A person is seen from the side, looking out over a vast, hazy mountain valley. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow that fills the sky and the distant mountains. The person is in the foreground, their silhouette partially visible against the bright light. The valley below is filled with rolling hills and mountains, their details softened by the distance and the light.

A RESOURCE OF CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLY

Through the Valley

A 7 Day Devotional for Coping with the Loss of a Loved One

Even if I walk through a very dark valley,
I will not be afraid,
because you are with me.
Your rod and your shepherd's staff comfort me.

Psalms 23:4 (NCV)

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Introduction

The following is a guide for processing the death of someone you love. If you have lost a loved one, we want you to know that God is with you in the process, and, although it can be messy, He will see you through it!

Each day, this guide identifies a different aspect of the grieving process along with actions you can take to help you move through that process. While several activities are suggested and facilitated in this guide, writing is a key component each day. You might find writing to be an easy exercise, or you might find it to be difficult. The writing exercises can be as simple as you like. You are not writing for others to read. Do not worry about what or how you write out your thoughts. Allow yourself freedom to write as much or as little as you want.

Selections from scripture, and examples of prayers are also provided as ways to invite the Holy Spirit to be your constant companion as you move through the grieving process. Feel free to make the written prayers your own. You might read them to the Lord. You might want to use your own words. The examples of prayer are provided to help you when help is needed.

Grief has no timeline and should not be rushed. It is very likely that your grief will last far beyond seven days. Use this guide at your own pace. Completing the guide in seven days will give you some training for how to recognize and respond to various aspects of grief as you continue to process your loss in the days, weeks, months, and even years to come. If you find that it is difficult to complete this guide in seven days, then give yourself freedom to slow down. Perhaps you want to spend two or three days acting and processing what you are experiencing before you move to the next session. Whether you complete it in seven days, or you choose a different pace, decide to complete the guide. Committing and following through with the process will serve you best.

Lastly, tell a friend or counselor that you are working through this guide. Some of the exercises provided will call for you to communicate with someone. It is not a good idea to grieve alone. Also, speak regularly to the Lord in prayer while you use this guide. Invite God to speak to you through his word. Trust him and rely on him to help you through your grief.



Preparing For Grief



Sometimes a loved one passes away suddenly with little or no time to prepare. Often, however, death is the culmination of a long, drawn out process of illness, deterioration, and sometimes prolonged pain. In the latter case, you can take some action to prepare yourself for the grief that is to come.

In the event of a sudden death, your process of grieving begins with little or no time to prepare. You might feel like time has slowed down, the world is strange, and your thoughts are foggy. After a death, life often seems surreal — as though reality has become like an irrational dream. It's natural to see the world differently — in fact, your life may operate differently. Still, your grief will need time and attention. The following six days offers a guide to process through stages of grief.

Today:

Before you begin to prepare for grief, spend a few minutes reading a selection of scripture from 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, and reflect on how you can apply God's word in your life.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Reflections:

Grief is part of life for all of God's people. Yet, Paul says there is something about our hope that changes how we grieve. Our hope in the future that Jesus has secured for us is a real hope. It is not wishful thinking, it is confident expectation of life with Almighty God, both today and forever. Our hope will be fulfilled in a way that is hard to describe with common language. Our hope is rooted in the love of our Savior who overcame death and offers us eternal life. In light of this hope, death is not the same for those who believe, and if death is not the same, grief is not the same. Our hope is never absent in our grief.

Prayer

Lord, I trust you and my hope is in you. You understand life and death in ways that I don't. Help me through this. I need your comfort. I need your strength. I'm relying you to lead me and guide me. In the name of Jesus, my Savior, I pray. Amen.

Actions:

READ SCRIPTURE

Establish yourself in the hope of God's word. Read several examples of what the Bible says about death. If your friend or family member is a believer — has accepted by faith Jesus as Lord and Savior —you will find reassuring and encouraging words about the hope God has secured for those who believe. Trust God's word and entrust your loved one to God's care. (see Bible verses on pages 8-9)

CONFIRM FAITH

Settle any question of your loved one's spiritual condition. Ask your loved one if they feel ready to face death if and when they pass. Explain or review the gospel. Tell your loved one that you want to talk with them about the hope of the gospel. He or she may not be a believer, and you could make an eternal difference in your loved one's final days. Invite them to pray with you, and to express their faith in Jesus. Below, is an example of how to help them pray.

