

Grief and Loss Counseling: Biblical Foundations

Capstone Essay

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Module One

Grief can be a complicated issue but one thing's for sure, no one living on the planet can escape it. Eventually, it will catch you. I don't think in American culture we do grief well; we get in a hurry and want to rush it along, grief takes time. We, as a society, lend support to the bereaved for a couple of weeks and then the griever is on their own. In the lecture by Dr. Freda Crews entitled "Grief and Loss," she discusses the stages of grief most people experience: anger, shock, denial, bargaining, depression and acceptance. These do not occur in any particular order nor does everyone experience each stage. She states that normal grief should last 12-18 months depending on the individual. I find that statistic surprising. In my personal experience, people who have lost a child or a spouse tend to grieve much longer than that. The paradigm that caught my attention in this module was that of abnormal grief. There are some key factors that a counselor should take note of to ensure that a client gets adequate help. According to Dr. Crews, people experiencing abnormal grief can exhibit the following signs:

- Completely disown their pain
- Enshrinement of the deceased
- Psychosis
- Somatic complaints
- Angry withdrawal
- Obsessing over the loss
- Lingering depression

Untreated abnormal grief can have life-long implications, so it important for the counselor to notice when it is happening and refer them to other professionals when necessary.

Module Two

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Often in the throes of grief, people experience guilt over the loss. According to Dr. Kevin Ellers in his video presentation “Survivor Guilt and Resiliency,” there are various types of guilt. There is real guilt in which a person actually caused the harm. There is imagined guilt where a person imagines that if they had chosen a different course of action they could have altered the outcome. A third type of guilt that was discussed is survivor guilt. Survivor guilt often follows a traumatic event. A client may struggle with questions such as “Why did I survive instead of them?” There are steps a counselor can take to help their client. According to Dr. Ellers, the following are beneficial:

- Provide a safe environment for people to express their feelings of guilt
- Let people understand their trauma story
- Help people understand how they feel guilt
- Explore the factors that contribute to feelings of guilt
- Mourning the loss is an important step in healing
- Help them see their survival is a gift from God

Module Three

When a person’s loss is caused by a crisis or traumatic event, early intervention is a must to avoid post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In the lecture “Peer Support and Accountability” given by professor Joshua Straub, he recommended using the S.A.F.E.R. model to help reduce the risk of PTSD. In using the S.A.F.E.R model, it is recommended, when possible, to use peer support to strengthen the level of trust. The first step in the model is “S,” stabilize the situation. Be a calming force and provide for basic needs when appropriate, and be present. The “A” in this model stands for acknowledging the crisis. If the victim wants, let them tell what happened and reflect back to them what is said. Don’t try to fix them, just be a loving presence and listen to their story. Be a safe place for them to express themselves. The “F” in the model stands for facilitating. Let them know that what they are feeling and experiencing is a “normal reaction to

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an abnormal event.” The “E” is to encourage and equip. A counselor can guide them in stress management techniques and provide them with information in coping techniques. It is a good idea to have printouts ready to give them so they can review it when the chaos has diminished and they can think more clearly. The “R” is for recovery and referral. Verbalizing an expectation of recovery can also aid in their progress of healing. “He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds.” Psalms 147:3 NLT

Module Four

When a person is grieving, they can feel like they have lost all hope. Hope is an important emotion for a Christian to have! In the panel presentation by Dwight Bain and Georgia Shaffer, they pointed out that hope is the second most powerful positive emotion in the Bible referring to 1 Corinthians 13. They spoke about true hope and false hope. False hope is trusting in things other than God. Many people trust in money for their security. We see in the life of Job that having riches is not true security, it can all be snatched away in an instant. Scripture says, “Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.” 1 Timothy 6:17. True hope is to hope in God. “For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” Romans 8:24-25. In counseling someone struggling with hopelessness, a counselor can offer some suggestions for ‘activities of hope.’ One such activity is encouraging clients to personalize scripture in order strengthen their hope. For example, when reading a Bible passage a client inserts their name where it applies to make it more personal. Another activity a client can do is to start a Hope Journal. They can also find someone who has had a similar struggle and overcame the odds. There are healing rituals that can also be effective

in helping them such as prayer, scripture reading, attending church and meditation just to name a few.

Module Five

When a client is grieving, they may have a difficult time remembering just how rich life can be. In the final module of this term, Dr. Tim Clinton, president of the AACC, taught “Celebrating Life”. He suggested encouraging clients to write down the defining moments of their life, such as marriage, birth of a child and other memorable events. Having a client walk down memory lane can help them see how God has guided them and that even if they are struggling God will still walk with them on their path. As a counselor or coach, using this technique can help guide others through challenging life events and offer hope. “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2

References

Light University Online. (2011). *GLCO 501 Grief and Loss Counseling: Biblical Foundations Course Materials*. Forest, VA.