

**“Grief in the Christian Life”  
with Fr. Hayden Butler**

*“No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear...There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be about me. I dread the moments when the house is empty.” -C.S. Lewis*

*“Am I equipped for happiness?” Yes, but I am much more familiar with pain. As the direct result of years and years of practice, I am expert at identifying and relating to emotional pain. Happiness is an unwelcome intruder in how I relate to myself.” -Russel Friedman*

Grief signals the presence of loss, a disruption of the familiar pattern of life. Unchecked, it leaves us unable to be present in our own lives as we rebound from obsession with past pains to anxious planning for future disaster. Grief leaves us feeling lonely in a room full of people and surrounded by fearful thoughts and anxious worries when alone. Sound familiar? If so, I invite you to this two-week seminar on grief and its relationship to our life of prayer. Together, we will come to a new understanding of grief, identify where we might need to address unresolved grief, and seek new paths of healing for our experiences of loss. If that sounds desirable, I invite you to join me in the **Bishop’s Study from 9:30-10:30am on February 9 and 16.**

Definitions

**Grief** : the conflicting feelings caused by a change or end in a familiar pattern of behavior.

“The normal and natural emotional reaction to loss.”

**Unresolved Grief** : undelivered communication of an emotional nature.

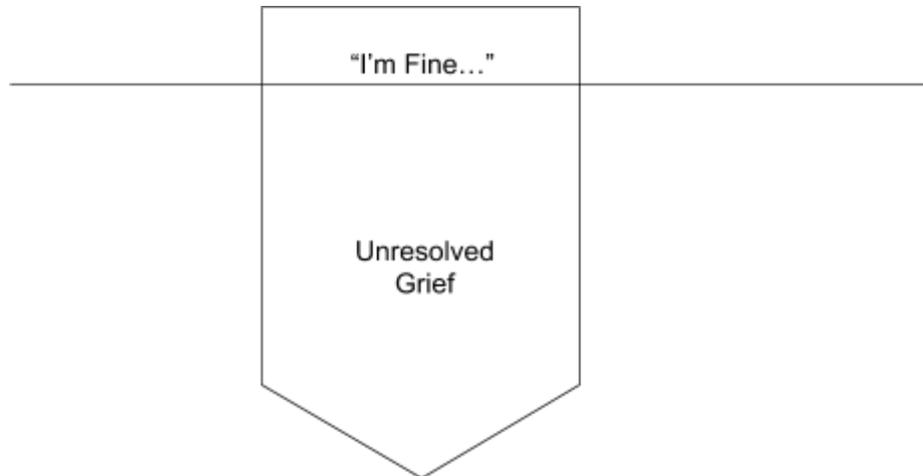
**Emotional Completion** : saying goodbye to any unmet hopes, dreams, and expectations (what we wish were different, better, or more).

“Incomplete relationships can cause us to limit our lives, can induce us to sabotage good relationships, and can encourage us to keep choosing poorly. Unresolved grief can cause us to define ourselves as unworthy of happiness. We must learn how to grieve and complete relationships that have ended or changed...Incomplete relationships can cause us to limit our lives, can induce us to sabotage good relationships, and can encourage us to keep choosing poorly. Unresolved grief can cause us to define ourselves as unworthy of happiness. We must learn how to grieve and complete relationships that have ended or changed.” -Russel Friedman

## Grieving Events

- Death of a spouse
- Divorce
- Marital separation
- Imprisonment
- Death of a close family member
- Personal injury or illness
- Marriage
- Dismissal from work
- Marital reconciliation
- Retirement
- Change in health of family member
- Pregnancy
- Sexual difficulties
- Gain a new family member
- Business readjustment
- Change in financial state
- Death of a close friend
- Change to different line of work
- Change in frequency of arguments
- Major mortgage
- Foreclosure of mortgage or loan
- Change in responsibilities at work
- Child leaving home
- Trouble with in-laws
- Outstanding personal achievement
- Spouse starts or stops work
- Begin or end school
- Change in living conditions
- Revision of personal habits
- Trouble with boss
- Change in working hours or conditions
- Change in residence
- Change in schools
- Change in recreation
- Change in church activities
- Change in social activities
- Minor mortgage or loan
- Change in sleeping habits
- Change in number of family reunions
- Change in eating habits
- Vacation
- Christmas
- Minor violation of law
- Loss of Trust
- Loss of Approval
- Loss of Safety
- Loss of Control of My Body

“Like an iceberg...”



