Despair* administers a very helpful course to address what many people seek to distance themselves from in grief: its pain. Greenspan, a psychotherapist, states in the Preface the need to shift our mindset about these emotions: “in my view, there are no negative emotions, just unskillful ways of coping with emotions we can’t bear.”38 Her encouragement is to break from the need to conquer or master these emotions to trusting


36 Ibid., 19-20.


them to lead people toward wholeness and creativity. She invites the reader to reject the “dissociative culture – a culture that separates body from mind, body from spirit, feeling from thinking”\textsuperscript{39} in which people reside into a more holistic experience of their humanness – body, mind, spirit (Dt 6:5). This is a helpful place to begin. Grief becomes one environment of the wholeness of the human experience instead of a place to be shunned. Grief is not only an emotional experience, which many believe. Greenspan brings the location of these emotions into the body, a new thought for many. Her focus on the body as a way to identify and engage with these emotions has the added benefit of helping to reconnect the griever to his or her body and thus to assist in healing the body.

This connection is based in listening, which is defined by Webster as “hearing with thoughtful attention.”\textsuperscript{40} Listening is the key, in her view, to healing. “Without a listener, the healing process is aborted.”\textsuperscript{41} That listener needs to be both one’s own self as well as another. Greenspan’s assurance though is that listened to or not, these dark emotions, as valued by society, will require attention. Whether they become “an act of grace or an act of violence, a cancerous growth or a surge of creative energy”\textsuperscript{42} is predicated upon whether “[w]e discover that the darkness has its own light”\textsuperscript{43} (Ps 139:11-12).

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{40} Quoted in Greenspan, \textit{Healing through the Dark Emotions}, 15.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 14. This pairs with Kosminsky and Jordan who invoke the necessity of an “engaged, attuned presence of one or more other people.” See Phyllis S. Kosminsky and John R. Jordan, \textit{Attachment-Informed Grief Therapy: The Clinician’s Guide to Foundations and Applications} (New York: Routledge, 2016), 101.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
Greenspan designed a system for freeing these emotions and embracing the light they bear.⁴⁴ They are the skills of attending, befriending, and surrendering. Attending is learning to listen. It is to become aware of the presence of these emotions and their location within the body. To focus on them not only locates them but also identifies them. In grief, identifying and naming emotions allows one to encompass that emotion, which is the first step in allowing it to work within us for healing. Jesus, on multiple occasions, encourages us to “keep awake” (Mt 24:42, 25:13, Mk 13:35, 37, 14:34, 37, 38). Keeping awake invites awareness. Awareness invites action. Befriending is being non-judgmental, learning to tolerate the experience without losing perspective. This permits “the body to feel what it feels, and the mind to think what it thinks, while maintaining a witness consciousness.”⁴⁵ I would call this an Elmo stance after the Sesame Street puppet. The Elmo stance places the individual in a third person allowing one to be self-reflective about the emotion, the event, the experience without becoming it. Simply, instead of saying, “I am angry” one can acknowledge, “I am feeling anger.” The Elmo stance provides the distance necessary to remain non-judgmental. Jesus cautions us about judging for it is the judgment that will be used against us (Mt 7:1). Humans are good about turning the judging eye about these dark emotions against their own self.

Greenspan’s final skill is surrendering. To surrender one “[moves] into what hurts, with awareness as your protection. Surrender is a form of deep acceptance.”⁴⁶ Surrender, following Jesus’ lead, is to release oneself from results and outcome, allowing God to

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⁴⁴ Greenspan, *Healing through the Dark Emotions*, 73-79.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 77-78.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 78.
work in and through events to bring hope and healing. Jesus’ prayer “not what I want, but what you want” (Mk 14:36c) is the basis of surrender.

Reframing our attitude toward these dark emotions as well as practicing the skills necessary to allow them to work in us will be difficult. Much of what Greenspan calls for is counter-intuitive to what we desire. A helpful resource for pastors will be the Part Four of the book. This contains thirty-three Emotional Exercises designed to equip the bereaved with tools for focusing awareness through intention or to naming the dark emotions as they arise, thus befriending them.47 Greenspan gives three simple prayers – help me, thank you, and I surrender – as one way to practice surrender.48

Attachment-Informed Grief Therapy by Phyllis Kosminsky and John R. Jordan

To understand the power of grief, it is important to understand the power of the attachments humans form beginning with the most important, the caregiver. Dr. Phyllis Kosminsky and Dr. John R. Jordan have done that with this book. Attachment theory, like Worden’s work defining the Mediators of Mourning, provides for the pastor the ground from which to be humble with the bereaved. Kosminsky and Jordan’s direct approach to the complexity of John Bowlby’s work makes it available to those not fluent in psychoanalytic language. They light the way, allowing the pastor to navigate the journey for those supporting the bereaved. Their explication of the instinctual nature of our attachments, “the goal of which is to provide protection and a sense of comfort and


48 Ibid., 290-291.
security,“ and the wide varieties of expression those attachments manifest, set up the pastor to grasp the foundational nature of this influential theory.

Letting go of the need to furnish answers to a bereaved person as a way of rescuing them from the pain of grief invites pastor and bereaved into a relationship of discovery and mutuality. Here, Greenspan’s work of attending is practiced. Kosminsky and Jordan point out how important such a relationship is; “reregulation in the aftermath of loss, like the recovery of emotional balance in infancy, is a dyadic and transactional process that is facilitated by, if not dependent on, the engaged, attuned presence of one or more other people.” This guiding principal of attachment-informed grief therapy invites pastor and congregation into a healing relationship grounded in the most basic of human interaction. True relationships are Trinitarian in nature. They are the relationship encompassing God, Self, and Other (Mt 22:37-39). Here is fertile ground for healing made possible by an attuned presence.

Any relationship, to be true and life giving, is based in trust and fidelity. Here the authors point to another guiding principal: “[t]he foundation of all successful grief therapy…is the development of a trusting, emotionally safe, and psychologically nurturing therapeutic relationship.” To foster trust, a pastor must be aware of her own emotions, their depths and triggers. This can help a bereaved person learn to reregulate his own pain because the pastor can stay with them, providing a safe place and nurturing company for normalizing feelings, situations, and expressions of grief.

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49 Kosminsky and Jordan, Attachment-Informed Grief Therapy, 4.

50 Ibid., 101.

51 Ibid., 102.
Kosminsky and Jordan stress “emotional safety is the cornerstone of all secure attachment relationships,”\(^{52}\) thus reminding the pastor of the instinctual need for safety built into the Body of Christ. The authors point to the development of trust through the continual work of providing transparency, control, and respect for the bereaved. The execution of these three are seen in Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal Son where the Watchful Father embraces the grief of both the Prodigal Son as well as the Elder Son (Lk 15:11-32).

While the book focused on grief therapy and techniques for providing that therapy, Kosminsky and Jordan are aware of the value and power of social support in all its forms. That “the healing role of empathically resonant human relationship in the process of mourning is not limited to the domain of professional grief therapists”\(^{53}\) is good news for pastors and churches that care and want to express their care to those suffering grief. Compassionate presence is what the bereaved need. The need is not for trained therapy. The need is for compassionate people (Lk 10:2a). Such is the harvest: a harvest of healing, compassion, and hope.

*Religion and Spirituality in Adjustment Following Bereavement by Jennifer H. Wortmann and Crystal L. Park*

It is a common statement pastors hear from people coming to a place of resolution of their grief: “I don’t know how people without faith in God can do this. I would not have been able to make it if it were not for my faith.” This is an anecdotal way of saying what researchers have often noted. Faith is considered “…one of the most frequently used

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 113.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 171.
and effective means of coping with death.” While that is a long-standing belief, Jennifer Wortmann and Crystal Park delved into research about how and why religion and spirituality is related to adjusting to a world that no longer contains the deceased (Worden’s Task III). Once again, as Worden’s Mediators of Mourning and Kosminsky and Jordan’s description of attachment theory show, it is a multiplicity of aspects of faith and spirituality that are helpful in some cases and not so in others. Some of the important findings for pastors and churches to be aware of are 1) attendance at worship and its affect; 2) general religiousness or the importance of religion/spirituality; 3) religious coping. Awareness of empirical data can provide credence to a pastor’s encouragement to the bereaved to remain consistent and active in the church after a loved one’s death.

Attendance is important for coping with bereavement and two elements seemed to make a difference. “Frequency of attendance at religious services…is a dimension that may reflect the relative value of religion for some individuals and may be a way for the bereaved to obtain important resources that support adjustment.” Regular attendance would be a place, both physically and spiritually, that a person could seek comfort and support. Attendance would surround the bereaved with people, at least early on. Those reaching out or a church with a bereavement support group would yield on-going social support, a key to adjusting and integrating a loss.


Wortmann and Park, 704.
A second finding is that the importance of religion or spirituality to the bereaved generally points to better adjustment. There is a multiplicity of outcomes within this category. Some studies point to less outside treatment sought by the bereaved while others report less unhappiness.\textsuperscript{57} Another study reported the “use of more coping behaviors (considered by us to reflect adjustment) and fewer health problems.”\textsuperscript{58} Perhaps the most meaningful finding shows “religious interest was also related to making sense of the loss, even shortly after the loss.”\textsuperscript{59}

A third finding is that of religious coping. Religious coping involves a variety of “activities and beliefs to deal with stressful events.”\textsuperscript{60} The use of religious coping lowered the level of anxiety in the bereaved and helped the bereaved to respond to a sense of depression. In my experience, it is not unusual for people to become more involved with prayer and scripture reading in particular, both of which are coping mechanisms. These kinds of activities deepen one’s relationship with God, moving one toward new perceptions of God as well as a new stage in faith development. These also support meaning making for the bereaved.

The totality of the research shows that religion and spirituality play a powerful role in the bereaved person’s positive adjustment after the loss. While there is enough evidence to make this claim, it is not a claim that can be made universally. Variables, like those pointed out in Worden’s Mediators of Mourning, influence each grief experience.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 711.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 712.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 717.
dramatically. Thus, the only stance a pastor can have before a bereaved person is one of humility.
CHAPTER 3:

PLOWING THE FIELD: DEATH AND GRIEF

The question of why humans grieve is complicated. The hurt when a loved one
dies can be extreme. Following the death of a person close to our heart, it can seem as if
the whole world is off kilter, not the same, and quite different without the hope of it ever
returning to normal. J. William Worden describes the necessity of processing the pain we
experience in our grief, but understanding grief is a necessary part of the processing
work.2

From our earliest moments, human beings make connections and build
relationships. Early on it is with the one who cradles us, calming and soothing us when
hunger awakens, we are startled awake, or the fear that we are alone and vulnerable
overtakes us. We build relationships because we are alone and that is not good (Gn 2:18).
Relationships are innate and a natural part of being human, because relationships are
necessary for both our survival and our physical and mental health.

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1 This chapter is based heavily on two previously unpublished papers: “Silence, Word,
Resurrection: Grief as Soul Making” June 29, 2015, and “Attachment, Death and Continuing Bonds: A
Spiritual Growth Map for the Journey Home” September 1, 2017. I will be reiterating in a succinct manner
many of the concepts and thoughts expressed in those papers.

2Worden, Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy, 45-46.
Yet for every relationship we build, we enter into a covenant with sorrow and grief because death is a fact that will end every life. It is a simple equation; love and death equals grief. Love, by definition, is a “warm personal attachment.”3 Truly, anything to which we are attached, upon its destruction, will leave us in grief. It is an inescapable fact, one of which we are acutely aware.

Such awareness leaves humankind in a quandary. We know of death. Rationally, it makes sense. We know that we, and all whom we love, will “go the way of all the earth” (1 Kgs 2:2). But death is for the other person, not for me and my loved ones. Ernest Becker writes: “at heart one doesn't feel that he will die, he only feels sorry for the man next to him. Freud’s explanation for this was that the unconscious does not know death or time; in man’s physiochemical, inner organic recesses he feels immortal.”4 Regardless of how we feel, death is a fact of life and will receive everything and all that we hold precious.

Despite this, we keep forming relationships, attaching ourselves to people and identities that will bring pain once again. We do this because, like forming attachments and loving relationships, grief is the natural healing journey into which we are driven. Grief is grounded in our attachments. To become fully human again, we must clear the stubble from the field left behind by death. Harrowing our life prepares us to receive the seed of the new life God is planting and nurturing:

Do not remember the former things,  
or consider the things of old.  
I am about to do a new thing;  
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness

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and rivers in the desert. (Is 43:18-19)

But this perception must be nurtured and grown. To learn to see, hear, and trust God in that wilderness requires a process of grieving. It is a process of being silent in the face of overwhelming experiences that empty and quiet you. It is a process of hearing the language coming from that silent space so that you might speak of the wreckage your beloved’s death has left you. The process is learning to look around in the wilderness to see what is helpful, choosing what is portable, and taking it with you into a new land of relationship. Grieving is a practice of learning again to trust the presence and the process set in the soul. Seeing with new eyes the new creation (2 Cor 5:17) God brings forth in each individual is a resurrection, a movement through death and loss, to a new person and a new spirit. It is a birth of the Christ-nature transforming us “from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:18).

As Christians this is our hope and desire, to become like Christ, being united as one with Christ (Rom 6:5). After all, to be named a Christian is to be a little Christ, evidenced by the suffix *ian*. However, we misconstrue the agony inherent in this process if we discount grief as simply necessary or “the way it is.” Many are wont to do so as an escape from grief’s pain and sorrow by looking to glory, heaven, or perfection (1 Thes 4:13). We must understand the pain involved in this journey. Birth, like death or any other major life transformation, is an agonizing process (Mk 10:28-30). A plow cutting through a field tears the dirt, overturning the soil row by row, leaving marks. But into those rows seed is planted (Mt 13:3). Cradled in the overturned soil, it is nurtured by the hovering presence of the Spirit of God (Gn 1:1) waiting to bring forth the harvest (Mt 13:8). Finally, this is what we long for in our pain: a nurturing spirit, the presence of another, bearing our burdens and sorrows (Gal 6:2) and comforting (Jn 14:18) us through
our journey. Long ago a name was coined for such a relationship: the Body of Christ. This is the Church: our calling, our ministry.

**Genesis of Grief: Growing an Identity**

**Attachment Theory**

When God created humankind (Gn 1:27), God imparted God’s image through relationship. God is in relationship with the other members of the Trinity and all parts of creation (Ps 24:1). Being human and bearing the image of God means being connected to a multiplicity of persons, ideas, and structures. Through these relationships we develop our individual identity. This identity, and the process of learning how to be in those relationships, is grounded in our earliest relationship, generally with our natural caregiver, when we are born.

Being weak and vulnerable, unable to provide for our own basic needs, we must learn to trust another to provide these for us. Food when we are hungry, shelter for protection, comfort when we are afraid, and affection as we grow; each must be delivered by our caregivers. Their provision teaches us we can form positive, reliable relationships. Learning to rely on others, we learn that we need these relationships. Beyond the simple meeting of needs, self-understanding and ego development is cultivated through these relationships. Ethnologist John Bowlby recognized this process and established what is known as attachment theory.  

