



A BIBLICAL MODEL OF GRIEVING

Hope in the Midst of Your Grief

The Big Idea: In just 1,000 words we contrast the world's way of grieving with the Word's way of grieving and growing.

HOW DO WE FACE SUFFERING?

How do we face suffering face-to-face with God rather than turning our backs on God during the grieving process? What does the journey with God look like as we find *hope when we're hurting*?

In finding God's healing for life's losses, we have two basic options. We can turn to the world's way. Or, we can follow the way of God's Word.

THE WORLD'S WAY: IS THAT ALL THERE IS?

Students of human grief have developed various models that track typical grief responses. Swiss-born psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, in her book *On Death and Dying*, popularized a five-stage model of grieving based upon her research into how terminally ill persons respond to the news of their terminal illness. Her five stages have since been used worldwide to describe all grief responses.

A RESEARCHED-BASED MODEL OF THE GRIEF PROCESS

- *Denial*: This is the shock reaction. "It can't be true." "No, not me." We refuse to believe what happened.
- *Anger*: Resentment grows. "Why me?" "Why my child?" "This isn't fair!" We direct blame toward God, others, and ourselves. We feel agitated, irritated, moody, and on edge.
- *Bargaining*: We try to make a deal, insisting that things be the way they used to be. "God, if You heal my little girl, then I'll never drink again." We call a temporary truce with God.
- *Depression*: Now we say, "Yes, me." The courage to admit our loss brings sadness (which can be healthy mourning and grieving) and/or hopelessness (which is unhealthy mourning and grieving).
- *Acceptance*: Now we face our loss calmly. It is a time of silent reflection and regrouping. "Life has to go on. How? What do I do now?"

UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD'S LIMITATIONS

These proposed stages in the grief process seek to track *typical grief responses*. However, they do not attempt to assess if this is what is *best to occur*. Nor could they assess, simply through scientific research, whether these responses correspond to *God's process for hurting (grieving) and hoping (growing)*.

We must understand something about research in a fallen world. At best, it *describes* what typically occurs. It cannot, with assurance and authority, *prescribe* what should occur. Research attempts to understand the nature of human nature are thwarted by the fallenness of our nature and of our world.

As Dallas Willard (*The Spirit of the Disciplines*, HarperOne, 1990, p. 45) explains:

Secular psychology is not in an “at-best” set of circumstances. The question of who we are and what we are here for is not an easy one, of course. For those who must rely upon a strictly secular viewpoint for insight, such questions are especially tough. Why? Because we do in fact live in a world in ruins. We do not exist now in the element for which we were designed. So in light of that truth, it’s essentially impossible to determine our nature by observation alone, because we are only seen in a perpetually unnatural position.

THE WORD’S WAY: ALL YOU NEED FOR YOUR HEALING JOURNEY

Understanding these research limitations, and believing in the sufficiency of Scripture, we can focus on a revelation-based model. We can address and assess the typical five stages of grieving, however, we can move beyond them.

The biblical approach to grieving and growing identifies eight scriptural “stages” in our responses to life’s losses. God’s way equips us to move through hurt to hope in Christ—from grieving to growing. We call it “Biblical Sufferology”—a scripturally wise and practically relevant understanding of suffering.

Stage One: From Denial and Isolation to Candor: Honesty with Myself

Stage Two: From Anger and Resentment to Complaint/Lament: Honesty with God

Stage Three: From Bargaining and Works to Crying Out to God: Asking God for Help

Stage Four: From Depression and Alienation to Comfort: Receiving God’s Help

Stage Five: From Regrouping to Waiting: Trusting with Faith

Stage Six: From Deadening to Wailing: Groaning with Hope

Stage Seven: From Despairing and Doubting to Weaving: Perceiving with Grace

Stage Eight: From Digging Cisterns to Worshipping: Engaging with Love

GOD’S HEALING PATH

The first four stages in a biblical response to grief involve *sustaining in suffering*. The second four stages relate to *healing in suffering*. Please always remember that these “stages” are a relational process, not sequential steps. Grieving and growing is not a neat, nice package. It isn’t a tidy procedure.

Grieving and growing is messy because life is messy. Moving through hurt to hope is a two-steps-forward, one-step-backwards endeavor. We don’t “conquer a stage” and never return to it. Rather than picturing a linear, step-by-step route, imagine a three-dimensional maze with many possible paths, frequent detours, backtracking, and even the ability to reside in more than one “stage” at the same time.

However, positive movement is possible. In fact, it is promised. You can find God's healing for your losses. You *can* find hope in your hurt. Whatever your grieving experience has been like up to this point, don't quit. Don't give up.

Join the journey. Experience the biblical reality that *it's normal to hurt and necessary to grieve*. Learn how to move from denial to personal honesty (candor), from anger to honesty with God (complaint), from bargaining to asking God for help (crying out), and from depression to receiving God's help (comfort).

Stay on the path. Experience the biblical reality that *it's possible to hope and supernatural to grow*. Learn how to move from regrouping to trusting with faith (waiting on God), from deadening to groaning with hope (wailing to God), from despair to perceiving with grace (weaving in God's truth), and from digging cisterns to engaging with love (worshipping God and ministering to others).

God truly does provide you with everything you need for life and godliness. Through the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the people of God, you have all you need for your healing journey.

JOIN THE JOURNEY

What is your initial response to this eight-stage biblical approach compared to the typical five-stage approach of the world?

What do you think it would be like to apply the stages of grieving (candor, complaint, crying out, and comfort) and the stages of growth (waiting, wailing, weaving, and worshipping) to your grief and growth journey?

Note: Excerpted from *God's Healing for Life's Losses* by Robert W. Kellemen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Robert W. Kellemen, Ph.D., LCPC, served for over a dozen years as Chairman of the Master of Arts in Christian Counseling and Discipleship Department at Capital Bible Seminary. He is now Professor-at-Large in that Department. In his three pastoral ministries, Bob has equipped hundreds of lay people as biblical counselors and spiritual friends. In his role as Founder and CEO of RPM Ministries (<http://www.rpmministries.org>), Bob is known for his Christ-centered, comprehensive, compassionate, and culturally-informed approach to equipping local churches for biblical counseling and spiritual formation. Bob is the Executive Director of the Association of Biblical Counselors' Center for Church Equipping. He also serves as the Launch Director for the Biblical Counseling Coalition. Bob is the author of *Soul Physicians*, *Spiritual Friends*, *Beyond the Suffering*, *Sacred Friendships*, and *God's Healing for Life's Losses*.