A Believer's Prayer

God, I believe. I want to trust you with my life. Jesus, I receive you as my Savior. I am trusting you to be Lord of my life. Forgive me for my sins. I receive your mercy and forgiveness. You are my God, and I am your child. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

STAY RELATIONALLY ENGAGED

When you learn that someone you love is dying, you will have so many feelings, it can be overwhelming. The goal is to be able to ‘end well’. Encourage your loved one to express their emotions, concerns, questions, and desires. Death is a dynamic process. The conditions of illness, treatment, and age can all effect the circumstances of one passing away. They may have limited ability to communicate with you, but they are likely still internally processing thoughts and feelings. The ability to hear usually remains long after other physical abilities fail. You can speak to your loved one. You can encourage that internal work. Encourage them to offer Jesus all that they are thinking and feeling. Say what needs to be said: If there is any gratitude, love or good memories you want to express, now is the time. It is also a time to ask for forgiveness, if needed. Do small things with great love: If there is something that you can and want to do simply to value them while they are still here, this will honor them.

MAKE A GRIEF PLAN

Plan out how you will memorialize your loved one after they pass away. What will you do to honor their memory? What will you do to celebrate the life they lived? Who will you call? With whom will you share your grief? Go ahead and reach out to that person(s). Let them know how thankful you are that you can share your grief with them. (see plan template on pg. 10)

COMMIT TO THE PROCESS

Plan to begin a guided process of grief. Grieving the death of a loved one is not something we already know how to do. Grief can be complicated, unexpected, and lonely. Having a guided process will help you navigate the experience.



What does the Bible say about those who die?

Establish yourself in the hope of God's word.

Job 19:25-27 - I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. 26 And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; 27 I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

Luke 24:5-6 - Why do you look for the living among the dead? 6 He is not here; he has risen!

1 John 3:1-2 - See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

John 11:25-26 (Jesus speaking) - Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

John 16:20, 22, 33 (Jesus speaking) - You will grieve, but your grief will suddenly turn to wonderful joy... 22 So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again; then you will rejoice, and no one can rob you of that joy.... 30 I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.



Bible verses cont.

John 14:1-6 - “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” Jesus said. “You believe in God.

Believe also in me. 2 In my father’s house there are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you, but I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may also be. 4 You know the way where I am going. 5 Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” 6 Jesus answered, I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me.”

1 Corinthians 15:46-57 - The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. 47 The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. 48 As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. 49 And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man. 50 I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” 55 “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 4:7-9 - 7 For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. 8 If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. 9 For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 - 13 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Revelation 14:13 - 13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.”

GRIEF PLAN

1. I am thankful that I can call _____ (name of a friend/family member) when I need to talk and process my grief.
1. Is this person already aware of the situation?
1. Record any other contact information you want to have on hand.

When I think of _____ (who passed away), I am inspired to honor his/her life by...

What will you do?

--

When will do this?

--

Who will you invite to join you?

--

Once they pass away, consider taking the following actions of remembrance.
You may want to write your own eulogy as a way of saying good-bye.

With children, doing something tangible could be helpful. Consider gathering with your family, and together release helium balloons with notes attached as a way of symbolizing that you trust God to receive the deceased into his presence.

Beginning to Grieve

Up until this time, you have mostly been coping with the loss as best as you can. You might be experiencing grief in waves of different emotions. Your emotions will likely ebb and flow — sometimes swelling up, and then receding, only to swell up again. Those emotions can vary and sometimes feel overwhelming. You might believe that you will not be able to control those emotions if you allow yourself to feel them. You will likely seek out ways to stay busy. You might occupy your time and energy with responsibilities associated with the end of life (ex. planning a memorial service, hosting family, closing bank accounts, etc.) You might consider “not giving in” to emotions as noble, or responsible. You are already living through the first stage of grief, or what is commonly called denial.

