Care Ministry GUIDE

7 Answers to Hard Grief Questions



GriefShare®

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CareLeader.org

PO Box 1739
Wake Forest, NC 27588-1739

Email: info@careleader.org
Website: www.careleader.org

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How to use this ebook

This is a practical, ministry-first companion you can keep on your desk or phone. This eBook draws from "*Is My Grief Normal?*", a grief support resource created by GriefShare. The insights and practical steps throughout come from that book, and have been adapted here to equip pastors and church leaders. Each question includes:

- **What's really going on (pastoral insight)**
- **What to say in the moment**
- **Scripture anchors**
- **Practical next steps (for the griever and for you)**
- **Red flags & referrals**
- **A brief prayer**
- **A GriefShare next step (optional, if you offer groups)**

Use it to have answers ready for when you're on a bedside call, after a funeral, or in a hallway conversation. We also encourage you to share freely with your church staff and lay leaders.

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Tone to aim for: present, non-fixing, biblically hopeful, trauma-aware, concise.

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1 "Why would God let this happen?"

> **"One of the biggest challenges after my husband died was my relationship with God. I grew up in the church, and I felt I had a close relationship with God. Frankly, God had been nothing but good to me. But when I experienced this loss, I just didn't know what to do with it. I didn't know how to see God anymore. I only knew Him as a loving God. But I felt like this was really cruel. I didn't know how it fit into my whole worldview, and I felt so far away from Him: Did He really love me? And did I really love Him?"**
>
> *—Malika, Is My Grief Normal, Section 6*

Pastoral insight

When tragedy strikes, many ask why a loving God would allow such pain. Section 6 of *Is My Grief Normal?* reminds us that grief often raises deep theological questions about God's goodness, sovereignty, and presence. People in pain are rarely looking for a quick answer. They're longing to know whether God still cares, and whether faith can survive sorrow.

Pastor Ryan Wright offers this perspective:

> "We live in this tension of a good God in a fallen world. We live in this tension of "I know we're all going to die one day, but why do we have to die today?" Maybe the better question is, "What does God want to do with this tragedy in my life?" Jesus is able to take the worst life has to give us and somehow bring us through it for our

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good and God's glory. I don't always understand how He does that. But I've watched time and time again, where people have had terrible losses, and somehow they come out of it in a good way. And I can only credit that to God. Why does God allow it? I don't know. But what does God do with it? I can show you amazing story after story after story of great things God has done in absolutely horrendous circumstances. To me, that's the beauty of the good news of Jesus."

A primer on what to say

"It's okay to ask that question. God doesn't shame you for wondering. Grief brings hard questions to the surface, and God invites us to bring them to Him.

Think of Job. In response to Job's questions, God didn't explain every detail of what had happened. Instead, He reminded Job of who He is—wise, powerful, and trustworthy even when life is painfully hard. You may not understand what has happened, or see any good in it right now. That's understandable. God hasn't revealed all the details of His plan, but He has revealed enough to show that He can be trusted.

Read Romans 8:18-39. Then bring your questions and pain to God in prayer, trusting that He is with you even in what you don't understand."

Scripture anchors

- Psalm 22:1-2 — *Honest lament has a place in Scripture.*
- Psalm 78 & Acts 7 — *Remember God's power and faithfulness.*
- Romans 8:18-39 — *God's love holds us through suffering.*
- John 11:33-36 — *Jesus wept before raising Lazarus.*

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Practical next steps ➡

- Encourage journaling prayers that begin with "God, why…" and end with "I trust You with what I don't understand."
- Suggest reading a lament Psalm aloud (Psalm 13, 42, or 77). Remind them that these psalms are prayers to God, and they can use them that way too.
- Affirm that grief can bring hard questions and even anger at the intrusion of death, and that these struggles can exist alongside genuine faith as trust continues to grow.

Red flags & referrals 🚩

Watch for total spiritual withdrawal, self-blame ("God is punishing me"), or anger that isolates them from all support. Offer pastoral counseling or refer to trusted Christian counseling as needed.

Prayer 🤲

"Lord, meet _____ in their difficult questions. Draw them close while answers remain unseen. Let Your love be more real than their pain. Amen."

GriefShare next step

Encourage participation in a 13-week GriefShare support group where participants can explore faith and suffering with guided support.

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2 "How do I deal with my anger toward God?"

> **"My journey of grief took me from deep sadness to despair. Then it turned into all the whys and a bitterness toward God. I felt abandoned by Him."**
>
> *—Nan, Is My Grief Normal?, Section 6*

Pastoral insight

Anger is a common, human response to loss—especially when we believe God could have prevented the pain. *Is My Grief Normal?* notes that this anger often stems from confusion, disappointment, or a sense of betrayal.

