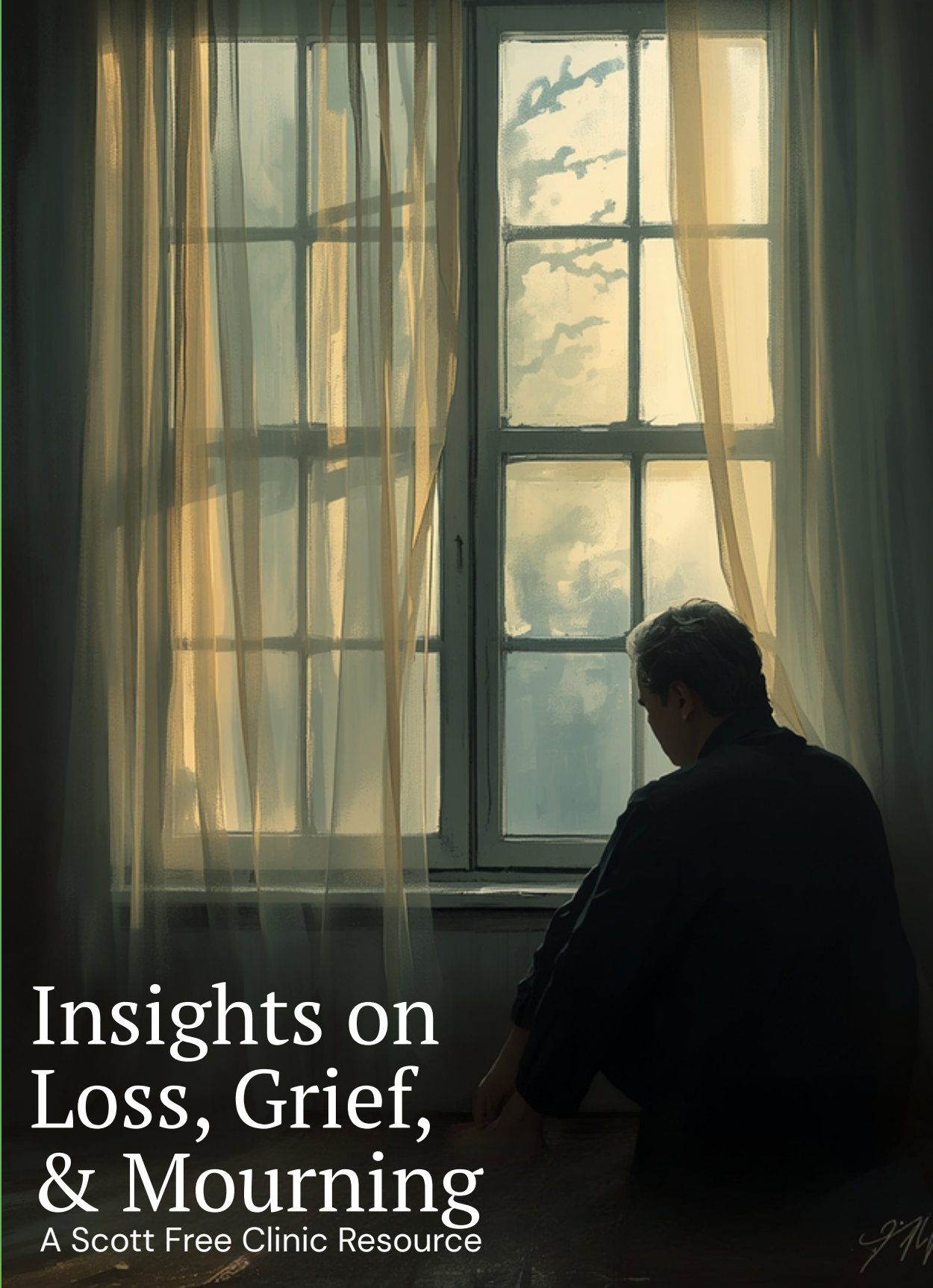


A person is seen from behind, sitting on a windowsill and looking out a large, multi-paned window. The window is covered with sheer, light-colored curtains that are slightly parted, allowing bright, warm light to stream in. Outside the window, a cloudy sky is visible. The person is wearing a dark jacket. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

Insights on Loss, Grief, & Mourning

A Scott Free Clinic Resource

J. M.

Insight ...

“Grief reflects attachment, love, and meaning, and it surfaces when something deeply valued is taken away.

