

NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

GOOD GRIEF:
EMBRACING GRIEF AS A MEANS OF SPIRITUAL
FORMATION IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

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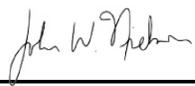
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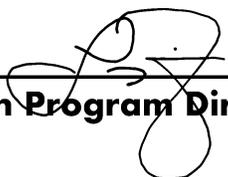
We, the undersigned, determined that this dissertation has met the academic requirements and standards of Nazarene Theological Seminary for the Doctor of Ministry program.



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ABSTRACT

Jennifer R. Ballenger

Good Grief:
Embracing Grief and Loss as a Means of Spiritual
Formation in the Christian Tradition

Grief is an inevitable reality, and all people will experience grief at some point in their life. Pastors are among those who first respond at the time of a death and are often invited to journey with people who are grieving, yet there is a lack of training for pastors to know how to use grief as a spiritually forming process in pastoral care practices. There is a great disconnect between pastors, grief researchers and clinicians who practice it. Therefore, pastors must be better trained in understanding grief theory and best practices for grief care that are grounded in Christian theology and practices. In this dissertation, I will be creating a semester-long course for undergraduate ministry majors to be used to equip pastors to understand contemporary grief theory and to present faithful and formative practices to help people move through the grief journey in healthy ways which include: the Christian funeral, hospitality, and grief care teams. The purpose of this dissertation is to help pastors create congregations of hope in times of death and dying, so our language and practices align with who we are as the people of God.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | iii |
| ABSTRACT | iv |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS | v |
| Chapter 1: The Problem and Reality of Loss | 1 |
| Formation of Grief Rituals | 2 |
| The American View of Death and Funerals | 4 |
| American Christianity | 8 |
| Cultural Grief Rituals and Traditions | 12 |
| <i>Native American Death Traditions</i> | 13 |
| <i>Mexican Death Traditions</i> | 14 |
| <i>Asian Death Traditions</i> | 15 |
| <i>African Death Traditions</i> | 17 |
| Conclusion | 19 |
| Chapter 2: Understanding Grief with Literature Review | 21 |
| Defining Grief | 21 |
| Understanding Grief | 24 |
| Grief and the Body | 26 |
| Grief and the Brain | 29 |
| Grief and Attachments | 41 |
| Grief and the Spirit | 43 |
| Conclusion | 49 |
| Chapter 3: Embracing Grief as Spiritual Formation | 50 |
| Grief Care Theories | 50 |
| <i>Meaning-Making After Loss</i> | 55 |
| <i>Continuing Bonds</i> | 57 |
| <i>Companionship with Those Who Grieve</i> | 59 |
| Good Grief | 62 |
| <i>Caring for the Dead</i> | 65 |
| <i>Grieving in Community</i> | 69 |
| <i>The Grief Language</i> | 71 |
| <i>Problematic Grief Language</i> | 72 |
| <i>The Place to Honor Grief</i> | 78 |
| Conclusion | 80 |
| Rationale for Artifact | 82 |
| Understanding the Classroom | 84 |
| <i>The Current Students</i> | 84 |
| <i>Preferred Pedagogy</i> | 88 |
| Structure of Course | 89 |
| Conclusion | 92 |
| Chapter 5: Conclusion | 94 |
| Standards for Artifact | 94 |
| Limitations to Artifact | 95 |
| <i>Theodicy and the Presence of God in Grief</i> | 96 |
| <i>Lament</i> | 97 |
| Conclusion | 98 |
| Bibliography | 101 |
| Appendix A: Grief Models | 106 |
| Appendix B: Results from Nazarene Universities | 107 |
| Appendix C: Ability Statements for Artifact | 108 |
| Appendix D: Artifact (Syllabus) | 109 |
| Appendix D: Artifact (Course Schedule) | 114 |

Chapter 1: The Problem and Reality of Loss

Grief is a natural response to the death of a loved one. Grief has been described as, “the intense emotion that crashes over you like a wave, completely overwhelming, unable to be ignored.”¹ Grief is a moment that occurs repeatedly as a person continues to process the death of a significant person in one's life. Although grief can be caused by other events, this dissertation will focus specifically on grief as a response to the death of a loved one. While *grief* defines the moments of anguish that recur from a loss, *grieving* is the process that takes place as a person moves through the grief journey. Grieving has trajectory, and the trajectory takes place as a person who has experienced the death of a loved one moves from a place of overwhelming grief to one where grief lessens, and the overwhelming feelings occur less often.

Everyone will experience the death of a loved one at some point in their life, so understanding grief and grief care is beneficial for all people. Specifically, pastors are among those who first respond at the time of death and are often invited to journey with people who are grieving. Therefore, pastors must be better trained in understanding grief theory to implement best practices for grief care. However, there is a great disconnect between pastors, those who research grief, and clinicians who practice it. Pastors are not typically trained in the most current ideas and practices regarding grief, nor do the researchers and clinicians who study grief tend to include issues of faith and spirituality in their studies. It is my desire to help make connections between the three. To address this gap, I would like to propose curriculum to help educate pastors on contemporary theory and practices for understanding grief and to assist in integrating that knowledge into faithful language and practices in their respective ministries that are rooted

¹ Mary-Frances O'Connor, *The Grieving Brain: The Surprising Science of How We Learn from Love and Loss* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2023), xvi.

in a Christian perspective. This curriculum will specifically target Nazarene pastors, although the content will be helpful for other denominations within Protestant and Evangelical traditions.

In this chapter, I begin by providing context for how grief rituals are formed and then give specific examples of how some of these death and grief practices have been lived out in different cultures. From there the chapter describes and evaluates how death is viewed in the American culture considering Christian beliefs, which will help identify some of the issues that pastors are trying to navigate as they lead parishioners in the grieving process. The final piece of this chapter, I will identify the American Christian landscape which certainly informs the death and grief rituals that pastors implement as they care for the deceased and the deceased's family.

Formation of Grief Rituals

Rituals and practices at the time of death help us to confront and process the death of a loved one. Therefore, it is important to look at how these grief rituals are formed, why grief practices are used, and how different cultures incorporate them. In *Accompany Them with Singing*, Thomas Long, a Presbyterian minister and theologian, suggests that funeral practices are born out of the intersection of necessity, custom, and conviction.²

Necessity refers to the fact that death mandates certain social needs and obligations. At some point, everyone dies. When this happens, it necessitates that something be done. No one must be taught this; when a person who was alive is no longer living, those who are still alive know something must be done in response. Long said, "A dead body in the presence of the living both poses some kind of threat—of contamination? Of impurity? Of the loss of human dignity?—and constitutes a summons to dispose of the body with care and reverence."³ In this

² Thomas G. Long, *Accompany Them with Singing: The Christian Funeral*, Pbk. ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 8.

³ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 9.

way, we join with all humanity. Caring for someone who has died is necessary, and the living must help move the body from where they have been to where they need to go reverently.

The second component in deciding funeral practices is customs. The local customs, defined by geography, history, and culture, help us identify what is good and proper to do with the dead and how to handle the loss of a loved one. Specific examples of these cultural customs will be presented in the next section. Other cultural differences include the liturgies that can be found at funerals within Christian churches. Some congregations are silent, stoic, and reverent in their grief, while others are demonstrative with loud crying and pronounced displays of grief. From the beginning of the Christian church, Christians have had to assess what to implement from local customs and what to ignore or push back on, to remain true to Christianity. Long states that what is important to remember about this is, “The Christian faith transcends every tribe, clan, and local custom, while at the same time it seeks to express itself in every local dialect.”⁴

The third component that shapes funeral practices is convictions. Convictions give the reason and philosophy for the practices that take place. Conviction for followers of Christ keeps people grounded in traditions of the Church and rooted in the Christian story during grief practices. For example, when Long discusses the necessity of death, he says that a dead body means we do something with it and move the person from here to there. Our convictions give us language, truth, and hope as we “name the ‘here’ as the life we have shared in faith and the ‘there’ as the place in the arms of God toward which our sister or brother is moving.”⁵ The conviction gives us the story to tell that gives reason and meaning to what we do, who our loved one was, and what we believe about what is next.

⁴ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 13.

⁵ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 16.

What is problematic is the American culture is lacking in all three: necessity, customs, and convictions. There is no necessity, because we have handed over the care of the dying and the dead to professionals. There is no longer a need for family and friends to be involved in caring for the dead; we can call hospice, hospitals, morgues, and funeral directors to do it for us. In addition, the United States is comprised of so many different cultures and customs, so there isn't one custom that pastors are rooted in when it is time to perform funeral rites. I am not suggesting there should be only one, but this is one of the hurdles that pastors must navigate when it comes to deciding the funeral practices to implement. Finally, and most importantly, we are lacking in convictions as evidenced by the problematic language used surrounding death and grief, and the scarcity of practices implemented that ground us in hope.

The American View of Death and Funerals

The American⁶ culture has a complicated relationship with death and grief. While there is cultural diversity within the American context, it is important to name some clear themes emerging for how the American context at large relates with death and grief practices. Long says,

Death in our [American] culture is a mixture of taboo and terror, always fertile ground for whistling-in-the-dark humor, and while some have claimed that North America is a death-denying culture, this is not exactly on target. For Americans, death is more like pornography, endlessly fascinating while at the same time forbidden.”⁷

Lisa Takeuchi Cullen, from *Time* magazine, studied death rituals in America for several years. She concluded, “The new American way of death is personal, spiritual, and emotional. It is altruistic, futuristic, and individualistic.”⁸

⁶ In this dissertation, the term “America” refers specifically to the United States. I acknowledge that America consists of more than the United States, and it is not my intention to be exclusive. It is also important to note that there is much diversity in the American culture with many other cultures being present and active. The “America” term is the common language found in much of the literature I will be using, so I will use this term throughout the dissertation, unless I specify otherwise.

⁷ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 22.

⁸ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 7.

Long agrees with this conclusion and gives specific ways that this is lived out. He shares that American funerals have taken on new patterns and rituals over the last seventy years including:

(1) a memorial service instead of a funeral, (2) a brief, simple, highly personalized and customized service with several speakers, (3) a focus on the life of the deceased, (4) an emphasis on joy rather than sadness, and (5) a private disposition of the body, with an increasing preference for cremation.⁹

These new practices are seen and celebrated not only in American culture at large, but specifically within streams of the American Protestant and Evangelical church. To be clear, this is not an attack on specific cultures or denominations, but rather it is important to name the philosophical underpinnings within U.S. society that has tendrils stretching across various religions, ethnicities, and communities but is especially prevalent in white, Protestant and Evangelical circles. It is important to identify how the ideas and practices of the American culture have permeated the local church,

There are three primary reasons why these practices are being implemented within these churches. The first reason is that the emphasis on joy and the celebration of a life well-lived corresponds with the Christian witness to the resurrection. However, focusing on the hope of the resurrection without an honest look at the death of a loved one takes away from what makes the resurrection so significant. Death and loss must be acknowledged and faced first for new life and resurrection to be fully appreciated. In *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead*, Oscar Cullmann said, “Death, in itself, is not beautiful, not even the death of Jesus. . .Whoever paints a pretty death can paint no resurrection. Whoever has not grasped the horror of death cannot join Paul in the hymn of victory: Death is swallowed up—in victory!”¹⁰

⁹ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 58.

¹⁰ Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul: Or, Resurrection of the Dead?: The Witness of the New Testament* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 27.

The second reason that these practices have been accepted in the local church is that clergy acknowledge that funerals are expensive. A study from the National Funeral Directors Association in 2021 shows the average cost of an adult funeral with a burial is about \$8,000, and the average cost of an adult funeral with a cremation is close to \$7,000. The greatest expense of the funeral is the casket, which ranges in price from \$1,500 to \$3,000, and a rented casket is still close to \$1000.¹¹ Costco, which is a wholesale store known for their cheaper prices, sells caskets for \$1,100. Understanding the costs of funerals leads clergy to be supportive of the simple, less formal services. In some ways, these types of services help to break away from some of the production and funeral expenses. Although this is financially helpful for the families, these decisions and funeral plans are being formed by financial decisions. Even if these financial decisions are rooted in wisdom and frugality, finances are dictating what is practiced, instead of Christian doctrine, tradition, or faith practices determining these death rituals.

The third reason these changes to funeral practices and grief rituals have been embraced by many local churches is because of the way consumerism has permeated the American culture and therefore seeped into the Church. Robert Goss and Dennis Klass describe this American consumeristic culture in *Dead but Not Lost* by saying, “We are supposed to be happy, to devote our lives to self-actualization and self-fulfillment, or, absent that, to consume things that make us happy up to the credit limits of our Visa cards.”¹² This way of life has even infiltrated death and the ways we approach grief. This can be seen specifically in two ways. The first is seen in the ways that grief has become an individual problem. Often, in the pursuit of happiness and larger incomes, people move away from their families and the communities who know them and know their stories. Then, when a loved one dies, the death is often only important to a small group of

¹¹ John Egan, “How Much Does a Funeral Cost?,” *Forbes Advisor*, October 1, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/life-insurance/how-much-does-a-funeral-cost/>.

¹² Robert Goss and Dennis Klass, *Dead but Not Lost: Grief Narratives in Religious Traditions* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005), 254.

people. While others may come to the funeral, few people are experiencing the grief of the loss together.

The funeral rituals and grief practices are not shared by a group of people, but rather individuals are deciding how they should grieve. Goss and Klass say, “When grief becomes individual, the mourning rituals that prescribed behavior, guided feelings, and structured social interactions are gone.”¹³ This individualistic approach to the rituals leads to highly personalized and customized services, where the focus is on the individual who has died almost as a way to introduce the deceased to those who are attending.

The second way consumerism can be seen in the death rituals and the ways we approach grief within the church is the way we keep everything as palatable as possible. This is seen with the bodies of the deceased that are either heavily made up with lifelike shape and color or absent from the funerals altogether. Another example of trying to make the funeral as comfortable as possible is to remove these services from the church and to host them at funeral homes or party/recreation halls, while still being officiated by clergy. Funerals that have historically served to help usher the dead from this world to the next are now focused on comforting the living to help them process the loss. When a culture’s emphasis is on comfort and happiness, there is not space for suffering and grief. While it is understandable that these practices are implemented to try to make the death of a loved one bearable, the truth is, when a loved one dies, there most certainly is mourning and grief that takes place. To suggest otherwise is demeaning and does not honor the significance of the loss. These examples are just a snapshot of how death and the practices at the time of death are viewed in the American culture.

While these new funeral practices may have been implemented with good intentions within the American church, the Christian tradition is expressed differently in various cultures

¹³ Goss and Klass, *Dead but Not Lost*, 255.

and a standard set of beliefs, rituals, and patterns around death and dying have been abandoned to meet cultural preferences. Many streams of the Protestant and Evangelical church have allowed the American culture to reshape the Christian traditions, including our death practices. By making funerals more personal and individualistic, we have forgotten the importance of the communal gospel story and the communal loss as people who have lived in community with the one who has died. In addition, moving funerals from the church to the funeral homes, we have traded pastors' voices for the voices of funeral directors, removed liturgies that have been passed down through the history and traditions of the Church, and removed symbols that ground us and remind us of our faith story and where our hope is found.

Instead of culture shaping the church, the church should be leading the way in traditions, rituals, and practices that care for the dead and the family that remains. Our congregations should be a community of hope in a time of grief. While I do believe that pastors and congregations typically offer a faithful presence in the immediacy when a loved one dies, to truly be a community of hope, our language and practices need to demonstrate this hope consistently through the funeral and entire grief journey as well.

American Christianity

One of the challenges of maintaining faithful language and practices in death and grief rituals is due to the state of American Christianity.¹⁴ There has been much debate over whether America is a "Christian nation." While there may be nativity scenes up all over the United States during December, and the language of "one nation under God" is still in the pledge of allegiance, in actuality, the United States' version of Christianity mirrors the blending of our nation's

¹⁴ The term "American Christianity" refers specifically to Protestant and Evangelical traditions with low church realities within the United States church landscape.

culture. There is a lack of consistency and cohesiveness within the United States that permeates the Protestant and Evangelical streams of the Church.

Stephen Prothero describes the American Christian landscape in *American Jesus*. He talks about how over the past few decades, there has been an increase of spiritual growth and interest in different religions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Transcendental Meditation, Mormonism, and others, which have created a pluralist paradigm. Prothero goes on to share that “nearly one-fourth of Christians in the United States believe in reincarnation. There are about 2,000 mosques in the United States, more than 600 Hindu congregations, and in LA alone, there are over 200 Buddhist centers.”¹⁵ Prothero says, “America’s city on a hill is tipped with church spires and minarets: America the beautiful and the pluralist.”¹⁶

The United States is a spiritual marketplace, where people pick and choose beliefs from different faith traditions and systems to craft a religion they agree with, which includes the death rituals and practices that are implemented. One example of this can be found in a study that Springtide Research Institute conducted in 2021 called, “The State of Religion and Young People: Navigating Uncertainty.” This survey focused specifically on Gen Z, ages eighteen to twenty-five-year-old in the United States, and they discovered that the idea of the spiritual marketplace is especially true for this age group. The study showed that a majority of young people say they are religious (71%), and spiritual (78%).¹⁷ However, while they are religious, they are not turning to religion, as Gen Z does not necessarily participate in organized religion. They do not claim a bundled faith, a whole set of traditions, doctrine, and practices from one religious institution or denomination. Rather, they want what Springtide calls, “Faith

¹⁵ Stephen R. Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 6.

¹⁶ Prothero, *American Jesus*, 5.

¹⁷ Springtide Research Institute, “The State of Religion and Young People: Navigating Uncertainty” (2021), <https://springtideresearch.org/the-state-of-religion-2021-digital-edition/?page=1>, 21.

Unbundled,” which “is a term that describes the way young people increasingly construct their faith by combining elements such as beliefs, identity, practices, and community from a variety of religious and non-religious sources, rather than receiving all these things from a single, intact system or tradition.”¹⁸

Prothero claims the spiritual revolution that took place in the 19th Century played a significant part in creating the spiritual marketplace that we have in the United States today. This spiritual marketplace greatly influences the ways in which the Church implements specific traditions, rituals, and practices, even for the dead.

Prothero names three stages of the spiritual revolution and how they impacted America’s shift in removing Jesus from being bound to a particular religion or Christian doctrine. First, in the early 19th century, evangelicals separated Jesus from Calvinism. This doctrine focused on a sovereign God in contrast to the brokenness of humanity. This perspective did not leave much room for Jesus, who was both fully divine and fully human. During this period, the creeds were also being removed from Protestant and Evangelical churches, because in the creeds, Jesus was being overshadowed by God the Father and by saints. In removing Jesus from formal liturgy, highly connected to the historical tradition of the Church, Jesus became more personal and was seen as a friend; Jesus became his own person apart from the Trinity, who fully embodied virtues they could imitate and who had a mind both evangelicals and culture, in general, could understand.¹⁹

Secondly, in the decades immediately following the Civil War, the churches were influenced by Darwinism, comparative religion, and biblical criticism. These influences had Protestant and Evangelical churches extracting Jesus from the Bible, replacing *sola scriptura*,

¹⁸ Springtide Research Institute, *Navigating Uncertainty*, 59.

¹⁹ Prothero, *American Jesus*, 13.

scripture alone, with *sola Jesus*, Jesus alone.²⁰ Finally, beginning with Thomas Jefferson, who Prothero called the “founding father of America’s extra-Christian Jesus piety,”²¹ Jesus was liberated from Christianity itself. This idea continued to develop and fully blossomed after the 1965 immigration boom “as Hindus and Buddhists boldly adopted Jesus as one of their own, unbinding him from Christian tradition for their own purposes.”²² As these changes took place, people became able to embrace the version of Jesus they preferred. If Jesus is not bound to scripture, history, or faith traditions, Jesus can be molded into any belief system a person wants or needs.

Prothero believes that Jesus was embraced as a person in the 1800’s, became a personality early in the 20th century, and more than that, Jesus grew to be an American celebrity in the 1920’s.²³ Through the rise of consumerism and mass media and communications, portrayals of Jesus were able to be seen in books, film, and radio. One example of this is the *Head of Christ*, which is an image of Jesus that was created in 1940 by Warner Sallman, an evangelical Protestant who worked in advertisement and saw his art as a Christian calling. This is one of the most popular images of Jesus, and it has over 500 million copies sold and can be seen on prints, plaques, bookmarks, funeral cards, mugs, and calendars. With the help of mass media and Christian bookstores, as Leonard Sweet said, “Jesus went from *Logos* to logos.”²⁴

More recently, the Barna Group reported in 2017 that most Americans (93%), Christians and non-Christians, believe that Jesus was a real person who actually lived, and that two-thirds of Americans have made a significant commitment to Jesus.²⁵ While this sounds like good news, as was previously stated, while there is belief in Jesus of some kind, it does not mean that

²⁰ Prothero, *American Jesus*, 14

²¹ Prothero, *American Jesus*, 14.

²² Prothero, *American Jesus*, 14.

²³ Prothero, *American Jesus*, 112.

²⁴ Prothero, *American Jesus*, 123.

²⁵ Barna Group, “Jesus: Man, Myth or God?” (2017), <https://www.barna.com/research/jesus-man-myth-god>.

Americans are deeply rooted in their faith in Jesus Christ, nor are they grounded in sound doctrine or traditions of the Church. Instead, much like the Statue of Liberty, American baseball, and Mickey Mouse, Jesus is recognized, liked, and seen as a symbol or icon of America.

The culmination of this progression has made American Christianity an anemic version of Christianity with a pluralistic mindset. Jesus is attached to all different disciplines, doctrines and religions, and cultures. It is important to understand the culture of American Christianity because this culture has affected the language and practices we implement, including those surrounding death and grief. Not only does this anemic and pluralistic mindset affect death practices, but it also effects a person's view of death and faith formation as they grieve.

To better look at the ways that necessity, customs, and convictions form grief rituals and practices, we need to explore some examples of death and grief practices that are implemented in other cultures. How we take care of the dead is also tied to how we honor the living. Long said, "A society that has forgotten how to honor the bodies of those who have departed is more inclined to neglect, and even torture, the bodies of those still living."²⁶ Intentional care and practices for the dead and for those who grieve are necessary, humane, and a faithful Christian response.

