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### Learning to Cope With Grief Through the Use of Biblical Creativity With the Community of First Saints Community Church

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LEARNING TO COPE WITH GRIEF THROUGH THE USE OF BIBLICAL  
CREATIVITY WITH THE COMMUNITY OF FIRST SAINTS COMMUNITY  
CHURCH

A PROJECT  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
OF THE M. CHRISTOPHER WHITE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY  
GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY  
BOILING SPRINGS, NORTH CAROLINA

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
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MARCH 15, 2023

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Most importantly, I give thanks to God, who is always creating something new, even out of us.

## ABSTRACT

Supporting those who are grieving has long been a complicated process for church communities and pastors. This project investigated whether introducing a creative activity to a grief support group could help participants view their loss through a lens of faith and clinical aspects of grief. Although further studies will strengthen this hypothesis, a four-week curriculum was conducted with five participants at First Saints Community Church in Leonardtown, MD. Results from quantitative and qualitative analyses showed that there was a benefit to those participants.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Like love, grief is a universal human experience. Also, like love, it is hard to understand grief until you experience it for yourself. Coping with grief is not an easy thing to do. Healthy coping often requires intentionality, community, and emotional and spiritual resources that not everyone has. To help with these deficits, my ministry project was leading a four-week course at First Saints Community Church for those who have experienced a grief event in the past five years. This class taught creativity as a vital part of coping during the grieving process, one that connected faith, grief theory, and personal story. Each week we focused on a different sort of creative endeavor, an aspect of grief, and a biblical text; using this format, each week included a spiritual, practical, and therapeutic element. The class included a teaching section but was participatory in nature and gave those involved a place to process their own grief using various coping skills, to integrate theological thought with their grief, and to build biblical community along the way.

While I am by no means an artist, or even what I would call a creative person, creativity has helped me as I processed my own grief. The concept of creativity can be intimidating. To help mitigate that, the creative endeavors used in the project were designed to be simple and easy-to-do projects with few materials needed or skills required; this allowed participants to practice what had been taught each session, and gave them a way to learn how to share their own grief stories.

In addition, I taught a biblical understanding of grief, alongside the psychological grief theories, to give participants a new language to use for describing what they were

experiencing. It was my hypothesis that the combination of these three: creativity, biblical understanding, and learning what to expect in grief would help participants feel comforted as they expressed their grief.

### **Statement of Ministry Problem**

In his book, *The Anthropocene Reviewed*, John Green while contemplating the song Auld Lang Syne says this about his friend: “She is dead. The rare present tense sentence that once true is true forever.”<sup>1</sup> Much of our lives are spent in learning this devastatingly hard lesson. Twenty years ago, when I was a sophomore in college, my high school sweetheart died suddenly. He is dead. It is present tense and always true. That loss, and the subsequent grief that followed, has shaped my life and ministry for the past eighteen years. He was loved, past tense, and always true. This statement has also shaped my life and ministry in profound ways. I began my local church ministry only three years after Sam passed. My experience of these feelings and the messiness of the grief that followed gave me something to lean on when my role as a pastor led me to accompany those who were dying or grieving. Later, my husband and I would suffer together through five miscarriages, the death of his parents, and two of his grandparents-- all in a short amount of time. Again, my past experience of grief became something I both leaned on- to remember that I had been through this before and could make it through again, and had to learn to distance myself from so that my own grief did not bleed into the grief of others.

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<sup>1</sup> John Green, *The Anthropocene Reviewed: Essays on a Human-Centered Planet* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2021), 146.

There are many ways to approach providing grief support. I have noticed over my time doing this, both in the local church setting and for hospice, that much of the practice of supporting the bereaved is centered around providing space to talk and educate. Yet, finding creative ways to process my feelings and my faith has become a vital part of my own personal journey, and so I wanted to explore whether that could be true for others. My question became, “How can creativity be used as a coping skill? How can creativity help us process grief theologically in a local church setting?”

Resources for good grief ministry have always been a struggle to find in the local church. Either the programs focus on the Pastor providing all care, one-on-one companioning (e.g., Stephen Ministry),<sup>2</sup> or the curriculum is expensive, vague, or too focused on evangelism. In my eighteen years of ministry, I had yet to see a programmatic or book resource that provided a way to connect grief with faith in a way that was tangible or community-oriented or one that included creativity as a coping skill. In addition, from my perception, the materials available at the local church level often lacked a depth of understanding of modern grief theory and mourning practices, and they did-not account for essential parts of Christian education (e.g., multiple intelligence theory). All of these were the reasons why I believed this project was needed.

It is impossible to get through life without experiencing loss. We begin experiencing this even in childhood, as we transition classrooms, we lose the teacher we loved, or the friend we sat with every year. We lose our pets, or move to a new neighborhood, or we simply lose our innocence of thinking every fairytale has a good ending. The hardest losses are those due to the death of a loved one, and these can affect

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<sup>2</sup> “What is Stephen Ministry,” Stephen Ministries, accessed August 10, 2022, <http://www.stephenministry.org>.

every aspect of one's life. In their book, Brook Noel and Pamela D. Blair write, "The grief associated with bereavement is one of the most profound of all human emotions- and one of the most lethal. Every year about eight million Americans suffer the death of a close family member, disrupting life patterns for up to three years."<sup>3</sup> The sense of finality that follows the death of a loved one begins a complex, emotional, multi-dimensional process that we call grief. Grief includes a wide range of emotions and experience that change in intensity over time, sometimes moment by moment.

Processing our grief has been compared to a walk in the wilderness, being pulled under an ocean wave, a long journey, or even going through a tunnel. While the feelings and experiences of grief are painful and demand energy, they are also a normative part of living, and require understanding, flexibility, and resiliency that we might not have had to call on before we became bereaved.

Many persons begin processing their grief privately, which often leads to an intense feeling of loneliness. However, it is possible, and often helpful for grief to be a shared experience, particularly if the person lost is missed by more than one person. While each person's grief will be experienced differently, because of his or her unique relationship with the deceased, grieving together can often help the bereaved to know they are not alone. One can find comfort in receiving support from those who understand, and in reaching beyond oneself and giving support to others.

Over the years there have been many theories in psychological, medical, sociological, and pastoral fields about grief. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross popularized the

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<sup>3</sup> Brook Noel and Pamela D Blair, *I wasn't Ready to Say Goodbye* (Milwaukee, IW: Champion Press, Ltd., 2008), viii.

theory of the stages of grief, but others have critiqued and improved upon that great work by suggesting other ways to conceive of the grieving process. Kenneth Mitchel and Herbert Anderson suggest that there are four needs of grieving, which provides a framework for this project, and for its rationale. 1.) Time and Space 2.) Rehearsing feelings 3.) Remembering 4.) re-integrating or re-connecting.<sup>4</sup> Each of these needs or tasks of grieving can guide the church in its support of grieving people. To admit the reality of one's loss, a grieving person needs to have time and space, while having the freedom to express his or her grief which often requires outside support and encouragement. For a grieving person to remember, encouragement is often needed; people need to be invited to share the stories of their loved ones and the story of their grief. Finally, to help those who mourn, build a new life and reconstruct their faith, the church can provide conversation and even sometimes gentle confrontation about how faith impacts grief. All of this is the work of the church. One of the major needs that people who are grieving experience is that of time and space. We all need time to grieve and the space to do it free from the expectations of other people.

Once the first three needs of grief have been seen to or at least been started, one can proceed to the final need of the griever- reintegration. Loss, especially the loss of a loved one- leaves a hole in our lives and one that cannot just be filled back in because there will never be a replacement for the person being gone. While the intensity of pain may lessen over time, it will never completely go away. It becomes instead something that we carry with us. One of the hardest needs of mourning is finding a way to re-enter

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<sup>4</sup> Kenneth R. Mitchel and Herbert Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs: Resources for Pastoral Care* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1983),100.

back into the life and community around us because this means re-integrating our new selves into our old life, becoming re-oriented, and finding a new normal.

### **Project Setting**

The setting for this project was First Saints Community Church (hereafter referred to as FSCC), a multi-site United Methodist Congregation located in St. Mary's County, Maryland, 50 miles south of Washington, DC. St. Mary's County is a small rural county on the western shore of the Chesapeake Bay. Founded in 1637 by Catholic pilgrims from England, the county is proud of its history and development. St. Mary's County has a large Naval Air Base with a program that has played host to multiple astronauts in their fighter pilot school, and St. Mary's College of Maryland, a National Public Honors College. As a peninsula, there is nowhere in the county you can go that is far from a beautiful water view- either of the Patuxent River or the Chesapeake Bay.<sup>5</sup>

FSCC, as it is affectionately referred to, is a congregation focused on their community; it began as three distinct congregations with deep historical roots.<sup>6</sup> St. Paul UMC in Leonardtown, MD, was founded in 1828; First Friendship UMC in Ridge, MD in 1855, and St. George UMC in Piney Point, MD, in 1855.<sup>7</sup> While the Leonardtown church had been a larger independent and growing congregation, the other two were smaller congregations that had long since been yoked together under one pastor with

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<sup>5</sup> "About St. Mary's: History," Visit St. Mary's City, accessed August 12, 2022, <https://www.visitstmarysmd.com/about/history/>.

<sup>6</sup> "What We Believe," First Saints Community Church, accessed August 10, 2022, <https://www.firstsaints.org/what-we-believe>.

<sup>7</sup> "Who We Are," First Saints Community Church, accessed August 10, 2022, <https://www.firstsaints.org/who-we-are>.

distinct ministries. In 2008, all three congregations came together after a long discernment process and congregational votes, deciding they were better together than apart. The goal of this new congregation was to touch the community in as many places as possible. The now unified congregation started under a new name: First Saints Community Church, a name chosen to honor each campuses' origins, and began ministry with a unified staff, leadership board, and shared budget. In 2013, a new campus was launched, which was at first called California Campus, because it met in a middle school located in California, MD. In 2019 the middle school became unavailable for Sunday morning worship, and the campus used a prayerful discernment process to re-launch as a "home church" that meets in a refurbished house owned by the church. This campus is focused on being one that provides space for participation of all ages during worship, and a more comfortable and relaxed environment.

Our entire congregation has an average worship attendance of about 150, although pre-pandemic the average was closer to 200-250. The congregation reflects the diversity in our area, which is 75.6% Caucasian, 13.8% black or African American, 3.5% Asian, and 4.6% Hispanic.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, our worshipping population is primarily Caucasian with a smaller percentage of Asian, black, and Hispanic members. We are primarily middle-class professionals with a large and diverse age range, again reflecting the 68.1% white-collar and 31.9% blue-collar demographics of our area.<sup>9</sup> While our congregation is moderately diverse in socio-economic status and education, there is a strong social and

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<sup>8</sup> "Fullnsite", Mission Insite, accessed August 12, 2022, <https://peopleview.missioninsite.com/app/#/welcome/demographics/step-4>.

<sup>9</sup> "Executive Insite," Mission Insite, accessed August 12, 2022, <https://peopleview.missioninsite.com/app/#/welcome/demographics/step-4>.

political conservative leaning.<sup>10</sup> Each of our three campuses has a unique personality, worship style, and ministry focus but with a common mission and one vision. Our mission statement is to “meet people where they are and bring them to where Christ wants them to be.”<sup>11</sup> We do this by creating places in which people can belong, heal, grow, and serve.

In total, the congregation owns and maintains eight separate buildings. The largest of these is the sanctuary, Sunday school rooms, and church hall that houses our Leonardtown Campus. On this same physical property, there are two houses, one of which is used for office and small group space, and the other is rented out to a low-income member of the community. Our fourth, fifth, and sixth buildings are the sanctuary, unattached church hall/kitchen on St. George Island, and the former parsonage that is now used in cooperation with our local housing agency as temporary housing for those transitioning out of homelessness. Our Ridge campus has a sanctuary with an attached small church hall. The final building is a house that hosts our Callaway Campus worship, as well as spaces used for retreats by our Women’s, Men’s, and Youth ministries.

The governing leadership board is guided by the pastors and representatives from each campus. Our 2022 budget was \$827, 695 and stayed steady from the 2021 and 2020 budget. Giving for 2021 fell short of the approved budget by about \$50,000, but the congregation had enough savings to compensate for the downfall. FSCC also administers

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<sup>10</sup> “Religious Insite,” Mission Insite, accessed August 9, 2022, <https://peopleview.missioninsite.com/app/#/welcome/demographics/step-4>.

<sup>11</sup> “What We Believe,” First Saints Community Church, accessed August 9, 2022, <https://www.firstsaints.org/what-we-believe>.

an endowment created in 2017 after a large gift was bequeathed to the church in honor of a former member. The endowment's mandate is to fund ministries that focus on children and education in St. Mary's County, in Maryland, and then in the U.S.- prioritized in that order. The endowment's principal investing, and the giving of grants based on the interest, is overseen by a small committee with representatives from each campus; the balance of the fund currently sits around \$740,000.<sup>12</sup>

First Saints is currently staffed by two full-time and one part-time ordained clergy and many part-time staff, including a youth director, a youth administrative assistant, a children's ministries director, a communications director, a treasurer, a small groups coordinator, two paid musicians, a building custodian, and an administrative assistant. As the staff list implies, the ministries and missions at FSCC are very much staff oriented. Our focus has long been on small group ministries as the primary discipleship pathway; this was seen especially in the make-up of our youth group, which pre-pandemic included a large group meeting on Sunday evenings and four-five small groups that met in the early mornings before school. Our children's ministry operated a yearly summer VBS program that sometimes welcomed over 100 children, as well as thriving Sunday school classes between services at multiple campuses. Much of this is now being re-built as we come back post-pandemic. Many of our most loved programs and events over the past few years have had a heavy focus on learning, creativity, and building community- all of which are important values to our congregation.

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<sup>12</sup> Budget numbers taken from Council Notes and Financial Reports. Meeting date Jan 2022 compiled by Caroline A. Trossbach

While our church has multiple campuses, they are all geographically close. To keep us united, it is customary for all our programming to be offered by a specific campus and to the full church. This means that the project, specifically the control group, included members from each campus; however, it was held at Callaway Campus. This campus was chosen as the host site for two reasons: 1.) This is the campus where I primarily preach, and 2.) it is the most comfortable and modern of the four campuses. Initially, this campus was also the site of the experimental group meeting. However, like most churches, our ministry has changed dramatically since the spring of 2020 and the start of the pandemic. Many of our ministries switched to either a virtual or a hybrid format and at least half of them have stayed that way. As I was trying to put the group together, it became apparent that a virtual meeting space was required. For various reasons (time to travel, unwillingness to be around others unmasked, childcare issues), almost everyone who requested to be part of the group also requested it to be virtual.

### **Project Resources: Literature Review**

There were many resources used to complete this project. First, there are the financial resources, time to dedicate to my study and this project, and physical space made available by the leadership at First Saints Community Church. The church will cover the cost of materials for this four-week course and provide the space used.

Secondly, during the development of this project proposal, I have been working at Calvert Hospice as a Bereavement Coordinator in addition to my job at the church. These experiences have been a huge part of my work on this project. Last year, I led three drop-in grief support groups and four closed groups. The materials used to lead those

groups have been helpful in honing my skill as a group facilitator, and my experience with the participants has given me even deeper insight into the need for good, well-researched, and resourced material for churches to do the work of supporting the grieving. These materials included Dr. Alan Wofelt's *Understanding Your Grief*.<sup>13</sup> Although not written from a faith perspective, this book does a fantastic job of explaining modern grief theory in easy-to-understand terms and helps readers apply that to their own experiences. It includes practical suggestions and lots of food for thought. Furthermore, I relied heavily on Kenneth Mitchel and Herb Anderson's, *All Our Losses, All Our Grief: Resources for Pastoral Care* in developing the format of this project. Although a bit dated, they provided a pattern to use for the four weeks of the class that was extremely thoughtful.<sup>14</sup> One last book in this genre that I found extremely helpful was *Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry* by Melissa M. Kelley.<sup>15</sup> Her book also helped connect theory to faith in ways that were invaluable.

In addition to these resources, in 2018, FSCC ran a small group experience at our church that we called "Better Together Thursday." This program had six or seven small group choices led by clergy and laity. One of the most popular of these was the one led by our communications director, Alex Sanford, on faith and creativity. She used the book, *Creative Courageous*, by Jenny Randle.<sup>16</sup> Watching and helping her prepare for

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<sup>13</sup> Alan Wofelt, *Understanding Your Grief* (Fort Collins, CO: Companion Press, 2021).

<sup>14</sup> Mitchel and Anderson, *All Our Losses*.

<sup>15</sup> Melissa Kelley, *Grief: Contemporary Theory and Practice of Ministry* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Jenny Randle, *Courageous Creative* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2018).

this class, and the stories of people in the class that were shared afterward provided part of the inspiration for this project. A second source that helped in developing the creativity in this project were books by Jan Richardson. Particularly in *The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times of Grief*,<sup>17</sup> I found the poems, art, and reflections helpful. Finally, Nicholas Wolterstorff's memoir, *Lament for a Son*, is a book that I have read many times.<sup>18</sup> It was first gifted to me while I was in seminary, during a deeply grief-filled year, and I have read it, suggested it, and loaned it to many people since. Wolterstorff gave me insightful foundations for this project.

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<sup>17</sup> Jan Richardson., *The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times of Grief* (Wanton Gospeller Press, 2020).

<sup>18</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987).

## CHAPTER 2- DETAILED PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### Project Goals

The project's main goal was to create a program that gave participants an understanding of the roles creativity and faith can play in the grieving process. This goal can be broken down into three parts that I hoped participants would integrate into their own grief journey: learning to view grief through a biblical lens, gaining a greater understanding of a clinical understanding of grief, and using creativity as a coping skill. As a part of that, I had the following learning outcomes across the affective, psychomotor, and cognitive domains of learning-

#### *Affective:*

- Participants will develop a sense of community from a biblical perspective. (Week 1, 2, 3, 4)
- Participants will discover a sense of compassion for those who are grieving through biblical stories. (Week 2, 3)
- Participants will practice possible coping skills for grief. (Week 2, 3, 4)
- Participants will discover increased confidence in their resilience. (Week 1, Week 4)
- Participants will practice the biblical concept of lament in connection with their grief. (Week 2)

#### *Cognitive:*

- Participants will identify stories of grief and loss in scripture and connect them in meaningful ways to their own lives. (Week 1).

- Participants will assess the role of modern clinical grief theories in their individual grief process. (Week 1)
- Participants will apply creative coping skills to their grief. (Week 2, 3, 4)
- Participants will identify a language for describing the story of their grief. (Week 4)

*Psychomotor:*

- Participants will collaborate to design a word cloud that describes their grief experiences. (Week 1)
- Participants will design a candle that begins to tell the story of their grief.
- Participants will compose a painting showing the range of emotions experienced in grief. (Week 2)
- Participants will create a collage of memories of their deceased loved one and a broken planter that serves as a metaphor for their grief experience and our time as a group. (Week 3 and 4)

### **Means of Evaluation**

The project was evaluated in multiple ways, in both qualitative and quantitative terms. The quantitative means was evaluated around a pre/post survey given to participants. The pre-post surveys used a Likert scale and asked participants to rate their knowledge or understanding of the material presented (See Appendix D). These questions assessed the success of both cognitive and psychomotor learning outcomes. The instrument also assessed their perception of success in the content areas, including grief

skills and understanding of the biblical and theological basis for dealing with grief using faith and creativity.

The control group took the pre-test prior to the worship experience on the first Sunday of the project and took the post-test on the last Sunday of the project. The control group participated in a worship service, during which I gave an intentional sermon (See Appendix P) regarding coping with grief using faith and creativity. No qualitative questions were asked of the control group.

The experimental group took the pre-test at the beginning of the first session and the post-test at the end of the last session, with the same purposes as above. They also took additional quantitative surveys. One of these was pertaining to my performance as a project leader (See Appendix E), and the other provided an additional means by which I could evaluate their progress in dealing with grief (See Appendices F and G).

The qualitative means of assessment of the experimental group were accomplished in two ways: the art projects that the individuals created each week and the opportunity to reflect in writing on open-ended questions about the project (See Appendix F). These art projects showed whether the participants could put into practice the theory and biblical themes taught during the sessions and whether they could integrate their own grief story and faith journey. The artwork was not evaluated based on the artistic skills shown but rather on how well it told the story of each person's grief (See Appendix G). For example, in assessing week two's art project, I looked at how many colors/feelings the participant used, what order they chose to put them in, and how they shared it with the larger group. When assessing week three's project, I looked at how many and what type of personal pieces they put in the shadow box or collage. Did

they share specific memories or were they very general in what they shared? Were they able to connect the stories they shared with the biblical stories shared during the lesson?

Answers to the open-ended questions allowed participants to show an integration of ideas and provided feedback that could not be captured using other means. In addition, with their permission, I recorded their storytelling and used the recording to create verbatims that illustrated their responses, and I took pictures of their artwork to be used in evaluating the final project.<sup>19</sup> Finally, I received feedback from the experimental group for my performance in facilitating the project (See Appendix E).

Overall, it was my hope that these methods of evaluation would together generate the kind of feedback that would enable me to determine if helping the bereaved learn to use creativity and faith as coping mechanisms were helpful. I hoped that it would help me to envision how to develop further methods for engaging people in learning how to manage their grief by integrating faith and creativity.

### **Project Calendar**

Communication about the project began with announcements printed in our bulletin, our electronic newsletter, and our social media pages (See Appendix B). In addition, verbal announcements about the project were made at all campuses at the beginning of worship. Separate email invitations were sent to an ongoing list of pastoral care recipients with known losses in the past year. Around twelve people inquired about participating in the class, but only five registered in the end. The original intention was for the group to meet in person, but as people started inquiring about participating in the

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<sup>19</sup> I had received permission from the GWU Institutional Review Board to share these stories while maintaining anonymity.

class it became clear that in order to have enough people to form a group, a virtual format was needed instead.

The project began on November 27, 2022. It commenced with regular Sunday worship at Callaway Campus; this group of worshippers became the control group for the project. Using the script found in Appendix B, I shared with those in attendance the purpose of the project and the procedure we would follow. Prior to the start of worship, all adults were given a pre-session survey (See Appendix D). I then preached a sermon on grief and creativity taken from the materials written for the project proposal (See Appendix P). After worship, on the last day of the project, the same adults were given a post-session survey (See Appendix D). This was the extent of participation of the control group. There were ten adults in attendance, all of whom participated.