Grief also has the capacity to transform. Human beings are created with the ability to endure adversity and grow through suffering. This growth does not occur by bypassing grief but by allowing it to be experienced honestly. Grief slows people down and invites reflection. It creates space to examine what has been lost and what that loss reveals about love and value.

Emotions associated with grief are often misunderstood or avoided. Yet emotions are signals that provide important information about internal states. Grief emotions indicate the depth of attachment and the significance of loss. Avoiding them may delay healing and increase stress.”

— Kevin Ellers, D.Min.
“*The Grieving Brain: Understanding Loss and Healing Pathways*” - Light University



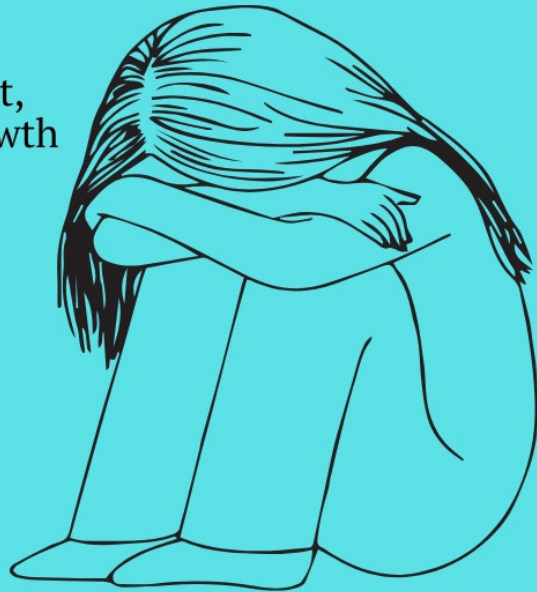
Insight ...

“Loss confronts individuals with the reality of mortality. Reflecting on death has long been recognized as a catalyst for wisdom and spiritual growth. When people acknowledge the finiteness of life, priorities shift and values clarify. While the awareness can feel unsettling, it also deepens perspective and appreciation for what matters most.

As individuals move through adulthood, experiences of loss often accumulate. The death of loved ones, peers, and community members reshapes one’s inner world. These cumulative losses alter identity and worldview, even from even when the changes are subtle or resisted. Grief does not simply remove something from life, it reshapes how life is understood.

When people allow themselves to engage grief rather than suppress it, growth becomes possible. This growth does not negate pain but allows sorrow and meaning to coexist.”

— Kevin Ellers, D.Min.
“*The Grieving Brain: Understanding Loss and Healing Pathways*” - Light University



The myth about “five stages of grief”

The “five stages of grief” — denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance — are widely treated as a universal roadmap for loss, but this framework is a complete misconstruction of the original research. These concepts were introduced in the 1969 book *On Death and Dying* by a Swiss-American psychiatrist named Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. Kübler-Ross was not writing a guide for how the general public should move through the loss of a loved one; she was a researcher documenting her direct, one-on-one interviews with terminally ill patients at a hospital in Chicago. She was acting as a recorder of the raw, often erratic human experience of facing one's own impending death, not as an architect creating a standardized, step-by-step recovery model.

The massive distortion of her work occurred when outside editors, educators, and the media stripped the nuance from her clinical observations and promoted them as a rigid set of stages. This transformed a study of individual, internal experience into a sequential rulebook for the bereaved. The myth of the “stage model” implies a linear progression: a starting point, a middle, and a finish line at “acceptance.” This sequential framing is the complete opposite of Kübler-Ross's actual findings. She argued consistently that these emotional states are not a ladder to be climbed. In her 1974 follow-up, *Questions and Answers on Death and Dying*, she explicitly attempted to correct this institutional and public error by explaining that individuals do not move from one emotion to the next in a clean line. A person can feel multiple emotions simultaneously, they can shift back and forth in an unpredictable cycle, or they can skip any of these states entirely.

The weight of this misconception has forced countless people into a false sense of failure. Because the “stage” theory was popularized as a universal requirement, people suffering from a loss often believe they are “stuck” or doing something wrong if they do not experience their pain in the specific, orderly fashion the myth dictates. Kübler-Ross deeply regretted that her observations were used to create this rigid, destructive expectation. She believed that grief is an intensely personal, chaotic, and non-linear experience that cannot be fit into a box. Her true message was that all of these emotions are valid and none of them should be judged, timed, or forced into a predetermined structure. The entire concept of a “stage” theory of grief is a fabrication that Kübler-Ross never authored and spent significant time during the later portion of her career explicitly rejecting.

Insight ...