Cultural Grief Rituals and Traditions

Cultures have specific ways of viewing death, which is accompanied by practices, rituals, and patterns of grief within a community. In contrast with the way the American culture views death, this section provides a few examples of different cultures and their specific grief rituals and traditions. They are presented to demonstrate how necessity, customs, and convictions come together for a particular people group. Specifically, the Native American, Mexican, Asian, and African traditions are explored. Each of the cultural traditions contains subgroups, and there are

²⁶ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 7.

cultural variations of how death and grief are practiced within those subgroups. However, these rituals and customs which will be presented are general, commonly known practices for each culture and will serve as an example of different ways death rituals are lived out among these people groups. These examples are not intended to be exhaustive nor comprehensive but rather are offered as a few specific ways that death rituals and customs are practiced.

Native American Death Traditions

Native American death traditions are rooted in both necessity and conviction. While these practices have been altered by colonialism, they are still active and present in some form. Native Americans have a deep respect for nature and believe that everyone and everything is one with nature.²⁷ Since death is a part of nature, then death is natural, and they live in a way that they are prepared for death to come at any time. In addition, in *The World of Bereavement: Cultural Perspectives on Death in Families*, Joanne Cacciatore and John DeFrain explain the way Native Americans view the world and their place in it. They say,

“Unlike the linear model espoused by many in Western society, the relational worldview is intuitive, non-time-oriented, and sees life as harmonious where health and wellness are achieved by maintaining balance between the spiritual, mental, and physical aspects in one’s circle of life.”²⁸

Maintaining this balance is essential both in living and in dying.

Burials usually take place in a special place that is near, but far enough away, from where they live. The dead are often buried in trees or on platforms above ground. The exposed corpse helps with speedy decomposition and the sun helps bleach the skeleton, so the bones can later be removed and placed in sacred burial grounds.²⁹ In addition, placing the dead on platforms, out in nature, also allows animals and birds to eat at the body, which contributes back to the land and

²⁷ Joanne Cacciatore and John D. DeFrain, *The World of Bereavement: Cultural Perspectives on Death in Families*, International and Cultural Psychology (Cham: Springer, 2015), 224.

²⁸ Cacciatore and DeFrain, *The World of Bereavement*, 224.

²⁹ Lynne Ann DeSpelder and Albert Lee Strickland, *The Last Dance: Encountering Death and Dying*, 8th ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 2009), 104.

completes the circle of life. The body becomes one again with the land, and the spirit is then led to the afterlife.

The Native American death ceremony and funeral is usually led by the spiritual leader of the tribe. It includes dances, death songs, and an invitation for deceased ancestors to join the ceremony to help ensure the deceased is transported to the next life.³⁰ The grieving time varies depending on the tribe, but mourning is seen as necessary to create strength for the people. Grieving is often expressed openly and communally, but the men often express minimal outward emotion and express grief through songs or chants, while women typically express their emotions outwardly with wailing.³¹ The death practices and grief rituals are an important part of the Native American culture, and they are done to both honor the dead and to stay in good standing with the spirit world.

Mexican Death Traditions

Death is such a part of the Mexican culture that many have said that death is the nation's symbol.³² Images of death are portrayed all over Mexico, and death is celebrated and incorporated into everyday life. One of the most recognized Mexican death traditions is *Día de los Muertos*, which translated means "Day of the Dead," and is a national holiday to commemorate the deceased. It is a communal celebration that combines aspects of the Christian celebration of All Saints' Day with festival-like qualities that were incorporated from the Aztecs. These include decorating the graves of deceased family members, building altars at the graves with photos and mementos to help those living to remember the dead, and eating feasts with favorite foods of the deceased with extended family and friends. *Día de los Muertos* is a

³⁰ DeSpelder and Strickland, *The Last Dance*, 102.

³¹ Cacciatore and DeFrain, *The World of Bereavement*, 225.

³² Isabel T. Gutiérrez et al., "Embracing Death: Mexican Parent and Child Perspectives on Death," *Child Development* 91, no. 2 (March 2020), accessed September 27, 2023, <https://srce.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cdev.13263>, 491

celebration that connects the living with the dead. In *The Last Dance: Encountering Death and Dying*, Lynne Ann DeSpelder and Albert Lee Strickland describe what happens during this celebration by saying, “The souls of the dead reassure the living of their continued protection, and the living reassure the dead that they will remember and nurture them in their daily lives.”³³

Another death tradition in the Mexican culture is to put up decorative altars in the home called *ofrendas*. These ritual altars often have food, flowers, incense, and candles on them to remember the loved one who has died and to pray for their souls every time a family member walks past these altars.³⁴ These altars are usually present in the home for three to seven years after the loved one has died, and they believe that the deceased is still a part of their lives and family.³⁵

These Mexican cultural death traditions ensure that people of all generations, are an integral part of annual death rituals and that they encounter symbolic images of death on almost a daily basis. Celebrations surrounding death and rituals that keep death in front of the living on a continual basis are deeply rooted in their cultural convictions about death. These Mexican traditions speak to their belief that all people live, and all people die, so both the living and the dying should be celebrated and participated in together.

Asian Death Traditions

Asian cultures also have specific death traditions that revolve around deep familial connections, which are central to their beliefs. Caring for elders in the community includes helping them die well, and ancestors typically occupy a central place in Asian communities and are held in high esteem and with great respect. DeSpelder and Strickland said, “The living and the dead are dependent on each other; the living perform the necessary ancestral rites while the

³³ DeSpelder and Strickland, *The Last Dance*, 113.

³⁴ Gutiérrez et al., “Embracing Death,” 494.

³⁵ Cacciatore and DeFrain, *The World of Bereavement*, 134.

dead dispense blessings to their descendants.”³⁶ One of the ancestral funeral rites includes positioning the casket with the feet toward the door, so that the spirit of the deceased can exit the door and enter the next world without obstacles.³⁷ Another death practice is that people come forward at the end of the funeral service with flowers to place in or on the casket, and they face the deceased and bow as a sign of respect.³⁸ Both the Chinese and the Japanese people have traditionally honored the spirits of their beloved ancestors by creating family graves or family altars in which family members maintain properly and make offerings as a way to keep the presence of their ancestors with them.³⁹

One of the most important death practices in Chinese traditions is regarding the bones of the deceased. To honor the ancestors, their bones need to be in the family ancestral burial plot. This proved to be an issue for Chinese immigrants in the United States. At one point, it was common to exhume the bones of Chinese Americans after ten or twenty years to return them to their ancestral homes. When that could not happen, “Bone Houses” were created in Chinese cemeteries in the United States, where the bones of deceased Chinese wait to return to their homeland someday.⁴⁰

One final death tradition to note for Asian cultures is the way they honor the grief process. Both the Chinese and Japanese wear clothing that signifies that a loss has taken place. The Chinese traditionally wear white to most funerals. However, when the death first occurs, people in mourning will attach a black piece of material on their clothes, and at the funeral, they will remove it and bury it with the coffin.⁴¹ The mourning time varies for the Chinese, and it is based

³⁶ DeSpelder and Strickland, *The Last Dance*, 113.

³⁷ DeSpelder and Strickland, *The Last Dance*, 114.

³⁸ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing* 10.

³⁹ DeSpelder and Strickland, *The Last Dance*, 117.

⁴⁰ DeSpelder and Strickland, *The Last Dance*, 117.

⁴¹ Braun, Kathryn L and Rhea Nichols, “Death and Dying in Four Asian American Cultures: A Descriptive Study,” *Death Studies*, Vol. 21, no. 4 (August 1997), <https://www.proquest.com/docview/231404932/fulltext/A40E808CBD744932PQ/1?accountid=39422>.

upon the relationship between the deceased and the survivor. It is generally understood that survivors should not attend weddings or celebrations for 100 days after the death to signify that they are still in mourning.

Similarly, the Japanese will wear a white headband or attach a piece of white cloth to their clothing during the memorial services.⁴² They hold memorial services for the first 49 days after a loved one has died, and they believe that the spirit of the dead lingers at their home during that time. They hold another memorial service again after 100 days. Mourning in the Japanese culture can last up to three years.⁴³ All of these Asian death rituals are practices to honor their ancestors and help to keep strong connections with their ancestors in the days to come.

African Death Traditions

Most of the funeral and grief rituals embodied in African cultures are community based. The entire community comes together to mourn the loss of the community member. African traditions of bereavement and mourning “asserts that the loss to the community is just as important as that of the family and also makes central the community’s role in healing.”⁴⁴ This support from the community demonstrates *Ubuntu*, which is an African spiritual philosophy which means, “I am, because we are.”⁴⁵ This way of life speaks to the idea that everyone in the community is connected through showing care, concern, and unity. This philosophy is true for those who are alive and grieving, and it is also believed to be true for the community who has already died and is gathered together in the next life.

The traditional African attitude toward death is peaceful, in that they see it as a part of the whole of life, and death is a natural transition to the next part of life. The belief in reincarnation

⁴² Braun and Rhea, “Death and Dying in Four Asian American Cultures: A Descriptive Study.”

⁴³ DeSpelder and Strickland, *The Last Dance*, 115.

⁴⁴ Cacciatore and DeFrain, *The World of Bereavement*, 5.

⁴⁵ Cacciatore and DeFrain, *The World of Bereavement*, 5.

is common, so they believe the dead are not gone, but alive in another place.⁴⁶ African cultures view the ancestors who have died as the “living dead.”⁴⁷ In the article, “The African Conception of Death,” Baloi describes this concept by saying, “the deceased is believed to be living in the ontology of the invisible, intangible beings, dynamically engaging in an evolving state of existence in the world of the animated being.”⁴⁸ This understanding allows the living to still have some kind of relationship with their loved one, even though they have died.

The African funeral rituals traditionally last six months to a few years. There are stages that move the community through different phases of the death and grief. This lengthy funeral custom helps to separate the dead from the living, and they believe it also gives the dead time to join the ancestors who have gone before them.⁴⁹ African death traditions include taking the dead body out of a home through a hole, so the spirit will not be able to find its way back into the home, and burying the person properly, so the dead does not become a wandering ghost.⁵⁰ All of the death rituals they practice are for the purpose of helping the dead to enter the afterlife, which is imagined to be geographically similar to where they live and to be populated with their people.

These are just a few examples of the ways that the geography or culture dictates and shapes the practices at funerals. These funeral rituals and grief practices that are presented are intentional, thoughtful, and deeply rooted in necessity, customs, and convictions. They are communal and help to form and express the many meanings and emotions in grief. While each person experiences the loss differently, the grief is experienced in the context of community and the grief rituals give the cultural means for people to grieve together.

⁴⁶ DeSpelder and Strickland, *The Last Dance*, 107.

⁴⁷ Lesiba Baloyi, “The African Conception of Death: A Cultural Implication” (University of South Africa, 2014), 235.

⁴⁸ Lesiba Baloyi, “The African Conception of Death,” 235.

⁴⁹ DeSpelder and Strickland, *The Last Dance*, 109.

⁵⁰ DeSpelder and Strickland, *The Last Dance*, 109.

Conclusion

As seen in the previous sections in this chapter, pastors have the responsibility to implement death and grief rituals that are deeply rooted in necessity, customs, and convictions as they lead parishioners in the grieving process. However, there is not one ideal or pure form for Christian funeral practices, due to differences in historical and denominational contexts, ages of people, forms of death, and ethnic and cultural differences. Yet the one thing that must be consistent is the gospel narrative. Long speaks to this truth by saying, “All Christian funerals—formal or informal, high church or low, small or large, urban or rural—say, in essence, “Look! Can you perceive this? The life and death of this one who has died can be seen, if you know how to look, as shaped after the pattern of the life and death of Jesus.”⁵¹ As we tell the story of the deceased through the lens of the gospel, we see how Jesus came, was baptized, lived, died, resurrected, and ascended to heaven. Our story is Jesus’ story and should be told and celebrated through the Christian rituals surrounding death and grief.

We need to speak and act in ways that proclaim the *Christus Victor*, the One who through his death and resurrection offers victory over death. Christians should embody the hope of the gospel in all seasons, but especially in death. The funeral practices that are taking place need to be evaluated to ensure that our theology shapes our practices. Christianity should be a way of life that shapes how we care for the world, love our neighbor, manage our finances, raise our children, gather for meals, engage in worship, and even how we encounter sickness and death. To best portray hope, our language and practices need to demonstrate this and must be consistent with who we are as the people of God.

The following chapter will focus on developing a greater, holistic understanding of grief. As pastors walk with people through the grief journey, they must have a better understanding of

⁵¹ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 16.

how grief affects the people they are caring for. Gaining insight on the ways grief affects the body, brain, relationships, and spirit will be beneficial for pastors to integrate into pastoral grief care.

Chapter 2: Understanding Grief with Literature Review

The previous chapter, I identified several issues that pastors must navigate when deciding which death and grief rituals to implement. While other cultural traditions seem to have specific and intentional death practices that are born out of necessity, customs, and convictions, the American culture and the American Protestant and Evangelical traditions seem to lack consistency and clarity in their rituals. While ethnic, geographical, cultural, and denominational differences influence and shape the current practices used in funeral rituals and grief care, I believe it is imperative that pastors have consistent language and practices that are rooted in Christian doctrine with a robust understanding of grief and grief care.

To lay the common foundation for shared language and practices in death and grief rituals, pastors need to first understand grief and the holistic ways it effects those who experience it. This chapter will highlight key areas that need to be explored in grief from leading voices in those areas. It begins by describing grief and providing definitions to help clarify what kind of grief people experience through death and dying. Next, it will present the holistic effects of grief by presenting how grief affects the body, brain, relational attachments, and the spirit. This literature review is intended to provide a deeper exploration of grief and best practices for grief care, so that pastors can provide a faithful response to those who will deal with the death of a loved one.

Defining Grief

There has been significant work done in grief research in the past twenty years. One example of recent progress is the inclusion of “prolonged grief disorder,” formerly known as chronic grief, as the newest disorder to be added to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). It is included in the text revision of DSM-5 (DSM-5-TR), which was

released in March 2022.⁵² Some critics are concerned that labeling grief as a disorder communicates that grief is abnormal. Others are concerned that adding grief to the DSM-5 “medicalizes” ordinary grief, and grief can then easily be overtreated with prescriptions and antidepressants.⁵³ However, there are several benefits of prolonged grief disorder being added to the DSM-5, which includes obtaining more trained mental health practitioners and greater awareness of the importance and impact of grief on the larger community.

Adding grief to the DSM-5 gives grief credibility in many ways. It gives more access to services for those who are grieving, because there will be more clinicians who know how to treat grief. In addition, more people who experience grief can receive treatment from professionals, because it can now be covered by insurance. This recent addition to the DSM-5 speaks to the fact that grief is an important issue in our society, and researchers and clinicians are currently giving much time and attention to grief.

While there are many types of grief, there is a difference between *acute grief* and *prolonged grief*. *Acute grief* is the grief that takes place in the immediate period after a loss. Typical signs of acute grief include “feelings of shock or disbelief, yearning, waves of sadness or other intense emotions, feeling disconnected from others, and desire to disengage from roles or responsibilities.”⁵⁴ The length of time that acute grief lasts is controversial, but most agree that there is no uniform expiration date on normal grief. The time of grief varies depending upon the closeness of the relationship to the deceased and circumstances of the loss. There are other factors that play into how long the acute grief will last, including how old the deceased was at

⁵² American Psychiatric Association, “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5-TR).” (2022), www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm.

⁵³ Lindsey Getz, “Complicated Grief -Does It Belong in DSM-5?,” *Social Work Today* Vol. 12 No. 4, (July/August 2012), 8.

⁵⁴ Kristin L. Szuhany et al., “Prolonged Grief Disorder: Course, Diagnosis, Assessment, and Treatment,” *FOCUS* 19, no. 2 (June 2021): 163.

the time of death, prior knowledge of diagnosis or anticipation of the death, the way the loved one died, or the comfort and peacefulness of the person's last days and final moments.

While there is no specific, standard timeline, studies show that for most people, their grief intensity is lessened by about six months after the death occurs.⁵⁵ This does not imply that grief is gone nor is it fully resolved, but rather the grief has become better integrated. For the person grieving, the grief has moved more to the background, and they have learned how to reengage in lives without the deceased.

In comparison, Prolonged Grief Disorder is defined in the DSM-5 as “the intense yearning or longing for the deceased (often with intense sorrow and emotional pain), and preoccupation with thoughts or memories of the deceased (in children and adolescents, this preoccupation may focus on the circumstances of the death).”⁵⁶ While many of the symptoms are similar and overlap with acute grief, this grief is persistent, disabling and prevents the person experiencing this type of grief from functioning in everyday life. These are the people who get stuck in their grief and need assistance in reintegrating into their life without the loved one who has died.

Out of all who experience grief, only about 7-10% of bereaved adults⁵⁷ and approximately 5-10% of children and adolescents will experience depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and/or prolonged grief disorder following bereavement.⁵⁸ The DSM-5 states the loss has to have happened twelve months prior to the prolonged grief disorder diagnosis for adults, and at least six months before diagnosis for children and adolescents.⁵⁹ As pastors care for those who experience grief, it is important to keep track of how much time has

⁵⁵ Szuhany et al., “Prolonged Grief Disorder,” 163.

⁵⁶ American Psychiatric Association, “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5-TR).”

⁵⁷ Szuhany et al., “Prolonged Grief Disorder,” 161.

⁵⁸ Nadine M. Melhem et al., “Identifying Prolonged Grief Reactions in Children: Dimensional and Diagnostic Approaches,” *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 52, no. 6 (June 2013): 599..

⁵⁹ American Psychiatric Association, “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5-TR).”

passed from the loss in comparison to how that person is responding to the loss. Recognizing the signs of prolonged grief in a person necessitates a referral to a counselor and other medical professionals for additional help in processing the grief.

Understanding Grief

Not only is it important to define and identify the different types of grief, but pastors also need to understand what takes place holistically in the individual when grief occurs. Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* suggests that trauma and loss have a two-part structure that consists of the actual event and then the ongoing processing of the event.⁶⁰ Trauma and loss have no clear end but instead returns as if it were “not integrated in time.”⁶¹ Caruth names this returning as the difference between trauma and suffering.

In Shelly Rambo’s initial book on trauma studies, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*, she identifies this same concept: while “suffering is integrated in time,” trauma is “not solely located in the actual event but, instead, encompasses the return of that event, and the ways in which the event is not concluded.”⁶² Rambo and Caruth share the view that trauma is not simply a wound that marks past suffering, rather it speaks beyond that past suffering into the present and foreseeable future. In this way, trauma is an ongoing, open wound. Rambo says that the structure of trauma introduces what she calls “the middle—the figurative site in which death and life are no longer bound. Instead, the middle speaks to the perplexing space of survival.”⁶³

In *Spirit and Trauma*, Rambo continues this idea with the story of her encounter with Deacon Lee in New Orleans, 29 months after Hurricane Katrina. Deacon Lee explained that while the crisis of the storm is over, the effects of the crisis linger and continue to do damage to

⁶⁰ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Twentieth Anniversary edition. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 4.

⁶¹ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 7.

⁶² Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 7.

⁶³ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 7.

the people living there. “Hurricane Katrina is not simply a singular event that took place in August 2005. It is an event that continues, that persists in the present. Trauma is what does not go away.”⁶⁴ The people of New Orleans were rent from their homes and rent from life as they knew it. They continue to do the hard work of seeking a new normal as things cannot return as they were before. As Deacon Lee said, “No life after the storm is conceived apart from the storm.”⁶⁵ Death does the same. When a loved one dies, there is no going back to the before. Life cannot be conceived of from that point forward apart from the loss.

Philosopher Susan Brison writes about the aftermath of her own personal, physical attack and trauma and describes her experience as a time where death and life were interconnected. Brison writes, “The line between life and death, once so clear and sustaining, now seemed carelessly drawn and easily erased.”⁶⁶ Rambo speaks more to this and explains that trauma is an encounter with death—not literal death, but a death to “all that one knows about the world and all the familiar ways of operating within it.”⁶⁷ It is a radical ending of life as one knew it, in which it is extremely difficult to be alive or to conceive of life. The event is now what defines everything, and it is hard to imagine any kind of life around it. Rambo goes on to say, “Life takes on a fundamentally different definition, and the tentative and vulnerable quality of life in the aftermath means that it is life always mixed with death.”⁶⁸

For those who experience loss and trauma, they are ripped away from their former normal, and they must figure out how to live and function in the space that remains. Severson states, “For the sufferer of wrenching trauma, physical or otherwise, there is no road forward that completely obliterates the brokenness of a person’s past. . .the recipients are left to cope with a

⁶⁴ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 2.

⁶⁵ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 4.

⁶⁶ Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*, New paperback edition. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), 9.

⁶⁷ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 4.

⁶⁸ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 4.

life permanently altered.”⁶⁹ It is learning to “survive,” which is literally translated as living on.⁷⁰

Rambo explains this does not mean one gets beyond the death or loss, but rather “death remains in the experience of survival and life is reshaped in light of death—not in light of its finality but its persistence.”⁷¹

After the traumatic event or loss, it is no longer a life and death situation, but Caruth describes these experiences as “death-life encounters.” She says, “trauma is not merely an encounter with death—and thus something to be solely pathologized—but trauma is also a rewriting of life.”⁷² This continual movement of survival between death and life speaks to a middle space in which death and life cannot be experienced apart from each other.

To fully care for those who are grieving, it is important to know the signs of grief as they are expressed in an individual in this middle space where grief takes place. Pastors need to understand that not only is grief an emotional response to a death, but rather this loss can also be expressed in many ways. As stated previously, grief is a natural response to the death of a loved one, and it affects every aspect of the person grieving: body, mind, relationships, and spirit.

Grief and the Body

When the death of a loved one takes place, one area that the loss is experienced is in the body. Initially, it is common to experience shock, where you feel either numb or intense emotions that include sadness, anger, or guilt. Many times, the initial shock includes swinging between numbness and intense emotions. It is also common to experience anxiousness or to have brain fog, to not be able to sleep or eat, or any combination of these experiences.

⁶⁹ Eric R. Severson, *Scandalous Obligation: Rethinking Christian Responsibility* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2011), 142.

⁷⁰ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 25.

⁷¹ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 25.

⁷² Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 4.

