

Growing Through Grief: Personal Healing

By Howard Clinebell and Martha Hickman

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Part 1: Preparation

Introduction—to the Leader

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Grieving is an active process—more than a slow passive waiting, or an attempt to divert the pain until “it doesn’t hurt so much.” It can also be an occasion for growth.

This resource has been produced with the hope that “Grief Healing Groups,” as shown in these six sessions, can provide a new and significant breakthrough in our efforts to help heal the wounds of the spirit called “grief.”

The basic skills needed to use grief as an opportunity to grow can be taught and learned. The power to transform loss into growth is released in two ways—by being in relationships of mutual caring, and by finding spiritual meaning in losses. A Grief Healing Group, or Grievers’ Group, can help meet both of these needs.

Probably all of us carry the burden of unresolved losses—lost dreams, lost relationships, lost opportunities. The grief experience, while it is infinitely more vivid and new and costly to some than to others, is not a stranger to anyone who has lived in the world for any length of time. So it is the assumption of this series that you, the leader, while you have special qualities to lead and special responsibilities as the leader, are in some ways a griever, too. As you view this DVD in advance for your sessions, you’ll see how Howard Clinebell, the designer of this program, carries out the dual role of griever and of leader.

Dr. Clinebell is Professor of Pastoral Psychology and Counseling at the School of Theology at Claremont, California, and directs both the Pomona Valley Pastoral Counseling and Growth Center and the Institute of Religion and Wholeness. He has written more than a dozen books and more than 50 articles for professional journals and texts. The six sessions—of himself and seven other people dealing with a variety of griefs—were filmed at Claremont.

Each session focuses on a particular aspect of grief:

- I. The Five Tasks of Grief Work
- II. Healing Guilt
- III. Fear and Anger
- IV. Growth from Divorce
- V. Infections of the Grief Wound
- VI. Saying “Goodbye” to Our Losses

We recommend that you use them all, as a series, with the same group of people. (Sometimes a group setting is not possible or preferred. One person can, of course, view the sessions alone. A paragraph addressed to that use in each session plan.) Most sessions are on a theme present in

many grief-causing events. Divorce has been given special focus in session IV—though there are many references to divorce in the other sessions—because it is so common and because in the past the faith community hasn't done very well in dealing with it. (More is said about possible formats for using the series in the section of this guide called Utilizations.)

In addition to the Utilizations pages, Part 1 of this guide includes a section on How to Lead a Grievers' Group*. Part 2 contains chapters on each of the six sessions, with a suggested lesson or process plan, a synopsis of that session's content and its key points, and questions for discussion and thought. Part 3, "Supplementary Material," has two articles on grief and a Bibliography—all of which you may want to duplicate and hand out, and instructions for "Placing the Series on TV."

*Some of the material in this section appears again in Dr. Clinebell's article, "How to Set Up a Grief Healing Group," which is included in the Supplementary Material for duplication and handout to group participants.

Utilizations

Possible Applications and Settings

Most churches will have at any time numerous people going through some significant crisis—divorce, bereavement, unemployment, retirement, a serious—even life threatening—illness of one’s self or a loved one, some form of crisis of passage from one life stage to the next. These persons are natural candidates for a grievors’ group.

The group may take many forms. It can be small (three or four, plus the leader) or large (as many as ten or twelve). It can be larger than that, of course—up to the number of people who can comfortably view the TV screen or monitor. But if a group is larger than twelve, it’s a good idea to break up into smaller groups for discussion and sharing. In this case, there should be co-leaders—one for each discussion group.

A minimum of an hour and a half should be allowed for each session. The group can meet once a week, for six weeks—perhaps on an evening or a Sunday afternoon. Sunday church school time is not the best time—the environment is apt to be bustling, the mood not conducive to quiet unhurried conversation and reflection, and the time short. But church school classes may find the sessions useful for a special series on using losses as growth opportunities. If church school time is chosen, an additional evening session along the way might be considered for some of the “overflow” questions, discussion, reflection, which may arise.

Another way to use the series is in an intensive retreat or other weekend experience, spacing the viewing sessions out over the hours together. This has the value of concentrated attention and of lots of group interaction, but lacks the value of time for reflection and assimilation between sessions. If you do use this format, be sure to allow ample unstructured time after each session to allow viewers to deal with the powerful feelings and crucial issues raised.

It may be useful for some people to view these sessions alone. If that is done, it’s important that the viewer write down notes—of impressions, questions, feelings—and go over these with a trusted friend, pastor, or counselor.

You can, of course, use any one of the sessions by itself. You may choose to use Session IV on divorce—either in a group of persons dealing with divorce in their own lives, or in a study group of people trying to understand some of the issues of divorce, though they themselves are perhaps not directly involved. Any of the other sessions, too, could be used alone, as part of a study series, or as discussion starters on a particular human issues theme. The series was designed as a whole, however, and it is expected it will be used most often in that way.

How to Lead a Grievers' Group

Goals. The purpose of a grief group is to help persons who have experienced losses deal constructively with the feelings and practical problems which result; to help them learn how to deal better with losses yet to come; to help them learn how to reach out to others wounded by grief.

Because major losses are such life-shaking experiences, the group may also become a place for examining one's view of life—one's faith and value system, one's entire network of relationships and support. So, in addition to helping heal the specific wounds that bring the person to the group, a grief group should help its members grow in strength and understanding in dealing with all of life, and to know again the value of a caring community in bearing what seems unbearable. A grievers' group which takes faith seriously will also help its members, through the process of the shared experience—of mutual support, of questions and answers—to find strength and comfort and hope in the faith in which the community is grounded. Few if any types of growth groups can contribute more to the enhancement of the holistic health of persons than an effective grief group.

Who should lead? The person who leads a grief group should be an open, warm and congruent person, who has had training and experience in leading small groups. This could be a clergyperson, a mental health professional, a layperson with specialized training. The role of the leader is to recruit and convene the group, to help the group develop a clear, mutually acceptable contract (spelled out in broad outline in the publicity but focused and made more concrete in the first session), and to facilitate the process of sharing on a meaningful level—the level where persons are both experiencing pain and learning how to face practical problems constructively. It is an advantage for the leader to have been through a significant loss, and to be open about her or his losses and pain. Sometimes two persons co-lead a group, dividing the responsibility and increasing the leadership pool of experiences and insights. Male/female co-leaders can be particularly helpful.

The leader in a grief group is often a spiritual growth facilitator. By asking questions such as “How does this loss relate to your personal faith?” or “What place, if any, do you think God has in what happened to you?” the leader can open opportunities for spiritual exploration and discovery. So a leader should be comfortable in this role as well.

Who should attend? The group of eight persons on the DVD represent a variety of losses—deaths (of parents, spouses, children, other loved ones), divorces, the loss of youth. It is also possible to have a specialized grief group of persons who are dealing with the same kind of loss—divorce, for instance. There are many commonalities in grief, however, and it is enriching for people to discover their ability to know and sustain one another in different losses and life transitions. So, unless you have a very large group to draw from, it's probably better to have a mixture of losses represented.