The first session of the experimental group occurred later that same day at 3 p.m. on ZOOM. There were five participants in attendance, plus myself. The session began with an explanation of the project, reminders about how we would proceed, and information about confidentiality. Next, the participants were asked to take the pre-survey thru electronic means (See Appendix D). They were each assigned a participant number that was privately messaged to them, through an online tool, along with a link to the survey. The first set of questions, using a Likert scale, asked participants to rate their knowledge of grief theory, biblical examples of grief, and their own coping skills. They also filled out electronically a participation covenant and a participant info sheet (See Appendices A and C). All materials for creative projects were mailed to participants prior to the session, with the exception of items they would already have like scissors etc.

The first session focused on the first need of mourning: time and space (See Appendix H). Since the format changed from in-person to virtual, a change had to be made to the art project. A group project of a word cloud had been the original plan in the project proposal. In order to incorporate this, I used the website menti.com and had the participants electronically send in words so that a word cloud was created (See Appendix I for a screenshot). Discussion around the patterns seen in the word cloud followed. This provided a good entry into the sort of creative projects that the whole project would include and acted as an icebreaker for the group. Added to this session was an individual project of making a candle to honor their loved one that could be used throughout the project. Participants were sent the materials needed ahead of time: wax paper, tissue paper, and a candle. They were asked to provide their own markers, scissors, and a hairdryer. After drawing their loved ones' names on the tissue paper, they were instructed to draw or write something that reminded them of their loved ones. Next, the tissue paper was placed on the candle, the wax paper wrapped around it, and a blow dryer on high heat was used to transfer the tissue paper drawing to the candle (See Appendix J). When everyone was done, participants were asked to share their candles. This allowed rapport to be established within the group as participants shared more of their own grief stories. The session ended by sharing together the liturgical blessing used each week: "You are not alone. I am not alone. We are in God's presence. We have each other."

The second week of class began at 3:00 pm on December 4<sup>th</sup>. I felt initially frustrated because none of the participants joined the meeting until almost 3:15 pm. After everyone was there, we began the class by reviewing the material from last week, including a reminder about the expectation of holding confidentiality. This session

focused on the second need of mourning, rehearsing feelings (See Appendix K). All of the participants joined in the conversation, and things flowed much easier during this session. The art project for the week was painting our emotions during grief on a canvas. There was initial skepticism by participants and comments about not being artists; I reminded them that we were not expecting a professional painting and that a perfect outcome was not the point. I shared with them an example of what I had done, which helped ease some of the worries. After they ended, participants were invited to share, and everyone did so except one participant, who asked to finish it first. Two of the participants told me afterward that they had enjoyed the process so much that they wanted permission to engage family members and friends through it and asked for my notes and instructions to share likewise. The session ended again with the sharing of our liturgy.

The third week of class was originally supposed to be December 11<sup>th</sup>, but because of a family emergency on my end, that session was canceled and re-scheduled for the following week. All give participants had agreed to December 18<sup>th</sup> (which was supposed to be our fourth and final meeting time originally), but in the end, only three were in attendance. This session focused on the third need of mourning (i.e. remembering). The discussion centered on what it means to purposefully mourn and remember our loved ones and how this shows up in scripture (See Appendix M). The art project was a shadow box. Participants had been sent the shadow box but were asked to bring to our session items about their loved ones that they would like to put in the shadow box. After going through the teaching and having time to create their shadowbox, participants were invited to share. All three of them shared their shadowboxes with us. One of the participants

shared that they were dreading this particular art project and had not wanted to do it but in the end, were grateful for the chance to share memories purposefully. The third session ended with our shared liturgy. After the session, I emailed the two missing participants to give them the notes from the meeting and art instructions. One of them sent me a photo of a completed shadowbox about a week later.

The final session was held on January 8<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 pm. This date meant that there was a two-week break between the third and fourth sessions, but it was necessary because of the Christmas and New Year holidays. All participants were in attendance. The session focused on the fourth need of mourning (i.e. reintegration). The lesson focused on hope and re-entering the community as we continue to grieve (See Appendix N). This art project also changed from the original suggested in my project proposal because of the change from an in-person class to a virtual class. It was impossible for a long-term project like a mosaic to be done and materials to be sent. Instead, we used ceramic flowerpots. This project was based on one I had done during a retreat I participated in during college. Participants were invited to write the words “Hope Is” along the top inside of their pot and then write words that they would use to describe hope. After this, they were invited to use a hammer or something strong to break their pot into at least three pieces. Once broken, participants wrote specific hopes they had for themselves on the outside of the broken pieces and then glued their pot back together. This part of the project did cause some frustration because of the difficulty of gluing it back together. After the session, participants were given the link to complete the post-class surveys (See Appendices D,E,F).

### CHAPTER 3 BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

After my project was complete, a friend sent me a link for the podcast by Pete Ens and Jared Byas called, “The Bible for Normal People.” This particular episode was, of course, about grief. During the episode, Pete, Jared, and their guest Jeff Chu talked together about how they had all been processing the recent loss of their friend and fellow writer, Rachel Held Evans. Near the beginning of the podcast Jared shared this description about grief,

Grieving is a loss. It’s emotionally processing a loss. And we lose things all the time, and not just people. So you know, thinking through what you said is, it’s refreshing to think about grief as a thing that pushes us into the unknown. It reminds me a little bit of a wisdom category, because it’s not right or wrong. It’s not, here are the three steps. It’s this up and down. It’s this process that we often can’t, I think, get our arms around.<sup>20</sup>

His description and the whole podcast episode sum up much of what I have been teaching people about grief for years. Grief pushes us into the unknown. There is no right or wrong in grief, no easy three-step process, and it is terribly hard to get our arms around it. And we are almost constantly grieving some sort of loss. Yet, as they point out, we are not without a place to go in order to find our way through. Scripture can be a guide; it can be a place where we are reminded once again that we are not alone, even in this. It is a place where we are reminded that grief and hope go hand in hand.

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<sup>20</sup> Pete Ens and Jared Byas, hosts, Jeff Chu guest, “202: Grief as a Biblical Practice, Reissue,” April 18, 2022, in *The Bible for Normal People* (podcast), <https://thebiblefornormalpeople.com/episode-202-jeff-chu-grief-as-a-biblical-practice-reissue/>.

Stories of grief are woven throughout the Old and New Testaments. Some stories reflect the grief that comes alongside infertility: Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah in the Old Testament, and Elizabeth in the New Testament to name a few. Grief is found in the sagas of biblical heroes like Noah, Moses, Abraham, Jacob, and David. The Psalms speak of grief, as do Lamentations, Proverbs, and Job. They, alongside the prophets, speak to the deep grief that comes with being in exile and feeling not only physically far from one's home and place of worship, but also far from God. Grief is found in the Gospels, epistles, and even apocalyptic literature. Grief shown throughout the biblical witness is never all by itself; found right alongside it are themes of comfort, hope, and community. Like all universal human experiences, we cannot help but connect our faith to it. Our grief can be affected by our faith, and our faith can be affected by grief.

### **Creativity and Faith**

This project was not just about grief and faith, though. It hinged on my suspicion that creative endeavors or engaging participants kinesthetically could be just the coping skill needed to help those who are grieving view their grief through a lens of faith. Grief can be, and traditionally has been, processed simply through verbal sharing and psychoeducation. But scripture is more than that. It is in and of itself a gift filled with creativity and movement, and I have long believed that entering into it not just with our minds but with the whole of ourselves can be transformative.

I have never thought of myself as a creative person. I struggled in art class from elementary school through middle school until finally, they let us choose our classes. And yet, as I reflect on some of the more transformative moments in my life, creativity is

present. In Gen 1:1 we are told God is a creative being, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”<sup>21</sup> It is in fact, the first character trait of God communicated in scripture, and in many ways sets a foundation for how God will work in the world.<sup>22</sup> In all of the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for ‘create,’ or *bara*, is only used in places where God is the subject. From the beginning to the end of scripture, God is making something out of nothing, constantly revealing new things to us both communally and personally. However, the writers of Genesis choose another verb, “*asa*” meaning “to make,” an ordinary, everyday word that is also integrated into Genesis's creation stories.<sup>23</sup> It is this second word that is used in Genesis 1:26 when it says, “Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness.” Just a few verses later in Genesis 1:28, God commands that those created in the divine image (human beings) also be involved in the creative process, meaning that from the beginning, as theologian Terrence Fretheim writes, “God chooses not to be the only one who has or exercises creative power.”<sup>24</sup> Some of this participation is directly correlated to the instructions to populate the earth and care for creation, but I think it can also be seen as an invitation to something more, an invitation to let creativity be part of how we live and move and work in the world. Really though, it is more than an invitation; it is a statement about who we are as those made in the image of God. Viewed through this lens, creativity is used throughout scripture, woven into the very fabric of how God’s work in the world is described from the first

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<sup>21</sup> All scripture cited will be from NRSV unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>22</sup> Randle, *Courageous Creative*, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Terrence E. Fretheim, “Genesis” in *New Interpreters Bible Commentary*, ed. Leander Keck, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 342-343.

<sup>24</sup> Fretheim, “Genesis,” 345.

words in Genesis 1 to the last word in Revelation. This creativity is not just a movement of God but also of those witnessing with their words to this movement of God. The writers of scripture describe in beautiful language the making of the tabernacle in Exodus 26, the power of feeling and attraction in Song of Solomon, and even the sheer depth and breadth of the earth in Job. If creativity was important to God in creation and to Jesus (who else would problem solve not having enough lunch by multiplying loaves and fishes or getting to the disciples by walking on water?), then it should also be important to us.

In some ways, the use of creative pursuits in the grieving process can become sacramental. The sacraments have always been a vital part of my ministry as an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church. In Article XVI, of the Articles of Religion, entitled “Of the Sacraments,” John Wesley writes that,

Sacraments ordained of Christ are not only badges or tokens of Christian’s men profession, but rather they are certain signs of grace, and God’s good will toward us, by which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm, our faith in him.<sup>25</sup>

In modern terms, sacraments are outward and visible signs of an inward and invisible grace given by God. The sacraments are a means by which we see and feel and celebrate the free gift of God’s grace that is given to us. Wesleyan scholar Randy L. Maddox writes in his book *Responsible Grace*, “A sacrament uses this- worldly and material means to communicate transcendent reality.....a message is communicated through a material sign which calls forth a response that brings about change in the life of the

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<sup>25</sup> “Articles of Religion XVI,” *United Methodist Book of Discipline*, (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016) Paragraph 103, 63.

recipient.”<sup>26</sup> Put more simply, participating in the sacraments is one way that we answer the call from God for a response from us. Sacraments are simple things used in a holy way. They are small moments that point us to Christ. They are the way we respond to and physically embody God’s grace for and in the faith community. Sacraments incorporate the senses- we see and taste and smell the bread and wine, we hear the splash of water in baptism, and feel the water on our skin. These physical objects then become a way for us to connect to the non-physical presence of God. Now, it must be said that creative works are not sacraments, because unlike baptism and communion, they were not something Jesus commanded us to do. But I believe they can be sacramental, meaning they can become moments of sacredness for us, connecting us with our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. My hope in the project was to help my participants see the gift of creativity found in scripture, as well as the creativity within themselves. It is so easy for us to make excuses, like I used to do in regards to art classes. It is easy to worry about what people will think or say about what we have made. I wanted the participants to hear the word of God, the voice that echoed in creation, “It is good” (Genesis 1:4).

### **Grief in the Old Testament**

There is a passage from Isaiah 61 that I have often used in funeral sermons. Its words give us a glimpse into what God’s work in the world looks like and were used by Jesus to proclaim and describe his own ministry.

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the broken-hearted,

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<sup>26</sup>Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 159.

to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
 and release to the prisoners,  
 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,  
 and the day of vengeance of our God,  
 to comfort all who mourn,  
 to provide for those who mourn in Zion—  
 to give them a garland instead of ashes,  
 the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
 the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit  
 They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
 the planting of the Lord, to display his glory (v.1-3).

We use these words at funerals because they specifically tell us that God is bringing good news to the oppressed, binding up the brokenhearted, and comforting all who mourn.

According to Elna Solvang, the person sent by God is not identified in the text, although it is clear that the commissioning and power come from the Lord; it is, however, logical for one to assume that the voice speaking and the mission being described is that of the prophet for whom the book is named.<sup>27</sup> This “anointed one” is sent to communities that are in the margins of society: the oppressed, those with broken hearts, the captives, the imprisoned and the grieving. The anointed one’s mandate is not just to go to these communities but, more than that, to reverse circumstances and transform identities. This comes in the form of good news, healing, declarations of liberty, release, and comfort.

Particular attention is given in v. 3 to “those who mourn in Zion.” Since this part of Isaiah is most often considered to come from the post-exilic period in Israel’s history, we know that this is complicated grief. I once heard a counselor say that grief is not just one emotion, but rather a container for our emotions after loss. This resonates for me

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<sup>27</sup> Elna Solvang, “Commentary on Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11”, *Working Preaching*, Luther Seminary, December 11, 2011, paragraph 2, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/third-sunday-of-advent-2/commentary-on-isaiah-611-4-8-11>.

with what, Elna Solvang writes about this passage. She suggests that the mourning described here is probably not the shock and horror that came in the beginning when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Babylonian army and many were sent to an uncertain and unknown future in Babylon, but instead it could rise from the frustration and humiliation of an inability to rebuild what has been destroyed, from the knowledge of reality that their current circumstances have not met the visions and expectations for a restored Jerusalem that had been proclaimed previously.<sup>28</sup> Grief is never just one thing. When we grieve the loss of a person, we are also grieving the loss of the dreams we shared with them, the memories that they hold and we do not, and the knowledge that one's vision of the future cannot be met. In this passage from Isaiah, the comfort provided would, hopefully, change the way the people saw themselves, and the way they were regarded by others. Rather than ashes, a symbol of humiliation and grief, they were given festive garlands; they were honored guests instead of avoided and were anointed with the "oil of gladness and mantles of praise." Solvang describes it this way, "They are to be treated as and they are to become other than the humiliated, fragmented, dispirited and exploitative people that they currently are. Then they will accomplish what is needed and what has been too difficult: rebuilding Jerusalem as a city where righteousness and justice flourish."<sup>29</sup> We might not be humiliated by our loss but is certainly a hard thing to share, and it brings with it similar feelings of isolation. These are appropriate words of hope for all who mourn- that God might help us to be cherished guests instead of avoided and that we might see ourselves as God sees us. They also can remind those of us who

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

grieve that while we do not have to “move on,” we can trust that God will help us rebuild or build something new.

One of the steps in any re-building process is looking at and naming the reality of the current situation. Most contemporary grief experts agree that naming the reality of a loss, including the attending feelings, is an integral part of the work of mourning.<sup>30</sup> Suffering must be named. Dorothee Soelle argues that “the first step towards overcoming suffering is, then, to find language that lets out the air of suffering that makes one mute, a language of lament, of crying, of pain, a language that at least says what the situation is.”<sup>31</sup> Finding a language that “lets out the air of suffering” is difficult work and one that we are not very good at in western culture. We are often told, even within the church that sharing our feelings or complaints should be kept to oneself. Scripture, however, tells us the opposite. The book of Psalms gives us wonderful examples of what it looks like to fully admit and name the reality of loss. This is specifically found in what many scholars call Psalms of Lament. Willem Prinslo affirms that individual Laments are the most prominent in the psalter.<sup>32</sup> Some scholars make a distinction between ‘complaint’ and ‘lament’ Psalms; the term ‘complaint psalms’ describe those that refer to “situations in which there is still hope and a time to argue a case before God,” and lament Psalms are those that “refer to an irreparable, hopeless catastrophe.”<sup>33</sup> It is important to note that a lament in scripture is not simply an indication of suffering, as its purpose is not only to

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<sup>30</sup> Mitchel and Anderson, *All Our Grievs*, 107.

<sup>31</sup> Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 70.

<sup>32</sup> Willem S. Prinslo, “Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible: Psalms.” in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, ed. James D.G. Dunn and John Rogerson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 366.

<sup>33</sup> Prinslo, “Eerdmans Commentary: Psalms,” 367.

ask for the suffering to come to an end but also to draw closer to God.<sup>34</sup> Rabbi and Scholar Daniel Feld, calls this genre Psalms of disintegration or despair, which I have found are also good descriptions for what it feels like to grieve. Often it feels like everything solid beneath and around you is disintegrating. He writes that there are some Psalms that are, “replete with a sense of God’s presence, God’s goodness and care, and the hope in God’s justice, but strikingly, the book of Psalms also includes descriptions of other, darker human moments: expressions of abandonment, the confrontation with realities that question faith, the experience of despair...”<sup>35</sup>

Lament is a word we sometimes use but rarely something we practice. It is certainly not something we frequently do within worship in most American churches. In contrast, biblical literary forms of lament are an act of worship; one that provides the worshiper an avenue for expressing intense feelings of grief, sorrow, and anger. Laments acknowledge the fullness of life- that life is not always wonderful or perfect, because it also encompasses pain, grief, darkness, and evil. In addition, laments illustrate that complaining to God about one’s circumstances, or even holding God responsible for them, is not an unfaithful response.<sup>36</sup> At times, this grief found within the Psalms is personal and stems from an illness or tragedy, is communal or can be the result of injustice. As Nancy J Duff suggests, Psalms of lament, despair, or dis-orientation indicate that the Hebrew worshiper felt free to express deep feelings that we would sometimes

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 368.

<sup>35</sup> Edward Feld, *Joy, Despair, and Hope: Reading Psalms* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), 73.

<sup>36</sup> Prinslo, “Eerdmans Commentary: Psalms,” 369.

label as negative- complaints, anxiety, rage, deep sorrow- before God and before others in their community.<sup>37</sup>

The forty-second Psalm is one example of a lament Psalm that expresses deep grief and deep hope. Most scholars agree that Psalm 42 and 43 were probably originally a single poem; Tremper Longman III highlights as evidence the single refrain repeated throughout, that Psalm 43 does not have a title in a section where almost all of the rest do, and that some ancient manuscripts have them as a single Psalm.<sup>38</sup> As Feld concludes, the setting of Psalm 42 is personal exile; being exiled from the temple in Jerusalem was a crisis that brought not just physical distance and absence but spiritual distance as well.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Longman states that the sentiment expressed here is not that of one who has a satisfying relationship with God but wants to go deeper; rather, it is the exasperation of one who feels abandoned by God.<sup>40</sup> In describing this, Rabbi Edward Feld writes that exile brings with it a “loss of the ability to sense God’s closeness and therefore an experience of losing one’s center.”<sup>41</sup> This sentence is for me not only a description of what is felt by the psalmist, but also a wonderful description of what grief can do to one’s faith.

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<sup>37</sup> Nancy J. Duff, “Recovering Lamentation as a Practice in The Church.” in *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square*, ed. Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 3.

<sup>38</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary* in Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2014), 193.

<sup>39</sup> Feld, *Joy, Despair, and Hope*, 85.

<sup>40</sup> Longman, *Psalms*, 194.

<sup>41</sup> Feld, *Joy, Despair, and Hope* 85.

This Psalm opens with the image of a stag searching for water in a desert. The word for pants/gasps is found also in Joel 1:20, which references wild animals in a drought stretching upwards as if imploring God for relief.<sup>42</sup> The connection the Psalmist is making here is the sense of lacking something that is vitally needed for life and having a prior experience that tells one it can be found, if one looks precisely enough.<sup>43</sup> The Psalmist uses this powerful imagery to make not just a physical connection to the natural world but also an existential crisis that comes with being far from one's home.

The images of creation continue as the Psalmist is overwhelmed by memories of the past. Memory is a function central to Biblical Theology, and certainly to Israel's existence, but here it is a two-edged sword because recalling even moments of joy can be painful rather than consoling when the feelings of grief overwhelm.<sup>44</sup> The Psalmist turns in verses 4-7 to share their memories of celebrations in the temple when they rejoiced in a home that is so far away in time and space that it can only be dreamed of and remembered. As Eaton and Day describe, "The lament continues by drawing the contrast between the present state of mourning and past scenes of festal worship."<sup>45</sup> In verse seven the psalmist names Mount Mitzar, which some scholars believe is a play on the Hebrew, *tza-ar*, meaning 'trouble' or 'pain'; in other words, the psalmist finds himself in the land of pain, in exile and in this place, "even that which was meant for salvation

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<sup>42</sup>John H. Eaton and John Day, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2003), 180.

<sup>43</sup> Feld, *Joy, Despair, and Hope*, 90.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>45</sup> Eaton and Day, *The Psalms*, 180.

becomes an instrument for destruction.”<sup>46</sup> The psalmist describes the feelings of grief with physical description, as he dialogues with his soul. In addition, Eaton and Day describe verses five and six this way, “‘How you are bowed down’- how deeply you mourn, with gestures of crouching, rolling in the dust and moaning!”<sup>47</sup> The Psalmist does not dwell in that distress forever but instead wishes and hopes for an idealized future. Verse eight is the only time in the Psalm where God is called *Adonai*, and this is also the moment where the poem switches from lament to plea, which the psalmist specifically describes as a prayer.<sup>48</sup>

Psalm 42 makes room for many complex feelings and shows that human beings can hold all of these at once. In this psalm, “prayer and complaint, hope and dread, joy and pain, live side by side.”<sup>49</sup> The Psalm ends with a repeated refrain, “Await God, for I still acknowledge him.” For the Psalmist, God’s presence is “not only a memory, a reality that is past, but there is a life with God in the very act of faithfulness.”<sup>50</sup> The Psalmist uses the Hebrew word *ho-hili*, meaning, “wait,” a word that is synonymous with the word *ka-veh* used in Psalm 27, meaning hope. *Ho-hili* is used to describe Noah’s waiting for the land to dry up in the book of Genesis and describes a waiting with expectation, a reminder that every good thing needs time to unfold.<sup>51</sup> It is a reminder that

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<sup>46</sup> Feld, *Joy, Despair, and Hope*, 89.

<sup>47</sup> Eaton and Day, *The Psalms*, 181.

<sup>48</sup> Feld, *Joy, Despair, and Hope*, 90.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 90-91.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 91.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 91.

our hope is not based on nothing, but rather our hope is partially based on previous experience. Once there was a time when our joy was palpable, and that time will come again. In the same way, our rehearsing of our feelings of grief can lead us to a place where memory becomes something more than just reciting a story; it becomes a way to fully name the loss we have experienced and remind ourselves of the hope we profess and have previously experienced.