In *The Atlantic*, Cari Romm shared that the Old English word for grief, “heartsarnes,” literally means soreness of the heart.⁷³ Soreness of the heart can certainly refer to the emotions experienced when a loved one dies, however it seems to also have physical implications as well. During those first weeks of grief, people have increased heart rates, higher blood pressure and may be more likely to have heart attacks.⁷⁴ *The Atlantic* reported on a study published in 2012, in the journal *Circulation*, that found “a person’s risk of having a heart attack increased 21 times over in the day immediately following the death of a loved one and six times over in the following week.”⁷⁵ Other research in *JAMA Internal Medicine* found that the increased risk of stroke or heart attack can last up to a month after the death of a loved one.⁷⁶

This happens because grief is felt in the body in the form of stress. The stress caused by grief can cause symptoms that are like those of a heart attack: chest pain and shortness of breath. Dr. Maureen Malin, a geriatric psychiatrist who works with McLean Hospital, explains how these heart attacks can happen: “Extreme stress, the kind experienced after the loss of a loved one, is associated with changes in heart muscle cells or coronary blood vessels (or both) that prevent the left ventricle from contracting effectively — a condition called stress-induced cardiomyopathy or broken-heart syndrome.”⁷⁷

A recent study published in 2020 showed people who scored higher on psychological measures of grief also had higher levels of certain stress hormones like cortisol and epinephrine.

⁷³ Cari Romm, “Understanding How Grief Weakens the Body,” *The Atlantic*, September 2014, the Atlantic.com/health/archive/2014/09/understanding-how-grief-weakens-the-body/380006.

⁷⁴ Ann Finkbeiner, “The Biology of Grief,” *The New York Times*, April 22, 2021, nytimes.com/2021/04/22/well/what-happens-in-the-body-during-grief.html.

⁷⁵ Romm, “Understanding How Grief Weakens the Body.”

⁷⁶ Iain M. Carey et al., “Increased Risk of Acute Cardiovascular Events After Partner Bereavement: A Matched Cohort Study,” *JAMA Internal Medicine* 174, no. 4 (April 1, 2014): 598.

⁷⁷ Harvard Medical School, “Grief Can Hurt in More Ways than One,” *Harvard Health Publishing*, Mind and Mood, February 1, 2019, health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/grief-can-hurt-in-more-ways-than-one.

Over time, chronic stress can increase the risk of cardiovascular conditions, diabetes, cancer, autoimmune conditions, depression, and anxiety.⁷⁸

While intense feelings of sadness are normal when people are grieving, sometimes these intense feelings linger or combine with pre-existing chemical imbalances lead to clinical depression. The Harvard Health article states, “Up to 50% of widows and widowers have depression symptoms during the first few months after a spouse's death. (By the one-year mark, the proportion is down to 10%).”⁷⁹ These symptoms include feelings of hopelessness, lack of sleep and appetite, suicidal thoughts, continued feelings of loss of purpose and worth, and a significant, ongoing mental and physical sluggishness.⁸⁰ All of these symptoms have the potential to cause harm to the body.

There are other ways a person’s body can respond to the stress of grief. Over their lifetimes, bereaved spouses may have an increased risk for long-term cardiovascular complications, infections, cancer and chronic diseases like diabetes.⁸¹ In an article from the Cleveland Clinic, Dr. Regina Josell, a clinical psychologist, explains the stress of grief can worsen physical symptoms a person was already struggling with, or the stress can bring on completely new symptoms. Dr. Josell identifies these additional physical symptoms can be caused by grief: “aches and pains, chest pains or a feeling like your heart is racing, exhaustion or trouble sleeping, headaches, dizziness or shaking, high blood pressure, muscle tension or jaw clenching, stomach or digestive problems, or a weakened immune system (which can leave you more vulnerable to contagious diseases).”⁸²

⁷⁸ Dora Hopf et al., “Neuroendocrine Mechanisms of Grief and Bereavement: A Systematic Review and Implications for Future Interventions,” *Journal of Neuroendocrinology* 32, no. 8 (August 2020): e12887, 18.

⁷⁹ Harvard Medical School, “Grief Can Hurt.”

⁸⁰ Finkbeiner, “The Biology of Grief.”

⁸¹ Finkbeiner, “The Biology of Grief.”

⁸² Cleveland Clinic, “What To Do When You’re (Literally) Sick With Grief,” *Cleveland Clinic Health Essentials*, January 26, 2023, <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/can-grief-make-you-sick>.

The body of someone who is grieving clearly feels the pain of the loss. When someone experiences an unexpected or sudden death, an out-of-order death, or a loss that completely changes the way a person will now have to live, these losses place considerable amounts of stress on a person. The body registers this stress and can develop other conditions, as noted above, which impact the body's wellbeing.

The appearance of physical symptoms in the body can provide a practical way in which pastors or pastoral care teams can respond. One response could be to ensure physical needs are being met by providing meals and helping the bereaved to eat and stay hydrated. Since grief itself is a stressor, another way to respond could be providing home services like cleaning, grocery shopping, or childcare to help relieve stressors an individual might carry. Finally, being present with an individual who is grieving is helpful to see what physical symptoms a person might be experiencing. Identifying symptoms of grief can provide opportunities for robust pastoral care.

Grief and the Brain

There are two key voices that inform our understanding of grief and the brain. The first key voice is Dr. Bessel Van der Kolk, who focuses on the neuroscience of trauma, and the second is Dr. Mary-Frances O'Connor, who focuses on the neuroscience of grief. Van der Kolk, who founded the Trauma Center in Massachusetts and is also the director of the National Complex Trauma Treatment Network. Van der Kolk has spent his career studying how children and adults adapt to traumatic experiences and his research has led to developing effective treatments for trauma. He has taught at universities and hospitals around the world and is the author of the book, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma*.

Since Van der Kolk's emphasis is on trauma, not grief specifically, it is necessary to first connect trauma to grief. The original meaning of the word *trauma* is "wound."⁸³ It was first understood as a physical wound, but over time, the word became broader and is now refers to various crises people experience.

However, the primary, clinical definition of trauma is found in Criterion A of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)* and defines trauma as:

The person was exposed to: death, threatened death, actual or threatened serious injury, or actual or threatened sexual violence, in the following way(s): direct exposure; witnessing the trauma; learning that a relative or close friend was exposed to a trauma; indirect exposure to aversive details of the trauma, usually in the course of professional duties (e.g., first responders, medics).⁸⁴

This definition is the most accepted definition of trauma, and it is the most specific, qualitative, and restrictive. The death of a loved one would be considered as a traumatic event, especially if the death of a loved one was unexpected, out-of-order, or was caused by violence. However, even if the death of a loved one is not diagnosed as trauma, it still causes stress on the body, and Van der Kolk explains how the brain responds to this stress.

Van der Kolk describes trauma as the "imprint that those overwhelming experiences leave on the mind, brain and body."⁸⁵ Traumatic symptoms are not caused by the traumatic event itself. Instead, the symptoms stem from the memory of the event being perceived as if reliving it, effecting the brain and body as if it were happening in the present. It is the remembering of the death or the events surrounding the death are deeply imprinted in the body and the brain to the point a person can see in detail what happened, or smell scents from that space, or feel as profoundly as the moment it took place even in the remembering.

⁸³ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 3.

⁸⁴ American Psychiatric Association, "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5-TR)."

⁸⁵ Bessel A. Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, Reprint edition. (New York, NY: Penguin Publishing Group, 2015), 21.

In the early 1990s brain-imaging techniques were developed to see how the brain processes information, including how it processes memories using the Positron Emission Tomography (PET) and functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI).⁸⁶ With these new techniques came three new branches of science, which have led to a greater understanding of the effects of trauma and how it impacts the mind, brain, and body. The first is neuroscience, the study of how the brain supports mental processes. The second is developmental psychopathology, the study of the impact of adverse experiences on the development of mind and brain. The third branch which brought great awareness to this field was interpersonal neurobiology—the study of how our behavior influences the emotions, biology, and mind-sets of those around us. These areas of study helped to show trauma literally changes the way the brain is made up and compromises the brain area which is responsible for helping people function in healthy ways, including damaging the brain’s “alarm system.”⁸⁷

To understand how trauma works in the body, it is important to understand the basics of how the brain is made up and the functions of each part. Van der Kolk divides the brain into three main parts: the brain stem, limbic brain, and prefrontal cortex, and explains the brain is built from the bottom up. The oldest, first developed while in the womb, is the brain stem, found at the bottom or base of the back of the skull. The brain stem stores the thalamus and hypothalamus. This is where the basic housekeeping of the body takes place, including arousal, sleep/wake, hunger/satiation, breathing, heart beating, and chemical balance. These are the things the body does without us thinking about it. The life-sustaining systems are controlled here.

The second section of the brain is the limbic brain, which is developed in the first six years of life, in the middle of the brain. This is the area that controls emotional regulation and

⁸⁶ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 39.

⁸⁷ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 2.

relevance, perception and most importantly, houses the amygdala. The amygdala, derived from the Greek word *amygdala*, meaning “almond,” consists of two small almond shaped structures in the limbic system responsible for controlling and regulating emotions. The amygdala warns an individual if he or she is in danger and activates the body’s stress response. The final part of the brain as it relates to trauma is the prefrontal cortex. This is the youngest part of the brain and is found at the front, top of the skull. The prefrontal cortex is the rational, logical, cognitive brain that controls planning, anticipation, empathy, and reasoning.⁸⁸

When someone encounters danger of any kind, information comes through basic senses, including the eyes, nose, ears, and skin and is brought to the thalamus in the brain stem. It receives the information, processes it, and makes sense of what is happening. In the case of traumatic memories, the thalamus cannot tell if it is happening now or in the past. It processes real danger and remembered danger the same. The sensations are then sent in two directions. Van der Kolk calls the first place these sensations are sent the “low road,” which is the amygdala. The information gets there extremely fast. Van der Kolk refers to the amygdala’s function as the “smoke detector” of the brain. It processes information faster than the frontal lobes and the prefrontal cortex, so the amygdala determines “if the incoming information is a threat to our survival even before we are consciously aware of the danger. By the time we are aware we are in danger, our body is often already responding in some basic way.”⁸⁹

The other direction the initial sensations go is to the frontal lobes, specifically the prefrontal cortex. Van der Kolk calls this the “high road,” and it takes several milliseconds longer to get the information to the top of brain than to the amygdala. Van der Kolk refers to the function of the prefrontal cortex as the “watch tower.” The prefrontal cortex offers a view of the

⁸⁸ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 55-59.

⁸⁹ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 61.

situation and determines a rational plan as response. Van der Kolk says, “As long as you are not too upset, your frontal lobes can restore your balance by helping you realize if you are responding to a false alarm and abort the stress response.”⁹⁰ The prefrontal cortex helps us to observe, analyze, and make reasonable decisions in response to situations around us.

Since the amygdala receives the information first, when a person perceives he or she is in danger of any kind, the amygdala, the emotional alarm system is activated, and “it triggers the preprogrammed physical escape plans in the oldest part of our brain. . . .When the old brain takes over, it partially shuts down the higher brain, our conscious mind, and propels the body to run, hide, fight, or on occasion, freeze.”⁹¹ Trauma is expressed not only as fight or flight, but also as shutting down and failing to engage in the present or to freeze. It is the last resort and is often turned on when a person is physically trapped or cannot move. When this happens, the heart slows, breath becomes shallow, and we disengage from our present situation. Van der Kolk stresses how if we are trapped, stuck, or in a long-term trauma, and we are not able to fight or flight in a situation, the brain keeps sending the signals anyway. The brain continues to fire hormones and stress chemicals to try to get us to do the things we were created to do to save ourselves, even if we are not able to do so. Even after the traumatic event is passed, the brain may keep sending these signals, which eventually causes harm to body and mind.⁹² Being able to move and do something when we face danger is a critical factor in how a person deals with trauma in the days to come.

The amygdala releases powerful stress hormones, called cortisol and adrenaline, when it thinks we are in danger. Van der Kolk explains, “Activation of this fear center triggers the cascade of stress hormones and nerve impulses that drive up blood pressure, heart rate, and

⁹⁰ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 62.

⁹¹ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 54.

⁹² Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 51-64.

oxygen intake that prepares the body for fight or flight (or freeze).”⁹³ When this happens, the two halves of our brain cannot communicate anymore. If the amygdala fires up and thinks we are in danger, it takes over and prevents the prefrontal cortex from engaging. Usually, the two sides of the brain work together, constantly sending signals to each other. However, Van der Kolk learned in times of crisis, or reliving the trauma, the subjects’ brain lit up only on the right, bottom side, and the left, top, logical, rational side was shut down. People who are very upset sometimes say they are “losing their minds” or flipping their lids. In reality, they are experiencing loss of executive functioning with the right-side firing and not the left. The rational brain has no power to talk the emotional brain out of its own reality.⁹⁴

It is important to note that the amygdala fires up in any kind of perceived danger, which is helpful when we are confronted with real danger. Normally, when the threat is passed, the hormones settle and the body returns to normal. In people who are traumatized, and for those who experience grief over a long period of time, the situations do not necessarily pass, and the amygdala is constantly firing up. The amygdala is continually releasing the stress hormones throughout the body, which is why the health issues listed in the previous section take place.

Additionally, when the amygdala is constantly at work, it takes much longer to get a person calmed down and to return to normal or baseline. These hormones spike quickly now and not appropriately, more easily triggered by less stressful situations.⁹⁵ Van der Kolk’s research on how the brain responds to trauma is helpful for pastors who partner with people in the grief journey. It is necessary to understand what the brain and body are doing to deal with the stress of grief.

⁹³ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 42.

⁹⁴ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 44-45.

⁹⁵ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 46.

The other key author to speak to this topic of grief and the brain is Dr. Mary-Frances O'Connor, a neuroscientist and psychologist who studies the effects of grief on the brain. She researches grief at the University of Arizona and directs the Grief, Loss, and Social Stress (GLASS) lab. While Van der Kolk focuses on the way the brain functions in trauma and grief, O'Connor focuses more on the wiring of the brain and the way it processes grief. One of the ways this can be explored is through the neuroscience of grief, which is a relatively new area of study regarding grief. She is one of the few researchers who studies this area of grief.

In her book, *The Grieving Brain: The Surprising Science of How We Learn from Love and Loss*, O'Connor found the brain struggles to understand the death of a loved one. She explains the brain devotes so much effort to mapping where our loved ones are while they are alive, because we need our loved ones for our survival, especially when we are young. O'Connor discovered when a loved one dies, the brain then struggles to learn new information to cancel out the original mapping. The brain cannot hardly process the fact the loved one, the person we are wired to always know where they are in the world if we need them, is not there anymore.⁹⁶

Our brain creates a virtual map of our world, which O'Connor compares to Google Maps.⁹⁷ The brain moves our bodies through our daily activities by using the virtual map it has created, telling us where to go, what to avoid, who to look for throughout the day, based on prior information. There is also a section of the brain devoted to error detection, to see if there are any areas where the brain map and the real world do not align. When a loved one dies, and the brain knows this person has always been trusted to be there in the past, the brain recognizes something is very wrong. O'Connor says, "Grief is a heart-wrenchingly painful problem for the brain to solve, and grieving necessitates learning to live in the world with the absence of someone you

⁹⁶ O'Connor, *The Grieving Brain*, xiv.

⁹⁷ O'Connor, *The Grieving Brain*, 4.

love deeply, who is ingrained in your understanding of the world. This means for the brain, your loved one is simultaneously gone and everlasting, and you are walking through two worlds at the same time.”⁹⁸

O’Connor explains how the attachment forms in the brain and found the way we map our loved ones is based on three dimensions: space (where is our loved one?), time (when will our loved one be here?), and closeness (How close and strong is the bond we have with our loved one).⁹⁹ The first dimension that forms in the brain is space. Space is learned from the beginning of life as an infant experiences physical contact with a caregiver and is soothed and content. While the baby does not understand what is happening, there is an innate instinct to cry when that contact is missing and is desired. The baby quickly learns if there is no contact, then crying brings the caregiver into contact again to soothe and fix whatever is missing. As the baby’s brain develops, and now has a sense of the attachment bond, the baby can trust the caregiver will return despite a little more physical distance between them.¹⁰⁰ O’Connor says, “Here we have the first virtual reality, the mental representation of the mother, based on seeing or hearing cues and not just physical touch. This is the attachment bond bridging space, like an invisible tether.”¹⁰¹

The second dimension established in the brain is time. Somewhere during the first year of life, the baby begins to cry when the baby’s caregiver leaves the room. While that response is connected to the emotional bond of the baby to the caregiver, O’Connor shares something important in the brain happens at this time to correspond with this crying response. The baby begins to build a memory, where new neural connections are happening between parts of the brain. O’Connor says, “Now the baby can keep in his mind the memory of what happened thirty to sixty seconds ago (Mama was here), and what is happening now (Mama is not here) and relate

⁹⁸ O’Connor, *The Grieving Brain*, 5.

⁹⁹ O’Connor, *The Grieving Brain*, 11.

¹⁰⁰ O’Connor, *The Grieving Brain*, 11.

¹⁰¹ O’Connor, *The Grieving Brain*, 12.

the two.”¹⁰² The older baby brain has matures enough to recognize the difference between past and present for short periods of time, but it is not mature enough to understand what the absence might mean for himself. Instinct has taught the baby to cry in hopes the caregiver will return.

Eventually, with experience in a healthy caregiving relationship, the baby realizes although the caregiver may be gone, the caregiver always comes back. A toddler begins to understand a caregiver will return after a period of time. O’Connor says, “Now Mama is still present in the virtual reality in the toddler’s mind, even when Mama is out of sight and cannot be heard. . . Thus, the attachment bond tethers them across time.”¹⁰³

The third dimension is closeness. Just like we use time and space to predict when and where we will see our loved ones, we use emotional closeness to determine if we can trust our loved one to be there for us. The closeness of attachment is greater than how we feel towards someone in a given moment or how they feel towards us. We might be upset with someone we love for something they did to wrong us, or someone might be mad at us for a moment or season. However, in secure relationships, closeness still persists. Since closeness is the other dimension which helps us to map and find our loved ones, when our loved one dies, the brain does not know how to process this. O’Connor says, “When a loved one has passed away, we may feel that we are no longer close, but our brain cannot believe it because “closeness” no longer applies. Instead, our brain may believe it is because they are upset with us, or they are being distant.”¹⁰⁴

When the loved one has suddenly, with no explanation, stopped calling or showing up, the brain registers this as the loved one has disappeared without warning. The brain cannot understand how someone could suddenly move from close to distant. The brain seeks to fix the broken relationship, but the problem is it cannot be repaired since the person is dead. This causes

¹⁰² O’Connor, *The Grieving Brain*, 12.

¹⁰³ O’Connor, *The Grieving Brain*, 13.

¹⁰⁴ O’Connor, *The Grieving Brain*, 26.

a range in emotions—sadness at the missing relationship, but also anger, guilt, doubt in the relationship, or anxiety. O’Connor says, “During grief, we are not sad or angry simply as a reaction to what happened. . .in some cases, we are sad or angry at ourselves because we have ‘failed’ to keep our loved ones close on the closeness dimension.”¹⁰⁵

Since these three dimensions help us find and keep track of our loved ones, no matter where they are in the world, then death causes a devastating problem in our brain. Suddenly, someone a person has instinctively known how to find for the entirety of his or her life is no longer able to be located in space and time. While cognitively it can be believed as true, O’Connor explains the brain cannot make sense of it. She says, “The idea that a person simply does not exist anymore does not follow the rules the brain has learned over a lifetime. . . If someone is missing, then our brain assumes they are somewhere else and will be found later.”¹⁰⁶ The brain cannot understand this death fully, it only recognizes loss. Therefore, grief occurs as a result of the attachment bond being broken.

As the brain struggles to process the loss, the brain continues to call pictures of the deceased loved one to mind. It is as if the brain is asking where the loved one has gone. These pictures arise suddenly and without prompting are called intrusive thoughts. “Intrusive thoughts are memories of personal events and people that come to mind suddenly and spontaneously, without your intending to recall them.”¹⁰⁷ Intrusive thoughts come with extremely emotional events, both negative and positive events. Significant life events like weddings, graduations, and births often come to mind without intentionally thinking about them, especially in the first few weeks and months after these events take place. These are the memories your brain will also retrieve periodically throughout your life.

¹⁰⁵ O’Connor, *The Grieving Brain*, 29.

¹⁰⁶ O’Connor, *The Grieving Brain*, 14.

¹⁰⁷ O’Connor, *The Grieving Brain*, 126.

The intrusive thoughts connected to positive experiences are a gift and cultivate happiness and joy when remembered. Yet, the intrusive thoughts which are connected to negative emotional events are incredibly painful when they come to mind involuntarily and unannounced. While they are most painful and common in the early weeks and months after a loss, these intrusive thoughts are the memories that come into your mind years later when you smell a particular scent or hear a specific song; without warning, you are overwhelmed with a painful memory of your loved one who has died, and you are overcome with acute grief.

Why does this happen? O'Connor asserts our brain is continually accessing our memories of our loved ones, whether they are thoughts of a spouse during the day or of a child you miss who is far away, but when the brain continues to access thoughts repeatedly of the one who has died, it can be painful, especially when the brain cannot fully understand what has happened to them. C. S. Lewis describes these intrusive thoughts in *A Grief Observed*, writing about the experience of his wife's death:

I think I am beginning to understand why grief feels like suspense. It comes from the frustration of so many impulses that had become habitual. Thought after thought, feeling after feeling, action after action, had [my wife] for their object. Now their target is gone. I keep on through habit fitting an arrow to the string, then I remember and have to lay the bow down. So many roads once; now so many *culs de sac*."¹⁰⁸

Grief arises from the absence of a loved one who once filled the attachment needs and the ways a person once identified and functioned in the world.

O'Connor explains grief continues in the brain, because the person you form attachment bonds with is always in the wiring of the neurons of the brain.¹⁰⁹ So, if the attachments are permanent and the loved one who has died remains in the wiring of the brain, then one of the ways pastors can help with those grieving is help the brain to process the loss of a loved one.

¹⁰⁸ C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 47.

¹⁰⁹ O'Connor, *The Grieving Brain*, 49.

One way we can help the brain to begin to register the truth and the reality of the death is to help the person grieving to build new memories that can be stored to mark something has changed. This is where grief rituals and practices can help. As grieving people actively engage in practices where they are confronted with the one who died and the grief of those around them, these experiences will become the new memories that help them process the reality of their loved one's death.

