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Good Grief

by Granger E. Westberg

Discussion Guide

Good Grief, by Granger Westberg (Augsburg Fortress, copyright © 1997), provides guidance on how to deal with loss, such as death, loss of a job, or any of the painful changes that happen to all people as a part of life. The author walks us through the ten stages of grief and offers valuable insights into the grief process. It is a valuable resource for better understanding the good that comes with the grieving process.

Permission is granted to reproduce this discussion guide.

Introduction

This introduction provides an overview of this book and shows how grief is a natural part of the human experience.

1. Share why you selected this book to read and what you hope to learn from it.

2. In your own words, explain what grief is and name a few of the many things that can cause people to grieve.

3. Why do people grieve? Why is it natural?

4. How can grief be good?

5. If you are comfortable doing so, share a time of grief in your life.

6. Why is it important to learn about the grieving process?

7. Discuss the role of faith in grief. How is this role different from what many expect?
Stage One

**We Are in a State of Shock**

*This stage is the first symptom of the grief experience.*

1. How does shock help us deal with grief?
2. Give an example of what it means to be in a state of shock.
3. Why does being active help in a period of crisis?
4. How can you help a person who is in this stage of grief?
5. When does shock become an unhealthy sign of grief?

Stage Two

**We Express Emotion**

*This stage begins when a person begins to realize the extent of the loss.*

1. Discuss why it is good to express emotion.
2. If you would like, share a time when you became emotional over a loss.
3. Why is it difficult for men to cry in our society?
4. How does society generally view the fact that women are better able to express their emotions? What are the messages that our society sends about being “emotional”? Do you agree or disagree?
5. What is the connection between emotions and faith?

Stage Three

**We Feel Depressed and Very Lonely**

*This stage shows how depression is a normal part of life in times of loss and is a part of good, healthy grief.*

1. How does a grieving person feel about God at this stage?
2. What does depression feel like?
3. List some helpful things to remember when coping with depression.
4. Explain why such depression is normal and healthy grief.
5. How can we as individuals and as a community of faith support those struggling with depression?

Stage Four

**We May Experience Physical Symptoms of Distress**

This stage centers on the emotional and physical problems that can be caused by grief.

1. What does “psychosomatic” mean? How do our thoughts and emotions affect our bodies? Discuss examples.

2. How is some illness caused by an unresolved grief situation?

3. Discuss the cause and symptoms of Mrs. Brown’s grief.

4. Why is Mrs. Brown’s problem both a philosophical and religious one?

5. If a person is stuck at this stage, what needs to happen in order for them to move on?

Stage Five

**We May Become Panicky**

This stage is often caused when a person is fixated with a loss.

1. Describe what it feels like to panic.

2. What causes panic? Give some of the symptoms.

3. How can understanding the grief process help a person cope with panic?

4. How do new and different human relationships help at this stage?

5. Discuss a time when you experienced panic. What helped you overcome it?
Stage Six

**We Feel a Sense of Guilt About the Loss**

*This stage illustrates the struggle people have with guilt and the need to be released from it.*

1. Discuss the difference between normal and neurotic guilt.
2. Give an illustration of normal guilt associated with a loss.
3. What is neurotic guilt? Give an example.
4. Why does a religious person have an advantage in handling this stage of grief?
5. How does a person work past a sense of guilt?

Stage Seven

**We Are Filled with Anger and Resentment**

*In this stage, a person looks for someone or something to blame for the loss.*

1. Why are some people not always aware of the anger and resentment they have?
2. What are some healthy ways to cope with anger and resentment?
3. Discuss some situations that could trigger anger and resentment.
4. Why can God often be a target of anger?
5. Discuss the statement: “The human is always looking for someone to blame.”

Stage Eight

**We Resist Returning**

*This stage may reflect our feelings that others don’t understand our loss.*

1. List some reasons why people resist returning to normal activities.
2. How can friends help a grieving person through this stage?
3. Why is it difficult to grieve a loss in the presence of other people?
4. What are some of the public acts of mourning that are no longer in fashion today? How has the loss of these acts made grieving more difficult?

5. Describe the thoughts and feelings of a person in this stage of grief.

6. Why is it important for friends to help keep the memory of a lost loved one alive? Why is remembering a loved one in public so important?

Stage Nine
**Gradually Hope Comes Through**

*This stage signals that the person is recovering from grief and normalcy is returning.*

1. In your own words, what is hope and why is it so important to possess it?

2. How does the grieving person feel at this stage?

3. What does it mean to “press our emotions” and how is this helpful?

4. What does the grieving person want from others at this stage?

5. How can our support and affection help encourage someone who is grieving to open herself or himself to new opportunities and experiences?

Stage Ten
**We Struggle to Affirm Reality**

*This stage is still a struggle, but shows the grieving person is ready to return to the real world.*

1. What does it mean to affirm reality? Why is this important?

2. Discuss the importance of possessing and nurturing faith.

3. How does the way you look at life make a difference in the grief experience?

4. As we leave our grief experience, why are we not our old selves again?

5. Why does Westberg suggest that we should train for loss by nurturing and growing our faith?

6. How does an awareness of God’s presence make wrestling with grief less difficult?

7. How has reading this book and having these discussions helped you?