Recruiting a group: In a congregation, a group may be started simply by the minister's making a public announcement inviting those who have experienced a loss within the past few years to join the group. An announcement can also be made in the church's bulletin or newsletter. Often, though, people in crisis need a personal invitation. One of the byproducts of grieving is often a degree of psychological paralysis and passivity. The grieving person has been hurt so badly he or she may not have the energy or courage to take on a pain-confronting—though healing—experience without some personal support from the pastor or other prospective leader of such a group. (Don't be surprised if some of the people you invite turn you down—for some it may be too soon; others may not want to risk upsetting the fragile balance they feel they have achieved, or may think the group experience would be too frightening, or just not congenial.) As mentioned in the Utilizations section, a group can be as small as three, plus leader, or as large as ten or twelve—larger, if smaller discussion groups, each with a leader, can be provided for.

Preparation: Read through this guide and view the DVD before the series begins. Try to preview each session again in advance of using it with the group. Look over the Bibliography at the end of this guide. Check the items you're familiar with and acquaint yourself with some of the others.

If you don't know personally the people who will be in the group, you may want to meet them individually to learn a little about them before the first group meeting.

Reread the material for Session One and make a tentative plan of how you'll use it.

Arranging the Room: Set up the chairs in a semicircle within comfortable viewing range of the screen. Perhaps the leader can initially place his/her chair near the screen (perhaps beside it, but slightly to the front?) then move back to one end of the semicircle for viewing the DVD. It's important that group members not be separated from the leader or each other by tables, chairs or other pieces of furniture to "hide behind." A circle would be ideal, but obviously people have to see the screen!

Be sure you know where the light switches are and that you can plug in the equipment where you need to. It's nice to have a dim light, for use when the DVD is being shown, and somewhat brighter (but still soft) lighting for other times. On a low table you might put a box of tissues and a pitcher of water and some glasses.

You may want to have on hand a newsprint pad and easel and marker, for use in the discussions. If so, decide where you'll put them. Have pencils and paper handy, too—enough for each member of the group.

If you'll have a large group for the DVD viewing, and then break up into smaller leader-led groups for discussion, decide how you'll accommodate your space and equipment to that.

Setting up the Equipment: To use this resource, you'll need a DVD player and a TV monitor or monitors to enable everyone to see easily.

A Word on Misuse of DVDs: It's relatively easy, of course, to copy DVDs, without paying for them. It's also easy to rationalize and to develop a flabby or careless conscience about the ethics of this practice. So, please treat this as a matter of simply honesty, which it is, and resist the requests of friends who want to copy the DVD.

Establishing the Climate: It is important, as the group gathers for the first time—and each subsequent time, too—that there be an atmosphere of trust and warmth. The leader will set the tone for this at first, even before the DVD is shown, but the other group members can be helpful, too. If they didn't have some willingness to trust, and express their vulnerability, they probably wouldn't have come.

The sessions provide the initial content of this Growing Through Grief experience. Group members will find it increasingly easy to identify with the persons on the DVD, and therefore to bring to the surface their own pieces of untended grief, the unfinished business that must be taken care of for healing to occur.

It is important for the leader, too, to flow with the discovery-learning experiences the sessions evoke. The feelings you (and other group members) get in touch with may be disturbing or scary, but experiencing them is an essential part of the healing and leading process. As other members see you be in touch with your own pain, they will be helped to express theirs.

In any group there are more reticent and more talkative members. You'll want to be careful to keep people's contributions in balance, making sure everyone has a chance to speak. No one should feel under pressure to talk if she or he doesn't want to. Sometimes a "go-around" of the group, giving each person in turn a chance to respond, rather than relying only on people's spontaneous contributions, may give the shyer members the encouragement they need to say something they'd really like to say.

As the sessions progress you'll notice a gradual increase in group-centeredness, as contrasted to initial leader-centeredness. Group-centeredness develops as members are given space (by a leader who doesn't need to lead everything all the time) to participate in group decisions and leadership. Members connect and communicate more frequently with what others are sharing and less frequently with the designated leader. As a group becomes more group-centered, the mutual healing-growing impact of the experience tends to increase.

So, trust the process, and the presence of the Spirit which is always present when people reach out in love and trust to one another. Try to be open and recapture some of the feelings of newness and adventure we usually associate with new learnings in a small child. Open yourself to the lift and excitement of learning that it really is a blessing to mourn and to help bear each other's burdens.

A Word About Handouts: From time to time you may want to distribute handouts to group members—copies of the Bibliography and perhaps the articles included in Part 3, “Supplementary Material,” of this guide. There may be brief passages from other parts of the text you want to reproduce and hand out. The value of “something in the hand” is not only in the words it may contain but also as a tangible symbol and reminder of a precious learning time. You will want to encourage group members, too, to keep the notes they’ve taken as a response to the sessions and the ensuing discussions.

The Wound That Doesn’t Heal: Occasionally, one encounters a person whose grief isn’t healing normally. In most cases this is a person whose wound is infected by unfaced guilt, remorse, anger, resentment, or ambivalence toward the lost person—feelings which have been too painful to face and work through. The God-given forces of healing and growth which are available in persons and their relationships are blocked. An effective grief group or counseling relationship often releases the person to grieve fully, let go of the loss, and experience healing. If this does not happen, it is important to encourage the person to see a competent psychotherapist.

Some signs that may indicate the presence of an unhealed grief wound include: Inappropriate and undiminished grief; little or no grief; continuing or increasing withdrawal from relationships; prolonged or undiminishing guilt and/or hostility; pretending the loss is not real; chronic disorientation; psychosomatic illness; continuing undiminished depression; marked personality changes, retreat into excessive use of drugs (including tranquilizers), alcohol, or other pain-deadeners.

Having a Backup for Referrals: It’s a good idea, unless the group leader has training as a counselor and leader of small growth groups, to ask a pastoral counseling specialist, a clinically trained chaplain, or mental health professional in the community to act as a professional backup person. Such a relationship is useful under three circumstances:

1. To be available if the leader falls in over her or his head
2. To consult with when the leader feels unsure of what to do with certain situations in the grief group
3. To expedite referrals to a psychotherapist or mental health agency when this is indicated

Leading grief groups does not require advanced competency in group dynamics and counseling (through the more one knows about these disciplines and better). Sensitive, caring lay persons who have grown through their own losses often make excellent leaders. But having a back-up person with professional training in psychological issues, therapy and small groups is invaluable, particularly for leaders who are relatively inexperienced in leading such groups. Getting regular supervision or coaching while one is learning these skills, and professional consultation whenever one of the above three circumstances occurs, can enhance a group leader’s own developing skills. The vast majority of persons who join grief groups have adequate personality strengths and self-protective resources to use the experience in healing rather than hurtful ways. But in the

relatively rare situation in which a person who really needs professional therapy gets into a grief group, having a professional back-up person is very important.

Other Community Resources. You may at some time want to refer group members to various other community resources—either for special help for themselves if that is indicated (AA if a person has an alcohol problem; an ongoing therapy group, after your group is terminated, if that seems indicated; a single-adults group for a lonely person whose spouse has died). Sometimes a friendly suggestion from a person one respects and trusts can be all the push that’s needed to move someone into a life-enhancing program.