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5 “Everything visible, without exception, is the outpouring of God. What else could it really be? ‘Christ’ is a word for the Primordial Template (‘Logos’) through whom ‘all things came into being, and not one thing had its being except through him” (Jn 1:3). Richard Rohr, The Universal Christ (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2019), 13.

6 John Bowlby’s extensive work on attachment is contained in the three volume work, John Bowlby, Attachment and Loss (New York: Basic Books, 1969). A full explication of the nuances of his
These attachments are vital for our growth as healthy individuals. Bowlby states, “What is essential for mental health is that the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother-substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment.”7 This “warm, intimate and continuous relationship” becomes the blueprint of all the other attachments in our life. Relationships with our parents, siblings, friends, and classmates are all subject to its framework. Learning to trust one’s mother therefore becomes the scaffolding on which all other relationships are built. Trusting relationships continue to be built and maintained in a lifelong endeavor. Bowlby is clear about this: “one further point about attachment behavior…is that it is a characteristic of human nature throughout our lives – from the cradle to the grave.”8 We form relationships with spouses, children, friends, neighbors, and co-workers, each subject to the original framework.

Foundationally, these attachments to one another define what it means to be human. Humankind has been created to be in relationship with one another (Gn 1:26a, 2:18), and without our relationships it is hard to create self-identity and self-understanding. Our attachments help us to create an environment in which we can explore our world and our own self-understanding because we feel safe and secure. Bowlby states, “Although food and sex sometimes play important roles in attachment relationships, the relationship exists in its own right and has a key survival function of its

work is not within the scope of this paper. For a deeper understanding of how significant an impact on human grief and faith development see “Attachment, Death, and Continuing Bonds: A Spiritual Growth Map for the Journey Home.” Unpublished paper by Galen Goben, September 1, 2017.


own, namely protection."³⁹ That protection promotes security. Security, based in trusting relationships, promotes courage within. This courage we use to test our boundaries, explore what we believe, and engage curiosity about our own self and others. To be secure is to trust that our attachments will not crumble; neither will we be abandoned during times of vulnerability and anxiety.

The Assumptive World

A primary outgrowth of Bowlby’s theory is the lens these attachments make for each individual. When a need arises for a child, say food or comfort, how the caregiver responds to those needs begin to shape the child’s perception of her own self and her world. How often and to what extent these needs are met form the operating system that informs the child’s assessment of the world. These form the basis of how the child assumes or expects the world works, creating what has been termed the assumptive world.¹⁰

Ronnie Janoff-Bulman states that one’s assumptive world consists of three components: “Perceived benevolence of the world, meaningfulness of the world, and worthiness of the self.”¹¹ The first component asks is the world a nice place that can be trusted or do events and people conspire to hurt me. Can I, as an individual, expect that life will be a generally negative and dangerous experience or can I expect a positive and generally satisfying outcome? The question of meaningfulness, the second component, asks if there is some overarching sense of fairness and justice governing events and their

³⁹Ibid., 121.


outcomes. If good people prosper and evil persons get what they deserve, one might assume they can control outcomes through their conduct. Yet randomness and accidents also play a part in life, and this also must be considered. Finally, the third component asks about worthiness, whether one is a moral, good, and decent person and how that affects perception of their inner self.

How an individual answers these three questions determines their assumptive world which then acts as a filter for experience providing sense and structure to daily living. A person is able to make plans, act on them, and anticipate the outcome of those plans by virtue of their assumptive world. An individual’s assumptions become the working diagram that provides a sense of safety and security based on their expectations. Such a schema is active on a daily basis.

Faith will shape an individual’s assumptive world. Likewise, one’s assumptive world will shape a person’s faith. An example can be found in the book of Proverbs. Proverbs, and much of the Wisdom literature in the Bible, is designed to give direction for building and determining the assumptive world. As an example, Proverbs 15:3 says, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.” 15:6 states, “In the house of the righteous there is much treasure, but trouble befalls the income of the wicked.” 15:9 says, “The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but he loves the one who pursues righteousness.” Each acts as a guiding principle for understanding the world and orienting oneself providing shape and meaning to one’s worldview.
The Self and God as Objects of Attachment

Safely inside one’s worldview, each of us builds our life day by day. We make plans, set goals, design and carry through projects and assignments. Each accomplishment builds our self-esteem and we grow in self-understanding promotion and designing our ego. Richard Rohr defines this as building one’s container.\(^{12}\) It is the cumulative work that defines and shapes one’s self. We go to school and earn degrees. Getting jobs and acquiring titles, salaries, and offices add to our self-understanding. Through the creation of art, music, objects, and families we continue to define and refine our egos. They are constituencies of how we see ourselves and express ourselves in the world. Spiritually this has been defined as the False Self.\(^{13}\) It is the ego and its way of thinking and defining what is true about our identity.

As we build this identity, this container, it provides for many of us a sense of lasting legacy. There is permanence and a concrete reality we can point to with each of them. Jeff Bagwell in his induction speech for the Baseball Hall of Fame said, “It’s a dream just to be a part of this beautiful group. That I have that plaque forever. It’s unbelievable.”\(^{14}\) I suggest that the permanence of the plaque and the honor it bestows upon Bagwell is an example of the manner most of us strive toward, to protect ourselves in a changing and impermanent world. Permanence, power, and recognition are hoarded as shields against change and protection in vulnerability.


\(^{13}\) Ibid., 85.

Our spiritual self is no different. Granqvist, Mikulincer, and Shaver show that our relationship with God is subject to the original scaffolding of our attachments.\(^{15}\) We connect with God through a relationship based in love. Founded in a personal relationship, it is a relationship mutually beneficial to both parties (Lv 26:12). God, understood as both omnipotent and omnipresent, extremely important divine traits, brings both power and presence to soothe an anxious heart. According to Bowlby’s attachment theory, power and presence are core criteria necessary for a trustworthy caregiver, administering the longed for security when threats arise.

Therefore, one’s attachment to God, our ultimate relationship (Acts 17:28), becomes subject to that early attachment style. How we learned to trust those who provided safety and protection is what we learn to expect of God. As we have seen, these expectations provide grounding for our faith and detail for our assumptive world. Moreover, as our ultimate relationship, and as the outcome of our hope in life, God becomes the final guarantor of our eternal protection and security.

We seek permanence, strength, and concreteness as a fortress against the fragility of our life. Death and endings are a fact of life that, early in life, we begin to comprehend. As a result we strive to store up abundance in titles, positions, degrees, family, accomplishments, and any other element that brings us comfort and satisfaction. We build bigger barns (Lk 12:18) and containers attaching our identity to all that they hold, falsely believing they will protect us and keep us. Our False Self, strong and brittle as it

is, uses these to define and defend itself. We are an engineer, a chef, a CEO, or a salesperson. We identify as a spouse, a parent, a homeowner, neighbor, or friend. We claim to be an American, a patriot, a soldier, a citizen.

Yet all of these will ultimately fail. All that we desire, dream, create, and build is bound to end because ultimately life ends. All of it is as “grass,” says Isaiah (40:6-7). It will be “thrown down,” says Jesus in Matthew (24:1-2). In the confrontation with death, all of it will end. Truly, even our expectations for God will be shown to be limited and fail.

Death: The Plow in the Field

The Fear of Death

Happy the hare at morning, for she cannot read
The Hunter’s waking thoughts, lucky the leaf
Unable to predict the fall, lucky indeed
The rampant suffering suffocating jelly
Burgeoning in pools, lapping the grits of the desert,
But what shall man do, who can whistle tunes by heart,
Knows to the bar when death shall cut him short like the cry
   of the shearwater,
   What can he do but defend himself from this knowledge?16

W. H. Auden directly captures both the satisfaction and the struggle that is slice of the very nature of being human. It is a great blessing to be alive. To experience and share each day in the beauty and joy that permeates living is the gift of consciousness. The flip side of that gift is the curse of having the awareness that living will end. Being cognizant that what we hold as valuable, meaningful, and important in our life will one day not be accessible to us because we will die is an affront to the False Self. This is the blessing

and curse of conscious awareness, of being little lower than the angels (Ps 8:4-8, Heb 2:6-8).

Naturally, it is necessary for a human to “defend himself from this knowledge” as we have seen.17 Our striving, our compulsion to succeed, subdue, and exercise our dominion is all in the hope of outlasting this conscious reality. Yet, death and decay is the ultimate No to all permanence and longevity. This is the “worm at the core” as William James called the human awareness of death.18 Such annulment seems cruel. This invalidation is understood as a curse. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross states,

From a psychiatrist’s point of view [human’s distaste for death] is very understandable and can perhaps best be explained by our basic knowledge that, in our unconscious, death is never possible in regard to ourselves. It is inconceivable for our unconscious to imagine an actual ending of our own life here on earth and if this life of ours has to end, the ending is always attributed to a malicious intervention from the outside by someone else.19

Ernest Becker emphatically writes, “…the fear of death must be present behind all our normal functioning, in order for the organism to be armed toward self-preservation.”20 He adds, “The result was the emergence of man as we know him: a hyperanxious animal who constantly invents reasons for anxiety even where there are none.”21 Anxious, we defend our False Self by continuing to strive. However, death and

17 Ibid.


19 Kübler-Ross, On Death and Dying, 2.

20 Becker, The Denial of Death, 16.

21 Ibid., 17. Nine times in the Pentateuch God tells someone to not be afraid (i.e.: Gn 15:1, 21:17, Num 21:34). In the Gospels Jesus makes the same command seventeen times (i.e.: Mt 1:20, 10:31, 14:27, Mk 6:50, Lk 5:10, 12:32, Jn 6:20).
loss in a variety of forms consistently strip us of these false protections. Time and again we build something up and strive to strengthen and protect our False Self from its reality and ultimate end only to have those fortifications breached. “Death is the only successful collector,” writes Loren Eisley. Death collects all our strivings, protections, and ultimately our life. Death’s negation leaves us bear, empty, and vulnerable to our own self and before God.

However, death also is a moment of birth rich with the presence of God and the potential of new life. “For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18). In some ways, Christians are invited to consider how the trap we spend our whole life trying to avoid and protect against can become the doorway into our full humanity and to see how the shattering of that which we hold as real can become the construct of God’s real presence. This only happens if we trust that negation is the opportunity for growth and the development of our True Self.

Emptying of Self and the Concept of *kenosis*

The death of a loved one and the loss of our assumptive world leave us feeling bare and naked before the world. Gone with the attachment figure is the sense of stability, place, and protection that attachment affords. Vulnerable and insecure, emptiness is a close companion and a common experience for many bereaved persons. An

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22 “...loss could (and has been interpreted to) subsume a welter of human experiences, including bereavement, relationship dissolution, job loss, natural catastrophe, sexual assault, geographic displacement, physical illness, role redefinition, interpersonal violence, and political torture, to name just a few.” Robert A. Neimeyer, *Meaning Reconstruction & the Experience of Loss* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001), 5.

uncomfortable experience, emptiness denies us of self-efficacy. If there is nothing to stand on, nothing to offer, this vulnerability will remain our state. Yet here is where loss begins to turn toward life.

Paul depicts the pathway through death as one of emptying or being emptied and of descending into that place of loss that becomes the way toward God.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. (Phil 2:5-8)

By referencing this great Christological hymn, which would have been familiar to his first readers, Paul introduces the Greek concept of *kenosis*. *Kenosis,* “to empty” or “to nullify,” is the first step toward a Christ-like transformation and of the discovery of our True Self. Nothing can be filled that is not first emptied. Yet emptiness and humility are not generally the choice of the False Self. In Christ, self-emptying is offered as a humble gift. Here Paul invites us to empty our self and it is a special person who can do so. Emptiness provides an opening for one to be filled. New wine cannot be poured into wineskins that are already full. The human soul is no different. Already full of our own

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26 Ibid.
false self, God finds no room at the inn (Lk 2:7). Therefore, I suggest that death and loss are the mechanism whereby we are emptied so that God’s spirit can fill the void.

Death becomes a tool in the Divine Hand. God’s redemption goes so far as to redeem death itself. God is turning death inside out to open us, to move us toward God’s own self, drawing us close. Poet and teacher Alex Donovan beckons us to view death not as an adversary:

In shamanic societies, death is seen as an “advisor” or even friend rather than the enemy. The Torah and Bible are full of wisdom literature that acknowledge very explicitly that man is “dust, and to dust he will return.” Our culture tends to relegate death to nursing homes and short wakes and funeral services, but it is meant to be a central reality to the existence of the living.27

Death, a central reality of life, empties us when we ourselves cannot. Death breaks the attachments on anything that we grasp and cannot or refuse to release, denying the legitimacy of anything in which we place our ultimate trust. Death removes anything that stands between us and the fullness of God.

When God makes a home with someone, they are restored (Jn 14). God’s Spirit affects the work transforming us into the divine vessel that bears God’s image (Gn 1:27) so that we might take on the image of Christ (2 Cor 3:18). As Augustine writes in his Confessions, “Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it repose in Thee.”28

Yet this is still a movement from security and comfort to death and uncertainty. The death of a beloved person, a significant loss, or a perceived failure breaks us open. It


is neither pleasant nor easy. However, it is necessary to trust that this downward trajectory will lead us back to security and comfort. We must trust that the new land into which we are traveling, a place without the beloved and laid waste by loss, can be a good place.

However, in the context of a shattered worldview, trust can be hard to regain. Trust requires that there is a system that makes sense to the person. That schema, the new and developing assumptive world, must be trustworthy. Each component, one’s own self, the world, and God, must be trustworthy. Trusting is an act of faith and for some that requires a great leap.

The Kierkegaardian Leap of Faith

Trust is a deep act of faith. Trust requires that one feel safe within the place they find themselves. Bowlby recognized this when he watched children explore their surroundings while taking notice of their caregiver’s proximity and attention. With the caregiver close the child felt empowered to explore.29

For many Christians their faith is their assumptive world. What then is shattered is their faith. The death of the beloved is experienced as a breakage of the covenant between the bereaved and God. They have accepted Christ. They are living a righteous and upright life according to what they understand is expected of them. Their reward is to have themselves and their loved ones protected from harm. This struggle is evident when people ask whether or why they are being punished after the loss of a loved one.

The benevolence of the world, one where God is sovereign, is called into question. Justice is meted out according to God’s righteousness; yet that no longer holds

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29 Bowlby, A Secure Base, 124.
true for it is not just that this person should die. God’s love and protection for the survivor and the worthiness or deserving nature of the survivor may all be questioned and, therefore, all these must be redefined. There is a chasm between what this person has known and understood and what is now before them. A leap of faith becomes a key step in our grief.