*Unhappiness comes from an attempt to be in any other moment but the present.*

Past

10% Fond Memories

90% Pain/Regret

Present

Future

10% Planning

90% Worry/Anxiety

*Expectations of the future = planned disappointments*

Belief Systems

“By age 15, a child has been told 23,000 times not to feel bad.”

“By age 15, 95% of our belief system is instilled (our working mythology for life).”

Popular Myths about Grief:

- Don't feel bad
- Replace the loss
- Grieve alone
- Be strong for others / Be strong for \_\_\_\_\_
- Just give it time
- Keep busy
- Others are responsible

## Short-Term Energy Relieving Behaviors (STERBs)

Food	Gambling
Drugs/Alcohol	Social Media
Sex	Studying/Intellect
Work	Shopping/Retail Therapy
Church	Storytelling
Volunteering/Serving	Cleaning
Exercise	Projects
Sleeping	Entertainment
Smoking	Parties

## Processing Experiences

### *Stimulus - Thought - Feeling - Action*

For a griever, especially at the time of a new loss, it can feel like an overwhelming assault of stimuli. The stimuli are generally neutral, but the meaning of them is inflected by experiences of loss. For example, think of a song that was once shared with a dear friend or significant other who was lost.

### *New Action - Reduced Feeling - Different Thought - Present Moment*

Maturity is making a decision and letting our feelings catch up to it.

<u>Cause</u>	<u>Effect</u>	<u>Reaction</u>
0%	100%	at least 1% responsibility must be assumed
100%	0%	at least 1% responsibility must be assumed

Cause and Effect are independent of our responsibility for our own recovery.

Other people are not entirely responsible for how I feel.

### New Action:

Forgiveness - giving up the hope for a different or better yesterday. It is a new action that leads us to cease resentment towards an offender through acknowledgment that communicates what was done or left undone.

### Habit Forming:

1. Becoming aware of the need for a new action
2. Discovering and being taught the steps or components of the new action in their proper order.
3. Practicing #2 30-40 times.

## BLOG NOTES

Perhaps a parent or a sibling, someone with whom we should have had a more loving relationship. We are almost always incomplete when a "less than loved one" dies. Almost always we are left with the awareness that our hopes and dreams of someday having the difficult relationship be pleasant and happy have ended. Even if our hope is simply not to be tormented anymore, the death often exaggerates the torment rather than diminishing it. That is when many of us report being "ruled from the grave."

-Friedman

The reason for this is that grief is cumulative. Most of us have a defensive mechanism or habit in place of suppressing our painful emotions, rather than expressing them. This is a habit that we begin to establish at a very early age, when we hear someone tell us to "not feel bad" when we are dealing with a moment of sadness. While that comment does not make us feel any better, we tend to bury those feelings of sadness, in an effort to follow the directions offered by someone we trust, on how to cope with an emotionally painful event. -Stephen Moeller

We are a society that lives with rituals all the time, yet little is commonly understood about how rituals develop and how they continue to have value for those who participate in them. So, first we need a brief educational understanding of rituals. There are many types of rituals. There are religious rituals, educational rituals, and social rituals, to name only a few. Some rituals can satisfy more than one category. That is to say that a wedding can satisfy both a religious and a secular/social obligation. But at minimum, all rituals must meet the following tests:

- A ritual of any kind must mark a significant progress in the life of an individual[s].
- A ritual must notify the interested segment of society of that progress.
- All rituals have an unchanging purpose. (Although they may take on a vastly different appearance over long periods of time).
- The conclusionary ritual marks the progress in the life of an individual. In fact it marks the final progress in the life of an individual.
- The conclusionary ritual notifies the interested segment of the society of that final progress. (The purpose of the obituary).
- Finally, the conclusionary ritual has an absolutely unchanging purpose. The unchanging purpose is: To create an accurate memory reflection of the life of the person who died.

As in our example of the wedding which can look different over time, every conclusionary ritual can, and in fact, should look and sound different, so that it conforms to the essential purpose of creating an accurate memory reflection of the life of the person who died.

