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Getting Started



How to Use This Journal

Journaling is a journey. We begin in one place and, by the grace of God, we find ourselves further down the road.

There are no guarantees, of course. Grieving is not a mechanical process by which we make positive progress as if putting together a piece of furniture. Nothing in this guide ensures healing.

Grief is a dark place. It feels like we are trapped by an enemy, and we have little hope, perhaps no hope, of liberation. It's difficult to concentrate, to see the goodness that surrounds us, and sorrow is constantly by our side. Tears flow so easily, and we feel like there is no end to them. Grief blinds us, burdens us, and zaps our energy.

In my own life, I tried to stuff it, ignore it, and avoid it. I lived in a dark place and pretended I was in the light. But the darkness suffocated any authentic joy, and I functioned more like a zombie—alive but lifeless. In my avoidance, the hurt came out sideways in negative ways, and I deepened my wounds rather than finding healing.

Somewhere along the way, someone shared a metaphor with me that helped me. Let me share that metaphor with you: While we rightly find ourselves sitting in the darkness for a time, there comes a moment when we begin to move through the darkness toward the light. We can wait for the light to dawn, but perhaps it is better to move toward the light. It's like living in a dark tunnel, and as long as we remain where we are, the darkness will continue to oppress us. At some point, through the help of friends, community, and faith, we begin to move toward the light and, by the grace of God, we will begin to see some light at the end of the tunnel, though the darkness remains with us.

This is why processing grief is important. Journaling opens us up to our own feelings in the presence of God and gives the Holy Spirit opportunity to work in our hearts and emotions. By journaling, we engage Scripture, prayer, and our own hearts. We face our grief in the presence of God.



SESSION 1



Our Stories

Everyone's story is different, and everyone's suffering is unique. No one's story serves as a paradigm for everybody else. This is true of Job, the psalmists, and myself, as well as you.

At the same time, when we listen to another's story, we open ourselves to learning about ourselves and about our journey into the life of God. In Psalm 119 we hear the story of an ancient worshipper of God. This is not exactly your story or mine, but let us hear this Word to God about God in the presence of God.

First reading. Read Psalm 119:65-88 out loud and meditate on this passage.

Second reading. Read the passage again and write down key phrases you found meaningful.

Why did you find those phrases meaningful?

Make a gratitude list for the good things in your life. List at least 30! You can begin small (“I have indoor plumbing”), if you like. Think of 30 and write them down.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
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24. _____
25. _____
26. _____
27. _____

Third reading. Read the passage once more and list one thing it says about God and one thing it says about people.

God

People

What is one way this passage invites you to participate in God’s story?

→ ACT

What are your rituals of grief? In the space below, identify what you can do to help yourself grieve or deal with loss. For example, I visit my son Joshua's grave on Easter morning. My wife, Jennifer, purchases an annual figurine to remember Leah. Or perhaps you have a ritual of silence and solitude, or listen to music, or follow a prayer ritual of some kind. How do you grieve? If you don't currently have a plan, what would you like to do to help yourself grieve?

On the next page, journal about how the meaning of the new heaven and new earth, the resurrection, and the return of Jesus affect you in your grief. How do you connect your grief and God's victorious future? What does this mean for you?

Then on the third page, imagine a ritual or practice you might incorporate into your grieving that connects you tangibly and in a concrete way with your hope.

What I do to help myself grieve or deal with loss:

SESSION 7



The Courage of Silence

Silence can feel awkward and uncomfortable to potential comforters. But it is the most powerful balm available for healing. It doesn't seem like both should be true. Nevertheless, many have experienced comfort in the silent presence of friends.

As people who would comfort others, we must have the courage of silence, and with that courage, those who suffer learn to trust God's healing presence through the presence of silent friends.

First reading. Read Job 2:11-13; 13:5; 16:1-5; 42:1-6 out loud and meditate on these passages.

Second reading. Read these passages again and write down key phrases you found meaningful.

Why did you find those phrases meaningful?