Søren Kierkegaard’s concept of the leap of faith provides a way across this chasm of broken trust. It is not hard to believe that God is a loving God. But that belief is, for many, ensconced in their thoughts, while the chasm that has opened has opened in their hearts. To hope and believe that God is at work in “all things” (Rom 8:28) is experienced differently in one’s head than in one’s heart. To maintain that God loves me “for the Bible tells me so” is a different song when sung by the head while the heart hears a different tune. It can be a long way back to trusting God when the wilderness that surrounds us following the death of a person is a place with few recognizable markers.

The size of the gap between the head and the heart, Kierkegaard tells us, is located within the experience of the person, "...as if even the smallest leap did not possess the quality of making the ditch infinitely broad, as if it would not be equally difficult for the one who cannot leap at all” [italics in the original text] whether the ditch is broad or narrow…”30 The ditch, for Kierkegaard, is clearly a metaphor, “since it is not the breadth of the ditch in an external [by which he means historical or physical] sense that prevents [one from attempting the leap] but the dialectical passion in an internal sense that makes the ditch infinitely broad.”31 What may look like a small and easily conquerable objective,

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such as believing again in the loving nature of God, can seem like an impassable abyss to the bereaved soul. To attempt to believe again is an intimidating leap.

To one struggling with that leap of faith, Kierkegaard’s description is straightforward and evocative. He writes, "One closes one's eyes, grabs oneself by the neck a la Munchhausen, and then – then one stands on the other side, on that other side of sound common sense in the promised land of the system."\(^{32}\) This act, Dennis Klass points out, is a leap into a land of trust: “One interpretation of Kierkegaard's leap of faith, then, is not into belief, as many of us were taught, but rather a leap into being consoled, a leap … into trust.”\(^{33}\) We must learn to trust once again: the basis of any relationship is trust, and the basis of life is relationship. To be human we need to trust. Trust is necessary to learn again to open our self to exploration of our life and our world. Exploring these is an exploration of God’s own self as well.

**Grief as Seed for the Transformed Life**

Do not hurry / As you walk with grief;
It does not help the journey

Walk slowly, / Pausing often:
Do not hurry / As you walk with grief

Be not disturbed / By memories that come unbidden.
Swiftly forgive; / And let Christ speak for you / Unspoken words.
Unfinished conversation / Will be resolved in Him.
Be not disturbed.

Be gentle with the one / Who walks with grief.

\(^{31}\) Kierkegaard, "Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments,” 195.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 196.

If it is you, be gentle with yourself.  
Swiftly forgive; / Walk slowly, / Pausing often.  
Take time, be gentle / As you walk with grief.  

This Celtic blessing is a reminder of what is essential with grief, walking slowly. Life at three miles an hour, to identify it that way, is the tempo and attitude that we should accept when we are bereaved. It takes time for our heart and our head to be together again. It is necessary to look at life from a new perspective and to discover the way that life is to be lived now without that person here to participate with us. Unhurried time is a principal antidote to craziness and discontinuity that is so common with a significant loss.

However, slowing down as a strategic response to death is not what we are socialized to believe and understand. Remaining attentive with the pain of grief through the process of adapting to the loss and discovering the new normal is not what society considers helpful. Often the encouragement is to return to normal as quickly as possible and to be strong. Yet such an attitude often sublimates the powerful emotions and struggles that accompany a normal grief. Much healthier and more healing for us would be to stay with one’s grief and give it its due. Francis Weller describes the strength of silence as a healing space. “Silence and solitude…form the vessel for working with the eruptive and difficult material that accompanies grief work. Loss and sorrow pull us inward and downward. There is a natural gravity to sorrow that leads us toward the interior of our lives and nearer to the felt sense of soul.”

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The interior of our life, the soul, is where the seed of new life and new hope and new relationship is planted. Through silence and lament our new heart is nurtured and tended. Silence gives us pause. Lament gives us language. Resurrection is witnessed in the humility of the harvest of our True Self that emerges through grief.

Silence as Initial Response to Grief

The mystery of death is beyond comprehension to the Western rational mind. We understand that being mortal, we die. But, that is hardly the answer or assurance for which we are looking. Death rends the wholeness that is body, mind, and spirit. In death, the body is often before us yet we cannot so easily place the other two. Faith teaches to look to heaven and with God. Yet there is, as Richard Feynman says, no knowledge of their “new address.”\(^{36}\) The geo-positioning capacity of the human brain cannot locate them in their new space. Words as answers spoken into this mystery are a “noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor 13:1). Mystery evokes silence, awe, and wonder. Wisdom knows silence.

To rebuild one’s assumptive world is to learn to trust again. It is a long process. To be silent is to be most available to this process. Silence allows us to stand in the middle of the chaotic and disordered world following a death without the need to escape. “I did not go through pain,” writes Jerry Sittser, “and come out on the other side; instead I

\(^{36}\) Richard Feynman was a physicist who worked on the Manhattan Project. In a letter to his wife, written several years after she died, he added this postscript. “Please excuse my not mailing this – but I don’t know your new address” Qtd. in Robert Goss and Dennis Klass, *Dead But Not Lost: Grief Narratives in Religious Traditions* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press. 2005), 2.
lived in it and found within that pain the grace to survive and eventually grow."\textsuperscript{37}

Therefore silence provides a pathway to endure (Rom 5:3, 2 Cor 4:7-9).

To stand in the pain and sorrow of grief without demanding that it be over or asserting answers, direction, or control is the beginning of developing a humble heart, which will discern all three. It is the silence, Gerald May writes, that “calls us onward: it nourishes our spirits and encourages our hearts for whatever may be the next step in our journey towards the Real."\textsuperscript{38} This nourishment and encouragement is a gift poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5b). Silence readies us to receive that gift.

The Psalmist says,

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,  
and in his word, I hope;  
my soul waits for the Lord  
more than those who watch for the morning,  
more than those who watch for the morning (Ps 130:5-6)

Silence is the manner in which we wait within the plowed field of liminal space, which is the land in-between: the land of our life before the loss that is no longer and the land of our new life in which we now reside as an alien. Psalm 27:5 says, “For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent.” Silence becomes the shelter for our souls to reside.

Silence is the Language of God

Following a seminar on grief for the bereavement group at a local Catholic Church, a woman came and spoke to me. Her companion had died recently and she spoke of the difficulty she had acknowledging the death as well as coping with the rollercoaster

\textsuperscript{37} Jerry Sittser, \textit{A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows Through Loss} (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 37.

nature of her emotions. She found herself overwhelmed with grief one day while sitting in the living room. “I was overcome sitting in the silence.” Then she leaned in to me, placed her hand on my arm, and said, “I felt God was speaking to me in the silence.” I asked her how that made her feel. “Comforted. I felt like I was going to make it.”

Knowing she needed to be soothed, the presence of God comforted this woman. She experienced God in the silence, the language of God. What she heard was the felt presence of God, speaking into her suffering. She had made the leap, crossing the chasm between her head and her heart. Like Elijah before her, she learned she was not alone.

In I Kings 19 Elijah emerges from the cave when he hears "a sound of sheer silence;" the LORD passes by and "a voice came to him" (1 Kgs19:12-13). It speaks the soothing comfort he seeks in his suffering. It is not a voice Elijah hears with his ears. It is a voice Elijah knows deep in his soul. It is a voice recognized by experience, in relationship, and through rapport. Elijah understands. He is and has been in conversation with this voice his whole life.

Maria Shriver writing about her recent grief following the death of Saoirse Kennedy exemplifies this exact experience.

With time, the grief slowed down, and I found myself in total stillness — the kind where you can hear the wind and your own breath. Amidst this stillness atop the mountain came an extraordinary revelation. I opened my eyes, looked around, and realized I was OK. The word “survivor” even came to mind.

In silence God speaks. In silence we are aware of God's presence consoling, soothing, sustaining, and embracing. Rubem Alves says, "Mystics and poets have known that

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silence is our original home…."⁴¹ At home, in the embrace of God, we begin to discover our own voice.

Lament as Surrendering to Death

According to J. William Worden, one of the significant early experiences in grief is a feeling of disbelief and unreality. Task I is “To accept the reality of the loss.”⁴² It just does not seem right that this person has died. Kübler-Ross described it as denial.⁴³ In either schema, language fails to capture how surreal the experience can be. Yet language is what we need to begin to process the death. Words name our experience and create a degree of control. The biblical concept of lament provides a way to define and express this loss. Walter Brueggemann and others identify three elements, which are especially beneficial for the bereaved. Laments start with naming God. The address is usually very intimate in nature. It is the kind of intimacy that we need to feel safe and to trust. The address is followed by the complaint. It is a statement of what is wrong. It identifies the destruction and threat that one feels. It embraces the vulnerability and threat that is encountered. Then the lamentor demands that God do something. This demand is made of God because in the lament the one who cries out is stating their total inability to fix or make a significant impact upon the situation. It is the recognition of our finite abilities.⁴⁴

In lamenting we face reality. We stare at the devastation for what it is, world changing. Daniel Nehrbass, quoting Brueggemann says the psalms of lament "insist that

⁴²Worden, Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy, 41.
⁴³Kübler-Ross. On Death and Dying, 34.
we must look at the world and our lives the way they really are, no pretense, no denial."\footnote{Daniel Michael Nehrbass, \textit{Praying Curses: The Therapeutic and Preaching Value of the Imprecatory Psalms} (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), x.} Worden put it this way: "The first task of grieving is to come full face with the reality that the person is dead, that the person is gone and will not return."\footnote{Worden, \textit{Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy}, 41.} That is a harsh reality, and a difficult one. But as was shown, death puts an end to all of our strivings and claims upon power in which we clothe ourselves. Lamenting gives us language to state the obvious.

Another healing element of lament is it cements us within our relationship with God. Scripture identifies God’s love and compassion for creation and humanity (Ps 8, Lk 12:7, Rom 8:21). Yet sorrow and death create feelings of alienation and isolation. The bereaved often feel abandoned. To lament, to display the confidence and vigor that a lament calls forth, is to rely upon the depth and concrete nature of that relationship. God as rock or fortress (Ps 71:3) or shelter (Ps 61:4) is named as the place of rest in the chaotic and disjointed experience of grief. Such a safe place is necessary to confront the vulnerability one feels in grief.

To lament is to offer up a complaint and in the complaint to have the loss validated. The whole of our grief is heard. It’s lonely, empty nature stands true and stark before us. The complaint is that the loss is hard. Death is devastating. We want to return to normal, which is impossible. We are powerless to command or control our circumstances.

We are forced to face that reality and begin grieving the death. Acceptance requires that we give up our "god-like pretensions to administering the universe rightly,"
as Nehrbass says.\textsuperscript{47} Since bringing our loved one back is beyond our power, we are forced to rely on a higher authority. To lament is to voice one's "dependence upon God."\textsuperscript{48} As the words begin to arise, to shape our experience, these words, like silence, direct us towards God as the ultimate place of reconciliation for this devastating experience of our loved one's death. It forces us, out of necessity, to trust God.

This movement toward trust is healing as well as necessary to begin to rebuild the assumptive world. Dennis Klass points out the relationship between trust and consolation, the balm to the deep ache of grief:

\begin{quote}
The English word [\textit{consolation}] comes directly from the Latin \textit{consolatus}, with no change in meaning. The Swedish word is \textit{Tröst} (Gilje & Talseth, 2007). The German cognate is \textit{Trost}. The German verb is \textit{trösten}. To be without consolation is \textit{untröstlich} or \textit{Trostlos}. Freud described himself using the participle, \textit{ungetröstet}. The words in both languages are related to the English \textit{Trust}. Our German colleague Monica Müller says (personal correspondence, November 26, 2011),

\begin{quote}
‘This seems to be interesting for it changes the meaning of helping or supporting into being there, being "trustable," staying, keeping in contact, companionship. Because \textit{trösten} is in our understanding a very strong and active verb.

Mothers \textit{trösten} their children when they happen to fall or get any wounds. They take them into their arms and whisper \textit{Trostworte}.’
\end{quote}

\textit{Trostworte} are comfort words, soothing words, consoling words, that is, words to restore trust. Solace is found, then, within the sense of being trusting or being connected to a reality that is outside the self. In both theology and finance faith means trust.$^49$
\end{quote}

We see the power of lament in its ability to move a bereaved person beyond the trouble of their present state. Lament is the act of grabbing “oneself by the neck a la

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{47}Nehrbass, x.
\textsuperscript{48}Ibid., 4.
\end{footnotesize}
Munchausen” and landing again in the company of the Omnipresent God whose “steadfast love endures forever” (Ps 136). Here now is the place where God plants the seed of new life and identity. Here now is resurrection.

Humility as Resurrection

Christian faith is based in the reality of death. Resurrection is possible only after first dying. Yet in our faith we often attempt to escape Good Friday. We rally around the King shouting Hosanna on Palm Sunday. Then we gather at the empty tomb singing Hallelujah! on Easter. We prefer to forget all the suffering in between: accusations, betrayal, denials, shame, failure, conflict, sorrow, blood, pain, abandonment, anger, fear. It is a long list of breakage and destruction. It is a list that humanity knows well.

Proverbs 18:12a says, “Before destruction, one’s heart is haughty.” We all must die physically. This is preceded by the ten thousand earlier sufferings and deaths of pride, self-centeredness, our False Self, and the other attachments we form to protect and guard our vulnerable soul. Each death is painful and degrading in its own manner. However, as Proverbs 18:12 goes on to say, “but humility goes before honor.” So it is with each experience of death, we receive the opportunity to discover this humility and with it our true identity.

Job sits upon his ash heap (2:8) in mourning for all that he has lost. Cattle, camels, sheep, oxen, his sons and daughters – all are gone in traumatic fashion. Along with these losses are his legacy with the end of his house and his status in the community. Job curses the day of his birth to God and to the three witnesses, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. Here, on the ground, covered in dust to remind him of his mortality, chapter after

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50Kierkegaard, "Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments,” 196.
chapter is Job subjected to the reasons for his suffering and loss by his three friends. Job sits through all their examples and explanations for the losses. He endures in his suffering and refuses consolation in the form of platitudes and explanations that provide a quick way out of this meaningless experience.

Waiting in his darkness the question is asked “But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?” (Job 28:12). “It is not found in the land of the living” (Job 28:13) and “It is hidden from the eyes of all living” (Job 28:21). Here in the “deep darkness” (Job 28:3), one encounters God for whom “darkness is as light” (Ps 139:12). Here in this place of abandonment and aloneness, where defenses are breached, reserves have run out, and reinforcements have all been depleted we are alone with God. “Now my eyes see you,” (Job 42:5) claims Job.

In the encounter with God, Job surrenders his will and his concepts. Stephen Mitchell depicts the act of trust that comes through surrender. “Surrender means the wholehearted giving up of oneself. It is both the ultimate generosity and the ultimate poverty, because in it the giver becomes the gift.”51 The gift that Job gives is his final acceptance of his finitude. He is not God. He is powerless in the face of death and loss to command it. Job accepts death, loss, and finitude. “Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom” (Job 28:28).

