



## R-Group Process

# CONNECTING TO GRIEF

**Goal:** To connect to grief in our lives in a way that leads us toward a mature heart. To feel our own pain, as well as the pain of others. To connect to compassion for others. To experience compassion from others. To commune with others at the foot of the Cross.

**Energy:** Lover

**Materials:** None

**Teaching:** The gateway emotion to the Heart/Lover is sadness (the other Quadrants: Warrior -- Anger; Mind -- Fear; Sovereign -- Joy). From sadness/grieving we move toward compassion for others. The capacity to grieve is evidence of an open heart. Conversely, the lack of compassion or empathy for others points to an underdeveloped heart.

Grief is a type of deep sadness caused by loss, disaster, misfortune or suffering. It is natural to grieve over the death of a loved one, the end of a relationship, unfulfilled dreams, loss of a job, pain in another's life and many other situations in life where there is an ending or pain. Grieving includes allowing whatever feelings arise to simply be present, without denying or trying to ignore them. In grieving we face the pain of loss and invite God and trusted others into this pain without judgment.

**What happens if we do not grieve?** It does not lead us to compassion and an open heart, but instead we get stuck. One could choose to deny the presence of pain and attempt to go about life as if the loss never occurred. However, when we try to deny the pain, it is likely to come out sideways. This could look like anger, rage, resentment, becoming manipulative, over protective or many other false behaviors. It will certainly lead us to shut down part of our heart and limit our capacity to love God and others and accept their love for us. How else might denying the presence of loss show up in our lives?

Another way that someone may choose to not grieve is to stay stuck in the story. At the surface, it may look like this person is grieving because they are always in pain. However, by staying stuck in the story, they are denying the reality of the loss. Like the person who denies the pain, they may also experience resentment and direct that to God or others. They may form an attachment to needing answers to their question of “why” (Why did this need to happen, why me, why would God allow this, etc.) They may become fearful of starting anything new, and become overprotective of loved ones. They may see themselves as the eternal victim. When someone stays stuck in the story, they cannot receive compassion from God and others. Have any of you been in this situation, where you did not grieve, but stayed stuck in the story?

**The Process:** *We are going to do an exercise that helps us connect to sadness. (If you have a co-leader, model the exercise with them. If you do not have a co-leader, ask if someone would be willing to take a risk and volunteer to go first.) One at a time, starting with the person on your left, we are going to ask you, “Tell me your greatest loss.” You will respond, “My greatest loss is...” and the person who asked the question will respond, “Thank you.” We will go around the circle three times (total of 12-15 questions) without stopping.*

Explain to the group: *We understand that by definition there should only be one “greatest loss.” The point of this exercise is to help us identify the losses we have experienced. It is a tool to help us access sadness. When you ask someone to “tell you his greatest loss” do not deviate from these words. Each time state the question in the same way. Do not add any qualifiers to the sentence, like, “Now, really tell me your greatest loss.” This minimizes what they have already shared. When you respond to someone’s question to tell them your great loss, respond each time with “My greatest loss is...”*

*Each time, the one who asks says “thank you.”*

Tell the group that everyone will have an opportunity to be asked about their greatest losses.

Ask the group: *Which of you is already connecting with some of your losses? Would one of you like to go first?*

Have everyone in the group put down their notebooks in order to focus and be present to the one who volunteered.

*Now, starting with the person on your left, each group member will go around clockwise and ask you: “Tell me your greatest loss.”*

*You will respond: My greatest loss is...”*

*The man or woman who asked then responds, “Thank you.”*

*We will go around the circle THREE times without stopping.*

(So, if there are six members in the group, each person will be asked 15 times to say their greatest loss." The one who volunteers will be asked the question three times by each of the other five in the group.)

If someone deviates from these words: "Tell me your greatest loss." "My greatest loss is..." "Thank you." Remind them what we are asking them to say. It is your job to coach them with these instructions. Do it from the beginning and everyone will follow suit. If someone says they do not have any more and they have not gone around three times, thank them, then move on to the next group member. Come back to them at the end and see if they would like to continue. Do this before you take your turn. Once the 1st volunteer has been asked the question by every member three times, then ask for the next volunteer. Repeat as stated above.

**Debrief Questions:** The purpose of the debrief time is to continue to build safety and an awareness that we are all the same. It creates more opportunity to experience community. AVOID spending a lot of time teaching or speaking during the debrief. Remember, sadness leads to compassion, so let the group experience compassion for one another.

- What was that like for you?
- What came up for you?
- What did you notice about what was shared in the group?
- What are you aware of?
- When one person shares something, ask the group if anyone else identified with that.

Then, ask them to say more if they would like. Briefly, talk about what you are aware of and what it brought up for you.

**Teaching Piece:** How does grieving lead to compassion?

- In grieving, we connect to our humanity and all the reality that goes with it.
- In being vulnerable to the state of our heart, we are open to God and others.
- In risking experiencing grief/sadness we risk experiencing compassion from God and others.
- From this place of receiving, we now give compassion.
- We identify with all humans in their suffering, in their sin and its consequences. We identify with their longings -- ill pursued and rightly pursued.
- We enter into communion with others at the foot of the cross and are awash with God's grace.

## TAKE HOME

### JESUS A MAN OF SORROW

“Who has believed our report?  
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?  
For he grew up before him like a young plant,  
And like a root out of dry ground;  
He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him,  
And no beauty that we should desire him.  
He was despised and rejected by men;  
A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;  
And as one from whom men hide their faces  
He was despised, and we esteemed him not.” (Isaiah 53: 1-3 RSV)

As you went through the “My Greatest Loss” Exercise, what was one loss that stands out to you? Maybe this is a loss that you have previously denied or maybe it is a loss where you have gotten stuck in the story. This week, what would it look like to be intentional about inviting God and one trusted other into the pain of that loss? Here are a few ideas:

Find pictures from that time in your life when this loss occurred. Spend a few hours, somewhere where you will not be disturbed, and look at those pictures. As memories come up, in prayer, invite God into those memories and the pain those memories bring up. You may want to consider doing this with one other person, and allowing them to ask you to share about those memories, then pray together.

Prayerfully read through 2 Corinthians 1:3-7. Pray through the loss. Tell God about the pain, the loss of hope, how you feel about it. Welcome whatever emotions come up for you (sadness, anger, fear, shame, etc.,) and imagine yourself before God and expressing these emotions before Him. Read through 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 again, and pray again asking God to reveal to you His presence when the loss occurred. Again, welcome whatever emotions come up for you in His presence. Lastly, read 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 one last time. Prayerfully asking God to use this experience of loss to help you be more compassionate to others.