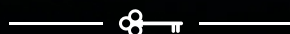


THE THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS SERIES

WHAT IS GOD'S HEART ON GRIEF?

Excerpt from
KEYS FOR LIVING LIBRARY



GRIEF

Living at Peace with Loss

What Is God's Heart on Grief?

Grief is common in our broken world. When we face a significant loss in our lives, it is natural to feel heartache and to mourn. But in our grief, God is near. He sees our pain, understands it, and walks with us every day. God's Word shows that we don't grieve without purpose or without His presence.

*"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."
(PSALM 46:1)*

God empathizes with your grief because He has experienced grief Himself.

"He [Jesus] was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief" (ISAIAH 53:3 NLT).

God is with you in your grief.

"Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (ISAIAH 41:10).

"In our grief, God is near. He sees our pain, understands it, and walks with us every day."

God sees your grief and suffering.

"You, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand" (PSALM 10:14).

God hears your cries and listens to you in your pain.

"The LORD has heard my weeping" (PSALM 6:8).

God wants you to process your grief with Him.

"Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken" (PSALM 55:22).

God wants you to have hope even in your grief.

"Dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope" (1 THESSALONIANS 4:13 NLT).

God wants to give you joy even in your grief.

"You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing. You have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy" (PSALM 30:11 NLT).

God wants to comfort you with His presence.

"I, yes I, am the one who comforts you" (ISAIAH 51:12 NLT).

God wants to comfort you through others.

“God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus” (2 CORINTHIANS 7:6).

God wants to comfort you with His Word.

“I have suffered much; preserve my life, LORD, according to your word” (PSALM 119:107).

God wants to use your grief to comfort others.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4).

God will one day wipe away your tears—and there will be no more death or mourning or grief.

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever” (REVELATION 21:4 NLT).

What Complicates the Grieving Process?

What makes grieving difficult is not just the loss of a loved one but all the changes that accompany the loss. Depending on the type of loss, there are numerous and often significant changes that can occur. These changes can extend or intensify your grief.

When you experience loss and all the changes that come about as a result of it, remember that God is your *constant* companion.

*“The LORD your God will personally go ahead of you.
He will neither fail you nor abandon you.”
(DEUTERONOMY 31:6 NLT)*

The following issues can affect the grieving process:

Logistics—dealing with immediate concerns surrounding a loss (phone calls; funeral plans; writing an obituary; notifying insurance; processing a will/probate; coordinating meetings, work schedule, childcare, meal planning)

Housing/property/finances—dividing assets; cleaning out a home; having to relocate; dealing with insurance payments or status, hospital bills, funeral expenses, taxes, debts, adjustments to change in income

Busyness—being consumed by daily life and responsibilities to the extent that you do not have adequate time to process your thoughts and emotions

Support system/remaining family—not having people who can comfort you and be there for you; adjusting to new family dynamics; handling conflicts

Circumstances surrounding the loss or death—not recognizing how the unique circumstances of the loss or cause of death will impact survivors (for example: grieving over a miscarriage, suicide, drug overdose, terminal illness, violent death, sudden or accidental death, losing multiple people at once)

Length/type of relationship—not understanding how the duration or type of relationship can intensify the grief (parent/child, spouse, grandparent, friend, church member, coworker/boss, pet, student/teacher)

Memories—being confronted with memories of your loved one (often in unexpected ways or at unexpected times) through various people, places, songs, meals, smells, etc.

Emotional complexity/inexperience with grief—not knowing what to do with the depth and range of emotions or what to expect or how to cope

Spiritual needs—not having a spiritual foundation or community to understand and process grief

Physical needs—neglecting physical needs (sleeping, eating, exercising, etc.)

Regret/guilt—wishing you had said or done something differently before the loss; feeling responsible for wrongdoing toward the person you've lost

Denial/refusal—living as if the loss has not occurred; choosing to ignore the loss

*“The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge.”
(PSALM 18:2)*

Key Verses to Memorize

*“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,
who comforts us in all our troubles,
so that we can comfort those in any trouble
with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”
(2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4)*

Key Passage to Read

Lamentations 3:19–26

*"I remember my affliction and my wandering,
the bitterness and the gall.
²⁰ I well remember them, and my soul
is downcast within me.
²¹ Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:
²² Because of the LORD's great love
we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.
²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
²⁴ I say to myself, 'The LORD is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him.'
²⁵ The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him;
²⁶ it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD."*

My Personalized Plan

As the Lord uses this period of grief to produce the character of Christ in me, **I will . . .**

Recognize my grief

- Know the stages of grief
- Share my pain with another
- Openly express my emotions

"I am exhausted and completely crushed. My groans come from an anguished heart. You know what I long for, LORD; you hear my every sigh" (PSALM 38:8–9 NLT).