What to Do If A Person Misses A Session. Part of the group contract in the beginning will be the understanding that members will if at all possible be present at each session—not only for themselves but because the group suffers if they are gone. But if someone has to miss a session, it’s important, before the next session, that the person have a chance to view the DVD and read the pages of the guide which describe that session. (The leader might copy those pages so the group member can have them to peruse at leisure.) If the person who’s had to miss can talk with another group member, and get some of the “feel” of what happened, that will also help to bridge the gap.

Now, on to the Sessions!

Part 2. Session Plans

Session I: The Five Tasks of Grief Work

Session Plan

After group members are seated ask them to introduce themselves to one another. They can take turns telling their names, how they learned about the group, a little of the life circumstances that brought them here, and anything else they want to share—including what they may be hoping for, and afraid of, in joining this process. If the group is large and the members unknown to one another, you may want to provide name tags for the first meeting or two.

The group members will probably be anxious about being here. Acknowledge that, as well as your own nervousness too (if you have any), and that we are here to support and help each other by mutual sharing of our loss experiences.

Remind the group of the times and dates for future meetings, and any other housekeeping details.

Describe briefly the nature and goals of the group (See “Introduction—to the Leader” and “How to Lead a Grievers’ Group” in the earlier pages of this guide.)

Discuss the principle of confidentiality—that it is important to protect each other’s privacy, and that we not talk with other people about personal matters that are discussed here.

Stress the importance of being here each time, and that if someone has to miss a session, it’s very important to let the group leader know, and arrange for a separate viewing of the missed session, along with the opportunity to read the relevant pages in the guide.

In preparation for viewing the session, urge the group members to try to be aware of their own feelings as they watch. How does what they see and hear relate to the losses they have experienced?

View the session.

At the end of the viewing, go around the circle (or semi-circle) and give each member a chance to say how he or she is feeling now. Include yourself in this “go-around.” This sharing will probably lead to expressions of strong feelings by some group members.

After each person has had a chance to speak, it may be appropriate to remind the group of the principle of “loving listening” which Clinebell described on the DVD—“listening with understanding and concern to what the person is saying and feeling without judging or giving advice.” You have probably just done that for one another.

It may be helpful to follow Clinebell’s recommended exercise: Write down the five tasks of grief work. (You may want your newsprint and marker for this, or each person may want to take

individual notes.) Allow time for group members to reflect on their own losses in relation to these basic tasks.

Ask group members to go back and relive a significant loss in their own lives, letting themselves experience all the feelings that still cluster around that loss. Encourage them to share what they are experiencing with one another. This is apt to be a painful recounting, and should be met with reverence at the disclosure of the deep and painful places in another and with loving and careful attention.

Ask members to consider what they feel may be unfinished grief tasks in their own life. If they want to write those down, or share them with the group, encourage them to do so. It is an accomplishment for some people to even be able to think in these terms. No one should feel pressed to go further than she or he feels ready to do.

Suggest that group members may want to think more about what they have just seen, heard, and discovered about themselves, during the time between now and the next session. There will be time for sharing any of that which they want to, at the beginning of the next session. Encourage them to keep notes, or some kind of journal—both as a way of having a record of significant insights and thoughts (We always think we'll remember, but we don't!) and as a way of clarifying those insights and thoughts by writing them down.

Ask if there is anything anyone wants to bring up. (There are some Questions for Thought/Discussion at the end of this chapter if you want to use them. Or, it may be best to bring this first meeting to a close now.)

Before you close, take a few minutes for the group members to say how they feel about the session.

Stand and join hands in a circle, feeling your connectedness with one another, the strength of life and love that flows through you. You may want to close with a prayer, or simply, "Amen."

If You Are Viewing the Session by Yourself: It is especially important that you discuss your experience with someone who will be a loving listener—a friend, a spouse or other family member, a minister or other counselor. Discussing and sharing what you have experienced will help you work through and resolve the painful memories and feelings that were stirred up by the session. If the viewing of this or other sessions in the series is very emotionally disturbing, it is crucial that you talk with someone trained in counseling. Otherwise you will miss the growth possibilities present in getting in touch with grief-related pain that—as long as it is not resolved—is wasting your valuable energy. The discovery of hidden pain can be a valuable first step toward the healing of unfinished grief. You may want to call the toll-free number given by Dr. Clinebell at the end of the DVD. Shalom.

Session Summary

Synopsis: Dr. Clinebell makes some initial remarks about the prevalence of unhealed grief wounds in our society and refers to the goals of this series. He affirms the value of small groups doing grief work together. Members of the taped group introduce themselves. Clinebell refers to emergence of understanding of grief work and outlines the five tasks of grief work. Segments showing group members describing and working at these tasks are interspersed throughout.

Key Points:

1. There is an epidemic of unhealed grief wounds in our society.
 - Incidence of grief-causing events accelerates as we grow older.
 - Grief events coming close together cause a cumulative stress.
 - Grief comes from all significant changes and losses (not just the big losses, such as the death of loved ones).
2. There are five essential tasks you must do to help heal grief:
 - (1) Accept the reality of your loss.
 - (2) Experience and talk about the painful feelings caused by our loss until healing takes place.
 - (3) Put your life back together by making decisions and taking actions that are constructive and that make allowance for whatever you have lost.
 - (4) Put the loss into a wider context of meaning and faith.
 - (5) Reach out for mutual help to others who have suffered losses.

Questions for Thought/Discussion

1. In the session, Carol expresses grief over a series of losses going back to the death of her father, 13 years ago. This is an old loss to be still grieving over. What is your experience of society's expectation of how long it takes for major grief to heal? How do you feel about that? Do you feel differently about how long it takes than before you had major loss in your own life? (One survey showed that the average person believes people recover from grief in a few weeks. Actually, the grief healing process after major losses usually takes years.)
2. The suicide of Barbara's daughter was sudden, immediate, and shattering. Kip's loss of his wife after long illness was, as he said, "inevitable" and "really a blessing." Still, he also said, "You never did quite feel it was going to happen, then. So when it happened it was still a surprise, more or less." How does your own experience of grief relate to the losses described by group members?
3. How did you respond in your own experience to Barbara's question to herself at the time of her daughter's death, "What kind of God is this?" How about her anger—"God damn

God,” and also her sense of “something beyond,” of the Communion of Saints, of a “sense of connectedness,” that “I and God are one”?

4. How about Russ’ statement about sensing God in “the goodness that people portray to other people”?
5. Several of the people on the DVD spoke of some of the hard unexpected times—a song, a picture, some random memory. Do you identify with this? Do you see any pattern to your own “hardest times”?
6. Which of the five grief tasks have you found hardest to work at? Do you feel stuck in one or more of them?
7. Have you found yourself, already, reaching out to others who have suffered major loss? If so, how has that felt?

Session II: Healing Guilt

Session Plan

After a group has been apart, it's important to help members reconnect psychologically. Ask them to join hands and become aware of their here-and-now feelings, including the feeling of being back together again.

Invite thoughts and feelings any of the group members may have had about what happened last time, or new insights that may have occurred to them during the time they've been apart. Some will be eager to tell, some more reticent. After the more eager have spoken, check with each of the others, too, to be sure everyone who wants to share feels personally invited.