Denial is the action of preventing yourself from allowing or acknowledging your emotions. We do this by shutting off or blocking out emotions that seem unpleasant or inconvenient. While denial is a natural human response to loss, it's time to give proper expression and attention to the emotions of your grief.

Today:

Before taking actions to address the reality of denial, spend a few minutes reading a selection of scripture from John 11:30-36, and reflect on how you can apply God's word in your life.

John 11:30-36

Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

³⁵ Jesus wept.

³⁶ Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

Reflections:

Jesus was troubled and deeply moved by the death of his friend, and by the sadness of those who were grieving with him. If Jesus expressed emotions, you can express emotions. If Jesus wept, you can weep. Whether you are looking through old photos, or visiting a special place, you can acknowledge the presences of the Lord with you. Trust him to know how you feel and speak to him in prayer.

You will not be alone with your emotions. Psalm 34:18 says, “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.” The Holy Spirit, who Jesus called “The Comforter”, is with you, available to help you, and able to sustain you through your emotions. It is a good idea to pray, ask God for his help, and speak to him about your emotions and concerns.

Prayer

Lord, you know how I feel right now. I believe you also know what it feels like. I believe you are with me. You know how much I miss (the name of the deceased). I am trusting you to help me walk forward through this grief. I receive your love for me. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Actions:

VIEW PHOTOS

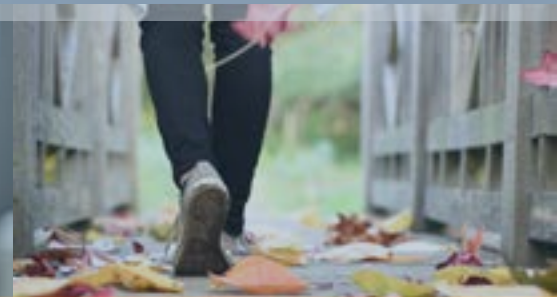
Photos offer a powerful, visual connection to our emotions, and viewing them is a good way to let the reality of your loss sink in. Pictures help us remember how we felt about the person. Revisiting those emotions can help you identify what emotions you feel now. You might find pictures on a social media page, in a photo album, or old home videos. Now's the time to get those out, visit those images, and let your emotions surface.

CALL A FRIEND

You do not need to process grief by yourself. It will help to have one or two friends you can call. Reject the assumption that other people do not want to “hear you whine”. That is not what this is about. You have legitimate emotions that need to be expressed. People who care about you will be honored to hear you tell them how you feel. Identify who you will call, text, or visit to communicate how you are feeling.

VISIT A PLACE

Going somewhere and doing something that reminds you of your deceased friend or family member can be both helpful and honoring. Taking this kind of action enables you to offer your emotions as a tribute to your loved one.



WRITE

As you take action to allow and acknowledge your emotions, write them down. This gives you an intentional approach that will help you navigate the grieving process. It's okay to write down whatever emotion you are feeling. You are not writing this for others, only for yourself. Writing out your feelings will help give them your attention so that you can ask God in prayer to help you express them appropriately.

My Emotions

Coping with Anger

As you experience all the emotions of grief, you may be surprised to discover that anger is the most common. You might be angry about the loss of companionship, or loss of missed opportunity with your loved one. You may be angry at people who are not experiencing grief with you, or people who remind you of your grief. You may be angry at the person who died, or angry at God. You may even be angry at yourself for feeling angry.

You need to know that this is all a normal, natural stage in any process of grief. You have lost someone. You have lost a friendship. You have lost opportunities for more memories with this person. Loss is unpleasant, and unwanted — it feels empty or like something is out of reach. You might feel impatient or easily frustrated. It is okay to be angry right now, but you don't want it to last forever.

The goal of this stage is to move past anger with proper response and appropriate expression. You must do something about it.

Today:

Before taking actions to identify and cope with anger, spend a few minutes reading a selection of scripture from Psalm 4:1-8, and reflect on how you can apply God's word in your life.

