

West View Methodist

# Journey with Grief

Small Group Study Guide

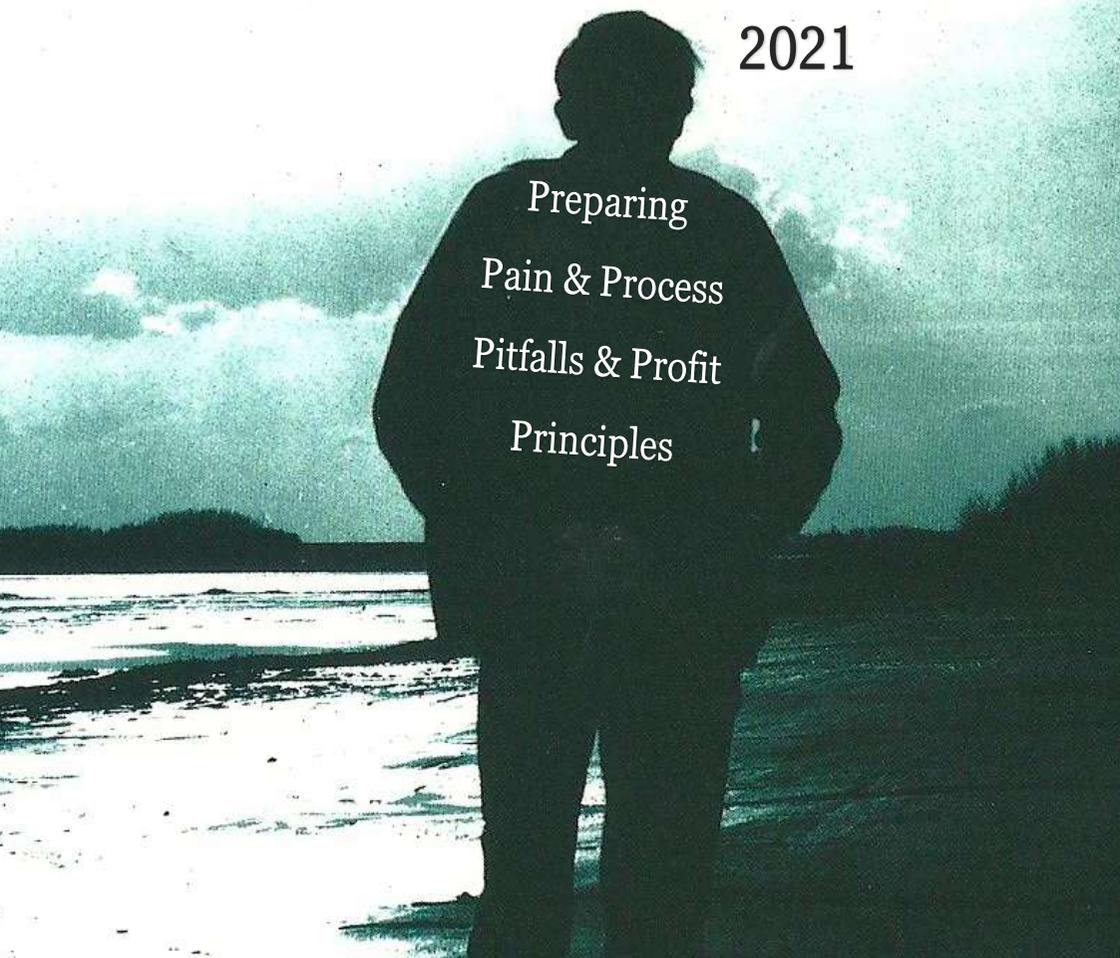
2021

Preparing

Pain & Process

Pitfalls & Profit

Principles



# Good Grief Series

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## Good Grief Series

# Journey with Grief

*Leigh Robinson, Journey with Grief, Digital Action, South Africa, 2014*

*Small Group Material adapted by Rev. Athol Emmett.*

### **Introduction:**

The COVID-19 world-wide pandemic has brought into sharper focus the reality of death – and, that *grief* is an inevitable part of *life*. Whether it be the loss of a loved one, the ending of a marriage, the emigration of children or the experience of retrenchment, or even retirement, the experience of loss which triggers grief is unavoidable.