“Grief can be understood through four interconnected dimensions. The first is loss, which identifies what has been taken away. The second is grief, the internal emotional and psychological response to loss. The third is grieving, the active process of expressing and responding to grief. The fourth is growth, the transformation that may emerge over time.

These dimensions do not occur in a fixed sequence. Individuals move back and forth among them, often revisiting earlier dimensions as new layers of meaning emerge. This framework provides orientation without imposing rigid timelines or stages.”

— Kevin Ellers, D.Min.

“The Grieving Brain: Understanding Loss and Healing Pathways” - Light University



SCOTT **FREE** CLINIC
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“Grief can be understood through four interconnected dimensions ...”

- Kevin Ellers, D.Min.



The tasks of mourning

It is natural — and beneficial! — to mourn.

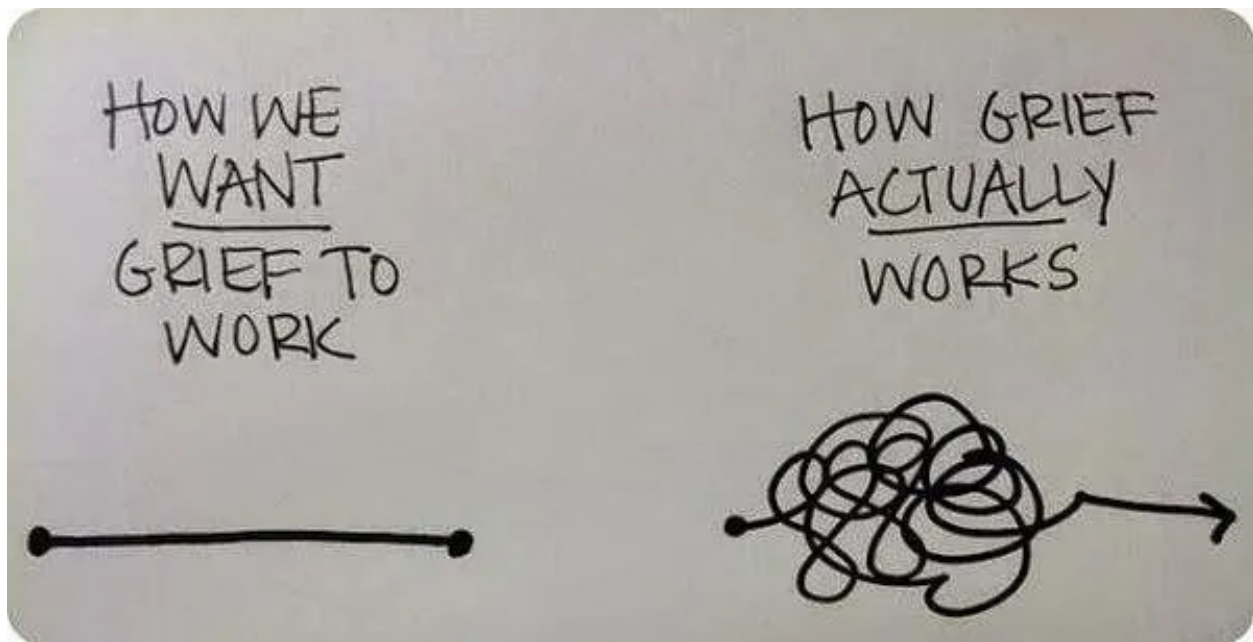
A minister once told the story of a young woman in his church who asked him to talk to her grandfather.

“He’s been so down and irritable lately,” she said.

The preacher asked, “Is there anything that you can point to that would contribute to his emotional condition?”

“Well, Grandma died,” she said, “but that was six weeks ago. You’d think he’d be over it by now. He’s making us all depressed!”

She didn’t understand the grief process! Her approach to mourning was more like this:



Many people are familiar with what are commonly taught as “stages” to grieving — denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance — but many people also don’t relate well to this theory because their own experience has been very different.

It might be helpful if, instead of thinking there are certain “stages” we need to move through when grieving, it might be more beneficial to gain some insight into the

“tasks” of mourning. Our mourning actually has a purpose greater than being a time of great personal pain. In his book, *“Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy,”* William Worden identifies four specific and important tasks for our mourning to accomplish:

1. To accept the reality of the loss. When faced with a death, especially in the case of a sudden or unexpected loss, it feels unreal. And it can impact us on many levels. For example, we might rationally accept the fact a loved one is no longer with us, but deep down, emotionally, we don’t. Accepting the new reality is an important foundation for healing. Psychologist Rochelle Perper notes:

“To many, ‘acceptance’ often implies agreement or approval. To others, ‘acceptance’ may imply severing ties to the past. Acceptance doesn’t have to mean any of this. Rather, in the case of losing a loved one, acceptance may simply mark the moment we are ready to begin our journey of healing. Engaging in rituals such as funerals or writing a letter to the person who has died, or talking to a therapist or a close friend or family member are helpful ways to start to come to terms with the reality of the situation.”