Psalm 4:1-8

Answer me when I call,
 God, who vindicates me.
 You freed me from affliction;
 be gracious to me and hear my prayer.
 2 How long, exalted men, will my honor be insulted?
 How long will you love what is worthless
 and pursue a lie? Selah*
 3 Know that the Lord has set apart
 the faithful for Himself;
 the Lord will hear when I call to Him.
 4 Be angry and do not sin;
 on your bed, reflect in your heart and be still. Selah
 5 Offer sacrifices in righteousness
 and trust in the Lord.
 6 Many are saying, "Who can show us anything good?"
 Look on us with favor, Lord.
 7 You have put more joy in my heart
 than they have when their grain and new wine abound.
 8 I will both lie down and sleep in peace,
 for You alone, Lord, make me live in safety.

*The meaning of Selah is not fully understood by modern readers but is most likely a note of direction to pause while praying or singing.

Reflections:

The psalmist speaks honestly to the Lord. There is emotion in this prayer. There is also wisdom in verse 4. "Be angry and do not sin." Feeling angry is not wrong, but what you do with your anger can have regretful results. Go ahead and be angry. Death is unpleasant. Death is loss. Anger is a natural response to death, but it is possible to express what you feel so that moments of anger can pass without regret.

Prayer

Lord, it is no surprise to you that I am angry. Help me to tell you about my anger. Help me to make wise choices with my anger. Help me to respond properly and express my emotions appropriately. I am trusting you, Lord, to guide me through this stage of grief. Thank you for being with me, listening to me, and reassuring me with your grace and truth. Because of you, I can find peace. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Actions:

WRITE

Describe or define your feeling of anger. Try to write sentences that clarify why you are angry. You might identify more than one reason. You might have different reasons throughout your day or week or month. That's okay. You can have as many reasons as you need in this stage of grief. The better you become at recognizing your anger, the better you will be at responding to it properly and expressing it appropriately. You can write about your anger in a journal, in a letter (more on this later), or even on scraps of paper. You do not need to keep what you write. You do not need to show what you write to others. If you write about your anger in the form of a letter — it could be addressed to the deceased, or to someone else — you don't need to send the letter anyone. You can keep whatever you write or throw it away. The point is to do something with your angry feelings so that you can respond properly and express them appropriately.



Actions:

LAMENT

Pray and tell God how you feel. You can tell God that you are disappointed. You can tell God that you feel powerless, and you hate feeling that way. You can complain to God while you grieve. Prayer does not need to sound polite, or religiously scripted. God already knows how you feel. So, tell him all about it. There is a book in the Bible called Lamentations, which turns complaint into prayer and disappointment into worship. There is another book in the Bible called Job, in which a man pours out his emotions — including anger — to God. Leveling your complaints to God is a healthy, cathartic way to express your anger. God can handle your anger, and by speaking it out to God you will spare others from receiving a potential tirade.

ADMIT

Admitting to someone that you feel angry can help you move past your anger. This does not mean you should vent your emotions to whoever is in your path. Bombarding others with unbridled bursts of anger will only lead to regret. However, telling someone how you feel can help. Choose someone who will listen, empathize, and respond with truth and grace. Consider visiting a licensed therapist (ideally one who is committed to Jesus), or identifying a close friend who can plan to spend some time with you. Whoever it is, ask them to listen to how you feel, and then to pray for you.

Bargaining with God



When someone dies, we not only miss them, but we also need to grieve missed opportunities. This is what is referred to as bargaining with God. Often our bargaining shows up as nagging questions of inadequacy, regret, or unresolved conflict with the person who passed away. Did I do enough? Did she know how I felt about her? Was he disappointed in me? If only I had done... If only I had not said... If I could go back and do it over again I would... This is a way to try to undo what already has been done.

It can be difficult to stop all the wondering that goes on in the bargaining stage, but it's time to let the past be what it is — past — so that we can live on with appreciation for the person who died. You cannot live in those nagging questions. You cannot change what was done. Grief is a time to pause in your emotions and move forward with your memories.

Not one "could", "should", or "would" will change what happened. Let them go. Trust that the Lord knows the past, holds you in his hands, and secures your future in his love.

Today:

Before processing bargaining thoughts, spend a few minutes reading a selection of scripture from Psalm 139:1-18, and reflect on how you can apply God's word in your life.