Death practices like participating in funerals, calling family and friends to tell them of the death, receiving condolences and flowers, seeing the deceased loved one, wearing special clothing for funerals or grieving periods, joining with loved ones to cry and to share memories are all new memories to store which give the brain a different picture, to mark something has changed. These practices stamp in the memory the fact and truth of the death. O' Connor says, "A community recognizes, and shows explicitly in their behavior, that this person is not going to return. It reinforces what the bereaved survivor can only half believe at the time."¹¹⁰ Memories of these events serve as proof our loved one is gone.

Learning to live without a loved one is the work of grief, and this is a kind of learning which is the function of the brain. The brain is the part of the body that sees and hears the news a loved one has died, and it is the place which tries to protect us from the pain, or perceived danger, that the news of the death causes in the survivor. It is the part of the body that wonders how to process this loss. The brain has the tremendous capacity to adapt, change, and reassess information to move the ones who grieve from mourning to the place of integrating the loss with everyday life. The brain is important in the grief process and understanding the work of Van der Kolk and O'Connor will help pastors better partner with people in grief.

¹¹⁰ O'Connor, *The Grieving Brain*, 51.

Grief and Attachments

When a person dies, they leave nine people, on average, grieving for them.¹¹¹ Grief comes from the distress of missing a specific person who filled one's attachment needs, who was a part of one's identity and belonging in this world. British psychiatrist, Dr. John Bowlby, named attachment as the bond of closeness. Bowlby is most known for the attachment theory. Bowlby's premise is that attachment bonds are lifelong, and you either experience attachment or the absence of it. Bowlby's work focused on the importance of a child's relationship with the mother, or caregiver, in terms of the child's social, emotional, and cognitive development. O'Connor described attachment bonds as the "invisible tethers that motivate us to seek out our loved ones, and to derive comfort from their presence."¹¹² Whereas O'Connor focused on the formation of neural pathways in the brain, Bowlby highlights why these connections matter relationally.

Children come into the world biologically programmed to form attachments with others, to aid in survival. Bowlby believed a person's first attachment is often established with the primary caregiver during infancy. Those who received support and love from their caregivers are likely to be secure, while those who experienced inconsistency or negligence from their caregivers are likely to feel more anxiety surrounding their relationships. However, it must be noted, attachment is not unique to infant-caregiver relationships but may also be present in other forms of social relationships. Attachment for children is necessary for survival. Adult attachment is not necessarily about survival. However, "the desire to be loved and cared for is fundamental to human nature in adults as well as children."¹¹³ We were created to need one another.

¹¹¹ Finkbeiner, "The Biology of Grief."

¹¹² O'Connor, *The Grieving Brain*, 35.

¹¹³ Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs: Resources for Pastoral Care*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 28.

Bowlby believed attachment was the secure base which gave children the best launch for building healthy relationships for the rest of their lives. The opposite is also true. One who struggles to form secure attachments when young will have a more difficult time forming secure relationships later in life. The secure base is founded on the accessibility and responsiveness of the caregiver.

One of Bowlby's colleagues, Mary Ainsworth, noted the different styles of attachment and identified them as: "secure, resistant/ambivalent, or avoidant."¹¹⁴ Infants who experienced secure attachment expected their caregivers to be ready and able to care for their needs. Those infants who were insecurely attached as resistant/ambivalent were apprehensive of relationships and fearful the caregivers might not be trustworthy. The infants who were avoidant have expected rejection or lack of care from their caregiver and often maintained emotional distance and limited intimacy from others as a defense mechanism.¹¹⁵

When the death of a loved one takes place, the level of attachment influences the way a person grieves. When someone has a secure base with a loved one who dies, separation from that person they trusted to be there may cause anxiety, fear, and great grief because that person is no longer there. However, when someone who has had an insecure style of attachment experiences a loss of a loved one, the loss may be even more difficult because it confirms the understanding the person who died was not to be trusted.

Bowlby viewed grief as a natural response in trying to adapt to the loss of attachment with a trusted loved one. Bowlby applied his studies regarding the attachment theory, to grief and bereavement. He believed attachment was lifelong, and therefore the grief never fully subsided with the absence of the deceased. Instead, the grief takes less of a prominent role as a

¹¹⁴ Melissa M. Kelley, *Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 56.

¹¹⁵ Kelley, *Grief*, 56.

person who has lost a loved one begins to learn how to re-engage in life and in other relationships.¹¹⁶

Bowlby and another one of his colleagues, Colin Murray Parkes, identified four stages of grief people experience as they try to process the loss of a loved one: (1) Shock and Numbness, (2) Yearning and Searching, (3) Despair and Disorganization, and (4) Reorganization and Recovery.¹¹⁷ The crisis of a loss requires revising the understanding of the relationship. The necessary grief work must include helping people establish secure attachments with the living, attachments with God, and continuing attachment bonds with the deceased as well.

Grief and the Spirit

When a person experiences the death of a loved one, it is often a critical time regarding a person's spirit and one's faith. During a time of loss and grief, many people turn to God or religious communities to find answers, comfort, and hope. Goss and Klass say, "The myths and symbols of religion seem to be formed for use in the human experience of grief, yet at the same time grief often tests the adequacy of religions' myths and symbols."¹¹⁸ The death of a loved one causes people to evaluate their faith or may even cause a crisis of faith. In the journal article, "Spirituality and Loss," Muselman and Wiggins state these crises of faith could cause "questioning, distancing, or altogether abandoning religious beliefs. . .while others may find comfort in believing they are part of God's greater plan and may search for greater meaning and purpose in their lives."¹¹⁹ It is an important time for those experiencing loss and grief to make

¹¹⁶ Illene C. Noppe, "Beyond Broken Bonds and Broken Hearts: The Bonding of Theories of Attachment and Grief," *Developmental Review* 20, no. 4 (December 2000): 525.

¹¹⁷ Courtney E. Ackerman, "What Is Attachment Theory? Bowlby's 4 Stages Explained," *PositivePsychology.com* (April 27, 2018).

¹¹⁸ Robert Goss and Dennis Klass, *Dead but Not Lost: Grief Narratives in Religious Traditions*, (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005), ix.

¹¹⁹ Dannette M. Muselman and Marsha I. Wiggins, "Spirituality and Loss: Approaches for Counseling Grieving Adolescents," *Counseling and Values* 57, no. 2 (October 2012): 234.

sense of the aftermath of loss and the grief process, which is why pastors must implement faithful presence, practices, and language in this time with those who grieve.

As a person grieves, it is common for questions to arise regarding theodicy, which is, “an intellectual defense of God in the face of evil and suffering,”¹²⁰ by wrestling with the idea of the presence of God amid suffering. Questions like, “Where is God in my suffering?” or “How could a good God allow this death to take place?” are often asked throughout the grief journey. Yet, the Christian faith, rhythms in the Christian calendar, the person of Jesus, Scripture, and the Christian community all provide a rich foundation to help pastors navigate these conversations and to make space for ministry to the spirit in times of grief.

Rambo says the central claim of the Christian faith is often bottom lined to the death and resurrection of Jesus. New life arises from death. While that claim is certainly true, loss and trauma do not fit neatly into that simplified faith structure. If we focus only on the cross (death) or the tomb (life) or rush from bad news to good news, we dismiss, ignore, or rush all who are in the in-between. Rambo says, “If resurrection is the event of new life in Christian theology, reconciling these claims with the experience of survival in which life is not experienced as new, or as better, is difficult. Insofar as resurrection is proclaimed as life conquering or life victorious over death, it does not speak to the realities of traumatic suffering.”¹²¹

In other words, Rambo protests the simple or linear path from “end to beginning, death to life.”¹²² Rambo teaches to honor those who have experienced trauma and loss, we must seek a theology which speaks to the aftermath of trauma, the in-between or middle space.¹²³ The journey from death to new life takes time, and one of the best ways pastors can minister to those

¹²⁰ John Swinton, *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2007), 2.

¹²¹ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 7.

¹²² Shelly Rambo, “Saturday in New Orleans: Rethinking the Holy Spirit in the Aftermath of Trauma,” *Review & Expositor* 105, no. 2 (May 2008): 235.

¹²³ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 6.

who are grieving is to make space to acknowledge the presence of grief in personal conversations and in times of corporate worship. Resurrection will come, but people need to have permission and space to first grieve their loss.

One way this middle space has been honored and practiced throughout the history of the Church is Holy Saturday. In the Christian calendar, Holy Saturday is that space which exists between death and life, the place holder between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. It is one of the most traumatic times in the Christian calendar, and yet it is hardly recognized now outside of liturgical churches. On Holy Saturday, Rambo says there is “no hint of light, no hint of life, no hint of words,”¹²⁴ as Christ, the Son of God, is dead. Rambo uses Hans Urs von Balthasar’s writings to draw an understanding of Holy Saturday. On Holy Saturday, as von Balthasar states, “Christ does not descend into hell as one victorious over death.”¹²⁵ There is, in Rambo’s words, “no victory there and no activity. Instead, the Son is a dead man in hell.”¹²⁶ There is a day in the middle when Jesus is dead.

This is the space when Christians are invited into a distinct place of suffering. Rambo says, “Holy Saturday reveals a distinct landscape of suffering that cannot be understood exclusively in terms of the passion: neither can it be interpreted in relationship to resurrection. Instead, the experience of God in hell is an experience of death extending beyond its conceivable boundaries.”¹²⁷ Rambo encourages us to acknowledge our wounds have a place, much like Christ’s wounds lingered after His resurrection, and that place is Holy Saturday.

It is imperative we not deny the gravity of death nor the weight of grief and loss and hurt. The urge to ignore it in the hope of the coming resurrection does not honor the reality of the present hurt and suffering. Death does have a sting, and we must recognize it is a shared sting

¹²⁴ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 63

¹²⁵ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 63.

¹²⁶ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 63.

¹²⁷ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 46.

which all humans experience. We all experience grief and loss, including Jesus Himself. To fully recover from trauma and loss, we must be faithful to honor this grief in the middle space. Holy Saturday gives us a picture of how this loss and grief can be experienced and gives us language for this middle space, where wounds can exist in-between death and life. While we cannot fully understand it, Rambo reminds us, “The crucified one, the one who shows us the world through his wounds, persists in the space following death.”¹²⁸

Holy Saturday is not deeply expounded upon in biblical text. In the literary and liturgical tradition, Holy Saturday marks the event of Christ’s descent into hell as seen in the Apostle’s Creed, which states: “[He] was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead.”¹²⁹ This descent is not seen in any of the Gospel accounts, nor is it fully accounted for in Scripture. What we do see in the Gospels are a few sentences that describe the preparations for Jesus’ burial. In addition, we also see a few accounts in the Gospels of those who were first to witness Christ’s resurrection and the moments leading up to their encounter with him. While these encounters do not take place on Holy Saturday, they do occur in the early moments of the resurrection, while the disciples are steeped in grief and reeling from loss. In each of these examples, we see the closest followers of Jesus trying to make sense of the trauma, grief, and loss they are experiencing, and we get a better picture of what grief in this middle space looks like.

These biblical encounters have much to teach us about the middle space in the aftermath of death and loss and before the fullness of life. As Rambo says, these gospel narratives are

¹²⁸ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 74.

¹²⁹ Anglican Church in North America, *The Book of Common Prayer* (California: Anglican Liturgy Press, 2019), 20.

“survival narratives: a biblical testimony to what it means to remain in the aftermath of death without the assurance of life ahead.”¹³⁰ In these encounters, we see testimony to this middle space, a space where fear, overwhelming grief, doubt, and confusion remain, and where not all is quite made right. In these biblical testimonies, we see some common themes and experiences for all who find themselves in this aftermath of death and loss, including how these losses mark us, the processing of grief, confusion and unbelief, the importance of community, and the presence of God that can be seen in this middle space.

In addition, there are many Scriptures which have spoken directly to the experience of grief through the stories of many characters throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament, for example, when Job’s children died and he lost most of his possessions from fire, storms, and raiders, we see Job express deep grief when he says, “My spirit is broken; my days are extinct; the grave is ready for me...My eye has grown dim from grief, and all my members are like a shadow.”¹³¹ We also find multiple psalms expressing the intense pain of grief, including “My eyes waste away because of grief; they grow weak because of all my foes,”¹³² or when the psalmist cries out to God in Psalm 31:9, “Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also.”

In the New Testament we continue to find examples of immense grief. One example of this is through the story of Lazarus’ death in John 11. Jesus’ own grief shows up when he weeps with Mary and Martha who mourn the death of their brother.¹³³ Another example of Jesus’ grief is found in the garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus contemplated the suffering he was going to experience through his death. Jesus said, “My soul is deeply grieved, even to death; remain here,

¹³⁰ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 108.

¹³¹ *Holy Bible*, ed., *NRSVue*, (GRAND RAPIDS: Zondervan Bibles, 2022), Job 17:1, 7.

All Bible quotations will be from NRSVUE unless otherwise noted.

¹³² Psalm 6:7.

¹³³ John 11:33-35.

and keep awake.”¹³⁴ Later, in the hour before Jesus' arrest, Jesus checks on his disciples and finds them asleep due to their grief.¹³⁵ The experience of grief and reflections on it is integrated throughout the Story of God and is a part of life as the people of God. Scripture's testimony to grief and trauma can be a powerful tool to help lead people to process grief as it connects to their faith in God and with their spirit.

Recovering from death and loss is challenging. There is not a set amount of time when a person can clearly, and in a linear movement, progress from the death to resurrection of their own experience. Contrary to the familiar adage, “time heals all wounds,” when people are forced to encounter circumstances, traumatic events, and significant losses they have no control over, they experience wounds that cannot be undone. Healing and life are possible after these experiences; however, they are a new form of life which persists amid grief, trauma, and loss.

To get to a place of healing, pastors can help those who grieve hold the tension of the tragic gap between death and life. This gap is the space where a person waits with grief, loss, trauma, and hardship while also looking forward to the hope of what is to come in resurrection. This can be done in worship by incorporating liturgical readings, songs, prayers, and scriptures that specifically deal with the topics of death and grief instead of only focusing on life and resurrection. There needs to be space for both as we gather with the community of faith. Additionally, when engaging in conversations with the bereaved, pastors must not rush the grief process. While pastors should always speak to the hope that is to come, there needs to be an acknowledgment of the lingering pain and grief that will remain. As Rambo says, those who witness this middle space give us a new conception of life, “a picture not of victorious new life

¹³⁴ Mark 14:34.

¹³⁵ Luke 22:45.

but of persistent witness to love's survival."¹³⁶ This is the good and faithful work pastors are invited to participate in with those who are grieving as it pertains to the spirit.

Conclusion

It is imperative pastors understand how grief manifests itself in the bereaved so that we might provide holistic care. Gaining insight into the ways grief impacts the body, how the brain responds to and processes grief, how attachment styles influence the loss of relationships, and making space for grief and the spirit will be beneficial for pastors to integrate into pastoral grief care.

No two grief experiences are the same. Each person's experience is unique. All these dimensions of a person's life are brought to the grief process. While pastors are not trained clinicians, nor should we be, it is important pastors learn about the general elements of grief, so we can respond appropriately and supportively. If we are limited in our understanding of grief, we risk seeing someone's grief in an incomplete way. This oversight and ignorance could potentially entail pastoral malpractice. When we understand the experience of grief is holistic, it will help us to offer more sensitive, appropriate, and faithful care.

¹³⁶ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 110.

Chapter 3: Embracing Grief as Spiritual Formation

The purpose of this chapter is to present best practices for faithful grief care. Different grief care theories will lay the foundation for understanding the purpose of this work. Then we will see two different approaches for pastoral care: implementing continuing bonds and companioning. In addition, there are examples of funeral and grief practices as models of formation which can be adapted for our context. The work of Thomas Long and Thomas Lynch, who proposed a framework for defining a good funeral, will help present what good grief looks like. The following sections will provide pastors with language and practices to embrace grief as a spiritually forming experience.

Grief Care Theories

Although grief has been documented throughout history, how it has been understood and explained has differed greatly across epochs and cultures. Melissa Kelley, author of *Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry*, writes, “Historically, grief has often been described as problematic, difficult, even dangerous.”¹³⁷ Some have gone as far to connect grief to physical and mental illness, but most of these views disappeared in the West in the twentieth century due to “the rise of psychoanalysis and its definitive description of grief.”¹³⁸ The most significant contributor to this philosophy was Sigmund Freud.

Sigmund Freud, the originator of psychoanalysis, did not write much on the topic of grief itself, but his work shaped psychoanalytic thought regarding grief. In 1917, Freud wrote *Mourning and Melancholia*, where he defined the work of mourning, the traditional psychoanalytic term for grief, was to remove the connection from the dead and to redirect that energy to another object.¹³⁹ He believed death was the end of a relationship, and the goal of grief

¹³⁷ Kelley, *Grief*, 33.

¹³⁸ Kelley, *Grief*, 34.

¹³⁹ Kelley, *Grief*, 34.

work was to move from the loss of the relationship and towards a new connection. Goss and Klass explain until recently this Freudian theory of grief was widely accepted and practiced by psychologists and psychiatrists.¹⁴⁰ Most of this work “assumed that the work of grief was to sever the bonds with the dead so the person could be free to make new attachments that could serve their needs in a world that no longer included the dead person.”¹⁴¹ The solution to grief was to grieve the loss and then move on. The work of grief ended with acceptance. Freud’s psychoanalytic ideas laid the groundwork for many current models of grief.

An example of the influence of Freud's philosophy can be found in Elisabeth Kübler-Ross’ *On Death and Dying*. In that work, Kübler-Ross presents the model of the five stages of grief, which include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. This is the most widely known model for understanding grief, is taught in most general psychology courses, and is deeply embedded in our cultural understanding of grief. While the five stages do describe aspects of grief, it is important to note this grief model was not created to define and describe grief after a loss. Kübler-Ross originally created these stages of grief to describe what terminally ill patients were experiencing as they were dying. To knowingly approach one’s own death, it is important to do the work to get to a final place of acceptance. Kübler-Ross’ work quickly transitioned from helping terminally ill patients die well to becoming the primary way people understood death and grief. This model was then used to not only describe what the bereaved were experiencing, but it also prescribed what the grief process should look.

Grief researchers and practitioners have pushed back against some of the long-accepted, traditional grief theory and grief therapy. Recent studies on grief show Kübler-Ross’ model of grief is inaccurate or incomplete. One example of this push back comes from O’Connor. She

¹⁴⁰ Goss and Klass, *Dead but Not Lost*, 3.

¹⁴¹ Goss and Klass, *Dead but Not Lost*, 3.

believes Kübler-Ross' stage theory has done harm to those who grieve, because "the model she developed has been considered more than a *description* of grief of those she interviewed and taken as a *prescription* for how to grieve."¹⁴² When people do not move through these stages in linear and complete ways, then people who are grieving may feel they are grieving incorrectly, or they are not completing something they are supposed to complete.

Ruth Davis Konigsberg, in *The Truth about Grief: The Myth of Its Five Stages and the New Science of Loss*, challenges Kübler-Ross' five stages and her entire premise that grief can be managed therapeutically and in clear stages. Konigsberg describes grief as "unpredictable, wild, and undomesticated in its form and intensity. It breaks like a storm over us and then calms, seemingly without reason."¹⁴³ Konigsberg goes as far as to say attempts to manage grief therapeutically cause more harm than good for those struggling with grief, except for complicated and chronic grief.

Theologians object to Kübler-Ross's stages of grief as well. Long points out in Christian theology, death is not to be "accepted," as it is never a friend. He says, "Capital D Death is no friend. Small d death, which is biological death, can sometimes come as a friend, a relief from intense suffering. But capital D Death is a power pitted against all life, is in fact the destroyer of life, the breaker of promises, the slayer of love and communion."¹⁴⁴ Long says Death is never to be welcomed but to be fought against as the final enemy. He goes on to suggest that part of the acceptance of Kübler-Ross' stages is connected to American optimism more than religious hope.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² O'Connor, *The Grieving Brain*, 73.

¹⁴³ Ruth Davis Konigsberg, *The Truth about Grief: The Myth of Its Five Stages and the New Science of Loss*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 123.

¹⁴⁴ Thomas G. Long and Lynch, Thomas, *The Good Funeral: Death, Grief, and the Community of Care*, First edition. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 223.

¹⁴⁵ Long and Lynch, *The Good Funeral*, 223.

This stage theory suggests a person successfully mourns when they have fully disengaged from the deceased and have reached some form of closure. Yet that is not an accurate or healthy picture of what it means to grieve well. That is not a hopeful posture at all. Furthermore, the psychoanalytic, therapeutic understanding of grief too often takes grief recovery to mean a return to “normalcy,” except there is no going back to normal. Instead, grief care should help a person learn to integrate the loss of a loved one into finding new normals.

There is a movement among grief psychologists to move away from seeing grief as a group of treatable psychological symptoms people experience during the grief process. In the late twentieth century, bereavement science began to move away from focusing solely on the content of grief and moved towards learning how people process the grief over a period of time. One of these grief models is called “The Dual Process Model of Coping With Bereavement” (also called “dual process model”), and it was developed by Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands.¹⁴⁶

The diagram of this model shows two ovals inside an outer oval, and the inside ovals represent (1) loss-oriented stressors and (2) restoration-oriented stressors. The loss-oriented stressors are the painful emotions associated with losing someone you love; this is what has typically been labeled as grief. The other oval represents the restoration-oriented stressors, which are the practical things which you must learn that you did not have to do before, reorienting to the new normal. Connecting the two inside ovals is a jagged line, showing how people move back and forth between the two stressors, which represents the process of grieving.

This model demonstrates how the work of grief is not just to focus on the painful grief, nor is it to only move on and to focus on the new life without the deceased. Rather, grief work is the oscillating back and forth between the two ovals, sometimes spending a whole day in one

¹⁴⁶ O'Connor, *The Grieving Brain*, 76. See Appendix for diagram

oval before moving to the other, or other times we move back and forth several times throughout a day.¹⁴⁷ Instead of the loss-oriented stressors disappearing, this model recognizes both ovals never truly disappear, but they become less intense and less frequent over time. I believe engaging in both loss and restoration are necessary to grieve well.

