



Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy

Volume 15 | Number 2

Article 7

4-1-1990

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Recommended Citation

Westover, L. Alan (1990) ""And Ye Shall Find Rest Unto Your Souls", *Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy*. Vol. 15 : No. 2 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp/vol15/iss2/7>

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“And Ye Shall Find Rest Unto Your Souls”

L. Alan Westover, MS

In recent years, formal grieving processes have been identified (Kubler-Ross, 1989; Kreis, et al., 1969; Hendin, 1973) (see Table 1). We have observed that individuals absorbed in the grieving process often dwell upon past events associated with the loss and upon the intense personal pain resulting from those events (Madsen, 1978). While lessons of great value can be individually learned in the process of grieving, unnecessarily prolonged grieving is frequently debilitating and crippling. The excessive concentration of attention upon painful events of the past drains time and energy by first agonizing over the loss and then engaging in escapist behavior in an effort to find relief. Inasmuch as preoccupation with one's own needs is frequently accompanied by a decrease of sensitivity to the needs of others, grieving can be a very selfish activity.

Table 1
Stages of the Grieving Process

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- | |
|-----------------|
| 1. Shock/Denial |
| 2. Guilt |
| 3. Anger |
| 4. Bargaining |
| 5. Depression |
| 6. Resolution |
-

In contemplating the various stages identified in the grieving process, I have been struck by three observations. The first is the great similarity of the grieving process to what is experienced by both the “offender” and the “offended” in consequence of offensive behavior. While some loss occurs as a result of events and circumstances for which no person is responsible (as in the sudden loss of health or life), serious loss can also result from our own misbehaviors or from the misbehaviors of others. It is suggested that indeed both the “offender” and the “offended” do suffer loss and do grieve, and that much of the emotional turmoil we observe in these two groups may be usefully viewed from the perspective of grief resolutions (see Table 2).

Perpetrator and victim alike appear to pass through parallel grieving processes as they strive to resolve feelings generated by past offenses. This should not be surprising when we realize that not only the “offended” but also the “offender” suffer significant personal loss as a result of the offense. The offender may suffer many losses including a loss of the Spirit of the Holy Ghost, a loss of Divine approval, and a loss of self-respect. Many transgressions result in the loss of physical health, family, priesthood, temple blessings, personal freedom, financial security, and gainful employment. Such losses are not trivial. Nonetheless, in my experience, transgressors, perpetrators, or offenders are generally not viewed as grievers, particularly when they are immersed in the stages of denial or anger and continue to exhibit irresponsible behavior patterns.

Second, we may be too limited in the range of clinical needs which we associate with grieving behaviors. While the resolution of grief is central to the treatment of sexual abuse, and the loss of a loved one through death or divorce, etc., it is less common to address other clinical arenas such as husband/wife or parent/child challenges from this context. Family members in conflict are often caught up in vicious cycles of hurt-counterhurt behavior patterns in which the primary motivation appears to be the mutual infliction of pain. When this occurs, estranged family members struggle with the loss of approval and acceptance from the very people whose approval and acceptance are most highly valued.

Table 2
Stages of Grieving and Resolving Grief

<div>1. Shock/Denial</div> <div>2. Guilt</div> <div>3. Anger</div> <div>4. Bargaining</div> <div>5. Depression</div>		
<i>Natural Loss</i>	<i>Loss Due to Transgression</i>	<i>Loss Due to Victimization</i>
8. Acknowledge the truth	8. Acknowledge the truth	8. Acknowledge the truth
<i>Exercise Faith in Jesus Christ By :</i>		
9a. Repenting (if needed)	9. Repenting (confess, make restitution, forsake transgression.)	9. Forgiving the offender
9b. Forgiving (if needed)		
10. Submitting the balance of the burden unto the Savior and letting go	10. Submitting the burden of sin unto the Savior and letting go	10. Submitting the burden of judgment unto the Savior and letting go
11. Pressing forward in living today rather than in past, enduring temporary immutable loss with dignity	11. Pressing forward in living today rather than in past, enduring temporary immutable loss with dignity	11. Pressing forward in living today rather than in past, enduring temporary immutable loss with dignity
12. Enjoy promised peace, rest, Divine approval, and enhanced self-esteem	12. Enjoy promised peace, rest, Divine approval, and enhanced self-esteem	12. Enjoy promised peace, rest, Divine approval, and enhanced self-esteem

Might it be that much of the denial, anger and depression exhibited by families in conflict occurs due to the failure of the family members to deal constructively with this perceived loss of

love, acceptance, and approval? Because interpersonal skills typically suffer when one is in the throes of concentrated grieving, families containing multiple grieverers are particularly ill equipped to cope with their own grief, the grief of other family members, while simultaneously attempting to resolve their differences. As previously mentioned, grieving is often a self-indulgent activity. Often each of the parties feels victimized and abused, and is therefore more inclined to seek vengeance than to render relief. Each wishes their personal pain to be acknowledged, and wishes to be further supported and pampered while in state of discomfort.