In addition to the lesson of how important and faithful naming our feelings before God is, the Psalms can also remind us that grief does not have to be an individual experience. As Jeff Chu shared in the podcast episode, Psalms are used in communal settings in the Jewish tradition both then and now; even the ones written in first person language were meant to be spoken or sung communally.<sup>52</sup> In fact throughout scripture, much of what happens in terms of grief is processed as a community. Scripture affirms over and over that we are not meant to bear the burden of grief alone. This notion was affirmed for me during the project. Watching the process of burdens being shared, a community being acknowledged, and feelings being attended to without recrimination, judgment, or silencing- gave me a glimpse into what could and should be happening in our churches on a daily basis.

The Psalm also teaches us about the importance of using memory to grieve and name our experiences. Traditional grief theory posited that in order to heal, the grieving person must release or withdraw “psychic energy” from the deceased loved ones, in order to reinvest in new relationships.<sup>53</sup> More contemporary grief theories, however, suggest

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<sup>52</sup> Ens, Byas, and Chu, “Grief as a Biblical Practice, Reissue”.

<sup>53</sup> Kelley, *Grief: Contemporary Theory*, chapter 1, Kindle.

that a continued connection to their deceased loved ones is not to be considered pathological but instead can bring comfort and healing. One way that this continuing bond is kept is through memory. We know this intrinsically- it is why we share stories of our loved ones in eulogies and memorial services. Poet Julia Kasdorf writes, “Grieving a loss is not only the process of letting go, but it is also the process of keeping.”<sup>54</sup> It is deciding which memories we will share and which we will let pass us by. It is through the sharing of these memories that our loved one stays with us. Pastoral Counselors Kenneth R. Mitchel and Herbert Anderson tell us that “reminiscing or remembering with another person is the principal means by which we build such memory, which in turn helps us gain needed emotional distance from the past.”<sup>55</sup> Each week during the project I encouraged participants to share their memories; extra space was given for this practice as we shared the shadow boxes that were created. Remembering helps us to admit the reality of our loss. The Jewish faith has a tradition of saying, “May his/her memory be for a blessing,” when someone has passed. For example, my Facebook feed became filled with this statement after the passing of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. It is a beautiful phrase that refers to the continued blessing someone leaves behind- the blessing of their good works and deeds, their legacy left behind in family and friends, their teaching, their example.

Memory is a function central to Biblical Theology, and certainly to Israel’s existence. The Jewish people are commanded, for instance, to tell the story of the

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<sup>54</sup> Julia Spicher Kasdorf, *The Body and the Book: Writing from a Mennonite Life: Essays and Poems* (Philadelphia: Penn State University Press, 2009), 89.

<sup>55</sup> Mitchel and Anderson, *All Our Grievs*, 114.

Passover each year so that generations will remember that God has rescued them (Exodus 13:3). Memory is again emphasized in the New Testament when Jesus commands the disciples at the last supper to “remember....” (Luke 22:19). The Psalms are one of the places in scripture where memory becomes almost its own character. As the psalmist laments being in a strange land while in exile, over and over the memories of being in Jerusalem are shared. As Feld suggests, Psalm 42 shows us how memory can be a two-edged sword, because recalling even moments of joy can be painful rather than consoling, when the feelings of grief overwhelm. Yet, the psalmist remembers. The Psalmist remembers celebrations in the temple and times of rejoicing in a home that now can only be dreamed of and remembered.<sup>56</sup>

Our ability to remember well, to tell the stories of our loved ones and of our faith, is what helps us find and create meaning in our suffering. Finding meaning is one of the major tasks of grieving.<sup>57</sup> It is how we come to understand God’s activity in the world, God’s feelings about and for us, and God’s role in suffering. Melissa Kelley affirms, that meaning is what helps us maintain order in a world filled with chaos.<sup>58</sup> This is one of the central themes in the book of Job, i.e., how to speak of God in suffering. Indeed, one could argue that the whole of the book of Job is trying to answer that very question.<sup>59</sup> The book of Job presents the struggle of a Jewish man, whose assumptions about the way the world works, has been severely altered by circumstances beyond his control. In the face

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<sup>56</sup> Feld, *Joy, Despair, and Hope*, 91.

<sup>57</sup> Wofelt, *Understanding Your Grief*, 139.

<sup>58</sup> Kelley, *Grief: Contemporary Theory*, chapter 4, Kindle.

<sup>59</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 13.

of trials caused by the loss of everything he holds dear, Job is forced to confront the traditional wisdom and orthodoxy he had previously clung to so closely. His friends and those close to him also cling to these ancient orthodox answers as they each respond to Job's devastating losses; they do so without listening fully to the new questions Job raises about human suffering and the meaning found in it. One way to use Job's story, as we consider how to respond to those who are grieving, is to examine the behavior of those who seek to help Job. As Fohrer writes, "The concern of this narrative, as of the book as a whole, is not the problem of suffering but the behavior of people in their experiencing enduring suffering...not the problem of theodicy but of human existence in suffering."<sup>60</sup>

The titular character in the book of Job is described as a blameless, upright, and God-fearing man (Job 1:1.) By any measure he has all that anyone could ask for: family, friends, land, work and purpose, and faith. In a quick turn of events Job loses everything. What begins with his oxen, donkey, and servants being killed, continues with the loss of his sons and daughters. Job's response to these losses is a wonderful example of traditional mourning practices found in the Bible. He rises, tears his robe, shaves his head, falls to the ground and worships. Saul M. Olyan explains that in addition to these actions displayed by Job, mourners in the Bible may also "fast, groan or sigh, move their bodies back and forth, utter dirges or mourning cries, avoid anointing with oil, lacerate themselves, and manipulate head and beard hair by means of shaving or depilation."<sup>61</sup> These mourning practices serve to set those that mourn apart from the rest of society,

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<sup>60</sup> Georg Fohrer. "Man and Disease According to the Book of Job" in *Studien Zum Alten Testament* 1966-1988, (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 1991,) 80-84, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110886191-007>.

<sup>61</sup> Saul M Olyan, *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 30-31.

giving them the time and space to mourn separate from the expectations of everyday life and practice. As Job's mourning continues, his friends join him and initially they are a biblical example of mourning and comforting. They join him in his mourning practices and sit in solidarity. In chapter two of Job, they see him from a distance and begin weeping; they tear their garments just as he had done, throw dust on their heads, sit on the ground, and mourn with him.

Unfortunately for Job, his friends begin by mourning with him in solidarity, but then give into the strong impulse or habit of reaching for and sharing opinions or explanations on his suffering. They express a worldview known as Retribution Theology, a view that perceives all that happens to human beings as either a reward or punishment sent from God.<sup>62</sup> They point out to him that the righteous do not suffer, only the evil do; thus, if Job is suffering, he must have done something to earn it. In Job 4:8 his friend Eliphaz states, "As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it." Bildad continues these explanations in 8:4 saying, "When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin." These explanations and Job's defense of himself continue through much of the book. Their words and Job's reaction to them can remind those of us who seek to comfort or counsel the bereaved that we should stay away from explanations or accusations and instead simply sit in solidarity with their experience and feelings. Any grieving person one talks to can share stories of the often well-meant but hurtful things others have said. While practicing lament in week

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<sup>62</sup> Fohrer, "Man and Disease According to the Book of Job," 82.

two, we spent time sharing some of these stories, to allow participants a chance to let the air out of this part of their suffering as well.

One biblical text which speaks hauntingly of suffering is the book of Lamentations. Biblical scholar Kathleen M. O'Connor writes that the rawness of the five poems within the book of Lamentations provides a place where both "communal and personal pain can be reexperienced, seen, and perhaps healed."<sup>63</sup> This poetic form of the biblical text is yet another example of creativity being used to share a word from God. Indeed, the writer of Lamentations does not shy away from the vastness of human emotions, taking no measures to make them more palatable, including feelings of guilt, anger, despair, and even a desire for revenge.<sup>64</sup> Much like the Psalms, Raymond R. Roberts suggests that one of the gifts of Lamentations is the lesson that "Mourning involves honestly naming these external and internal realities. The poet knows that we cannot find comfort by pretending that things are other than what they really are."<sup>65</sup> Roberts goes on to suggest that the acrostic form of the poem is not only pleasing because of the beauty of its structure, but also that the form itself can teach the reader that loss will not have the last word. He writes, "We may need to go through the alphabet of pain more than once (the poet goes through the Hebrew Alphabet four times,) but eventually

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<sup>63</sup> Kathleen M. O'Connor, "Lamentations" in *New Interpreters Bible Commentary* edited by Leander Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), Introduction, accessed August 2022, <https://www-ministrymatters-com.ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/library/#/tnib/75a519348c466d20946273afabb70c79/overview.html>.

<sup>64</sup> Raymond R. Roberts, "Between Text and Sermon: Lamentations 3: A Journal of Bible and Theology." *Interpretation* 67, no. 2 (04, 2013): 196-8, accessed October 17, 2022, <https://ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/between-text-sermon-lamentations-3/docview/1350472878/se-2>.

<sup>65</sup> Roberts, "Between Text and Sermon," 196.

we will come to the end. That is, we reach a stopping place. Grief need not be bottomless.”<sup>66</sup>

Perhaps the passage in which finding this healing is most possible is Lamentations 3:21-24. This passage, O'Connor believes, shows a sudden emotional reversal, as the writer remembers something about God that helps to change his outlook and give him hope; this kind of reversal is typical of the laments found in scripture.<sup>67</sup> In these verses, the writer expresses the theological dilemma that is at the core of the human experience, one that faces both the speaker and his community. What gives the writer hope is God's character, which includes steadfast mercy, (*hesed*), fidelity, and mercy. The writer quotes himself, naming YHWH as his “portion” The self-quotations that the writer uses show that he gives equal rhetorical attention to both hope and failed hope (v. 18). O'Connor concludes, “In this case, hope is a decision of the speaker based on remembrance of divine mercies.”<sup>68</sup> The writer addresses God directly for the first time in the poem, which can serve to underscore the mutual relationship they share. The verses that speak affirmation of divine *hesed* shown next to the verses naming his experiences of grief and rejection show an internal struggle to persuade himself that indeed his faithfulness and hope are well placed.<sup>69</sup> This internal struggle is one many who are grieving face, as we vacillate between hopelessness and hopefulness. Passages like this one are in a way permissive, hospitable, and even welcoming to those who grief. It is as if they say to the

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<sup>66</sup> Roberts, “Between Text and Sermon,” 196.

<sup>67</sup> O'Connor, “Lamentations,” 3:21-39.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid

<sup>69</sup> Ibid

reader, ‘This poem is going to allow your grief to be whole. We will not cut it off before it’s time. But we will also remind you that grief is not the last word in God’s story, or your story.’

### **Grief in the New Testament**

This reminder that grief and death do not have the last word in God’s story, or in our story, continues into the New Testament. One passage in which I find this reminder is one that is not generally thought of as a story about grief at all. The twenty-fourth chapter of the Gospel of Luke recounts a number of post-resurrection appearances of Jesus; the first of these happened when two of the disciples, one of which was named Cleopas and the other unnamed, were on their way to a village called Emmaus, seven miles outside of Jerusalem. This resurrection story only appears in Luke’s Gospel, and in many ways, sews together some of the narrative threads the author has created by going over again the events in Jerusalem, naming the hope of liberation, the importance of the table, and the movement from lack of sight and insight to a deeper perception.<sup>70</sup> Luke 24 is much more than a simple recounting of two grieving people walking to a village. Throughout the history of the church, this story of an encounter with the resurrected Jesus has provided insight into the theology of the resurrection, the nature of faith, the work of the Holy Spirit, the importance and promise of Eucharist and hospitality, and the necessity of communal practice.<sup>71</sup> While not necessarily a passage about grief, I would add that this

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<sup>70</sup> John T. Carrol, *Luke: A commentary* (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2012), 480.

<sup>71</sup> Molly T. Marshall, “Theological Perspective Luke 24:13-35” in *Feasting on the Word*, eds. David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster, 2010), 418.

text can become for us a pattern of how to process our grief, because it provides us examples of the four needs of grief that Mitchell and Anderson suggested in their work.<sup>72</sup>

Luke 24 is a story unique to the Gospel of Luke and is a characteristic of both his writing style and perspective.<sup>73</sup> The setting of the story- a journey to Emmaus- is typical of Luke, as he places Jesus' mission and ministry in the context of a journey throughout his Gospel, one that moves continuously from Galilee to Jerusalem. The concentric structure of this passage- beginning with travel away from Jerusalem and ending with travel to Jerusalem- is an example of the author's artistry and could be viewed as emphasizing the disciples moving away from the physical place where their very real hopes were crushed.<sup>74</sup> These disciples' journey can be seen as a continuation of Jesus' work.<sup>75</sup>

There are three sites that have traditionally been candidates for the actual physical location of Emmaus, although there is no real consensus. However, if we are using this text as a pattern for processing grief, the physical location is immaterial in the end.

Frederick Buechner in fact, interprets Emmaus as,

The place we go in order to escape...Emmaus is whatever we do or wherever we go to make ourselves forget that the world holds nothing sacred: that even the wisest and bravest and loveliest decay and die; that even the noblest ideas that men have had- ideas about love and freedom and justice- have

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<sup>72</sup> Mitchell and Anderson, *All Our Grievs*, 100.

<sup>73</sup> Donald Senior, "Exegetical Perspective Luke 24:13-35" in *Feasting on the Word*. eds. David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 2010), 419.

<sup>74</sup> Carrol, *Luke*, 482.

<sup>75</sup> Senior, "Exegetical Perspective Luke," 419.

always in time been twisted out of shape by selfish men for selfish ends.<sup>76</sup>

Like the location, we do not know why the disciples were traveling to Emmaus, but no matter the reason, the journey provided these two a time apart from other people, time to contemplate and share, time to ask questions and time to be in silence. Luke recounts that they were “talking with each other about all these things that had happened” (v. 14) when Jesus came near and went with them, but they did not recognize him. Are they going over the events of the past week? Or were they remembering and comparing the details of Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion? Perhaps they were sharing what they had seen and heard, all the pieces that others had told them and that they themselves experienced. Maybe they were thinking over their conversations with Jesus long before that terrible week, parsing them for clues or trying to decipher their feelings. Examining the Greek word choice here can give us some insight into the conversation. Luke used the imperfect tense of the verb *homiloun* to indicate the travelers were talking, in sustained conversation.<sup>77</sup> This along with the word *syzetein* (debating) hints at a quite spirited exchange of differing opinions.<sup>78</sup>

This was further indicated by Jesus’ inquiry “What words are you tossing back and forth?”<sup>79</sup> When Jesus appears to them, they do not recognize him. They were visibly upset, and Jesus asked them what they have been discussing; literally his question was,

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<sup>76</sup> Frederick Buechner, *The Magnificent Defeat* (New York: Seabury, 1966), 85-86.

<sup>77</sup> Carrol, *Luke*, 483.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 483.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 483.

“What are the words you are tossing back and forth?,” a further indication that their conversation was spirited.<sup>80</sup> After an incredulous and perhaps sarcastic question that implied, he must be the only one in the world who does not know, they began to tell him. The prophet Jesus, “powerful in word and deed” (Luke 24:20), was sentenced to death and crucified. “But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:21).

The disciples’ journey to Emmaus provided them with the time and space they needed, one that was not hemmed in by the expectations of their community or any other person’s idea of what a grieving person should be. In addition, the disciples provide us with an excellent example to follow for how to process grief, as they name not only the reality of Jesus’ death but also the death of their hopes, for we never lose just one thing when someone we love dies. Our loss includes their physical presence and the future we had planned and all of it must be named and mourned. Jesus initiates this conversation by simply asking what they have been talking about as they walked. It is a common enough question, and the disciples, “stood still looking sad” (v. 17). According to Alan Culpepper, their response to Jesus stretches across six verses, 112 words in Greek, and summarizes both the actual events that have happened and their feelings.<sup>81</sup> Jesus also gives us an example to follow, as he provides space for this naming. The best thing to do when someone suffers a loss, is to listen. As Mitchel and Anderson state, “Grief expressed is not grief heard unless someone is listening.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 483.

<sup>81</sup> Alan Culpepper, “Luke” in *New Interpreters Commentary*, edited by Leander Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 477.

<sup>82</sup> Mitchel and Anderson, *All our Grievs*, 107.

Marshall writes that as the story of Jesus' resurrection appearance continues in the Gospel of Luke, there is familiarity, mystery, recognition, and confusion.<sup>83</sup> These same descriptors could be used in the grief process. There are moments and rituals that feel familiar but are shrouded in mystery. There are moments full of confusion that also help us fully recognize ourselves. Nicholas Wolterstorff wrote a poignant and profound examination of grief after the sudden death of his twenty-five-year-old son. He names that when one has a loss like this one "everything is charged with the potential of a reminder. There's no forgetting."<sup>84</sup> And yet, not forgetting is not the same as remembering.

The act of remembering is central to the Emmaus story, and it functions in multiple ways.<sup>85</sup> First, the disciples spend some time remembering- sharing with this stranger all that has happened in Jerusalem. Later in the narrative, Jesus will help them to remember in a new way, as he connects the pieces of his former teaching with the most recent events. But first, the disciples must remember and recount together what has happened. They include in their remembering not only facts, that Jesus of Nazareth was a prophet, and the chief priests and leaders handed him over to be crucified. They also share their confusion- that some women have told them that Jesus' body is gone and seen a vision of angels telling them he is alive. But they also share their hopes-"we had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel" (v. 21). According to Carrol, the phrase, "we had hoped" is the imperfect tense, *elpizomen*, "we had been (were) hoping." Some

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<sup>83</sup> Marshall, "Theological Perspective," 420.

<sup>84</sup> Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son*, 98.

<sup>85</sup> Culpepper, "Luke," 477.

manuscripts have the perfect tense of the verb, translated, “we have come to hope (we still do)” or the present tense “we still possess hope”.<sup>86</sup> Hope is foundational to our Christian faith and is a concept that goes beyond all reason and expectation. Hope is not found in cliches or in memories but in the fulfillment of a promise made. Culpepper notes that at first the disciples on the road to Emmaus only saw Jesus’ death as the frustration of their hope- their hope that he would be the “one to redeem Israel.”<sup>87</sup>

It is only later, after Jesus interpreted the scriptures for them, and had a meal with them, that their eyes were opened, and they were able to find their hope in Jesus’ death as the fulfillment of scripture. Luke has a little play on words when using “to interpret” (*diermeneuo*) and “to open” (*dianoigo*); there is also a balance found in the use of the verb translated “to recognize or perceive” (*epiginosko*), which Luke uses frequently, and the report of the disciples’ eyes being opened to recognize him.<sup>88</sup> It is not just the disciples’ eyes that are opened; Jesus opened the scriptures (v. 27, 32), he opened their eyes (v. 31) and later their minds (v. 45). This theme of careful investigation and personal experience is a theme throughout the Gospel of Luke that he shares at the start, “After investigating everything carefully from the very first” (1:3). In conclusion, Culpepper says the disciples and Luke recognized the truth of Jesus through the memory of his actions and the interpretation of his teachings.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Carroll, *Luke*, 482.

<sup>87</sup> Culpepper, “Luke,” 478.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 480.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 480.

Jesus' appearance to the disciples on the road to Emmaus is certainly not the only example of grieving we have in the New Testament. The Gospel of John contains another story about death, life, and resurrection in the eleventh chapter; once again it is a story that only appears in this Gospel. It is the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.<sup>90</sup> Much like the movement in Luke 24 from closed eyes to open, here there is a movement from hopeless to hope-filled; while commonly referred to as "the raising of Lazarus," the story is about much more than just that. Its focus is not only on Lazarus, the one whom Jesus' loved, and his illness, death, and re-emergence from the tomb, but rather the focus is on the one who brings it about, and on others' responses to the event.<sup>91</sup> The passage begins with Jesus being sent a message from Lazarus' sister Mary, informing Jesus that "he whom you love is ill" (John 11:3). Interestingly the Greek word for "love" used here is not *agape*, a word that the Johannine corpus uses for self-less, self-giving love; rather, the writer uses *philia*, a common everyday Greek word for "friendship" or "human affection" to describe Jesus' love for his friend.<sup>92</sup> Jesus though, tells those around him that Lazarus' death does not lead to death but is for God's glory, and accordingly stays where he is for 2 more days (v. 4-6). When he finally does arrive, Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days (v. 17).

As the narrative continues, Jesus interacts with both of Lazarus' sisters. He is met first by Martha, who explicitly names her disappointment that Jesus had not come sooner.

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<sup>90</sup> James O. Duke, "Theological Perspective John 11:1-45," in *Feasting on the Word*, eds. David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster, 2010), 142.

<sup>91</sup> Duke, "Theological Perspective John 11:1- 45," 140.

<sup>92</sup> John Rollefson, "Homiletical Perspective John 11:1-45," in *Feasting on the Word*, eds. David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster, 2010), 143.

It is important to note that these opening statements made by Martha fit clearly within the language of faith in Judaism.<sup>93</sup> She goes on to say, “even now,” showing that her confidence in Jesus’ power and ability is undiminished even in the face of Lazarus’ death. Like the Psalmists, Martha’s lament is a faith-filled response in which she remembers what God has already done.