Realize my insufficiency

- Acknowledge my grief and pain to God
- Admit I am powerless to carry the grief alone
- Ask God to help me experience His strength in my weakness

"But he [Jesus] said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I [Paul] will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 CORINTHIANS 12:9–10).

Relinquish control

- Recognize God's rightful, sovereign control over my life
- Give my dreams and desires to God
- Trust God's plans for me

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight" (PROVERBS 3:5–6).

Respond to God's grace

- Spend time in God's Word
- Allow the Lord to meet my emotional needs
- Recognize that God loves me and has not deserted me

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze" (ISAIAH 43:2).

Rebuild my life

- Acknowledge the "new normal" in my life
- Stay active in church and be involved in the lives of others
- Recognize that God wants to use me in new ways

"The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast" (1 PETER 5:10).

How to Apply Dos and Don'ts of Healthy Grieving

Throughout the psalms, David shows us what to do with our grief and other difficult feelings. He brings his raw, honest feelings to God. He cries out to God. He questions God. He tells God how his grief and suffering affects him physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. As David processes his grief before God, he often recalls God's faithfulness to him. He remembers God's promises. By the end of many psalms, David expresses a renewed trust in God.

David shows us that instead of running away from God in our grief, we can run to God. That's a mark of healthy grieving. There are other steps to take—and things to avoid—that will help you in the grieving process.

*"Commit everything you do to the LORD.
Trust him, and he will help you."
(PSALM 37:5 NLT)*

Don't let self-pity dominate your thoughts.

Do seek peace through contentment.

"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances" (PHILIPPIANS 4:11).

Don't become consumed with regret.

Do learn from and accept the past.

"Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance" (PROVERBS 1:5).

Don't ignore memories and feelings—both positive and negative.

Do allow yourself to feel your emotions and to reflect on your memories.

"I thank my God every time I remember you" (PHILIPPIANS 1:3).

Don't isolate yourself.

Do seek the support of others and look to the Lord to meet your needs.

"Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you" (ISAIAH 46:4).

Don't compare your circumstances to the circumstances of others.

Do focus on what God wants you to do in *your* situation.

"Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground" (PSALM 143:10).

Don't busy yourself with distractions in an effort to avoid your grief.

Do set aside time to process your grief through prayer, journaling, conversations, etc.

"The Lord said to her, 'My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her'" (LUKE 10:41–42 NLT).

Don't make major decisions while grieving.

Do establish priorities and seek wise counsel.

"The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways" (PROVERBS 14:8).

Don't define yourself by your grief.

Do find your identity in Christ.

"Listen to the LORD who created you. . . . The one who formed you says, 'Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine'" (ISAIAH 43:1 NLT).

How to Help the Grieving

Your words can build up and comfort the grieving, and your actions can show your love and care. When someone is grieving, they may be too overwhelmed to deal with everyday responsibilities in addition to the emotional impact of the loss. Acknowledge their loss immediately and let them know as soon as possible that you are available for them. Because they often won't ask for help, find helpful things to do without being asked. They will usually appreciate small acts of kindness and support.

*"Let's not merely say that we love each other;
let us show the truth by our actions."
(1 JOHN 3:18 NLT)*

Consider these practical suggestions for reaching out to others with the compassion of Christ:

Pray. Remind yourself to pray regularly *for* the grieving and, as appropriate, pray *with* them.

Be there. Don't feel the need to fill the silence. Sometimes the most meaningful way to show compassion is simply to be present. Offer a hug when appropriate.

Listen. Give the one grieving opportunities to talk about the loss. Expect tears and emotional extremes. Accept emotional or verbal responses without judgment.

Offer to help with phone calls. Depending on the loss, there may be a lot of phone calls to make. Offer to help answer phone calls and relay information, if needed.