It is essential that this accurate memory picture be created or the ritual will have little value for grievers. In fact if the conclusionary ritual does not create this accurate picture it can actually make matters worse. It is now time for a bit of honesty. How many of you reading this have attended a funeral that was held in a church or temple for someone who had not been in a church or temple for twenty years? How could that religious liturgy possibly create an accurate memory picture of the person who lived and then died? How many of you have attended a military funeral that was held for a person who had not been in the military for sixty years. If someone's entire military career represented only four of the eighty years of that person's life, how could that over focus on one aspect possibly create an accurate memory reflection of the life of the person who lived and then died? The obvious answer to all the above questions is that it

couldn't. Therefore the ritual had little if any value to the grievors who attended. In fact it may have put them in an untenable position of having to say the service was fine when in fact they were not emotionally moved or helped in any way.

So how do you avoid making these mistakes? For the most part, you will not be called on directly to create a conclusionary ritual. That task typically falls to Funeral Directors and Clergy. You will however, sadly, occasionally be a part of creating a conclusionary ritual. You can be a valuable ally for yourself and your family to assure that the funeral or memorial service for your loved one meets the essential criteria which are emotionally beneficial.

How to plan funerals:

There are three underlying objectives in the creation of the accurate memory picture:

1. To help us complete any unfinished emotional business we had with the person who died, so that we can
2. Say goodbye to the physical presence we have known, and
3. To take on a new emotional and spiritual relationship with them for the rest of our lives.

Here are some guidelines to help assure that you and others you love will derive the maximum emotional benefit from a funeral or memorial service. The outline below lists the categories that will help you determine what would create the most accurate memory picture of the life of someone you and many others have loved. You as well as the other family and friends must review these categories to discover what will help you to remember your loved one as he or she was in life so that you can better complete anything that may have been incomplete in your emotional relationship with them.

The six major life categories are as follows.

- Family activity
- Church or religious activity
- Career
- Community involvement
- Hobbies
- Friends \*\*\*

\*\*\* In the category of friends, this review should include all of the other categories. There could be separate friends in each category who do not know each other. What they all will have in common is that they too are grieving.

Whether this review is done in the presence of a funeral director or clergy member, or in the privacy of your own home, it will allow everyone to find the memories they have that will contribute to creating an accurate memory reflection of the life of the person who died.

So what can you say or do when people post their grief on Facebook?

- Acknowledge the loss by “liking” their post

If you are unable to pick up the phone to call your grieving friend, at least acknowledge their post by clicking the “like” button on Facebook. This let's the griever know they were heard.

- Leave a comment

Write something such as,

“I can't imagine what you're going through” or

“I'm so sorry”

Be careful not to fall into the trap of leaving intellectual statements like, “Don’t feel bad, his suffering is over” or “She’s in a better place”

Those comments might be intellectually true, but won’t help your grieving friends feel better.

- Call

If you can always pick up the phone and call your friend who is grieving. Human interaction is always more helpful than typing, texting, or email. Ask the griever what led up to the loss, and then listen to their response.

- Follow up

Grievers get a lot of attention following a loss, but people tend to forget after a few weeks. Be sure to give them a call or invite them to coffee to see how they feel.

1. A return to a sense of trust in God when a griever has felt a breach of faith as the result of an overwhelming loss. This also can apply their loss of trust in the clergy and other members of the church. Some losses are so impossible to comprehend—so out of the normal order of things—that grievors often find themselves losing faith and trust in God, and with the people in their religious community.

2. Completing underlying grief, as well as the presenting loss issue, helps people see themselves more honestly, leading to enhanced religious and spiritual participation in their lives.

The baggage of the past tends to clog our vision of ourselves and others. The freedom to see events and feelings as they really were—though sometimes painful—opens the pathway to emotional completion.

3. In a crisis we go back to old beliefs and old behavior. Effective Grief Recovery makes return to new beliefs and new behavior possible, and improves religious and spiritual connections.

For many people whose faith had been compromised earlier in life, but who came back to the fold, a new loss can take them back to old ways. Grief Recovery can help them regain and sustain their hard-won religious and spiritual beliefs.

4. Dealing effectively with past grief allows parishioners to re-build a sense of trust in God, themselves, and others.

Losses of trust, safety, and control are some of the major by-products of unresolved grief. Since those losses don’t repair themselves, it’s important to take the actions that help restore what has been lost.