Anger often includes two impulses:

- We conclude that what happened is unjust or unfair. It clashes with how we believe the world should work.
- We look for someone to blame. And when we're angry about a death, it's common to direct that anger toward the One we may have expected to prevent it: God.

You can understand the logic: God is sovereign, and God is good—so when tragedy strikes, the questions come quickly. Where were You, God? Why did You let this happen?

People may fear that bringing anger to God means losing faith. But Scripture shows that God invites honest lament—not bitterness that turns away from Him, but grief that brings pain, confusion, and even protest into His presence and learns to trust Him there.

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A primer on what to say

"It's okay to tell God you're angry. He can handle your honesty. Anger is not the same as rebellion. Often, it is part of trying to make sense of a relationship that matters deeply to you. God is patient with those who are grieving, confused, and hurting.

When you bring your anger to Him instead of turning away, He can begin to transform it. In Scripture, the psalmists prayed with startling honesty. They asked God how long the pain would last and what He was doing in it. You can adapt their prayers to your own situation. Notice, too, how many of those psalms eventually move toward trust in the Lord. As you pray those words honestly, they can become a pathway back to trust, even before you feel 'better.'"

Scripture anchors

- Psalm 13:1-2 — *God invites honest cries of pain and confusion.*
- Job 7:11 — *Anguish can be brought into God's presence.*
- Ephesians 4:26 — *Anger must be handled carefullyand without sin.*

Practical next steps

- Encourage journaling prayers that begin with "God, I'm angry because..." and then, like many of the psalms, move gradually toward remembering who God is and why He can still be trusted.
- Suggest naming their anger out loud in prayer and with a trusted believer. God often uses other people to show His patience and compassion.

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- Affirm that grief can bring hard questions and even anger at the intrusion of death, and that these struggles can exist alongside genuine faith as trust continues to grow (see Psalms 42–43).

Red flags & referrals

If anger hardens into bitterness, becomes blame toward others, or leads to spiritual isolation, suggest pastoral counseling or a GriefShare group for guided support.

Prayer

"Patient Father, thank You for loving us through our anger. Help _____ bring their pain honestly to You and find comfort in Your steadfast presence. Amen."

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3 "When will I feel normal again?"

> "Will I feel like this forever?"
>
> —*Janet, Is My Grief Normal?, Section 2*

Pastoral insight

Grief is not a single event but a journey that reshapes life. Most people won't return to the old "normal." Over time, they learn to move forward in a life marked by deeper acceptance, mixed emotions, and the capacity to carry both sorrow and joy.

Dr. Brad Hambrick, counselor, says, "When we enter grief, one of the early things we recognize is that we're not sure how to do grief. It feels like there ought to be a "right way" for something this significant. But we might think of grief more like poetry or jazz, in that there's not a right way to do it. You're going to do grief in a way that fits and suits you."

As a pastor or church leader, be careful not to reinforce the expectation of an orderly grief process—there isn't one.

A primer on what to say

"Right now nothing feels normal—and that's not a failure on your part. Loss has turned your world upside down. Grief brings many unfamiliar emotions and experiences. And not only do you want

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to know if your feelings are normal, you also wonder if you'll ever feel any kind of normal again.

One of grief's challenges is that there's no set formula for how you will, or should, grieve. But one thing is certain, right now you don't feel 'normal.' In one sense you'll never go back to the 'normal' you once knew. That's impossible. You may be thinking, I don't want a 'new' normal. I just want my loved one back. That's understandable.

Grief doesn't mean trying to forget, and healing doesn't mean replacing the one you've lost. Over time, you'll find new ways to live with your loss—not ways to erase it. As you walk through this journey of grief, trust in God's strength. Over time, you may find the valleys are not as deep. I'm here to walk with you as you discover a new normal."

Scripture anchors

- Psalm 34:18 — *The Lord is near to the brokenhearted.*
- Hebrews 13:8 — *Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

Practical next steps

- Invite them to make two short lists: What has changed? What remains the same?
- Encourage one tiny, doable rhythm (short walk; consistent sleep/wake time; a simple regular meal).
- Normalize waves: "Good days and hard days can sit side-by-

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side, and that's okay."

Red flags & referrals

Persistent, unrelenting despair that disrupts daily life for two or more weeks—consider counseling. Note: Some holidays (like Thanksgiving and Christmas) are obvious hard days. Other significant events like anniversaries, birthdays, or shared routines can sneak up with less warning.

Prayer

"Jesus, be steady ground as everything shifts. Hold _____ close, and meet them in today's needs. Amen."

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4 "How can I go on?"

