A Biblical Model of Grieving: Hope in the Midst of Your Grief

The Big Idea: The following is a 1,000-word summary of God's Healing for Life's Losses. In just 1,000 words we contrast the world's way of grieving with the Word's way of grieving and growing.

How Do We Face Suffering?

How do we face suffering face-to-face with God rather than turning our backs on God during the grieving process? What does the journey with God look like as we find hope when we're hurting?

In finding God's healing for life's losses, we have two basic options. We can turn to the
The World's Way: Is That All There Is?

Students of human grief have developed various models that track typical grief responses. Swiss-born psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, in her book On Death and Dying, popularized a five-stage model of grieving based upon her research into how terminally ill persons respond to the news of their terminal illness. Her five stages have since been used worldwide to describe all grief responses.

A Researched-Based Model of the Grief Process

- **Denial**: This is the shock reaction. “It can’t be true.” “No, not me.” We refuse to believe what happened.

- **Anger**: Resentment grows. “Why me?” “Why my child?” “This isn’t fair!” We direct blame toward God, others, and ourselves. We feel agitated, irritated, moody, and on edge.

- **Bargaining**: We try to make a deal, insisting that things be the way they used to be. “God, if You heal my little girl, then I’ll never drink again.” We call a temporary truce with God.

- **Depression**: Now we say, “Yes, me.” The courage to admit our loss brings sadness (which can be healthy mourning and grieving) and/or hopelessness (which is unhealthy mourning and grieving).

- **Acceptance**: Now we face our loss calmly. It is a time of silent reflection and regrouping. “Life has to go on. How? What do I do now?”

Understanding the World’s Limitations

These proposed stages in the grief process seek to track typical grief responses. However, they do not attempt to assess if this is what is best to occur. Nor could they assess, simply through scientific research, whether these responses correspond to God’s process for hurting (grieving) and hoping (growing).

We must understand something about research in a fallen world. At best, it describes what typically occurs. It cannot, with assurance and authority, prescribe what should
occur. Research attempts to understand the nature of human nature are thwarted by the fallenness of our nature and of our world.

As Dallas Willard explains:

Secular psychology is not in an “at-best” set of circumstances. The question of who we are and what we are here for is not an easy one, of course. For those who must rely upon a strictly secular viewpoint for insight, such questions are especially tough. Why? Because we do in fact live in a world in ruins. We do not exist now in the element for which we were designed. So in light of that truth, it’s essentially impossible to determine our nature by observation alone, because we are only seen in a perpetually unnatural position.

**The Word’s Way: All You Need for Your Healing Journey**

Understanding these research limitations, and believing in the sufficiency of Scripture, we can focus on a revelation-based model. We can address and assess the typical five stages of grieving, however, we can move beyond them.

The biblical approach to grieving and growing identifies eight scriptural “stages” in our responses to life’s losses. God’s way equips us to move through hurt to hope in Christ—from grieving to growing. We call it “Biblical Sufferology”—a scripturally wise and practically relevant understanding of suffering.