The other bereavement model that can be a helpful tool to aid in ministering to those who experience grief is called “The Trajectories of Grief.” George Bonanno, Kathrin Boerner, and other colleagues identify patterns of grief to consider for grief care. Their longitudinal study¹⁴⁸ tracked more than 1,500 older adults across different times, up to three years before the death, and up to four years after the death of a spouse. Through this study, Bonanno developed a model of grieving about changes which take place in grieving over time.¹⁴⁹

The researchers found there were four trajectories to categorize the way people grieve. These trajectories include: (1) Resilient, those who never develop depression after the death of a loved one, (2) Chronic Grieving, those who were diagnosed with depression that begins after the death of a loved one, (3) Chronic Depression, those who were diagnosed with depression before the death of a loved one and continues or worsens after a death, and (4) Depressed Improved, those who were diagnosed with preexisting depression that abates after the death of a loved one.¹⁵⁰

Kelley says these trajectories can help ministers in pastoral grief care in three ways. First, these trajectories prove grief can last years after a death, which suggests grief care and ritualizing loss needs to happen in ongoing ways. Secondly, this model shows how grief is unique to each person which requires adaptive care for each person. Finally, these trajectories help us to be

¹⁴⁷ O’Connor, *The Grieving Brain*, 76.

¹⁴⁸ These trajectories were found through a Changing Lives of Older Couples (CLOC) research project.

¹⁴⁹ Kelley, *Grief*, 17. See appendix for diagram of Trajectories of Grief.

¹⁵⁰ O’Connor, *The Grieving Brain*, 82.

better pastors in grief care by helping us anticipate a person's possible grief trajectory by noting the support one receives before and after the loss.

Meaning-Making After Loss

Contemporary grief theory identifies meaning-making after loss as the primary work in grief care. Kelley defines meaning as “the deep sense we make of things, the way we understand the world, how we articulate the overarching purpose or goal of our lives, the significance we seek in living, the core values by which we order our lives.”¹⁵¹ This kind of meaning also includes a theological component as Christ-followers make sense of God's work in the world, including God's role in suffering. Robert Neimeyer is the leading voice in this meaning-making work, and he names three areas those experiencing loss must go through to reconstruct meaning in their lives, including making sense of the death by looking for reasons it has taken place, finding positive outcomes despite the loss, and finding a new identity without the deceased.¹⁵²

The purpose of meaning-making after loss is to create order or make sense out of the chaos and grief that occurs when a death takes place. This is an important and sacred work pastors can engage in with people who are grieving. People often make meaning out of a loss by focusing on beliefs, the afterlife, or identifying how God is at work in a loss. By making space for this work in pastoral care, pastors offer hope by helping those who grieve to find true meaning in God's faithful love and presence.

If pastors are to be intentional about helping those who grieve to make meaning out of loss, it is important to identify how to do this faithfully. In *How God Becomes Real: Kindling the Presence of Invisible Others*, T.M. Luhrmann writes from an anthropological perspective and defines faith as, “a sustained, intentional, deliberative commitment to the idea that there are

¹⁵¹ Kelley, *Grief*, 77.

¹⁵² Muselman and Wiggins, “Spirituality and Loss,” 234.

invisible beings who are involved in human lives in helpful ways.”¹⁵³ It is searching for this invisible being and having this being made real to others when true faith is realized. Luhmann names one way the kindling of faith takes place is through the creation of a world and then creating rules within the world to help make God real to people. Luhmann calls these rules the “rules of engagement” or rituals, and when people practice these within a religion, they give practical handles to encounter God.¹⁵⁴ Rituals are ways to experience God, and therefore practicing rituals can also help to make meaning out of loss.

Rituals give people a practical way to do something with their grief, and spiritual practices help people to cope with grief while experiencing God amidst their pain. Muselman and Wiggins say, “rituals are powerful therapeutic tools that enable people to understand how their faith speaks to loss and are invaluable in connecting people to their community and family when grieving the death of a loved one.”¹⁵⁵ There are many spiritual practices to aid in making meaning in a time of loss, including stories, lament, and hospitality.

Not only is it important to understand and apply contemporary grief models like the dual process, the trajectories of grief and meaning-making after loss, but there are two other specific components of grief care to explore: continuing bonds and companioning. Both continuing bonds and companioning are deeply rooted in the central understanding that humans were designed for community and people long for intimacy, connection, and love. This is especially true when someone dies. The grieving person is not only dealing with grief but also the loss of someone who had filled that need. Encouraging these practices can help provide those who grieve find some meaning in the midst of loss. These two components should be incorporated to help the bereaved to grieve well.

¹⁵³ T. M. Luhmann, *How God Becomes Real: Kindling the Presence of Invisible Others* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2020), 21.

¹⁵⁴ Luhmann, *How God Becomes Real*, 31.

¹⁵⁵ Muselman and Wiggins, “Spirituality and Loss,” 235.

Continuing Bonds

Researchers Dennis Klass and Phyllis Silverman, along with psychiatrist Steven Nickman, introduced the term *continuing bonds* in 1996 to describe the ongoing relationship the living have with the dead. In *Dead but Not Lost*, Goss and Klass write that by the mid-twentieth century, most research on grief focused on the grief process in which the goal was to completely sever the attachments the living had with the deceased. However, by the late twentieth century, research showed a significant portion of those who were grieving maintained continuing bonds with the deceased.

In fact, Klass tells a story of a group of bereaved parents he met with for over a decade. These parents all shared a similar loss and met as a support group. Klass watched as they were supposed to be severing attachments with their dead child over time, but they refused. Klass shared, “these parents found that even if they accepted their children’s death, they did not accept that the love between them and their children was over.”¹⁵⁶

Continuing bonds with the dead are not a form of denial. Goss and Klass say, “Survivors are not confused about the reality of death, but they also know if death ends a life, it does not end a relationship.”¹⁵⁷ Continuing bonds can take many forms including memories, a sense of legacy, or feeling a deceased loved one is close, watching over and protecting loved ones which are still alive.¹⁵⁸ Others continue to see themselves in relationship with the one who died, although the relationship is defined differently than before.

These continuing bonds focused on the living and the ways they connected to the dead instead of the dead connecting to the living as has been the case in other cultural traditions.¹⁵⁹ Instead of the mourner actively shifting the relationship from one of presence to one of memory,

¹⁵⁶ Goss and Klass, *Dead but Not Lost*, 24.

¹⁵⁷ Goss and Klass, *Dead but Not Lost*, 5.

¹⁵⁸ Kelley, *Grief*, 26.

¹⁵⁹ Goss and Klass, *Dead but Not Lost*, 21.

other cultures have encouraged ongoing, interdependent relationships in some form after death. Not only is this idea encouraged, but there are rituals in place to support this. The Mexican cultural death tradition, *Día de los Muertos*, or the ritual altars in both the Mexican and Asian traditions previously referenced in chapter one are examples of how these cultures both recognize and celebrate continued connections with the dead. These are examples of the ways continuing bonds have been incorporated in other religious and cultural traditions.

Maintaining bonds with the dead has played an important role in the formation of religious traditions, including Christianity. Continuing bonds are seen through the ongoing relationships the Church has with the saints. Donald Steele, author of “With All God’s People: Toward a Protestant Reclaiming of the Communion of the Saints,” explains while the word “saint” is found several times in both Old and New Testaments, the idea of saints has caused disagreements and division for Christians since at least the fourth century. He says, “While Reformation leaders admitted the validity of saints and tied an understanding of the communion of saints to the Book of Hebrews, much of the wholeness, not to mention the holiness, of gospel sainthood was ignored or abandoned in an ardent overreaction to the excesses of the high Middle Ages.”¹⁶⁰ Steele believes Protestants should reclaim our relationship with the saints as they can be models for living, serve as a reminder of God’s faithfulness, intercede on our behalf, and be a spiritual source of encouragement, strength, and inspiration to help us live toward the same end.

Jackson Lashier, a theologian, member of the Methodist church, and author of *Great Cloud of Witnesses: How the Dead Make a Living Church*, defines saints as those who “devoted themselves so completely to following Christ, and the result is lives that embody the gospel.”¹⁶¹ Lashier describes the mysterious reality at work with saints in the Christian belief that these past

¹⁶⁰ Donald M. Steele, “With All God’s People: Toward a Protestant Reclaiming of the Communion of the Saints,” *Theology Today* 51, no. 4 (January 1995): 539.

¹⁶¹ Jackson Lashier, *Great Cloud of Witnesses: How the Dead Make a Living Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2023), 3.

saints are dead yet are also alive. He writes, “though they, too, are waiting for final resurrection, the saints are living with Christ now.”¹⁶² In the New Testament, we see the saints in this glorious state giving praise to God,¹⁶³ cheering us on like when the sheep was returned to the flock,¹⁶⁴ and interceding for us.¹⁶⁵ The writer of Hebrews refers to the saints as the cloud of witnesses who surround us as we run with perseverance.¹⁶⁶ God’s Church consists of the saints who are both living and dead.

One of the ways pastors can aid those who grieve is by reclaiming the saints. Teaching our people, even before they experience the death of a loved one, to commune with the saints through worship, reading Scripture, prayer, or proclamation of the Word is important work that can help preventatively with grief. To recognize these continuing bonds with the saints is to better live into the Christian hope of the resurrection. When someone they love dies, people will be postured in a way to lean into continuing bonds with their loved ones, because of the relationship they experience with the saints. These continuing bonds with the deceased can be developed by making space for storytelling and sharing memories and helping those who grieve to redefine their relationship with the one who has died.

Companioning with Those Who Grieve

The second component necessary to help someone grieve well is companioning. Our contemporary understanding of grief is to make it private, individual, and therefore, an isolating experience. However, Alan Wolfelt, grief counselor and author of *Companioning the Bereaved*, says individualistic approaches to grief violate the purpose of mourning. He writes, “Mourning,

¹⁶² Lashier, *Great Cloud of Witnesses*, 4.

¹⁶³ Lashier, *Great Cloud of Witnesses*, 4.

¹⁶⁴ Luke 15:7.

¹⁶⁵ Revelation 8:3-4.

¹⁶⁶ Hebrews 12:1.

by nature of its definition—'a shared social response to loss'—must be viewed in the broader context of social and family perspective."¹⁶⁷

There is an African tribe in northern Ghana called LoDagaa, which has a rich grief tradition that embodies this idea of companioning. When someone dies in this tribe, one of their grief practices is to use “mourning restraints,” which are restraints made of either leather, cloth, or string. The kind of restraint used represents the closeness of relationship with the person who died. The most beautiful part of this tradition is that attached to the other end of the mourning restraint, with a restraint of their own, is a “mourning companion,” who accepts the responsibility for the one who grieves and is committed to helping them and making sure they act responsibly during their bereavement. This mourning companion makes sure the one grieving eats, sleeps, and has what they need to survive for up to 30 days.¹⁶⁸

The mourning companion is a model I think can and should be adapted to our current church context. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “companion” as “to accompany, to associate, to comfort, to be familiar with,”¹⁶⁹ and the original Latin roots the word means *com* (with) and *pan* (*bread*). Wolfelt uses these definitions to define a mourning companion as someone you would do life with or share a meal with. Wolfelt turns the noun into a verb, and says, “Companioning the bereaved is not about assessing, analyzing, fixing or resolving another’s grief. Instead, it is about being totally present to the mourner, even being a temporary guardian of her soul.”¹⁷⁰ Wolfelt presents a relational model rather than a medical model of caregiving, where the caregiver is a learner, observer, and someone who bears witness to the

¹⁶⁷ Alan Wolfelt, *Companioning the Bereaved: A Soulful Guide for Caregivers* (Fort Collins, Colorado: Companion Press, 2006), 8.

¹⁶⁸ DeSpelder and Strickland, *The Last Dance*, 109.

¹⁶⁹ Wolfelt, *Companioning the Bereaved*, 19.

¹⁷⁰ Wolfelt, *Companioning the Bereaved*, 17.

grief taking place. The central roles of companioning are to honor stories and to practice hospitality.

Like the LoDagaa tribe, communities of faith should find people in our congregations who are willing to serve as mourning companions. When someone experiences the death of a loved one, they would be partnered with a mourning companion who would commit to companioning with a person for at least a year. Based on the trajectories of grief, we know the first year is the most critical in dealing with grief. During this first year, the mourning companion would check in consistently to ensure the bereaved is caring for themselves. This would include lining up and providing meals during the first couple of weeks and then making space to have a weekly meal with them throughout the remaining year. This mourning companion would practice hospitality, listening to stories about the deceased, and learning with the person who is experiencing grief.

This idea of companioning the bereaved is deeply connected to the spiritual discipline of spiritual companioning. In *Spiritual Companioning*, Angela Reed describes spiritual companioning as “a way of accompanying others in intentional relationships of prayerful reflection and conversation that help them notice God’s presence and calling in their personal lives, local communities, and the world.”¹⁷¹ The steps presented in *Spiritual Companioning* can also be applied to the work of a mourning companion. These steps include being fully attentive, being a prayerful listener, being a respectful and empathetic presence, being reflective together, speaking the truth in love, naming and describing experience, and encouraging spiritual practices.¹⁷² Companioning requires listening intently to the Spirit, while also listening fully to the one who grieves.

¹⁷¹ Angela H. Reed, *Spiritual Companioning: A Guide to Protestant Theology and Practice* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2015), xx.

¹⁷² Reed, *Spiritual Companioning*, 14–20.

A final example of companioning is imaged in John 20, as demonstrated by Jesus. In this chapter, there are two different stories of people experiencing overwhelming grief because Jesus is dead. In each of these stories, we see a beautiful picture of a loving God who shows up in the middle of brokenness. When Mary was weeping at the tomb, Jesus showed up.¹⁷³ When the disciples were huddled and scared in the upper room, Jesus appeared in their midst both times.¹⁷⁴ Jesus shows up in our pain and grief.

In *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*, compassion is defined as being “derived from the Latin words *pati* and *cum*, which together mean “to suffer with.” Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human.”¹⁷⁵ Jesus demonstrates this kind of compassion by being fully present in the suffering and grief of others. Not only was Jesus present, but in this middle space of loss and grief, his presence, and his presence produces glimpses of hope and life. This is the good and beautiful work of grief care through companioning.

Both continuing bonds and companioning help to address the attachment issues which arise in grief. These models serve to build community, continued relationships with the living and the dead. Continuing bonds and companioning can be vital components to helping people grieve well.

Good Grief

Two of the most significant writers on the topic of the “good funeral” are Thomas Long, previously mentioned, and Thomas Lynch, an undertaker and author. Their work, although

¹⁷³ John 20:14.

¹⁷⁴ John 20:19, John 20:26.

¹⁷⁵ Donald P. McNeill et al., *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*, Rev. ed. (New York: Image Books/Doubleday, 2005), 4.

coming from two different perspectives, complements and strengthens the other. Long and Lynch both believe the rituals and practices surrounding death and grief give a clear picture of the culture's heart. The ways in which people approach and treat death communicates how a people truly value life. In the book they co-authored, *The Good Funeral: Death, Grief, and the Community of Care*, Long and Lynch examine current culture and the ways it engages in the issues of death, the body, the funeral, and grief. They give sound, practical advice on how to engage in these issues in more ethical and faithful ways. Before exploring Long and Lynch's four elements that make up a good funeral, it is necessary to begin with why the funeral matters in the first place.

Zygmunt Bauman, a sociologist and author of *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, writes, "No form of human life has been found that failed to pattern the treatment of deceased bodies and their posthumous presence in the memory of the descendants."¹⁷⁶ Bauman asserts humans in every culture and tradition have always taken care of their dead and have kept those who have died in their memories. People always dealt with the concept of death and grief, by dealing with the dead, including the corpse. Only in the past fifty years have Americans begun to pass off dealing with the dead to medical professionals and funeral directors. Americans do keep the "posthumous presence in the memory of the descendants" in many ways, but they no longer are willing to take care of the dead themselves. Lynch says, "The option to dispose of the dead privately, through the agency of hirelings, however professional they might be, and however moving the memorial that follows may be, is an abdication of an essential undertaking and fundamental humanity."¹⁷⁷ Lynch suggests this refusal to deal with our dead

¹⁷⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality, and Other Life Strategies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 51.

¹⁷⁷ Long and Lynch, *The Good Funeral*, 80.

keeps us from being able to fully deal with and accept death, which also causes an inability to deal authentically with life.

O'Connor would agree as she studied the changes in death practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people were not able to be with their loved ones as their sickness progressed, nor were they with them as they died. The death practices, especially those within the larger community, were not able to take place. O'Connor says, "Without the opportunity for saying good-bye, for expressing love, gratitude, or forgiveness, and without the memory of seeing our loved one's physical decline and death, ambiguity may surround the 'realness' of the death."¹⁷⁸

Other ambiguous losses include loved ones who are missing and presumed dead in natural disasters, wartime, or plane crashes. These are any losses where there is not overwhelming evidence to prove the loved one has died. Without the visible proof of death, the brain has a more difficult time rewiring to comprehend our loved one's disappearance. Caring for the dead and keeping the memory of the dead in our presence is necessary for helping to deal with grief, and the funeral is one way we can do this well.

Not only do funerals offer proof of the death of a loved one, but funerals also help the brain to counteract the loss of someone in space and time. Religions assist in honoring this loss and the desire for the brain to "find" the missing loved one in space and time, giving some answers to space (Where did they go? Where are they now?) and time (When will we see them again?).¹⁷⁹ Answers to these questions are usually presented at funerals.

Long challenges pastors to recognize the importance and urgency of speaking into these questions. Everyone gathered at a funeral is faced with their own mortality. Long says:

"This is death, and no one knows exactly what to say or do. But something must be said, something must be done, and the pastor is the one standing there. . .the minister is standing

¹⁷⁸ O'Connor, *The Grieving Brain*, 53.

¹⁷⁹ O'Connor, *The Grieving Brain*, 18.

there alone beside the grave, and the brink of all we fear. If faith has no word for this, it has no word at all. The moment calls for faith, for bravery, even for presumption.”¹⁸⁰

What pastors say at funerals not only helps the brain to receive important information it needs to process the loss, but what is said also gives a richer theological understanding of death and dying for the people of God.

Long and Lynch each present four elements necessary for a “good funeral.” They vary somewhat in their terminology, but as this research is intended to better equip pastors, I will be using Long’s elements as the framework, since he is defining a Christian funeral. However, I will merge some of Lynch’s work into Long’s, to provide a more robust explanation of what a good funeral should be. Here is the comparison of Lynch’s and Long’s elements necessary to comprise a good funeral:

Long¹⁸¹

Holy Person
Holy People
Holy Script
Holy Place

Lynch¹⁸²

Body
Mourners
Story
Transport

By implementing these four elements in a Christian funeral, the funeral becomes the most faithful and formative practice to address the neuroscience, psychology, and spiritual needs of the bereaved. In addition, I propose as continuing bonds and companioning are woven into these four elements throughout the funeral and the entire grief process, these elements define what good grief looks like as well.

Caring for the Dead

Regarding the first element, the holy person, Long says, “The deceased is the central human character in a Christian funeral.”¹⁸³ However, for the first time in history, there is a new

¹⁸⁰ Long and Lynch, *The Good Funeral*, 46.

¹⁸¹ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 123.

¹⁸² Long and Lynch, *The Good Funeral*, 79-80.

¹⁸³ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 124.

trend in America to not include the deceased in the funeral at all. It is as if everyone is welcome to the funeral except for the deceased. In a *New York Times* article, Mark Duffey, who runs a “funeral concierge” service said, “The biggest change is that as more families choose cremation—close to 70 percent in some parts of the West—services have become less somber because there is not a dead body present.”¹⁸⁴ This trend to move away from having the body present at a funeral started with the White, educated, urban and suburban Protestant Christians, but other people groups, both religious and secular are now practicing this, too.¹⁸⁵ While those who have a choice often choose to not have a dead body present, yet when a loved one dies in a way that the body is lost or destroyed, the family members are devastated.

It is important to note the body of the deceased is often missing from the funeral for several reasons. One reason the body is often missing from the funeral is the location of the cemeteries. Cemeteries used to be in the backyard of the home or inside or right outside of the church. Cemeteries were often in the center of the town, close enough to visit often and visible to remind those in the community of those who had lived and died among them. Beginning in the nineteenth century, cemeteries were moved to rural areas in park-like settings, both for a more peaceful place to visit the dead, but also because they believed it was more sanitary. There was a rumor, that proved to be untrue, how dead bodies were contaminating the ground and polluting the water.¹⁸⁶ Moving the cemeteries further away from town and away from where the funerals took place removed the need for the bodies to be present at the funeral. If they were not going anywhere, why would the body need to be present?

The other reason the body is often not at the American funeral is because of convenience. Not only do we tend to find easier ways of doing things, which includes dealing with our dead,

¹⁸⁴ John Leland, “It’s My Funeral and I’ll Serve Ice Cream If I Want To,” *The New York Times* (July 20, 2006), <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/20/fashion/20funeral.html>.

¹⁸⁵ Long and Lynch, *The Good Funeral*, 92.

¹⁸⁶ Long and Lynch, *The Good Funeral*, 95.

but having a deceased body present is morbid and difficult. With the “celebration of life,” death rituals are more joyful celebrations rather than solemn gatherings, and bodies tend to dampen a celebratory atmosphere. In addition, Long suggests the greatest reason the body is not necessary at a funeral is the fundamental shift in our society from an emphasis on embodiment of faith to a less embodied and a more free-flowing form of spirituality.

The more science influenced western thought, the more truth came to be understood as facts. As this shift took place, it meant science and religion were in opposition to each other, and spiritual truth became harder to hold on to, as it could not always be proved. Long describes what happened in this transition as, “Science got the universe, religion got the soul,”¹⁸⁷ which led to a re-emergence of belief in the disembodied spirit. The body is not necessary at a funeral if the body is just a shell for the spirit that has already left.¹⁸⁸ However, as the people of God, we believe the body matters in both life and in death.

Christians believe humans are sacred, lives are sacred, and therefore, so are bodies. Bodies were not idolized or idealized in the Greek’s view of bodies, but instead, the belief that bodies are sacred moved Christians to care for and to honor bodies, living and dead, in ways others did not. This view only grew stronger as they meditated on the incarnation and the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Early Christians cared deeply about the world and about bodies because bodies obviously mattered to God. The theological framework for this truth is rooted in both the *imago Dei* and in the incarnation. Humans were made in the image of God, not as spirits, but as people who are embodied beings.¹⁸⁹ Through the incarnation, we see God’s interest and love for humanity as God, in the form of Christ, took on flesh and lived among us.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Long and Lynch, *The Good Funeral*, 101.

¹⁸⁸ Long and Lynch, *The Good Funeral*, 96-105.