This series aims to help and minister to those of us who are grieving a loss of one sort or another; but it also aims to equip us to support more effectively, someone else in trouble. Or, putting the good in grief with compassion, support, and community.

The series is based on the structure of Leigh Robinson’s 64-page book “*Journey with Grief*” - and explores how the words ‘*good*’ and ‘*grief*’ can, with God’s help, appear in the same sentence – hence the title: “Good Grief.”

You will receive, online, a study guide to make notes from the messages starting on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> April and the three following Sundays. You will be able to use the study in a group, if you are in one, to grapple more deeply with the subject of grief – which is so much part of our lives today.

Also, by referring to a variety of translations of the Bible on our own, or in a group, we will find that like the different



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## I. Preparing for Grief.

### Opening

Greetings, introduction and catching up on how everyone is doing. Invite a member of the group to open in prayer.

### Read: John 16:33.

Share how you have found what Jesus said to be real, in and for, your life-journey. Be as honest as you can.

### Consider the following:

Leigh Robinson, in his book *“Journey with grief,”* says: *“Can we prepare for grief? Yes and no. In one sense we can never be prepared for grief. It is almost always an unknown and unwelcome intruder that disturbs life and brings depths of pain we could not have imagined. But in another sense, we can and must prepare for it. Grief is a crisis, and we prepare for crisis times in the ordinary times.”* (chapter 1)

The Covid-19 virus and later versions has initiated a world-wide crisis – with millions of people succumbing to it. Millions have lost their jobs. Many of us have lost a loved one, or a friend, or a neighbour.

**Q1 – Share what this means for you. Is it okay to talk about death? Why? Why not?**

### How can we prepare?

Leigh Robinson shares several helpful ways we can - some of which will be dealt with in the Sunday messages, so, making notes is recommended.

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**Q2 – Think of these, and/or discuss them as a group – speaking from personal experiences:**

- **Face the inevitability of loss.** For close on a year, we have been reminded of the inevitability of death and loss through the Covid-19 virus. Talk about it; ponder what it means to you.
- **Develop a sound theology.** This has to do with what we believe about God – the picture we have in our minds about God that has been formed over our lifetime – for some that picture isn't a good one. *The good news is that the picture we have of God can be changed. "through disciplined personal study of the Bible, reading good Christian books, and regular exposure to sound biblical preaching and teaching"* (Leigh Robinson, p.12). This also true through times of worship when the songs and hymns remind us of who God really is.
- **Internalize the Word of God.** Hold on to the many promises of God found in the Bible that we have memorized over the years.
- **Strive to build and maintain loving relationships.** Deal with any unfinished business with a spouse, child, parents, sibling, or a friend – tomorrow may be too late. *"Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry."* (Ephesians 4:27).
- **Be a vital part of a caring Church.** See 1 Corinthians 12:26 which reminds us that our relationship with Jesus makes

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us part of his body (the Church) – *“if one part suffers, every part suffers with it...”*

- **Cultivate a close relationship with God:** We can be sure that *“Resources; inner, spiritual resources (are) developed over time through the discipline of a daily walk with God. People who have walked with God in the sunshine know where to find him in the darkness, people who have cultivated intimacy with God and learned to depend on his grace in life’s ordinariness continue to do so in the midst of life’s hardships.”* (Leigh Robinson, p.17).

**In closing, read (or have someone read it in your group): 2 Corinthians 1:3-5:**

*“All praise to the God and Father of our Master, Jesus the Messiah! Father of all mercy! God of all healing counsel! He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us.”* (Message translation).

Take these verses home and work through them each day to let them “sink in”, as it were. Remember that this study is to not only to help us in our hard times – but also to equip us to help others who are going through a similar situation.

**Say the Benediction together – no hands though!**



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# II. The Pain and the Process of Grief.

### Opening

Greetings, introduction and catching up on how everyone is doing. Invite a member of the group to open in prayer.

