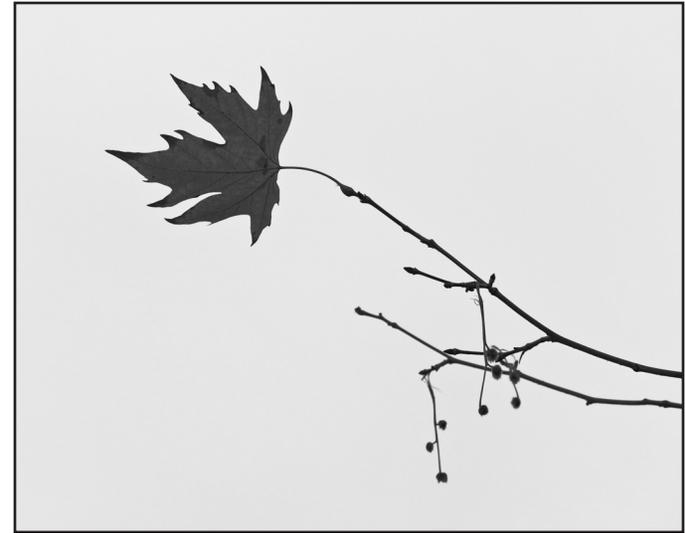


The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group.
- to honor the group by letting the leader know if I will be absent and to come to the group one last time and say goodbye if I need to quit.
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others.
- to avoid cross talk, giving feedback or trying to fix anyone
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and not tell other people's stories.
- to listen to what others share with an open heart, and to share deeply in my turn.

Covenant Groups



Loss and Grief

Loss and Grief

Chalice Lighting

We bereaved are not alone.

We belong to the largest company in all the world--the company of those who have known suffering.

When it seems that our sorrow is too great to be borne, let us think of the great family of the heavy-hearted into which our grief has given us entrance, and inevitably, we will feel about us their arms, their sympathy, their understanding.

-Helen Keller

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support.

Shared Readings:

Doesn't everything die at last, and all too soon? Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

-Mary Oliver

Then a woman said, "Speak to us of joy and sorrow." And he answered, "Your joy is your sorrow unmasked. And the self-same well from which your laughter rises was often times filled with your tears."

-Kahlil Gibran

To live in this world you must be able to do three things; to love what is mortal; to hold it against your bones knowing your own life depends on it; and, when the time comes to let it go, to let it go.

-Mary Oliver

It doesn't interest me how old you are... I want to know if you have touched the center of your own sorrow, if you have been opened by life's betrayals or have become shriveled and closed from fear of further pain! I want to know if you can sit with pain, mine or your own, without

moving to hide it or fade it or fix it. It doesn't interest me to know where you live or how much money you have. I want to know if you can get up after the night of grief and despair, weary and bruised to the bone, and do what needs to be done...

-Oriah Mountain Dreamer

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

Round I

Going around the circle, look at the losses that you have written in the stained glass picture and simply name one, if you are willing. Go around the group several times, or until people no longer have losses to share.

Round II

If you are willing, share more deeply about your feelings of grief and loss in response to the homework questions.

Round III

Are there thoughts you have about the idea of learning to let go of little things in preparation for letting go of more important parts of your life?

Closing Words Read the following prayer in unison:

I pray for all of us who mourn.

May we face each day with courage, strength, and hope.

May nothing destroy what we have been given.

May nothing erase our memories of joy.

May all the good of the past overpower the fear of the future.

May our current laments of grief eventually change into prayers of thanksgiving.

I pray for all of us who mourn.

-Manual of Grief Counseling

Group Business

Leader's Notes for Loss and Grief

Preparations or any special instructions

As people come in, give them a bulletin and a pencil and tell them to write one thing or person they have grieved for in each of the stained glass segments. The object of this exercise is to help your group members to get in touch with their losses, great and small. Have some tissues handy...you may have members who weep.