Ask whether there's anything else anyone wants to share before viewing the session. In preparation for viewing the session, ask if anyone wants to have paper and pencil handy—just to jot down key phrases or words of something he or she wants to come back to. Again, urge that they be aware of their own feelings as they watch. What do the questions and disclosures trigger in them in relation to their own losses? Suggest that, as Clinebell suggests on the DVD, they may want to try the second exercise as he leads the DVD group through it.

View the session.

Ask for responses.

After group members have given any general responses to what they've experienced during the viewing, undertake the two exercises Clinebell had demonstrated:

The Inner Dialogue Exercise, in which one carries on both sides of a dialogue with someone who's gone but toward whom one still has unfinished feelings such as remorse, regret, or anger. Take a few minutes for group members to try this out in silence. Share with one another what the experience of this silent inner dialogue was like. Ask if there's someone who's willing to try it aloud, as Kip did in the session. (Most people feel uneasy and may therefore resist doing this out loud; it's important not to push.) If someone is willing, ask that person to close their eyes, and speak first for themselves, and then, in response, for the loved one who's gone. Continue the dialogue as long as the person wishes.

When the person has finished, ask how that was, and how they feel now. Give him or her opportunity to debrief the experience fully. Then give the other members of the group ample time to share the feelings they had while watching the dialogue.

If there is time, ask if anyone else wants to try. And so on. Remind the group that this is an exercise one can also do on one's own.

The group may find it useful to do, again, the second exercise—the Cupped-hand Exercise—using these instructions:

Close your eyes, put your hands out in front to form a bowl. Imagine that you are putting into your hands the feelings and fears that you're holding onto and would like to let go of. These feelings can relate to your grief or to anything else. [Pause]

Now, reach out as far as you can, and turn your hands over, turning over what's in your hands to the Spirit of the Universe. Let go of it... Now sit quietly for a few minutes. [Pause]

Form the bowl a second time. Imagine this time it's a receptor. Let the energy of the Spirit of Life present in this room, at this moment, the energy of the love of God flow through your hands like a stream of healing light. Let it flow up through your arms and throughout your whole body. Feel the flow of life energy.

After this exercise, ask group members how they feel now. Do they feel any lighter, any less burdened? Recommend that sometimes when they're feeling down, they try doing this exercise.

If you have time, use some of the Questions for Thought/Discussion.

Take a few minutes to evaluate what happened in the session today.

Join hands in a closing circle.

If You Are Viewing the Session by Yourself: As you watch, and as you do the two exercises, make notes on what the experiences were for you. Particularly if you come upon very sensitive or saddening material, be sure to find someone you trust to be with. Tell that person about what you've experienced, expressing and seeking to resolve your feelings. If what you become aware of is deeply disturbing or depressing, seek the help of a trained pastoral counselor or other therapist.

Session Summary

Synopsis: Unresolved guilt often keeps people from completing their grieving and growing from their losses. Various ways to think about and experiment with guilt and forgiveness are explained and demonstrated.

Key Points:

1. Unresolved guilt is often the key factor that keeps people from recovering and growing from their griefs.
2. There are two kinds of guilt, requiring different ways of healing:

- (1) Appropriate guilt is a product of hurting ourselves or others by intentionally behaving in destructive ways. We must learn to accept God's forgiveness, be reconciled to one another, and forgive ourselves.
- (2) Inappropriate guilt is a product of breaking inner unconscious taboos, often left over from childhood. We need to recognize its inappropriateness, accept our humanness, and, if such guilt continues, get help from a trained counselor or therapist.
3. Grief-related guilt often gets tangled with anger and fear, including our fear of God, death, and our anger.
4. Dreams can play a constructive part in helping us with the necessary tasks of grief work.

Questions for Thought/Discussion

1. In your own life, particularly in grieving, what are some examples of inappropriate guilt you may be carrying around? Of appropriate guilt? What are the roles—constructive and destructive—of guilt?
2. Discuss this statement, "When you forgive yourself you are forgiven." Why is it so hard to forgive ourselves?
3. Clinebell quotes from the film, I Never Sang for My Father, "Death ends a life, but not a relationship." Has that been true for you? How?
4. Do you recall dreams that had a bearing on your grief? Can you guess what their meaning was for you? (Group members may want to agree to make notes on dreams related to their griefs and share them next week.)

Session III: Fear and Anger

Session Plan

You may or may not want to join hands this time, as a means of reconnecting. You will want to ask if anyone has anything to report on—any new insight that has come, or new happenings related to what’s been going on here.

What about dreams? If you agreed at the end of the last session to keep track of grief-related dreams, talk about them now.

Explain that the subject of today’s session is the Unfinished Business of Anger and Fear. Allow a moment for group members to get in touch with that area in their own lives, especially as fear and anger may have to do with their grieving.

Ask if anyone wants paper and pencil. Then watch the session.

Use a go-around to give each group member a chance to respond to the session. How do they feel? Do they identify with Karen, empathize with her? In what ways? What feelings and awareness did the session stir up in them? Did they get in touch with old childhood feelings about God?

After the group has shared their responses to Karen’s dialogue with God, offer the opportunity for everyone to do the exercise themselves silently with their eyes closed, the leader giving the instructions printed below. Allow several minutes of silence for people to do their own inner dialogue. Then invite the group members to share what they have experienced.

An alternative approach is for the leader to ask whether there is one person (and then, a second, if there is time) who wants to try the exercise aloud, while the others observe. Doing it aloud tends to be more transformative for the person and also to be a powerful awakener of awareness for those who observe. Another alternative is to provide a copy of the exercise for each person to do, with a trusted, listening friend, during the time between sessions, and then to discuss the experience when the group comes back together. Here are the instructions for the exercise:

Dialogue with God

1. Recall and relive in memory the most painful crisis or loss in your life.
2. Concentrate on any feelings about God connected with that crisis or loss.
3. If you become aware of such feelings, carry on a dialogue with God saying frankly out loud to God what is really on your heart and mind.
4. Then respond for God. Continue even though it feels strange until you experience a lightening of your load of heavy feelings.

If you wish, use the Questions for Thought/Discussion.

Remind the group that you are midway through your experience together and ask how they feel about it so far. Have the sessions been what they expected? Are there things they'd like to see happen that aren't happening? Suggest they think about unfinished business they may want to deal with during the remaining sessions.

Close by joining hands in a circle, feeling your connectedness with each other and the gifts of healing and love that you share. You may want to close with prayer or some other spoken acknowledgment of what you have experienced together.

If You Are Viewing the Session by Yourself: Do the Dialogue with God exercise as it is given above, aloud, either by yourself or in the presence of a wise and loving friend. Particularly if you do it by yourself, take notes—as a way of anchoring the experience, making it a bit more tangible. Again, it is important to talk about the experience with someone you trust.

Session Summary

Synopsis: Through focusing on one member of the group, Karen, Clinebell shows how leftover childhood ideas and feelings about God can leave us angry and fearful; and how, by bringing those ideas and feelings to the light—putting them in words as a dialogue and then dealing with them—we can move toward a more adult and life-giving faith.

