

SESSION TWELVE

# Grieving Loss

PRAYING WITH OTHERS | LEVEL TWO



## Grieving Loss

## THE DOORWAY



I remember standing on the stage at our wedding next to Jonathan, worshiping that day to the song "I Surrender All" — the gravity of those words sinking in, in a whole new way. My life was not my own, I was not authoring this story, but I was surrendering my life and the life of those I loved over to Jesus, who I was choosing to believe was good and trust-worthy. One of the great graces of suffering and loss for me, is that I have learned so much about relinquishment. All the facades of control that we have built our lives get stripped away when our dreams die. They get stripped away when our life is turned upside down, and suddenly, often for the first time, we begin to learn what it looks like to cling to Jesus, and to stand with Him. And I'll be perfectly honest; the process of relinquishment and clinging to Jesus is a battle. It's a battle for hope over despair, for faith over fear, and for belief, when doubt about God's goodness and faithfulness creep in. But in the battle, God's grace to us is that we have the opportunity to learn to cling. And I would much rather be clinging to Christ who is unshakeable, than striving to hold onto control of things that were never mine to hold.



Nancy Guthrie, author of the book  *Holding on to Hope*  who lost, not one, but two, infant children says this: "Our task is not to decipher exactly how all of life's pieces fit and what they all mean but to remain faithful and obedient to God, who knows all mysteries." In loss, we learn to cling.

Right in the midst of some hard days, I prayed with a friend of mine and God led her to Isaiah 40:28-31.

She got done reading that and said to me, "I think the Lord just wants you to walk and not faint. Don't worry about soaring, don't worry about running, I think the invitation is to simply walk." And that was such a helpful word to me, because the journey through loss is not a fast one. I believe that Jesus invites us to grab his hand, and simply take one more step with him.

Do you not know?  
Have you not heard?  
The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of  
the ends of the earth.  
He will not grow tired or  
weary, and his understanding  
no one can fathom.  
He gives strength to the weary  
and increases the  
power of the weak.  
Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;  
but those who hope in the Lord will  
renew their strength.  
They will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow weary,  
they will walk and not be faint.

—Isaiah 40:28-31



# Your Losses



## Name Your Losses

Check all that apply.

- Death of Mother**
- Death of Father**
- Death of a grandparent**
- Death of a child**
- Death of a sibling**
- Death of a friend**
- Health**
- Job**
- Home**
- Finances**
- Relationship**
- Dream for:**
- Travel**
- Relationship with:**
- Success in:**
- Education in:**
- Place to live**
- The way I wanted my family to be**
- The way I wanted my marriage to be**
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

## Space

Make space to welcome the emotion of grief.

## Forgiveness

Is forgiveness needed? See Session Five (*Praying with Others-Level One*) for help with working through forgiveness.

## Remembrance

The following are ways to mark or remember loss:

- Plant flowers or a tree in your garden or a local garden of remembrance.
- Write a goodbye letter (instructions on following pages).
- Consider naming a child that you may have lost as result of miscarriage, abortion, or adoption.
- Light a candle on anniversaries and other special days to mark your loss and remember.
- Create a memory box—place in it things that are meaningful to your journey of loss and healing.
- Buy something special in memory of your loss—a piece of jewelry, a painting, a garden stone.
- Write a letter or poem about your loss.
- Make a donation to a favorite charity or do some fundraising.
- Take a day of vacation on the anniversary of your loss, and do things that bring you joy.
- Begin a gratitude journal asking God to show you His graces in the midst of your loss.
- Make a pilgrimage—visit specific places connected to your loss, feel the emotions that arise in those places and let Jesus speak to your there.
- Run or walk in a race with people who have suffered losses similar to yours.
- Consider seeking out a support group to find community with others who have suffered in similar ways.