2. To work through the pain of grief. Loss is painful but the only prescription for that pain is to work through the experience of mourning in order to get to the other side of it. Grief naturally is accompanied by a wide range of intense emotions such as sadness, longing, emptiness, loneliness, anger, numbness, anxiety, and confusion. Dr. Perper adds:

“The grieving process can cause complete exhaustion, sore muscles, loss of appetite, and difficulty focusing and making decisions. It is important that you are patient with yourself and allow all of these feelings to wash over you in order to process them. It is during this time especially that we need to focus on good self-care such as eating well, incorporating physical activity into your routine, sleeping and spending time with others who you feel comfortable with.”

3. To adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing. After a loss, we have to adjust to our “new realities” of life without our loved one. This task requires adjusting externally to the world, but also internally, to new emotional and spiritual needs.

The types of adjustments also vary depending on our relationship with our loved one. For example, someone who has lost a spouse will have extra responsibilities as a caregiver around the house. This requires external adjustments. But a recent widow or widower will also have to adjust to the concept of living alone or doing things by themselves. This requires emotional adjustments.

These adjustments are not easy and will take time. But working on this task helps us to better understand our new role in the world, as well as help us realize the impact that the loss has created in our lives.

4. To find an enduring connection with the deceased while embarking on a new life. This task includes finding an appropriate, ongoing connection in our emotional lives with the person who has died, while allowing us to continue living. Like the other tasks, this can mean varying things to each one of us. But, it often means allowing for thoughts and memories, while simultaneously engaging in the activities that are meaningful to us and that bring us enjoyment in living. This may even include new activities, people, or new relationships.

For Worden, not accomplishing this task is to not live. It is important to remember that life did not stop when the person died, and that it is important for us to continue to live our lives with a sense of purpose and meaning.

Worden's Four Tasks of Mourning

To accept the
reality of the
loss.

TASK
#1



TASK
#2

To process the
pain of the grief.

To adjust to a
world without
the deceased.

TASK
#3



TASK
#4

To find an
enduring
connection with
the deceased
while embarking
on a new life.

Reference:
Worden, W. (2009). Grief
Counselling and Grief
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Practitioner. New York,
USA: Springer Publishing
Company.

habits for
wellbeing™

Insight ...

“Grief is experienced not only emotionally but physically. The body carries loss through fatigue, tension, illness, and somatic distress. Suppressed grief often manifests in physical symptoms, as the body expresses what words avoid.

Neuroscience confirms that grief affects the brain, nervous system, and physiological regulation. Healing requires attending to bodily experience rather than focusing solely on thoughts and emotions. Recognizing grief as a whole-body experience reduces shame and encourages holistic care.”

— Kevin Ellers, D.Min.
“*The Grieving Brain: Understanding Loss and Healing Pathways*” - Light University



UNDERSTANDING “GRIEF BRAIN”

COGNITIVE DISRUPTIONS

Grief commonly disrupts cognitive functioning.

Common experiences include:



- Memory lapses



- Difficulty concentrating



- Confusion



- Mental fog

These are normal responses to overwhelming emotional stress.

Neurological strain rather than personal failure.

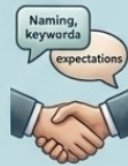
PATHWAYS TO HEALING & ADJUSTMENT



Normalizing grief brain reduces self-criticism and anxiety.



With time, support, and regulation, cognitive functioning typically improves.



Naming these changes allows individuals to adjust expectations and communicate needs more clearly.

Kevin Ellers, D.Min., “The Grieving Brain: Understanding Loss and Healing Pathways”
- Light University



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LET'S CHANGE YOUR LIFE!

A critical step in the process of grieving ...

If there was something I wish I had a magical power over, it would grief.

Grieving the loss of someone we love is one of life's most painful experiences. While in times of grief, it feels like our hearts will burst and that we cannot endure such a seemingly overwhelming plight to our minds and hearts; we often feel like we cannot survive the impact.

