

Week 6 Helping Yourself Heal

Healing from grief looks different than most other things from which we heal. The definition of **'healing'** in a dictionary offers such words as **"process"** and **"restoring"**, as well as **"curing"**. The key word of the definition when speaking of healing from grief is **"process"**. We have already addressed the fact that while there is no cure for grief, there are processes through which we can begin restoring ourselves to good health, both physical and emotional.

This week we will focus on what things we can do to help restore our health in three areas: physical, emotional, and spiritual; all three are important to building a healthy pathway forward after a loss.

As humans we are triune beings similar to God, in whose image we are created. God is Triune, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Notice how that relates to our own nature. We humans are physical – like the humanity of the Son (Jesus). Humans are also emotional beings which we draw from all three. And we are spiritual beings like the Father and the Holy Spirit. This triune nature of the human person means that we must address all three aspects along our healthy pathway to healing.

Grief, as we have learned affects our head, heart, and spirit. We will look at each of these areas as we discuss measures, we can take to help ourselves to heal from our loss.

Head:

When speaking of how grief affects our heads, we are drawn to both physical and emotional issues. We learned in Week 4 some of the ways that grief affects our brains, causing us to act and feel different. To properly speak of helping our 'head' in the grief process we need to speak of our ability to reason. The power of reasoning is what makes us human and separate us from animals. Yet our reasoning is affected by our emotional state when grieving. Our reasoning may tell us that we need to pay attention to physical factors You can see how interconnected everything is; one cannot be wholly separated from the other. In this way we are much like God. The three persons of the Trinity are somehow separate yet completely one, which is a mystery for sure but one that we can embrace by faith and reason.

Headaches are a frequent occurrence in many illnesses, and grief is no different. The myriad of feelings we experience on our grief journey often produce headaches which in

turn can exasperate other emotions we have at the time. During our grief journey it is important to pay attention to our physical bodies and the symptoms they give us that things are not right.

Concentrating on good nutrition, drinking plenty of fluids, exercising, and trying to get a proper amount of sleep all seem like common sense advice that are easier said than done. However, we benefit physically if we set up a plan to accomplish all three. Getting a proper amount of sleep is often said to be the hardest to accomplish. During our grief journey we may at times get either too little or too much sleep, depending on other factors such as depression which can impair our sleep cycles.

As you can see, how we are doing physically, has much to do with how we feel emotionally. We really shouldn't try to disconnect the two, but rather do our best to learn how the one affects the other.

Another important thing to recognize is that we may not always feel in control emotionally or physically. This too is common in the grief experience. While you want to be aware of safety issues around you, try not to feel as if you must be always in control. It is normal to have times where you feel out of control. Truthfully, there is very little you can control in the grieving process.

Heart:

On a heart level, grief is a devastating feeling. The loss of our loved ones penetrates to the depth of our beings, to the soul level. Again, we see the connection to our triune being that cannot be separated. We are created for each other and when we lose someone close it feels as if a part of us has died with them, and indeed a part has.

The part of us that was connected to our loved has changed. Through death, we lose the physical connection to our loved one. However, like when our other senses become stronger when we lose one of our five senses, so too our heart connection can grow even stronger through loss. I will say more about this under the 'spirit' connection.

Guilt often plays a part in the pain our hearts feel in grief also. We have already talked about the difference between true guilt and false guilt, but here we want to acknowledge that a proper understanding of forgiveness has a lot to do with our feelings of guilt as well.

In his book, *"Total Forgiveness"* pastor and author, R. T. Kendall writes about the threefold nature of forgiveness. He states that often in life, we have three persons to forgive. One is the to forgive the person who hurt us (we may feel this toward our loved one who has died). Two is to forgive ourselves. The third need for forgiveness is often hard to understand but of critical importance to our healing at a heart/soul level. Kendall says we need to forgive God. That is a bold statement. On the surface it may not make sense but when we begin to realize we often harbor resentment toward God in feeling He could have prevented the death of our loved one, then we are blocking our ability to heal properly.

Often, resentment toward God even goes unsaid in our spirits because we are afraid to speak against God. However, a healthy understanding of the nature of God will help us to see that anger or resentment towards God can be normal and even healing when we allow our hearts to work through it, along with scriptural and pastoral guidance. The psalms have many examples of anger, resentment, and disappointment toward God.

PSALM 13:1-6

"How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?"

Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him," lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me."

PSALM 42:9-11

"I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?"

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God."

Spirit:

It is normal to feel somewhat depressed in our spirit after experiencing the loss of a loved one. There are a few things we can do to help us when we feel a depressed spirit arising within us.

First, is to embrace our faith. We should look to God's word and a pastor or counselor to help us understand why we feel as we do. As in all forms of counseling, truthfulness is key to our finding answers. Be sure you have a counselor with whom you can be completely transparent with all your feelings, fears, and doubts.

Second, we should recognize that no question is off limits. The number one question asked in times of loss is why. Why did this person have to die? Why did this person have to die the way they did? Such questions are completely normal and if we are to heal properly, we must give ourselves permission to ask them. As we ask questions, we need to recognize that there are some questions that do not have answers in this world. Only in eternity will we find some answers. But we need to recognize that it is in the questioning process that our healing occurs, not necessarily in finding the answers.

Third, we must embrace the treasure of memory. The memories of our loved ones are our greatest treasures. One of the ways we preserve memories is by sharing them. Think of ways to share your memories with family and friends. This begins with the funeral or memorial service but can have an even greater healing effect if we will share remembrances later when the death is not so recent in time. There are many ways to keep memories alive in our spirit. Some examples are to print photo books, make videos, and keep photos and objects of your loved ones around your home as a perpetual remembrance.

Our memories may make us laugh and cry, both are necessary to help us heal. In all the work we do to help ourselves heal in our grief; we need to remember that it's important to keep moving forward. When we embrace our grief, we are in a healing process. The

process is different for everyone and has no timetable, so give yourself grace to be different, and feel the fullness of all your emotions along your healthy pathway to healing from loss.

Discussion & Activities

(Rules for discussion: No one must share or talk if they do not wish to. Everyone has a right to their own feelings, and your feelings will be honored and respected.)

Action Item:

- Make a list of all the questions you have about the death of your loved one. Remember, nothing is off limits. Writing these down will help you to process the answers as they come over time.

- Consider keeping a special place of memory of your loved one in your home? Items may include, pictures, candles, memorabilia.

- Helpful ideas for facing the holidays while you are grieving:
 1. Don't place any extra expectations on yourself for the holidays.

 2. Embrace your traditions and memories:
 - a. Consider setting a place at the table for your loved one as a guest with you in spirit. Perhaps even add a picture of them at the place. You may also light a candle as both a prayer for your loved one, and a symbol of the light of their memory that is still with you.
 - b. Try not to avoid your family traditions because of your grief, but give yourself room to change, if you are moved to do so.
 - c. Give yourself an exit plan – realize that some settings may just be too difficult. That's ok. Don't force yourself to endure something for which you are not ready.