Psalm 139:1-18

1 O Lord, you have examined my heart
and know everything about me.
2 You know when I sit down or stand up.
You know my thoughts even when I'm
far away.
3 You see me when I travel
and when I rest at home.
You know everything I do.
4 You know what I am going to say
even before I say it, Lord.
5 You go before me and follow me.
You place your hand of blessing on my
head.
6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for
me,
too great for me to understand!
7 I can never escape from your Spirit!
I can never get away from your
presence!
8 If I go up to heaven, you are there;
if I go down to the grave, you are
there.
9 If I ride the wings of the morning,
if I dwell by the farthest oceans,
10 even there your hand will guide me,
and your strength will support me.
11 I could ask the darkness to hide me
and the light around me to become
night—

12 but even in darkness I cannot hide
from you.
To you the night shines as bright as day.
Darkness and light are the same to
you.
13 You made all the delicate, inner parts
of my body
and knit me together in my mother's
womb.
14 Thank you for making me so
wonderfully complex!
Your workmanship is marvelous—
how well I know it.
15 You watched me as I was being
formed in utter seclusion,
as I was woven together in the dark of
the womb.
16 You saw me before I was born.
Every day of my life was recorded in
your book.
Every moment was laid out
before a single day had passed.
17 How precious are your thoughts
about me, O God.
They cannot be numbered!
18 I can't even count them;
they outnumber the grains of sand!
And when I wake up,
you are still with me!

Reflections:

The Lord knows you better than you know yourself. He knows what worries you, what hurts you, what distracts you, what you wish for, and what you regret. He knows it all. Your life was his idea, and he invites you to live your life everyday with him. It is all recorded in his book — even those moments that are difficult for you to understand. God knows what to do with those moments. Leave it to him. Today is another day he is inviting you to live.

Prayer

Lord, you know what I wish, and what I regret. I trust that you forgive me, and I need your help to forgive others. Thank you for inviting me to live this day with you. I turn from worries and regrets of the past. I turn away from those old conflicts. I trust that you can resolve what I cannot. Help me to live this day in grace and in truth. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Actions:

WRITE

Write down questions you have asked or statements you have made about the adequacy of your care, regrets you may harbor, and/or unresolved conflict. This may come easy for some — especially if you have already voiced these questions and statements. Others might be reluctant to acknowledge and express these concerns. Chances are, not every statement or question indicated will apply to you. The purpose of this exercise is to identify what missed opportunities you need to grieve as you are grieving the loss of your loved one. Complete whichever questions and statements below that apply to your grieving process.

- Did I do enough to...
- Could I have...
- Should I have...
- If only I had said or done...
- If only I had not said or done...
- I wish I had...
- I wish I had not...

REPENT

Needing to repent does not always mean that you have done something sinful. To repent means to turn around or change your mind. As you grieve, it is important to change your mind about your bargaining questions and statements. Moving forward in your grief will necessitate that you turn away from the "should", "would", "could", and "if only" concerns. You can begin to turn away and move forward by simply saying, "I'm sorry." I'm sorry I couldn't have been there or done more. I'm sorry I said that. I'm sorry I did that. I'm sorry I never told you how I felt. I'm sorry we were never able to fulfill what we hoped to accomplish. Bargaining statements are based on a hypothetical reality that can never exist, but the sorrow you feel is entirely true. Acknowledge the truth and turn away from the bargain. Write in the space below, a statement of repentance beginning with the words, "I'm sorry..."

FORGIVE

In the Bible, forgiveness always follows repentance. Now that you have expressed your repentance, you can ask God to forgive you if there is anything you believe you neglected to say or do. Trust that God has forgiven you, and you can also forgive yourself. You might need to also forgive the person who died. Your bargaining might not center on what you wish you had done differently, but the person who died would have done differently. Maybe they left something undone or unsaid. It is time to forgive them. It is time to place in God's hands all your regrets and conflicts with the person who has passed away. There is no need to keep holding that person accountable. They are in God's hands now. It is time to say, "I forgive you." Write in the space below, a statement of forgiveness beginning with the words, "I forgive you for..."