It is within two tightly parallel phrases found in vv. 25-26 that perhaps the theological dimensions of this passage are most profoundly heard.<sup>94</sup> Built around the verbs “believe” (*pisteuo*) and live (*zao*) and die (*apothnesko*), Jesus spells out what it means for him to be the resurrection and the life. He says “Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” (v. 25-26). As O’Day writes,

For Jesus to be the resurrection means that physical death has no power over believers; their future is determined by their faith in Jesus, not by their death. For Jesus to be the life means that the Believer’s present is also determined by Jesus’ power for life, experienced as his gift of eternal life.<sup>95</sup>

The text then tells us that when Jesus sees Mary and others weeping, he is “greatly disturbed in spirit and moved deeply” (v. 33). The Greek verb used is a strange one, *embrimaomai*, which has a literal meaning of “to snort”; it is used elsewhere in scripture including Matthew 9:30 and Mark 1:43, and is usually used to convey anger and

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<sup>93</sup> Gail R. O’Day, “John.” In *The New Interpreters Bible Commentary*, Vol IX edited by Leander Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 688.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 688.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 689.

emotional display and indignation.<sup>96</sup> The second verb, *tarasso*, is most accurately translated “agitated or “troubled” and is used in this case to underscore the intensity of the emotions Jesus displays.<sup>97</sup> Gail R. O’Day posits that these three verses, v. 33-35, are some of the most difficult to understand in the Gospel, and that it is for this reason that interpreters and commentators have had a tendency to over-sentimentalize Jesus’ response and emotions, changing the translation of the Greek words to compassion instead of anger.<sup>98</sup>

Moody Smith suggests that the Gospel writer is telling us that Jesus participates in the mourning and sadness over Lazarus’ death, and the statement 2 verses later that “Jesus wept” confirms this.<sup>99</sup> The bystanders are touched by Jesus’ expression of emotion saying, “see how he loved him,” (v. 36). It is a profound statement that is true on multiple levels; certainly, it is an acknowledgment of love between these friends, a love shared with his sisters, but they are also naming- perhaps without noticing- the love Jesus has for his disciples. As Smith writes, “Having loved his own who are in the world, he loved them to the end. Moreover, it symbolizes, or better, gives concrete manifestation to, the life-giving work of Jesus, who does what God has given him authority and power to do.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> D. Moody Smith, “John” in *Abingdon New Testament Commentary* ed. Victor Paul Furnish, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), Section: the Raising of Lazaurus, paragraph accessed October 19, 2022, <https://login.ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/login?url=https://www.ministrymatters.com%2flibrary%2f#/abtc/8ad925190d98623cf9ad14073fae2ac/introduction.html>.

<sup>97</sup> O’ Day, “John,” 690.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 690.

<sup>99</sup> Smith, “John”, Section: The Raising of Lazarus.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*.

There are multiple instances of weeping in the story of Lazarus' death and rising; perhaps the reason behind the weeping points to the difference between grieving with hope and without. Mary and Martha weep because their brother's death devastates them, and perhaps because of their disappointment at Jesus not being present. Jesus weeps because the people around him cannot see the resurrection; they have not understood what he has been saying all along about his own pending death and resurrection.<sup>101</sup> Jesus wants Mary, Martha, the disciples, and the other mourners to believe in the eschatological statement he's made in verses 25-26 but also elsewhere in his ministry. Jesus' tears, which come in direct response to the invitation to "come and see" are also a "public acknowledgment of the pain that death causes in human life."<sup>102</sup> Perhaps this is a reminder too that in the midst of our own grief, we can become so consumed by our suffering that we fail to acknowledge and remember how God, time and again, redeems suffering and overcomes death in unexpected ways but first and foremost through Jesus' death and resurrection.<sup>103</sup> Katie Hines-Shah reminds us in her reflections on this text that,

This study of grief is not without recourse. We do not grieve as those who do not have hope. Christians always read the story of the passion with the knowledge of the resurrection. We read the stories of our world, of those we love, and of ourselves knowing that something more awaits. The raising of Lazarus is not just a foretaste of the feast to come but a real and tangible sign: resurrection is not just for "the last day" but also for now. We can expect that God will call us out of tombs. We can anticipate being called to unbind those long thought dead. Having seen the

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<sup>101</sup> O'Day, "John," 689.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 691.

<sup>103</sup> Katie Hines-Shah, "Living by the Word." *The Christian Century*, April 08, 2020, <https://ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/living-word/docview/2387314833/se-2>.

resurrection of Lazarus, alongside other resurrections in our lives and in our world, we can, like Mary, dare to believe.<sup>104</sup>

Through our own careful investigation of scripture, and our experience of God in our lives, we will find that our hope is found in Jesus; it is found in his presence, and love, and promises. It is found in his life, death, and resurrection, which bring a new day, a new hope, a new future that was previously not possible. Nouwen understands the meaning of eschatological hope when he says,

The Lord who died...died not because of any death or darkness in him, but only to free us from the death and darkness in us. If the God who revealed life to us, and whose only desire is to bring us to life, loved us so much that he wanted to experience with us the total absurdity of death, then-yes, then there must be hope; then there must be something more than death; then there must be a promise that is not fulfilled in our short existence in this world; then leaving behind the ones you love, the flowers and the trees, the mountains and the oceans, the beauty of art and music, and all the exuberant gifts of life cannot be just the destruction and cruel end of all things; then indeed we have to wait for the third day.<sup>105</sup>

The love of Christ, even in the face of death, brings hope. We anticipate the resurrection day. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul reminds the Church at Thessalonica that God's plan continues to be carried out. It is because of this hope that we do not grieve as others do, because we believe that this is not the end- not for the one we have lost, or for those left to grieve. Within the story of the resurrection appearance on the way to Emmaus, we get a glimpse of this hope. Marshall indicates that while the Gospel writer does not fully articulate a theology of the resurrection, he does affirm through the appearance of the

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<sup>104</sup> Hines- Shah, "Living by the Word".

<sup>105</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, *A Letter of Consolation* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1982), 78.

resurrected Christ to his disciples, that “relationships of depth, grounded in forgiveness and hope, will endure.”<sup>106</sup> We wait in hope for the day when we will be renewed, redeemed, and given new life; this promise offers encouragement to those that are grieving and mourning. This hope helps us to write a new story, even in our grief.

Thomas Long assesses in this manner,

The work of grief is to gather the fragments and to rewrite the narrative, this time minus a treasured presence...But we do not do this task of rebuilding our life narratives alone. In the wilderness of grief, God provides narrative manna - just enough shape and meaning to keep us walking - and sends the Comforter, who knits together the raveled soul and refuses to leave us orphaned. Sometimes the bereaved say they are looking for closure, but in the Christian faith we do not seek closure so much as we pray that all of our lost loves will be gathered into the great unending story fashioned by God's grace.<sup>107</sup>

It must be said that this hope does not mean that we cannot or should not feel pain in the midst of our grief. Pain and hope do not have to be opposites. Wolterstorff writes in *Lament for a Son*, “Elements of the gospel which I had always thought would console did not. They did something else, something important, but not that. It did not console me to be reminded of the hope of resurrection. If I had forgotten that hope, then it would indeed have brought light into my life to be reminded of it. But I did not think of death as a bottomless pit. I did not grieve as one who has no hope.”<sup>108</sup> There is always the hope of resurrection. It can, and hopefully does, change the way that one grieves, but it does not

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<sup>106</sup> Marshall, “Exegetical Perspective,” 420.

<sup>107</sup> Thomas Long and Thomas Lynch, *The Good Funeral: Death, Grief, and the Community of Care* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 224.

<sup>108</sup> Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son*, 31.

take away the desire to hold or be with the loved one again. Hope enables the faithful to continue to move forward despite the pain, seeking to follow God into the future prepared for us, continuing to love and be loved, and looking towards the day when death will be no more.

The vision of the new creation that John shares in Revelation is another passage that has been used in many funeral homilies over the centuries because it is a vision of hope. John is guided by both Jewish and Christian traditions in his vision for what will come. God promises Israel the creation of a new heaven and new earth after the destruction of the Babylonian Exile in Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22. The author of 2 Peter encourages weary Christ followers to maintain their hope that a new heaven and earth will come, one where righteousness reigns (2 Peter 3:13). Paul also references less specifically the new creation in 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15.<sup>109</sup>

John's new creation, however, will not be completely disconnected from the one that came before. Koester indicates the word *kainos*, new, gives emphasis to the difference of what has gone before but also encompasses continuity, as in the same person with a new name.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, Blount adds that the language suggests that God is not just creating something new but is taking what is old and transforming it. Out of destruction will come creation.<sup>111</sup> Koester suggests one way to think of it is that "God's

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<sup>109</sup> Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary* (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2013), 376.

<sup>110</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 794.

<sup>111</sup> Blount, *Revelation*, 376.

creative action transforms the existing world from suffering into blessing.”<sup>112</sup> Or, as Boring writes, “God does not make ‘all new things,’ but rather makes all things new.”<sup>113</sup>

Blount sees that the vision John shares turns auditory, with a loud voice speaking from the throne; God’s voice had previously been used in prophecy to indicate judgment activity, but here it signals salvation, which is and always has accompanied God’s eschatological activity.<sup>114</sup> The voice from the throne says that God will tabernacle, or “pitch God’s tent” directly with the people of God. The language calls to mind for the listener the times when God previously resided with Israel during their wilderness wandering, thus here the “people have left persecution behind and exist now in direct proximity to the ultimate promise, God’s presence.”<sup>115</sup>

In this eschatological exodus, God is with the people in a place where every threat has been taken care of permanently. Like in the Psalms, proximity to God implies relationship with God and John explicitly names this when the voice from the throne declares that “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and be their God” (Revelation 21:3b). While the voice from the throne is most likely not God, since it refers to God in the third person, it most certainly has divine authority.<sup>116</sup> Blount posits that this

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<sup>112</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 794.

<sup>113</sup> M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 220.

<sup>114</sup> Blount, *Revelation*, 376.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 380.

<sup>116</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 797.

covenantal language, while similar to Old Testament covenantal language indicates a powerful shift in theology, however, as John shifts from singular *laos* (people) to the plural (*laoi*), indicating that what was particular to the people of Israel has become universal- that all nations, all people can participate in this covenantal relationship.<sup>117</sup> As Beale and Campbell imply, the intimacy of this eschatological relationship is indicated in these verses by sharing what God will do for the peoples- wiping away every tear- and removing the cause of the tears- mourning, crying, pain, and even death itself. In this new creation, “God’s people will no longer experience any of the forms of suffering characteristic of the old creation.”<sup>118</sup> That is: there will be no more death, no more crying, no more pain. This would have been a shift in thinking for those from the Greco- Roman world who believed that death was not to be feared, because it ended suffering. Revelation on the other hand, as interpreted by Koester, names death as an adversary to be defeated; it is an adversary that can be faced because of the knowledge that it ultimately ends with resurrection and new creation.<sup>119</sup> This is a fulfillment of the prophecy from Isaiah 25:8, “the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces.” Beale and Campbell conclude that the prophet Isaiah describes God fully restoring Israel in such a way that they experience “everlasting joy” (35:10) and protection from “sorrow and sighing” (51:11). Similarly, the vision that John shares is one in which all barriers to fully experiencing God’s presence have been done away with.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Blount, *Revelation*, 380.

<sup>118</sup> G. K. Beale and David Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015), 365.

<sup>119</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 798.

<sup>120</sup> Beale and Campbell, *Revelation*, 365.

One of the goals of this project was to help the bereaved create a community; the example for this vision and the command to do so comes from the whole of the biblical canon, which emphasizes the importance of community but especially from the Epistles, where we are directly commanded to do so. We are told to “weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15) to “comfort one another” (1 Thess. 4:18; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4), to “bear with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2), and to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2) among others. In fact, if it were not for the community I found in various seasons of my life, I would not have survived the valleys that came with my own experiences of grief. The bereaved can often feel isolated and as if God is far from them in the midst of their grief; being in community however, especially Christian community, challenges this perception by affirming the truth that God is relational and personally near to his people when they suffer. Paul Randolph argues that those who are grieving do not need, or often desire, either an understanding of the *process* of grieving, nor an *elaborate theological explanation*, rather, he says, “They need the person that Jesus is.”<sup>121</sup> The beauty of being in community, especially with others who are grieving, is that we can be Jesus for each other, and in doing so “fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). One member of my congregation, who was not a part of the experimental group, told me recently that she has had trouble finding hope during her season of grief. I shared with her, that this is why God puts us in community, so that we can hold hope for her until she can once again grasp it for herself.

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<sup>121</sup> Paul Randolph, “Grief: It’s Not About a Process; It’s About the Person,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 17, no. 2 (Winter 2005): 16.

All of scripture reminds us that sadness, grief, and suffering are often the journey to restoration; it is the journey to healing. At the end of the podcast on grief Jared Byas shares this summarization,

I think that Jesus's death and resurrection, that model and pattern has become so important to me to recognize when everything in me wants to avoid the hard things and the sadness and the grief, I recognize that it's only through death that we have resurrection. We don't get to skip over Friday and Saturday and just get to Sunday.<sup>122</sup>

Grief will, inevitably, be a part of our journey. But it does not have to mean the end. If we let God work within us as we process it, grief can become the starting point for new forms of community, new strength, and a river of empathy for the suffering of others. God can make a new thing even out of this.

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<sup>122</sup> Ens, Byas, and Chu, "Grief as a Biblical Practice."

## CHAPTER 4 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

### Participant Information

As said earlier, this project was evaluated through interactions with control and experimental groups. Both groups took a pre-post survey at the beginning and end of the project; the experimental group participated virtually in four sessions of teaching, discussion, sharing, and completing a creative project, while the control group participated in person and only listened to a sermon on grief with no discussion, sharing, or project.

A look at the demographics of both groups and how they were created is helpful for the analysis of the data. The control group consisted of all of the adults who worshiped at the Callaway Campus of FSCC on the first day of the project, November 27, 2022. On this particular Sunday, there were ten adults in worship. This was a lower number of adults than originally predicted for two reasons. First, our average worship attendance has gone down since the start of COVID. Previously Callaway Campus averaged thirty-five to forty on a given Sunday, and now we average twenty to twenty-five. Secondly, this was a Sunday after the Thanksgiving Holiday. Usually, our attendance does not go down on holiday weekends because not many of our families travel; that was not true this year. In addition, this year, we have often had more people under the age of eighteen in worship than over; since the participants could only be over the age of eighteen, this limited the number of participants. All of the adult worshippers had been told ahead of time the topic of worship for the Sunday.

Of the ten adult participants in the control group, six were men, and four were women. Nine of the participants were white, and one was Asian. The ages ranged from

thirty-one to seventy. All the participants had experienced some time of loss. One of the participants had lost his mother to a long-term illness just two weeks previously; all of the other losses were over five years ago. The same adults took the pre-post survey on the last day of the project as well.

The second group was the experimental group; this is the group of participants who attended the four group sessions. I had ten people express interest, seven registered and two later dropped out; five ended up participating. Three participants were female and two listed themselves as non-binary. The age range of participants was twenty-eight to sixty-four. All participants had some connection to FSCC, although not all live in the area currently. The participants had various losses: parents, spouses, and close friends. Many of the participants had multiple losses that were significant and recent. All the losses were in the last year. The causes of death were natural (old age), illness and expected, and/or traumatic. Another helpful demographic piece to remember while analyzing the data is that one of the participants was a pastor, one is a current seminary student, and a third also has an undergraduate degree in social studies.

### **Analysis of Quantitative Data**

The table below shows the average results of the pre/post-survey given to both the control and experimental group, as well as the average difference between the pre to post-test for both groups. In all but five of the seventeen questions, the experimental group showed a more considerable difference between the participant's answers to the pre and post-survey. The highlighted questions in the table are the ones in which the control group showed a more considerable difference than the experimental group (See Table 1).

**Table 1**  
Average Pre/Post-Test Comparison

| Question  | Control |      |            | Experimental |      |            |
|-----------|---------|------|------------|--------------|------|------------|
|           | Pre     | Post | Difference | Pre          | Post | Difference |
| <b>1</b>  | 3.6     | 4.9  | 1.3        | 3.6          | 5.6  | 2          |
| <b>2</b>  | 4.6     | 5.2  | .6         | 4.4          | 6    | 1.6        |
| <b>3</b>  | 4.4     | 5.1  | .7         | 5.2          | 6.4  | 1.2        |
| <b>4</b>  | 4.4     | 5.3  | .9         | 4.8          | 6.5  | .75        |
| <b>5</b>  | 3.6     | 4.4  | .8         | 4            | 6.4  | 2.4        |
| <b>6</b>  | 3.1     | 4.7  | 1.6        | 4.2          | 6.25 | 1.25       |
| <b>7</b>  | 5.6     | 5.4  | -0.2       | 5.4          | 6.8  | 1.4        |
| <b>8</b>  | 2.4     | 5.5  | 3.2        | 3.8          | 6.8  | 3          |
| <b>9</b>  | 4.6     | 6    | 1.4        | 6.6          | 7    | .4         |
| <b>10</b> | 5.3     | 6.1  | .8         | 5            | 6.4  | 1.4        |
| <b>11</b> | 6       | 6.2  | .2         | 5.6          | 6.2  | .6         |
| <b>12</b> | 5.9     | 6.4  | .5         | 6            | 6.8  | .8         |
| <b>13</b> | 5.4     | 5.8  | .4         | 5.8          | 6.8  | 1          |
| <b>14</b> | 5.3     | 5.8  | .5         | 6            | 6.8  | .8         |
| <b>15</b> | 4.5     | 5.5  | 1          | 4.4          | 6.6  | 2.2        |
| <b>16</b> | 3.8     | 5.2  | 1.4        | 4.2          | 6.6  | 2.4        |
| <b>17</b> | 5.6     | 6.2  | .6         | 6.8          | 6.8  | 0          |

The question being asked by the project was, “Would the combination of creativity, biblical understanding, and modern grief theory help participants feel comfort as they expressed their grief?” My hypothesis was that it would. After conferring with Dr. Julien Corvin, a Math professor at Illinois State University, I determined that to analyze the data, I should use an independent variable, two-tailed t-test. The rationale behind using this statistical test is that the sample size for both groups was small, and the number of participants in each group was not the same. This test analyzes the differences in answers between the pre and post-survey in both groups to see whether or not there is a statistically significant difference. I used an online t-test calculator for this that was

recommended by Dr. Corven.<sup>123</sup> There were three questions that showed a statistical significance in the differences between answers in the pre-post survey: two, seven, and nine.

Question two asked the participants to rate their “knowledge of what the Bible has to say about grief” on a Likert scale of one to seven, with one representing low and seven representing high. In this question, the five participants in the experimental group (M=1.6, SD=1.14) compared to the ten participants in the control group (M= .6, SD=.69) demonstrated a significant difference in the answers between the pre and post survey,  $t(13) = -2.125, p = 0.533$ . This indicates that the experimental group increased their knowledge of what the Bible has to say about grief at a higher rate than the control group did, to a statistically significant level.

Question seven asked the participants to rate their agreement with the following statement, “I believe I have the resiliency to get through my grief.” Interestingly, the control group's average answer was lower in answer to this question by -0.2 between the pre and post-survey, while the experimental group's answers resulted in an increase of 1.4. For this question, the five participants in the experimental group (M=1.4, SD=1.14)<sup>124</sup> compared to the ten participants in the control group (M=-0.2, SD= .788) demonstrated a significant difference between answers between the pre and post-survey,  $t(13) = -3.205, p = .007$ .<sup>125</sup> This indicates that the experimental group received a higher rate

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<sup>123</sup>, Social Science Statistics, accessed February 18, 2023, <https://www.socscistatistics.com/tests/ttestdependent/default2.aspx>.

<sup>124</sup> M= Mean, SD=Standard Deviation

<sup>125</sup>  $t(\text{degrees of freedom}) = \text{the } t \text{ statistic}, p = p \text{ value}$

of benefit to their sense of resiliency while grieving from their participation in the group than the control group did from the sermon.

The last question to show a statistically significant difference when performing the t-test on the data was question nine. Question nine asked the participants to rate their agreement with the following statement, “I believe that naming our feelings is an important part of processing grief.” This datum is unique in that the difference is shown going the other direction. In this case, the control group shows a larger difference between the pre-post survey responses than the experimental group does. In this question, the ten participants in the control group ( $M=1.4$ ,  $SD=.966$ ) compared to the five participants in the experimental group ( $M= .4$ ,  $SD=.547$ ) demonstrated a significant difference in the answers between the pre and post-survey,  $t(13)= 2.124$ ,  $p=0.053$ ). This could indicate that the control group received more of a benefit in this particular area than the experimental group did.

However, the data from this question also give us an excellent example of one situation that could affect the statistical data and analysis: the ceiling effect. It is noticeable that the average answers the experimental participants gave in the pre-survey were higher than those given by the control group. The ceiling effect explains that when the answer in a pre-survey is very high on a scale (in this case, a scale of one-seven), it leaves very little space for growth to be shown on the post-survey. Question seventeen is an excellent example of this effect. This question asked participants to rate their agreement with the statement, “I am open to new ways of coping.” As revealed in Table 1, the average answer in the experimental group pre-survey was “6.8.” Since the scale is out of seven, this leaves virtually no room for growth between the pre and post-test. On

the other hand, the control group shows an average answer of “5.6” to question seventeen, giving more room for growth. This same ceiling effect is shown in question nine, which asks the participants to rate their agreement to the statement, “I believe that naming our feelings is an important part of processing grief.” Table 1 shows that the experimental group had an average answer of “6.6”, while the control group had an average response of “4.6”.

The second effect that could have had an influence on the data is response bias. The participants knew that the group was a part of the work that needed to be completed for me to receive my Doctor of Ministry, and thus may have responded more positively in the pre-post survey to “help” me. This must be considered when reviewing the data from both groups.

While none of the other questions in the pre-post survey showed statistically significant results in the differences between groups, this does not mean that there was not a benefit from participating in the group. The small sample size makes it difficult to achieve any statistically significant differences.

### **Data Supporting Original Hypothesis**

The project's main goal was to create a program that helped participants find comfort as they grieve using creativity as a coping skill. My hypothesis was that participating in a group that taught about grief from three domains-biblical and theological understanding, modern psychological grief theory, and creativity as a coping skill-would show more benefit than only one sermon on grief, with no participation, discussion, or creative project. Applying the t-test to the total average of differences

between the pre-post survey for both the experimental and control groups does show positive support for my hypothesis. For this analysis, I used a dependent variable two-tailed t-test, because the number of questions was the same in both groups (seventeen questions), and I was comparing the results of one treatment (sermon only) to a second treatment (a four-week group that included the same material as in the sermon but expanded along with discussion, participant sharing, and creative projects). These results showed that the five participants in the experimental group ( $M=1.364$ ,  $SD=.812$ ) compared to the ten participants in the control group ( $M=.923$ ,  $SD=.74$ ) demonstrated a significant difference between answers in the pre and post-survey,  $t(13)=2.481$ ,  $p=.025$ . This indicates that there was an increased benefit to the experimental group members over the control group members, thus showing positive support for my hypothesis, suggesting that teaching, discussion, engagement and creativity made a difference.