### Feedback from week 1:

How has 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 helped and/or challenged you?

**Read:** 2 Samuel 18:24-33. What do you think about David's reaction upon hearing of the death of his son? If you are willing to share, how do *you* think you would respond to the hearing of similar news? Have you needed to respond to a significant loss in the past?

**The Pain of Loss:** Leigh Robinson writes: *"The pain of grief is due in part to an awful sense of loss. A loved one has died. A relationship has ended. Whether or not good-byes have been said, they are not coming back – not ever! It is so final – so terribly final...There are a thousand reminders that the one we loved was here. But they have gone, and life will never be the same again. We are gripped by the awful pain of loss."* (p.20)

### **Q1 – What has been your experience in terms of loss?**

**The Pain of Loneliness:** *"The pain of loss is immediate. The pain of loneliness follows close behind. A partner, a child, a parent, a friend has gone and left an aching void, called loneliness, in our*

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*lives. We miss their presence. We crave their companionship...Life seems so empty without them.” (p.20)*

## **Q2 – Can you relate to this? What has your experience been?**

**The Process of Grief:** *“Just as in physical healing, the healing of the pain of grief involves a process. There are no painkillers that immediately deaden the pain of grief...Although God ‘comforts us in all our troubles’ (2 Cor.1:3), his comfort does not remove the pain or short-circuit the process.” (beginning of Ch.3).*

*“Every person who suffers a significant loss goes through what has become known as ‘the grief process,’ although everyone grieves (and should be allowed to grieve) in their own way.” (p.24).*

## **Several stages have been identified in the Grief Process:**

**Stage 1: Denial:** We are wired with something like an inner **emotional protective device** which manifests itself through a feeling of *shock or numbness*, whereby we find it hard to believe that the news of a loss is true. Somehow, we are helped to cope with what needs to be done.

**Stage 2: Anger:** *“As the reality and the enormity of the loss begins to set in and take hold, anger may be felt and expressed. We may feel anger toward God, toward others, toward ourselves, and even toward the loved one who has died.” (p.26)*

It is also at this stage that the *“Why questions”* are often asked, including: *“If God is a loving God, why did God allow this to happen? Why did God not heal him/her?”* “Unfortunately, many people get stuck at this stage – sometimes for a lifetime, not being able to find satisfactory answers to these “big” questions –

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or come to terms with their loss. It is also true to say that not everyone is able to express their feelings of anger - especially toward God - *because of their view of God*. They fear that he will respond with vengeance

*"It is natural to ask "Why?" but it's naïve to expect answers; living by faith in God means learning to live with unanswered questions. It means learning to trust God's heart even in situations where you cannot trace his hand. Remember, with God there are mysteries, but no mistakes. So, don't let the things you don't understand rob you of the things (about God and his love, power, and wisdom) that you do understand."* (pp.26f)

It will be a wise decision to seek help from a good, qualified person to work through such questions as well as to reach a better understanding of who God is.

***\*Pause to discuss this vital issue: have you found this true for yourself? Have you experienced this in someone else?***

***Stage 3: Depression:*** *"As the grief process unfolds – as the loss becomes a reality and as loneliness sets in – periods of deep darkness, even despair, are not uncommon. By this time family members and friends have returned to their busy lives, letters, and cards, etc....all but dry up...in the minds of many people you should be 'over it' by now..."* (p.27) Leigh Robinson goes on to share a very helpful exercise: *"In my periods of depression, I discovered the importance of speaking to myself, instead of listening to myself. I learned this lesson from the psalmist. Amid his depression, he turns on himself and questions and commands and encourages himself. He says, 'Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God' (Psalm 42:5). I had to learn*

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to handle myself in order to keep from focusing on my own problems and feeling sorry for myself. I learned to speak to myself in the language of Scripture, reminding myself of who God is, what he has done, and what he has promised to do. Again, and again, speaking to myself in this way helped lift my depression.” (pp.27f)