Here is the mind of Christ, which Paul sets before us in Philippians. The emptying of one’s self, the relinquishing of our False Self and its never-ending search for safety and control, is an act of trust that births humility. Humility, says Andrew Murray, is “[Christ’s] chief characteristic, the root and essence of all His character as our

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Redeemer. Humility is the very Christ nature in which we seek to be clothed. Humility “the sense of entire nothingness, which comes when we see how truly God is all, and in which we make way for God to be all.”

Humility, therefore, allows God to be God. Theologies and dogmas about God fade in the presence of suffering and loss. It is not knowledge of God that renews life. It is the encounter with God, the presence of God, the experience of God in the midst of suffering and loss.

Humility, “the place of entire dependence on God,” allows humans to be human. Humans, who are of the earth (humus) but inspired by the breath of God (Gn 2:7), release the Christ nature inherent within us, as children of God (Gn 1:27). By virtue of our kinship to Christ and the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit, we grow in wisdom and stature (Lk 2:52). This growth is an on-going discovery of our new life and identity, as God’s beloved child.

As children, we learn to be secure in our relationships and to trust the caregiver through repeated opportunities where the caregiver provides the soothing comfort we need. Since as Job says, trouble is what we are born to (Job 5:7), our Caregiver has ample opportunity to demonstrate unfailing presence in the midst of our darkness and suffering.

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53 Ibid., 3.


55 Ibid., 1-2.

Humility, Murray writes, is “simply the disposition which prepares the soul for living on trust.”\textsuperscript{57}

In the Garden, Jesus prayed to bypass the suffering of the cross. Yet in humility, he surrendered his need to escape the pain and control the outcome. The way of Christ, “the cross, and the death, and the grave, into which Jesus humbled Himself, were His path to the glory of God. And they are our path.”\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{57} Murray, \textit{Humility}, 37.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 38.
CHAPTER 4:
RECONSTRUCTING COMMUNITIES OF HEALING

Jesus’ Healing Ministry

Jesus, in the Gospel of Luke, claims the image of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah as his mission statement (Lk 4:16-19). The scope of the Servant’s care in Isaiah includes the work “to bind up the brokenhearted” (Is 61:1) and “to comfort all who mourn” (Is 61:2). While Luke abbreviates the reading, Jesus’ ministry clearly includes the bereaved. Jesus’ interaction with the widow of Nain in Luke 7:11-17 shows his compassion for a mother’s broken heart and desperate situation. In Mark 5:35-43, Jesus travels to the home of Jairus where he lifts ups Jairus’ daughter from her bed. As with the widow and her son, Jesus restores the child to the parents. In John 11, Jesus weeps and mourns with the family and the community of those burdened by Lazarus’ death. This is especially difficult for Jesus because of the relationship he shares with Lazarus (Jn 11:3, 36). John 11, viewed through the lens of thanatology, provides a meaningful guide for a healing ministry with the bereaved.

Very quickly, Jesus sets the reasoning for such a ministry by locating it with the proper focus. Lazarus’ death is not a punishment or a learning experience. Jesus states “…it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (Jn 11:4).
For bereaved persons whose assumptive world has been significantly dislodged, God can seem absent. It can be hard for some to experience God’s presence in the midst of loss, illness, death, and grief. The loss of a person or other significant attachment that is meaningful to an individual’s identity can feel as if God is punishing or testing one’s faith. Asking why God took a person or why God is punishing the living are not uncommon questions for the bereaved to ask.

Jesus’ focus on reincorporating God’s presence in the midst of grief acts as the first balm to the pain of loss. Glory denotes the presence of God. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me” (Ps 23:4, KJV). God is present in the presence of Jesus with Lazarus’ grieving community. The presence of someone with us in our pain helps us to bear it and move through it. By extension, Jesus is glorified, present and real, through those who attend the bereaved.

In verses John 11:8-11 the disciples warn Jesus of the danger he is entering should he go to Judea. There is danger to those who enter into ministry to the bereaved: the danger of meeting the reality of one’s own mortality and the requirement to face one’s fears. Many people are subject to a certain level of death anxiety, the natural anxiety produced by the awareness of our finitude. Therefore, death anxiety is important to address in preparation for this ministry. J. William Worden’s Personal Death Awareness, highlighted later in this chapter, provides a good tool to introduce and prepare people for acknowledging this inherent danger.

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1 Death anxiety is a complex behavioral activator that, like an individual’s grief, is comprised of many variables. It is assumed here that, following Becker, most if not all persons are subject to some level and intensity of death anxiety. For more see Charles A. Corr and Donna M. Corr, Death and Dying Life and Living (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth CENGAGE Learning, 2013), 55-56.
Another danger is the temptation to fall prey to the ego-inflating need to administer answers, to be the one whom people seek for support. This pitfall, exemplified in Job’s friends, is too common among pastors and laity alike. Truly, it comes out of the human need help someone in grief or to fix their pain. Most of us do so by trying to make sense of experiences according to our own assumptive world. But, as we have seen, the bereaved neither need another’s answers nor instant ones. Assigning meaning is a measure of the journey of grief for each person. Discovering how a loss shapes their assumptive world and incorporating that loss is the rebuilding work that must be done by the bereaved.

In providing bereavement support, one must also guard their own grief. To enter into another’s grief is to become vulnerable. It is not an unusual for a person providing care to have their own grief triggered. The emotion of the bereaved and the story of the death are just two ways that a person can have their own memory and history of grief prompted. In providing care to the bereaved, it is wise to be aware of the dangers inherent in such ministry. Yet these dangers should not deter the Church from following Jesus’ lead.

A manner in which we protect ourselves is to immerse ourselves in community. In John 11:16, Thomas says, “Let us also go.” This is not meant to say that every visit and every offering of support should be accomplished in pairs or groups. That runs the risk of overwhelming the bereaved. It is meant to point to the need for a group of people who are

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2 This is especially true for those who are supporting trauma survivors. Vicarious Trauma, sometimes called, compassion fatigue is a significant hazard due to the repeated and ongoing exposure to intense and significant emotions. Awareness of its presence and the way that it affects a caregiver is important, given its eroding effect on a person’s values and outlook. However, the scope of this paper does not provide the space or the treatment necessary for addressing vicarious trauma. For more information, see Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recover: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).
accountable with and to each other for this ministry. The burden of providing care in a loss should be shared among a community that can debrief each other, provide an outlet for the stress inherent in this ministry, and offer prayer, guidance, and care to each another. It is not a solo ministry. It is, at its best, an ensemble working together.

John 11:20-33 reveal the subtle arts required for ministry with the bereaved. Two sisters, Mary and Martha, ask Jesus the exact same question. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (Jn 11:21, 32). Yet Mary and Martha are two individuals who each have their own unique grief experience. Jesus in his wisdom does not supply them with the same response. With Martha, who comes to meet him, he offers theological context and faith. From Mary, who is sent to him by her sister, he offers action, “Where have you laid him?” (Jn 11:34).

It is imperative to respect each person as an individual and as the owner of a unique grief experience. The intricacy of each person’s grief is due to what Worden has described as the “mediators of mourning.” These mediators will flavor, shape, and hone a set of lenses that makes each person’s grief distinct. Worden designates categories such as a person’s kinship with the deceased, the personality type of the survivor, or the concurrent stressors that are a part of the bereaved person’s immediate experience with the grief as factors in that grief experience. Among other significant mediators are the quality of the attachment the survivor had with the deceased, their attachment style, and

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3 While I do not believe offering answers and providing meaning to a bereaved person is the best provision of care for the reasons stated, I give Jesus the benefit of the doubt with his words and leave room for the intentions of the Gospel writer.

4 There are seven mediators that Worden identifies and four of the mediators have sub-categories that influence a person’s grief. These are very important for understanding the intricacies and complexity of an individual’s grief experience. For further details, see Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 59-76.
the type of death. Such complexity requires that a caregiver never have a settled answer or a singular response to the bereaved other than presence and curiosity.

Jesus, confronted with the totality of grief displayed by Mary, Martha, and the community, can do no less than allow that grief to touch his own. He engages his humanity and weeps (Jn.11:35). Jesus does not stay emotionally removed. He is not strong for them. By his tears, he joins the community because he himself loves Lazarus (Jn. 11:36).

In bereavement ministry, one can also witness to one’s own grief while providing care and support. Jesus expresses his own humanity at Lazarus’ tomb; so too can those providing compassionate support. Psychologist and teacher Danai Papadatou expects this to occur. Her work with pediatric patients led her to believe that “health professionals are expected to be affected and express their grief reactions in anticipation, at the moment of death or after it. The intensity and expression of their grief, however, must be tempered and controlled.” Still, compassion should never be contrived or forced. Inauthenticity is the opposite of providing care. Yet, when a caregiver is genuinely moved, tears can be connecting and compassionate. Dr. Heidi Horsley, therapist and Board member for The Compassionate Friends bereavement support organization, said, “I believe that it is okay to cry with my clients as long as I don’t cry more than them.”

Even while touching his humanity and being “greatly disturbed” (Jn 11:38), Jesus is active and decisive. He knows what to do and is directive as evidenced by his

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5 This is Rule No. 2 of a set of six rules that Papadatou has created as guidelines for those working with pediatric patients. All six rules are found in Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 257.

command to “take away the stone” (Jn 11:39). He acts as the shepherd that the bereaved often need. I have heard on many occasions people expressing how lost and confused they feel. There is a fogginess or numbness present with many persons as they walk the early days of grief in particular. Pastors and trained laity, starting with the funeral or memorial service, can offer a great comfort to the grieving simply by knowing what to do, when to do it, and gently shepherding persons through these events. “Are you ready to begin? If so, we will get everyone seated inside and start with Martin’s service.” With these words I was able to move friends from an impromptu, pre-service receiving line to inside the sanctuary where the service for their husband and father was prepared. These words and the movement indoors brought order to the chaos of a very difficult day.

The climax of this powerful text is Lazarus’ exit from the tomb and Jesus’ command to “Unbind him, and let him go” (Jn 11:44). Jesus, in unbinding Lazarus, unbinds the brokenhearted sisters and the community. They receive that which they most desire, Lazarus returned to them. This is what the bereaved want and is the only optimal and complete remedy to a wounded heart. In any loss, the return of the object of affection would bring a return to a sense of normal that the bereaved seek.

This is not to suggest that our ministry is to resurrect the dead. However, it is to suggest that our ministry is to “bind up the brokenhearted” (Is 61:1) and that such a ministry can smooth a rough pathway for the bereaved (Lk 3:3-5). Normalizing grief is one of the prime ways that any supportive presence can bolster a smoother journey for the bereaved. In the wilderness of loss and grief, to learn how normal, common, and broad is the experience makes available a place for the bereaved to stand as they begin to navigate their journey. An added benefit of qualified and consistent support is the
lessening of complicated and difficult grief for the bereaved. William H. Hoy, in a blog post titled “The Community’s Role in Healing Grief,” cites a study done by Lauren Vanderwerker and Holly Prigerson which “conclusively demonstrated that overall social support was protective against Major Depressive Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and complicated grief as well as being associated with an overall better quality of life.”\(^7\)

Embracing this important part of Christ’s ministry as healing agents within grief rests in the willingness to expose ourselves to another’s grief. Henri Nouwen asks,

> But are we really ready to experience our powerlessness in the face of death and say: I do not understand. I do not know what to do but I am here with you. Are we willing to not run away from the pain, to not get busy when there is nothing to do and instead stand rather in the face of death together with those who grieve?\(^8\) [Bold text in the original.]

Christ expects the Church to follow this lead. Jesus sends the twelve out with the directions and the ability “to heal” (Lk 9:2). Real and concrete support offered to those who grieve is the very definition of “presence and proximity before performance.”\(^9\) Caleb Wilde identifies this as *tikkun olam*, the Jewish concept of repairing the world.\(^10\)

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\(^10\) Ibid.
The Church as the Body of Christ

Alberta Spencer stood outside the door of her friend’s home waiting to enter. For two weeks, every day she came to be with Meryl whose husband had divorced her. After two weeks Meryl opened the door and let her in. Over the next ten days Alberta arrived, Meryl allowed her in and said, “You know where the coffee is.” Sitting next to Meryl on the couch for the next hour, not another word was spoken. Finally, one day Meryl opened up. She spoke to Alberta about her anger, loneliness, and fear. One month later, Meryl returned to church and spoke before the congregation about Alberta’s perseverance and presence. “You wore me down by being there. I didn’t want to speak to or see anyone. But you just wore me down. And then you just sat and listened to me. I am forever grateful you stayed with me.”

Great loss can fragment, alienate, and leave us isolated, sometimes by our own desires and actions. However, the support that a person receives is a primary tool used to manage and respond to grief. Hoy declares the value of the community when he states, “In no other place does the role of caring community become more treasured than in confronting loss.” Looking to these relationships for comfort and support in grief and deep loss is natural. Bowlby writes, “…a child’s strong propensity to attach himself to his mother and his father, or to whomever else may be caring for him, can be understood as having the function of reducing the risk of his coming to harm.”

Within the Church, familial connections are common. The Church has understood itself as a family

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11 This story was recounted by Alberta Spencer during a workshop held at the Regional Assembly for the Pacific Southwest Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Fullerton, CA. October 20, 2019. Her name and permission to share was granted by Alberta.


13 Bowlby, A Secure Base, 81.
(Mk.3:34-35) using familial relationships like brother, sister, mother, and father in addressing members. So it is natural for many bereaved persons to look to their Christian family for support along the journey and to reduce the stress and anxiety of grief. Leon wrote to me, “I have received substantial and loving support from friends and family, my church, and from _______ Christian College.”

The offering of care in support of one member is an acknowledgement of the loss as a loss for the whole. “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (1 Cor 12:26). This understanding grows from Paul’s metaphor of the Church as the Body of Christ.

For as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1 Cor 12:12-13, 27)

As the Body of Christ, we are charged to “have the same care for one another” (1 Cor 12:25).

Such care and support often come in the form of the provision of daily needs for the bereaved. Picking up children at school, providing meals, and the rituals of funerals and receptions are quite common offerings by congregations for their bereaved members.

“Real care is not ambiguous,” writes Henri Nouwen. “Real care excludes indifference and is the opposite of apathy. The word ‘care’ finds its roots in the Gothic ‘Kara’ which means lament. The basic meaning of care is: to grieve, to experience sorrow, to cry out with.”

Locating the reality of the loss in the bereaved person’s everyday life assists the bereaved in accomplishing Worden’s Task I, accepting the reality of the loss. At the

15 Nouwen, Out of Solitude, 33-34.
16 Worden. Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy, 41-44.
same time, caring for everyday needs and tasks can level the valleys and mountains of an unknown landscape (Is 40:4).