Another way to analyze whether the experimental group received more of a benefit than the control group is to look at the individual learning outcomes (See Table 2). If the answers to the survey responses are grouped by learning outcomes in the affective and cognitive domains, the data is as follows<sup>126</sup>:

**Table 2**  
**Learning Outcome Mean Differences**

|    | Affective |              | Cognitive |              |
|----|-----------|--------------|-----------|--------------|
|    | Control   | Experimental | Control   | Experimental |
| #1 | .8        | 2.4          | 0.525     | 1            |
| #2 | .82       | 1.459        | 1.5       | 2            |
| #3 | .966      | 1.138        | .9666     | 1.138        |
| #4 | -0.2      | 1.4          | .775      | 1.25         |
| #5 | 1         | 1.375        |           |              |

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<sup>126</sup> Since the third domain was psychomotor and included goals around the creative projects, those goals will be considered in the qualitative data section.

In order to analyze this data, I used the same independent variable, two-tailed t-test because the sample sizes were small and not the same size. This statistical analysis revealed that three of the learning outcomes showed a statistically significant difference between the two groups: Affective #2, Affective #4, and Cognitive #1. The second hoped-for outcome in the affective domain was that participants would discover compassion for those grieving through biblical stories. These results showed that the five participants in the experimental group ( $M=1.45$ ,  $SD=1.382$ ) compared to the ten participants in the control group ( $M=1.10$ ,  $SD=.82$ ) demonstrated a significant difference between answers in the pre and post-survey,  $t(13)=-2.146$ ,  $p=.035$  in the responses that were measuring this learning outcome. This indicates that the participants in the experimental group showed a statistically higher increase in their compassion for those grieving, including, themselves, than did the control group. Since the only difference between the experimental and control group was the participatory elements, the data suggests that this made a difference.

The second learning outcome that showed a statistical significance was already highlighted in a previous section; this outcome stated that participants would “discover increased confidence in their resilience.” For this question, the five participants in the experimental group ( $M=1.4$ ,  $SD=1.14$ )<sup>127</sup> compared to the ten participants in the control group ( $M=-0.2$ ,  $SD=.788$ ) demonstrated a significant difference between answers in the pre and post-survey,  $t(13)=-3.205$ ,  $p=.007$ .<sup>128</sup> This indicates that the experimental group

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<sup>127</sup> M= Mean, SD=Standard Deviation

<sup>128</sup>  $t(\text{degrees of freedom}) = \text{the } t \text{ statistic}$ ,  $p = p \text{ value}$

received a higher rate of benefit to their sense of resiliency while grieving from their participation in the group than the control group did from the sermon.

The third learning outcome that showed a statistical significance was the first in the cognitive domain, which stated that participants would “identify stories of grief and loss in scripture and connect them in meaningful ways to their own lives.” These results showed that the five participants in the experimental group ( $M=1$ ,  $SD=1$ ) compared to the ten participants in the control group ( $M=.847$ ,  $SD=.525$ ) demonstrated a significant difference between answers in the pre and post-survey,  $t(13)=-1.890$ ,  $p=.62$ , in the responses that were measuring this learning outcome. This indicates that participants in the experimental group identified stories of grief in scripture and connected them to their own lives at a higher rate than did the control group.

While these are the only three that showed statistical significance, we once again must remember how the ceiling effect, response bias, and the small sample size could have influenced these results. Overall, when looking at Table 3, we can see that the experimental group showed a higher difference between the pre and post-survey results, indicating a movement toward achieving the learning outcome; further evidence of this is shown in the qualitative data analyzed below.

### **Analysis of Qualitative Data**

While numbers give us a good idea of what happened in the project, to give us the full picture we need to look at the other type of data received. This project had two types of qualitative data from which we can glean more information, the creative projects and the open-ended questions in the final survey. The art projects are, in some ways, the most

important pieces for evaluating this project because they are the proof of the work we did each session. The open-ended questions gave students an opportunity to show their receptivity to the biblical and theological teaching, while their knowledge was assessed in the pre-post survey.

Each week I did an evaluation of the artwork made by participants; this evaluation was not to critique the art from an artistic perspective but to evaluate whether or not it met the goal of the project (See Appendix G). The questions in this rubric were simply yes or no questions. In all cases of completed artwork, I do believe that the projects met the stated psychomotor learning outcomes for the week. One participant did not finish any of the artwork past the first week. When I asked that participant, they told me, "I'm a perfectionist and I just need more time to think about them." To analyze the qualitative data, we will look at the creative projects done each week.

The creative project for the first week was changed from that first mentioned in the project proposal. The original idea was for the group to create a wordcloud as a sort of collage from magazines that named how they experienced grief. Since we were not in person this could not be done. However, we did create a wordcloud electronically (See Appendix I). Participants were asked to send in answers to the question, "How would you describe grief?" As participants sent in words, they would appear on the screen. The words that are larger were ones that were sent in by more than one person. This became an excellent icebreaker and introduction to the group, as participants shared why they chose certain words. The other creative project we did this week was a candle; participants were invited to use wax and tissue paper to write their loved ones' name's on their candles, along with images or words about them (See Appendix J). The artwork

rubric for this project asked one question, “Does the candle help participants tell the story of their loss?” All five participants were able to use the candle to tell the story of their loss.

The project for the second week, which focused on the biblical concept of lament and naming one’s feelings, was a painting. These paintings used assigned colors representing feelings to help participants name feelings and lament (See Appendix L). The rubric for this project asked three questions (See Table 3).

**Table 3**  
**Week 2 Artwork**

|                                                                                        | Yes | No |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|
| <b>Week 2:</b> Did the participant use more than one color (feeling) in their artwork? | 4   | 1  |
| <b>Week 2:</b> Does the painting show a pattern of multiple feelings?                  | 4   | 1  |
| <b>Week 2:</b> Was the participant able to explain their choices of color?             | 4   | 1  |

Table 3 reflects that one of the participants did not complete the project; however, this person was able to verbally share his or her feelings. This week is unique in that it had the longest discussion about the artwork, even after the class was over. In fact, I received two text messages from participants asking if they could share the activity with family members. This week was also referenced multiple times in the answers to the open-ended questions in the post-group survey that allowed participants to reflect on the

process. One participant wrote, “The lesson that stuck out the most was when we named the feelings associated with grief and painted the pictures. It allowed me to understand there are other descriptors in grief beyond pain and sadness and they’re all valid.” Another participant ended up showing not just feelings but one of his or her favorite places to be with the parent they had lost. This person’s reflection indicated, “The painting process revealed emotions I had not really named that I had been carrying. That the end result looked like my (parent’s) farm was comforting and hard at the same time. I can’t go back to that place in the same way, but the painting reminded me of the many God moments on that farm.” As we shared and discussed this activity, participants were able to make multiple connections with the project and their grief. One participant mentioned in the discussion that the way the colors bled into each other, with no definitive start and stop, could remind us of how messy our feelings are. Another spoke about the texture of the paint and the way some of the colors felt thicker or harder, just as emotions sometimes feel thicker or harder to process.

A shadow box was the creative focus for the third week, which focused on remembering as both a coping skill and a biblical concept. Participants were provided with a shadowbox and pins but were invited to bring to the session memorial items to place in the shadowbox. One of the participants remarked at the end of the class that a dread feeling permeated from the moment the box arrived, but in the end gratitude surfaced. I have not provided pictures of this project, because the items inside revealed personal details. There were only two questions for this project in the rubric (See Table 4).

**Table 4**  
**Week 3 Artwork Rubric**

|                                                                                        | Yes | No |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|
| <b>Week 3:</b> Did the participant bring materials from home for the shadowbox?        | 4   | 1  |
| <b>Week 3:</b> Did the participant shadowbox reflect their loved one or grief journey? | 4   | 1  |

These results again reflect the fact that one of the participants never finished the shadowbox. Those that participated were able to reflect on their loved one and their grief journey as they shared the items they had placed in the box. This week was unique in that only three participants were in the session, but one of those absent finished the shadowbox outside of class and shared it with us the next week. In reflecting on this project in the survey one participant wrote, “The shadow box also allowed me to revisit my emotions and memories and gave me some closure that I did not have doing her graveside service in the fall.”

The final art project was, according to the open-ended responses, the second favorite next to the paintings. It was in some ways, the culmination of all the grief theory, scripture, and coping skills we learned. The theme focused on hope; pictures for this project can be seen in Appendix O (See Table 5).

**Table 5**  
**Week 4 Artwork Rubric**

|                                                                                                                | Yes | No |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|
| <b>Week 4:</b> Does the broken flowerpot have more than 3 pieces?                                              | 4   | 1  |
| <b>Week 4:</b> Did the participant define hope inside their pot?                                               | 4   | 1  |
| <b>Week 4:</b> Was the participant able to articulate the connection<br>between the flowerpot and their grief? | 4   | 1  |
| <b>Week 4:</b> Was the participant able to articulate the connection<br>between the flowerpot and their faith? | 4   | 1  |

The rubric's questions reflect the process we undertook for this project. First, we used markers to define hope on the inside of the pot, then we broke it, and drew individual hopes on the outside before gluing it back together. This project also brought a lot of reflection from the participants. One of them remarked that it was the description of hope written on the inside of the pot that helped the glue it together once broken, one of them shared, "hope glues us together." Another participant summed it up this way in their written response, "The ordering of the activities were (*sic*) most meaningful. Identifying my feelings through painting and ending with an activity mimicking breaking and healing was most meaningful."

The final qualitative piece that affirms my hypothesis is the reflections written at the end. Three questions allowed the participants to reflect fully on the project. When asked what have you learned in these four weeks, participants reflected not just on the knowledge gained, but also on the community. One participant sums it up well,

I need support to get through this time and doing the activities was especially helpful to me as I am a visual learner and need to have hands on ways to express

my emotions. The explanation of the difference between mourning and grief was helpful as were the four needs of mourning. The community in this group was helpful to me. I had longed for a group to share my grief journey, but as a pastor, I was uncomfortable being in a group at my church. I know I need to find other supportive groups to join as grief is a journey. Four weeks was enough to show me that I need more of this.

Other responses reflected on lamenting or deepening knowledge they already had. Like this one, “Much of this reinforced my knowledge of grief work. The validation, community, and time to sit with it helped shift my knowledge into a deeper understanding.”

The second open-ended question invited participants to reflect on what they learned about their faith in the midst of grief. One participant, in particular, wrote a response to this question that explains their responses or non-answers in the pre/post survey and shows the possibilities of what can happen in a class like this. This person said,

Over the last few years I haven't actively practiced Christianity which is why some of the questions are blank. When cancer very suddenly took my dad from us (one month after I gave birth to my first child), I found it hard to listen to others around me telling me to cling to god's plan and find hope in that. With some time I have started to see how that is a valuable thing for people to cling to, and especially through the peers in this class, I appreciate their journeys and how faith intercedes. Trish is one of the only people who I trust enough to talk about faith safely, and her perspective allows me to find hope, even when I'm not too sure what I believe.

At first I found myself disappointed and worried about the response from this participant. However, on reflection, I think this actually provides a wonderful example of what good Christian community can be. This participant was able to come with doubts and his or her grief story and be welcomed with open arms. It is my hope that in doing so, and in

hearing the reflections shared by others struggling with grief and faith, they will once again see and know the hope that only Christ provides.

Others gave what were perhaps more anticipated and expected answers:

- “My faith is my anchor in this storm. It validates my emotions and gives me hope.”
- “That God is with me through all of it. So despite how alone I may feel, I am far from alone.”
- “I know that no matter what I go through and regardless of the duration God is with me.” “He understands and is faithful, so I believe He will provide whatever I need to go through the process.”

The third and final open-ended question asked participants, “What was most meaningful for you?” Their responses were as follows:

- “Sharing stories and thoughts with a diverse group of people. Trish holding space for class to move at its own pace yet gently guiding discussion. The lesson in remembering and making the shadow boxes.”
- “The ordering of the activities were most meaningful. Identifying my feelings through painting and ending with an activity mimicking breaking and healing was most meaningful. The high level of preparation and distribution of quality materials designed to facilitate the best experience was heartwarming. The high respect and supportive loving care for my situation created trust and earned my confidence in the process.”
- “Lamenting provided a new and different perspective to how I grieve. Moving beyond meditation and using creativity to reflect and express my emotions was just as therapeutic.”
- “I am inspired to do a group like this at my church that is more than just talking and watching videos. I like the interactive aspect of this group.”

The answers to these questions affirm for me the positive aspects of this project and the need for a group like this. I am grateful that they trusted me with their memories and stories and were willing to share their feelings so honestly. As in the quantitative data analysis, it is helpful to remember the effect that response bias could have on these comments. While they were given anonymously, there were only five participants, which would have made it fairly easy for me to parse out who said what; in addition, the

participants are all people with whom I have some type of relationship, and they may have wanted to share positive feedback so that I did well.

### **Evaluation of Facilitator**

The evaluations of me as a facilitator from the experimental group were overall very high (See Table 6). The table below shows the summary of these results.

**Table 6**  
**Summary of Answers from Survey 2**

| <b>Question #</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>Standard Deviation</b> |
|-------------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| <b>1</b>          | 6.8         | 0.44                      |
| <b>2</b>          | 6.75        | 0.5                       |
| <b>3</b>          | 6.8         | 0.44                      |
| <b>4</b>          | 6.75        | 0.44                      |
| <b>5</b>          | 6.6         | 0.55                      |

The format for this feedback was the same as the pre/post-survey. Using a Likert scale, participants rated their agreement or disagreement to statements on a scale of one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree.) The first question asked participants to rate their agreement with the statement, “Pastor Trish’s presentation of grief theory was clear and easy to understand.” Overall the participants showed a strong agreement to this statement. The second question asked participants to rate their agreement with the statement, “Pastor Trish’s presentation of the biblical material was clear and easy to understand.” Again, this statement had a high rate of agreement, however it should be noted that only four of five participants answered this second question. One possible

explanation for the missing response could be connected to participant #4's comments in the qualitative portion of the survey, in which the participant wrote, "Over the last few years I haven't actively practiced Christianity which is why some of the questions are blank."

The second category for evaluation of the presenter was around the timing of sessions, and whether participants believed that we had started and ended on time. Participants strongly agreed that I started the sessions on time, with an average of 6.8 (sd. 0.4). There was also a strong agreement with the statement that I ended on time, with an average response of 6.75 (sd .5). However, again, this statement only had four respondents. While there were no comments made to tell me why a participant did not respond, one possible reason could be that the students were not completely aware of how long the sessions should last, and so they did not feel fully able to rate their agreement to the statement. In addition, some sessions took less time than originally intended, so participants could have been confused as to what the expectations were.

Finally, to gauge how comfortable my facilitation of the sessions made the participants feel, they were asked to rate their agreement to the statement, "I felt comfortable and able to participate fully." This statement had an average response of 6.6, indicating that students felt comfortable and able to participate fully.

As indicated in the previous section, in analyzing this data the effect of response bias must be kept in mind. The participants could have rated my facilitation higher because of their relationship with me and the knowledge that this was an essential piece in working towards my degree. In reflecting on these survey results, it would have been helpful to include a question that rated the instructions for the art projects, as sometimes I

wondered if I explained things well enough. Also, since the class changed from in-person to virtual, I should have included questions about ease of access to the Zoom meeting, and collection of materials. However, overall, I am satisfied with my facilitation of the course and the solid feedback from participants.

### **Strengths and Weakness**

Projects like this one come with a lot of moving pieces and thus results in some of the pieces being offered are strong and others weak. I would like to examine both in order to help further research. The first weakness I would name is the timing and the schedule. Church Calendars are hard and are often dependent upon approval of outside entities. Each community is unique in what works and what does not. Finding a schedule that worked for all who expressed interest was the hardest part of this project and probably impacted the results most. It is possible that if a different schedule was chosen, the group size would have been larger, which could have led to a more thorough statistical analysis. Our church's calendar year was already set with upcoming classes in January as part of a big push in discipleship, so I knew that this was the only timing available to hold the class. However, I also knew that the holiday season both made this more complicated and more necessary. Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's can contribute to a hard season of grieving for many people, and extra support at those times is often necessary. Thus the timing was both a strength and a weakness.

Having to switch the experimental group from in-person to a virtual platform was in some ways a weakness. Coordinating the ZOOM sessions, making the surveys electronic and anonymous, sending weekly art materials were all a lot of details to be

done in a short time. Connected to this, the small sample size for both the control and experimental group is a weakness that cannot be emphasized enough. To have a higher support of my hypothesis I would need results from a higher sample size.

The other weakness I see in the project is the pre-post survey questions. While analyzing the data I found that there were some questions we should have asked but did not include, and there were some that could have been asked slightly differently. For example, none of my pre-post survey questions asked about creativity specifically; being able to analyze a participant's sense of their creativity from the beginning to the end of the project could have been helpful data. My survey asked participants to rate their agreement on the statement that “naming our feelings is an important part of grief,” but it did not ask if participants felt an increased ability to do so. In addition, a few more open ended questions could have strengthened the qualitative data as well. I should have added a question asking participants to explain in their own words concepts like lament, which could have allowed me to assess whether or not they fully understood the concept that was taught. One more possible weakness is the qualitative data of the open-ended questions being done electronically; I wonder if participants would have written more if they had been doing it by hand. While doing the surveys electronically allowed for increased anonymity, it could have had an effect on how much they wrote.

All that being said, I do see strengths in the project. Clearly, this small group of five formed a community. They found things they shared in common, and they listened deeply to one another, honoring the stories they heard and helping one another make connections to the material and the lives. During the course of our work together, I did not hear a single cliché being thrown at anyone else, or unsolicited advice offered, which

can so easily be done when someone is in pain. Each of the participants were able to tell different aspects of their grief experience over the course of the four weeks and each of them discovered something about themselves in the process.

The creative projects themselves are a strength, particularly the last three. They show the power of using creativity to cope, and they show that this does not have to be a hard, complicated masterpiece. Each week I made an example of the project so that the participants could see that the expectations for a masterpiece was very low. Each of the projects connected well to the themes of each week, and in some ways, they built upon themselves, culminating in the broken pot project.

While I listed the virtual platform as a weakness in the previous section, I do think it is also in some ways a strength. It allowed people to participate who would not otherwise have been able to do so; for example, two of the participants have younger children and doing a virtual class allowed them to attend without having to arrange for childcare. The virtual platform also caused me to be more organized in the gathering of supplies since they had to be mailed ahead of the class, and it forced me to shift some of the projects, which I think strengthened them. The other strength is that many of the students want to be able to do this again or to lead it with people they know. They see the need in their lives and have a desire to share the hope of Christ with them in this kind of creative effort.

### **Personal and Professional Growth**

I have learned a lot about myself during the process of this project, and during my time as a student at Gardner-Webb. The biggest gift it has given me is helping me hear

God's calling to move out of local church work and into working specifically with those who are grieving through Hospice. When I began the program, I was feeling burnt-out and very frustrated with the direction of my ministry. In addition, the added stress from being in a denomination that is currently working towards a very messy divorce has taken its toll on my health, my ministry, and my calling. The seminars, and even the very long drives back and forth, gave me time to pray, be still, and discern. While there were times the schedule was frustrating, and the thought of making one more trip was hard, it was very clearly where I needed to be.

Professionally the project has helped me to hone my skills as a facilitator. It has allowed me to put together pieces of both my jobs, and to flex my creativity in ways that have bled into all areas of my life. In addition, just the advertising of the project helped open some conversations at our church as to new possibilities for grief support and education. Intellectually the seminars and project have increased my understanding of family systems, emotional intelligence, and pastoral care. Working through the theological and biblical studies part of the project has forced me to look at scripture in new ways and helped me to put new language to my own feelings associated with grief. While I have experienced the hope of God over and over in twenty years of grieving the sudden loss of my boyfriend Sam, the project forced me to re-examine how I articulated that hope.

## CHAPTER 5- FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

As I think about the future in regards to my project, I wonder whether an increased benefit would be found through an in-person group, and I think this is one area that could be further studied. It is much easier to build community when face-to-face in a room. I believe being in person would have changed the results; I suspect it will allow the group to learn better, share more, and take their time seeing one another produce the art. It would allow for music in the background and chatter. While we were on zoom and people were doing their project, they were mostly silent; chatting while working can be less intimidating and allow for more group bonding.

Another area that could be studied further is the length of the group. In my work through Hospice, most of our groups are six to eight weeks, and I think that would allow for solidifying the teaching in both the biblical and grief theory areas that might have resulted in strengthening the results of the learning outcomes, simply because participants would have heard the material more. This of course, would require additional teaching material and creative tasks, so this is another area that could be further studied. In addition, alternate creative projects would be a good avenue for further study.

I do believe that the results of this project indicate that participants benefited from the combination of creativity, grief theory, and theological discussion. Grief support is vitally important in this era of increased isolation, busy-ness, and stress; churches can and should be the place where people can bring their grief and be assured both that they are not alone, and that there is hope. This curriculum could help them to do just that. The biggest compliment I received was from one member of the group, a pastor at another church, asking if she could have the curriculum to use at her church. She had been

frustrated with the materials they were using and yearned for something more experiential; after losing her mom, she joined our group and found exactly what she needed. Talking with her assured me I am not alone in being frustrated with other grief support systems, and I firmly believe that a group like the one I have facilitated would be a great benefit to the universal church. I have a sense that this kind of group can help not only in the church setting but also in my hospice setting. While hospice is not a faith-based organization, it is a holistic one, recognizing that faith and spiritual support play an important role both for patients and their families. A group like this could have a positive impact on both populations. While writing a curriculum was not part of my original goal in working towards my Doctorate of Ministry, or when I conceived of this project, I can see how it would be possible and how it would benefit my colleagues in ministry in addition to individual participants.

Frederick Buechner once remarked that “The place God calls you is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”<sup>129</sup> While I do believe the last eighteen years of my ministry have met that description, after completing this project I sense that God is calling me to meet another deep hunger with the skills, gifts, and experience with which I have been blessed through this process. I am excited to see what new thing God will do with this work in the future.

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<sup>129</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (New York:Harper One, 1993), 85.

## APPENDIX A

### Participation Covenant

Your willingness to participate in this small group experience is much appreciated. During these 4 weeks, we will cover multiple topics surrounding grief and bereavement. In our time together you will be invited to reflect theologically, and personally and to participate in creative activities led by Pastor Trish. Pastor Trish asks for your commitment to attend all of the 4 sessions.

There may be times during this group that you will share information you wish to keep confidential. You are encouraged as a means of maintaining the integrity of the project, and as an example of Christian witness, to keep all conversations shared to the classroom. While you may share the content learned (i.e. grief theories, scripture passages, creative projects,) please keep all stories and personal details to yourself.

