



# Holding Loss and Hope Simultaneously

## Creating Space to Grieve Losses

Grief is a natural part of the human experience. It is an appropriate response after losing someone or something that is important to us. It involves changes of emotions, thoughts and behaviors as one reacts and then adjusts to a world without that someone or something.

The following are the various kinds of losses to recognize and name.

- Loss can involve something physical, such as:
  - The death of a loved one
  - The loss of a possession
  - The loss of a limb, or other losses due to permanent disabilities
- A loss can also involve something immaterial and not as obvious which people might not readily recognize or try to minimize, such as:
  - The loss of a relationship
  - The loss of hopes and dreams
  - The loss of safety through violence or trauma
  - Losses associated with a change in life circumstances

Because people tend to avoid pain, it is important to create space and encourage people to name and feel their losses. When helping others grieve, ask about it and make space for people to:

- Acknowledge the loss
- Name the loss
- Name the feelings
- Find ways to express those in helpful ways

As we try to help people acknowledge their losses, it is important to be learners of their grief. Here are some questions you can ask to help people connect to and hold their grief.

- Would you be open to telling me more about your loss?
- What does it feel like to be you right now?

- What emotions are you experiencing today?
- What have you been thinking of as you are grieving?

Then as people share, validate and normalize their grief. Sometimes caregivers are afraid to validate other people's emotions. In Validating, all you are saying is that "it makes sense to me that that emotional response is happening." It's not saying they should necessarily act on that feeling. Also, as you minister to people, do not avoid your own grief. Remember to process your own losses as you help others name their losses.

## **Holding on to Hope while Grieving Losses**

Along with making space for people to grieve, it is also important to help them hold onto hope. As Christians, our hope is a person, Jesus. He is Immanuel, God with us. He is not a God who is distant. He is God who entered our world and has known loss and tears, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Is. 53:3). Hope is an encounter with a person, a companion, who understands. People feel more hope when they feel less alone.

In Tim Keller's sermon, "Praying Our Tears" (Feb. 27, 2000), he reminds us that although suffering and tears may be inevitable in life, what matters most is that we are praying our tears to God, and in fact bringing all the emotions in the grieving process to him. What matters most to God is that we continue to talk with him.

Here are some questions we can ask people to help them connect to hope:

- How do you feel about bringing your losses to God? What makes that difficult? What has helped you do that so far?
- I'm wondering what is helping you right now?
- What is making you feel a sense of hope?
- What would make you feel more seen and known?
- How can I pray specifically for you in terms of encountering hope?

Connecting people to hope in their grief is about finding different ways to help them draw near to Jesus who enters into their pain and loss. It's also a process of journeying with them. As we listen to learn, we are giving them a taste of Christ's compassion, who sees and hears them in their suffering.