**Stage 4: Acceptance.** *“In this stage you come to accept the loss. You begin to realize that life is good and that you have a purpose in life. Memories of the loved one are cherished, but they are no longer the source of the stabbing pain they were at the beginning of the journey with grief.”* (p.28) *“And even though you still have many unanswered questions, you begin to see value in what you have been through...and have gained something worth passing on to others.”* (p.29) It is important to remember that these “stages in the grief process do not occur in neat, easily defined time periods. We do not move clinically from one stage to another on a given day. Grief recovery tends to be a back-and-forth process. Just when we think all is calm at last, another wave hits us, and we go under. But gradually the waves occur less and less frequently. The periods of calm are longer. Healing is taking place.” (p.29)

Spend some time this coming week mulling over the major lessons you have been challenged with in this session. Do they make sense to you? Have they helped you to a better, healthier view of loss?

**Q3 – Have you sensed God working and ministering his love and care to you?**

**Close the meeting by saying the Benediction together.**



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### III. The Pitfalls and the Profit of Grief.

#### **Opening**

Greetings, introduction and catching up on how everyone is doing. Invite a member of the group to open in prayer.

**Feedback from week 2:** Share how have you been helped to a better understanding of the stages of grief? If you have suffered a recent loss, where do you find yourself in the different stages?

**Read: Joshua 1:1-9.** We will refer to this passage at a later stage of this study.

***The Pitfalls of Grief:*** *“The journey of grief is not without its pitfalls. As we journey, we need to be careful to avoid them. If we fail to do so, we run the risk of hurting ourselves and others...”* (Start of Ch.4)

**There are 12 pitfalls of grief dealt with here – you and your group may find it helpful to examine just a few – look through the list and pick a few that stand out for you. You may also look at those dealt with in the Sunday service and work through what you heard.**

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**Pitfall 1: Escapism.** *“To avoid pain and maintain the ‘stiff upper lip...’” some communities are encouraged to avoid contact with the dead body, to hold memorial services at which no coffin is present to remind us of the reality of death, and to opt for private cremation rather than the trauma of burial. Thus, when a loved one dies in hospital they simply ‘vanish’. We’re told, ‘It’s easier that way.’ This is not necessary so. “(Start of Ch.4)*

*“...such practices may be a form of escapism...(and) can complicate the mourning and the healing process.” (p.32)*

**Pitfall 2: Guilt.** *“Guilt of two kinds may plague us after the death of one we love. **False guilt** is the blame we inflict upon ourselves over things we wish we had done differently.” For example, “I shouldn’t have let him take the car.”*

*“**True guilt**, on the other hand, is the guilt we feel because we are guilty...sometimes loved ones die before we have the opportunity to ask their forgiveness for a wrong, we have committed...”*

*“The Bible says, ‘if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness’ (1 John1:9). We must confess our sins to God and trust his promise to forgive us on the basis of the death of Jesus in our place.” (p.32f)*

Finding someone we trust to listen to our confession and to pray for us, can help us greatly in our process of healing.

**Pitfall 3: Self-pity.** *“It is relatively easy to fall prey to self-pity after we have lost someone we love.” (p.33) “We can focus all*

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*our attention on what we have lost, ignoring all we have, and end up being more miserable than is necessary.” (p.34)*

***Pitfall 4: Idealizing the Dead.*** *“After someone we love has died it is natural to remember the good things while the negatives recede into the background. We must, however, guard against idealizing the dead, making them into something in death that they never were in life. Parents who lose a child often make this mistake, frequently with serious negative impact on their surviving children who are made to feel they can never match up to the ‘perfect’ sibling who has died.” (pp.34f)*

***Pitfall 5: Serving the Dead.*** This is where we feel *“that we have to carry on where they left off or do things as they would have done them. We must not be governed by questions like: ‘What would he want me to do?’”*

In our earlier reading from Joshua 1, God said to Joshua: *“Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them.” (Verses 1-2)*

*“While there was continuity, God was about to do something new. Moses had done his job. The Moses era was over. Now it was time for Joshua to get on with the job God wanted him to do. A valuable lesson for the grieving!” (p.35)*

This will come in due course of the process of healing.