Key Points:

1. Anger and fear are often items of unfinished business, costing heavily in diminished aliveness.
2. Our vulnerability at times of grief can push us to look for the causes of inappropriate heaviness and fear we carry around.
3. Old images of God we had as children may continue to “spook around in our minds.” Even though our adult experience isn't congruent with the obsolete images, they can still be operative in our minds and spirits, making us angry and afraid.
4. When those ideas are brought into the light of adult consciousness (in this case by a Dialogue with God exercise) they can be dispelled, and our more assured, trusting, adult ideas and feelings about God can come to the surface.

Questions for Thought/Discussion

1. Clinebell quotes someone as saying, “The Muzak that plays in the background is the knowledge of our own mortality, and when you're sick or somebody close to you is sick or somebody dies, or you lose a very important job or relationship, the volume in the Muzak gets turned up, so the basic awareness that we're all living dying creatures—you can't not listen to it.” Have you found your own experience of loss has “turned the Muzak up” for you? How has that affected you?

2. Karen spoke of her childhood ideas of life, and of God—“The good are rewarded and the bad are punished,” “life is always fair and good.” How would you express childhood ideas of God you had? Do they suit you now, as an adult? Do some aspects of your idea of God still fit? Others not? What are some of them?
3. Do you feel anger at God is acceptable? Appropriate?
4. Have your ideas and experience of God’s presence changed since you experienced major loss in your life? In what way?
5. Respond to Karen’s statement to God, “I’m relieved to know that you’re God and I don’t have to be and what you want to me is to stop trying to play God and trying to figure it all out.” Is it important to you to try and “figure it all out”? Are there some things we need to be sure of and others we can let go?

Session IV: Growth From Divorce

Session Plan

Acknowledge the pleasure of being together again, and ask whether people have had insights or events or struggles they want to report on now. Did anyone do further work on the Dialogue with God exercise? Give those who did an opportunity to describe their experience.

Introduce the theme of divorce, which has been singled out for a taped session of its own—not only because it is such a common and often complicated cause of grief in contemporary society, but because we have had few supports to help persons affected by the grief of divorce.

Acknowledge the special interest in this session of any persons in the group who have undergone the pain of divorce, and also that they have valuable insights about the pain and recovery from divorce which they may want to share with the group after viewing the session. Then point out that all of us know people for whom this is a pressing grief, and probably will gain insight from watching it.

Provide paper and pencil if they're wanted. Show the session.

As for initial responses. If there are members of the group who have gone through divorce, ask them for their response first.

Are there group members who have been “children of divorce”? How has that been for them?

Turn to the Questions for Thought/Discussion as you continue the session. Perhaps members of the group who have gone through divorce would want to form a dyad or small group, as demonstrated in the session, to talk with one another about some of the issues raised, as others observe and learn from their sharing.

As a closing exercise, you might want to consider this guided meditation, which has relevance for the grief of divorce, but for other griefs as well:

Imagine that you have climbed into a large box, with the lid tightly closed. Get in touch with the trapped feelings of being in the box. Are these feelings related to your present experience of loss and grief? [Pause.]

Decide if you'd like to get out. Will you ask someone to help you out? Who will that be? How do you feel about having to ask someone to help you get out of the box? [Pause.]

Now picture a beautiful, open meadow. Be in the meadow in your imagination. Enjoy the open space and freedom for a few minutes in any way you desire. Experience the contrast and fun of the meadow with the feeling you had inside the box. [Pause.]

If you're by yourself in the open space, invite someone to enjoy the meadow with you?
[Pause.] has your experience in the meadow changed?

Ask your companion to leave so you can enjoy the experience of being alone again.
[Pause.] Has the experience changed?

Go back to the place where you left the box and take another look. Is there anything you want to do with or to the box? [Pause.] Feel free.

Take a few minutes to reflect on the experience you've just had. What did you learn about inner trappedness and freedom? About handling your griefs and losses? What was valuable? [Pause.] When you feel ready, come back.

Share the experiences you've had with one another.

Close by joining in a circle of love, support and celebration of the learning and growth you are experiencing.

(Remember, as you proceed through the sessions, to make provision for adequate "catch-up" for anyone who may have to miss a session. It's better for group morale if other group members know ahead of time, if possible, when someone is going to be absent.)

If You Are Viewing the Session by Yourself: You will certainly recognize many of the issues raised in this session. If you have undergone a divorce yourself, try and find another divorced person with whom you can discuss what you've seen and learned. Better yet, invite that person to view the session with you.

Session Summary

Synopsis: The issues around divorce are examined both in Dr. Clinebell's comments, and by group members, four of whom have experienced divorce. Clinebell gives five suggestions for persons suffering from the grief of divorce.

Key Points:

1. Divorce is a common cause for grief but often unattended to in society.
2. Divorce is made up of a large cluster of different losses.
3. The grief wound caused by divorce is often infected by intertwining feelings of resentment, anger, bitterness, guilt, rage, rejection and damaged self-esteem.
4. Divorce often occurs earlier in life than other major losses, so that people tend to have had less practice in dealing with grief.

5. Russ speaks of two important helps for him in coping with divorce: sharing with a friend who'd also been through divorce, and being part of a support group that could help replace the missing family.
6. Divorce belongs to what are called "socially unacceptable" losses, in which it is hard to tell friends and family, and for which society has few supports.
7. New skills must be learned, in addition to dealing with the pain: time management—to find time for children, and to nurture the self; dealing with a changed identity in the community; dealing with possible adjustments in regard to job; learning to negotiate with one's ex-spouse on behalf of the children.
8. Five things to do to help with the grief of divorce (Leader—You may want to duplicate this list and hand it out at the close of the session.):
 - (1) Do your grief work before you move on to a new chapter in your life. Avoid remarrying on the rebound. Unless you have finished your grief work and rebuilt your self esteem, the unresolved pain and problems will carry over to the new relationship.
 - (2) Reach out to others who have been through divorce and learned from it. You may be able to help each other in very important ways.
 - (3) Learn everything you can that will improve your future intimate relationships.
 - (4) Build a support group.
 - (5) Get some professional help for doing your grief work and preparing for more mutually satisfying and growth-producing relationships in the future.

Questions for Thought/Discussion

1. Barbara refers to her fear of telling friends and family, and then her surprise and gratitude at how supportive they were. If you have experienced a divorce, was your experience similar to hers, or different? In what ways?
2. Howard refers to divorce as one of the "socially unacceptable losses." What are some others? (A child's drug addiction; imprisonment of a loved one, etc.)
3. Why is it harder to talk about divorce than about many other losses?
4. What has been your experience of the church's attitude toward divorced individuals? What would a more redemptive attitude be?
5. If you've not experienced divorce yourself, do you have feelings of awkwardness, etc. about what's "the right thing to say"—or do? What about the grief experienced by close friends of the couple, for whom relationships are now changed?
6. Russ says, "I think we all have to keep reclaiming our lives, almost every day." How do you experience that need? What do you do about it? What about Howard's allusion to the fact that, with our emphasis on service, Christians have often had trouble claiming necessary time and energy for ourselves?
7. Are there differences other than those already mentioned between loss of a spouse by death and loss of a spouse by divorce?

