Part I

Getting Started
APPROACHES TO BEREAVEMENT MINISTRY

There are a number of ways to approach bereavement ministry. Some churches have clergy people who are able to spend considerable amounts of time in face-to-face or phone contact with those who are grieving. Others rely on a combination of clergy and lay ministers; some of these, in fact, have bereavement ministries carried out almost entirely by lay people. In other churches, the amount of personal visitation is far less. In some cases, a bereavement support group is set up to supplement personal visitation and comes, in fact, to play a crucial role in the bereavement ministry.

The program described in this book is meant to be very flexible and can be used by anyone from a single clergy person to a large team of clergy and lay people. It can replace or supplement the bereavement ministry that already exists in your church.

No matter how you choose to use the resources in this book, we suggest that you always include three main elements as you minister to each grieving person:

1. An initial visit, when bereavement ministers bring a packet of materials appropriate for the situation (the “Initial Packet”).
2. A program of regular letter-writing over at least the first year of bereavement (the “Monthly Messages”).
3. An accompanying schedule of personal visitation.

Many churches have found that a bereavement support group can be very helpful to grieving people. We have included guidelines for creating such a group so that you can include it in your bereavement ministry if you would like to do so.

WHAT THIS BOOK CONTAINS

I. Basic Resources

The heart of this program is the material included in the Basic Resources section. These materials have been created with the assumption that those who suffer a deep loss become involved in an ongoing process of grief—a process that creates different needs at different points in the process. The Basic Resources, then, have two primary components:

A. An “Initial Packet,” which contains materials to be given to the grieving person immediately after the loss occurs. These materials address the person’s needs during the initial phase of grief.

B. “Monthly Messages” for the second week, the first month, and so on, through the first year of the grief experience. These materials are intended to address the issues which arise as people work their way through the grief process.

The Basic Resources come in three sets: one for adults, one for children, and one for teenagers. There is some overlap (the Initial Packet page entitled “Prayer,” for example, is used in the section for children as well as the section for teenagers; the Monthly Message
entitled “Working With Your Grieving” is included in the section for teenagers as well as the section for adults), but, in general, the three sets have been tailored to meet the needs of these respective age groups.

2. Supplemental Resources

The section entitled “Resources for Holidays and Special Days” offers supplemental materials that bereavement ministers may send on special occasions. For example, the first Christmas after a loved one has died and the birthday of the deceased are often painful times. The section entitled “Resources for Special Circumstances” includes materials helpful in various specific experiences of grief. Circumstances addressed include:

- death of a spouse
- murder
- infertility
- natural disasters
- death of a child (of any age)
- rape or other assault
- death of a parent
- death of a pet
- suicide

Materials included for these special circumstances give directions for assembling an individualized Initial Packet and, in most cases, also give directions for sending ongoing Monthly Messages.

A final section includes a number of miscellaneous resources for bereavement ministers. Included here are forms helpful in organizing your bereavement program as well as detailed instructions for setting up an ongoing bereavement support group. We encourage you to familiarize yourself with both the Basic Resources and the Supplemental Resources so that you can make full use of them.

3. The CD-ROM

The CD-ROM that comes with this manual contains files for all of the reproducible materials offered here. Those materials that you will want to customize, such as letters, appear as Microsoft Word files. Others appear as PDFs (portable document files) and are to be opened and printed without alteration.

The CD is searchable both by page numbers (from this manual) and by topic.
Grieving Adults

Setting Up a Program of Bereavement Care for Grieving Adults

There are many kinds of losses that can create an experience of grief, including the death of a family member or friend. The following materials will be appropriate for many different situations.

Initial Contact

As suggested on page 12, you should make an initial visit to the grieving person as soon as possible. The following materials are designed to be given to the grieving person at your initial visit:

- Opening Letter (which introduces yourself and the program)
- Physical Symptoms of Grieving (page 24)
- Finances (page 123)
- Getting to Sleep (page 28)
- Meditation and Spiral (pages 238, 264–265)

In addition, the following Monthly Messages should be used during the first year of bereavement (see pages 12–14 for instructions on incorporating these messages into personalized letters or otherwise including them in bereavement care):