***Pitfall 6: Living in the past.*** *“While memory is a gift from God, and memories of loved ones should always be cherished, we*

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*must avoid the pitfall of living in the past. Life did not end when the loved one died. Life goes on and so must we.” (p.36)*

*“There is a significant difference between healthy remembering and unhealthy living in the past.” (p.36)*

***Pitfall 7: Substance dependence or abuse.*** *“When someone we love dies, pain is normal, feelings of depression are normal. Often in such circumstances well-meaning doctors, family members, or friends are too quick to prescribe ‘something to calm your nerves...’” (p.36f)*

*“Whether the ‘something’ is a pill or a tot of brandy, it is not always necessary or helpful. Grief needs to be faced, not forced ‘underground’. Emotions that are suppressed by chemicals don’t just go away; they often surface down the road with much more serious consequences. And then, of course, there is always that the ‘something’ we take to help us could end up enslaving us. I am not saying that medication is never necessary or helpful, but caution must be exercised.” (p.37)*

***Pitfall 8: Strain in relationships.*** *“...often results when a family member dies. For example, when a child dies, the parents of the child frequently experience difficulties in their marriage relationships simply because they are grieving in different ways and completely misunderstand each other. The one bottles up their emotions while the other expresses theirs. (p.37)*

*“Most of these problems can be solved through honest communication and sensitive understanding. Sometimes the*

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*help of a wise counsellor needs to be sought to help the mourners understand and support one another.” (p.38)*

***Pitfall 9: Rebound relationships.*** *“When a partner dies, the surviving partner needs to guard against hastily becoming involved in another relationship. Especially when a marriage has been a good one.”*

*“Such marriages often short-circuit the grieving process and, as a result are very stormy. Many don’t survive.”*

Of course, no one *“can dictate how long a bereaved spouse should wait before marrying. There is no ‘right time’. But care should be taken, and wise counsel should be sought before becoming involved in another relationship.” (p.38f)*

***Pitfall 10: Hasty decisions*** may be made during the early months of the grieving process that we may live to regret: Selling our house, leaving our long-standing support base and moving closer to, or in with, the children – especially if they are in another province where we know no one, and the children and grandchildren lead busy lives. We may believe we are thinking straight in the early months, but it is possible we are not.

***Pitfall 11: Withdrawal.*** *“Silence and solitude are a necessary part of the healing process. We need time alone to give attention to our pain and come to terms with the implications of our loss. We need to be able to think and weep in private.” (p.39)*

*“But there is also an unhealthy kind of withdrawal. Some grieving people become isolated, even reclusive, in their grief... (which will) hinder the healing process, whereas*

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reaching out to others in loving service actually helps the healing process along” (p.40)

**Read Isaiah 58:10-12 regarding the biblical principle for helping others out.**

***Pitfall 12: Communicating with the dead.*** “Driven by the pain of loss and loneliness, and sometimes by guilt, grieving people are at times tempted to seek to communicate with the dead through spirit mediums...This practice, (is) clearly forbidden in Scripture (see Deuteronomy 18:9-12).” (p.41)

***The Profit of Grief.*** “The death of a loved one, especially a spouse or a child, is one of the most difficult and painful of life’s experiences, but rightly responded to, it can also prove to be one of the most profitable experiences of life. There are lessons to be learned as we walk through ‘the valley of the shadow of death’ (Psalm 23:4) that can be learned nowhere else in life. (Start of Ch. 5)

## **Q2 – What Pitfalls do you struggle the most with?**

**There are 3 things we can “profit” from during the grief process:**

***Through God’s Presence:*** is one of the most valuable experiences we can profit from. “In Psalm 23:4, King David wrote, ‘Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.’ While believers in the Lord Jesus Christ can always count on his presence with them regardless of feelings, he often makes his presence felt in a more real way during times of pressure and

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*pain. He promises, 'When you pass through the waters, I will be with you' (Isaiah 43:2).*