Dealing with Depression

Depression is an inevitable stage in the grieving process. There is no standard length of time or measure of severity. Regardless of how long or severe, the truth is you can get through this stage. It is important that you do not deny it or rush through it. It is also important that you do not allow yourself to be convinced that it will last forever. You will feel sad. Do not lose hope. Sadness can cling to us like a sweater and fill the atmosphere around us like a lost cloud. When you are grieving the death of a loved one, you can try to reject sadness like an unwelcome visitor, but it is not outside. It is happening inside you.

Sadness is a normal part of love and loss. It is like the old children's book that says, "We can't go over it. We can't go under it. Oh no! We've got to go through it!" But rather than merely dreading it, remember that you will get through it. Depression over the loss of a loved one does not need to last forever. You will get to the other side.

You can take deliberate actions to keep moving in and through your sadness. There will be moments when you must give yourself permission and space to feel sad. There will be other moments when you must choose to carry the sadness with you as you keep living the life God gives you.

Today:

Before taking some action to deal with depression, spend a few minutes reading a selection of scripture from Micah 7:1-8, and reflect on how you can apply God's word in your life.

Micah 7:1–8

What misery is mine! I am like one who gathers summer fruit at the gleaning of the vineyard; there is no cluster of grapes to eat, none of the early figs that I crave. 2 The faithful have been swept from the land; not one upright person remains. Everyone lies in wait to shed blood; they hunt each other with nets. 3 Both hands are skilled in doing evil; the ruler demands gifts, the judge accepts bribes, the powerful dictate what they desire—they all conspire together. 4 The best of them is like a brier, the most upright worse than a thorn hedge. The day God visits you has come, the day your watchmen sound the alarm. Now is the time of your confusion. 5 Do not trust a neighbor; put no confidence in a friend. Even with the woman who lies in your embrace guard the words of your lips. 6 For a son dishonors his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies are the members of his own household. 7 But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me. 8 Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light.

Reflections:

Depression can feel empty. One moment you might desperately crave to fill that emptiness, and the next moment you can lose your appetite in a gulf of nothingness. The prophet, Micah, has become an expert on despair. He sees nothing but loss and pain in every direction. That is what makes his conclusion so surprising. “But as for me,” he says, “I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior.” It is a choice he has made — a defiant choice to hope in the middle of despair. Out of the loss, Micah springs with strength renewed by the Lord. Trust God to renew your strength. With God, you can rise with new hope.

Prayer

God, I'm sad. Sometimes I feel stuck in my sadness. Thank you for being with me even when I am depressed. Help me do some things today that I wouldn't choose to do on my own. I am trusting you to give me hope again today. I believe you have given me reasons to rejoice. I want to choose joy, Lord. Help me make that choice. I pray this in the name of my Savior, Jesus. Amen.

Actions:

PRAY

As you have seen, there are many reasons to pray as you move through the grieving process. While you are sad, and in moments of depression, you can pray for God to help you get through this stage. You can also talk to God about your loved one. We don't know if God speaks to people who have passed on, but you can tell the Lord what you would want your loved one to know. God hears your prayers. When you are feeling depressed, tell God what you wish you could tell the person who died. You can even tell God what you hope your loved one is experiencing. The sadness in the depression stage of grief is largely rooted in the loneliness of separation. While you are living through this stage, prayer can be a way of staying connected to your loved one through your relationship with God. What would you like to tell God about your loved one who has died? Take a moment tell him in prayer. If you want, you can write your prayer below.



WRITE

When you are depressed, it is important to choose to identify reasons for joy. One way to do this is to write down reasons to be joyful even when you are sad. You might try writing down three reasons each day that you can be joyful. Some days you might identify more than three reasons, and on other days you might need to repeat what you wrote on previous days. As you grieve through this stage, you might encounter reminders of the joy you shared with your loved one, and you might encounter new reasons for joy. Write down both the reminders and the new reasons you find. It is likely that while your life will continue to be filled with reasons to rejoice, the memories you shared with the person who died will continue to bring you joy as well. Start now and write down at least three reasons to be joyful today.