Portions of your written reflections, gathered at the end of the sessions, may be used in the final project submitted by Pastor Trish to the faculty of the Gardner Webb School of Divinity, but all identifying information will be removed and only your participant number used. This participant number will be assigned to you at the beginning of the group, and will be known only to you and Pastor Trish, to serve as a means of preserving your anonymity while maintaining continuity. You are asked to please use only this participant number on all surveys and reflections. Your willingness to fully participate in this project is what will make it possible, so thank you in advance for doing so. Please sign, date, and return this form to Pastor Trish at the first session.

Printed Name:

Signature:

Date:

## **Appendix B Announcements**

*The following language will be used to announce the project in the electronic newsletter for First Saints Community Church:*

Pastor Trish will be leading a 4-week class on grief and creativity at Callaway Campus as a part of her Doctorate of Ministry Project on (insert date). This class is open to adults who have lost a loved one in the past 5 years. There is no cost for participation. If you would like more information or would like to participate, please contact Pastor Trish at [pastortrish@firstsaints.org](mailto:pastortrish@firstsaints.org)

**When participants express interest, the following will either be mailed or emailed to them:**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in this 4-week class on grief and creativity. This project is a part of the requirements for my Doctor of Ministry program in Pastoral Care and Counseling which I have been doing through Gardner Webb Divinity School. The project has been approved by the Divinity School committee and the University's Institutional Review Board. We will meet for 4 consecutive weeks at Callaway Campus.

Over the course of 4 weeks, we will learn about grief and try to connect our grief to our faith using creative endeavors. These art pieces require no skills or ability! It is my hope that at the end of the class you will have gained some new coping skills, and a new community to help you as you process your grief.

If you would like to participate, I can meet with you to go over the consent forms. Please reply to this email if you would like to proceed, or if you have any questions.

Peace-  
Pastor Trish

**The following announcement will appear in our electronic newsletter the week before the project starts and will be read before Worship on the first day of project.**

Pastor Trish will be preaching a sermon on grief and creativity at Callaway Campus on November 27, 2022. This sermon is a part of her project for her Doctor of Ministry Program in Pastoral Care and Counseling thru Gardner Webb University. All adults present in worship will be asked to complete a survey before and after the worship service. Participation is not mandatory.

## APPENDIX C

### Participant Info Sheet:

**Participant number:**

**Gender:**

**Age:**            18-30                            35-50                            50-70                            71+

**What was your relationship to the person(s) you lost?**

Spouse            Child            Parent            Sibling            Friend            Other

**How long has it been since the death of your loved one?**

0-6 months

7-12 months

1-2 years

3-5 years

+6 years

**How would you describe their death?**

Normal (old age)

Expected (terminal diagnosis)

Anticipated (was in hospice)

Sudden

Traumatic

Not Sure

## APPENDIX D

### Pre/Post Class Survey

Please identify yourself only through the following criteria:

Participants #:

**Please rate your answers to the following questions by circling your answer for each question using the scale provided.**

1.) How would you rate your knowledge of modern grief theory?

|          |          |          |          |          |          |          |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>7</b> |
| low      |          |          | Average  |          |          | High     |

2.) How would you rate your knowledge of what the Bible has to say about grief?

|          |          |          |          |          |          |          |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>7</b> |
| low      |          |          | Average  |          |          | High     |

3.) How would you rate your knowledge of possible coping skills for grief?

|          |          |          |          |          |          |          |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>7</b> |
| low      |          |          | Average  |          |          | High     |

4.) How confident do you feel connecting biblical passages about grief to your own life?

|          |          |          |          |          |          |          |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>7</b> |
| low      |          |          | Average  |          |          | High     |

5.) How would you rate your sense of community with the people in this group?

|          |          |          |          |          |          |          |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>7</b> |
| low      |          |          | Average  |          |          | High     |

6.) How confident do you feel in your ability to practice biblical lament as a coping skill for grief?

|          |          |          |          |          |          |          |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>7</b> |
| low      |          |          | Average  |          |          | High     |

**Please share how much you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling your answer using the scale below.**

7.) I believe that I have the resiliency to get through my grief.

|                   |          |          |          |          |          |                |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------------|
| <b>1</b>          | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>7</b>       |
| Strongly disagree |          |          | Neutral  |          |          | Strongly Agree |





**APPENDIX F****Post-Class Survey 3**

Participant #

In the space provided, please write your reflections on the material covered in the last 4 weeks. If you are able, please include aspects of your own grief story. Feel free to include any suggestions you have for future material.

What have you learned during these 4 weeks?

How does your faith help you find hope in the midst of grief?

What was most meaningful for you?

**APPENDIX G  
ARTWORK RUBRIC**

**Participant #:**

|                                                                                                             | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------|
| <b>Week 1:</b> Does the candle help participant tell the story of their loss?                               |            |           |
| <b>Week 2:</b> Did the participant use more than one color (feeling) in their art work?                     |            |           |
| <b>Week 2:</b> Does the painting show a pattern of multiple feelings?                                       |            |           |
| <b>Week 2:</b> Was the participant able to explain their choices of color?                                  |            |           |
| <b>Week 3:</b> Did the participant bring materials from home for the shadowbox?                             |            |           |
| <b>Week 3:</b> Did the participant shadowbox reflect their loved one or grief journey?                      |            |           |
| <b>Week 4:</b> Does the broken flowerpot have more than 3 pieces?                                           |            |           |
| <b>Week 4:</b> Did the participant define hope inside their pot?                                            |            |           |
| <b>Week 4:</b> Was the participant able to articulate the connection between the flowerpot and their grief? |            |           |
| <b>Week 4:</b> Was the participant able to articulate the connection between the flowerpot and their faith? |            |           |

**APPENDIX H**  
**Week 1 Lesson Plan**  
**Time and Space**

**Learning Objectives:**

*After learning about the purpose of the project, and a general introduction to modern grief theory, the participants will exhibit the following learning outcomes thru their conversation and artwork:*

*Affective*

- Participants will discover increased confidence in their resilience
- Participants will develop a sense of community from a biblical perspective as they listen to each other's stories.

*Cognitive*

- Participants will begin to develop a language for describing the story of their grief
- Participants will identify stories of grief and loss in scripture and connect them in meaningful ways to their own lives.
- Participants will assess the role of modern clinical grief theories in their individual grief process. (Week 1)

*Psychomotor:*

- Participants will collaborate to design a word cloud that describes their grief experiences. (Week 1)
- Participants will create a candle to honor their loved one

**Length of Lesson:** 90-120 minutes

**Focus:**

- Biblical focus will be Luke 24
- Grief Theory will be introduced
- Art project will be a candle

**Supplies Needed:**

- |            |                |
|------------|----------------|
| ● Candle   | ● Tissue paper |
| ● Markers  | ● Wax paper    |
| ● scissors | ● blow-dryer   |

**Teaching Outline:**

Begin by welcoming students to the first week of this four-week group. Go over confidentiality agreements, and how the project will work. Remind folks that this is participation by choice, and that they can share as little or much as they feel comfortable with doing.

Before the teaching begins, ask participants to fill out the pre-class survey. Remind them that these will be confidential and that they will be taken again at the end of class in order to track the progress of project goals. Once surveys are done, collect them and put them aside.

**Continue the session by introducing general grief theory to students, including the pattern that we will follow. Include the following:**

- Loss is universal- give examples
- The hardest losses are those due to the death of a loved one, and these can affect every aspect of one's life. In their book, Brook Noel and Pamela D. Blair write, "The grief associated with bereavement is one of the most profound of all human emotions- and one of the most lethal. Every year about eight million Americans suffer the death of a close family member, disrupting life patterns for up to three years."<sup>130</sup>
- Grief includes a wide range of emotions and experience that change in intensity over time, sometimes moment by moment.
- Processing our grief has been compared to a walk in the wilderness, being pulled under an ocean wave, a long journey, or even going through a tunnel. While the feelings and experiences of grief are painful and demand energy, they are also a normative part of living, and require understanding, flexibility, and resiliency that we might not have had to call on before we became bereaved.
- Many persons begin processing their grief privately, which often leads to an intense feeling of loneliness. However, it is possible, and often helpful for grief to be a shared experience. Each person's grief is unique but one can find comfort in receiving support from those who understand, and in reaching beyond oneself and giving support to others.
- Go over theories in psychological, medical, sociological, and pastoral fields about grief, including popularized stages of grief.
- Introduce Kenneth Mitchel and Herbert Anderson's four needs of grieving 1.) Time and Space 2.) Rehearsing feelings 3.) Remembering 4.) re-integrating or re-connecting.<sup>131</sup>

**DO WORD CLOUD online using menti.com- What words would you use to describe your grief?**

After complete, lead a discussion on what words were chosen and why. *Did someone else enter one that resonates with you? What patterns do you notice?*

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<sup>130</sup> Brook Noel and Pamela D Blair, *I wasn't Ready to Say Goodbye* (Milwaukee, IW: Champion Press, Ltd., 2008), viii.

<sup>131</sup> Kenneth R. Mitchel and Herbert Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs: Resources for Pastoral Care* (Louisille, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1983), 100.

Share that psychological grief theory won't be our only guide because we look at our grief through faith. Scripture will guide us.

Introduce Luke 24 and the patterns we find there.

- This is not a passage about grief, but certainly, one could expect that the disciples were grieving.
- Examples of the four needs of mourning within the passage

Introduce the importance of creativity- highlighting Genesis

- Hebrew word for create
- Examples of creativity within scripture

Each week we will do a creative endeavor. There are no skills needed, no craftiness required. They won't be graded and don't need to be perfect. They are simply a way to express and practice what we're learning. We're going to start out easy. What I'd like you to create is a candle that honors your loved one. Afterward, we will share them, along with any pieces of your grief story you'd like to share.

**Candle Instructions:**

- 1.) On the tissue paper, write your loved one's name and any decorations that represents who they are.
- 2.) Cut out tissue paper as close to your drawing as you can.
- 3.) Wrap the tissue paper on the candle as you'd like it placed, and then wrap the wax paper tightly around it.
- 4.) Hold the blow dryer a few inches away from the candle for 3-5 minutes or until the tissue has adhered to the candle.

Provide time for sharing.

**Recap** what we learned and thank everyone for their participation.

Remind them of the agreement for confidentiality and any reminders for next week.

**End by saying these words together:**

You are not alone.

I am not alone.

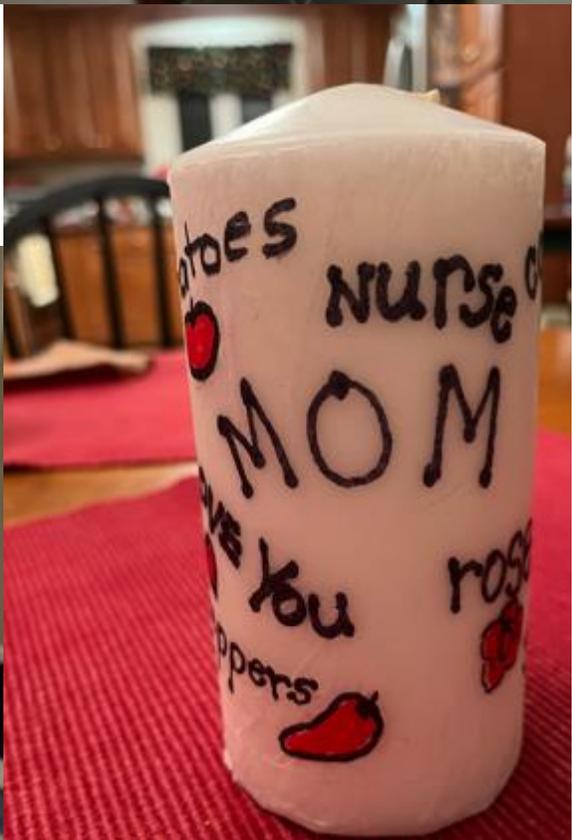
We are in God's presence.

We have each other.

### Appendix I

The image is a screenshot of a Mentimeter poll interface. The main title of the poll is "What words would you use to describe your grief?". The word cloud contains the following words: demanding, burdensome, scattered, loud, restrictive, grateful, nothing, regret, heavy, exhausting, peace, anger, sadness, disconnected, cyclical, weight, paralyzing, comfort, waves, and complicated. The word "peace" is the largest and most prominent in the cloud. The interface includes a "You are screen sharing" notification, a "Stop Share" button, a poll ID "2285", and the name of the presenter, "Talking: Patricia Watson". The Mentimeter logo is visible in the bottom right corner.

### Appendix J Candle Pictures



## Appendix K

### Week 2: Rehearsing Our Feelings

#### Learning Objectives:

*After learning about the Psalms, and the importance of rehearsing feelings during the grief process, the participants will exhibit the following learning outcomes thru their conversation and artwork:*

#### *Affective*

- Participants will discover an increased confidence in their resilience.
- Participants will develop a sense of community from a biblical perspective as they listen to each other's stories.

#### *Cognitive*

- Participants will develop a language for describing the story of their grief.
- Participants will identify stories of grief and loss in scripture and connect them in meaningful ways to their own lives.
- Participants will learn possible coping skills for grief.
- Participants will explain the purpose of biblical lament in their grief process.

#### *Psychomotor:*

- Participants will compose a painting showing the range of emotions experienced in grief.
- Participants will practice the biblical concept of lament in connection with their grief.

**Length of Lesson:** 90-120 minutes

#### **Focus:**

- Biblical focus will be the Psalms
- Grief Theory focus will be on rehearsing/naming feelings
- Art project will be a painting

#### **Supplies Needed:**

- Canvas for each student
- 10 colors of paint
- Paint brushes
- Water cups
- Paper Towels
- Drop clothes for floor
- Easels or tables for painting on
- Handouts of the Psalm
- Handouts of typical feelings experienced in grief

### Teaching Outline:

Begin by welcoming students to the second week and going over the group covenant that was created last week, emphasizing the importance of confidentiality and participation by choice.

*Remind participants of what we learned last week-* the basics of modern grief theory, the story of Luke 24 and the pattern for processing grief. Last week we began by giving ourselves the time and space needed to process our grief, and as we continue to do that, this week we will add learning how to rehearse our feelings in ways that are healthy and biblical.

*Share the handout of common feelings experienced during grief.*

Say to the students: it is very common for people to assume prior to experiencing grief that it is only one thing. Most of the time, when describing the feeling experienced in grief people will use words like sad, depressed, angry etc. But it is also possible, and common, that we will experience a wide range of emotions during our grief.

Go over each of the feelings and invite participants to share a time they have experienced that feeling. Remember: do not push but allow for easy conversation and thank participants when they do share.

Remind participants of internal/external feelings and that those emotions are temporary but often feel like they will last forever.

*Tell participants: now look at examples of where “rehearsing of feelings” occurs in the biblical text.*

Begin with an introduction to the book of Psalms:

- As a genre, the book of Psalms also gives us examples of what it looks like to fully admit and name the reality of loss; this happens specifically within what many scholars call Psalms of Lament.
- Individual Laments are the most prominent in the psalter.<sup>132</sup>
- It is important to note that a lament in scripture is not simply an indication of suffering, as its purpose is not only to ask for the suffering to come to an end, but also to draw closer to God.<sup>133</sup>
- Daniel Feld, Hebrew Scholar and Rabbi, calls these Psalms of disintegration or despair. He writes that there are some Psalms that are, “replete with a sense of

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<sup>132</sup> Willem S. Prinslo. “Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible: Psalms,” in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, ed. James D.G. Dunn and John Rogerson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 366.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 368.

God's presence, God's goodness and care, and the hope in God's justice, but strikingly, the book of Psalms also includes descriptions of other, darker human moments: expressions of abandonment, the confrontation with realities that question faith, the experience of despair..."<sup>134</sup>

Using Psalms, we can learn to practice the biblical concept of "lament"

- Lament is an expression of feelings that we do not use well in Western Christianity. It is a word we sometimes use, but not something we practice.
- Biblical literary forms of lament provided the worshiper an avenue for expressing intense feelings of grief, sorry, and anger. Laments acknowledge the fullness of life- that life is not always wonderful or perfect, and encompasses pain, grief, darkness, and evil.
- In addition, laments illustrate that complaining to God about one's circumstances, or even holding God responsible for them, is not an unfaithful response.<sup>135</sup>
- At times what is lamented is personal and stems from an illness or tragedy and at times is communal and the result of injustice.
- These Psalms of lament, despair, or dis-orientation indicate that the Hebrew worshiper felt free to express deep feelings that we would sometimes label as negative- complaints, anxiety, rage, deep sorrow- before God and before others in their community.<sup>136</sup>

One Example of this type of Psalm is Psalm 42

- The setting of Psalm 42 is personal exile; being exiled from the temple in Jerusalem is a crisis that brings not just physical distance and absence, but spiritual distance as well.<sup>137</sup> In describing this, Rabbi Edward Feld writes that exile brings with it a "loss of the ability to sense God's closeness and therefore an experience of losing one's center."<sup>138</sup>
- The word for pants/gasps is found also in Joel 1:20 which references wild animals in a drought stretching upwards as if imploring God for relief.<sup>139</sup> The connection the Psalmist is making here is the sense of lacking something that is vitally needed for life and having a prior experience that tells you it can be found if one

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<sup>134</sup> Edward Feld, *Joy, Despair, and Hope: Reading the Psalms* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), 73.

<sup>135</sup> Prinslo, "Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible: Psalms," 369.

<sup>136</sup> Nancy J, Duff, "Recovering Lamentation as a Practice in the Church," in *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square*, ed. Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 3.

<sup>137</sup> Feld, *Joy, Despair, and Hope*, 85.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>139</sup>John Eaton and John Day, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation* (London: Bloomsbury, Publishing Plc., 2003), 180.

looks precisely enough.<sup>140</sup> The Psalmist uses this powerful imagery to make not just a physical connection to the natural world, but an existential crisis that comes with being far from one's home.

- Psalmist is overwhelmed by memory. Memory is a function central to Biblical Theology, and certainly to Israel's existence, but here it is a two-edged sword, because recalling even moments of joy can be painful rather than consoling, when the feelings of grief overwhelm.<sup>141</sup>
- The Psalmist describes the feelings of grief with physical description, as he dialogues with his soul. Eaton and Day describe verse 5 and 6 this way, "how you are bowed down' - how deeply you mourn, with gestures of crouching, rolling in the dust and moaning!"<sup>142</sup>
- This Psalm makes room for many complex feelings and shows that human beings can hold all of these at once. In this psalm, "prayer and complaint, hope and dread, joy and pain, live side by side."<sup>143</sup>
- The Psalm ends with a repeated refrain, "Await God, for I still acknowledge him." For the Psalmist, God's presence is "not only a memory, a reality that is past, but there is a life with God in the very act of faithfulness."<sup>144</sup>
- The Psalmist uses the Hebrew word *ho-hili*, meaning, "wait," a word that is synonymous with the word *ka-veh* used in Psalm 27, meaning hope. *Ho-hili* is used to describe Noah's waiting for the land to dry up in the book of Genesis, and describes a waiting with expectation, a reminder that every good thing needs time in order to unfold.<sup>145</sup> It is a reminder that our hope is not based on nothing, but rather our hope is partially based on previous experience.
- In the same way, our rehearsing of our feelings of grief can lead us to a place where memory becomes something more than just reciting a story, it becomes a way to fully name the loss we've experienced and remind ourselves of the hope we profess and have previously experienced.

***Lead a discussion about material with the following questions:***

*What feelings do you hear in the Psalm? Write responses on a white board.*

*What does it mean to lament? How can we practice lament in our grief?*

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<sup>140</sup> Feld, *Joy, Despair, and Hope*, 90.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>142</sup> Eaton and Day, *The Psalms*, 181.

<sup>143</sup> Feld, *Joy, Despair, and Hope*, 90-91.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 91.

*Share that being able to name our feelings, and to connect those feelings with our faith, is an important part of the grieving process. Let's practice it with another passage.*

Remind participants of the Luke passage and invite them to point out where they see rehearsal of feelings in the passage. *What are the feelings you hear?*

**Introduce the Art project** as a way to name our feelings at this time.

*Instructions:* On the canvas, use the colors (each color represents a different feeling, refer to handout) to paint the emotions they have felt as they grieve. Show example.

*Remind participants* that this is not expected to be a masterpiece but rather a way to express outside what we often feel inside. Remind them there will be no judgment or grading of their work, and they can share as little or as much as they'd like to while they are painting.

Colors used:

Numb-Purple

Anxious- Orange

Anger-Red

Guilt-Brown

Sad- Blue

Lonely-beige

Hope-White

Gratitude-Green

Jealous-Yellow

Hopeless-Gray

Regret- Black

Denial-pink (you'll have to mix)

**Give time for painting. DO NOT RUSH THIS PART.**

When it seems like everyone has finished, provide time for anyone who would like to explain what they've made.

**Recap** what we learned and thank everyone for their participation.

Remind them of the agreement for confidentiality and any reminders for next week.

**End in a circle with these words:**

You are not alone.

I am not alone.

We are in God's presence.

We have each other.

### Feelings Worksheet

According to Dr. Alan Wofelt from the Center for Loss, grieving people may experience many different thoughts and feelings. Sometimes the emotions might seem strange, but they are an expression of where you are right now. It is important for us to try not to deny or ignore our feelings, but rather to recognize and learn from them. Naming and acknowledging them is the first step. It's also important to remember that feelings are neither good or bad. They just are, and you are allowed to feel a whole range of things- you might just need to explore it and find healthy ways of expressing them!