Session V: Infections of the Grief Wound

Session Plan

Remind the group that this is the next-to-last meeting. This helps those who've been holding back feelings and issues they need to deal with realize they must move ahead soon if they are to get help. It also helps members begin their grief work about what has been a meaningful group experience.

Take a few minutes now to ask that in silence each person relive again the major loss or losses you've been dealing with here, re-experiencing the pain that remains. Are there ways in which feelings about that loss have shifted, moderated, come clearer? Are you aware of particularly painful unfinished grief tasks you need to begin to attend to?

Introduce the subject of the session, Infections of the Grief Wound—that these infections occur because of unresolved feelings, usually of guilt and anger. Point out that there is some degree of infection in many grief wounds and that this infection slows down the process of healing.

Show the session.

Ask for initial responses. What stands out in viewers' minds as they reflect on what they've seen?

Use the Questions for Thought/Discussion.

Remind the group again that the next session will be the last one (unless the group re-contracts to continue). Ask whether people have special feelings of grief, relief, uncertainty, about that. Suggest that before the last session, each person reflect on their experience in the group up to this point and what they need to do in the last session to give this part of their grief recovery a sense of completion or closure. Also, ask them to think about what they'll need to do after the group ends to continue their healing and growth.

Is there anything they'd like to bring next time (a poem, a song, cookies...) to share with one another as the group finishes?

Close with a group circle, feeling your closeness with one another, and the power of life and of God to comfort, heal, and give hope.

If You Are Viewing the Session by Yourself: Try drawing your own particular logjam, as Clinebell demonstrated. Label some of the "logs" you may have piled up that deter your healing and energy from moving forward.

Take particular care in going over the Symptoms of Infected Grief Wound under the Key Points section of this chapter.

Try hitting the bed with a tennis racquet or roll of newspapers as a way of redirecting old angers. You're able to do this with less risk than in a group setting, so try it and see how it feels!

Again, be sure and find someone to talk with about anything that seems particularly significant or difficult in this session.

Session Summary

Synopsis: This session looks at how grief wounds get infected and at some of the ways the infection can be healed.

Key Points:

1. Grief is a normal response to any significant loss.
2. If strong feelings surrounding the grief—particularly feelings of guilt, anger, and fear—are not expressed and resolved, the wound becomes infected and does not heal. The figure of a logjam is used for illustration.
3. Some symptoms of infected grief wounds are:
 - chronic guilt, anger, or fear
 - the absence of appropriate grief feelings
 - continuing denial of the loss
 - withdrawal from other people
 - noticeable personality changes
 - psychosomatic problems
 - escaping too much into alcohol or tranquilizers or work
 - a feeling of inner deadness (probably the most common symptom of an infected grief wound).
4. Ways of dealing with Infections of Grief Wounds
 - Expressing hard-to-do express feelings, again and again, until they are drained off and let go of. In our culture men tend to fear expressing their vulnerability, crying, or loss of control; women tend to fear anger and assertiveness—in themselves or in others.
 - Counseling
 - Laughter (when not used as an escape)
 - One result of repressed feelings is depression
5. Ways of helping repressed feelings be released—
 - Being able to talk about them, when sincerely invited—as in, “How are you, really?”
 - Redirecting feelings into vigorous exercise—walking, jogging, kicking boxes, hitting beds with tennis racquets, etc.—which often “pull the plug” on repressed feelings.

Questions for Thought/Discussion

1. As you heard the symptoms of infected grief wounds described, were there some that you recognized as being present in you? (Leader: You might want to read the list again, or have it on newsprint.)
2. How do you feel about counseling and therapy? Signs of weakness? Of strength? Do you think the community at large feels as you do?
3. What do you think of the description of depression as “frozen anger”?
4. Do you agree with the assessment, in terms of expressing feelings, that men are fearful of crying, losing control, and women of expressing or receiving anger? How do those dynamics work in your relationships? What is so scary? How can you help yourself, and other family members, be more accepting of these expressions of feeling?
5. Do you think vigorous physical exercise, even to kicking boxes, hitting with a tennis racquet, etc. would be useful for you? Will you try it in the ensuing week and report how it feels?
6. Are there ways in which you experience work (your own or others’) as sometimes running away from grief? How about the use of drugs (e.g. tranquillizers) and alcohol?
7. How are you, really?

Session VI: Saying “Goodbye” to Our Losses

Session Plan

You will probably come together this time in a rather bittersweet mood—because you have grown very close, and learned a lot, and made progress with difficult tasks—and, unless you have re-contracted with one another to continue, this is your last time to meet as a working group. Acknowledge that and ask if people want to speak about it now—“How are you feeling, now?” suggest that this experience of saying goodbye to the group’s working life together is an example of the kind of minor but nevertheless costly grief we deal with very often in life. While it is painful to say goodbye to this group experience, it does give us an extra opportunity to understand, and savor, and work through, the grieving process in a way that can help us when we come to the next major grief of our life. (You may even want to go back and refer to the Tasks of Grief Work listed on page 12, and see how they can be accomplished in relation to the loss involved in disbanding this group.)

Are there things people brought to share as a result of our question last time, about sharing something on our last session?

Show the session. (Again, suggest that as they watch, members jot down feelings, key words, they’d like to refer to when the session is over.)

Ask for initial responses. How do the members of the group feel now, about their own agenda, and about the eight persons in the taped group?

Do the Saying-Goodbye exercise in the group, as Dr. Clinebell suggests, using an empty chair.

“Take a moment to go inside yourself and think about our sessions here as you’ve been re-experiencing your loss and your grief.... Imagine a person who was important but is lost to you, in the empty chair facing you. Say your goodbyes. Then respond for that person, continuing until you feel at peace... Or you may want to put part of yourself in the empty chair, or a place, a former job, another life stage, another way of life—some valuable part of your life that is lost.” Assure group members that if they’re not ready to say goodbye, they can either say “I pass.” or perhaps, like Barbara, they can make some modification of “Goodbye” that seems to suit the way they’re feeling now.

When you’ve finished the Saying-Goodbye exercise, take a few minutes to talk about what you’ve just done, and how that feels to each of you.

Use whichever Questions for Thought/Discussion seem useful for your group.

Tend to any unfinished business. Does the group want to devise any way of keeping in touch with each other—a reunion supper together, or meeting for coffee somewhere—maybe in about a month? Consider whether you as leader are willing to be called on if someone runs into trouble

with a delayed insight or task? If you are, say so. (If you sense that someone is in need of further therapy or counseling, you may want to talk privately with that person about it.)

One way to close this final session is by repeating the Cupped Hand Exercise you did in Session II, page 15:

This time let's consider putting into our cupped hands the leftover bits and pieces of grief work that we're not ready to release now... Then turn them over and let them go. Be aware of unfinished aspects of your grief and promise yourself you'll continue to work on these after the group ends...

Then let's form the bowl a second time. This time receive the love of God into our hands. Receive the love of one another as we have come to love and appreciate each other. Receive the promise that we will continue to hold one another in our memory and our care, and that what we have experienced here will stay with us, to bless us, and to will our peace.