5. Completion of old relationships can strengthen or restore religious beliefs that can be a source of great comfort at a critical time, and ensure that grievors don’t sabotage future relationships.

Sadly, many parishioners who don’t deal effectively with their grief, don’t return to church after a major loss. Grief Recovery helps them be much better prepared to deal with life’s inevitable losses when they happen.

When grievors do build up the courage to share their emotions, sympathetic friends usually say, “I know how you feel”. [That well-meaning phrase robs grievors of the opportunity to openly share their feelings.](#)

If you want to help someone who has a broken heart, two of the most helpful phrases to say are, “What happened?” or “I can’t imagine how you are feeling.” Then listen to the reply. Let grievors talk openly and freely without sharing your own experiences, correcting them, or interrupting. They will then feel safe and “heard”, which is invaluable. For more information on how to talk to grievors, download our free e-book.

"Singing cheerful songs to a person whose heart is heavy is as bad as stealing someone's jacket in cold weather or rubbing salt in a wound."

## Helpful Bereavement Scriptures

Who said that? Where does it come from? That, my friends, is [Proverbs 25:20](#) - and one of the rare times you'll see us quoting scripture with a correlation to unresolved grief and recovery. The power of that proverb is in its innate wisdom that grief or sadness are necessary and even essential emotions when we've been affected by a major loss. Any attempt to cheer-up a grieving person puts them in conflict with their emotional, spiritual, and even intellectual truths. A strange twist causes people to counsel hurting friends in an emotionally illogical manner. It's as if a reflexive reaction to the grief of others compels friends and family to intone the phrase, "Don't Feel Bad." Our response is: "WHY NOT!?" All caps, bold, underlined, in quotes, plus exclamation point means we are yelling as loud as we can. Why shouldn't a person who has been massively affected by a death feel bad?

Yes, survival is the reason that you will never hear sweetness and light as the opening story on the news - local, state, national, or worldwide. Your brain has a primary function that being the safety and protection of the organism it serves. Therefore it is in constant search mode for anything that it can perceive as a threat to its continued well-being.

Bad news is a danger, and the more information your brain can acquire about that danger, the more it thinks it's helping you. Perhaps this will help you understand some of those people you know, who always seem to have a problem, and if not, they create one. We'll bet you have friends whom you might label as drama queens or adrenaline junkies, those folks who seem to be unable to exist in anything other than mayhem. Listening to them is like tuning into the nightly news. Wait, there's more bad news. Our brains mostly are not interested in good news. Good news requires no action to protect us from outside invaders. Ever wonder why you don't refuse to watch the news right before you close your eyes to sleep, perchance to dream? After all, we teach our children better than we treat ourselves. We usually won't let them watch scary movies or even eat certain kinds of food before bedtime, lest either disrupt the restful sleep encouraged by that cute phrase, "sleep tight, don't let the bedbugs bite."

Now here's the puzzle. We live in a world that is constantly giving us bad news as a way of alerting us to ratchet up our survival defenses. And, at the same time, whenever anything sad or bad happens we are told, "Don't feel bad," as in, "Don't feel bad, she's in a better place," when a loved one dies; or, "Don't feel bad, you'll do better next time," after a divorce. So our brains are hard-wired to be ever vigilant for bad news, and then our world socializes us to try not to feel bad when we get that bad news. Is it any wonder we are a bit confused?

Discovery all too often masquerades as change. Yet it is only the first part of the puzzle. In the simplest of examples; if I become aware that I am overweight and I realize it is because I am eating too much food and taking no exercise, is it likely that my weight will be reduced by simply stating the truth about my habits? We don't think so.

If you are at all intrigued by now, we suppose we should fill in the blank we've created. Here's how the original statement could read to be more effective:

"Know the truth, take proper new actions based on the truth, and the result of the new actions will be freedom."

On our way to a new freedom, each of us has to do battle with a host of myths which limit us in our quest for happiness. One of those myths is that the truth alone is enough.

The truth itself is not the freedom. The truth, at best, can guide us to the actions which lead to emotional freedom. Without actions there can be no change. We have all known people who can recite a truthful litany of what has befallen them and relate it over and over, with tears, anger, and other feelings attached. And they can do it for years.