It is hard to do the necessary and challenging work of making sense of a loss. This work is not accomplished quickly. Sorrow is not just encased by the death of an individual. Concepts and theological understandings that may have served a person for a lifetime can be challenged by the death as we have seen. Coming to a new meaning or a new way of conceptualizing one’s assumptive world is both time-consuming and fatiguing. Here a second manifestation of the wholeness of the Body is expressed. As the bereaved challenge and renegotiate their assumptive world, the Church is a place where the whole history and perception of God’s efficacy and participation can come under scrutiny, examined for inclusion in the rebuilt assumptive world. Francis Weller illuminates the necessity of a support system for this demanding work; “Our ability to drop into this interior world and to do the difficult work of metabolizing sorrow is dependent on the community that surrounds us. Even when we are alone, it is necessary to feel the tethers of concern and kindness holding us as we step off into the unknown and encounter the wild edge of sorrow.”17 The power of these “tethers” is a part of what make the community so important. Robert A. Neimeyer states, “…that meaning reconstruction is as much a social practice as it is a cognitive one.”18 The community holds a person’s faith, questions, and understandings during the time the bereaved are not able to do so themselves. Even when the bereaved take the leap of faith á la Kierkegaard, their arrival is into an unfamiliar land.


The concrete nature of support provided to those who grieve holds and buoys them. Like Alberta and Meryl, such care creates an unwavering trust. The Irish way of expressing this kind of trust, says Padraig O’ Tauma, is captured in the phrase: “You are the place where I stand on the day when my feet are sore.”19 Trust, reinforced by the loving presence of the Church, provides a safe place to stand for the bereaved to do the anxious work of challenging, reframing, reflecting, and renegotiating. Trust achieves Paul’s instruction in Galatians 6:2: “Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” Bearing, supporting, and reinforcing are foundational words for the bereaved, who, when stabilized, can begin the journey forward adapting to their new surroundings.

Paul’s words that we all suffer together further strengthen the metaphor for the unity of the Body because the bereaved are also essential to their supporters. It is not just a one-way street. Stanley Hauerwas writes, “After all, we are not individually to be complete imitators of Christ; rather, the whole church is.”20 The bereaved and the suffering have a place in the church as well. Those who grieve are wounded but not weak or broken. It is a misunderstanding to believe that those who grieve are supported until they are whole again, after which they rejoin the church as whole members. The bereaved are whole in the same way that death is a part of the wholeness of life. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12:

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted

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20Stanley Hauerwas, God, Medicine, and Suffering (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 89.
in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

In the Church there is a place for the wounded. Their woundedness reflects the woundedness and suffering of Christ. Therefore, it is important for the Church to accept Jesus’ ministry with the grieving as its own. It is a place to reflect the wholeness of the Body of Christ. I suggest that Compassionate Presence Grief Training is one way to implement this ministry.

Goals for the Training

There are three primary goals of Compassionate Presence Grief Training. Pastors and the laity involved with ministry to the bereaved need to be exposed to contemporary models and understandings of grief. Also it is critical to present an alternative conception of the role or function that loss, death, and grief play in relationship to life. Finally, those who are actively involved in supporting the bereaved need to be prepared to do this emotionally taxing work.

As we have seen in Chapter 1, the availability of grief training for pastors is limited. Little is available to students in a seminary setting, and local community colleges and universities do not offer much either. Compassionate pastors seeking to expand their skills scan the internet for materials, but they are often led to expensive trainings designed to expand business potentials or others not grounded in current conceptions of grief and bereavement. Pastors need access to good, evidence-based material that will erect a solid foundation from which to offer care and comfort to members of their congregation and community. The goal here is not to create a course that will go deeply
into the vast and broad array of knowledge available. That material is too extensive. This course is designed to expose pastors and interested lay persons called to such ministry to valuable knowledge that will be beneficial as they care for people in a general or normal grief experience.

Compassionate Presence Grief Training is not a scholastic endeavor. It is a training providing a survey of material and touchstones to practical and common human experience. Material will be presented that will expose participants to more difficult grief experiences. However, this will be presented as a way of learning and recognizing one’s limitations, therefore being able to refer those whose needs and sorrow require deeper investigation and professional support. An extensive bibliography will be given to participants for their further and future exploration of individual subjects. There will be no assigned reading outside of the weekly class periods. Any learning requires time and ultimately integration of the knowledge and material presented will best be accomplished through use and examination.

A second goal will be the offering of an alternative theological understanding of death. As explained in Chapter 3, a primary theological conceptualization of death has been as a punishment for disobedience. Comprehending death as punishment is often a subconscious background for a person grieving a loss. Such a perception can be part of what comes under review by the bereaved as they make adjustments to their assumptive world and make meaning of their loss. As Neimeyer states, “…individuals make meaning by drawing selectively on a fund of discourse that precedes them and that is consensually
validated within their cultures, subcultures, communities, and families.”21 If members of
the faith community can bear a broader theological scope to the significance and role of
death and grief in human life, this may ease the way for reconstruction. Their non-
anxious presence can be a source of validation for the bereaved within the local church
community. The presence of alternatives legitimizes the work the bereaved do in
meaning making. Alternatives allow for a divergent view providing more room for the
bereaved person to build their new framework for life.

The third goal of Compassionate Grief Training is to present a variety of ways for
those engaged in this ministry to prepare themselves to be attentive to the bereaved. One
must be prepared to “enter the valley of the shadow” to be a companion with those who
suffer. As discussed earlier, this is an emotionally laden ministry with abundant traps and
pitfalls. Compassion fatigue is a danger to those who do not know or recognize their
human limitations. A significant buffer to compassion fatigue is self-care, which in this
training will focus on spiritual disciplines designed to help attendees grow deeper in their
own spiritual life connecting with the ultimate source of both presence and power. God’s
Holy Spirit, and not one’s own resources, becomes the animating and consoling energy
present to the bereaved, housed within the attentive care giver.

Training Strategy

Bereavement care is a ministry to which God calls both clergy and laity. There is
space for the clergy to bring professional presence and many bereaved persons want the
ordained, set-aside, person of God to be there and bring them comfort, especially in the

21Robert A. Neimeyer, “The Language of Loss: Grief Therapy as a Process of Meaning
Reconstruction,” in Meaning Reconstruction and the Experience of Loss, Robert A. Neimeyer, ed.
ritual of funeral and memorial services. Likewise, we have seen how the Body cares for itself in tangible acts of kindness and support. Consequently, bereavement ministry is best shared by both. As a way of responding to this call,\textsuperscript{22} I have put together a training that will provide the groundwork for local churches to respond to grieving hearts in a caring and competent way. In addition to local pastors, it will seek to equip invested persons to be in ministry to the bereaved.

**Sketch of the Small Group Training**

The class met once a week for eight weeks, two hours per session, and was designed to be interactive and inquisitive. A vital element of the instruction sought to facilitate reflection by the participants on their own experience to the communicated material. Therefore, a high degree of trust among the trainees was necessary. To reach its goal, the class needed be a safe place to learn and to share. The two elements of trust and safety, especially important to bereaved people, were emphasized, especially in the first session.

Sessions began with an opening exercise, approximately two minutes of directed prayer. Various methods, such as *Lectio Divina*, silent prayer, poetry, and song lyrics, were used as a way to introduce participants to spiritual disciplines as well as building community among the group.\textsuperscript{23} Two minutes is generally more time than many people are used to being in silence or quiet, yet not too long of a time for the students to become

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Frederick Buechner defines call or vocation as “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 95.
\item \textsuperscript{23} I used this variety to help students be attentive to the voice of God which I believe speaks in many ways. God speaks beyond scripture and Christian hymns and praise choruses. When we are attentive, God’s voice takes many forms.
\end{itemize}
uncomfortable. These practices were designed to prepare the students to listen to the Spirit and learn to release assumptions. The opening exercises would generate an experience of spiritual disciplines necessary for ministry with the bereaved.

After the opening exercise, a brief overview of the session’s subject matter presented a roadmap for the session and enabled class members to be prepared for the subject matter, especially material that might be challenging to them as individuals. The removal of surprises, especially with such subjects as the death of a child, trauma, or hearing a different theological perspective, can lower barriers a student might erect when encountering difficult material or a different point of view. A time for questions as well as a ten-minute rest break was incorporated.

The last ten minutes was spent explaining reflection material or homework and a formal closing. Generally, homework was a poem, scripture, or question meant to engage the student on the presented material. The reflection material was designed to help the student connect with the material on a personal level, helping them to recognize their role as a wounded healer. Journals were given to each student for this purpose. The homework was at times used as an opening to the next session’s material. Most sessions ended with two minutes of silent prayer.

Training Strategy

There is a broad array of material that could be incorporated in this endeavor. It is necessary to understand what was presented and why. What is included in contemporary grief theory? How significant is self-care and what is the basis for providing care to the

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24 Henri Nouwen uses the term to describe the overall experience of ministry. “[The minister] is called to be the wounded healer, the one who must look after his own wounds but at the same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others.” Henri Nouwen, The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society (New York: Doubleday, 1979), 82.
bereaved? Since this is a pilot project aimed at pastors and their congregations, I will go over information about who is to be recruited and why. Finally, I discuss the logistics.

Who and How to Recruit

It is important to recruit well. The success of this venture is founded in having a group that is dynamic, curious, and called to a ministry of caring for the bereaved. I will focus recruitment on pastors. First, I believe that pastors are vital to providing a strong foundation for ministry with the bereaved. Many lay members of congregations look to pastors to formulate direction for ministry and to set the priorities for the congregation. It was also be important to discover if this is deemed a meaningful addition to a pastor’s skills for ministry.

Having focused on churches in the Burbank-Glendale area, I met with two different pastors. These were personal, face-to-face encounters that allowed for frank discussion of the expectations I had for the training and for each of them should they chose to participate. I was also able to gauge from facial expression and body language their true interest in participation. Seeking a true learning and evaluation experience saved spoiling the project from a sense of obligation or less than honest assessment. Each of them agreed to participate. Having secured two local pastors for the project, I turned to the laity.

Mature Laity Who Feel Called to Serve the Bereaved

Healthy and stable individuals are integral to lending bereavement support, be that from a pastor or lay person. It is a not uncommon to hear a story from a bereaved person who had someone offer support only to quickly begin sharing their own grief. The
bereaved hear what they did and how they should feel or what they should do to “move on” or “get over” their loss. This disrupts the safe space that a bereaved person needs to grieve. It also can flip the roles where it is the bereaved who end up providing support and comfort to the one who has come to comfort.²⁵

The second qualification I sought was a sense of being called to such a ministry. For many people this arises out of their own experiences with the death of a loved one or other significant loss.²⁶ It is a part of the meaning-making process of significant life transitions. Sometimes to respond to this call, is the opportunity people need to acknowledge the deep gladness that rests in their heart. The training becomes the opportunity to be equipped for the ministry into which they are led (hence the adjective, invested as I have used). The course invests the person with the knowledge and community necessary to enter fully into the ministry. Invested persons are prepared to furnish the bereaved with the support they need to grieve.

Content of Training

The curriculum is established to present a survey of the areas that are important for a pastor and lay person to understand in supporting the bereaved. In general, these include contemporary grief theory, the type of death that a person can experience,

²⁵ An especially poignant example comes from a woman Jean (not her real name) who spoke to me about her son’s death. Jean recounted that a friend came to the funeral and when she came up front to offer condolences, the woman lost her composure, laid herself across the casket and began to weep. Jean ultimately had to take her friend from the chapel for a walk outside to console her. In a double tragedy, Jean missed her own son’s funeral. Personal conversation, Glendale, CA. Date unknown.

²⁶ As an example, a significant number of persons are employed in the funeral profession due to an experience they had surrounding the death of a loved one. Many of those see their work as a vocation, a calling. "Nobody just walks in here by an accident…I believe firmly people are called to be a funeral director." From Emily Siner, “Called To Be A Funeral Director: Most Mortuary School Grads Are First In The Family,” accessed October 30, 2019, https://www.npr.org/2019/09/23/752557052/called-to-be-a-funeral-director-most-mortuary-school-grads-are-first-in-the-fami.
reframing theological understandings, methods for providing comfort to support the bereaved, personal death awareness, and self-care. Each of these will be expanded as described below.

Contemporary Grief Theory

Contemporary grief theory includes a wide array of matters. John Bowlby’s attachment theory and Ronnie Janoff-Bulman’s work on the assumptive world was offered as the basis for this training. Each of these act upon the experience of grief as a whole providing significant energy to its expression. Bowlby provided insight into the genesis of a person’s grief and Janoff-Bulman for the difficult work and longitudinal nature of grief.

With these established, the training examines the manifestations of grief as related to the physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual experience of a grieving person. How these are demonstrated within an individual person, children included, will be shaped by types of death, the individuality of each person, and that person’s cultural background among other factors. Each of these is a different subject that is important to address, so each was explored.

As noted elsewhere, the Five Stages of Grief model is well ensconced in our society. Its historical significance, limitations, and dangers have been discussed. While any schema has its limitations and no model is comprehensive enough to provide coverage for all individual grief experiences, schemas give us a valuable framework for understanding what a person is accomplishing and how they are processing the grief. Thus the Five Stages was discussed. The Dual Process Model of Margaret Stroebe and
Henk Schut\textsuperscript{27} as well as J. William Worden’s Tasks of Mourning model\textsuperscript{28} were offered as alternatives.

**Grief through NASH+**

It is important to consider the type of death as a major component of a person’s grief. For example, a death resulting from cancer, AIDS, or dementia creates a different experience than one from suicide or combat for the surviving persons. Students learned the differences in the types of death as categorized by NASH – Natural, Accidental, Suicide, and Homicide. Deaths from accidents, suicide, and homicide are categorized as traumatic deaths. This provided a segue into the subject of trauma. The + symbol is an addition I included to take in non-death loss to make students aware of the variety of loss that can be a part of a person’s life and also a part of their grief after a person’s death.

**Theological Insights on Death, Loss, and Spiritual Development**

A paradox is something that “simultaneously unravels you and enriches you.”\textsuperscript{29} A paradox breaks the dualistic thinking that so often traps us in one view of scripture. Death and loss are two of the great paradoxes we encounter. As we serve the bereaved, we need to be able to meet them where they are, especially in their questioning and their awareness of God’s working presence in life. We need to be comfortable in the paradoxical world in which the bereaved find themselves. As such, it is for us to be comfortable with ambiguity and dissonance as we work to hold the space necessary for


\textsuperscript{28} In J Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 41-53.

\textsuperscript{29}James Finley, Unnamed lecture, Stillpoint Retreat, Church of our Savior, San Gabriel, CA. January 2017.
the development of a new assumptive world. For that reason the course represented death as a consequence of mortality. A function of this view is God’s employment of death not as trial or test but as a pathway to rebuild and reframe our life. Jesus teaches in John 12:24 that “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” The metaphor of bearing fruit can point to a person’s new life or new understanding of self and the world. Gillies and Neimeyer’s model of Post-Traumatic Growth\textsuperscript{30} was suggested as one way of conceptualizing the role and use of death in this divine scheme.