Give group members an opportunity to share their plans to deal with unfinished aspects of their grief.

Have a group hug as a closing and sing "Shalom" or some other song that feels appropriate. Congratulate yourselves and each other for being channels of God's healing in each other's lives. Encourage the group to do something symbolic as it closes, to celebrate the healing and giving that members have done with the help of this small, caring community! A song, a dance, a love feast—these are ways of celebrating the group's experience together.

If You Are Viewing the Session by Yourself: do the Saying Goodbye exercise, speaking aloud—both for yourself and the person to whom you're saying goodbye. It is important that you articulate the words, and hear them, even though you are alone.

Go over the Questions for Thought/Discussion.

Conclude with the Cupped Hand Exercise, feeling the presence of God with you in your solitariness.

Create an opportunity, as soon as possible, to share what you've experienced throughout with someone you love and trust.

Also, feel free to follow Dr. Clinebell's suggestion of using the toll free number, for information about how to join a group or how to start one.

Session Summary

Synopsis: After some words on the importance of being able to say goodbye, Dr. Clinebell leads members of the group in an empty chair technique—as they attempt to say goodbye to someone or something they have lost.

Key Points:

1. An important task of life is being able to say goodbye to all kinds of hurts and losses: to people who have died, to children who have left the nest, to a partner lost in divorce, to places, dreams, good health, lost jobs, a younger self—to a hundred different disappointments and vanished hopes. Some losses hurt a little and soon pass. Some hurt unbearably and go on a long, long time.
2. Life is also filled with occasions for saying hello to the new, but it's hard to do that if we've not said goodbye to what's gone.
3. An essential part of grief work is in feeling our feelings and talking about them until release comes.
4. As we approach the point of release it can be helpful to say goodbye, literally, to what we've lost.
 - Saying goodbye can help one experience closure in a loss.
 - Struggling to say goodbye can surface painful feelings we need to express if we are to be healed.
 - Saying goodbye can move a person along to the next stage of grief work.
 - Saying goodbye helps release what is going or gone, thereby freeing energy for on-going living and relationships in the here and now—for the hello's of the next steps we are now able to attempt.
5. Healing after one has lost a dear person by suicide usually takes a long time. It is very difficult to keep the grief wound from becoming infected. Getting personal and family therapy is usually very helpful.
6. One of the benefits of a grief group is seeing how much people can help each other and help themselves by helping others—something to remember to act on after the group is over.
7. Even minor losses can disrupt our lives. No grief is too small to deserve our caring attention.
8. It is important to keep the goodbye dialog going until we feel at peace. We'll remember the person with warmth, and value whatever was good in the relationship, but saying goodbye can bring a feeling of completion.
9. And keep in mind the growth we have experienced in our grief group, in helping deal with our loss and achieve wholeness. Sense the healing power of such groups and the importance of making them widely available!

Questions for Thought/Discussion

1. Other than the Empty Chair Goodbye Exercise you have just done, are there goodbye's you may want to work on saying in the next weeks and months? You may want to jot them down.
2. What for you has been the hardest part of saying goodbye? Do you know why that's so difficult?
3. Think about Karen's statement, "It's best to let some things go as they were and not keep trying to finish them." Is that hard to do? Why?
4. What about her "hardest goodbye"—goodbye "to a dream of a safe, secure place in the world"? And "hello to a more ambiguous world"?
5. How did you respond to Barbara's saying "Au revoir" rather than "Goodbye" to her daughter, Kathy?
6. As we come to the end of this growing-through-grief experience, what part does your faith play in where you are now?
7. What are your next own steps in your journey toward recovery? Do you feel some resistance in yourself in attempting a next step? Try to let your thoughts and feelings collect around that feeling of resistance. What is it telling you? How will you respond? What resources—people, groups, spiritual methods—will you mobilize to overcome your resistance and move ahead on your journey toward wholeness centered in Spirit?

Part 3. Supplementary Material

The following two articles are included as helpful summaries relating to grief and grief healing groups. Feel free to duplicate them, as well as the two parts of the bibliography which follows, for handouts to the group.

Some Key Concepts in Helping People Cope With Crises and Grief

By Howard Clinebell

1. The heart of a crisis is a loss or threat of a loss (grief).
2. A crisis or loss is a potential growth opportunity (a fork in one's road).
3. Two things help make it so—
 - (a) A vital framework of meaning (faith).
 - (b) A caring community (small group) within which one can experience love.
4. A series of crises and losses produces elevated levels of cumulative stress.
5. Crises are essentially interpersonal experiences.
6. Society's rapid change makes our personal crises and losses more difficult by diminishing interpersonal and social support.
7. "Knowing how a fire started is not necessary in order to put it out" (William Menninger); it is not necessary to explore the psychological roots of "copelessness" in order to help people in crises.
8. Short-term and lay help often suffices.
9. The human personality is like a muscle; use it and it grows stronger. One goal of crisis help is enabling persons to handle their problems better by taking constructive action.
10. The goals of help:
 - (a) Achieving a trustful relationship with a person in a crisis or loss.
 - (b) Helping the person separate the larger problem into its smaller parts.
 - (c) Challenging the individual to act in constructive ways, starting with one or two small parts of the problem.
 - (d) Helping the person develop and implement an ongoing growth-action plan.*
11. Awakening realistic hope is essential in helping people handle losses constructively.
12. Outreach to others who have similar losses and crises is often mutually helpful.
13. Potentializing is the key to prevention; "growth work" through which people develop their strength and potential prepares them to cope constructively with future stress and loss.
14. Every crisis or loss is a potential opportunity for spiritual growth!
15. It is helpful to remember that even "small" crises and losses often seem huge and painful when they are occurring.

*Adapted from an approach by Warren Jones

How to Set Up a Grief Healing Group

By Howard Clinebell

Grief groups are relatively easy to set up and lead. Here are some guidelines for doing so:

Nature and importance of the group: A grief group is one of the most useful types of growth groups. Such a group is a self-help group, or more accurately a mutual-help group, in which people who have suffered a significant loss of any kind can experience the healing which can occur in a small sharing and caring group. Few if any types of growth groups can contribute more to the enhancement of the spiritual and mental health of persons than an effective grief group. A loss or the threat of a loss is a key cause in all crises. Almost everybody is carrying some burden or loss. Unless people have the kind of help in dealing with their grief which is available in a sharing group, many will not experience the full healing of their grief wounds.

Two modes of groups: Ad hoc groups, set up for a limited period of weeks—usually from six to ten—have certain advantages. An intensive grief workshop for a full day or weekend with one or more follow-up sessions is a productive model. Some people will commit themselves to a time-limited group who will not come to a long-term or continuing group. The fact that the group has a terminus often stimulates participants to work more productively within the time limits. (A group can re-contract at the end of the agreed-upon time, if there is common desire to extend the length of the group.) However, some churches and social agencies have found that an on-going, open-ended grief group which people can join when they need it, and leave when they no longer feel this need, is a valuable resource.