- The Grieving Process (page 32) 1 month after loss
- Journal Reflection #1 (page 269)
- Common Myths About Grief (page 33) 2 months after loss
- Exercise and Nutrition (page 26)
- Journal Reflection #2 (page 270)
- You and Your Emotions (page 34) 3 months after loss
- Reading List and Support Groups (page 30)
- Secret Feelings (if applicable) (page 241)
- Journal Reflection #3 (page 271)
- Enough Faith? (page 36) 4 months after loss
- I Know There’s Life After Death (page 39)
- Journal Reflection #4 (page 272)
- Working With Your Grieving (page 37) 5 months after loss
Journal Reflection #5 (page 273)
Returning to “Normal” (page 58) 6 months after loss
On Your Own (page 129–130)
Journal Reflection #6 (page 274)
Dealing With Criticism (page 40) 7 months after loss
Journal Reflection #7 (page 275)
More About Exercise and Nutrition (page 41) 8 months after loss
Journal Reflection #8 (page 276)
How Will I Know I’m Feeling Better? (page 42) 9 months after loss
Journal Reflection #9 (page 277)
Poetry or a Special Note (page 43) 10 months after loss
Journal Reflection #10 (page 278)
Getting Involved Again (page 43) 11 months after loss
Journal Reflection #11 (page 279)
The Journey Continues (page 44) 1 year after loss
Journal Reflection #12 (page 280)

Also add “Special Day Messages” on pages 118–119 and Bereavement Surveys on pages 291–292 as appropriate.

Your Opening Letter will consist of the following: acknowledging the death, letting the family know about your program and what they can expect in terms of visits and monthly letters, and ending with a sense of gratitude for being allowed to walk with them in their journey.
(Please read Alan Wolfelt’s work on “companioning and treating” at www.centerforloss.com.)

Information for your record-keeping cards:

Side 1
Name of survivor:
Address:
Phone:
E-mail:
Spouse’s name:
Children (names and ages):
DOD (date of death):
DOB (date of birth):
WA (wedding anniversary):
one’s present sorrow. Sometimes faith is the courage to trust in spite of feeling to the contrary.
— R. S. Sullender, Grief and Growth: Pastoral Resources for Emotional and Spiritual Growth

After a major loss, it is not uncommon to question our faith. We may ask why this has occurred, we may feel angry at God, or we may feel nothing at all toward God. Such feelings are normal. True faith, as R. S. Sullender reminds us, is not a matter of feeling, but of the courage to go on believing and hoping.

Our thoughts and prayers are with you.

For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven . . . .
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance.

— Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4

Working With Your Grieving

How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

— Psalm 13:2

Your life has been changed forever. This is a reality that takes time to fully absorb. Those who are grieving often feel emotional and social isolation, anger, and loss of vigor for life. Try not to be too hard on yourself.

One exercise you can do to connect with some of the life, energy, and the resources of the relationship that you had with your loved one is to close your eyes and, instead of seeing the person who died as small and distant, see the person life-size. Instead of seeing (her/him) far away, see (her/him) close beside you. Instead of seeing (her/him) being still, see (her/him) moving.

You cannot replace the person you loved, but you can preserve the benefits and the qualities of the relationship. Maybe there was warmth, intimacy, and deep friendship. Maybe there was intelligence, humor, and liveliness. Maybe you appreciate yourself more because of your relationship. Whatever it is, take those qualities and values that were present in your relationship in the past and imagine what form those values and qualities might take in your future, as they continue to live in you.

You may want to try writing a letter to the person who died addressing the following questions:

What qualities do I miss most about you?
What will I miss about our relationship?
What do I wish I hadn’t said?
What do I wish I would have said?
What do I wish I would not have done?
What do I wish I would have done?
What is the hardest thing I have to deal with?
What is one special memory I have of you?
What are some ways you will continue to live on in me?

We pray these suggestions will be helpful for you and allow you to feel the love of the person who died.

Returning to “Normal”

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit.

—Romans 8:26–27

What’s “normal”? Normal is different for you than for your friends because of what you have experienced. Death has a way of changing people, often making them stronger and wiser. Your sense of “normal” will change as you pass through the grieving experience, and it will be different from month to month.

Although your thoughts may be different from some of your friends, they may be normal for someone who is grieving. You may find yourself angrier or more irritable. You may worry more about money than others do. You may find you cry more easily or feel like being alone more often.

These emotions can catch you off-guard. You may be out shopping, catch a glimpse of someone who looks like your loved one, and feel like running away. Or you may hear a certain song that brings back strong memories for you. Returning to church may bring back many memories, including memories of the funeral. Anything can be a trigger and set you off crying, feeling confused, or feeling like you need to run. These are known as “grief attacks” and can be a common part of grief. Take a couple deep breaths, cry if you need to, step out for a moment or two, or do whatever you need to do to center yourself. These feelings are real, and it is important to acknowledge that they are there. It will be difficult at first, thinking you are seeing your loved one everywhere you go, for example, but it does get easier.