The hard fact is that there isn't a magical power that can remove the difficulty of grief, it's something we must make our way through to get to the other side of it. Some try to avoid the pain by trying to dodge grief altogether, but that isn't possible, as pastor Bill Hybels illustrates:

"Fifty years ago industrialists thought they could just bury toxic waste and it would go away. We have since learned it doesn't just go away. It makes trouble. It leaks into the water table, contaminates crops, and kills animals. Buried grief does the same thing. Raw time doesn't heal a thing. Buried pain leaks into our emotional system and wreaks havoc there. It distorts our perceptions of life, and it taints our relationships. That contamination happens subconsciously."

Grieving is a natural, *healthy* response to the loss of someone we love. But key to entering into a healthy process of grief is making a critical transition from ***trauma*** to ***grieving***.

I often explain trauma as that experience of when the seemingly unthinkable suddenly becomes our reality.

There are many possibilities in living life that we do not, or will not, allow to enter into the realm of possibility in our minds. For example, entering onto a freeway at 55 to 70 miles an hour is actually a very dangerous thing to do, but we do it day after day without thinking about how perilous to our lives such activity could possibly be. In our minds, we keep outside of the realm of possibility how something could go wrong from such activity, otherwise we could become paralyzed with fear and unable to function as we need to.

But, when we get a call that a loved one was in an accident — the unthinkable has punctured its way into becoming our reality — it is a *trauma* that strikes our being.

Trauma isn't limited to just those sudden experiences. We may have loved ones who

experience long battles with illness; even though we may have a protracted period of time to process into our thinking that their loss is eminent, it can still be a traumatic experience when their loss finally occurs.

When someone is traumatized by either the memory or manner in which someone died, it is critical for them to de-traumatize from those memories or thoughts so they can feel free to grieve properly. Psychotherapist Mark Tyrrell likens being traumatized by loss as focusing on the last punctuation mark in a story:

“I often reassure people through analogy, by talking about how the final punctuation mark at the end of the story isn’t the book itself – it’s just the way it ends, and how you have all those different chapters full of events, adventures, and maybe illustrations. They are the real book, not that last punctuation mark. And when we think of a book, we take it as a whole, not just its final bit.”

Moving beyond the initial blow of *trauma* into *grieving* doesn’t make life easy, you’re just beginning the grieving process. But you cannot really begin a healthy grieving process until you transition from the experience of the initial trauma to grieving the life of the lost loved one. Moving beyond the initial trauma finally frees us to grieve — and celebrate! — the whole story that comprised the life of the one who is gone. Henry Simon tells a story of how we miss out on celebrating the life of our lost loved one when we remain stuck in our trauma:

“The home of Paul Laurence Dunbar, noted poet, is open to the public in Dayton, Ohio. When Dunbar died, his mother left his room exactly as it was on the day of his death. At the desk of this brilliant man was his final poem, handwritten on a pad. After his mother died, her friends discovered that Paul Laurence Dunbar’s last poem had been lost forever. Because his mother had made his room into a shrine and not moved anything, the sun had bleached the ink in which the poem was written until it was invisible. The poem was gone.”

If we stay in our trauma, we lose so much of the life that can be remembered with appreciation and celebration.

Let me urge you that, if you’re struggling with being able to make that transition from trauma to grieving, to get the help of a skilled, competent Christian counselor.

Insight ...

“Grief is not a problem to be solved. There is no technique or intervention that removes loss. Attempts to fix grief often arise from discomfort with pain rather than genuine care. These efforts can unintentionally silence or minimize the grieving process.

What grief requires is presence. Healing begins when grief is witnessed, acknowledged, and held within relationship. Presence does not eliminate sorrow, but it allows grief to move and integrate. Attempts to hurry grief or provide premature reassurance often increase isolation rather than comfort. Supporting grief means resisting the urge to correct or explain away pain. Grief unfolds at its own pace and must be honored rather than managed.”

— Kevin Ellers, D.Min.
“*The Grieving Brain: Understanding Loss and Healing Pathways*” - Light University



HEAD GRIEVERS AND HEART GRIEVERS

HEART GRIEVERS



EXPRESS GRIEF THROUGH EMOTION

- Cry and talk openly
- Express sadness outwardly
- Grief is visible to others
- Sharing feelings and being seen are key to processing.

HEAD GRIEVERS



PROCESS GRIEF COGNITIVELY

- Think deeply and reflect internally
- Ask questions about meaning
- Work through grief quietly
- Emotional experience is real but may not be outwardly expressed.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

NEITHER STYLE IS BETTER OR HEALTHIER

INDIVIDUALITY IS ESSENTIAL; AVOID JUDGMENT AND COMPARISON.