Mixed or specialized group: Persons who have experienced the same type of loss tend to become a group relatively quickly because they can identify with each other's losses. They can understand and help each other, both with painful feelings and the practical realities of coping, because they have been through similar experiences. These are some of the advantages of specialized grief groups, composed entirely of persons who have been through divorce, or the loss of jobs, or losses from surgery or accidents, or the loss of loved ones by death. But grief groups composed of persons with a variety of losses are also effective. They allow persons to discover the common core of any significant loss experience—which is very similar in different types of losses. In a small church or agency, it usually is more feasible to have a mixed grief group.

Purpose of a grief group: The purpose (which should be spelled out in the invitation or publicity) is to help persons who have experienced losses deal constructively with the feelings and practical problems which result, and to help each other by sharing in a small group. In this way, a grief group can help people use their losses as growth opportunities. Some groups have a second purpose—to discover ways in which they can reach out to persons outside the groups who are also going through losses. The discovery that one's

painful experiences are potential resources for helping others who are experiencing similar losses, is an important growth discovery which occurs in such a group. The purposes of any group should be described in terms of the theology or philosophy and purpose of the church or agency which sponsors the group.

Recruiting a group: In a congregation, a group can be started simply by the minister inviting those who have experienced a loss within the past few years to join the group. Personal invitations to people the pastor knows and a general invitation in the church's bulletin or newsletter usually result in enough persons to start a group. In a counseling or therapeutic agency, clients can be referred to a group or advised of the availability of a group (e.g., a Divorce Growth Group).

Size of Group: for effective sharing, a group usually should not be larger than 12-15 or smaller than 3, plus the leader-facilitator. Co-leaders—preferably a man and a woman—have advantages over a solo leader. One pastor reports that a meeting of over 30 bereaved persons in his church, meeting for only a few hours (for personal Bible study, worship, sharing and lunch together), was a remarkable healing experience for many participants. Larger groups such as this are more likely to be effective if the leader or co-leaders have had considerable experience in facilitating sharing groups.

Leader: The role of the leader is to recruit and convene the group, to help the group develop a clear, mutually acceptable contract (spelled out in broad outline in the publicity but made more concrete and sharply focused on participants' needs by group discussion in the first session), and to facilitate the process of sharing on a meaningful level—the level where persons are both experiencing their pain and learning how to face practical problems constructively. Any clergyperson who has had clinical training or supervised group counseling training, or who is fortunate enough to be an open, warm and congruent person, can facilitate a grief group. It is an advantage for the leader to have been through a significant loss. Some lay persons who have been through grief groups and other growth group experiences discover that they have natural aptitudes as growth group facilitators. Such persons should be offered opportunities for additional training and then invited to co-lead a grief group with the minister. Mental health professionals who are trained in small group methods can be invited to co-lead groups or help train leaders for such groups. It is important for any group leader or trainer to be open about his/her own losses and pain.

The wound that doesn't heal: Occasionally, one encounters a person whose grief isn't healing normally. In most cases this is a person whose wound is infected by unfaced guilt, remorse, anger, resentment, or ambivalence toward the lost person, which feelings have been too painful to face and work through. The forces of healing and growth which are available in persons and their relationships are blocked. An effective grief group or counseling relationship often releases the person to grieve, let go of the loss, and experience healing. If this does not happen, it is important to encourage the person to see a competent

psychotherapist. Some signs that may indicate the presence of unhealed grief would include: inappropriate and undiminished grief; little or no grief; continuing or increasing withdrawal from relationships; prolonged or undiminishing guilt and/or hostility; pretending the loss is not real; chronic disorientation; psychosomatic illness; continuing undiminished depression; personality changes, sudden or gradual; retreat into excessive use of drugs (including tranquilizers), alcohol, or other pain-deadeners.

The stakes are high: Many of us who do not have obvious symptoms of unhealed grief such as those listed above carry partially healed wounds, even though we function adequately in our relationships and work. The price of partially healed wounds is diminished creativity and feelings of aliveness, diminished capacity to enjoy life, and a waste of life energies which would be put to constructive use in living.

A spiritual growth opportunity: Every major loss, like every crisis, is potentially a spiritual growth opportunity. A grief experience confronts us with the need to examine our values, to look at the adequacy of our personal faith or philosophy of life, and to make needed changes in faith, lifestyle and values. A grief group provides a small community of caring within which such spiritual growth work can best take place. A group can enable all of us to find the courage to risk looking at the brevity and frailty of our lives, and to seek ways of putting these facts of our finitude into the context of a larger meaning which transcends our individual lives. The leader of a grief growth group is often a spiritual growth facilitator. By asking questions such as, "How does this loss relate to your personal faith?" or simply, "What have you learned from this experience?" the leader can often open opportunities for spiritual exploration and discovery.

Bibliography: For Further Reading and Reflection

The following two lists of books on dealing with grief and crisis may be helpful as you set up and participate in grief groups. The first is a list of books for the general reader; the second of books that are more technical and directed more toward the professional counselor.

Books on Grief and Crisis for the General Reader

Lynn Cain, Widow (NY: Bantam Paperback, 1974). A candid autobiographical account.

Glen W. Davison, Living With Dying (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1973). An illuminating exploration of the multiple meanings of dying.

Esther O. Fisher, Divorce, The New Freedom (NY: Harper and Row, 1975). Methods of coping creatively with divorce.

Richard Gardner, The Boys and Girls Book About Divorce (NY: Bantam Books, 1970). Children's responses and feelings about the divorce or parents.

Martha Whitmore Hickman, The Growing Season (Nashville, The Upper Room 1976). Describes the effects of her daughter's death, against the background of the issues of middle life.

Martha Whitmore Hickman, I Will Not Leave You Desolate (Nashville, The Upper Room 1982). Help for grieving parents.

Mel Krantzler, Creative Divorce (NY: Signet Books, 1974). Opportunities for growth in divorce.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, On Death and Dying (NY: Macmillan, 1969). Stages of death and dying.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, et al., Death, the Final Stage of Growth (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1977). A variety of papers on dying and growth.

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Books for the Professional Counselor or Other Leader

Howard Clinebell, Basic Tasks of Pastoral Care & Counseling, Revised Ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984). Chapter 9, "Bereavement Care & Counseling," Chapter 14, "Group Care and Counseling," and Chapter 16, "Training Lay Persons for Their Caring Ministries."

Howard Clinebell, Growth-Counseling: Hope Centered Methods of Actualizing Human Wholeness (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979). Basic philosophy, theology and methodology of growth-hope approach to counseling and therapy, which is the foundation of the approach used in this resource.

Howard Clinebell, Growth Groups (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977). Gives principles and describes methods of setting up and leading growth groups, including grief groups.

Diane Detwiler-Zapp and William Caveness Dixon, Lay Caregiving (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982). Practical manual on how to train and supervise lay care-givers.

Charles V. Gerkin, Crisis Experience in Modern Life: Theory and Theology in Pastoral Care (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979). Explores experience of finitude and vulnerability in crisis—bereavement, suicide, identity crisis, generation alienation, broken relationships—and suggest a theology of crisis ministry.

Edgar Jackson, Understanding Grief, Its Roots, Dynamics and Treatment (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957). A comprehensive discussion of grief and the recovery process.

Robert Leslie, Sharing Groups in the Church (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976). Introduction to theory and practice of crisis counseling.

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