Third, whereas the Lord has identified explicit proactive interventions for the offender (viz., the first principles and ordinances of the gospel), and for the offended, abused, and victimized (viz., forgiveness), students of the grieving process have had little to say about resolving the grief, beyond efforts to support clients in working through each successive stage of the process. Nonetheless, the Lord appears to be very serious about the responsibility of the aggrieved to apply these principles in dealing with unresolved past events. He *commands* the offender to repent and the offended to forgive. Failure to either repent or forgive results in condemnation and the loss of access to the blessings of the atonement (*Doctrine and Covenants* 19:16–18; Matthew 6:14–15). Because in grieving we tend towards selfishness, the means of resolution forwarded by the Lord requires that we move beyond our preoccupation with our own pain by unselfishly addressing the pain of others whether we be the offender or the offended. Until the offender acknowledges the pain of those he has offended, he is generally not inclined to confess and forsake. Similarly, the “offended” is not inclined to fully forgive until he is able to recognize the heavy and painful burdens of the offender (Madsen, 1978). When interpersonal conflict is involved, frequently it is necessary for each party to both repent and forgive: for each has both rendered and suffered offense. I believe we shortchange our clients to the extent we fail to teach them to resolve their grief by the application of these principles.

That the gospel of Jesus Christ provides powerful remedies for those wishing to resolve grief is an assertion which the remainder of this paper will address and explore. Whereas the stages of the

grieving process describe the griever's course through the intense emotions of shock, guilt, anger, and depression, the process of forgiveness as well as the first principles and ordinances of the gospel center on the resolution of such emotional disturbance.

Stage 8: Acknowledgment of the Truth

For both the repentance and forgiveness processes, it is necessary to acknowledge the reality of the loss, the source of the loss and to recognize the means by which the grief associated with the loss may be resolved. Until we acknowledge these three things, we are unable to find lasting relief from our grief. The Savior taught "the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Once we know the truth regarding the source of grief and the means by which it may be resolved, we are free to resolve or not resolve the grief as we will. Until we obtain this freedom, we can only languish in the emotions of shock, denial, guilt, anger and depression, or see relief through destructive escapist activities. And as previously noted, a significant part of an acknowledgment of the truth is the clear recognition of the pain being suffered by the other party. As an "offender" I do not become truly motivated until I recognize the horrible prices paid by others in consequence of my misdeed.

But I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins. Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell; yea I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments. Yea, and I had murdered many of his children, or rather led them away unto destruction; yea, and in fine so great had been my iniquities, that the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror. Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds. (Alma 36:12–15)

Likewise, as the "offended," I do not become truly motivated to forgive until I recognize the horrible burdens the offender is carrying in consequence of his misdeed.

Therefore, I command you to repent—repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your

sufferings be sore—how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea how hard to bear you know not. For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink . . . (*Doctrine and Covenants* 19:15–18)

It is difficult not to be moved with compassion for the “other party” when we allow ourselves to acknowledge pain they either are enduring or will ultimately be called upon to endure, if they fail to repent.

Stage 9: Adopt Intervention Strategies Taught by Jesus Christ

In the Church, we refer to the determination to implement intervention strategies taught by the Savior as exercising faith in Jesus Christ. Whether our differences are real or imagined, and whether or not we are the offended or the offender, we are commanded to do all in our power to resolve the differences if we are to obtain the Lord’s approval and forgiveness.

Therefore if ye shall come unto me, or shall desire to come unto me, and rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee—go thy way unto thy brother, and first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I will receive you. (3 Nephi 12:23–24)

The means of reconciliation, again, is for both parties to do whatever repenting and forgiving is needed. While repentance and forgiveness require responsible, mutual participation of grieving persons, each individual either chooses to do or not to do these things. When we choose to repent and/or forgive, we take charge of our lives, we become empowered, and we grow in self-esteem. In so doing, we regain resources essential to proceeding with our lives.