Based on content by Kevin Ellers, D.Min.,
"The Grieving Brain..." - Light University.

Coping with grief ...

To lose someone out of your life that you love dearly can be life-shattering, and the grief that follows can be some of the deepest pain you'll ever experience.

Initially, life doesn't go on the same when we lose someone. Most of us do not react to loss like the story of one woman as told in *"Today in the Word"*:

"Edith Rockefeller McCormick, the daughter of John D. Rockefeller, maintained a large household staff. She applied one rule to every servant without exception: They were not permitted to speak to her. The rule was broken only once, when word arrived at the family's country retreat that their young son had died of scarlet fever. The McCormicks were hosting a dinner party, but following a discussion in the servants' quarters it was decided that Mrs. McCormick needed to know right away. When the tragic news was whispered to her, she merely nodded her head and the party continued without interruption."

When we lose someone we love, life's party doesn't continue without interruption. Quite the contrary, the grief that follows can be such an interruption to our lives that it is important to find a way to cope through the initial pain of separation. There are some practical things you can do to help you cope as you grieve the loss of a loved one:

- 1. Feel what you feel.** Sadness and sorrow are normal, healthy, and appropriate responses to loss. Allow yourself to feel and express your emotions.
- 2. Express yourself.** Talking to a family member, friend, pastor, or trusted counselor can help soothe painful emotions.
- 3. Maintain your routine as much as possible.** There may be a temptation to crawl into bed and just stay there. That is fodder for diving deeply into depression, which can be dangerous for you. While it may be helpful, almost necessary, to slow down, rest, or take a break from non-essentials for a while, try to maintain as normal a routine as possible. Whether it's going for a daily walk, doing some weekly gardening, or other basic activities that make up a regular schedule, try to maintain your "normal" routine as much as possible.
- 4. Maintain a healthy sleep pattern.** When grieving, we may have the temptation to want to sleep too much (avoidance), or struggle with being able to sleep. To keep

yourself on balance, it is important to do everything you can to maintain a healthy sleep pattern. Loss of sleep can directly affect your rational thinking and emotions and further drain your already depleted energy, and too much sleep can be a negative attempt to avoid your new reality.

5. Eat healthy and exercise. Grieving strongly impacts us physically. To avoid being physically overwhelmed by your loss, it is vital that you not indulge in junk food meals, but instead, eat healthy and make sure you're exercising several days each week. Physical activity and exercise will directly help alleviate feelings of anxiety and stress over your loss, will boost your energy level, and will help you think more clearly.

6. Avoid the temptation to “numb the pain.” Some people turn to alcohol and other things in an attempt to dull the pain of their loss. But once the temporary effects of such things wear off, you can find yourself in the depths of despair. While it can be painful to face the truth of your loss, working through the pain is the way to eventually overcome it.

7. Lean on God. Let God embrace you, He cares and desires to comfort you! *“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed,”* Psalm 34:18. Cry out to God in prayer and draw close to Him, He will strengthen and uphold you while gradually leading you to recovery.

8. Don't hesitate to see a counselor. A skilled Christian counselor can help you through the jumble of thoughts and emotions as you respond to loss.

Time doesn't have any healing power, but it's important to know that grieving takes time, and the process is different for every person. Some process their grief more quickly and rationally than others; some battle an onslaught of emotions, anxiety, and depression. But it's critical to trust God to lead you through grieving to a new day. Scott Roberts tells a story that illustrates this very point ...

The trip was unplanned. I had received a phone call from a close friend telling me his 15-year-old daughter was about to die. In a few short hours, my family and I were on the road for a grueling 24 continuous hours of driving in order to be with my friend and his family.

While driving and praying and crying I looked out my window somewhere in southern Washington and saw the train tracks near the river in the valley below. On the tracks sat rusty old boxcars, one after another, when suddenly, a series of cars brightened up that morning sky. They had been hit by graffiti artists, but instead of

the normal tagging so common in the inner city, these were truly works of art. Each car was decorated with beautiful colors. Each car stepped off the tracks and opened up a new world of possibility and color. At that moment, I remember being struck by the raw beauty painted upon the rusty shells of the old cars.

Death, loss, grief and such are like that. For the longest time they seem just that – dreary and blah. They take their toll on our souls and rightly so. But then, God is able to shine into the darkness and paint new pictures over our pain, over our suffering, over our crying and tears, and he uses that new scene to comfort others who are coming into their own dark places.