EXERCISE

When we are sad often want to stay still and inside. To move through this stage of grief, you need to get moving. Go for a walk around the block. Join an exercise class at local gym. Make a commitment to exercise with others rather than at home alone. Set goals for action — two laps around the park every morning this week; complete the six-week cycling class at my gym; etc. So, set a goal right now. And ask a friend to complete it with you.

Exercise Plan

Goal:
Friend:

PREPARE

Grieving takes time, and grief can be reawakened by special dates and events on the calendar. You are likely to be revisited by sadness on a birthday, anniversary or holiday. Expect that to happen and prepare for it. Let some friends know if a day is coming up when you know you will be missing your loved one even more than usual. Ask someone to be with you or check in with you. Try not to spend that day home alone, with nothing to do. What's the next special occasion on your calendar? What will you plan to do that day? Who will you invite to be with you?

Living with Acceptance

The word “acceptance” needs some explanation. It does not mean that the death of your friend or family member no longer affects you. Acceptance means that you come to terms with the new reality of life without that person. When you have processed your loss to the point of acceptance, you will find that you can live this new reality with renewed peace.

Losing someone may bring about a good deal of change in your life. Life used to be a shared experience with your loved one, and there was a time when you could hardly imagine experiencing life without that person. Now they are gone, and you will likely live with a different perspective on life, love, relationships, meaning, and many other important topics. This doesn't mean that everything has changed, but a part of you has. Acceptance means recognizing that change in your life as a new normal.

In the acceptance stage you begin to find enjoyment in both new and familiar experiences. That is completely normal. And while you used to share that enjoyment with your loved one, you can still enjoy life after your loss. This is life without that person. You will never replace them, forget them, or stop missing them. That is normal after the death of someone special to you. Still, you will keep living. You are different, now. Life is different, now. This is acceptance.

Today:

Before taking actions to help you live with acceptance, spend a few minutes reading a selection of scripture from Romans 8:10–39, and reflect on how you can apply God's word in your life.

Romans 8:10-18, 28-39.

10 But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. 12 Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

14 For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. 15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us... 28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predest-

ined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

31 What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Reflections:

Life is full of change, but the greatest change ever took place when Jesus, after being dead for three days, rose again with power over death. He alone offers a new way of life, life empowered by the Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead and is alive in all who receive Him by faith. The sadness you feel after the death of a loved one is very real. Your grief is real. The way you live now will be filled with new reality. You can be filled with the Holy Spirit and be sure of one thing that will never change — nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Prayer

Lord, I am trusting in you even when life feels so different. I trust your love for me, and your plan for my life. I want to receive your Holy Spirit. Fill me and lead me. I trust you with my life, my new life, my different. You remain the same, and I remain your child. Thank you for loving me. I pray all of this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Actions:

CREATE

In the acceptance stage, you can choose to create new memories. Take a trip. Visit friends or a place you have always wanted to go. It might be something you talked about doing with the person who passed away. You might feel like you are betraying or disappointing them by carrying out this plan without them. It's okay to feel that way. You can still carry out those plans, or you can decide to make a brand-new plan. Either way, you will have feelings of sadness mixed with enjoyment. That is okay. Consider the following ideas and make a plan to create new memories. Include details of where, when, and with whom.

- Take a trip.
- Join a group - cachurch.com/groups
- Take a class - cachurch.com/thrive
- Start a hobby.
- Finish something that has not been completed.

PREPARE

Sometimes being with others will remind you of the person who is passed. You might be more aware of how much you miss that person when you are visiting with old friends or making new friends. Remember, you will always miss your loved one. That is part of the new life you live, but that does not mean friendship is less valuable. It is more valuable than ever before. In this acceptance stage, make yourself spend time with friends, both new and old.

Who will you call and ask to spend time with?

What's the next social event on your calendar?

What about your church's calendar?

What about your city or neighborhood's calendar?

WRITE

Keep a journal of what you are experiencing, and how your experiences made you think of the person who passed away. Do this every day for a week. Sit down once a day and make notes about where you went, what you did, who was there, and what made you think about the person who passed away. As you do this, some of what you write might make you want to cry, and some of what you write might make you want to smile or even laugh. Use the next page to journal.