Chalice Lighting: (2 min) Read the Chalice Lighting text provided in the bulletin

Sharing of Joys and Concerns: (10 min)

Silence: (3 min) Give your group the gift of three minutes of silence.

Shared Readings: (5 min) Ask one of the group members to begin the readings, then have them take turns around the room.

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening:

Round I (15 min) Ask your group members to look at the losses they've written down and, if they are willing, to simply name one, without explanation. If they are not willing to name a loss, they may simply shake their head when their turn comes. Go around the group several times, or until most people no longer have losses to share.

Round II (40 min) Ask each person to share more deeply about their feelings of grief and loss in response to the homework questions. Be sure to have a copy or two of the homework available in case someone has forgotten theirs.

Round III (15 min) Read Christine Robinson's quote from the homework (provided below), then ask your group members if there are thoughts they may have about the idea of learning to let go of little things in preparation for letting go of more important parts of their lives.

"Practice all the letting go's you can. From letting go of your thoughts in a meditation practice to letting go of your attachments to the things and relationships that leave our lives constantly, practice letting go. Every goodbye you say is a practice for the big goodbye. Don't let a day go by without letting go of something!"

Closing ritual or Closing Words: (5 min) Ask the group to read the prayer printed in the bulletin in unison. You may wish to allow a few minutes of silence before going on to the group business.

Group Business: (5 min)

Pass out Q and Q (homework) for next time.

Loss and grief

Every week, if not every day, we face losses. Our losses can cover the full gamut. We experience loss that is relatively minor and part of everyday life, such as the wearing out or breaking of cherished possessions. We experience losses that cause deep sadness and regret, like the loss of a beloved pet, or the acrimonious end of a friendship. And there are losses accompanied by profound grief: we lose our home, our job, even our spouse, or our child.

Despite our familiarity with loss and the emotions that come with it, we are tempted sometimes to suppress our feelings. We look the other way; we deny or rationalize by telling ourselves, "It's not so bad. No need to make a fuss."

Grieving our losses as they come keeps things from building up. Dealing with our smaller losses can be practice for dealing with more difficult losses, such as when we must let go of a life dream, when someone close to us dies, when we ourselves face death.

Practice all the letting go's you can. From letting go of your thoughts in a meditation practice to letting go of your attachments to the things and relationships that leave our lives constantly, practice letting go. Every goodbye you say is a practice for the big goodbye. Don't let a day go by without letting go of something!
Christine Robinson

Suffering ceases to be suffering in some way at the moment it finds a meaning.
Viktor Frankl

To be human is to know loss, and indeed, the more fully human we are, the more loss we will know and the deeper we will feel the losses; for the more we love and care, the more we have to lose. All the things to which we become attached are transient; they pass; they decay; they die. And when we lose someone or something we love, our response is grief.
Rev. William Murry

Man, when he does not grieve, hardly exists.
Antonio Porchia

We are not accustomed to thinking of grief in any way other than that associated with death. Nevertheless, people grieve when they clearly cease to have the protections of childhood. They grieve when they go away from home for the first time. They grieve when they have to give up their first love. They grieve when they suffer a serious illness or injury. They grieve when they leave each stage of life for another. People grieve when they change jobs or homes; when they leave one beloved and comfortable community for another. For a teenager the end of an infatuation or friendship can bring on a grief as profound and as serious as the grief which may follow the death of a grandparent.

Rev. John Nichols

The practice of deep listening should be directed towards oneself first. If you don't know how to listen to your own suffering, it will be difficult to listen to the suffering of another person or another group of people.
Thich Nhat Hanh

Think about some of the losses you have had over the years. Make a list and consider the following:

Was one loss especially important? Why was it so significant?

Does one linger, unfinished? What about that loss seems unfinished?

How do you get through losses and endings?

Think about your recovery from a significant loss. How were people important during that time?

There is a saying that what does not kill us makes us stronger. Does this saying ring true for you? Why or why not?