Comforting Strategies and Practices

Providing compassionate care to others is based in the art of listening. Rachel Naomi Remen identifies the power of listening.

Listening creates a holy silence. When you listen generously to people, they can hear truth in themselves, often for the first time. And in the silence of listening, you can know yourself in everyone. Eventually you may be able to hear, in everyone and beyond everyone, the unseen singing softly to itself and to you.\textsuperscript{31}

Through listening the servant creates the space needed for hearing. That space applies not only to the bereaved but also to the servant who can hear the Spirit directing and taking the lead in support. Thus listening was emphasized as the ground of compassionate care as it is extended to the whole person. Knowing the manifestations of grief, the places that need support as they are working out the pain within the bereaved, a listening agent can offer potent aids such as creating a lament, designing ritual, provision of concrete

\textsuperscript{30} Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) is the name given to the work that we do of finding benefit and making meaning out of traumatic experiences. PTG is a significant part of the process of moving through especially difficult losses. For more on PTG see, James Gillies, and Robert A. Neimeyer. “Loss, Grief, and the Search for Significance: Toward a Model of Meaning Reconstruction in Bereavement,” \textit{Journal of Constructivist Psychology} 19, (2006): 31-65. DOI: 10.1080/10720530500311182.

physical supports for daily and weekly mundane routines. This removes the temptation to be formulaic in offering support and works with and in the individual experience of the bereaved.

Personal Death Awareness

Personal death awareness is a concept important for each individual to consider. It is especially meaningful for those who are serving the bereaved. To be attentive to another who is grieving is difficult as it is. When the reality of mortality is brought into our awareness by another’s death and our thoughts become focused on the natural concern of our own death it becomes more challenging to be present. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross says,

Though every man will attempt in his own way to postpone such questions and issues until he is forced to face them, he will only be able to change things if he can start to conceive of his own death. This cannot be done on a mass level. This cannot be done by computers. This has to be done by every human being alone.32

To support this undertaking I used exercises from Worden and Proctor’s book *Personal Death Awareness: Breaking Free of Fear to Live a Better Life Now.*33 Participants looked at their own PDA. I hoped also to assist the students in gaining an appreciation for such awareness and how it informs our daily living.

Personal Disciplines for Self-Care

Caleb Wilde is a third-generation funeral director and author. In *Confessions of a Funeral Director* he writes about his struggles being constantly confronted with the reality of death. Towards the end of the book he reflects on how he came to “find words


for death.” Wilde, Confessions of a Funeral Director, 149.

35 Ibid., 149-150.


I also emphasized the need for a comprehensive self-care program. The spiritual disciplines will provide spiritual wellbeing. That enables one to recognize the need for strengthening one’s emotional, physical, cognitive, and social well-being. Students were encouraged to discover their organic ways of supporting these areas by reflecting on how they already perform these activities and exploring ways to expand them.

Logistics

The logistics of the training are as follows. The course was designed to be held over eight consecutive weeks to give time for the students to reflect on and process their learning. A local church was identified as a hosting site and was to be one of the two churches whose pastor had shown interest in participating and a desire to offer his church. It was necessary to make the training fit into the schedule for the host church which was impacted by the time of year chosen. I looked for a season that does not have too much already calendared. Thus times such as Advent and Lent would be avoided. I anticipated an evening class of two to two and a half hours in length to allow those who are employed to take part. Publicity was offered to churches through the Burbank Ministerial Association and the Glendale Religious Leaders Association. Pastors were first invited and encouraged to recommend this to members of their congregations who are mature with a call to ministry with the bereaved. Costs were to be minimal and borne by me personally.
CHAPTER 5:

THIRTY, SIXTY, HUNDRED FOLD

“But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.” Matthew 13:23

In this text from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus illustrates what God accomplishes with a word understood. For those who are able to hear, incorporate the word they hear, allow God to work with them in the field of life, the encouragement is a great harvest. It is the word, the seed that God implants into ready and receptive soil, nurtured by the Spirit of God that is responsible for the harvest. In the area of grief and faith, this promises to be a great blessing for the bereaved as well as for the world. The word about grief and its role in our life is rich with hope and new life.

As noted earlier the experience of loss, death, and grief fills our lives. Francis Weller states “Sorrow is a sustained note in the song of being alive.”² Congregations are full of people living with this note who are seeking a way through. Yet few churches and pastors are prepared to recognize the place of these soul-changing events and thus are not prepared to respond in a helpful and trustworthy manner. Consequently, the people flounder and the Church is missing out on an important ministry. Compassionate Grief

Training was directed to both lay and clergy so that the congregation would be prepared to respond to the bereaved in their midst. The subject matter was made accessible to each and caring responses were practical in nature. This summary of the project will explore the choice of congregation, the review of the training, the tools of evaluation used to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the program, and an accounting of what those tools revealed.

**Compassionate Presence Grief Training Summary**

**Choice of One Church for the Pilot Project**

As discussed in Chapter 1, Forest Lawn serves a vast area of Southern California. There was a need to narrow the focus for identifying local churches. Forest Lawn-Glendale and Forest Lawn-Hollywood Hills produced the best pool of churches. There were two prime factors used in consideration: accessibility and familiarity. Churches served by these two locations are accessible to me. Burbank is the next town to the east of my home and Glendale is the next one east of Burbank. The second factor is familiarity. I served a church in Burbank for ten years. I have several meaningful and long-term relationships with pastors and churches in the Burbank and Glendale areas. These relationships have been strengthened during my tenure at Forest Lawn due to my involvement in the on-going ministerial associations of these two communities.

I served in leadership of the Glendale Religious Leaders Association. I am the unofficial historian of the Burbank Ministerial Association because of my over twenty years of involvement. On more than one occasion, I have presented on grief to the members of these associations and have received positive feedback on the information
shared and the desire to learn more. In early 2018 I proposed working with a church and some overall details about the project and received positive feedback from two churches, one in each in Glendale and Burbank.

As I discussed the possibility of working with their respective congregations, it became clear that one was going to be more available to host the training given the openness and restrictions already a part of their church calendar. First Presbyterian Church of Burbank began to emerge as the best candidate to host this pilot project. In May of 2018, I met with Reverend Ross Purdy, Senior Pastor of the congregation. Reverend Purdy was excited about the possibility of the congregation collaborating with me for the training. He was also willing to participate in the training and to enlist members of his congregation to join. We agreed that I would enter into a partnership with First Presbyterian Church and Reverend Purdy.

Overview of the Assessment

As a pilot project, Compassionate Presence Grief Training was designed to be an approach to help Christian congregations be more prepared and better able to serve the bereaved. With the course designed for both pastors and lay persons, it was important to understand the efficacy of the training for each category of individual as well as the general overall quality of the training for everyone. To that end, Compassionate Grief Training was evaluated for both qualitative and quantitative results.

The qualitative assessment was made using an evaluation that each person was asked to complete at the end of the course. Feedback was sought on a broad range of topics including, but not limited to, the structure and organization of the sessions and the subject matter order. How helpful were handouts, discussion, and the homework? Was
the instructor knowledgeable? Queries were also made about the facilities, hospitality, and the cost. Space was given under each question, seeking comments and expansion on the rating in the scale. Quantitative assessment was focused on ideal participation and how well that was maintained through the course.

The course was limited to a maximum of twelve persons, a small enough group to ensure contributions and discussion from each individual. Yet twelve was large enough that should some persons be absent quality discussion and interaction could still be maintained. It was the responsibility of the instructor to make sure that no one dominated in discussion or asking questions. To complete the course and receive a certificate of completion, persons had to attend 80 percent of the classes, meaning participants were required to attend six out of the eight class sessions.

**Timeline**

In a subsequent meeting to the one in May 2018, Reverend Purdy and I discussed the congregation’s calendar in more detail and discovered that January and February of 2019 was an open period that could accommodate both the use of the space and the energy needed for the completion of the class. From there we backed into the calendar for necessary preparation. Beginning the first full week of January the class would run for eight consecutive weeks, which in 2019 allowed for the class to conclude prior to the beginning of Lent. The training became an offering during Ordinary Time for First Presbyterian. Therefore, the first Sunday of the year I was scheduled to preach and to provide a general grief seminar to the congregation. Reverend Purdy and I decided he would begin the process of recruitment of attendees and publicity during the fall.

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2 See Appendix 1 for the evaluation form.
Recruitment of Pastors and Laypersons

During the fall of 2018, announcements were made at meetings of the Burbank Ministerial Association and the Glendale Religious Leaders Association. In addition to these general announcements, Reverend Purdy had been recruited as well as Reverend Todd Leonard, Pastor of Glendale City Church, a Seventh Day Adventist congregation. Since I was also seeking another tradition, a personal invitation was extended to an Episcopal priest who had expressed an interest in the training. Sadly, he declined to participate with no reason given.

To avoid the possibility of a person who attends the group seeking bereavement support for their loss, or as an endorsement of their knowledge, participation of the lay members of the group was screened. Healthy and stable individuals are important in the offering of bereavement support as examined in Chapter 4. Reverend Purdy and I discussed these issues and decided that his pastoral knowledge of the congregation, extensive due to his almost twenty years as pastor, would be the guiding determiner of each individual’s inclusion. Should he desire a consultation about a specific individual, we would discuss their situation. Some individuals that Reverend Purdy wanted to include received directed invitations and a general invitation was made to the congregation.3

Sunday Preaching and After-Church Workshop

An important element to prepare a congregation for the challenging work of bereavement support is to preach about the subject. There are a great number of

3See the invitation, a flyer created by First Presbyterian using material I supplied in Appendix 2.
meaningful and appropriate texts. Depending upon the context of the church and recent experiences in congregational life, grief can be approached from many directions. Funerals and death (Jn 11 for Jesus and Lazarus, Lk 7: 11-17 for the story of the widow of Nain), losing a home (Gn 21 for Hagar and Ishmael’s banishment), moving the congregation to a new location (Ex 13 for leaving Egypt), aging (Jn 21:18-19 for Peter being taken “where he did not wish to go”), unfulfilled dreams (Dt 34 for Moses at the promised land) – are all opportunities to guide a congregation through the life-expanding experience of grief.

The most basic of experiences is the death of a member. With the general decline of the church here in the United States in both numbers and relevancy and the impending losses faced by the Boomer generation, preaching about grief and finding the appropriate context is not difficult. I preached on the Sunday before Compassionate Presence began. The scripture text in 1 Samuel 20: 35, 39-42 is the final goodbye shared between David and Jonathan. The text is a good one to talk about the emotions displayed between these two friends which are common to grief. In addition, their ritual of leave taking, Jonathan’s blessing of David, provides an excellent lesson for surrendering to the reality of death and loss while receiving the beauty of living.

The sermon leads into the opportunity to provide an adult forum or other regular educational experience on grief. Providing a general overview of grief normalizes the grief experience and the context of an adult forum allows for interaction. Many people have never been in an educational setting about grief. As they connect their own experiences with the information, you can see the recognition on their face. The questions
become more statement-like as they voice their realizations. The corroborating stories become truth spoken into witness.

Participant’s Permission Granting and Signing of Release

As previously stated, trust among the members of the training is a prerequisite. In the first portion of the opening session, the concept of covenant was presented. I emphasized the need to covenant together to honor and respect each other including individual stories, opinions and experiences. I was aware of the potential that some members might be trauma survivors and it would be important from the beginning to set safe boundaries. The sacredness of a covenant was explained. Confidentiality and the voluntary nature of participation allowing for the possibility of opting out at any time was emphasized. Members were made aware that no personal information would be used without specific consent and that results of the class would be reported within the framework of the Doctor of Ministry project and to the Council of Executives at Forest Lawn, which is supporting the project. I explained the training was to be a closed group meaning no one would be allowed to join after the first night. The closed group format was chosen to create continuity of the group, commitment to one another, and to facilitate comprehension because the curriculum was designed to build week to week.

I passed out a Covenantal Agreement and required each member to read and sign adding that I would co-sign as well.\textsuperscript{4} The originals were kept at my office in a secure file cabinet.

\textbf{Curriculum}

Outline for Topics of Training

\textsuperscript{4} See Appendix 3 for copy of the agreement.
The curriculum was designed as a survey course. The subjects are arranged to provide students with a logical progression. Below is a brief syllabus of the class.

January 10  Session One
Creating Community
Creating Community = safety
Personal introductions
Covenant
A BRIEF History of Grief
Attachment Theory – Bowlby
Decathesis – Freud
Continuing bonds – Klass, Silverman, and Nickman

January 17  Session Two
Overview of Grief – Part I
The Assumptive World
The Expressions of Normal Grief
Grief in Children

January 24  Session Three
Overview of Grief – Part II
Type of Death – NASH+
Mediators of Mourning
Cultural Awareness

January 31  Session Four
Overview of Grief – Part III
Trauma
Complicated Bereavement or Prolonged Grief Disorder
Non-death Loss

February 7  Session Five
Contemporary Models of Grief
Five Stages of Grief – Kübler-Ross
Dual Process Model – Stroebe and Schut
Tasks of Mourning – Worden

February 14  Session Six
Styles of Grieving
Comforting Strategies
Silence
Listening
Prayer
Social Media
February 21  Session Seven  
Grief as Spiritual Catalyst: Reframing Theological Understandings

February 28  Session Eight  
Personal Death Awareness and Self Care  
Course Evaluation

Contemporary Grief Theory

The loss of the attachments that we make (see Chapter 3) is the basis for the experience of grief. Thus, Bowlby’s attachment theory was where we began. A brief overview of the history of the study of grief was given. Session One was put together to help explain grief as the loss of an attachment and to contextualize why we say and do some of the things we do in grief.

Sessions Two through Four were defined as an Overview of Grief. Session Two explained the assumptive world and its constituent parts. I made the connection to theodicy to begin to help them picture how this impacts a person’s faith. Normal grief and its expressions along with grief in children, was examined to help understand and recognize what a caregiver is presented with and what they might expect to see from a bereaved person. Session Three was packed with a presentation about types of death, NASH+ as I called it, Worden’s mediators of mourning and cultural awareness. I included these so that they could be aware of the nuances that each of these affects to a person’s grief. Session Four presented trauma, complicated bereavement and non-death loss. These were included to help understand, in the case of trauma and complicated bereavement, to set boundaries for their offering of care. Non-death loss was included to expand their horizons about the extent of grief within their community.

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5Worden, Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy, 59-76.
Session Five offered three contemporary models of grief. The Five Stages of Grief by Kübler-Ross, Stroebe and Schut’s Dual Process model, and Worden’s Task Model were offered for their information. The Five Stages model was presented as both historical and as the common trajectory many people expect. Its limitations were also examined. The Dual Process model was gone over to help describe and illuminate the roller-coaster or back and forth experience that many people describe as their grief experience. The Four Tasks model was presented as a useful model for filtering and understanding a person’s grief and structuring one’s care giving opportunities.