**Biblical Sufferology**

*Sustaining in Suffering: Stages of Hurt—“It’s Normal to Hurt and Necessary to Grieve”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Typical Grief Response</th>
<th>Biblical Grief Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage One</td>
<td>Denial/Isolation</td>
<td>Candor: Honesty with Myself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Two</td>
<td>Anger/Resentment</td>
<td>Complaint: Honesty with God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Three</td>
<td>Bargaining/Works</td>
<td>Cry: Asking God for Help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Four</td>
<td>Depression/Alienation</td>
<td>Comfort: Receiving God’s Help</td>
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- Albert Mohler
- All About Him
- Association of Biblical Counselors Blog
- Biblical Counseling for Women
- CCEF Blog
- Christ Is Deeper
- Church History Blog
- Church Matters: The 9 Marks Blog
- Church Relevance
- Counsel One Another
- Counseling with Confidence
- Desiring God Blog
- Dialogue: 3rd John 8
- Don’t Stop Believing
- Ed Stetzer
- For the Love of God
- Grace Dependent
### Healing in Suffering: Stages of Hope—“It’s Possible to Hope and Supernatural to Grow”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Typical Acceptance Response</th>
<th>Biblical Growth</th>
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<tr>
<td>Stage Five</td>
<td>Regrouping</td>
<td>Waiting: Trusting with Faith</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage Six</td>
<td>Deadening</td>
<td>Wailing: Groaning with Hope</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage Seven</td>
<td>Despairing/Doubting</td>
<td>Weaving: Perceiving with Grace</td>
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<td>Stage Eight</td>
<td>Digging Cisterns</td>
<td>Worshipping: Engaging with Love</td>
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The first four stages involve sustaining in suffering, which we explore in chapters two through five of *God's Healing for Life's Losses*. The second four stages relate to healing in suffering, which we explore in chapters six through nine.

Please always remember that these “stages” are a relational process, not sequential steps. Grieving and growing is not a neat, nice package. It isn’t a tidy procedure.

Grieving and growing is messy because life is messy. Moving through hurt to hope is a two-steps-forward, one-step-backwards endeavor. We don’t “conquer a stage” and never return to it.

Rather than picturing a linear, step-by-step route, imagine a three dimensional maze with many possible paths, frequent detours, backtracking, and even the ability to reside in more than one “stage” at the same time.

However, positive movement is possible. In fact, it is promised. You can find God’s healing for your losses. You can find hope in your hurt.
Whatever your grieving experience has been like up to this point, don’t quit. Don’t give up.

Join the journey. Experience the biblical reality that it’s normal to hurt and necessary to grieve. Learn how to move from denial to personal honesty (candor), from anger to honesty with God (complaint), from bargaining to asking God for help (crying out), and from depression to receiving God’s help (comfort).

Stay on the path. Experience the biblical reality that it’s possible to hope and supernatural to grow. Learn how to move from regrouping to trusting with faith (waiting on God), from deadening to groaning with hope (wailing to God), from despair to perceiving with grace (weaving in God’s truth), and from digging cisterns to engaging with love (worshipping God and ministering to others).

God truly does provide you with everything you need for life and godliness. Through the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the people of God, you have all you need for your healing journey.

**Join the Journey**

1. What is your initial response to this eight-stage biblical approach compared to the typical five-stage approach of the world?

2. What do you think it would be like to apply the stages of grieving (candor, complaint, crying out, and comfort) and the stages of growth (waiting, wailing, weaving, and worshipping) to your grief and growth journey?
I first learned the Kubler-Ross stages of grief at a Christian college. I understood the factual true-ness of what I was told, but I remember thinking that it sure is a bad ending for grieving... just accepting the fact of the loss and living in the pain forever. The hopelessness of this really hit home when My husband died very unexpectedly. I was thrilled to find this resource for “the rest of the story”... GOD'S ending, which is really just the b
Gret Machlan says:
August 15, 2010 at 7:25 am

Thanks Bob — this is tremendously helpful for me personally and in my clinical practice. I will definitely check out the book and refer clients to it. Thanks for your faithfulness to God’s call on your life. Blessings — all ways!

Bob says:
August 16, 2010 at 8:23 am

Thanks Gret, for your encouraging words. Increasingly I’m hearing from counselors, chaplains, pastors, and small group leaders about how they are using the book to help those to whom they minister.

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Jan Evett says:
April 26, 2013 at 6:55 am

Bob,

I just posted a link to this article on one of my Facebook groups in response to someone who posted a photo of the 5 Stages of Grief. Just wanted to make you aware that I referred readers to your blog post!

Thank you for providing this resource. This is the link, if you would like to see the FB group “The Widows Walk Grief Support Group” –
https://www.facebook.com/groups/63869077910/
Spiritual Direction
Spiritual Formation
Suffering