***Through God's Word:*** *"In the early stages when the pain is particularly acute grieving people often find it very difficult to read anything, including the Bible. This is understandable and should not become a reason for guilt. But, despite the difficulty, it is worth persevering in the reading of Scripture during times of grief because it is through them that God speaks his words of comfort and consolation and hope" (p.44)*

*"In the weeks and months immediately following Esther's (his wife's) death I found wonderful comfort in reading the Psalms. Again, and again, I was able to find expression for my agony in the words of the psalmists." (p.44)*

***Through the Wider Ministry:*** *"The Word of God tells us that God 'comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God'" (2 Cor.1:4). Nothing we receive from God is just for ourselves. God's gifts are given to us for the sake of others. This includes the gift of his comfort. This explains why it is frequently those who have suffered loss themselves who are able to comfort the grieving most effectively. They are simply passing on what they have received from God." (p.45)*

***Q3 – If you are comfortable to share, how have you experienced the profit of grief before? In terms of God's presence, Word, and wider ministry.***



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# IV. Principles for Helping the Grieving.

### Opening

Greetings, introduction and catching up on how everyone is doing. Invite a member of the group to open in prayer.

Remember the verses we read at the beginning of this study, as well as at the end of week 3? 2 Corinthians 1:3-5?

Especially the “Message” version:

***“All praise to the God and Father of our Master, Jesus the Messiah! Father of all mercy! God of all healing counsel! He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us.”***

At the beginning we said that this study was *not only to help us in our hard times – but also to equip us to help others* at the same time.

Leigh Robinson says the following: *“When you learn that someone you know has just lost a family member or close friend, what should you do? How can you be of help and comfort to them in their bereavement?”* (Start of Ch.6)

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He goes on to list several principles to assist in knowing what to do and say – this is especially helpful when we feel inadequate for the task.

**Once again there is a long list of important principles – sort out some which you feel can be dealt with in a session. However, it will be wise to work through each one at home personally – for these are really vital principles for ministering to those who grieve.**

***Principle 1: Make Contact:***

- Visit.
- Or a telephone call.
- Acknowledge their loss.
- Tell them how sorry you are.
- Assure them of your prayers.
- Maybe find out more details of what happened.
- Determine specific ways you might be of help.

***Principle 2: Touch:*** (p.48)

**How we do this will depend on the Covid-19 protocols and the level SA is in. Remember that this pandemic is serious!**

- Wear a mask and sanitize.
- Give a hug or a warm handshake – or an “elbow bump.”
- Say, “I’m sorry.”

***Principle 3: Be there:*** (p.48)

- Don’t rush away. Stay a while.
- Help by answering the doorbell.

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- Make tea/coffee.
- You don't have to say anything.
- Discern when it is appropriate to leave.

## ***Principle 4: Attend the Funeral.*** (p.49)

**Once again this will depend on the Covid-19 protocols and the level SA is in.**

- Check the number of people who are permitted to be part of the service (50?)
- Be sensitive and make sure all the family members and close friends are accommodated – before entering the building. Wait outside if the church has the number of people permitted.
- Funerals are important for providing the opportunity to remember and pay tribute to the person who died.
- Greet the bereaved at the funeral – it is important for them to know that you took the trouble to attend.
- At a later date comment about some aspect of the service – it may lead to a deeper conversation.

## ***Principle 5: Listen.*** (p.50)

- It is the most helpful thing one can do for the bereaved person.
- You don't need "homely" bits of advice, or stories about your experience of grief.
- They may talk about the same things over and over – it's okay. Just listen!

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## ***Principle 6: Talk about the person who died.*** (p.50)

We may be afraid of doing so not wanting to upset the grieving person and/or family. It may also be out of a desire to protect oneself.

- Share your memories of them – including the funny things you remember.
- Recall their character qualities and accomplishments.

## ***Principle 7: Don't overlook the children.*** (p.51)

- Acknowledge them and that the loss is their loss too.
- Give them opportunity to talk about their feelings but avoid making them feel guilty for not grieving the way others in the family are.