¹⁸⁹ Genesis 1:27.

¹⁹⁰ John 1:14.

The body matters. All we do and how we engage in the world is through embodied realities. The person who has died has only been known to loved ones in an embodied way. Encountering the person's body throughout his or her life is the way God's gift of life has been recognized in that person. When a person dies, it is also right to bear witness to the lack of life in that same person. To care for the body at the end of life and to carry the deceased to the final resting place is a way to honor both the living and the dying of the one we loved.

It is important to note the physical body may not always be able to be present at the funeral. In situations where this is the case, either out of necessity or by the family's choice, the pastor could still use the language of the body to help teach this significant Christian theological framework regarding the body. Additionally, questions often arise about how an embodied resurrection can take place for those who are cremated. It will be necessary for pastors as the resident theologians, to help frame a theological physicality for the deceased. Through the great mystery of faith, we believe the One who makes bodies from dust at creation can also raise someone from dust at the resurrection. The body of the dead matter, whether it is present or not.

Caring for the bodies of the dead and moving them to their final place of rest is an important act of worship, too. Long says while the major religions disagree on many topics, all agree we learn how to live when we care for the dead. "Religions east and west proclaim that caring for the bodies of the dead is both a humane thing to do and a sacred thing to do."¹⁹¹

Not only should we care for the bodies and have the bodies present at funerals, but the focus should be on the person who has died. As the central human character in the funeral, the emphasis should be on celebrating the fact the person who has died was a holy person, a saint. It is a time to look at the deceased as one who belongs to God and in the light of Christ. Long calls the deceased a saint, not a label for only the most holy, but rather the funeral is a time for

¹⁹¹ Long and Lynch, *The Good Funeral*, 92.

“celebrating the true identity in Christ of the brother or sister who has died.”¹⁹² We must tell the whole truth about who the person is, the good and the hard, but all through the lens of grace and as one who has been redeemed and made new in Christ.

By remembering and celebrating all the ways the saint has lived among us in the body and seeing proof the body of a loved one can no longer engage in the world as he or she once had, it allows all who gather to process the reality of loss. Furthermore, the community of faith which has been a part of this saint’s spiritual journey has the privilege of carrying the body one more time to the place of final rest. Long says this journey is necessary, “because of the fact of death and symbolic of the baptismal journey now coming to completion.” Caring for the body and including the body in the funeral should be seen as necessary, a tremendous privilege, honor, and responsibility.

Grieving in Community

The second element necessary for a good funeral is the mourners, or the holy people. A definitive element for funerals is there must be a community who cared about the person who died. Death happens to both the one who has died and to all of those who are affected by it. Funerals do include pastoral care, encouraging and supporting each other in our community of faith, but it also serves as a place where questions arise regarding death, dying, and what comes next for the one who has died, but also for oneself. One of the best ways to address all that is happening in the hearts and minds of the people is to worship as a community of faith at a funeral. Long says, “At a funeral, the church has come not to provide therapy but to worship, to enact the story of the gospel about life and death, which of course, provides the deepest comfort of all.”¹⁹³

¹⁹² Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 125.

¹⁹³ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 134.

This principle is illustrated through the death rituals of the Sufi Muslims. On the “No Small Endeavour” podcast, Azim Khamisa describes how the death rituals of his religion saved him. When his son, Tariq, was shot and killed through gang violence, 1,400 people came to attend his funeral. Khamisa explains how in their tradition, everybody passes in a single file around his body, while chanting, “*Allahumma Salli ala Muhammadin waala aali Muhammed,*” which means, “O Allah, send your grace, honor and mercy.” It is a prayer that is prayed during difficulty. It took two and a half hours, and those words were chanted the entire time. After every person passed by the body, the father, along with the closest male relatives, carried the body out by carrying the body on a litter, with the poles resting on their shoulders. Khamisa shared how as they carried Tariq’s body out of the room, everyone they walked past put their hand on the gurney as if they were helping to carry the weight. The words chanted by all who gathered and the arms of the community who were willing to share the weight of the body and of the grief served as a powerful support to Khamisa.¹⁹⁴

By participating as a community through the singing of hymns, reading of scripture, and reciting and praying prayers, the holy people gathered at a funeral are reminded of who God is and what God has done in the past, present, and will do in the future. This includes the group who gathers at the funeral, but it also includes all of God’s holy people, both living and the dead. Pastors have the privilege and responsibility to help connect those living who have gathered with the communion of saints who are also gathered. Long says, “Part of the power of a funeral is that we can see so clearly ‘the rest of the community,’ that we are connected in worship to the one who has died and to those who, having died before us, now worship God in that land toward which we are traveling.”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Lee Camp, “Ending Violence Through Forgiveness,” June 8, 2023, *No Small Endeavor*, podcast, MP3 audio, 49:27, <https://www.nosmallendeavor.com/ending-violence-through-forgiveness-azim-khamisa>.

¹⁹⁵ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 135.

Helping to connect those who are gathered at the funeral to those who have gone before us, including the deceased, is a practice to assist the brain in processing the death. The ways these continuing bonds take place can include listening to the kind of music their loved one enjoyed, talking out loud to their deceased loved one at their grave, imagining what their loved one would say in a particular situation and using that wisdom in the present, writing letters to the one who has died, etc. While grief research has not yet explored how continuing bonds can be mapped in the brain, participating in these practices seem to assist people with their grief. Therefore, this practice of connecting the holy people, both the living and the dead, can be seen as a beneficial practice to help build continuing bonds for the brain as well.

As Christians, we believe while death changes the relationship we have with the dead, it does not destroy the relationship; it cannot destroy it. While we do not know what life looks like after death, Long reminds us, “We only know that the life they have is life in God, and that life we share. We do not know what their bodies look like; we only know that they are like us embodied, but unlike us their bodies are glorified and imperishable.”¹⁹⁶ As we worship, including the worship that takes place at funerals, we are joining this great cloud of witnesses, and communing with the saints. The goal is to model this belief and to lead worship in ways to communicate this truth.

The Grief Language

The third element of a good funeral is the holy script or the language we use in grief. As people gather, there must be some narrative to ground the people in the truth of who the person was, and offers answers or hope amid questions people have as they are faced with death. Gathering at funerals makes people face the reality of death and the reality of their own mortality. The story offered needs to be rich enough to handle this complex and difficult

¹⁹⁶ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 134.

situation. Lynch says this often is a religious narrative, but it can also be something philosophical, artistic, or intellectual.¹⁹⁷ However, Long defines holy script as, “a truthful gospel narrative about life and death that the community can perform.”¹⁹⁸ The script is supposed to be the gospel story, yet oftentimes the story of the deceased is the louder story told. Instead, the funeral is a place to tell the true story of the deceased while he or she was alive, but the story does not stop when the person dies. Rather, the story ends with God. The story of the deceased helps those gathered remember the one who has died fully and well, yet the good news of Jesus Christ must be told to give those grieving eternal hope.

Problematic Grief Language

However, oftentimes the language we use does not align with what we profess. Many of the statements used to process loss which are problematic are reflective of American Christianity, as they have roots in other disciplines including history, philosophy, and psychology, while also having ties to Christianity. Further study into the language used in these settings can offer insight as to where these statements originate and what they connect to. This study can also empower pastors to point out how these statements do not align with our Christian understanding of who God is, how God acts in the world, or what happens to us when we die.

One example of this is the idea of our *deceased loved ones become angels*. I have heard people tell parents whose baby has died that now their baby is an angel, and I have also heard people say their grandparent who died is now an angel watching over them. However, while this idea is common, this idea does not align with scripture, nor does it align with Christian doctrine. This idea is connected to Plato, the Greek philosopher, and his dualistic view of the body and the soul.

¹⁹⁷ Long and Lynch, *The Good Funeral*, 80.

¹⁹⁸ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 123.

Plato saw the “real person” as an immortal soul, which is separate from the body. The body is just a shell carrying the important soul, and oftentimes the body is in opposition to the soul. This is seen in the ways the body betrays us, tempts us, gets sick, dies, and decays. The soul is seen as divine, while the body is profane. So, when a person dies, one common, Platonic view is the good, divine soul goes to heaven. However, Christians believe angels and humans are created as different beings, and therefore, when humans die, they do not become a different creature. Nevertheless, this Platonic, dualistic view of body and soul is deeply embedded in our culture.

Viewing the body as “shells” only and not the full person has affected funeral practices to the point that the body is not necessary to be present at funerals. This ties back to another reason the body is missing at funerals. However, this understanding does not seem to offer any form of hope. Lynch furthers this idea and indicates this idea of “just a shell” minimizes the death and resurrection of Jesus. If “just a shell” was raised from the dead, it would be as if Jesus’ personality was raised from the dead or just the idea of Christ was raised from the dead, which is not sufficient nor true. Instead, Lynch writes, “Easter was a body and blood thing, no symbols, no euphemisms, no half measures.”¹⁹⁹ When a person dies, the person dies. It is not just the body that dies and the soul that lives on.

Contrary to the Platonic, dualistic view of body and soul, the Christian view of human beings is described best in Genesis, where God created the first human. God did not place a soul in a body, but instead breathed the breath of life into the human. Long writes, “What others call the ‘soul’ and ‘body,’ Christians call the ‘breath of God’ and dust; and when it comes to living human beings, they form an inseparable unity.”²⁰⁰ Humans are embodied creatures, and this

¹⁹⁹ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 35.

²⁰⁰ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 24.

embodied view connects with the way in which we experience life and engage with people around us. We only know the world in embodied ways. For example, we know someone by the way they look, how they act, what they do, and as we see them engaging in the world and with us. We only engage in relationships in embodied ways as we sit with people, eat with people, hug, and touch.

There is also a sacramental embodiment we experience through our faith as we are washed in baptism, eat at the Lord's Table, pray together, speak words of life and faith and decision in community, and as we use our hands and feet to engage in the world with acts of service. We know someone and their "soul," because we know them in their embodied life. When a person dies, the whole person dies. Some may wonder where the hope is by embracing the finality of the death of a loved one like this. However, the hope comes in the understanding of what comes next. Hope comes in "the messiness of declaring, in the teeth of death's apparent victory, the good news of the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting!"²⁰¹

Another example of phrases or ideas which are communicated around death and grief is, "*Pull yourself up by your bootstraps.*" This phrase is thought to have originated in the late 1800's, but it was meant to be a sarcastic statement, referring to something everyone knew was impossible. One, obviously, cannot lift oneself up by pulling on a bootstrap, yet now this statement is used to describe hard work people do on their own, without the help of others or an internal strength to get through something difficult. This statement speaks to two pervasive movements in our culture: extreme masculinity and rugged individualism.

Celebrating the extreme, traditionally masculine characteristics of power, strength, toughness, and control and holding these as the standard everyone must adhere to for survival and domination became the norm for the American culture and as permeated the local church.

²⁰¹ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 31.

The way these masculine traits have permeated the American culture has been deemed toxic because of the harm done by abusing these traits at the expense of other men and women. In *Jesus and John Wayne*, Kristin Kobes Du Mez gives examples of men like William Wallace, Teddy Roosevelt, General Douglas MacArthur, and the actor, John Wayne who are to be celebrated as evangelical popular culture heroes. Du Mez writes, “For many evangelicals, these militant heroes would come to define not only Christian manhood, but Christianity itself.”²⁰² These men would have embraced the “pull yourself bootstraps” mentality and would have served as a model for how to live this out.

The other pervasive movement that “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” connects to is rugged individualism or self-sufficiency. This cultural message urges people to forge their own pathway to the future with little or no input from anyone else. The individual is the center of reality, and the result is often a growing detachment and a deep skepticism of everyone else. Rugged individualism celebrates a separation from community in order for the individual to potentially be seen and recognized as important.

This statement is problematic because both extreme masculinity and rugged individualism are counter-Kingdom. This statement puts unrealistic expectations on both men and women. It is not possible for a person to pull oneself up by the bootstraps, nor can or should people try to pull themselves out of the sorrow and grief experienced from the loss of a loved one. To demonstrate this kind of strength in the face of grief does not allow a person to be fully human. Strength does not mean withholding emotion, nor does it mean to get better or to force oneself to get over the loss.

²⁰² Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*, First published as a Liveright paperback. (New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2021), 11.

Elizabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler discuss this kind of strength in *On Grief and Grieving*. They write, “We need to understand that strength and grief fit together. We must be strong to handle grief, and in the end, grief brings out strengths we never knew we had.” Finally, this statement speaks to the individual’s role in getting through the grief. As the people of God, we are meant to do life in community, to rely on each other. When one person suffers, we are called to suffer together and to hold one another up through the difficulty. For these reasons, “pull yourself by your bootstraps” should not be used as a means of offering hope to a person dealing with loss and grief.

Another ill-advised statement is, “Everything happens for a reason.” This statement has ties to the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, who was known for his theories of logic and the quest to find meaning in life. At the root of this statement is a desire to find purpose, meaning, and growth through the difficult situations people experience. I also believe this statement has connections to a form of American Christianity called the prosperity gospel, which is named for its primary theological claim: God wants to bless you.

Kate Bowler, theology professor at Duke Divinity School and author, names four themes of the prosperity gospel which include faith, wealth, health, and victory.²⁰³ The prosperity gospel promises a cure for tragedy, a desire for escape, and gives people a hope that a strong faith can change outcomes for individuals. Bowler also writes in *Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I’ve Loved*, “The prosperity gospel is a theodicy, an explanation for the problem of evil. . .it looks at the world as it is and promises a solution. It guarantees that faith will always make a way.”²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler, *On Grief & Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss*, Scribner trade pbk. ed. (New York: Scribner, 2014), 102.

²⁰⁴ Kate Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I’ve Loved* (New York: Random House, 2018), xiii.

The prosperity gospel presupposes spiritual laws, which if followed, will lead people and allow good things to happen to good people. The idea is God will reward a person if they have the right kind of faith and live this faith out by thinking positively, speaking positively, and believing hard enough. This philosophy is deeply ingrained in Americans, even if they do not buy into the prosperity gospel specifically. Many believe hard work will naturally produce awards, accomplishments, and good things. Virtue and success go hand in hand. Even if we do not fully lean into this belief, most people believe if something bad happens, there must be a reason.

The issue with “Everything happens for a reason” is when a person experiences a significant loss or traumatic death or experience, it is not always possible to have an answer or to find a reason. Instead of trying to find answers and reasons for why things happen, we need to focus on the hope we have to offer. Bowler questions the prosperity gospel's assumptions, asking, “What if being people of ‘the gospel’ meant we are simply people with good news? God is here. We are loved. It is enough.”²⁰⁵

Language matters. The words we speak should communicate hope as a means of comfort, healing, and faith formation for those who mourn. Our language should be rooted in scripture, sound theology, and filled with truth. We should not get caught up in trite phrases which speak to something other than what we believe, but instead we must honor the loss and pain with words that matter and offer hope.

These are just a few examples of grief language used to help process loss and grief, and these statements are often offered with the intention to encourage those who are grieving. However, these statements are incredibly problematic. Instead, we must be faithful to a holy

²⁰⁵ Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason*, 21.

script which aligns with who we are as God's people. Bowler interviewed Long on her

"Everything Happens" podcast. They discussed how to be faithful to the holy script. Long said:

"There are two preachers at every funeral. Capital 'D' Death comes to every funeral and loves to preach. And Death's sermon is the same every time. It is, '...I win every time. You want the evidence, it's right there. I break all loving relationships. I destroy all community. You belong to me.' And the pastor, the other preacher, has the duty and delight of standing there and saying, 'Oh, death, where's your victory? Where's your sting? I tell you a mystery.' We have got to say that."²⁰⁶

Not only does this offer hope, but by being faithful to this holy script, pastors help to honor the desire and need for the brain to "find" the missing loved one in space and time as O'Connor suggested previously. This holy script is the answer we should present at funerals.

The Place to Honor Grief

The fourth and final element of a good funeral is the place to honor grief. In the funeral, pastors should communicate a sense of sacredness towards the spaces where we have lived and participated in life together. Walter Brueggemann, theologian and author, describes the symbol of the land in the Bible and how it functioned in his book, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*. Brueggemann says land represents both the actual land and soil of God's promise and an eschatological symbol of the promise of God to come.²⁰⁷

The good Christian funeral should include these two things as well by describing places where the deceased has lived and has participated in life together with others, and the funeral should also tell the promise of the place yet to come. As pastors discuss the places the deceased has lived during a funeral, those grieving are reminded of places where vows were made, where meals were held, even where other family, friends, and other saints have been laid to rest. Those who grieve are grounded in the places which have mattered and where God's faithfulness was

²⁰⁶ Kate Bowler, "Number Our Days," March 2023, *Everything Happens*, Podcast, MP3 audio, 41:47, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/tom-long-number-our-days/id1341076079?i=1000624691289>.

²⁰⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 2.

seen. Long contends funerals are best when held in churches instead of funeral homes for this very reason. For the Christian, the church is where the saint has worshiped, been baptized, dedicated children, gotten married, etc. They are physical places that matter.²⁰⁸ And, while the land, the holy place, reminds us the ground we live on and even bury our dead is good, we also know our ultimate hope does not reside here. The good land of today reminds us of the future, better promised land still to come.²⁰⁹

One of the ways the funeral helps those gathered to engage in the holy place is with physical engagement by transporting the body to the land where the body will ultimately be placed. When a loved one dies, the mourners know at some level the deceased cannot stay among the living, and they must go somewhere else, to be placed somewhere else. Long says a funeral by its very definition, is what we do with the body: “This movement of the corpse is the central and inescapable reality, the unavoidable fact at the center of all death rituals.”²¹⁰

The physical transportation, the moving from church or funeral home to the cemetery, helps the body and brain to understand the loved one is no longer here. In fact, this transporting ritual is one of the only times in the grief process that the larger, local community shows respect to the dead and acknowledges the grief of the mourners. This is evidenced by cars pulling over as the funeral procession passes by on the way to the cemetery. For one moment, the grief feels seen and shared. Lynch adds it does not matter which way they are transported: buried, burned, entombed, scattered, cast out to sea; rather, by participating in the transport, helping the dead get to where they need to be, we not only honor our loved one, but we also help ourselves in the grieving process.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 130.

²⁰⁹ Long, Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*, 131.

²¹⁰ Long and Lynch, *The Good Funeral*, 95.

²¹¹ Long and Lynch, *The Good Funeral*, 81.

Not only does the place matter for the burial, but the place matters for the remembering that will come. Throughout Scripture, there are many examples where God asks the Israelites to set up memorials to remember what God had done for them. One example of this is in Joshua 4, when the Israelites crossed the Jordan River. God knew God's people were forgetful, so God told Joshua to choose twelve men, one from each tribe, to gather a stone from the middle of the dry riverbed to make a memorial next to the riverbank. These stones would be a visible reminder for them and all generations to come of God's faithfulness. The memorial stones would testify to future generations of God's faithfulness; this was a place for them to remember the work of God.

In the same way, it is important to have a space to return where you can remember the deceased, a place to designate where grief is welcomed. To integrate the loss into everyday life, the place where the deceased is placed or memorialized needs to be accessible and frequented for intentional acknowledgement of the grief. A place for grief helps those in mourning to continue to grieve well. This is not just physical spaces, but rather it includes space in the calendar to mark special days to remember including Lent, All Saints Day and Holy Saturday. Giving a place and time to remember those who have died is important in grieving well.

Conclusion

Gathering with the community of faith to worship, to remember and celebrate the deceased, to be grounded in the truth of the Gospel, and to participate in transporting the deceased to his or her final resting place both honors the dead and helps those who mourn to grieve well. As Lynch says, "By getting the dead where they need to go, the living get where they need to be."²¹² Pastors can help the living and the dead to get where they need to be by officiating good, Christian funerals and by leading those who grieve to experience good grief.

²¹² Long and Lynch, *The Good Funeral*, 54.

This chapter demonstrates best practices for faithful grief care. Pastors first must understand the different models for grief care, and how they help to address the needs of those who grieve. Specifically, implementing continuing bonds and the model of companioning will aid those who grieve in the community of faith, with both the living and the dead. Finally, by working through the framework for defining a good funeral and good grief, we see how the language and practices we use allow us to embrace grief as a spiritually forming experience. When we care for the dead, grieve in community, use faithful language regarding death, and have a place to honor the dead and our grief, aids in the grieving process.

Chapter 4: Proposed Solution and Methodology

Up to this point, this dissertation has focused on grief. Previous chapters demonstrate the need for pastors to be equipped to understand grief, the holistic effects of grief on a person, and how to implement grief practices that align in speech and practice with who we are as the people of God. In this chapter, the research concludes and turns the focus to the methodology I believe can best help meet this need. I will begin with the rationale for creating an academic, semester course that can be taught in undergraduate universities to help educate ministerial students.

Rationale for Artifact

This project is focused on how to better equip pastors for the difficult yet beautiful work of grief care. I hope to ensure pastors are better trained in understanding grief theory and best practices for death rituals and grief care. While I believe most pastors can benefit from this kind of training, I currently teach at Mount Vernon Nazarene University, and I see the great need for current ministerial students to be trained in this work. While this content can be taught in other Christian universities or presented at workshops for pastors, my hope was to create something applicable for my current context. As such, I will utilize language specific to my context and trust that others will adapt the resources to their particular context.

I contacted the deans of the Christian Ministries departments at the eight undergraduate Nazarene universities in the United States: Eastern Nazarene College (ENC), Mid America University (MNU), Mount Vernon Nazarene University (MVNU), Northwest Nazarene University (NNU), Olivet Nazarene University (ONU), Point Loma Nazarene University (PLNU), Southern Nazarene University (SNU), and Trevecca Nazarene University (TNU). I wanted to see if any school currently offered specific curriculum in their Christian Ministries departments that covering the topics of death and grief.²¹³

²¹³ See Appendix B for questionnaire I sent to the deans at the Nazarene Universities.

I received replies from five of the universities: ENC, MVNU, NNU, ONU, and PLNU. No school that replied offered a specific course on death and grief. Every school responding included the topics of death and grief in a pastoral care and counseling course, which consisted of two to three hours of learning and work on this topic.²¹⁴ In addition, MVNU includes the topic of death in Theology II, and death rituals are discussed in Worship in the Christian Tradition for an additional two hours.²¹⁵ Since most Christian Ministries programs offered at Nazarene universities are approved for the Course of Study for ordination in the Nazarene denomination, it is most likely these universities consistently covering death and dying in the courses listed above.