We comfort with the comfort we ourselves have received. Does the pain disappear? No, the rusty veneer is still beneath. But does hope grant us a new vantage point from which to see and serve? Certainly. This is the wonder of the gospel. Death is swallowed up in victory and light triumphs over darkness.

“He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us,” 2 Corinthians 1:4.

As you face loss and experience grief, be patient with yourself, and take care of yourself.

Insight ...

“Walking alongside someone in grief requires humility. No one can fully understand another person’s loss or dictate how it should be processed. Each experience of grief is shaped by personality, history, relationships, and meaning.

Effective grief companionship prioritizes listening over advising. Silence is often more supportive than speech. Asking open questions and allowing space for story creates safety for grief to emerge. Growth occurs through exploration rather than instruction.

Listening deeply communicates respect for the uniqueness of another’s experience and creates room for insight and healing.”

— Kevin Ellers, D.Min.
“*The Grieving Brain: Understanding Loss and Healing Pathways*” - Light University



SCOTT **FREE** CLINIC
LET'S CHANGE YOUR LIFE!

Strategies for facing a new season of life ...

The alarm almost seems to ring differently today. Maybe it's the unsettling silence of an empty nest, the terrifying rush of a new career, the sobering reality of a health diagnosis, or the crushing quiet following a profound loss. We all face changing seasons in life — some we crave, others we dread. They challenge the very bedrock of our routine, our comfort, and the external life structures we have become accustomed to rely on

You are not alone in feeling the swirl of emotions that comes with the territory of a new season. It's easy to feel lost, anxious, or completely overwhelmed when a familiar way of life is disrupted. But an important reality about changing seasons of life is this: You don't have to simply endure them; you can become stronger because of them.

THE NECESSITY OF FEELING

Our first instinct when faced with a new season is often to fight the feeling. We try to suppress the complex emotions — the grief, the fear, the confusion, etc. — as if holding them down will make them disappear. Yet, years of psychological research confirm this approach is futile and harmful, increasing your stress load and impairing your decision-making. The true path to stability starts with **acknowledging the loss**. This is the difficult, intentional decision to face the loss and accept the messy reality of the transition and the emotional weight of what is truly gone.

The next step is **emotional processing**: the mindful choice to engage with and integrate the resulting feelings of change. This process involves identifying, labeling, and examining the emotions (such as grief, fear, anger, etc.) that arose from the loss, thereby reducing their power over your current actions. Dr. James Pennebaker's work, for instance, showed that trauma survivors who simply wrote about their losses or illness experienced lower stress and better immune function. Think of it not as dwelling, but as clearing a blockage so your brain can integrate the new reality. Patients with chronic illness who gradually processed their grief, instead of avoiding it, showed lower depression and quicker functional recovery.

Once emotions are acknowledged, the challenge shifts to **meaning-making**. You are searching for purpose within the pain. True strength is found in reframing the experience. Consider the survivors of natural disasters who participated in reflective programs; they didn't just cope, they displayed measurable long-term post-traumatic *growth*. They didn't deny the hardship, but interpreted the adversity as an opportunity to build a stronger life. This is the difference between being crushed by the change and using it as a forge.

BUILDING YOUR LIFELINE

To maintain your stability during a change of seasons, you need tangible support. Your

most powerful defense against stress is your **social support**. The *Harvard Study of Adult Development* proved that close relationships predicted successful adaptation during life changes. For instance, widows who maintained strong social ties recovered faster and had fewer depressive symptoms, proving your connections are not a luxury, but important to your survival.

Equally important is **structured routines with flexibility**. When your external life is unpredictable, the predictable rhythm of daily habits — like set sleep times or exercise — preserves your neurological stability. Adults facing sudden unemployment who kept these regular daily habits showed lower stress and made better decisions. This stability frees you to **recalibrate your goals**. You can't cling to a past that no longer exists. Retirees, for example, who shifted their energy to volunteering or mentoring maintained their satisfaction because they actively redirected ways of making meaningful contributions. Finally, focus your energy on **controllable actions**. When external forces seem overwhelming, act on what you can influence. Job-seekers who prioritized retraining and networking rather than worrying about the economy reentered employment faster and experienced significantly less stress.