Session Six presented styles of grieving and supportive strategies. These were paired to help the trainees be aware of the different ways that people process their grief. This will help them provide the support that would be most helpful to the one they are trying to console. The strategies were also connected to the different ways people experience grief (Session Two) which empowers the students to connect the strategies to those different expressions.

Grief is a deeply spiritual experience. Scattered through the training, biblical texts and grief concepts were paired. However, Session Seven was aimed specifically at communicating the presence of God in a person’s grief to bring about healing. Acknowledging another possibility of the role and meaning of death, one as an opportunity for the development of life rooted more deeply in God instead of a punishment for failure and sin, expands the potential for offering space for bereaved individuals to wrestle with the spiritual components of their loss.

Session Eight was final preparation for the offering of compassionate care. The session examined each person’s personal death awareness and the need for self-care.
Compassionate care was presented as being offered first to our own self. A rich and full life is the best place from which to offer supportive care to another.

Reframing Theological Understandings

Throughout the training, biblical texts were used to illustrate different grief concepts. Some of these texts open our eyes to seeing grief behind the stories. An example is 2 Samuel 1:11-17 where David and his army grieve the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. We examined their actions such as weeping and fasting as physical responses. I pointed out cultural responses such as David and his men tearing their clothes as a traditional Jewish mourning activity. David’s execution of the messenger was brought up as an irrational outburst of anger. Viewing Scriptures from the context of grief make the story come alive as we see some human response to death and sorrow.

One session however, was devoted to offering a different framework for conceptualizing the role of death in life. An overview of the orthodox view of death as punishment for sin based most strongly in the Augustinian view of Romans 5:12 and Genesis 3 was presented. That understanding was contrasted with an alternative view of death as a natural consequence of human mortality. This alternative view is, ironically enough, also located in Genesis 3.

NASH+

NASH is an acronym for categorizing types of death: Natural, Accidental, Suicide, and Homicide.6 The + is my addition for including non-death loss. These types of losses are included so that the participants can begin to recognize the wide variety of events that bring one to a grief experience. I also included information about trauma. An

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6 Ibid., 61.
examination of trauma is useful because of increased awareness of trauma experiences and the reporting of traumatic events affects communities as well as individuals. Trauma is to be attended to by trained professionals and will be presented as an experience that many persons are subject to. The prevalence of trauma needs to be recognized as a concern beyond their capacity to address.

Comforting Strategies and Practices

Comforting strategies primarily were addressed through the art of asking questions and listening. Dr. William G. Hoy’s concept of building rapport with persons by asking what he calls heritage questions was given as a starting point for later expressions of providing support. I also scattered different concepts throughout the eight weeks of training. Silence, listening, prayer, and the use of social media – each were shown as ways of attending to bereaved persons. Attendees were encouraged to understand their role as being a presence with persons. I sought to implant the idea of serving a person in their sorrow as a way to counteract the natural desire to fix someone’s perceived brokenness and pain.8

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7William G. Hoy, Road to Emmaus: Pastoral Care with the Dying and Bereaved(Compass Press. 2007), 117-119.

8 This is based in Rachel Naomi Remen’s proposal of three views of the world. “Helping, fixing, and serving represent three different ways of seeing life. When you help, you see life as weak. When you fix, you see life as broken. When you serve, you see life as whole. Fixing and helping may be the work of the ego, service the work of the soul.” From Rachel Naomi Remen, “Helping, Fixing, or Serving?,” accessed November 24, 2019, https://www.lionsroar.com/helping-fixing-or-serving/. Helping and fixing, according to Remen are ego based and bring us to caring ministries for our own ego enhancement. Servicing is soul work. Service allows the other to be whole, even in the midst of their sorrow and woundedness keeping the bereaved and the comforter on even footing and allowing space for the Spirit of God to work.
Personal Death Awareness

A questionnaire from J. William Worden’s book *Personal Death Awareness: Breaking Free of Fear to Live a Better Life Now* was given as reflective homework the week prior to the session where PDA was presented. Through another of Worden’s exercises from the book, we looked at where each of us is individually within our own life compared to general life expectancy. The exercise was followed with discussion and a guided meditation designed to help process the experience.

It was gratifying that most of the members of the class were satisfied with where they are in life. Their awareness of their PDA was high, but I did not sense it was of a morbid or distracting nature. Each of the individuals was comfortable with their own mortality and had had reason for contemplating their death.

Self-Care

Self-care comprised a significant ingredient of the training. While not always indicated as a self-care practice, the opening exercises, the reflective work outside of the sessions and the silence, prayer, and poetry were designed to expose attendees to different practices and potentially discover some new methods for self-care. A portion of one session was focused on each person’s current self-care activities. They were encouraged to participate in practices that enlivened all areas of their life. I stressed the need to discover the organic and subconscious nature of self-care.

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9Worden and Proctor. *PDA* *Personal Death Awareness*, 5-19.
Guest Presenters

In the original design guest presenters were to be used to contribute specific expertise in children’s grief and trauma while bringing a different voice to the training. However, I decided that for such a short training variety was not essential. I also wondered if the sense of safety provided by our signed covenant, the closed group concept, and the practice of being together for several weeks would be interrupted by outside presenters. Since the training is a survey course and not an in-depth look at any specific part of grief, the expertise was deemed not essential.10

Other Topics Addressed

Within the brief history of grief that was presented, Freud’s concept of decathexis11 and Klass, Silverman, and Nickman’s work on continuing bonds12 were specifically acknowledged. Gender and grief, as a mediator of mourning and the societal expectation which it creates, were highlighted. Of special interest was how often Worden’s mediators of mourning were returned to by participants as they began to grasp why they themselves and others they knew responded to a grief in a unique way.

A glossary of terms and concepts was given to the class. It grew from session to session as one or another new term was introduced and students asked to have a term...
included. Students also received a list of the scripture texts cited as well as a bibliography for their further exploration.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{Logistics}

\textit{Where to Host the Training}

As discussed earlier, an element of the decision to present the training at First Presbyterian Church of Burbank was the church is used to hosting a variety of events and has ample space to do so. The Fireside Room at First Presbyterian proved to be optimal. A large room, it was able to accommodate everyone seated at a table in a slight arc allowing everyone visual access to the group as a whole, increasing community building among participants. This room was also very close to the parking lot and is accessible for all persons in attendance. A small kitchen is adjacent to the room making hospitality, a crucial factor in safety and community building, easy. There was one scheduling conflict which had to be worked around. A local homeless sheltering program was calendared to use the Fireside Room during one of our sessions. That evening the training was moved to another room where we could keep the same set up and structure, albeit on a smaller and more constrictive scale.

\textit{Cost Factors}

As a pilot project for a Doctor of Ministry, I was concerned about the cost of the class being an impediment to participation. As shown in Chapter 1, grief training can be expensive. In an effort to make sure that cost was not a factor determining involvement I was willing to bear the costs. Reverend Purdy felt very strongly that individuals should

\textsuperscript{13} See Appendix 4.
bear some cost to provide a sense of personal value to each person. The church was willing to donate the facilities and to provide a key for entry and securing the building afterwards. Necessary materials were minimal consisting of journals, pens, dry erase markers and eraser, snacks, and drinks. With the original plans to have outside presenters, an honorarium of $250.00 per person was included.

These considerations led to a charge of $100.00 for the eight sessions, or $12.50 per session. Reverend Purdy also said that the congregation had a scholarship fund making full and partial scholarships available to anyone wishing to attend the class regardless of church membership. First Presbyterian administered those funds.\textsuperscript{14}

Meeting Schedule

The length of each class was discussed by Reverend Purdy and me. We decided that two hours would not only be sufficient but also would encourage participation. I set up the class schedule and below is the outline for each class.

Class Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening Silence &amp; Prayer</td>
<td>8 Min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debrief from previous session/reflection during the week.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice self-care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review and Overview</td>
<td>5 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of previous week’s material (name only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of homework &amp; comments/questions about the work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of topics for the night</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustration/Story/Poem for topic to bring class into focus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of Material and Guided Discussion</td>
<td>45 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break  (approx. 8:15 pm)</td>
<td>10 Min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of Material and Guided Discussion</td>
<td>35 Min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{14} The remaining funds were returned to the church in the form of a donation to missions after deducting expenses for hospitality and materials.
Final Q&A 10 Min
Homework/Tasks 2 Min
PDA Questionnaire
Journal topic
Closing Prayer 5 Min

**Assessment and Evaluation**

Preparation of Evaluation Questionnaire

The primary assessment tool for Compassionate Presence Grief Training was a five-page evaluation form. In a learning environment, there are many elements that have a bearing on the success of a program. Each component of the training was submitted to the process through the evaluation form. Feedback was sought on the number of sessions, the length of the class session, the structure of the class, each part of the structure – the opening, the closing, handouts, and homework – the instructor – his openness to questions, knowledge, the delivery of the information – each of the subjects covered, which of these was most or least helpful, will the information be useful and do you feel prepared to support the bereaved, what was lacking, and would you recommend this training to others. Feedback was also sought on the publicity for the training, the cost of the training, the facilities, and the hospitality, and whether these were conducive to the learning experience.

The questionnaire was created to give individuals two sets of responses for each category. Using a rating scale on a one-to-five basis, with one being “not helpful” and five being “very helpful,” I sought quantitative input. Space for written comments for each question was plentiful to seek qualitative feedback.

The questionnaire was distributed at the end of the final session with the following instructions.
I want to thank you for your time, attendance, attention, questions, and willingness to accept a call to this sacred ministry. It has been a privilege and a blessing to be a part of this experience with each of you. We have been a sacred community. God has done a marvelous thing among us by bringing us together. Each of you is special and has enriched my life and my experience of our eight weeks together. I have learned so much from you.

Now I ask that you provide me with some written feedback. This will be very helpful as I continue to shape and refine this training. There is a wide variety of questions that will help me. Your honesty is important to me and to this process.

Answer the questions truthfully. You may answer before you leave here tonight. You may fill it out at home and send it to me either in email form or through the mail. If you wish to remain anonymous, fill it out and bring it to the church and I will retrieve it from here.

Personal Reflection

Compassionate Presence Grief Training is an important first step. As a pilot project, I do not believe it could have been any better for the learning experience that it created for the participants and for me. It was enjoyable putting the class together. As is often stated, the best way to learn something is to teach it. My preparation for some of the less familiar subjects was extensive so that I would be able to present the information accurately.

It was encouraging to hear from pastoral colleagues who attended the class how helpful and compelling the information and the instruction was for them. Reverend Todd Leonard of Glendale City Church spoke to me about the potential of the training being made available in a weekend format. He felt that many other pastors would benefit from it.15 Reverend Dr. Carmen Blair, a hospital and hospice chaplain, spoke about how helpful and insightful the training had been. She had not been exposed to many of the concepts covered in the training even though she had been involved in ministry for over

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15Personal conversation with Reverend Todd Leonard, April 23, 2019, Glendale, CA.
twenty years.\textsuperscript{16} Dr. Blair’s feedback is important as it helps to confirm the necessity for this training.

The energy and the enthusiasm were maintained from week to week. I looked forward each week to teaching the class and members commented they anticipated attending. It was jokingly suggested that a grief support group should begin after the class was over so that they would be able to grieve the ending of the class. One of the discoveries that surprised me was the Personal Death Awareness of the class in general. It was encouraging how high a PDA was displayed among the class and how comfortable with the concept they seemed to be. I believe that was due to the high level of maturity that Reverend Purdy and I sought out within the class participants to begin with. Many difficult and strong life experiences had challenged these people. With the challenge, they had moved toward a healthy resolution and growth.

Final Report

Compassionate Grief Training was held at First Presbyterian Church in Burbank, California on eight consecutive Thursday evenings from January 10, 2019 to February 28, 2019. Twelve people signed up for the course, ten women and two men. Ten were members of First Presbyterian and two were from other local congregations. There were two ordained clergy and nine trainees were lay. The goal was to have 25 percent participation by clergy members and 75 percent laity. That actual ratio was 19 percent clergy and 81 percent laity. Had Reverend Purdy, who was to be a member of the class been able to attend, the goal would have been met.

\textsuperscript{16} Personal conversation with Reverend Dr. Carmen Blair, April 4, 2019, Glendale, CA.
The class had an 86 percent attendance rate. Of the twelve who started, eleven completed the course by attending at least 80 percent of the sessions. One person dropped out after four sessions. Three persons attended all sessions and four others missed only one. This is remarkable considering that one of the sessions landed on Valentine’s Day and there were three other nights with significant rain. I believe these figures indicate the class was able to maintain its momentum and enthusiasm for learning from beginning to end. One evaluation stated the need for “a second class to cover the additional grief topics and go more in depth. Feel like we just ‘scratched’ the surface.”\textsuperscript{17}

The life experience the students brought to the class contributed to the quality of the training. Two of the members self-disclosed that they were trauma survivors providing a depth and veracity to the material as they shared. Their willingness to share their experience exemplifies the safety and community that was formed among the class. Two other members had recently experienced the death of someone close. One person was challenging to me as the instructor because of their need to ask questions of the material to help process a recent death. The task was to be respectful of the loss while directing the answer to a more general explication of the material.

Out of eleven possible evaluations six were returned for a 55 percent return rate. The surveys generated very useful material and this is what they told me. All responses except one felt that the number of sessions was appropriate. The one who did not felt there were too few. All responders also agreed that the two-hour schedule was the right length. The structure of the class (opening exercises, review, overview of the sessions topics, and presentation of the topic) was evaluated as very helpful and conducive to

\textsuperscript{17} Class evaluation, March 5, 2019.
learning with an aggregate score of 4.8. “Very helpful to re-estabishment [sic] of sacred, intimate atmosphere and to allow participants an opportunity to put aside the busy-ness of their day.”\textsuperscript{18} “Perfect approach.”\textsuperscript{19} I as the instructor was evaluated as a 5.0. No comments were offered however so it is impossible to have a full evaluation of instruction.

Responses to the subjects covered were insightful. They ranged from a low of 3.8 to 5.0. As mentioned above, trauma, prolonged grief, and non-death loss were rated as somewhat helpful (3.8). Creating community (4.3), cultural awareness (4.6), and personal death awareness (4.6) were the next lowest. All the other subjects were 4.8 or 5.0. Mildly conflicting information came with the comments. The pastors in the training were highly supportive of attachment theory, continuing bonds, contemporary models, and cultural awareness. “Cultural awareness could be covered (probably in a whole class by itself!)”\textsuperscript{20} “More information on non-European cultural expectations and grieving styles.”\textsuperscript{21} More follow up to seek clarity among those who offered evaluations would be helpful to discern this tension.