The means by which grief resulting from our own transgression may be relieved is repentance. As we begin to assume responsibility for our own behavioral errors via the activities of confession,

making recompense, and forsaking the transgression, etc., we begin to qualify as potential beneficiaries of the atonement. While it is often not as apparent to most of us, we are responsible for the decision to leave unresolved any offenses suffered at the hands of others. In a revelation to Joseph Smith, the Lord observed: "My disciples in days of old, sought occasion against one another and forgave one another not in their hearts; and for this evil they were afflicted and sorely chastened" (*Doctrine and Covenants* 64:8).

They were "afflicted" not by the offense, but by their own determination to find fault rather than to forgive! Because they chose not to forgive, they were "afflicted and sorely chastened." Apparently, the Lord finds it hypocritical for us to find fault and to condemn others for their errors at the same time we are approaching Him for forgiveness. The prospect of spiritual/emotional healing is diminished when we constantly pick the scab off of mending wounds. When we truly forgive, we let go of the constant regurgitation of painful memories by choosing not to indulge in the unproductive mental rehearsal of past events. (*Doctrine and Covenants* 58:42)

The first principles and ordinances of the gospel and the principles of forgiveness are frequently useful in resolving grief associated with loss which on the surface appears to be unrelated to transgression. It is not uncommon, for example, that in grieving over the loss of a loved one, that the grief exists in part due to a failure to resolve differences experienced with the loved one prior to death. When this is true, the grieving process cannot be fully completed until we do the repenting and forgiving that is needed. While we cannot personally approach and be reconciled with a deceased brother (3 Nephi 12:25), we can forgive and we can repent.

Stage 10: Submit the Balance of the Burden Unto the Savior

In the course of resolving grief, once we have completed needed repenting and forgiving, grieving will continue until we place the burden in the hands of the Lord (2 Nephi 25:23). A choice not to entrust a burden into the hands of the Lord when it is not in our power to meet a need, is a decision to continue carrying what is, for us, an unresolvable burden. When we implement the first principles and ordinances of the gospel, the atoning sacrifice of the Savior lifts the burden from our backs. (*Doctrine and Covenants* 19:16)

Similarly, in forgiving, we place the task of judgment into the hands of the Lord thereby letting go of the judging behavior which produces feelings of anger and bitterness. “And ye ought to say in your hearts—let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 64:11). When grieving a loss for which no person can be fairly held responsible, there is still a need to place the issue in the hands of the Lord even though repentance and forgiveness are not called for. I recently met with a man whose son had died in an automobile accident just days before he was scheduled to leave on his mission. The father was a very assertive, task-oriented person who normally resolved crises by meeting them “head on.” Here he was confronted by an outcome which he was powerless to change no matter how intense his desire. He could not reverse the reality of his son’s death. And while there was no repenting or forgiving to be done, the father had been unsuccessful for many months at resolving his grief. As we talked, it became apparent that the father had been unable to acknowledge his own limitations and dependence upon the Lord. Rather, he had continued to search for something *he* could do to reverse the loss. He had not chosen to submit to the will of his Father in Heaven.

Stage 11: Let Go of the Past and Live in the Present

When we choose to subject our own will to the will of our Heavenly Father and endure that which he chooses to inflict upon us (Mosiah 3:19), we become free to re-center our attention and energy upon needs of the present and we begin to live again. While we can choose to stubbornly cling to our own willful desires, we do so at the price of continued grief. Unnecessarily prolonged grieving over past losses, like an undue anxiety over the prospect of future losses, drains resources required for living successfully in the present. The Savior observed, “Sufficient is the day unto the evil thereof” (3 Nephi 13:34).

Stage 12: Enjoy the Fruits of Exercising Faith in Jesus Christ

I suggest that while we may find coping mechanisms which provide temporary relief from the pain of loss, the only way to obtain complete resolution, healing and wholeness, is to be coming unto Christ. To seek escape and relief from other sources is to place our faith in false gods which are not capable of giving true rest. “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). When we come unto Christ and thereby unto the Father, we do not merely seek to “avoid” pain but “obtain” Eternal life (2 Nephi 2:27) and thereby find lasting relief or rest.

Come unto me, all *ye* that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28–30, italics added).

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