You may find it difficult going back to work, back to your regular activities, back to social get-togethers, or back to church. Sometimes people don’t know what to say to you, so they avoid you. Sometimes friends or family members will say things to you that hurt you. Of course, in most cases, they don’t mean any harm; they simply don’t know the right thing to say. As you deal with these painful experiences, you will become stronger, and each step of the pain will lead you through grieving and back to life.
We really do need each other; that is the way God made us. In the midst of your loss and your pain, may you discover again a sense of community.

*Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.*

—Isaiah 12:2

**I Know There’s Life After Death, Right?**

You may have always believed that there was life after death, but now you’re not sure. Or maybe you believed that there was life after death, and this particular death made you feel all the more sure of it.

Our faith has a lot to say about death—in the teaching of the prophets, in the Apostles’ Creed, and in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Scientists conduct research with people who claim that they have died and come back to life. Some people have claimed that in near-death experiences, they have left their body and found themselves hovering over their “dead” body. Their experiences vary, but many describe an overwhelming sense of love and reassurance.

If you should feel the presence of the person who died, or experience them in your dreams, know that you are not going crazy. Such experiences remind us of our belief that there is life after death, and that both the living and the dead share in the communion of saints of which all believers are a part. Accept these experiences as a source of comfort. If, on the other hand, you have dreams that replay themselves over and over or have nightmares, talk with someone who can help you understand your dreams so you can move forward into a restful night’s sleep.

Praying for the person who has died can allow you to continue to express your love for her or him, while at the same time begin to let (her/him) go.

*But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died so that you may not grieve as others who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.*

—1 Thessalonians 4:13–14

**Support Groups**

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God.*

—2 Corinthians 1:3–4
PRAYER

Do all this in prayer, asking for God’s help. Pray on every occasion, as the Spirit leads.

—Ephesians 6:18

What is prayer? Prayer is simply talking to God. We can talk to God using prayers like those said in church, or prayer can be like talking to a friend. When you talk with a friend, you talk for a while and your friend listens. When your friend talks, you listen. Sometimes you want to be alone with your friend so you can share stories you don’t want others to hear, so you may go to your bedroom, go for a walk, or go out to a restaurant. That’s what it is like with God too. You can talk to God anytime you like: at school, at home, at your sporting events, anywhere. Sometimes going for a walk outside helps. Or having a special place in your home or bedroom may help you concentrate on God better.

Try the following:

1. Set a table with a candle, a picture of nature, a book, a cross, a picture of Jesus, or whatever you find peaceful.

2. Talk to God about whatever is troubling you. Share your feelings with God, draw a picture, or write in your journal. (Your bereavement minister can give you some reflections that may help you in journaling.)

3. Listen to God. It’s hard to listen when you are around a lot of noise, so you might want to try turning off the television, radio, your phone, or music. Then close your eyes and find the quiet place inside your heart where you can enter into this love-filled room and see God waiting for you. He has been eagerly awaiting your visit and has something to say to you. What do you hear?

4. Thank God for listening. Know that God hears your prayers and answers them in a way that God knows is best for you and for others. Remember, God is not the great “wish-giver” in the sky who gives you what you want. Talking to God, or praying, is having a friendship with God, a friendship like one with earthly friends, only better.
What is meditation? Meditation is a way of quieting your body, your thoughts, and your feelings to listen to God. It allows you to gain insight or wisdom about yourself and others and bring peace to your life. Meditation as a tool can improve your concentration and give you control over your emotions so they don’t have control over you.

Start by practicing two to three minutes at the beginning, then work your way up. You can probably work your way up to five to ten minutes if you’re in early grade school, ten to twenty minutes if you’re in late grade school, and twenty to thirty minutes if you’re in junior high or high school. Set a timer and make a chart for yourself keeping track of your progress. Some days will be harder than others and you may even fall asleep, which is okay.

If you’re feeling restless before meditating, try stretching your back by bending forward, backward, and from side-to-side. While you’re meditating, if thoughts creep into your mind either let them pass through or write them down on a slip of paper. Then go back to concentrating on the exercise.