Finally, the goal of the training was to help congregations become healing agents by providing supportive bereavement care to their members and the community. The question read: “Do you feel prepared to support the bereaved?” and received an aggregate score of 4.5. While this is high, in relation to the other scores it is one of the lower rated questions. The follow-up question on the evaluation was “If not, what do you feel you lack or would help you to be prepared?” Here no written comments were received.

\textsuperscript{18} Class evaluation, March 8, 2019
\textsuperscript{19} Class evaluation, April 2, 2019.
\textsuperscript{20} Class evaluation, April 4, 2019.
\textsuperscript{21} Class evaluation, April 2, 2019.
However, under “What would have made the class better?” a suggestion of “role playing, handling actual situations involving grieving people, how to deal with anger” illuminates the gap in preparation. The critique points again to too much information offered in too didactic a manner. I will address these adjustments to the curriculum in the summary.

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22 Class evaluation, March 5, 2019.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Throughout my ministry at Forest Lawn, when given the chance to speak with pastors about grief, I have received positive feedback and a hinted request for more in the form of “When are you going to write a book?” They have asked for more information or what resources they can use to be better prepared. There is a hunger, it seems to me, for good information that is accessible to them. This year alone, I have been invited to ten different churches and religious institutions to make a presentation on grief; pastors and lay members such as the elders who are responsible for providing pastoral care are generally the target audience. Pastors, new to their ministry as well as those who have been in their congregations for many years, seem equally desirous for material that will help them as they care for the bereaved in their congregations. Many seem to feel unprepared and unready to meet those needs. Through the course of my study, the awareness of this appetite led me to this project. In addition, the grief that dwells within the church and seeing the cresting wave that is preparing to break with the anticipated deaths of the Boomers called to me to recognize the necessity of teaching for the church to help them be prepared to care for their community and to act as agents of healing. Thus, I begin preparing Compassionate Presence Grief training.

My paper has been the work of describing this need as well as delivering the reasoning behind it. I have offered the trajectory of our human development and the natural course that it takes, much of which is not fully understood or utilized within the church, as the basis for this need. Through the work of John Bowlby we can see the foundational presence of our attachments. Ronnie Janoff-Bulman’s work on the assumptive world helps to recognize the devastating impact that a death or major loss can have upon a person’s suppositions that guide their daily living. Trust and faith can be
casualties of loss leaving the bereaved with the need to renegotiate and reframe their worldview from the context of that loss.

I have depicted the use of silence and lament as two of the chief healing aspects of our Christian faith. Through silence and lament the bereaved can enter into the pain of the loss. That entry is made possible by the availability of God in those two active behaviors. From this place of safety and shelter the bereaved person is able to confront the pain and begin the journey of grief. We have seen that healing is an experience of resurrection permeated with humility. The bereaved experience and receive a new life through a deeper encounter with God our Creator.

With the natural disposition toward these healing activities and faith that is the result of resurrection, the Church is primed to engage in the bereavement ministry of Jesus as a part of tikkun olam, healing the world. Here is an opportunity for the Church to answer the call to ministry. However, as noted, pastors are not equipped to understand grief, or to lead their congregations into ministry to the bereaved. To bring this ministry to fruition for the community, pastors and invested lay persons need training that is affordable in time and money. To provide Compassionate Presence Grief Training is my ultimate goal.

In the final analysis I would offer that the training is relevant, and I consider the pilot project a success. I believe the high quantitative scores given by the participants and their consistent attendance in the class point to the value of the experience for those involved. The clergy in attendance were very satisfied with the training, while delivering very constructive feedback. Informed laypersons now populate the congregations where they are able to be a healing presence with the bereaved. Both the awareness and the
knowledge which these individuals gained is a chief outcome to remember. This is a group of people who individually are more prepared to support and comfort the bereaved than they were before.

Two statements offered by Respondent A show the main thrust of being a compassionate presence. She wrote that what was most helpful is “Learning that grief does not go in the same order for everyone.”1 She added her gratitude for the class by “recognizing that not everything can be explained. Life remains a mystery.”2 The distinct personality of each individual’s grief and that life is a mystery is basic to the necessary attitude for being a compassionate presence, namely, humility.

Though I believe that this training was successful, I am aware of limitations and the need for improvements. I take two significant discoveries out of the experience and the evaluations. First there is a need to be more discerning when preparing the curriculum. There was too much information to give in such a short time frame and it was delivered too didactically. Too much material coupled with good strong questions and discussions led me to adjust the curriculum almost weekly because we had not managed to make it all the way through. I was asked by Respondent B, “Is this a high school-level course or a college-level course?” I had not considered a specific grade level as I put the training together. I only wanted it to be accessible to anyone. Upon reflection, it was too intensive. The amount of information raised it to a college-level course. It will be critical in a redesign to discern the information that should be in an eight-week course and to reduce the number of subjects presented. In its current state, the curriculum is too much.

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1 Class evaluation, March 3, 2019.

2 Ibid.
Material that should be deemphasized is the history of grief, the assumptive world, and Personal Death Awareness. According to the feedback from the evaluations, the lowest rated subjects were trauma, prolonged grief, and non-death loss. I would agree with de-emphasizing prolonged grief and less time should be spent on trauma. However, considering the amount of non-death loss that people cope with, its prevalence in our daily living, I believe it is important to include. I would suggest that some of the subject matter did not need the depth which it received. More of that material could be offered as handouts or other references for those who are intrigued and seek more knowledge, thus opening up time for the caring strategies that students sought.

I also discovered that the quantity of material left us short on time to participate in the experiential nature of grief and compassionate presence. If the church is going to become a compassionate community and an agent for healing, it needs more practice in being available to offer that healing. There is natural religious wisdom in silence and learning to listen. But to learn to be silent and to listen takes practice. The course would have been stronger if more time were arranged to practice these and the other arts in the safe confines of the training situation. That comment came up on the evaluations more than once. Respondent A answered the question, “Do you feel prepared to support the bereaved?” by adding a comment, “As much as one can be.” Respondent C answered that she wanted to know more about “How to be supportive to someone experiencing profound life change due to the death of a loved one.” This was echoed by Respondent

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3 These subjects should still be addressed as a way of creating boundaries for the caregivers to recognize as they serve the bereaved. The boundaries of complicated grief and trauma need to be respected by those not fully trained so they can provide referrals for the delicate soul work these involve.

4 Class evaluation, March 8, 2019.

5 Class evaluation, April 4, 2019.
D who said she needed “More supportive strategies [like] how to deal with [a] grieving person’s extreme emotions.” The experiential nature of the opening exercises and the homework were included to be part of the practice element of the training. However, they were not experienced as such. Each opening and closing exercise should be introduced as a doorway into not only the caregiver’s spiritual growth but also as a way to connect with and support the bereaved.

The final limitation with Compassionate Grief Presence training is that the single evaluation used is not enough to comfortably provide assessment. A later evaluation beyond the immediate one is necessary. A follow-up would have pinpointed what section was most useful by measuring how much was retained. It would be helpful to know what knowledge about grief they were using and what comforting strategies they were most comfortable with and therefore using. I would be very interested to know what ways of comforting others they had discovered since the training. This would help them to further learn about the arts of supporting the bereaved. Caring for the bereaved is to learn to pack your bags lightly. As you journey with them and finding or creating supportive habits along the way is growing in this ministry.

Of equal importance would be to learn what they considered as tangential to their lived experience, making it easier to extract the extraneous material. A check-in at six months would have given ample time for some of the attendees to practice compassionate presence in the congregation and in their own lives. It would have revealed how much was actualized by the students and put into practice. A gathering of the participants at the

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6 Class evaluation, March 5, 2019.
six-month benchmark would have provided a forum for them to share their feedback and would have provided significant data to further refine the training.

I sat with four lay persons and their pastor recently. They were caring persons who were in ministry for their congregation. Each person headed a different ministry such as a compassion care and bereavement support ministry. Their pastor, Dan, whom I had met through the Fuller Doctor of Ministry program, had asked me to spend about an hour and a half with them as an introduction to grief. It was a conversation between us as they wondered about specific losses and ways to best comfort those bereaved persons. I lightly touched on many of the subjects that are a part of Compassionate Presence Grief training. It was an abbreviated version of the training, the full sixteen hours compressed into two. As we ended our time together we discussed the work of reframing a loss and the need to walk with the bereaved as they discover the pathway of healing that leads toward God.

Preparing to leave, Sister Maria spoke of how much she appreciated the time together. She was joyful for the confirmation she received about what she was doing and how she was feeling led in her ministry now. She reflected on the death of her parents. In particular the struggle her father had of adapting after sixty years of marriage. “…I could only imagine losing [sic] a spouse had to be similar to losing [sic] a limb. A major identity change at the age of eighty-seven had taken place! My dad was now forced to re-learn every activity he once performed for the last sixty years of his life with very little thought if any thought at all.” Then she added, “In September of 2011 my father died as a result of a broken heart caused by grief. It did not take me long to realize that I was

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parentless at the age of fifty-one. No longer would I receive the unconditional love of a
parent. Then the Lord spoke into my spirit saying, ‘I Am a Father to the fatherless.’ That
is just what you said. I’m so thankful for today.”

In this brief setting, Sister Maria had discovered and learned consciously what she
and her father had gone through “with very little thought.” During this time her discovery
had blanketed her with a peace that she now could trust. The death of her parents had
emptied her and into that emptiness God poured love into her heart (Rom 5:5). As she
begins her new ministry with the church, now the seed of love and compassion that was
planted in her life upon the death of her parents is preparing to be a harvest – maybe a
hundred fold, maybe sixty, maybe thirty. Being touched by the healing that is the process
of grieving and coming to recognize it brings healing to the wider world. I believe that
the Spirit is calling the Church to be a place of compassionate presence.

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8 Ibid.
APPENDIX 1

Evaluation Questions

Do so anonymously if you would be more comfortable doing so.

On a scale of 1-5.  1 = not helpful  5 = very helpful.

**Overall structure of the training**

There were eight sessions. Was this:

- The right number? _____  Too many? _____  Too few? _____
- If you felt there were too many or not enough, how many would you suggest? _____

Comments

The class was two hours in length. Was this:

- The right length? _____  Too long? _____  Too short? _____
- If you felt it was too long or not long enough, how long would you suggest? _____

Comments
The class was designed with an opening, review of the previous session and overview for the night’s class. This was followed by presentation of the night’s topics divided with a break before ending with some homework and a closing.

Did you find this structure helpful and conducive to learning? 1 2 3 4 5

Comments

Did you find the:
  opening exercises helpful?  1 2 3 4 5
  closing exercises?        1 2 3 4 5
  homework?                1 2 3 4 5

Did you feel comfortable to ask questions?  1 2 3 4 5
Did the instructor invite discussion?      1 2 3 4 5
Where the handouts helpful?               1 2 3 4 5

Comments

Was the instructor:
  open to questions?          1 2 3 4 5
  knowledgeable?             1 2 3 4 5
  able to deliver the information in a clear and understandable way?
                                   1 2 3 4 5

Comments
Subjects covered
Please rate the subject/topic covered on a scale of 1-5. 1 = not helpful 5 = very helpful.

Creating Community 1 2 3 4 5
Attachment Theory 1 2 3 4 5
Continuing Bonds 1 2 3 4 5
Assumptive World 1 2 3 4 5
Normal Grief Expressions 1 2 3 4 5
Grief in Children 1 2 3 4 5
Types of Death (NASH) 1 2 3 4 5
Mediators of Mourning 1 2 3 4 5
Cultural Awareness 1 2 3 4 5
Trauma 1 2 3 4 5
Prolonged Grief 1 2 3 4 5
Non-death Loss 1 2 3 4 5
Contemporary Grief Models 1 2 3 4 5
Styles of Grieving 1 2 3 4 5
Supportive Strategies 1 2 3 4 5
Theology of Death 1 2 3 4 5
Personal Death Awareness 1 2 3 4 5
Self Care 1 2 3 4 5

Did the order of the subjects presented make sense? 1 2 3 4 5
Were the subjects helpful and informative? 1 2 3 4 5
Were the concepts well explained? 1 2 3 4 5

What was most helpful to you?
What was least helpful?
What could have been explained more thoroughly?
What was not covered that you wished had been?
What do you wish to know more about?

Can you use this information to support the bereaved? 1 2 3 4 5

Do you feel prepared to support the bereaved? 1 2 3 4 5
If not, what do you feel you lack or would help you to be prepared?

Would you recommend this training to others? 1 2 3 4 5

What would have made the class better?

Comments

Publicity
Did the publicity give you an accurate understanding of the training?
Was it fairly priced?  Yes______  No______  
If no, how much would you suggest?______________

Comments

Facilities

Was the room setup conducive to learning?  1  2  3  4  5

Was the hospitality welcoming and conducive to learning?
(rest room, snacks, accessibility temperature)?  1  2  3  4  5

Comments

Anything else that you wish to suggest or add?

Comments

Date: ____________________

Name (Optional): ____________________________________________
Grief Support Series
Thursday Evenings at First Presbyterian Church (8 weeks)
January 10th – February 28th
7 – 9 p.m.
Group size: 8-12 maximum
Registration: $100 (scholarships are available)

Galen Goben, a Certified Thanatologist, is the Grief Support Director for Forest Lawn in Southern California. He is responsible for providing grief education and services to the community and to the grieving families served by Forest Lawn. Galen is an ordained Disciple of Christ minister who served as a parish minister for 15 years. He is currently attending Fuller Theological Seminary studying for his Doctorate of Ministry in Thanatology. Galen is married to the Rev. Louise Sloan Goben, and they have three boys, Chris, Jeff, and Neill.
APPENDIX 3

The “Compassionate Presence Grief Training” is a pilot project designed to make contemporary grief education available to clergy and invested lay persons in Christian Churches for the purpose of creating agents for healing among their local congregation. This project is for the completion of the Doctor of Ministry degree from Fuller Theological Seminary.

This eight-week course will provide participants with an understanding of the grief experience and expose them to supportive activities and gestures to be a comforting presence with the bereaved. Participants will also gain experience through participating in self-care activities.

Participation is voluntary and signee can opt out of the training at any point. A certificate of Completion will be granted at the end of the training to all those who attend 80% of the class.

All interactions and discussions within the training are confidential in nature and signee agrees to maintain that covenant with the other participants.

Results and evaluations from this project will be shared with Fuller Theological Seminary and the Executive Council of Forest Lawn as written in the final Doctor of Ministry project. All personally identifying material will be changed to protect the anonymity of all persons in the class.

Galen Goben
D. Min. Candidate
Fuller Theological Seminary

I, ____________________________, have read and understood the above agreement.
(Print Name)

______________________________    ____________________________
Name                      Date
Bibliography for Further Exploration


Hill, Sarah. “DMIN Talk Main Points and Notes.” Guest lecture, Trauma and Faith, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, September 18, 2018.


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