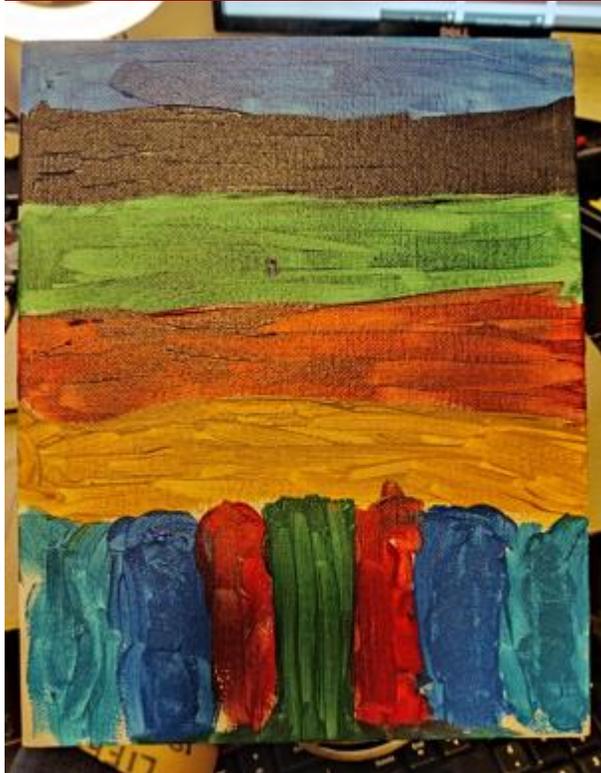
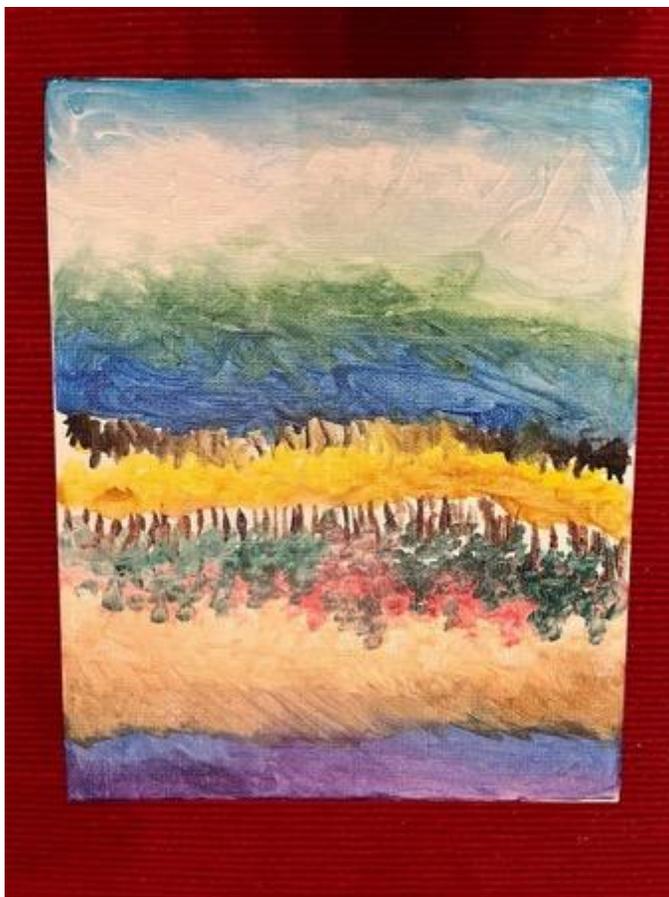
*It can be helpful to remember that grief is never just one emotion, but rather is a container that holds all of the emotions felt as a result of loss. You might feel:*

- Shock
- Denial
- Numbness
- Disbelief
- Disorganization
- Fear
- Confusion
- Yearning
- Anxiety
- Panic
- Anger
- Resentment
- Guilt
- Regret
- Sad
- Lonely
- Isolated
- Hopeless
- Worthless
- Relief
- Ambivalent
- Hope
- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Gratitude
- Envy

*“Anything a person feels inside of their own personal grief is correct”*  
Megan Devine

**APPENDIX L**  
**Feelings Paintings**





## Appendix M Week 3: Remembering

### Learning Objectives:

*After learning about the Psalms, and the importance of rehearsing feelings during the grief process, the participants will exhibit the following learning outcomes thru their conversation and artwork:*

#### *Affective*

- Participants will develop a sense of community from a biblical perspective.
- Participants will discover a sense of compassion for those who are grieving through biblical stories.
- Participants will practice possible coping skills for grief.

#### *Cognitive*

- Participants will develop a language for describing the story of their grief
- Participants will identify stories of grief and loss in scripture and connect them in meaningful ways to their own lives.
- Participants will apply creative coping skills to their grief

#### *Psychomotor:*

- Participants will create a collage of memories of their deceased loved one

**Length of Lesson:** 90-120 minutes

### Focus:

- Biblical focus will be Luke 24, also Isaiah, Job, and Lamentations
- Grief Theory focus will be on sharing memories
- Art project will be a shadowbox

### Supplies Needed:

- Shadowbox
- Glue
- Pins

### Teaching Outline:

Begin by welcoming students to the third week and going over the group covenant that was created the first week, emphasizing the importance of confidentiality and participation by choice.

*Remind participants of what we learned the last 2 weeks: 4 needs of grieving: Time and Space, Rehearsing Feelings, Remembering, Re-entering. Last week we worked on rehearsing our feelings and learned about the biblical act of lament. This week we continue into the next phase of the pattern, and that is Remembering.*

- Traditional grief theory posited that in order to heal, the grieving person must release or withdraw “psychic energy” from the deceased loved ones, in order to reinvest in new relationships.<sup>146</sup>
- Contemporary grief theories suggest that a continued connection to deceased loved ones is an important part of grieving.
- Poet Julia Kasdorf writes, “Grieving a loss is not only the process of letting go, but it is also the process of keeping.”<sup>147</sup>
- Pastoral Counselors Kenneth R. Mitchel and Herbert Anderson tell us that “reminiscing or remembering with another person is the principal means by which we build such memory, which in turn helps us gain needed emotional distance from the past.”<sup>148</sup>
- Remembering helps us to admit the reality of our loss.
- The Jewish faith has a tradition of saying, “May his/her memory be for a blessing,” when someone has passed.
- Memory is a function central to Biblical Theology, and certainly to Israel’s existence. The Psalms are one of the places in scripture where memory becomes almost its own character.
- Our ability to remember well, to tell the stories of our loved ones and of our faith is what helps us find and create meaning in our suffering.
- Finding meaning is one of the major tasks of grieving.<sup>149</sup> It is how we come to understand God’s activity in the world, God’s feelings about and for us, and God’s role in suffering.
- Melissa Kelley affirms, meaning is what helps us maintain order in a world filled with chaos.<sup>150</sup>
- This is also one of the central themes in the book of Job, i.e., how to speak of God in suffering. Indeed, one could argue that the whole of the book of Job is trying to answer that very question.<sup>151</sup>
- Another biblical text which speaks hauntingly of suffering is the book of Lamentations. Biblical scholar Kathleen M. O’Connor writes that the rawness of

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<sup>146</sup> Melissa Kelley, *Grief: Contemporary Theory and Practice of Ministry* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), chapter 4, Kindle.

<sup>147</sup> Julia Spicher Kasdorf. *The Body and the Book: Writing from a Mennonite Life: Essays and Poems*. (Philadelphia: Penn State University Press, 2009), 89.

<sup>148</sup> Mitchel and Anderson, *All Our Grievs*, 114.

<sup>149</sup> Alan Wofelt, *Understanding Your Grief* (Fort Collins, CO: Companion Press, 2021), 152.

<sup>150</sup> Kelley, *Grief: Contemporary Theory*, chapter 4, kindle.

<sup>151</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 13.

the five poems within the book of Lamentations provides a place where both “communal and personal pain can be reexperienced, seen, and perhaps healed.”<sup>152</sup>

- Raymond R. Roberts suggests that one of the gifts of Lamentations is the lesson that, “Mourning involves honestly naming these external and internal realities. The poet knows that we cannot find comfort by pretending that things are other than what they really are.”<sup>153</sup> Roberts goes on to suggest that the acrostic form of the poem is not only pleasing because of the beauty of its structure, but also that the form itself can teach the reader that loss will not have the last word. He writes, “We may need to go through the alphabet of pain more than once (the poet goes through the Hebrew Alphabet four times,) but eventually we will come to the end. That is, we reach a stopping place. Grief need not be bottomless.”<sup>154</sup>
- Lamentations 3:21-24. What gives the writer hope is God’s character, which includes steadfast mercy, (*hesed*), fidelity, and mercy. The verses that speak affirmation of divine *hesed* shown next to the verses naming his experiences of grief and rejection show an internal struggle to persuade himself that indeed his faithfulness and hope are well placed.<sup>155</sup> This internal struggle is one many who are grieving face, as we vacillate between hopelessness and hopefulness.

**Introduce Art Project for tonight-** we will be making shadow boxes or collages of the items you’ve brought in to remember your loved one. Share materials available, and an example if you have one.

Give time for boxes to be created.

**Invite participants to share their boxes and the stories they represent. Thank participants when they share.**

**Recap** what we learned tonight and thank everyone for their participation.

Remind them of the agreement for confidentiality, and any reminders for next week.

**End in a circle with these words:**

You are not alone.

I am not alone.

We are in God’s presence.

We have each other.

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<sup>152</sup> Kathleen M. O’Connor, “Lamentations” in *New Interpreters Bible Commentary* edited by Leander Keck, (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001)

<sup>153</sup> Raymond R. Roberts, "Between Text and Sermon: Lamentations 3: A Journal of Bible and Theology." *Interpretation* 67, no. 2 (04, 2013): 196-8, accessed October 17, 2022, <https://ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/between-text-sermon-lamentations-3/docview/1350472878/se-2>.

<sup>154</sup> Roberts, “Between Text and Sermon, 196”

<sup>155</sup> O’Connor, “Lamentations,” section: Lamentations 3:21-39.

## Appendix N

### Week 4: Re-Entering Community

#### Learning Objectives:

*After learning about the Psalms, and the importance of rehearsing feelings during the grief process, the participants will exhibit the following learning outcomes thru their conversation and artwork:*

#### *Affective*

- Participants will develop a sense of community from a biblical perspective.
- Participants will discover a sense of compassion for those who are grieving through biblical stories.
- Participants will practice possible coping skills for grief.

#### *Cognitive*

- Participants will develop a language for describing the story of their grief
- Participants will identify stories of grief and loss in scripture and connect them in meaningful ways to their own lives.
- Participants will apply creative coping skills to their grief

#### *Psychomotor:*

- Participants will create a mosaic

**Length of Lesson:** 90-120 minutes

#### **Focus:**

- Biblical focus will be Revelation 21, Ephesians 4:2, and Galatians 6:2
- Grief Theory focus will be on re-entering
- Art project will be a mosaic

#### **Supplies Needed:**

- Glass and ceramic pieces
- Stuff for mosaics

#### **Teaching Outline:**

**Recap** what we learned tonight and thank everyone for their participation. Remind them of the agreement for confidentiality,

4 Needs of Mourning:

Reminder of Emmaus Story-

Focusing on Re-integration. This is really about finding Hope.

- The love of Christ, even in the face of death, brings hope. We anticipate the resurrection day. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul reminds the Church at

Thessalonica that God's plan continues to be carried out. It is because of this hope that we do not grieve as others do, because we believe that this is not the end- not for the one we have lost, or for those left to grieve.

- Thomas Long assesses in this manner, "The work of grief is to gather the fragments and to rewrite the narrative, this time minus a treasured presence...But we do not do this task of rebuilding our life narratives alone. In the wilderness of grief, God provides narrative manna - just enough shape and meaning to keep us walking - and sends the Comforter, who knits together the raveled soul and refuses to leave us orphaned. Sometimes the bereaved say they are looking for closure, but in the Christian faith we do not seek closure so much as we pray that all of our lost loves will be gathered into the great unending story fashioned by God's grace."<sup>156</sup>
- Hope does not take away from the pain we feel in grief, but it gives it a new color. There is always the hope of resurrection. It changes the way that one grieves, but it does not take away the desire to hold or be with the loved one again. Hope enables the faithful to continue to move forward despite the pain, seeking to follow God into the future prepared for us, continuing to love and be loved, and looking towards the day when death will be no more.
- John shares this image in his vision of the new heaven and earth in the book of Revelation. John is guided by both Jewish and Christian tradition in his vision for what will come. God promises Israel the creation of a new heaven and new earth after the destruction of the Babylonian Exile in Isaiah 65:17; 66:22.
- The author of 2 Peter also encourages weary Christ followers to maintain their hope that a new heaven and earth will come, one where righteousness reigns. (2 Peter 3:13). Paul also references less specifically the new creation in 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15.<sup>157</sup>
- John's new creation, however, will not be completely disconnected from the one that came before. Koester indicates the word *kainos*, new, gives emphasis to the difference of what has gone before but also encompasses continuity, as in the same person with a new name.<sup>158</sup> Furthermore, Blount adds that the language suggests that God is not just creating something new but is taking what is old and transforming it. Out of destruction will come creation.<sup>159</sup> Koester suggests one way to think of it is that "God's creative action transforms the existing world from

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<sup>156</sup> Thomas Long and Thomas Lynch, *The Good Funeral: Death, Grief, and the Community of Care* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 224.

<sup>157</sup> Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*. (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2013), 376.

<sup>158</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 794.

<sup>159</sup> Blount, *Revelation*, 376.

suffering into blessing.”<sup>160</sup> Or, as Boring writes, “God does not make ‘all new things,’ but rather makes all things new.”<sup>161</sup>

- Like in the Psalms, proximity to God implies relationship with God and John explicitly names this when the voice from the throne declares that “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and be their God” (Revelation 21:3b).
- As Beale and Campbell imply, the intimacy of this eschatological relationship is indicated in these verses by sharing what God will do for the peoples- wiping away every tear- and removing the cause of the tears- mourning, crying, pain, and even death itself. In this new creation, “God’s people will no longer experience any of the forms of suffering characteristic of the old creation.”<sup>162</sup> That is: there will be no more death, no more crying, no more pain. This would have been a shift in thinking for those from the Greco- Roman world who believed that death was not to be feared, because it ended suffering.
- Revelation on the other hand, names death as an adversary to be defeated; it is an adversary that can be faced because of the knowledge that it ultimately ends with resurrection and new creation.<sup>163</sup>
- the vision that John shares is one in which all barriers to fully experiencing God’s presence have been done away with.<sup>164</sup>
- One of the goals of this project is to help the bereaved create a community; the example for this vision and the command to do so comes from the whole of the biblical canon, which emphasizes the importance of community, but especially from the Epistles, where we are directly commanded to do so. We are told to “weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15,) to “comfort one another”, (1 Thess. 4:18; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4) to “bear with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2) and to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2.) among others. In fact, if it were not for the community I found in various seasons of my life, I would not have survived the valleys that came with my own experiences of grief. The bereaved can often feel isolated and as if God is far from them in the midst of their grief; being in community however, especially Christian community, challenges this perception by affirming the truth that God is relational and personally near to his people when they suffer. Paul Randolph argues that those who are grieving do not need, or often desire, either an understanding of the *process* of grieving, nor an *elaborate theological explanation*, rather, he says,

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<sup>160</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 794.

<sup>161</sup> M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 220.

<sup>162</sup> G. K. Beale and David Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015), 365.

<sup>163</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 798.

<sup>164</sup> Beale and Campbell, *Revelation*, 365.

“They need the person that Jesus is.”<sup>165</sup> The beauty of being in community, especially with others who are grieving, is that we can be Jesus for each other, and in doing so “fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2)

### **Art Project Steps:**

- 1.) On the inside of the pot, use the markers to write, “Hope Is.....” and then use whatever words you want to define hope, finishing the sentence down further into the pot.
- 2.) When you’re done, break the pot (don’t hit it more than 3 times or it will be too small.)
- 3.) On the outside of the broken pieces- without putting them together- write words describing specific hopes you have for your future.
- 4.) Glue the pot back together

**Discussion-** Invite participants to share their pots.

**Ask:** *What does this project have to do with our grief? What lessons can it teach us? How does it represent the hope we have in Christ?*

### **End in a circle with these words:**

You are not alone.

I am not alone.

We are in God’s presence.

We have each other.

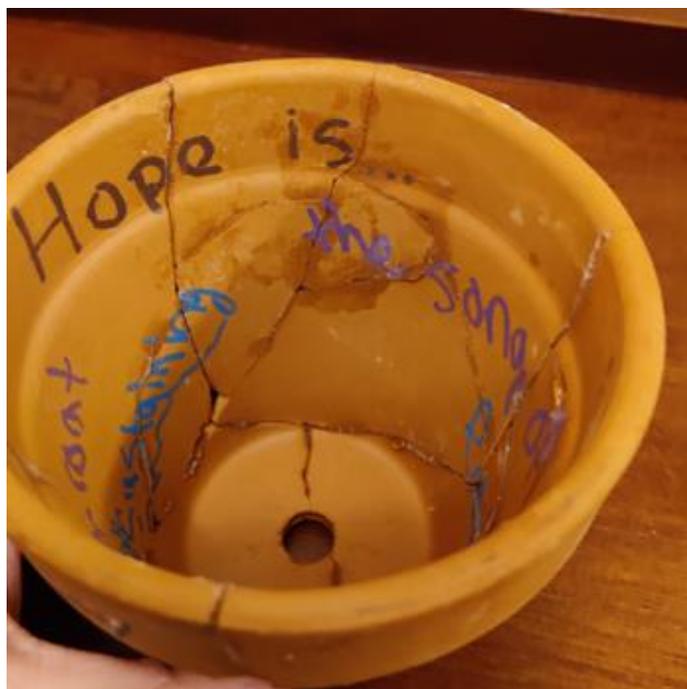
Send an electronic link for ending surveys to each student and thank them for participating.

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<sup>165</sup> Paul Randolph, “Grief: It’s Not About a Process; It’s About the Person,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 17, no. 2 (Winter 2005): 16.

### Appendix O Pottery Pictures







## Appendix P Sermon Outline

Stories of grief are woven throughout the Old and New Testaments. Some stories reflect the grief that comes from infertility: Sarah, Rachel, Hannah in the Old Testament, and Elizabeth in the New Testament to name a few. The Psalms of lament speak to the deep grief that comes with exile and feeling far from God. Likewise, stories of grief can be found in the sagas of most biblical heroes like Noah, Moses, Abraham, and Jacob. Grief is found in the Gospels, in the epistles, in the prophets, and in apocalyptic literature. Throughout these stories of grief, there are also themes of comfort, hope, and community. Because grief is an inevitability of the human experience, we cannot help but connect our faith to it as well. Indeed, if our faith impacts our lives, then our faith must have something to say about the deep feelings of grief we feel within.

Most contemporary grief experts agree that naming the reality of a loss, including the attending feelings, is an important part of the work of mourning.<sup>166</sup> Suffering must be named. Dorothee Soelle argues that “the first step towards overcoming suffering is, then, to find language that lets out the air of suffering that makes one mute, a language of lament, of crying, of pain, a language that at least says what the situation is.”<sup>167</sup>

One biblical text which speaks hauntingly of suffering is the book of Lamentations. Biblical scholar Kathleen M. O’Connor writes that the rawness of the five poems within the book of Lamentations provides a place where both “communal and personal pain can be reexperienced, seen, and perhaps healed.”<sup>168</sup> It probably isn’t a book most of us have spent very much time in—partly because it is, quite frankly, a bit depressing. The author pulls no punches and does not shy away from what we might think of as darker emotions like guilt, anger, despair, and even a desire for revenge. But there are also gifts to be mined. One of these is that Lamentations teaches us that mourning involves honestly naming our external and internal realities. The poet knows that we cannot find comfort by pretending that things are other than what they really are. One biblical scholar says that even the form of the poems do this. They are acrostic—you know following the alphabet. So they’re pleasing because of the beauty of that structure but also the form itself reminds us that loss will not have the last word. He writes, “We may need to go through the alphabet of pain more than once (the poet goes through the Hebrew Alphabet four times,) but eventually we will come to the end. That is, we reach a stopping place. Grief need not be bottomless.”<sup>169</sup>

Perhaps the passage in which this healing is most possible is found in Lamentations 3:21-24. “Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed. For his compassions never fail. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, The lord is my portion; there

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<sup>166</sup> Mitchel and Anderson, *All Our Grievs*, 107.

<sup>167</sup> Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 70.

<sup>168</sup> Kathleen M. O’Connor, “Lamentations” in *New Interpreters Bible Commentary* edited by Leander Keck, (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001)

<sup>169</sup> Roberts, “Between Text and Sermon,” 3:21-39.

for I will wait for him.” It’s beautiful right—in this case-- hope is a decision. He’s saying, “I am choosing to hope, because I can remember all of the other times God has been my portion. I am choosing to hope.

Over the years there have been many theories in psychological, medical, sociological, and pastoral fields about grief. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross popularized the theory of the stages of grief, but others have critiqued and improved upon that great work by suggesting other ways to conceive of the grieving process. Kenneth Mitchel and Herbert Anderson suggest that there are four needs of grieving, which provides a framework for this project, and for its rationale. 1.) Time and Space 2.) Rehearsing feelings 3.) Remembering 4.) re-integrating or re-connecting.<sup>170</sup> Each of these needs or tasks of grieving can guide the church in its support of grieving people.

The twenty-fourth chapter of the Gospel of Luke recounts a number of post-resurrection appearances of Jesus; the first of these happened when two of the disciples, one of which was named Cleopas and the other unnamed, were on their way to a village called Emmaus, seven miles outside of Jerusalem. This resurrection story only appears in Luke’s Gospel, and in many ways sews together some of the narrative threads the author has created by going over again the events in Jerusalem, naming the hope of liberation, the importance of table, and the movement from lack of sight and insight to a deeper perception.<sup>171</sup> Luke 24 is much more than a simple recounting of two grieving people walking to a village. Throughout the history of the church, this story of an encounter with the resurrected Jesus has provided insight into the theology of the resurrection, the nature of faith, the work of the Holy Spirit, the importance and promise of Eucharist and hospitality, and the necessity of communal practice.<sup>172</sup> While not necessarily a passage about grief, I would add that this text can become for us a pattern of how to process our grief because it provides us examples of the four needs of grief that Mitchell and Anderson suggested in their work.<sup>173</sup>

The setting of the story- a journey to Emmaus- is typical of Luke, as he places Jesus’ mission and ministry in the context of a journey throughout his Gospel, one that moves continuously from Galilee to Jerusalem. There are three sites that have traditionally been candidates for the actual physical location of Emmaus, although there is no real consensus. If we are using this text as a pattern for processing grief, the physical location is immaterial. Frederick Buechner in fact, interprets Emmaus as

The place we go in order to escape...Emmaus is whatever we do or wherever we go to make ourselves forget that the world holds nothing sacred: that even the wisest and bravest and loveliest decay and die; that even the noblest ideas that men have had- ideas about love and freedom and justice- have

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<sup>170</sup> Mitchel and Anderson, *All Our Grievs*, 100.

<sup>171</sup> John T. Carrol, *Luke: A commentary*, (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2012,) 480

<sup>172</sup> Molly T. Marshall, “Theological Perspective Luke 24:13-35” in *Feasting on the Word*, eds. David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster, 2010), 418.