“Children should be included in the events surrounding the death of their loved one, and, unless they are very young, should definitely attend the funeral. They should not be excluded from one of the most significant events of life.”  
(p.51)

## ***Principle 8: Give permission to grieve.*** (p.52)

- Encourage rather than stifle expressions of grief – especially if someone else is trying to do so.
- Never tell a grieving person not to cry.

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***Principle 9: Avoid spiritual clichés, pat answers, and hurtful comments.*** (p.53)

*“With the best intentions, people often say things to grieving people that are untrue, unkind, and unhelpful. Here are some examples:”*

- “I know how you feel (Do you? Really – unless you have been through a recent bereavement)
- “You’re young enough to marry again.”
- “At least you still have the other two children.”
- “I understand – my dog died recently.”
- “God picks the best blooms in his garden first”
- “The Lord must have needed him more than you do.”  
(Really?)
- Beware of poems/letters found on the internet...

***Principle 10: Give Practical Help.*** (p.54)

- See principle 3 “Be there” and practical things listed there.
- Providing meals.
- Organize a meal roster (if needed).
- Fetch and carry children (if you are known to them)
- Help with funeral arrangements.
- Fetch family members from the airport.
- Offer accommodation to family members and/or friends coming to the family.

***Principle 11: Pray.***

Paul, in 2 Corinthians 1:10b -11, spoke of the help prayer can be in times of pain and pressure: *“On him (Jesus) we have set*

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*our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favour granted us in answer to the prayers of many.”*

### ***Principle 12: Speak a “Word in Season.”***

“During the early days of the grief process the grieving do not take in much that is said to them. During that phase we can often help most by just being there, listening, and giving practical help. But the time comes when it may be appropriate to speak words of comfort and counsel, when it is right to share a Scripture verse or passage, when it is helpful to share something, we learned in our own experience of loss.” (p.55)

### ***Principle 13: Provide Helpful Resources.*** (p.56)

A few months down the road a CD, a book such as Leigh Robinson’s book “Journey with Grief” can be very helpful.

### ***Principle 14: Maintain regular contact.*** (p.56)

“Studies have shown that in the first two years following the loss there are definite peaks and valleys in the pain level. The pain and grief intensify at three months, and then gradually subside, but not in a steady fashion. Around the first anniversary of the loss the intensity of grief comes rushing in with pain that rivals the initial feeling of loss. So, the notion that the grieving person should be ‘over it’ in a few weeks or months is ridiculous. This why it is important to maintain regular contact, and not assume that because nine or fifteen months have passed, healing has taken place.” (p.56f)

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“It is also important to remember anniversaries. The first birthday, the first Christmas, the first wedding anniversary, the first anniversary of the death – all may be especially hard times when a phone call, a letter, a visit, and special prayer will be very necessary and much appreciated.” (p.57)

***Q1 – How have you experienced some of these principles before in your own life?***

***Q2 – As part of this series is to equip us and aid us in being ready to assist and care for others who are in grief, which of these principles most resonate with you that you can practice, and which would be a struggle?***

***Q3 – Lastly in closing of this series, share any final remarks on aspects of the series that have stuck out for you, ways in which the Holy Spirit may have ministered to you over these past weeks.***

### Closing Prayer

*Lord Jesus, I know that You are close to those that are broken-hearted and grieving in their soul and that You rescue those that are crushed in spirit. Draw near to Your many children who are facing times of sadness and loss and draw each one ever closer into Your precious arms of love and support.*

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*Thank You that You are wonderfully good to all who wait for You and seek You, and I pray that those of my brothers and sisters in Christ who, for whatever reason, are facing times of grief and hardship in their lives, that in Your grace and mercy You would draw very close to each one and gently carry them on Your shoulders, as a Shepherd carries a little lamb that has been torn by the briars.*

*Be close to all that are grieving today I pray, and flood their souls with hope, knowing that underneath are Your everlasting arms.*

*Give me a heart that is sensitive to those that are grieving, the wisdom to know when to speak words of comfort or when to keep silent. And Lord, I also pray that You would use my life to be a channel of encouragement and hope, through whom the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ will flow into their hearts, to heal and help.*

*Amen*