> **"I told myself that as long as I was in pain, I would remember my son. I decided I was going to isolate myself, other than taking care of my children. Pretty much 20 hours a day I stayed in a chair in my living room. I didn't answer the phone, didn't talk to people, didn't have friends over, and didn't go out, unless I needed to do something for my kids."**
>
> *—Reese, Is My Grief Normal?, Section 1*

Pastoral insight

After a death, security, purpose, and identity can feel shattered. Withdrawing can look like honoring the loved one, but isolation prolongs pain. Grieving people often find themselves emotionally drained, struggling to see a reason to keep going. Some describe this as "losing the will to live"—not necessarily in a suicidal sense, but in feeling unable to engage with life as it is now.

After the loss of a loved one, the drastic changes that follow can make grieving people want to step back from life. But it's important to acknowledge what has been lost, and encourage them to take the time they need to notice where life now needs to adjust. Over time, this can become part of giving thanks to God for the relationship they had. Keep in mind: continually avoiding people and responsibilities won't ease their pain.

A primer on what to say

"It makes sense that you want to stay under the covers. Let's focus on one next step today. You don't have to do the whole

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future—just this hour. Your life still has a God-given purpose. That purpose may not look the way it did before, and you may not see it yet. But God does. And step by step, you can find it again. Let's work together to identify someone close to you who can help you see what new possibilities for the future may look like."

Scripture anchors

- Isaiah 41:10 — *God strengthens and helps His people when they are afraid.*
- Lamentations 3:22-23 — *God's mercies are new each morning.*

Practical next steps

- Do the next thing: drink water, shower, eat something, make one call.
- Ask, "Who can be with you for errands or meals this week?"
- If hopelessness is evident, offer pastoral counseling and reinforce hope rooted in the death and resurrection of Christ.

Red flags & referrals

Any suicidal thoughts: refer to your church's policies and procedures. Recommend immediate referral with pastoral follow-up; in the U.S., call or text **988**.

Prayer

"*God of our daily bread, provide enough grace for today—help my brother/sister to trust You for the strength to take one step at a time. Help them to see the purpose You have for them and how you are working even in this difficult time for good. Amen.*"

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5 "Why can't I stop crying?"

> **"I was very, very sad. I felt the need to cry sometimes. Yet, as a guy, I was embarrassed by that. It was easier to be angry than it was to be sad. I shouldn't be crying. I'm supposed to be the tough one."**
>
> *—Tom, Is My Grief Normal?, Section 8*

Pastoral insight

Crying is one of the most common expressions of mourning. For some people, the tears never seem to stop. They may wonder, "Am I crying too much?" Tears are a God-given release. How often someone cries is shaped by closeness of relationship, culture, personality, fatigue, and timing.

Crying can also be a form of love. The apostle Paul wrote, "Love must be sincere. … Be devoted to one another in love. … Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn" (Romans 12:9-10, 15). Empathy with those who are suffering is part of life in Christ, because Jesus Himself meets us with compassion.

Pastor James White says:

> "One of the shortest verses in the Bible that became one of the most powerful verses for me in dealing with grief is in John 11—"Jesus wept." Why is the One who is "the resurrection and the life" crying when He is going to raise [His dear friend] Lazarus from the dead? We might say it's because He sees the impact of sin and what sin does. I get that. But He wept. Even though He knows there's going to be a resurrection, He weeps. I'm glad I've got a Savior who cries."

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A primer on what to say

"Tears are not weakness—they're love made visible. In your tears you can trust Jesus because He's not someone who has just a theoretical knowledge of what it means to be hurting. He's lived it, and He can join you in your hurt as the friend who understands and who's committed to walking with you through your sorrow to the very end. Grief therapist H. Norman Wright's perspective is encouraging: 'Tears are normal and natural. They are a gift from God. You cannot predict when you'll cry; just let it occur. And if other people are uncomfortable, so be it. This is more for your adjustment and moving forward.'"

Scripture anchors

- John 11:35 — *Jesus wept.*
- Romans 12:15 — *Weep with those who weep.*

Practical next steps

- Slow breathing: inhale for four seconds, hold for four, exhale for four. The goal is to keep breathing rhythmic, slow, and deep (instead of quick and shallow, which can lead to hyperventilation and panic).
- Step away briefly to cry in private if needed; return when you're ready.
- Drink water and aim for steady sleep routines.

Red flags & referrals

If crying is constant and disabling for weeks, consider a referral to a counselor or therapist.

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Prayer

"Jesus who weeps, receive these tears and bring comfort. Amen."

GriefShare next step

GriefShare groups normalize tears and provide a safe place to grieve with others who understand.

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6 "Why do I feel numb—am I broken?"

> **"Does this mean I didn't love him? Why don't I feel anything? What will people say if I'm here in the front row and not crying? How do I make myself feel something? Why do I feel so numb?"**
>
> *—Kathy, Is My Grief Normal?, Section 2*

Pastoral insight

Numbness is a protective part of grief, and it is often temporary. It's one way God has equipped your body to process grief. Think of it like a time-out in a basketball game. It lets you catch your breath and regroup before getting back onto the court. Emotional numbness allows you to "step away" from the relentless pressure of grief, giving you space to recover and prepare for your next steps. It's not avoiding the game—it's helping equip you to keep going.