Every dean who replied to my inquiry expressed the need for this work. As already discussed in this dissertation, these deans confirmed pastors are among those who first respond at the time of a death and are often invited to journey with people who are grieving, yet there is a lack of training for pastors to know how to use grief as a spiritually forming process in pastoral care practices. While this training is greatly needed, these Nazarene educational institutions are only covering between two to five hours on this topic during a four-year program. There is clearly a need for more training to take place, and the course I am proposing would add a minimum of 120 learning hours for a three-credit hour course.

Not only does this course meet the need for more hours of training for pastors, but a college course can also be tailored to the learning methods that students respond to most positively. An academic college course provides space and structure for covering the material offered in this dissertation on grief, and if presented with effective pedagogy, it can address the specific need to better equip the next generation of pastors.

²¹⁴ ENC indicated that the topic of grief, lament, and funeral practices is included in 3-4 courses. This is however, in great part to their Practical Theology professor having this as a particular focus area.

²¹⁵ See Appendix B for results from the questionnaire.

Understanding the Classroom

When creating a college course, there are two important issues for consideration when writing curriculum. The first is to consider the current students who will be taking the course. It is necessary to know who will be in the classroom and to identify the needs of the students. The other issue to consider before writing the curriculum is the preferred pedagogy, both in identifying what best connects with the students in the classroom, but also implementing best teaching practices to lead to effective learning.

The Current Students

Effective teaching requires a thorough understanding of your students. At the time this dissertation is written, as mentioned in Chapter 1, this group of students, traditionally ages 18-23, are a part of Generation Z (Gen Z), which is currently the second-youngest generation. Gen Z has been shaped by the digital age, climate and security anxieties, a shifting financial landscape, and COVID-19. These issues have shaped college-aged students greatly and have impacted their faith formation, interactions with their community and world, and the ways they approach death and grief.

As mentioned earlier, in 2021, the Springtide Research Institute reported Gen Z to be very religious or spiritual, but this generation is more religiously unaffiliated than any previous generation in the United States. Not only are they unaffiliated with religions, but Springtide Research Institute shares they also do not turn to their faith community in challenging times.

Springtide Research Institute reports:

“But our data shows that even though the majority of young people identify as religious (71%) or spiritual (78%), most aren’t turning to religion—whether religious communities, leaders, practices, or beliefs—to help guide them in moments of uncertainty. This is true even of the young people who tell us they attend, believe in, or identify with a particular religious tradition.”²¹⁶

²¹⁶ Springtide Research Institute, *Navigating Uncertainty*, 21.

Of the young people who identified as “very religious,” less than half (40%) told us they found connecting with their faith community helpful during challenging or uncertain times; only 23% of those who consider themselves moderately religious found this helpful. Only one in five people in general agree with the statement “I use faith as a guide when I am confused about things.”²¹⁷ This is important to know as it pertains to the way Gen Z might respond to the death of a loved one and who they may or may not turn to in their grief. In addition, while teaching this course to Gen Z, when talking about the importance of ministering to those who grieve, the students may not naturally connect with the concept of turning to pastors in grief, because they have not seen it lived out among their peers.

It is also important to note, college students are interested in matters of faith and are eager to learn, but they want to explore, discover, and personalize their own faith. Gen Z does not want to be told what to believe; they want to discover on their own. Yet, trusted adults do play a significant role in young people’s lives, because while they may not want to be told what to believe, they do want relationships with mentors and adults who are alongside them as they explore. Springtide Research Institute's 2020 report claims, “Young people engage and thrive when they encounter trusted adults who care for, listen to, and guide them. Religious leaders are needed to meet young people amid the messiness of the present moment.”²¹⁸ To teach in the most effective way, educators must provide opportunities for this age group to learn for themselves in the classroom but also must recognize educators are also needed and welcome to provide soft guidance.

Another area for consideration with this age group is the faith development stages. In *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, James Fowler and Mary

²¹⁷ Springtide Research Institute, *The State of Religion and Young People*, 21.

²¹⁸ Springtide Research Institute, *The State of Religion and Young People: Relational Authority*, 2020, 49.

Lynn Dell write about these faith development stages. These stages do not describe how strong a person's faith is, but rather help educators and pastors to understand how this age group or stage development thinks, interacts with faith practices, and how they relate to God, their faith, and their relationships with others.²¹⁹

According to the faith development stages, this age group is typically at either stage three, the "Synthetic-Conventional Faith," or stage four, which is the "Individuative-Reflective Faith." Stage three generally starts about the age of 13 and goes until around 18, however, some people stay at this stage for their entire life. In this stage the students can think abstractly, and they are able to see layers of meaning in the stories, rituals, and symbols of their faith. At this stage people can see things from someone else's perspective. This means they can also imagine what others think about them and their faith. People at this stage claim their faith as their own instead of just doing what their family does. In stage three, issues of religious authority are important. For older adolescents and adults in this stage, authority resides with friends and the religious community. For all people in this stage, religious authority resides mostly outside of themselves personally.

As some of the college students progress in their faith development and move to stage four, which can take place in late adolescence, ages 18-25, many people experience the kind of dissonance that comes with the complex questions of faith when one begins to address at this stage of development. People in this stage start to deconstruct their faith, by questioning their own assumptions around the faith tradition, and young people at this stage also question the authority structures of their faith. This is often the time when someone will leave their religious community if the answers to the questions they are asking are not to their liking. Those in stage

²¹⁹ Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, ed., *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, The Sage program on applied developmental science (Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications, 2006), 40.

four continue to grow in faith maturity by rejecting some parts of their faith while affirming other parts. In the end, the person starts to take greater ownership of their faith journey.

As an educator, understanding how college students process their faith and the significance of questioning their faith at this stage is important to take into consideration when thinking about how to present the difficult topic of death and grief. There should be space for questions in the curriculum to allow discussion to both learn from and with a mentor/teacher the students trust. These methods will aid in connecting with college students and create the platform to faithfully to point students back to the hope of the Gospel, which is necessary to prevent harm from taking place to their faith development.

Finally, it is important to note, most college students may not have encountered the death of a person close to them. Many people in the United States do not experience their first close death until their 40's, because two-thirds of U.S. deaths happen to those 65 or older.²²⁰ Whereas in the 1900's most children had experienced personal loss, over half of all deaths in the United States were deaths of children, 15 or younger.²²¹ We are more distanced from grief and loss, so it is possible college students in the classroom will not have experienced a close, personal loss yet. However, if a student has experienced the death of a loved one, then it is an out of order loss, and it is likely there is trauma connected to the loss. It will be important to know what kind of loss has been experienced by those who are in the classroom at the beginning of the semester. As the topics of death and grief are covered, the professor can be attentive to the needs represented in the room.

While this section on students focuses specifically on Gen Z, understanding the specific needs of the students in the classroom is foundational work for effective teaching to take place.

²²⁰ Wolfelt, *Companioning the Bereaved*, 10.

²²¹ Wolfelt, *Companioning the Bereaved*, 10.

As new generations enter the classroom, continued work needs to be done to understand how to best meet the needs of the specific students in the classroom. However, for the most part, the age-level characteristics of college students and the ways these students move through development, including faith development, are universal. Learning how students think, develop, and learn is important for understanding the classroom.

Preferred Pedagogy

In addition to understanding the way college students think, believe, and act, it is also necessary to think about an effective pedagogy that will be most effective for this age group. There are over 50 different theories of learning styles, and all these theories suggest people learn in all different ways and learning happens in a process. I utilize 4MAT System, developed by Bernice McCarthy, which separates learners into four quadrants: (1) Imaginative Learners, (2) Analytic Learners, (3) Common Sense Learners, and (4) Dynamic Learners.²²² The Imaginative Learner asks the question, “Why do I need to know this?” The Analytic Learner asks, “What do I need to know?” The Common Sense Learner asks, “How does this work?” And, the Dynamic Learner asks, “What can this become?” McCarthy believes all these questions need to be addressed in the lesson, and the most effective teaching takes place when all four learning styles are implemented.

Within each learning style, students also have different learning preferences, called modalities. Modalities are the sensory channels through which we receive information, and in *Practicing Christian Education*, Mark Maddix names four specific modalities. The senses that are used for learning are visual (seeing), auditory (listening), kinesthetic (moving), or tactile (touching). The more senses used in presenting a lesson, the more information the students will

²²² Marlene LeFever, *Learning Styles: Reaching Everyone God Gave You to Teach* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook Publishing, 1995), 24.

be able to receive. Maddix writes, “Traditional teaching places a high value on the auditory and visual in teaching, but when we’re teaching children and youth, the kinesthetic and tactile modalities are an important part of learning.”²²³ This is relevant to current students, because according to Dr. Jean Twenge's 2018 research, 18-year-olds have the developmental age of 15-year-olds.²²⁴ This means implementing more hands-on, experiential teaching methods is beneficial in the college classroom today, because it best meets their developmental needs for learning. The educator must be intentional about creating a lesson that will allow each student to participate in the learning process. The more a student can experience in a lesson, the more effective the lesson will be. It is necessary for teachers to be creative in this planning process for effective learning to take place.

Effective pedagogy includes both the educator and the students working together to learn the content of the course, while being formed by a culture in the classroom where community, dialogue, curiosity, and critical thinking skills are encouraged and practiced. As the death and grief course is taught, it is my desire for students to learn the content and to be formed in such a way they will be able to implement faithful grief care as they minister to those who experience loss. In the next section, I will lay out the structure of the course that will incorporate how the content will be taught and the ways the learning will be assessed.

Structure of Course

The class I am presenting is called, “Pastoral Care in Death and Grief.” This will be a three-credit hour, 15-week semester class. The ninety-minute sessions will allow for thorough engagement of the content and opportunities for experiential learning. While the content will

²²³ Mark A. Maddix, *Practicing Christian Education: An Introduction for Ministry* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2017), 131.

²²⁴ Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy?: And Completely Unprepared for Adulthood: And What That Means for the Rest of Us* (New York: Atria Books, 2018), 18.

differ each day, the structure of the class will be the same each time we meet. There will be five main components to each lesson: (1) Grief Journal, (2) Biblical Framework, (3) Death and Grief Teaching, (4) Grief Activity, (5) Discussion/Small Group Work.

Each day we will begin with the grief journal. There will be a piece of artwork, an icon, a poem, a song, or some other medium presented as students come into the room. They will review the medium presented and reflect on what they see, feel, and experience as it pertains to death or grief. The students will keep a journal to track these reflections and will submit them at the end of the semester. These journals will demonstrate a progression of what they learn regarding death and grief throughout the semester, and they will serve as their participation points for the semester. This grief journal addresses the Imaginative Learners as it serves as the “hook” to get students reflecting on their experiences as it relates to death and grief.

The second section of the lesson will be the biblical framework on grief. Each class we study a portion of Scripture which speaks directly to death or grief. Many of the examples listed in chapter 2, “Grief and the Spirit,” will serve as examples of Scripture’s reflections on grief. Using Scripture, the educator can give students a biblical basis to see how others have experienced grief, including Jesus himself. This space in the lesson will provide students with an opportunity to process their understanding of faith in grief and provide a repertoire of Scripture to use in the future as they lead parishioners in the grief journey. In this portion of the lesson, understanding what Scripture teaches about grief will provide an important framework to build upon for the remainder of the lesson.

The third section of the lesson is the teaching on death and grief. Those lessons will consist of content from this dissertation, specifically the content from chapters 1-3. I will begin by presenting the problem and identifying some of the issues pastors navigate as they lead parishioners in the grieving process. Lessons will explain how death is viewed in the American

culture and define the American Protestant and Evangelical Christian landscape, which certainly informs the death and grief rituals. The next section of content will focus on how death rituals are formed and how these rituals are lived out in different cultures. The third section of content will focus on defining grief and how grief affects a person holistically. The fourth and final section of death and grief content will cover the Long and Lynch material on the four components that comprise a good funeral. Both the second and third sections of the lesson will meet the needs of the Analytic Learner. This is where new content will be taught, and it will answer the “What do I need to know?” question.

The fourth section of the lesson will address the Common Sense Learner, and it will be the hands-on, experiential component of the lesson. This portion will include grief activities to practice how to minister to someone who is grieving. It will include working through case studies, engaging in grief care worksheets and activities students might implement with their future parishioners, writing liturgies to implement in worship services specific to dealing with death and grief, and learning specific grief tips and strategies to faithfully care for the grieving. Students will also be introduced to companioning and continuation bonds in this section. This will also be the section of the lesson where students will learn about best grief practices including companioning and continuation bonds. All these practical activities will help answer the “How does this work?” question.

Finally, the fifth section will incorporate discussion and small group work. This portion addresses the Dynamic Learners and answer the questions, “What can this become?” This will also be the space for questions, wrestling with the topics discussed in class, and for thinking through gaps in content. This section of the class will be the last few minutes of class, and the amount of time can be adjusted to meet the needs of the students. Some classes are more talkative and curious than others, so if it is needed, 10-15 minutes can be allotted for this

discussion time. I will always have a question ready related to the daily content, but it is important to allow the students to ask questions, since questions as a part of their faith development.

These five components of the lesson meet the needs of the student learners and provide intentional space to cover the material to best equip students who will care for people who are grieving. One way to assess if students have learned the content is to create assessments in alignment with the objectives of the course. The assessment for a course on death and dying would need to look different than a typical content exam. Instead, assessment to gain an understanding on how a student has processed the curriculum could be assessed by watching interaction between a student and a person who has experienced the death of a loved one, or through a philosophy of death and dying paper including components taught in the course and how the student will apply what they have learned. In addition, a “death and pop culture” project will be assigned, where the student will need to watch a movie or gather an hour’s worth of music (or some other form of media) and make connections to what they’ve learned in class, which will demonstrate a greater level of comprehension and personal engagement with the content. This course will not only provide content for the students to learn, but they will also engage in experiential activities to practice what they are learning in the classroom. It is my hope this course will help students to feel equipped to walk with people in times of death and dying.

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented an academic, three-credit hour course on death and grief as the methodology I believe can best help meet the need of equipping pastors in this work. I gave the rationale for creating this course to be taught in undergraduate universities to educate our ministerial students. In addition, I explained how a college course is the best, concrete

methodology, and how by identifying the needs of the current students and the ways in which they learn, a college course can be most effective in this training.

This “Pastoral Care in Death and Grief” course is designed to meet the needs of all learning styles through the sections of the lesson the students will move through in each class. This course will provide a thorough look at death and grief and will include biological, psychological, cultural, and social considerations related to grief rituals and grief care. Special emphasis is given to understanding issues and problems common to those who experience loss and grief and developing a philosophy and practice of relational ministry and pastoral counseling that is biblical, relevant, and practical. The syllabus, course schedule, and outlines of the 15 weeks of lessons for “Pastoral Care in Death and Grief” are included in the appendix as the full artifact for this dissertation.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In the previous chapter, the “Pastoral Care in Death and Grief” course was presented to better educate and equip pastors to minister to those who grieve. This course combines content to present content knowledge with opportunities for experiential learning, which is how young adults learn best. This college course covers content to address the problems presented in chapter one, how grief effects the whole person, and how to implement practices and rituals to help people to grieve well. It is my belief educating Christian Ministries students in the undergraduate programs at on the topics of death and grief is a necessary intervention for training pastors. This way they can learn about death rituals, grief, and best practices for grief care before they encounter the demand for it in ministry. As there is not a course like this currently offered at any Nazarene universities, this course meets a need for ministerial students.

This final chapter aims to summarize the ways in which this course, “Pastoral Care in Death and Grief” will contribute to the conversation around preparing pastors to lead people through experiencing loss and grief. The following sections will conclude by identifying the standards for the course, presenting limitations to this dissertation work, and naming areas still requiring further development and study in the work on death and grief.

Standards for Artifact

The first issue to consider is the standards to use for this course. It is important to note the Church of the Nazarene has clear curriculum expectations for the courses offered in clergy education. In the “Sourcebook on Ordination,” the Course of Study Committee presents four major areas of education for students who are preparing for ministry: content, competency, character, and context.²²⁵ In addition to these major categories of clergy education, the Course of

²²⁵ Course of Study Advisory Committee--USA, “Sourcebook on Ordination” (Church of the Nazarene, Revised 2012), <https://www.usacanadaregion.org/sites/usacanadaregion.org/files/USA%20SB%20Final2012ms2.pdf>, 10.

Study has been developed with a series of ability statements which fall under the four larger categories previously listed. These ability statements represent content, competency, character, and context areas in which Nazarene elders should be proficient. Any program validated as an approved Course of Study must demonstrate how it addresses these abilities. All MVNU courses that are part of validated course of study must include the relevant ability statements.

Therefore, to assess the standards for this “Pastoral Care in Death and Grief” course, it is necessary to identify the ability statements addressed in this course. I have attached the full list of ability statements addressed in Appendix C, but it is important to note four ability statements will be covered through the content of the course and fall within these categories: congregational care and counseling, worship, Christian ethics, and spiritual formation.²²⁶ The course objectives for this course align with the ability statements from the Church of the Nazarene, and both are listed in the syllabus.

Limitations to Artifact

Another area to consider is the limitations to my project. While I believe a semester-long academic course is an effective way to educate and equip ministerial students, one limitation is the lack of space in our program to add a new course. There is a significant push from the department of Academic Affairs at MVNU to streamline our programs and to decrease the number of credits and courses in our program. Other Nazarene universities have communicated the same thing is happening at their schools. This means adding an additional course into the course program is not going to be possible currently. However, it is possible this course can be added as an elective within the ministry departments. So, while this course cannot be made

²²⁶ Course of Study Advisory Committee--USA, "Sourcebook on Ordination," 12–21. See Appendix C for Ability Statements addressed in artifact project.

mandatory within the program, the students will have the option of taking it by the Spring 2025 semester.

Another area of limitation is this course does not address the need to educate and train pastors already in the field. One suggestion for adapting this course is to create a workshop or seminar for Nazarene district or field training days. The workshop venue would provide a wider opportunity to reach pastors already serving in local churches, and it would make the content more accessible for pastors. The content for this course could also be used to train pastors outside of the Nazarene church, however my network is primarily in this denomination.

Areas of Further Study

There are a few other areas of study within the topic of grief not covered within this dissertation. One area to further explore is theodicy and the questions arise in the grief process and our theological convictions as the people of God. The second area of further study in grief is lament. These are two areas referenced throughout this dissertation, yet there is much more to research and apply to grief work.

Theodicy and the Presence of God in Grief

The first area for further study is theodicy. When a person is in the aftermath of a loss, there are three questions which are simple, yet carry enormous weight and are often asked: (1) Why?, (2) Where is God in this?, (3) What does this suffering mean? People want answers, and we especially need reasons for why bad things happen to us. While some of these questions will be addressed through the Scripture component of the curriculum and through interactions with those who have experienced the death of a loved one, I think this topic needs more time and attention than what I have been able to give it through this dissertation. Specifically, I would draw upon voices like John Swinton, Diane Leclerc, and Jürgen Moltmann.

In *Raging with Compassion*, Swinton explains theodicy is not about figuring out where God is in suffering, nor is it learning arguments designed to defend God's role in suffering. Instead, Swinton suggests the people of God need to understand themselves as deeply rooted in a theodicy that is embodied within Christian community before trying to make sense of everything happening around us. Leclerc's work with *Backside of the Cross* speaks to the powerful potential the atonement of Christ has towards those who have experienced trauma, abuse, and loss. Finally, the work of Jürgen Moltmann would be beneficial to study and implement in this curriculum in the future regarding theodicy and godforsakenness. This profound understanding of God and suffering would be important to add to the content of the course and would help pastors to better understand how God is present with those who grieve.

Lament

The second area for further study on the topic of grief is lament. The genre of lament is seen throughout scripture, and specifically over 40 percent of the psalms are lament psalms.²²⁷ Lament gives language to those who experience anguish and pain, and who long for intimacy with God amid their grief. Walter Brueggeman identifies that laments consist of four parts: 1) Address to God, 2) Complaint, 3) Petition, 4) Praise or Blessing.²²⁸ Lament is a familiar practice to the people of God throughout history, and it is a spiritual practice that would be beneficial for people who grieve today. I engaged the work of Walter Brueggeman, Michael Card, and Henri Nouwen in the topic of lament, but as this was not the focus of my work, it is not possible to address it fully here.

²²⁷ James Japheth Sudarshan Harrichand, "Recovering the Language of Lament for the Western Evangelical Church; A Survey of the Psalms of Lament and Their Appropriation within Pastoral Theology," *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* MJTM 16 (2015): 105.

²²⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Our Hearts Wait: Worshiping through Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, First edition., The Walter Brueggemann Library volume 2 (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2022), 114.

In summary, reflecting on the deep questions of theodicy, God's presence in suffering, and lament would provide more tools for pastors engaging in grief care. The words we use and the practices we implement in death and grief matter. If used rightly, they can help those who have experienced the death of a loved one to experience God in significant ways as they grieve. Specifically, Kelley shares people often turn to religion to cope with their grief, and it is through religious beliefs, religious practice, and the religious community where those who grieve seek comfort.²²⁹ Therefore, a pastor can best minister to those who grieve by speaking loving words rooted in sound beliefs, offering meaningful religious practices, giving opportunities to experience God during loss, and providing a faith community to comfort those who grieve.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project is to help educate and equip pastors to create congregations of hope in times of death and dying. To accomplish this, a semester-long college course was presented to educate ministry students on contemporary theory and practices for understanding grief. We have explored the importance of grief and faithful grief care and aimed to assist in integrating that knowledge into faithful language and practices in their future congregations which are rooted in a deeply Christian perspective.

Chapter one identifies some of the problems pastors must navigate when deciding which death and grief rituals to implement within a congregation. While other cultural traditions seem to have specific and intentional death practices, the American culture and the American Protestant and Evangelical traditions specifically seem to lack consistency and clarity in their rituals. This was presented through cultural and anthropological data, and pastors were encouraged to ground death rituals in the gospel narrative and in Christian rituals and traditions.

²²⁹ Kelley, *Grief*, 108–110.

Chapter two examines grief in depth, through describing grief and providing definitions to clarify what kind of grief people experience through death and dying. A holistic understanding of grief was presented through an extensive literature review that gave insight on the ways grief affects the body, brain, relationships, and spirit and will be beneficial for pastors to integrate into pastoral grief care. When the experience of grief is understood as holistic and as unique as the individual experiencing it, this knowledge will help us to offer more sensitive, appropriate, and faithful care.