You can make up your own words to chant such as “love,” “peace,” “kindness,” etc., or try using images from nature. The following exercise is one way to meditate. You may find it hard to read this sheet and meditate at the same time. If so, you may want to record the following instructions on tape. Then play it back so you can simply listen to the instructions instead of reading them. Or you could have someone else read the instructions to you.

Start by sitting in an upright position (this can be in a chair or on the floor), uncross your legs (unless you are on the floor), and let your arms rest lightly on your lap. Close your eyes and take three deep breaths, breathing in through your nose and blowing out through your mouth. Starting with your feet, curl your toes and hold, 1, 2, 3, and relax. Slowly, work your way up from your feet, tightening each group of muscles to a count of three, and then relaxing. When you get to your head, scrunch your entire face and hold
to the count of three and relax. Take three more deep breaths, breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth, monitoring your body and making sure all your muscles are relaxed.

Next focus on the spot between your eyebrows. Concentrate on this area and imagine yourself breathing in through this spot in your forehead—breathing in the breath of God and blowing out anger. Breathe in peace and blow out fear. Breathe in love and blow out guilt. Next move your attention to your heart, and imagine yourself breathing in through this spot. Breathe in the breath of God and blow out anger. Breathe in peace and blow out fear. Breathe in love and blow out guilt. Still concentrating on your heart center, ask God your question or just “be” in God’s presence. Listen for your answer. Remember it may not be what you think it should. Then, thank God before you go.

When you have finished meditating, begin feeling your feet on the floor and your bottom on the chair (or the floor, if you are sitting on the floor). Feel your fingers and start to move them and when you are ready, you can open your eyes. You may want to write about your experience of meditating in a journal or dairy.
Making a Memory Book

Answer the questions in the spaces provided or make your own special “book” by writing your answers out on sheets of paper and then stapling them together or placing them in a folder. If you make a memory book, you may want to include photos or other things.

The full name of the person who died ______________________________________________

Where was that person born? ______________________________________________________

When was that person born? ______________________________________________________

When did that person die? _________________________________________________________

How old was the person when she/he died? __________________________________________

What was the person’s favorite color? ______________________________________________

What was the person’s favorite story? ______________________________________________

What was your favorite thing to do with the person? _________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

I liked the way the person used to ________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

I still think about that person when ________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

One special memory I have of the person who died is _________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Put your favorite picture of the person who died here.
FINANCES—WHAT TO DO IN THE FIRST MONTH

1. First:
   - Don’t throw anything away, even if it looks unimportant.
   - In the first few days and weeks after a major loss, try not to make any major decisions such as selling your home, moving, making a major investment, loaning money, or buying insurance.
   - Have a trusted friend help you.
   - If it is worrying you, make finances a matter of prayer.

2. Next, locate these important papers and start an estate drawer in a filing cabinet:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Additional Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Marriage certificate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Certificates of deposit in spouse’s name or joint</td>
<td>banker if you cannot find it. If you have no will, call the probate clerk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Car title/lease agreements</td>
<td>in your county. Check under local government listings.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Real estate deeds and titles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Health insurance policies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Spouse’s birth certificate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Safety deposit box location and key</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Divorce agreement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Most recent mortgage statement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Trust agreements (set up or beneficiary of)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Copies of the death certificate (at least twenty)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Managed portfolio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Partnership agreements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Will (Check with your lawyer or banker if you cannot find it. If you have no will, call the probate clerk in your county. Check under local government listings.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Life insurance policies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Social security records (all family members)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Military discharge papers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Naturalization papers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Pre- or postnuptial agreement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Title insurance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Stock option plans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Checking, saving, and money market</td>
<td>account statements (spouse/joint)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Credit cards (spouse/joint)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Retirement asset statements</td>
<td>(IRA, Keogh, Company Pension Plan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Mutual fund shares (spouse/joint)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Then, organize and pay your bills.

First, pay your mortgage, your health and property insurance, and utilities. You may want to wait to pay the full amount of other bills until you have a clearer picture of your finances. These include funeral directors, doctors, hospitals, or other creditors. Write them a letter advising them that you intend to pay but that you need time to determine your financial status. Send along a token payment.