Acceptance Journal

You can return to this page over the next seven days to keep a journal of thoughts and memories about your friend or family member who passed away. You do not need to complete this seven-day journal before moving on to the final day of this devotional.

Day 1

Day 2

Day 3

Day 4

Day 5

Day 6

Day 7

DAY SEVEN

Moving Forward Unfinished

The process of walking through the stages of grief looks unique for every individual. There is not a time-limit, and you might be surprised by moments of grief well into the future. The question you should ask is not when you will be finished, but rather what you can do to keep moving forward. You might even return to this guide and work through stages of grief again — each time gaining strength from God’s word, the Holy Spirit, and your actions. Remember, you move forward different. You move forward while missing someone. Still you move forward.

By moving forward, you can eventually become a source of comfort for others who lose loved ones. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, Paul explains this saying: “All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. 4 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.”

The deep sadness and pain of grief creates in us new depths of empathy, and compassion. Having lived through loss, and processed through grief, you know how valuable it is to have a friend who recognizes what you feel and can speak words of understanding. You too, can offer that friendship to others.

Today:

Before exploring ways to move forward, spend a few minutes reading a selection of scripture from Psalm 84:1-7 and Revelation 1:17-18, and reflect on how you can apply God's word in your life.

Psalm 84:1-7

- 1 How lovely is your dwelling place,
O Lord of hosts!
- 2 My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and flesh sing for joy
to the living God.
- 3 Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O Lord of hosts,
my King and my God.
- 4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
ever singing your praise! Selah
- 5 Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.
- 6 As they go through the Valley of Baca (which means Weeping)
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.
- 7 They go from strength to strength;
each one appears before God in Zion.

Revelation 1:17-18

- 17 When I saw him [Jesus], I fell at his feet as if I were dead. But he laid his right hand on me and said, “Don’t be afraid! I am the First and the Last. 18 I am the living one. I died, but look—I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave.

Reflections:

God has made known to us his greatest desire, and it is life with you and me forever and ever. We know that because of Jesus. He has secured for us life, even for those who die. For all who receive Jesus and trust in him, God has promised that death will not be the end of our stories. We will all pass through valleys of sadness and grief, but in those valleys, we can receive an increasing strength from our God. We will all pass through valleys of weeping, but those who trust in the Lord will dwell in his house and sing his praises forever.

Prayer

Lord, I am trusting you to keep leading me through grief, and to let my tears become a source of comfort and encouragement for others who grieve. You bring life out of death; you can bring comfort out of grief. Lord, let me be an example of your strength for someone who is weak with sorrow. Let me be a source of encouragement for someone who feels stuck in sadness. Let me be a friend of comfort to anyone who mourns. My hope in you will increase as I share my hope with others. Be glorified in my life, even in my grief. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Actions:

WRITE

Write a letter or an email to someone who gave you comfort and encouragement during your grief. They might not even know how significant their words or presence were to you. Tell them how much you appreciate their friendship. A handwritten note is so rare these days that it makes your words even more significant. Who will you write? Make a list of four or five names.



COMFORT ANOTHER

It is very likely that someone in your social network is experiencing the same kind of grief that you have recently experienced. Choose to do something for them that will communicate the kind of comfort that you have appreciated or wanted while grieving. Maybe you remember an acquaintance from time spent in a hospital or doctor's office. You might even call your church and ask if the staff is aware of anyone grieving who you could seek to comfort and encourage. Remember that it doesn't take much to communicate comfort to someone who is grieving. It is enough to simply let them know that you are available and you care. What can you do to offer comfort to others who are grieving?



John 16:20, 22, 33

(Jesus speaking) -

20 You will grieve, but your grief will suddenly turn to wonderful joy... 22 So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again; then you will rejoice, and no one can rob you of that joy....

33 I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.

Going Further:

Websites

Understanding the Grieving Process by Focus on the Family

Going Through Dark Times - Tim Keller

Books

Lament for a Son -- by Nicholas Wolterstorff.

A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows Through Loss -- by Gerald Sittser