A primer on what to say

"Numb doesn't mean you didn't love or that you're doing it wrong. Your body is buying you time. We can invite feelings to thaw, gently. Acknowledge what you're feeling, even if it's uncomfortable or doesn't make sense. Honesty allows you to confront grief head-on.

The Psalms offer a raw and honest expression of human emotions. They remind us that it's okay to bring every feeling—

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numbness, sorrow, anger, or even confusion—before God. The psalmists poured out their hearts, trusting that God could handle their pain. Reading or praying through the Psalms can help you put words to your emotions when you can't find them yourself. They also provide a powerful reminder that God is present, even in your darkest moments."

Scripture anchors

- 1 Kings 19:4-9 — *Exhausted Elijah is tended before tasked.*
- Psalm 38:8-10 — *God sees distress even when words fail.*
- Romans 8:26-27 — *The Holy Spirit Himself intercedes for us.*

Practical next steps

- Go slow: light movement, regular meals, and sunlight exposure.
- Journal for two minutes daily: "What emotions am I feeling today?" and "What thoughts feel confusing right now?"
- Read or pray Psalms aloud when your own words are thin.

Red flags & referrals

Numbness paired with risky behaviors (substances, reckless driving) is in need of urgent support.

Prayer

"Good Father, be with _____ in the quiet. Let Your grace warm what feels frozen. Amen."

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7 "How do I deal with loneliness?"

> **"Loneliness as a widow is everything—you feel it down to your bones. It's the cold side of the bed at night, the washing of dishes while almost feeling his hands around your waist. It's wanting to share something good and realizing there's no one to share it with."**
>
> *—Clarissa, Is My Grief Normal?, Section 2*

Pastoral insight

People who haven't grieved a significant loss often assume loneliness is a simple fix. "Just surround yourself with other people," they might suggest. But there is a significant difference between loneliness and being alone. Being alone means you don't have others with you physically. Loneliness, on the other hand, is the subjective experience of not feeling meaningfully connected to others. Grieving people can be lonely, even in a room full of people.

A primer on what to say

"As you move forward, loneliness may still come in waves. But loneliness doesn't have to define you. Even when God feels distant, He invites you to seek Him. He is not only near the brokenhearted; He is also at work, drawing you toward meaningful connection with Him and others. In those lonely moments, turn to Him in honesty. God is not put off by your pain—He meets you in it."

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Scripture anchors

- John 14:18 — *Jesus does not abandon His people.*
- Psalm 34:18 — *The Lord is near to the brokenhearted.*
- Psalm 62 — *God is our rock when everything feels unstable.*
- Revelation 21:4 — *A day is coming with no more tears.*

Practical next steps

- Choose one low-pressure connection each week (a walk, coffee, or a simple serving role).
- Ask a friend to be your close companion at first gatherings, ensuring that you aren't left alone or excluded by accident.
- Redeem alone time with short, simple prayers and a lament Psalm (Psalm 13, 42, or 77). Notice how these psalms often move from honest pain toward renewed trust in God.

Red flags & referrals

Isolation that deepens over months, or an inability to manage basic tasks.

Prayer

"God who sees all, draw near and provide companions on the way. Amen."

GriefShare next step

Invite them to a GriefShare group for safe, guided connection with a community of peers.

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Appendix A:

Quick-Start Pastoral Checklist to Launch a GriefShare Ministry

In one month or less:

- ☐ **Identify a lay leader** with empathy, spiritual maturity, reliability, and compassion.
- ☐ **Purchase the ministry kit** (videos, leader guide, participant tools, and promotional assets).
- ☐ **Connect your leader with a ministry coach** for launch guidance, team-building, and troubleshooting.
- ☐ **Promote** from the pulpit and through your website and social media.
- ☐ **Open registration:** choose an in-person, online, or hybrid format.
- ☐ **Support the leader:** celebrate milestones and keep the ministry visible.

TIP: *Your role as pastor can be "chief encourager," while a trained lay team leads weekly sessions.*

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Appendix B:

Five Steps for When Grief Is Overwhelming

This simple five-step guide can be shared when grief feels overwhelming and someone needs a few practical anchors for the week ahead.

1. **Breathe:** Inhale for four seconds, hold for four, exhale for four, then hold again for four.
2. **Move lightly:** Take a 10-minute walk or stretch.
3. **Connect:** Text one safe person; accept one offer of help.
4. **Anchor:** Save one verse or short prayer on your phone.
5. **Remember:** Your tears and your numbness are both normal—and healing can hold both.

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