Be aware of phony claims. If you are not familiar with a bill, write the creditor asking for a proof of the claim. To prevent fraud, do not use the day and month (only the year) in the obituary. Mail copies of the death certificate to all three credit-reporting bureaus:

- Equifax Office of Fraud Assistance; P.O. Box 105069; Atlanta, GA 30348
- Experian; P.O. Box 9530; Allen, TX 75013
- TransUnion; P.O. Box 6790, Fullerton, CA 92834

4. Make appointments to see your financial planner, accountant, and lawyer.

If you do not have an attorney, find one who specializes in “probate” law. He or she should be able to explain things easily to you. Ask friends and family for references, or contact either of these two agencies for a reference:

American Bar Association (ABA)
321 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL 60654
www.abanet.org
1-800-285-2221
(Offering lawyer referral and probate information.)

National Legal Aid and Defenders Association
1140 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 900
Washington, DC 20036
www.nlada.org
(202) 452-0620
(A leading advocate for low-income clients.)

Remember that lawyers charge by the hour, so try to have your papers sorted out before your appointment and bring them along.

5. Open a new bank account in your name. Also, set up an estate account. Your spouse’s debt will be paid from the estate account.

6. In some states, bank accounts and safety deposit boxes are frozen upon a death. Get proper authorization to have the assets or other property released.

7. Notify all insurance companies of the death and file claims.

8. Notify spouse’s employer(s) to file for benefits.
9. Transfer jointly held securities to your name.

10. Notify custodians for IRA, Keogh accounts, and any other retirement plans.

11. Call Social Security 7 a.m.–7 p.m. at 1-800-772-1213 or go to www.ssa.gov to apply for benefits. Call the Veterans’ Administration, if applicable, to apply for benefits.

(Look under United States Government in your phone book.)


Once you have taken care of the most pressing financial matters, you will need to create a new budget for yourself. Armstrong’s book has additional helpful suggestions in setting up your own personal files, budgeting, picking out a financial advisor, and many other great ideas! This book is now on-line and can be uploaded to your home computer through your local library. Below are two or three other suggestions, but of course there are many other resources available! Check out your local library, bookstore, and church library, or ask other widows what they used.


COPING WITH YOUR EMOTIONS
AND MANAGING STRESS

Here are some suggested activities to help you deal with your grief:

1. Exercising. Try a walk around the block, a game of golf, or whatever exercise you enjoy.
2. Crying.
3. Talking about your feelings with a trusted friend, counselor, or pastor.
4. Writing your thoughts on paper and expressing your feelings to the person who died, to a doctor, to God, etc. Then you may choose to destroy your writing or place it in a secure place.
5. Praying—for the person who died and for yourself in coping with the necessary adjustments in your life.
6. Meditating and relaxing. This can offer you a brief respite from your emotions and obsessive thoughts and allow your body to heal.
7. Drawing, dancing, singing, or any other type of creative expression. Make up a song and sing it as loud as you can, or paint or color the emotions inside of you.
8. Watching a funny movie. This can offer a diversion from your grief work for a while, and laughter allows for the release of tension.
9. Thanking God for the support you have received, for friends, for books, etc. An attitude of thankfulness can be difficult at the beginning but will be an important aspect of living later.
10. Reading about grief and loss. See “Suggested Reading After a Major Loss.”
11. Trying an on-line chat room and talking with others about your grieving. See the included support group organizations.
12. Listening to music. This can offer relaxation and comfort—it can be a mood-changer.
13. Taking a warm bath.
14. Getting a massage. It helps relax your body and helps you feel cared for and loved.
Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words

—Romans 8:26

Late at night when the world is fast asleep, I’m awake thinking about . . .

Prayer:

Dear God,

I am hurting so much. Please help my family and me survive the death of my loved one.

Amen.

Additional thoughts:

(Credited to Rev. Jule’ Laney.)
Could You Help With Our Bereavement Ministry?

Our bereavement ministry team coordinates efforts to care for those who are working through grief following a death or other important loss. Often, those who are grieving need not only counseling, but practical, everyday help.

If you are interested in being a part of our outreach to the grieving, please take a moment to fill out this form. Check any of the following items with which you could help, and return this form by placing it in the offering plate or bringing it to the church office.

- ___ Bringing meals to the home
- ___ Bringing groceries to the home
- ___ Coming to the home in order to help with laundry, cleaning, preparing meals, etc.
- ___ Coming to the home to help with house maintenance such as yard work
- ___ Child care
- ___ Transportation to and from appointments, shopping, etc.
- ___ Help with personal care
- ___ Help with financial planning and decision-making
- ___ Help in searching for and finding a job
- ___ Other: ________________________________________________
- ___ I am interested in joining the bereavement ministry team