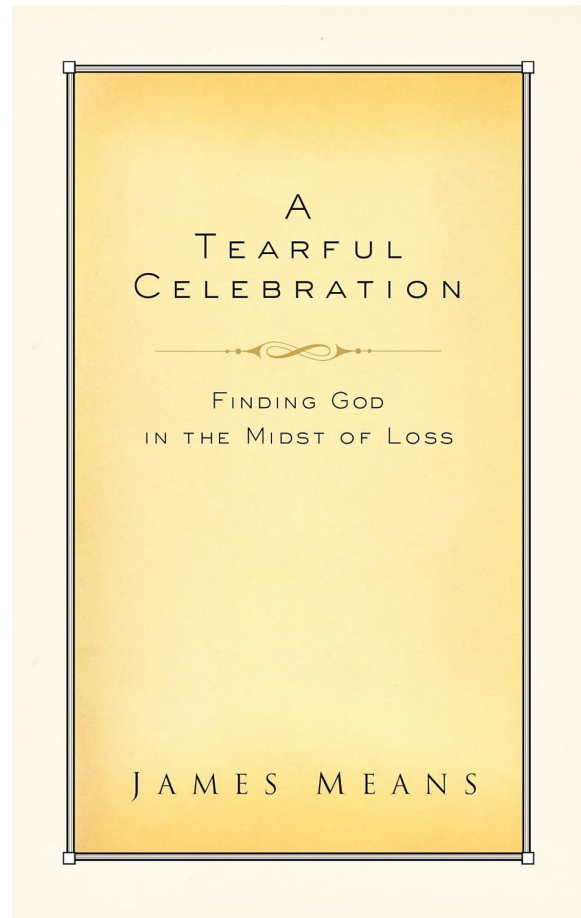
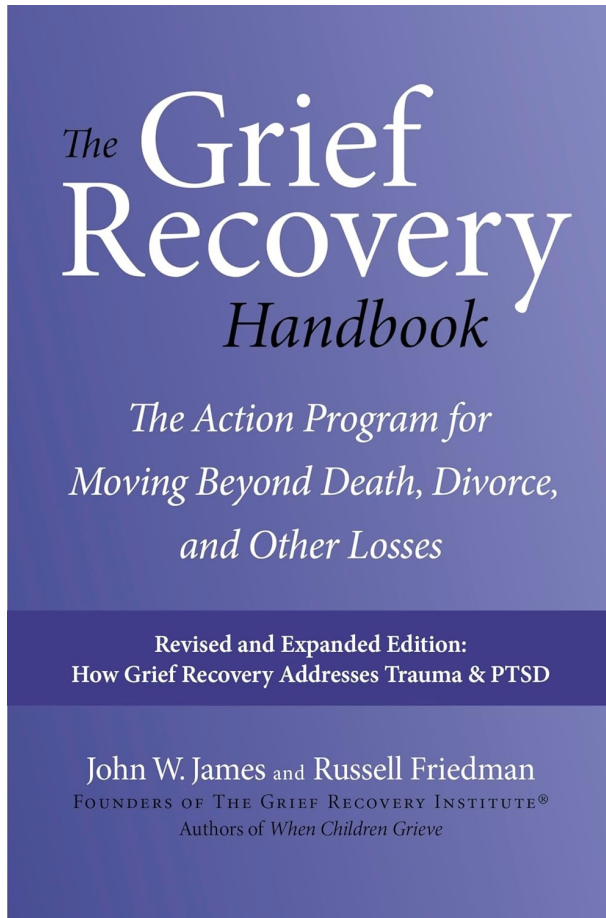
THE CONSTANT OF FAITH

For those grounded in Christianity, faith is the unshakable anchor when all earthly structures fail. It is the fundamental certainty that provides hope and confidence, precisely because our security is rooted in Christ, not in the passing seasons. This faith encourages **reflective practices** — prayer, meditation, and quiet study — which are proven to reduce stress and sharpen your decision-making. Think of Corrie ten Boom's testimony of finding strength and purpose in Scripture and prayer while enduring the profound suffering of a concentration camp; her devotion is a powerful, verifiable testament that an inner world, fortified by faith, withstands external chaos when the world offers no comfort.

This spiritual discipline, by grounding us in a larger purpose and constant hope, naturally provides enduring stability. You don't have to conquer the challenge today. Focus on facing manageable stressors gradually. Patients recovering from a major illness, for instance, who engaged in small, controlled challenges improved their cognitive flexibility. This slow, deliberate process strengthens you for the next turn in the road.

The final insight found in every new season is the understanding that you are not powerless; your ability to choose peace and progress is always greater than the circumstances you face.

Additional Reading Resources



For additional reading, you can find *The Grief Recovery Handbook* on Amazon by clicking this link <https://tinyurl.com/yk7rlhk> and you can find *A Tearful Celebration* on Amazon by clicking this link <https://tinyurl.com/2a55z3xt>.