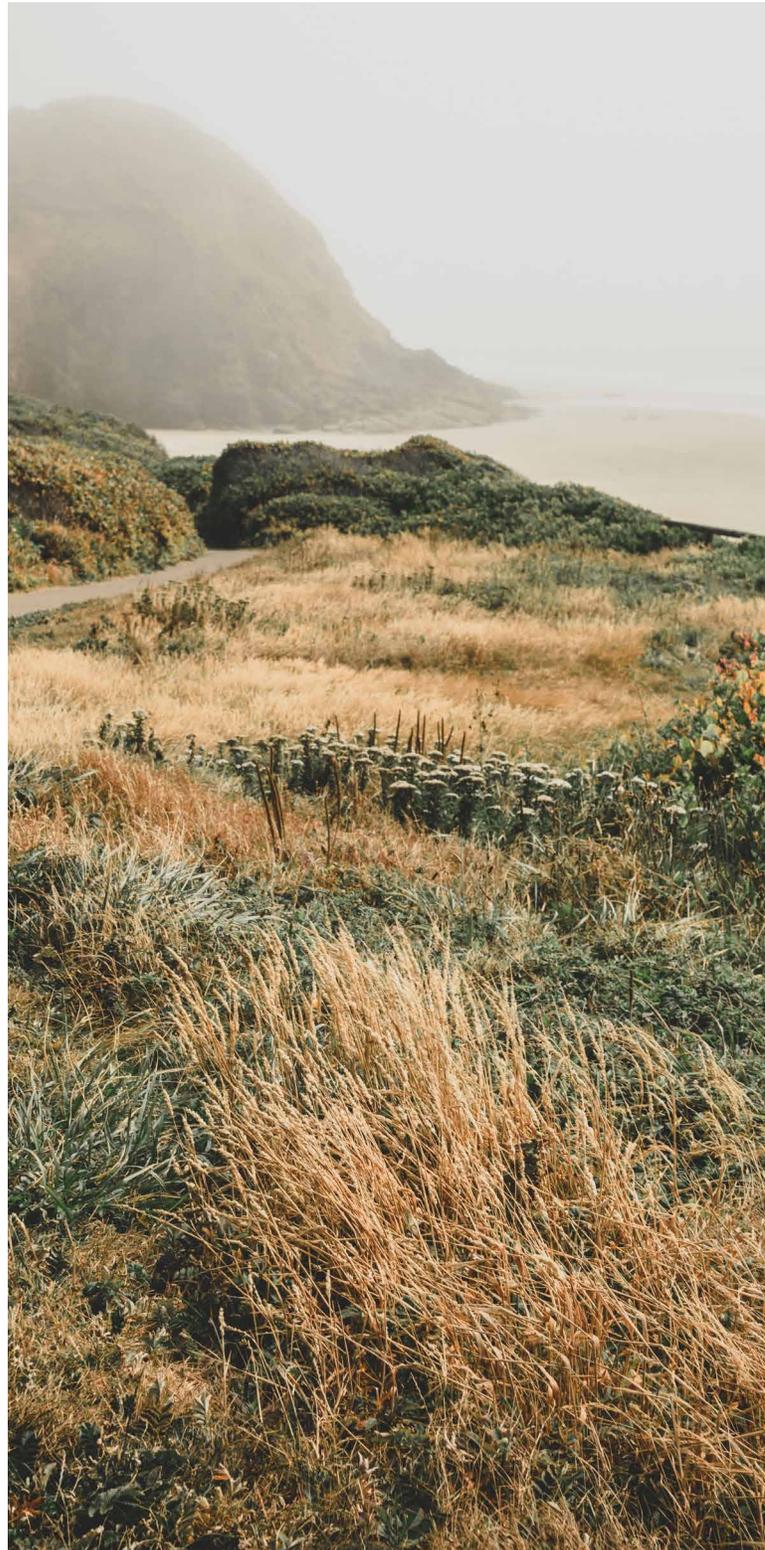
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# Goodbye Letter

Everyone has experienced some kind of loss, and it is appropriate and important to feel the hurt and grieve the loss of what you experienced. It is important to talk with God and others about loss so that you can process it in a healthy way. Grief over loss is natural and right. Sometimes, we know that our grief is holding us in a way that is unhealthy long term. The act of writing a goodbye letter can sometimes be a very healing thing. It is one tool to bring closure when the time is right to let go.

## When it is Time to Write a Goodbye Letter

- You carry bitterness, resentment and anger that hold you down in an unhealthy way, preventing you from moving forward into more wholeness.
- You feel like it's just time to move on from this stage of grief/loss and want to mark it by writing a letter.
- You sense that your loss has an unhealthy hold on you.
- The hold of grief feels stronger than the fruit of His Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control).
- You feel a lot of pain from the wounds you experienced and feel like the time is right to let go. Your life as you once knew it may no longer exist and it can be scary to be in new territory. Even so, you want God to show you what's next.



# MINISTRY



## A Prayer of Relinquishment

**Today, O Lord, I yield myself to you.  
May your will be my delight today.  
May your way have perfect sway in me.  
May your love be the pattern of my living.  
I surrender to you  
    my hopes, my dreams, my ambitions.  
Do with them what you will,  
    when you will, as you will.  
I place into your loving care  
    my family, my friends, my future.  
Care for them with a care that I can never give.  
I release into your hands  
    my need to control,  
    my craving for status,  
    my fear of obscurity.  
Eradicate the evil, purify the good,  
and establish your kingdom on earth.  
For Jesus' sake,  
Amen.**

*-Richard Foster*

People will be invited to read their goodbye letter aloud and the group will be honored to be witness. A blessing will be offered after the letter is read.

Then there will be an invitation to read the Relinquishment Prayer.

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# Writing a Goodbye Letter

Choosing a title could be a good way to start a goodbye letter. There are several examples below.

## Thank You for What You Gave Me

...significant people who have died or who will never be a part of your life again... a grandparent, spouse, sibling, a child, close friend, significant relative, ex-spouses, girlfriends, boyfriends, first love's, adulterous relationships

## I'll Always Remember You

See above... List out the gifts you will always carry.