Chapter three demonstrates best practices for effective and Christian grief care. Older models of grief care were explained and challenged, and two new models were presented as more effective. Additionally, continuing bonds and the model of companioning were offered as the two most beneficial aspects to grief care and both practices ground those who grieve in the community of faith, with both the living and the dead. Finally, the framework for defining a good funeral was explained, which consists of a holy person, a holy people, a holy script, and a holy place. Integrating continuing bonds and companioning into those four components allow those who experience loss to embrace grief as a spiritually forming experience.

Chapter four presents an academic, three-credit hour course on death and grief as the methodology to equip pastors most effectively in grief work. The “Pastoral Care in Death and Grief” course provides a thorough look at death and grief and includes biological, psychological, cultural, and social considerations related to grief rituals and grief care. Further, this course helps students gain an understanding regarding issues and problems common to those who experience loss and grief.

Chapter five concludes by summarizing the ways in which this course, “Pastoral Care in Death and Grief” prepares pastors to lead people through loss and grief. This chapter identifies the standards for the academic course and presents some of the limitations to this work. In

addition, two primary areas not discussed in this project were suggested for further exploration within the field of grief studies.

Grief is something all people will experience at some point. As pastors continue to care for those who grieve, my prayer is for pastors to continue to learn contemporary theory and practices for understanding grief and integrate that knowledge into the faithful language and practices that align with Christian tradition and Scripture. The more pastors understand grief and implement faithful expressions of grief care, the more they will better communicate hope as a means of comfort, healing, and faith formation for those who mourn.

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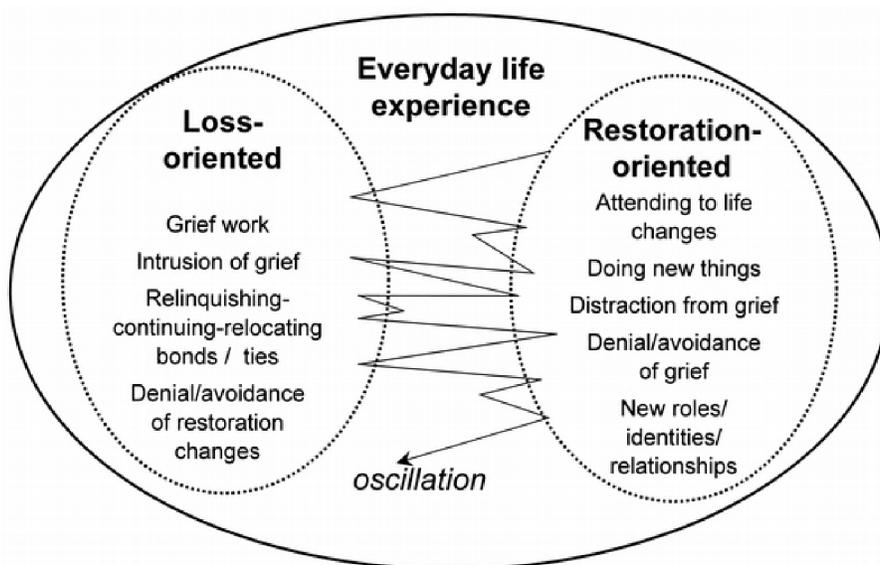
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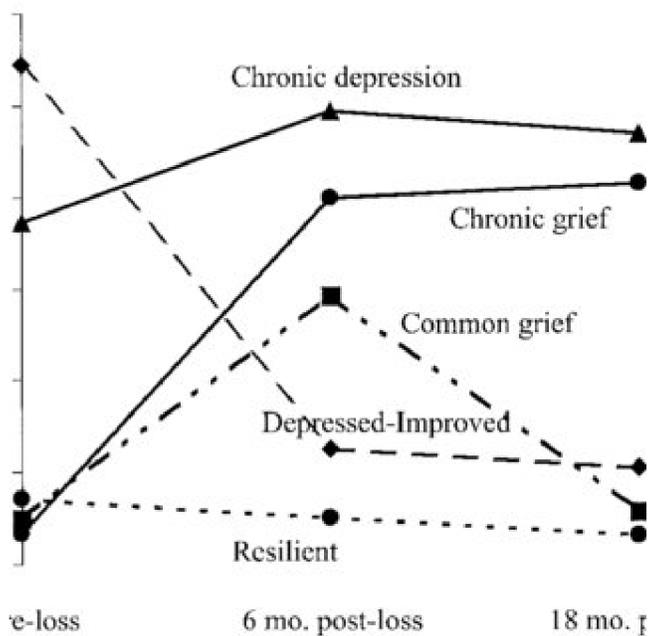
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Appendix A: Grief Models

Grief Theory: Dual Process Model



Grief Model: Trajectories of Grief



Appendix B: Results from Nazarene Universities

Nazarene Universities' Curriculum

1. Do you offer a course specifically on death, dying, and/or grief?

- ENC no
- MNU ----
- MVNU no
- NNU no
- ONU no
- SNU ----
- TNU ----
- PLNU no

a. If yes, is it a requirement for the major or is it an elective?

b. If yes, what is the name of the course, and how many hours is it?

2. What courses in your program cover the topics of death, dying, and/or grief?

- ENC Pastoral Care and Counseling, Pastoral Leadership and Congregational Life. Worship in the Christian Tradition, some take Psalms (OT elective)
- MNU ----
- MVNU Pastoral Care Youth and Children, Pastoral Theology and Practice, Worship in the Christian Tradition, Theology II
- NNU Pastoral Care and Counseling we cover issues of grief and loss
- ONU Pastoral Care and Counseling class, required for all pastoral, youth and children's ministry majors
- SNU ----
- TNU ----
- PLNU Christian Care of Souls (undergrad) deal with death, grief, and funeral rites as pastoral care. We have a philosophy course on existentialism that deals with death and mortality as the key foundational reality.

3. How many total hours are the topics of death, dying, and/or grief covered in your courses?

- ENC 9 hours (9 class sessions, does not include reading)
- MNU ----
- MVNU 7 hours (7 class sessions, does not include reading)
- NNU 2 hours
- ONU unsure. Couple of hours (2)
- SNU ----
- TNU ----
- PLNU 3 hours of lecture/class time and an additional 10 hours of reading

Appendix C: Ability Statements for Artifact

| Category | Ability Statement Code | Ability Statement |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Pastoral Care and Counseling | CP6 | Ability to provide pastoral and spiritual care for individuals and families, discerning when referral to professional counseling is required. |
| Worship | CP11 | Ability to envision, order, and participate in contextualized, theologically grounded worship and to develop and lead appropriate services for special occasions (i.e. wedding, funeral, baptism, and Lord's Supper). |
| Christian Ethics | CH1 | Ability to apply theological and philosophical ethics to nurture faithful living in the Christian community. |
| Spiritual Formation | CH5 | Ability to locate, understand, and use resources for individual and corporate spiritual formation. |

Appendix D: Artifact (Syllabus)

SCHOOL OF CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES
RSS-2089 Pastoral Care in Death and Grief, SPRING 2024



T/TH—8:40-10:10 A.M.
CAMP 243

Instructor: Rev. Jenn Ballenger
Asst. Professor of Youth and Family Ministries
Office: Christian Ministries Office, 2nd floor of CAMP
Office Hours: M, W, F—11:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m.
Phone: (740) 397-9000, ext. 3617. Voice mails go directly to my email inbox.
Email: jennifer.ballenger@mvnu.edu. This is the University's preferred means of communication.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

An introduction to the pastoral care of death and grief, this course will provide a thorough look at death and grief and will include biological, psychological, cultural, and social considerations related to grief rituals and grief care. Special emphasis is given to understanding issues and problems common to those who experience loss and grief and developing a philosophy and practice of relational ministry and pastoral counseling that is biblical, relevant, and practical. Special emphasis is given to practical experience.

TEXTBOOKS/COURSE MATERIALS:

- Kelley, Melissa M. *Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.
- Long, Thomas G. *Accompany Them with Singing: The Christian Funeral*. Pbk. ed. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013
- Wolfelt, Alan. *Companioning the Bereaved: A Soulful Guide for Caregivers*. Fort Collins, CO: Companion Press, 2006.
- Supplemental reading as assigned throughout the course—from *The Last Dance: Encountering Death and Dying*.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND/OR STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

This course is designed to help the student meet the following objectives:

1. Affirm the role of the pastor as a caregiver.
2. Be acquainted with the roles of pastoral care and pastoral presence.
3. Recognize the pitfalls and limitations of pastoral counseling including legal and ethical issues.
4. Define the nature of and need for pastoral counseling in the context of ministry.
5. Shape a personal understanding of and commitment to involving and empowering the laity in the work of pastoral care.
6. Consider the pastor's role and presence in crisis.
7. Become familiar with community resources and partnerships.
8. Consider the needs of the dying, bereaved as well as conducting funerals.
9. Become familiar with resources and practices useful for addressing important counseling and crisis topics.
10. Gain a cultural understanding of death and grief rituals.

COURSE OF STUDY ABILITY STATEMENTS FOR CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE:

- CP6 Ability to provide pastoral and spiritual care for individuals and families, discerning when referral to professional counseling is required.
- CP11 Ability to envision, order, and participate in contextualized, theologically grounded worship and to develop and lead appropriate services for special occasions (i.e. wedding, funeral, baptism, and Lord's

- Supper).
- CH1 Ability to apply theological and philosophical ethics to nurture faithful living in the Christian community.
- CH5 Ability to locate, understand, and use resources for individual and corporate spiritual formation.

COURSE POLICIES:

Class Attendance: MVNU is a teaching institution and, as such, it places a high premium on classroom attendance in order to support and elevate academic excellence. Students, therefore, are expected to attend the classes for which they are confirmed, including scheduled final exams. Regardless of attendance, students are responsible for all course work missed, to be completed in a reasonable time consistent with instructors' policies, which are included in this syllabus. Students are responsible to discuss any absence with the faculty member. Criteria for Excused Absences are listed in the *Catalog* on the MVNU website at [Class Attendance](#).

Late Work: All assignments are to be submitted by 11:59 PM on the specified due date, and **should be submitted through Moodle** unless otherwise instructed. Any extension must receive approval from the instructor prior to the due date. Apart from instructor approval, all late work will be penalized 10% and no assignments will be accepted more than seven days after the due date or after the last day of class. Planned excused absences (e.g., field trips, varsity athletic competitions) require completion of work at stated due times and dates. If you know you are going to be absent or late, please make prior arrangements to turn in your work.

Form and Style Expectations

When referencing materials, please use the form and style provided either by MLA or Chicago Manual of Style.

The following format should be used for written assignments: double-space the body of your writing; use 12-point Times New Roman/Arial font; set your margins to be 1".

Excessive typographical errors, grammatical errors, or formatting inconsistencies may result in deductions.

Gender Inclusive Language

We affirm the equality of women and men. Accordingly, all written assignments and discussion in this course should use inclusive language.

Inclement Weather Policy: If Knox County or the county in which you live is in a Level 2 weather emergency, use your best judgment in deciding if you can safely come to campus. Check email and the Moodle class site before you depart home if you live off campus. In any case, let the professor know as soon as possible if you are unable to attend. If campus is closed for the day, check the Moodle course site and email for updates.

Course Grade Composite, approximately:

Grading Scale: (used by most, but your department may have variations)

- 93-100% A
- 90-92% A-
- 87-89% B+
- 83-86% B
- 80-82% B-
- 77-79% C+
- 73-76% C
- 70-72% C-
- 67-69% D+
- 60-66% D
- 0-59% F

| Assignments | Points | Learning Hours |
|---|-------------|----------------|
| Class Participation and Attendance | 100 | 40 |
| Required Reading 3 books—25 points each | 75 | 25 |
| Cultural Death Rituals Group Presentation | 150 | 5 |
| Death and Pop Culture Project | 150 | 10 |
| Grief Journal | 150 | 10 |
| Death and Grief Liturgies | 100 | 10 |
| Grief Activities | 150 | 5 |
| Final Exam/Theology of Pastoral Care in Death and Grief | 200 | 16 |
| | | |
| Total | 1075 | 121 |

Course Requirements

1. Attendance and Participation. Attendance and engagement with the class discussion is a vital part of the learning process. As such, attendance is an expectation of the course. Regular attendance and participation is critical and expected. You will lose 10 points per hour for every unexcused absence. Please inform Prof Jenn as quickly as possible about any anticipated or unanticipated absences. Exceptions must be approved in advance by the professor. Additionally, all attendance policies in the current MVNU catalog will apply.

2. Course Reading. The textbooks should be read in their entirety. Receive 25 points for each reading report submitted throughout the semester. See the tentative class schedule for the chapter readings related to each class. Students will complete three reading reports throughout the semester. Due: February 4, March 18, April 3

3. Cultural Death Rituals Group Presentation. Using the supplemental readings on cultural death rituals and outside sources, each group must present a specific cultures beliefs, traditions, and rituals relating to death and grief. Your presentation must include a handout and a visual presentation of some kind. Each presentation must also include a grief activity that connects to your group’s assigned culture. Presentation dates: February 11, February 13, February 18, and February 20.

4. Death and Pop Culture Project. Each student will create a “Death and Pop Culture” project to integrate your understanding of death and grief into an engagement with culture. Students will provide a 10-minute presentation of a pop culture piece (movie, song playlist (at least 1 hour long), tv show (1 hour), viral trend) that reflects the idea of death and grief and the ways it is expressed in culture. Project will include a 3 page paper that covers: summary of what you viewed, how death/grief was portrayed, and then make critique on what you viewed in relation to course content.

Due Date: April 4

5. Grief Journal. The student should compile a journal throughout the semester—this can be electronic or handwritten in a journal. Each class there will be a piece of artwork, an icon, poem, song, or some other medium that will be presented as students enter the room. You will review the medium presented and reflect on what you see, feel, experience as it pertains to death or grief. You will keep this grief journal to track these reflections, and then submit it at the end of the semester. These journals will demonstrate a progression of what you have learned regarding death and grief throughout the semester, and they will also serve as your participation points for the

semester. If are late to class or absent for the day, you will not receive points from the journal entries from that day. Due date: April 23

6. Death and Grief Liturgies. Each student will develop and write four liturgical worship elements that would be used in a funeral service or to share with someone who is grieving:

- a. A funeral service
- b. A burial liturgy
- c. A written prayer
- d. A benediction

While the student is free to consult resources, the final product should be an original creation. The worship elements should be fitting for the student's context of worship. Due date: April 18

7. Final Exam/Theology of Pastoral Care in Death and Grief. For the final, each student must submit a reflection paper summarizing what was learned in this class. This reflection must be at least 5 pages. The paper should address three major areas: 1. Understanding death and grief: definition, biblical foundations, and principles of pastoral care in death and grief; 2. Grief care models (what did you learn, how does grief work, what is the purpose of grief?) 3. How will you implement it? (Practical applications/examples of grief care). The paper should consist of topics discussed in class and personal reflection. The paper should be appropriately supported, demonstrating both research and personal reflection.

The paper will be due at the end of the assigned final exam period, DUE BY 10 A.M.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES:

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is taken very seriously, as are attendance fraud, cheating, and other breaches of academic integrity. All cases will be handled according to MVNU policy. See [Academic Integrity](#).

While recent developments in Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology bring many exciting opportunities, this technology also poses significant challenges for higher education. As a result, MVNU has revised its Academic Integrity policy. The use of any AI language processing tool(s) to produce or modify any aspect of coursework a student is expected to complete, unless clearly permitted in assignment guidelines, is prohibited and is a form of plagiarism according to [Academic Integrity](#) policies. In response to the challenges posed by AI, several AI detection tools have emerged. The MVNU-authorized AI detection tool will be used to detect coursework that is AI generated.

Accessibility Services

MVNU provides equal access to all educational and programmatic activities and abides by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and ADA Amendments Act of 2008. A student with a disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities may request reasonable accommodations through [Accessibility Services](#) by submitting an online request form and documentation. The review process can take up to six weeks and accommodations are not applied retroactively. Therefore, students should request accommodations as early as possible. Once accommodations are approved, students are encouraged to meet with each course instructor to discuss how accommodations will be implemented. The Office of Accessibility Services is located within the Center for Student Success in the Thorne Library. More information and all forms can be found online at the [Accessibility Services website](#), or by contacting the office at accessibilityservices@mvnu.edu, or by phone at 740-397-9000 x4280.

Title VI, VII, and IX Compliance

MVNU is committed to creating and maintaining an educational environment that allows for all students to flourish and feel safe within its campus. MVNU has built in structures in compliance with federal law that prohibit discrimination of its employees and students on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, disability, or

military service. Any employee or student who believes that they have been subjected to unlawful discrimination may make a complaint through the [Reporting Form](#) for violations against Title IX, VI, and VII. Alleged unlawful discrimination arising under Title VI and/or Title VII of the federal Civil Rights Act will go through a fair and impartial investigation of all such complaints, with due regard for the rights of all parties.

Title IX Reporting and Confidentiality Policy

Consistent with its mission, MVNU seeks to assure that all community members learn and work in a welcoming, safe and inclusive environment. Federal law under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and, specifically, MVNU's Title IX policy prohibit gender- or sex-based discrimination including but not limited to pregnancy and pregnancy related conditions, harassment, and sexual misconduct within its community. Any student who has experienced gender- or sex-based discrimination/harassment/misconduct may report the incident and their concerns. There are both confidential and non-confidential resources and reporting options. MVNU is legally obligated to respond to reports of sexual misconduct, and therefore cannot guarantee the confidentiality of a report, unless made to a confidential resource. On campus, the confidential resources are the Campus Counseling Center, the Campus Pastor, the Associate Campus Pastor, and the school Nurse. As a faculty member, I am required to report incidents of sexual misconduct to the MVNU Title IX Coordinator and thus cannot guarantee confidentiality. I must provide the Title IX Coordinator with all relevant details including the names of those involved in a reported incident. For more information about MVNU's policies, procedures, support resources or reporting options, see the [Office of Civil Rights](#).

Appendix D: Artifact (Course Schedule)



SCHOOL OF CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES
RSS-2089 Pastoral Care in Death and Grief, SPRING 2024

T/TH—8:40-10:10 A.M.
CAMP 243

Instructor: Rev. Jenn Ballenger
Asst. Professor of Youth and Family Ministries
Office: Christian Ministries Office, 2nd floor of CAMP
Office Hours: M, W, F—11:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m.
Phone: (740) 397-9000, ext. 3617. Voice mails go directly to my email inbox.
Email: jennifer.ballenger@mvnu.edu. This is the University’s preferred means of communication.

| | Date | Topic | Reading and Due Dates |
|----|--------|---|---|
| 1 | Jan 11 | Introductions, Syllabus, and Grief | Reading: <i>Accompany Them with Singing</i> . introduction, chapter 1 |
| 2 | Jan 16 | Defining Grief | Reading: <i>Grief</i> , introduction |
| 3 | Jan 18 | Grief and the Body Presentation Organization | Reading: <i>Grief</i> , chapter 1 |
| 4 | Jan 23 | Grief and the Brain | Reading: <i>Grief</i> , chapter 3 |
| 5 | Jan 25 | Grief and Relationships | Reading: <i>Supplemental Reading--Fowler</i> |
| 6 | Jan 30 | Grief and Faith Development | Reading: <i>Grief</i> , chapter 2 |
| 7 | Feb 1 | Grief and the Spirit | Reading: <i>Supplemental Reading—US Death Rituals (articles)</i> Due: Reading Report #1 |
| 8 | Feb 6 | American View of Death/Death Rituals | Reading: <i>Grief</i> , chapter 5 |
| 9 | Feb 8 | Cultural Death Rituals | Reading: <i>Supplemental Reading—Last Dance</i> Due: Presentations |
| 10 | Feb 13 | Cultural Death Rituals | Reading: <i>Supplemental Reading—Last Dance</i> Due: Presentations |
| 11 | Feb 15 | Cultural Death Rituals | Reading: <i>Supplemental Reading—Last Dance</i> Due: Presentations |
| 12 | Feb 20 | Cultural Death Rituals | Reading: <i>Companioning</i> |

| | | | |
|----|----------|--|--|
| | | | (Read book over break) Due: Presentations |
| 13 | Feb 22 | Special Guest/Field Trip to Funeral Home | |
| | Feb 27 | NO CLASS: Spring Break | |
| | Feb 29 | NO CLASS: Spring Break | |
| | Mar 5 | NO CLASS: Spring Break | |
| | Mar 7 | NO CLASS: Spring Break | |
| 14 | Mar 12 | Grief Care Theories | Reading: <i>Companionship</i> |
| | Mar 14 | NO CLASS—GEN ED ASSESSMENTS | |
| 15 | Mar 19 | Grief Care Theories | Reading: <i>Companionship</i> Due: Reading Report #2 |
| 16 | Mar 21 | Grief and Continuing Bonds | Reading: <i>Companionship</i> |
| 17 | Mar 26 | Grief and Companionship | Reading: <i>Companionship</i> |
| 18 | Mar 28 | Good Grief—Caring for the Dead | Reading: <i>Accompany Them with Singing</i> , chapter 6- 7 |
| | Apr 2 | NO SCHOOL—EASTER BREAK | |
| 19 | Apr 4 | Good Grief—Grieving in Community | Reading: <i>Accompany Them with Singing</i> , chapter 2-3 Due: Death and Pop Culture Project |
| 20 | Apr 9 | Good Grief—Grief Language | Reading: <i>Accompany Them with Singing</i> , chapter 4, 9 |
| 21 | Apr 11 | Good Grief—Place to Honor Grief | Reading: <i>Accompany Them with Singing</i> , chapter 5 Due: Reading Report #3 |
| 22 | Apr 16 | Pastoral Presence in Dying and Death | Reading: <i>Grief</i> , chapter 6 |
| 23 | Apr 18 | Pastoral Presence in Grief | Reading: <i>Accompany Them with Singing</i> , chapter 8 Due: Death and Grief Liturgies |
| 24 | Apr 23 | Grief Workshop | Reading: <i>Accompany Them with Singing</i> , finish Due: Grief Journals |
| 25 | Apr 25 | Grief Panel | |
| 26 | April 30 | Wrap Up and Debrief | |
| | | FINAL DUE BY 10 A.M. | Due: Pastoral Care of Death and Dying Paper |