

PositiveTalk
Good Conversations, Better People.

LEARNING TO LIVE WITH LOSS

WHEN IT DOES NOT FEEL REAL

BOOKLET

A guided journey of remembrance and hope

GRIEF IS NOT A CHECKLIST. YOU ARE ALLOWED YOUR OWN WAY THROUGH.

BOOKLET 01 / THE FIVE GRIEF LENSES

When It Does Not Feel Real

Making room for shock, disbelief, and the small steps of today

A NOTE BEFORE YOU BEGIN

THE FIVE-STAGE MODEL IS A LENS, NOT A TIMELINE. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross originally described common responses among people facing death. The framework was later widely applied to bereavement. Grief does not follow a required order, a fixed schedule, or five mandatory feelings. You can experience several responses together, repeat them, or not recognize any particular stage. These booklets are invitations to reflect, not tests to pass.

You may start with any booklet. None is a level you must pass before opening another. If an exercise feels too intense, skip it, take a break, or do it with a trusted support person. The Scripture references invite reflection rather than promise a schedule for recovery.

READ IN YOUR OWN TIME

Keep a pen nearby. Circle what resonates. Leave blank what does not. You may revisit a page months or years from now and find different words. That does not mean you have returned to the beginning; it means you are a person whose love and circumstances continue to change.

SCRIPTURE FOR REFLECTION

Psalm 34:18; John 11:35; Isaiah 43:2

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

- Read the three brief teachings without rushing.
- Try one gentle exercise, not necessarily every exercise.
- Use the journal pages for your own words.
- Choose one act of care, connection, or remembrance.

DENIAL & NUMBNESS

A Gentle Beginning

There are moments when the mind knows someone is gone but the heart reaches for the familiar sound of their voice. A person may keep checking a phone, set an extra place out of habit, or feel almost nothing at all. None of these responses makes love less genuine. Shock can create space between information and emotion; the distance can feel confusing or even embarrassing. This booklet is about meeting that distance with patience rather than shame.

Before the Reading

What brought you to this particular part of the series today? You can answer with a single word, a sentence, a memory, or a blank page. There is no correct amount of sharing.

TEACHING 1 / DENIAL & NUMBNESS

When the facts arrive before your feelings

Loss can make ordinary details feel unreal. You may understand the facts enough to arrange a funeral, sign forms, or tell a neighbor what happened, then reach for your phone to call the person who died. That moment does not mean you have failed to comprehend reality. Familiar routines were built through hundreds of repetitions; they often continue for a while after life has changed. The mind, body, and relationships do not necessarily catch up with one another in a straight line.

One danger is measuring yourself against another person. A sibling may cry openly while you organize paperwork. A friend may want to retell stories while you need quiet. Different responses can coexist in the same family. Rather than declaring which one is proper, consider asking, “What is necessary today, and what can wait?” This small question makes room for your actual capacity. It also protects you from making large decisions while you feel disoriented.

In John 11:35 Jesus weeps at the death of Lazarus. The scene is not a demand for tears on command; it is evidence that sorrow does not make a person spiritually defective. Read the surrounding passage and notice that care arrives within a real human story. You do not need to produce a particular emotion to be worthy of care.

Pause and Reflect

After reading When the facts arrive before your feelings, what feels most important or difficult to hold today? You may write an insight, an objection, or a prayer.

TEACHING 2 / DENIAL & NUMBNESS

Numbness can be a response, not a verdict

Some people feel guilty because they have not cried. Others feel frightened when tears arrive weeks later, or when their body suddenly becomes tired. A period of emotional quiet can be one way a person responds to overwhelming change. If a feeling is absent today, you do not need to chase it. If a feeling arrives unexpectedly, you do not have to turn it into a performance. Let the moment be what it is.

Try describing your experience without judging it: “Today the house feels strangely normal,” “I am exhausted,” or “I do not know what I feel.” These statements are not permanent conclusions. The purpose is to speak truthfully enough to choose a caring next step. You might drink water, take a walk, eat with someone, or pause a difficult conversation. Sometimes it is wise to ask a trusted person to help with a task that involves too many decisions.

Psalm 34 speaks about God being near to those whose hearts are broken. Do not read nearness as a promise that your emotions must immediately improve. A quiet or confused day can still include prayer, support, rest, and practical care.