## I'm Declaring Independence

...from a childhood system, unhealthy patterns of living, abusers

## I'm Cutting the Cord

...to take responsibility for your adult life... you might share things with your mom and dad that have hurt you as well as helped you

## I Declare Freedom

...from unhealthy ways of living in fear, anger, prejudice, paranoia, being a victim, an abusive system, eating disorders, alcoholism, perfectionism, people pleasing, workaholism, sexual addiction, co-dependency, pornography—Things that have prevented you from joyful living

## I'm Living in the Truth

...letting go of lies about who you are ... too much, too little, not significant, not loved, not valued

## Goodbye Expectations: You've Not Been a Good Friend

...say good-bye to thoughts about how your life would be: unfulfilled dreams or regrets—then say hello to living expectantly for the Spirit rather than living with expectations

## Goodbye Unforgiveness: I Didn't See You There

...ask God to show you areas of unforgiveness—then, ask for forgiveness or forgive in this letter

## I'm Changing: You Won't Recognize Me

...When you are entangled in a bad relationship with someone in your present; you can't realistically say good-bye to that person, but you can say goodbye to the current system that relationship is following by refusing to participate in it as you have. You may be playing a new role or designing healthy boundaries or unhealthy patterns of behavior.



## How to Write a Goodbye Letter

If you ask God to write a goodbye letter to a loss that He wants to bring restoration and freedom to, He will show you how. Maybe it will be a song, a poem, a walk. He's very creative about these things. Here is one format for a letter you might want to consider:

**Say directly:** Today I am saying good-bye to .....

**Say what you are saying goodbye to**, how it has caused you pain, hurt, confusion, separation. You say things you couldn't say when the events were happening. Be truthful and expressive. Name feelings, people and places, lies, expectations.

*Very likely this portion of your letter will address forgiveness: State who you are forgiving, believing that forgiveness doesn't mean it's okay or that you will entirely forget or that you now trust this person. It doesn't necessarily mean reconciliation. Forgiveness sets you free and allows the Holy Spirit to be active in you and the other person.*

**Say what you are saying hello to.** What does God want to replace your loss with? Does He want to replace your loss with something of His character or a fruit of the Spirit? Does God want to give you truth, wisdom, healing or comfort? Ask God what to say hello to, because He is a Giver of good things.

**Read this letter to a trusted person** if you feel like this would aid in accountability or will mark this day of saying goodbye. Do you keep this letter as a reminder of this day or is it more appropriate to destroy it?

### Blessing for Goodbye Letters

**In the name of and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, I accept the love and affection of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. I receive the blood of the Lamb of God so that I may abide always under his protection, peace and grace. I abide in God's wisdom, strength, healing, well-being and fruitfulness. May these God-given attributes always be evident in me. I desire to be conformed and transformed into the perfect image and likeness of the beloved risen Son of God. I claim God's goodness and receive His blessings, healing and hope.**



## Goodbye Letter

A series of 20 horizontal dotted lines for writing a goodbye letter.



## Prayer

We recognize there are many among us who have only just crossed the invisible boundary marking their own before and after, who are looking at calendars today saying this time last week, things were still normal.

For those who have witnessed the kind of scenes that could haunt for a lifetime, we pray for a sanctified memory and a holy imagination. Release them from the haunting, we pray.

For those who begin to shake when the low light of evening sends shadows long across the yard, we pray for comfort.

For those whose sadness feels sharp like fear, soothe the jagged edges and bring relief.

For those who wait in the darkness groping for answers and finding only more questions, we pray for peace.

For those who have experienced loss but carry an odd-placed sense of responsibility, who can't shake the unexplained guilt that lingers in the air around them, we pray You might calm the chaos and awaken their heart to Your love.

One day in the future, some may begin to feel like they should be over it by now; they may grow tired of going through the whole thing again, or feel pressure to heal already; for these we pray for the courage to let grief do her sacred, invisible work.

We recognize the many layers of sadness present among us, both the kind that settles like a cloud over a nation after terrible loss and the kind that bursts unwelcome into our homes.

May Your presence fill up and overflow the gaping holes that are left in the wake of tragedy.

Live out Your Name among us, Emmanuel. Remind us you haven't left us alone. Amen.

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# RESOURCES

## Books

***Holding On to Hope: A Pathway  
Through Suffering to the Heart of God***  
by Nancy Guthrie

***A Grace Disguised: How the Soul  
Grows through Loss***  
by Jerry L. Sittser

***A Grace Revealed: How God  
Redeems the Story of Your Life***  
by Jerry L. Sittser

***Don't Take My Grief Away From Me:  
How to Walk Through Grief  
and Learn to Live Again***  
by Doug Manning

***The Gift of Significance:  
Walking People Through a Loss***  
by Doug Manning

***God Loves Broken People:  
And Those Who Pretend They're Not***  
by Sheila Walsh

***When God Interrupts: Finding New  
Life Through Unwanted Change***  
by M. Craig Barnes

***Imagine Heaven: Near-Death Experiences,  
God's Promises, and the Exhilarating  
Future That Awaits You***  
by John Burke

## Videos

***Healing Our Losses***  
by Third Church [YouTube]



Notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes, spanning the width of the page.