

## Appendix B

### Applying the Grief Seminar to Losses Not Caused by Death

Often it can be hard to recognize grief as grief, because of the absence of a death. Major losses can be caused by many other life changes than someone dying. But this difficulty goes well beyond the challenge of rightly labeling an experience. When we do not recognize the grief element in a major loss or life transition, we begin to try to make sense of that experience and overcome its fallout in ways that are not suited for the difficulties that lie ahead.

That is the purpose of this appendix – to prepare you to apply the materials contained in this study to grief experiences that are not the result of the death of a loved one. Throughout this study you will find language that refers to the loss of a person (i.e., loved one, him, her, spouse, child, parent, etc...). If your loss was not a person, then these references may give you the impression that these materials do not apply to you.

However, the major experiences, changes, and challenges of grief are similar enough that once you begin to see how grief disrupts your identity and story, you should be able to apply this material to losses that do not involve the loss of a person. The important thing for reading these materials is (1) that you recognize your loss as a grief event and (2) that you are able to articulate what you have lost so that when you read the personal language in this guide, you naturally think of your loss.

This appendix will examine grief not triggered by death in four categories: the loss of innocence, the loss of a dream, the loss of stability, and the living death of divorce. These categories are not mutually exclusive, but they should help you think through different aspects of a grief struggle that is not triggered by someone's death.

#### Grief & the Loss of Innocence

This grief is usually related to some form of abuse. In abuse, trust (a key element of innocence) is redefined from a positive quality that blesses a relationship to a dangerous activity that is now akin to naiveté. When that happens something precious is lost, but we often view this experience exclusively as a wound to be healed and overlook that it is also a loss to be grieved.

As you read and seek to apply these materials to the loss of innocence (or the other three categories), it may be helpful to find a physical object that represents the innocence that you lost. It could be a picture of you at the age just before the abuse occurred. Perhaps it is a picture of father or mother who is safe. Maybe you pick something more symbolic like a pillow to represent sleep without nightmares.

Regardless of the object, use it to remind you that you are grieving the absence of something good. In grieving lost innocence, it is easy to get lost in the powerful emotions and memories surrounding the violation that occurred and miss grieving the loss for the innocent person to whom they occurred. If we do this, we silence our grief and magnify our pain; we get distracted from the grief (our present task) and fixate on the violation (a past experience we cannot change). This leaves us trapped in a period of time we cannot change rather than allowing us to embark on a journey of grief by which God can give new meaning to our loss.

As you embark on this grief journey, recognize that healthy trust may be the most difficult and confusing aspect. The interaction you have with your Freedom Group, mentor, or counselor may be the most uncomfortable, yet beneficial, part of the journey. The redemption of innocence lost requires the willingness to embrace trust a blessing again.

A major theme in the journey that is ahead of you is seeing that Christ's righteousness allows you to experience a sense of cleanness and innocence that was taken from you. As a Christian, God does not see you as defiled, and He invites you to see yourself through His eyes. Surrendering to Christ as Lord doesn't just mean doing whatever God says, it also means allowing His perspective to have the final say on our life.



Do not feel rushed by that last paragraph. It may feel very far away. But that is why you are “Taking the Journey of Grief with Hope.” The purpose of this section is merely to help contextualize this study for your loss so that you are able to see how grief applies to your past hurt.

### **Grief & the Loss of a Dream**

The loss of a dream can emerge from a variety of experiences: infertility, divorce, job loss, chronic pain, a rebellious child, mid-life crisis, or anything else that prevents you from doing or having something very important to you. In the midst of these kinds of situations we often become so consumed with managing the details of life that we forget there is a loss to be grieved.

When we forget to grieve the loss of a dream, we are left with a nagging feeling that the experience was incomplete, but have no clue what is left to be done. After all, we managed all the details as best we could. What more could life want from me? But there still doesn't feel like there is “closure” (whatever that word means).