Pause and Reflect

After reading Numbness can be a response, not a verdict, what feels most important or difficult to hold today? You may write an insight, an objection, or a prayer.

TEACHING 3 / DENIAL & NUMBNESS

Gently naming what has changed

It is possible to acknowledge loss without forcing yourself to tell the whole story in one sitting. Try using two columns: WHAT IS DIFFERENT and WHAT REMAINS. The first may include absence, changed routines, unfinished plans, and practical responsibilities. The second might include values you learned, memories, photographs, a family tradition, a friendship, or the ongoing love you carry. Both columns can be true at the same time.

When you feel ready, you can speak one clear sentence about the loss. For example: “My father died, and I miss our conversations.” Then breathe. That may be enough for today. If the sentence overwhelms you, return to the present by placing both feet on the floor, noticing what you can see, and contacting someone safe. No worksheet should pressure you beyond what you can manage.

Faithful acknowledgment is not the same thing as rushing toward closure. In Isaiah 43:2, the image is of passage through difficult waters rather than instant removal of those waters. Let the text remind you that you can seek company and steadiness while learning to live with a changed reality.

Pause and Reflect

After reading Gently naming what has changed, what feels most important or difficult to hold today? You may write an insight, an objection, or a prayer.

A Story from Ordinary Life

Room for a Human Story

After his aunt died, Marcus helped everyone else make arrangements. He kept expecting to see her name on his phone. When the funeral ended he wondered why he felt so blank. A cousin said, “You must be the strong one.” Instead of agreeing, Marcus answered, “I am doing what I can, but I do not know what I feel yet.” That sentence helped him ask for a quiet evening rather than more responsibilities.

Faith and Honesty

Read Psalm 34:18; John 11:35; Isaiah 43:2. These references are invitations to encounter the passages in context. They do not claim that faith makes grief predictable or painless. Consider where compassion, patience, honesty, or hope appears in what you read.

What would you say to someone living this story?

YOUR REFLECTION

Four Questions Worth Sitting With

1. What feels especially unreal or hard to name right now?

2. Which routines still expect the person or life that is no longer here?

3. Where have I judged myself for feeling too much or too little?

4. What is one small way I could receive help today?

GUIDED EXERCISE

A Gentle Reality Map

Write three facts about what changed, using simple language. Next to each, write one support or practical step that may help you face it. Leave any line blank if you need to. End with one memory or value you wish to carry.

PRIVATE LETTER

Words You May Never Need to Send

If you could speak to the person you miss without needing to explain yourself, what ordinary detail would you tell them about today?

This page belongs to you. You do not have to share it, finish it, or keep it.

A QUIET PRAYER

An Honest Place to Begin

Lord, I do not have a neat way to describe this loss. Meet me in confusion, tiredness, silence, and sudden tears. Give me patience with my own response and the courage to ask for help. Guide me through one honest and manageable step today. Amen.

Three Possible Next Steps

- Name one feeling or write, “I do not know yet.”
- Ask for help with one practical responsibility.
- Create one calm place in your day, even for five minutes.

A permission slip

You are allowed to close this book today. You are allowed to laugh, cry, rest, remember, or ask for help. None of these actions erases the love that brought you here.

CARE & SUPPORT

You Do Not Have to Do This Alone

This faith-based educational workbook is not therapy, diagnosis, or crisis care. You may skip prompts that feel overwhelming. Consider a trusted friend, faith leader, licensed grief counselor, or clinician for support. If you feel unable to stay safe or are in immediate danger, call local emergency services. In the U.S. call or text 988 for crisis support.

Getting Support

- Ask for company without advice: “Could you sit with me or take a walk?”
- Tell someone what practical help would be useful, such as a meal, errand, or phone call.
- Consider a grief support group or bereavement counselor, including community or faith-based options that respect your needs.
- If sleep, appetite, functioning, or feelings of hopelessness worry you, speak with a licensed health professional.

Sources and Further Reading

American Psychological Association — Grief: Coping with the Loss of Your Loved One (apa.org/topics/death)

Cruse Bereavement Support — Understanding the Five Stages of Grief (cruse.org.uk)

NHS — Get Help with Grief after Bereavement or Loss (nhs.uk)

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross Foundation — Five Stages of Grief (ekrfoundation.org)

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