

Capstone Essay

Scott L. Thompson

Light University Online

LFCH 560: Grief & Loss Coaching

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Grief and loss are a part of every human's life. There is no getting around it. All of us will suffer grief and loss during our lives in varying degrees. As a Christian life coach it is important to have genuine empathy and concern for clients who have suffered a loss and are grieving. In addition, it is vital to have the proper training and know how to apply the training tools to each unique situation so that you can help your client navigate the difficult process of grieving. In this paper I will detail 5 categories of tools and explain how they might be used in grief and loss coaching.

The first tool has to do with how to attend to those who are suffering and within this category I would like to discuss 3 ways that coaches can do so. The first way to attend to someone who is suffering is to commit to being very cautious. My wife and I have experienced some multiple, devastating losses in the last few years. We have learned so much from the different ways that some people have been very cautious with us and from others who have been just plain hurtful and obnoxious. The people who have been cautious have sent loving texts saying that they are praying for us, put meals on our front porch, and called us or stopped by and just listened to us vent and given us hugs. The second way to attend to someone who is suffering is to accept their words and what they say. Trust and confidentiality is an important aspect here. We have grumbled and complained and shared our anger and hurt with people we trust and they have not judged us for doing so. In fact they have reminded us of how David, in the book of psalms, shared his anger, hurt, and different emotions. The third way is to affirm their dignity and value. When we had two of our children do some hurtful and illegal things, we had friends who came along side of us and affirmed that we were good and loving parents and gave examples of things that they admired in us and had seen us do. When a client is suffering and processing their grief I

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would use the above methods according to the need of the situation and according to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The second tool concerns assessing the client's life cycle stage and helping them to navigate to a positive future from the point that they are currently. If a married client came to me I would determine which of the 7 life cycle stages that they were in: 1. newly married. 2. First child. 3. School children. 4. Teens. 5. Young adults. 6. Mid years. 7. Retirement. It should be fairly easy to identify which life cycle stage a client is in by interviewing them and listening to their story. In some cases a client may be experiencing 2 stages at the same time. For instance, if the client gets married or remarried later in life, they could be in the mid-life or retirement stage as well as the teens stage at the same time. After listening to their story and identifying their loss a coach can then help the client to come up with a plan on how to move forward by helping them to understand their grief. Keep in mind that women may want to talk much more about their loss and men may want to isolate and do something about it. Talking with the client about the purpose of loss can be very beneficial as well.

The third tool has to do with coaching someone in the aftermath of a disaster. The client may be experiencing sub-syndromal impact. Subsyndromal impact is a term that describes manifestations or symptoms in a person's behavior that are not necessarily diagnosable but are still real and need to be addressed. Symptoms include cognitive impairments, emotional reactions, behavioral reactions, physiological reactions, and spiritual reactions. If a client is experiencing one or more of these symptoms I would coach them from a Christian worldview. I would help them to look at the big picture and use biblical scripture, stories, and personal examples to help them with their issues. For instance, the client may say that they are getting very angry at small triggers and that their brain feels like it is being flooded with an overload of

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thoughts and emotions such as having road rage. In this case I might suggest setting aside a quiet time each day and teaching them how to meditate on God's word and to memorize a scripture that they could recite to help calm them down when they are tempted to feel angry and act out. If they are doubting their faith then I would talk about how I have dealt with my own struggles and discuss the positive things that can come out of difficult times, such as a deeper and more mature faith in Jesus.

The fourth tool has to do with helping someone who has experienced the loss of a loved one. Creating an on-line memorial is a relatively new grieving tool that falls under the category of creating a memorial. Interest in these on-line memorials seems to be growing and I can understand why. Funeral services in our culture, in general, have become shorter and happen sooner after a death, if at all. There is something about the support of loved ones being present physically that ministers to those who have lost a family member or close friend. An online memorial is an attempt to help with honoring and remembering the deceased. We live in a computer age where a high percentage of people have access to a computer and to Wi-Fi. An online memorial affords people the opportunity to be a part of what has happened and to mourn in their own private way on their own time and schedule. It can provide opportunities for loved ones who are unable to attend a funeral or service to participate in the memorial by sharing photos, music, poems, etc. There are several on-line websites that can assist in setting up an on-line memorial and they vary in price and services. They include: Forever Missed, GatheringUs, iLasting, Never Gone, Qeepr, Remembered, Skymorials, and Tributes.

The fifth tool that a coach might use is the power of perspective. When we have a godly perspective it changes our response in a positive manner. For example, in the Old Testament in the book of 2 Chronicles chapter 20, Jehoshaphat starts his day routinely like any other day and

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then he and his kingdom suddenly become surrounded by enemies. It looks like there is no way out. However, Jehoshaphat does not allow fear to creep in. Because his habit is to spend time with God every morning, he has a godly perspective before the troubles come. This is ideal. However, many people do not spend time with the Lord daily and even if they do they may experience a faith crisis when a tragedy or trauma hits. It is important as a coach to allow the client to voice their frustrations, doubts, and fears and to validate these. As they do so we must gently but truthfully encourage them with a godly, eternal focus.