In the loss of a dream, closure most often means grieving. In these situations, the theme of “story” in grief which you will find in these materials can be particularly helpful to the grieving process. Your loss affected your future more than your past. You may have painful dreams unfulfilled more than painful memories flooding your mind. You feel like you are walking into grief more than you are walking away from it.

Your loss was part of how you built your future in your mind. Now you feel like a character without a story more than a story with a character (i.e., loved one) missing. Chances are you resist and even resent having to write a new story. This is the loss you are grieving – the loss of a good story (i.e., dream) having to be rewritten.

A major theme in the journey ahead of you will be trusting God as the ultimate Author of history. Based upon your good dream, God has failed and forfeited His role. Having dreams, goals, or ambitions may now feel impossible or painfully vulnerable. However, it is through the journey of grieving your loss that you gain the courage to embrace a story again. It is through honestly engaging with these fears, disappointments, hurts, and anger on the journey of grief that you can begin to see God for who He truly is again.

### **Grief & the Loss of Stability**

If the loss of innocence is past tense grief and the loss of a dream is future tense grief, then the loss of stability is present tense grief. This grief might include an elderly parent surrendering independence to live with children, a fire destroying your home, a natural disaster hitting your city, or a criminal intrusion into your life. In these experiences the fear and anger over the violation or interruption often cause us to overlook the grief experience.

Often the grief over lost stability (present) is closely related to grief over the loss of a dream (future). It is the grief of divorce's impact on my kid's school performance more than a grief related to the possibility of growing old alone. It is the grief of struggling to pay this month's bills, rather than unattainable dream of being VP in this company. It is the grief that drains the motivation to continue in rehab rather than that of the grief of understanding my life story as one that will include chronic pain.

With the loss of stability, the theme of “identity” which you will find in these materials on grief may be particularly helpful. To acknowledge my loss of stability often requires a significant change in my self-perception. However, unless we are careful this change can be a time when many lies and self-deprecating concepts enter our sense of identity.

Once you get through the initial shock of the loss of stability, then this grief process begins to closely resemble the grief related to the loss of a dream. The important thing to remember is that as you deal with the logistical and emotional fallout from your loss of stability, that this is a loss to be grieved and your processing of this event will likely feel incomplete until you have done so.



## **Grief & Living Death**

One of the common descriptions for the experience of divorce is “living death.” There is a union and family which dies, but each member of that family (spouses, children, and grandparents) remain alive to observe the slow, painful death and try to figure out how they are to relate to one another. In many ways grief is easier when the person or thing that you lost is not constantly coming in and out of your life or sending messages that have to be interpreted.

As you go through these materials on grief, you may need to give more attention the sections on grief triggers or unpredictably hard times, and rely less on the general guidelines given to the time frame for grief. Grieving a divorce is less orderly than other grief experiences.

You may also find that the experiences of anger and guilt are more pronounced in grieving a divorce than in other grief experiences. In your suffering story (chapter four), it may be harder to weave out the themes of “I deserve this,” “relationships hurt,” or “evil wins” from your grief. The fact that there is rarely an “innocent party” in a divorce will make the discernment between sin and suffering a more necessary task than in other forms of grief.

Thinking through the changes in relationships will be more involved than with other forms of grief. Most of the same dynamics that are discussed in this material will exist, but with an additional level of complexity. For instance, related to couple friends as a single person will still be different and awkward, but, after a divorce, maintaining friendship can feel like choosing sides for your friends. Overt conversations about these changes are wise.

A major theme in your journey through grief will be patience and reliance upon God. Coming to the same challenges over and over again (i.e., the pain of a weekly visitation schedule, having to decide about holidays, hearing “updates” on your ex-spouse from friends, etc...) will trigger grief regularly. You might ask several key people to pray Colossians 1:9-14 on your behalf regularly, especially verse 11 where Paul asks for “all endurance and patience with joy” for his Colossian friends.

Another theme in your journey will be the resistance of taking on “divorced” as your identity. Whenever we struggle with one thing for an extended period of time, we have a tendency to embrace it as who we are. As you move through the section on learning your gospel story, make sure that you see that divorce is not the defining chapter of your life.