Bring a meal. Cook a warm meal and deliver it to the one grieving. Use disposable containers if possible. Be aware of any dietary needs/restrictions or allergies.

Run an errand. Offer to go to the grocery store, post office, dry cleaners, etc.

Send gift cards. Buy them a gift card for a restaurant, grocery store, movie theater, online store, etc.

Send a card or flowers. Immediately following the loss, send a card or flowers to let them know you're thinking of them. Stay in touch by writing a letter or sharing a story or memory.

Encourage a change of scenery. Take them out to lunch, dinner, shopping, or just for a walk.

Travel with them. Offer to drive them somewhere or join them in running errands so they are not alone.

Help around the house. Offer to clean, mow the lawn, do laundry, etc.

Offer to house-sit, babysit, take care of pets. This can help the grieving person get some rest or attend to errands or personal responsibilities.

Gather information and identify help network. Depending on the loss, you can help find available jobs, houses, or services. Reach out to others who may be able to help the grieving individual or family as well.

Show hospitality. Depending on the loss and your availability, open up your home as a place for people to meet, have a meal, or spend a night.

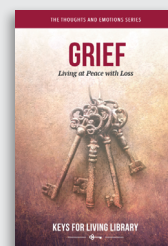
*“When God’s people are in need, be ready to help them.
Always be eager to practice hospitality.”
(ROMANS 12:13 NLT)*

Go Deeper

Keys for Living Books

Want to learn more about this topic? Check out the *Keys for Living Library* to discover biblical hope and practical help on this topic and many more. The *Keys for Living* are designed to help you—and help you help others—overcome difficulties, grow in maturity, and move forward in life.

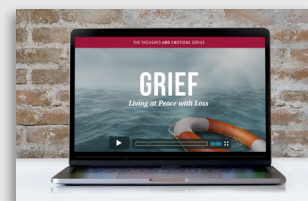
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4 POINTS OF GOD'S PLAN

Whether you're trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you've done or what's been done to you, *there is hope*. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will accept His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD,
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*
(JEREMIAH 29:11)

God's Purpose for You: *Salvation*

What was God's motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”* (John 3:16–17).

What was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”* (John 10:10).

The Problem: *Sin*

What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God's standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, *“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway”* (Romans 7:18–19 NLT).

What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, *“Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God”* (Isaiah 59:2). Scripture also says, *“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 6:23).

God's Provision for You: *The Savior*

Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, *“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8).

What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6). The Bible says, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved . . .”* (Acts 16:31).

Your Part: *Surrender*

Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”* (Matthew 16:24–26).

Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your “good works” as a means of earning God’s approval. The Bible says, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you’ve humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

*“God, I want a real relationship with you.
I admit that many times I’ve chosen to go my own way instead of your way.
Please forgive me for my sins.
Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins.
Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.
Change me from the inside out and make me
the person you created me to be.
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”*

What Can You Now Expect?

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . .”* (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me
has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”*
(JOHN 5:24)

The information in this resource is intended as guidelines for healthy living. Please consult qualified medical, legal, pastoral, and psychological professionals regarding individual concerns.

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

God gives us His Word not just for information but for transformation. The Lord wants you to “*be transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Romans 12:2). This isn’t something you do alone, but something God does in you by His Spirit.

The following questions are designed to help you reflect on the biblical truths in this resource. Take a moment to pray and ask God to settle your mind and quiet your spirit as you reflect on His truth.

*“Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord
will give you insight into all this.”
(2 TIMOTHY 2:7)*

What are two key truths, Bible verses, or “takeaways” from this resource that you found helpful—or that you simply needed to be reminded of?

In relation to this topic, what behavior(s) do you need to *begin*, *change*, or *stop* in order to help you grow into the person God created you to be?

In relation to this topic, what is the biggest obstacle you need to overcome in order to move forward?

What might your life look like a few years from now if you do *not* make changes regarding this issue? How might your life be different if you *do* make changes?

Is there anyone in your life who needs help with this topic/issue? How can you pray for them, and what is one thing you can do to encourage them?

What can you give thanks to God for today?

*“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself
and God our Father, who loved us
and by his grace gave us eternal comfort
and a wonderful hope,
comfort you and strengthen you
in every good thing you do and say.”
(2 THESSALONIANS 2:16–17 NLT)*

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