<sup>173</sup> Mitchell and Anderson, *All our Grievs*, 100.

always in time been twisted out of shape by selfish men for selfish ends.<sup>174</sup>

In addition to the exact location being murky, we also don't know why the disciples were traveling to Emmaus, but no matter the reason, the journey provided these two a time apart from other people, time to contemplate and share, time to ask questions and to be in silence. Luke recounts that they were "talking with each other about all these things that had happened" (v. 14) when Jesus came near and went with them, but they did not recognize him. The disciples were talking together about "everything that had happened." Sometimes I like to imagine that conversation in my head. Are they going over the events of the past week? Or were they remembering the details of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion? Perhaps they were sharing what they had seen and heard, all the pieces that others had told them and that they themselves experienced. Examining the Greek word choice here can give us some insight into the conversation- the word Luke uses is an imperfect tense of a verb that indicates sustained conversation- not quite an argument, but definitely a spirited discussion. In fact, when Jesus happens on them and engages them he literally asks them, "What words are you tossing back and forth?"<sup>175</sup>

When Jesus first appears to them, they did not recognize him. They were visibly upset, and Jesus asked them what they have been discussing; literally his question was, "what are the words you are tossing back and forth?"- After an incredulous and perhaps sarcastic question that implied, he must be the only one in the world who does not know, they began to tell him. The prophet Jesus, "powerful in word and deed" (Luke 24:20) was sentenced to death and crucified. "But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel." (Luke 24:21.) I think this is one of the first indications of the 4 needs of grieving that Mitchell and Anderson noted- The disciples' journey to Emmaus provided them with the time and space they needed, one that was not hemmed in by the expectations of their community or any other person's idea of what a grieving person should be.

The disciples provide us with an excellent example to follow for how to process our grief, as they name not only the reality of Jesus' death, but also the death of their hopes. According to Alan Culpepper, their response to Jesus stretches across six verses, 112 words in Greek, and summarizes both the actual events that have happened and their feelings.<sup>176</sup> Jesus also gives us an example to follow, as he provides space for this naming. The best thing to do when someone suffers a loss, is to listen. As Mitchell and Anderson state, "Grief expressed is not grief heard unless someone is listening."<sup>177</sup>

Marshall writes that as the story of Jesus' resurrection appearance continues in the Gospel of Luke, there is familiarity, mystery, recognition, and confusion.<sup>178</sup> These same

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<sup>174</sup> Frederick Buechner, *The Magnificent Defeat* (New York: Seabury, 1966,) 85-86.

<sup>175</sup> Carrol, *Luke*, 483.

<sup>176</sup> Alan Culpepper, "Luke" in *New Interpreters Commentary*, edited by Leander Keck. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995,) 477

<sup>177</sup> Mitchell and Anderson, *All our Grievs*, 107.

<sup>178</sup> Marshall, "Theological Perspective," 420.

descriptors could be used in the grief process. There are moments and rituals that feel familiar but are shrouded in mystery. There are moments full of confusion that also help us fully recognize ourselves. Nicholas Wolterstorff wrote a poignant and profound examination of grief in his book, “Lament for a Son,” after the sudden death of his twenty-five-year-old son. He names that when one has a loss like this one, “everything is charged with the potential of a reminder. There’s no forgetting.”<sup>179</sup> And yet, not forgetting is not the same as remembering. Remembering has to be intentional.

The act of remembering is central scripture in general, to the Emmaus story, and to grieving-and it functions specifically here in this scripture passage in multiple ways.<sup>180</sup> First, the disciples spend some time remembering- sharing with this stranger all that has happened in Jerusalem. It is intentional, and in answer to Jesus’ question. They include in their remembering not only facts, that Jesus of Nazareth was a prophet, and the chief priests and leaders handed him over to be crucified. They also share their confusion- that some women have told them that Jesus’ body is gone and seen a vision of angels telling them he is alive. But they also share their hopes- ‘we had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel.’ Some manuscripts have the perfect tense of the verb, translated “we have come to hope (we still do)” or the present tense (“we still possess hope”).<sup>181</sup> Hope is foundational to our Christian faith and is a concept that goes beyond all reason and expectation. Hope is not found in cliches or in memories but in the fulfillment of a promise made.

Later in the narrative, Jesus will help them to remember in a new way, as he connects the pieces of his former teaching with the most recent events. Jesus interprets scripture for them, re-directs their hopes, shares a meal with them and in doing so their eyes are opened. The act of breaking bread is what finally opens their eyes to who Jesus is and to what has happened in both his death and resurrection. Then they return to their community. So look at the story again- The disciples need time and space- which they get as they walk- the need to rehearse their feelings- to name their despair. They need to remember- which they do as they talk about Jesus to Jesus and as Jesus talks to them- and then they need to re-integrate into their community. Now, this is just one snippet of a much larger story, right? Those of us who have suffered through loss know that these moments happen over and over and over- and we’re not lucky enough to have moments like the disciples had with Jesus after they’re dead. But still, I think this passage can be an example for us in how to grieve.

Grief can be, and traditionally has been, processed simply through verbal sharing and psychoeducation, but I have a suspicion that creative endeavors, and engaging our grief kinesthetically, can be a vital piece in anyone’s grief journey and may be especially helpful in connecting our faith to our grief. I say this as a person who does not think of herself as a particularly crafty or artistic person. So when I talk about creativity I’m not talking about being able to look at a picture and put it on a canvas—I’m talking about thinking outside of the box when it comes to coping. In Gen 1:1 we are told God is a

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<sup>179</sup> Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son*, 98.

<sup>180</sup> Culpepper, “Luke,” 477.

<sup>181</sup> Carroll, *Luke*, 482.

creative being, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”<sup>182</sup> It is in fact, the first character trait of God communicated in scripture, and in many ways sets a foundation for how God will work in the world.<sup>183</sup> In fact, the word uses to describe God creating is only ever used in scripture with God as the subject. Perhaps this word is used only to speak to what God can do, to the “fundamental newness and uniqueness of what God brings into being.”<sup>184</sup> From the beginning to the end of scripture, God is making something out of nothing, constantly revealing new things to us both communally and personally. However, the writers of Genesis choose another verb, “*asa*” meaning “to make,” a common, everyday word that is integrated into the creation stories in Genesis.<sup>185</sup> In fact, it is this second word that is used in Genesis 1:26 when it says, “Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness.” Later in Genesis 1:28, God commands that those created in the divine image (human beings) be involved in the creative process, meaning that from the beginning “God chooses not to be the only one who has or exercises creative power.”<sup>186</sup> Some of this participation is directly correlated to the instructions to populate the earth and care for creation, but I think it can also be seen as an invitation to something more, an invitation to let creativity be part of how we live and move and work in the world. Creativity is used throughout scripture, woven into the very fabric of how God’s work in the world is described from the first words in Genesis 1 to the last in Revelation. The writers of scripture describe in beautiful language the making of the tabernacle in Exodus 26, the depth of feeling in Song of Solomon, and even the sheer depth and breadth of the earth in Job. If creativity was important to God in creation, and to Jesus (who else would problem solve not having enough lunch by multiplying loaves and fishes or getting to the disciples by walking on water?), then it should also be important to us.

Remember what I said before about the author of lamentations talking about hope being a decision? Through our own careful investigation of scripture, and our experience of God in our lives, we will find that our hope is found in Jesus; it is found in his presence, and love, and promises. It is found in his life, death, and resurrection, which bring a new day, a new hope, a new future that was previously not possible. The love of Christ, even in the face of death, brings hope. We anticipate the resurrection day. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul reminds the Church at Thessalonica that God’s plan continues to be carried out. It is because of this hope that we do not grieve as others do, because we believe that this is not the end- not for the one we have lost, or for those left to grieve. Within the story of the resurrection appearance on the way to Emmaus, we get a glimpse of this hope. Marshall indicates that while the Gospel writer does not fully articulate a theology of the resurrection, he does affirm through the appearance of the

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<sup>182</sup> All scripture cited will be from NRSV unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>183</sup> Randle, *Courageous Creative*, 23.

<sup>184</sup> Fretheim, “Genesis,” 342.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 342-343.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid*, 345.

resurrected Christ to his disciples, that, “relationships of depth, grounded in forgiveness and hope, will endure.”<sup>187</sup> We wait in hope for the day when we will be renewed, redeemed, and given new life; this promise offers encouragement to those that are grieving and mourning. This hope helps us to write a new story, even in our grief.

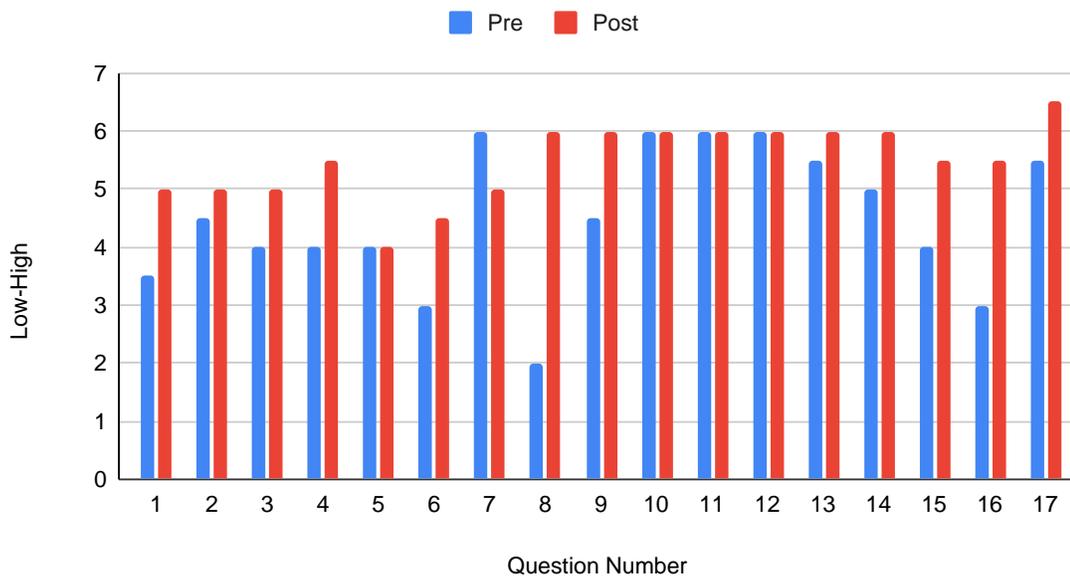
In one of my favorite books on grief, *Lament for a Son*, Nicholas Wolterstorff writes about how hope and grief interacted for him in his grief. He writes, “Elements of the gospel which I had always thought would console did not. They did something else, something important, but not that. It did not console me to be reminded of the hope of resurrection. If I had forgotten that hope, then it would indeed have brought light into my life to be reminded of it. But I did not think of death as a bottomless pit. I did not grieve as one who has no hope.” There is always the hope of resurrection. It changes the way that one grieves, but it does not take away the desire to hold or be with the loved one again. Hope enables the faithful to continue to move forward despite the pain, seeking to follow God into the future prepared for us, continuing to love and be loved, and looking towards the day when death will be no more. As Nouwen said, we must wait for the third day, the day that will come when our hope will be fulfilled. And in the meantime- we remind one another of that hope and hold onto it for and with each other

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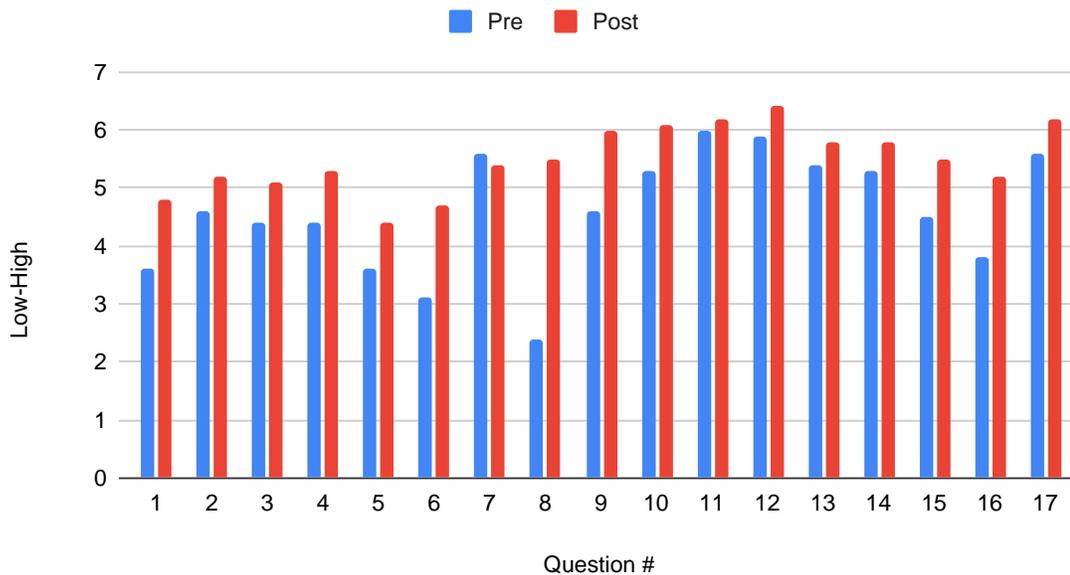
<sup>187</sup> Marshall, “Theological Perspective,” 420.

### Appendix Q Control Group Data

Pre and Post Median

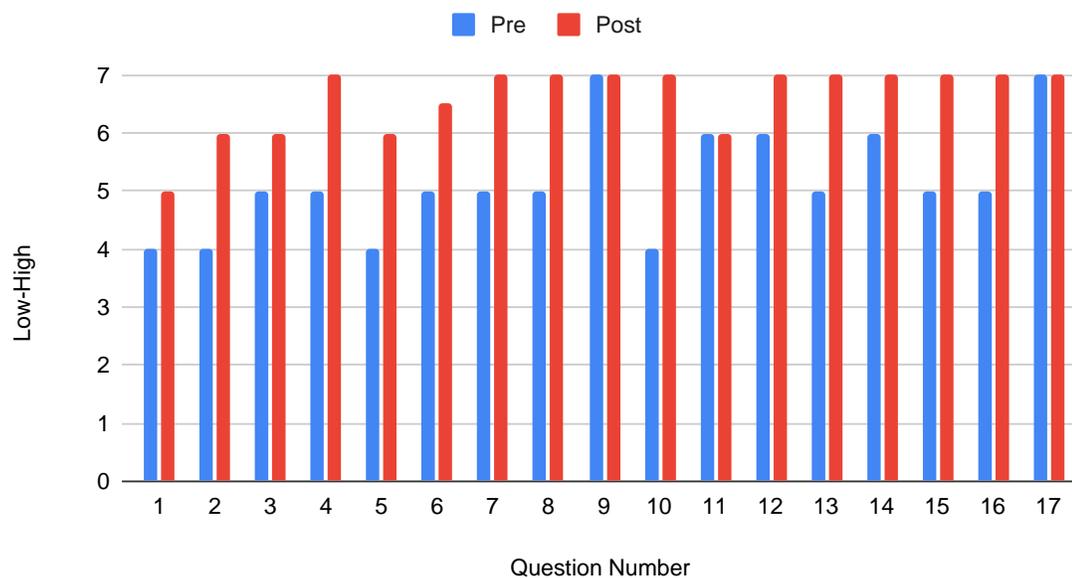


Pre and Post Control Group

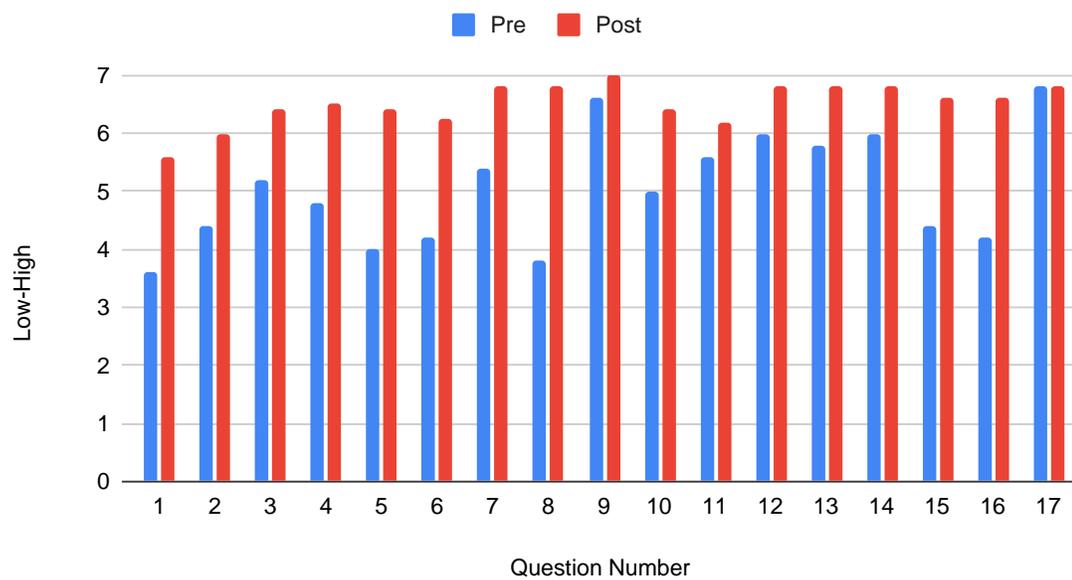


## Appendix R Experiment Group Data

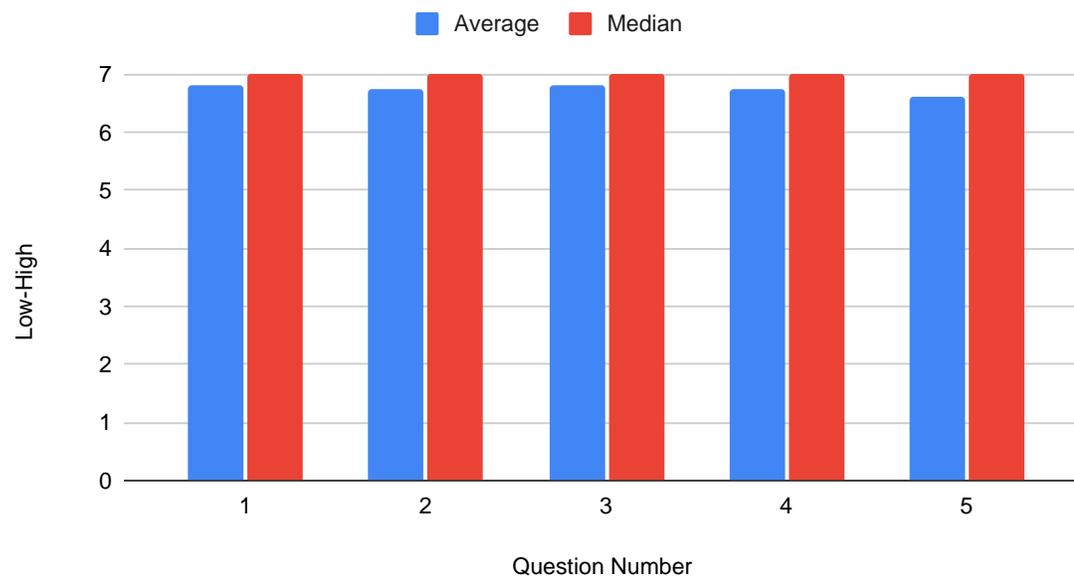
### Experimental Pre/Post Median



### Experimental Group Pre/Post Average



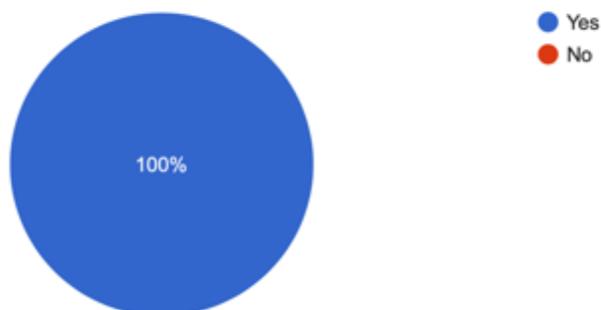
## Post Survey 2



## Appendix S Artwork Rubric Responses

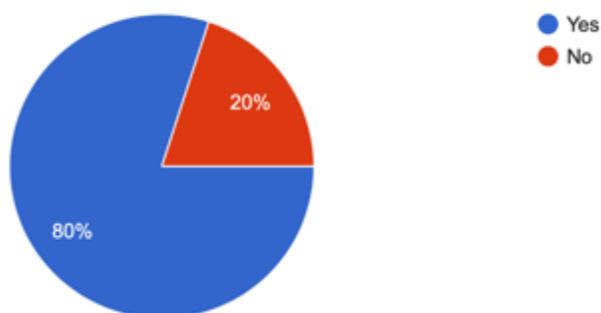
1 Does the candle help participant tell the story of their loss?

5 responses



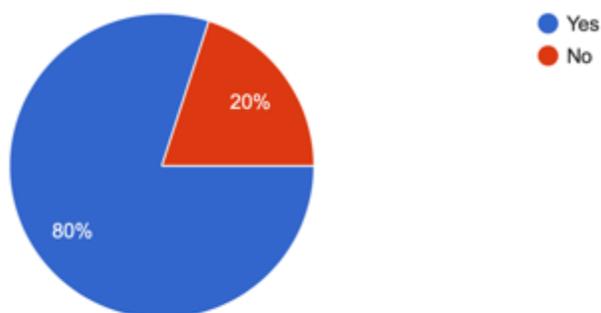
2a Did the participant use more than one color (feeling) in their art work?

5 responses



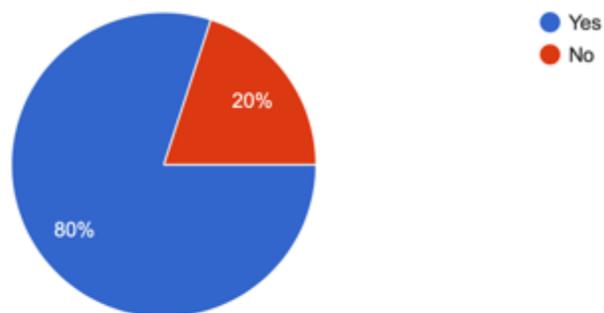
2b Does the painting show a pattern of multiple feelings?

5 responses



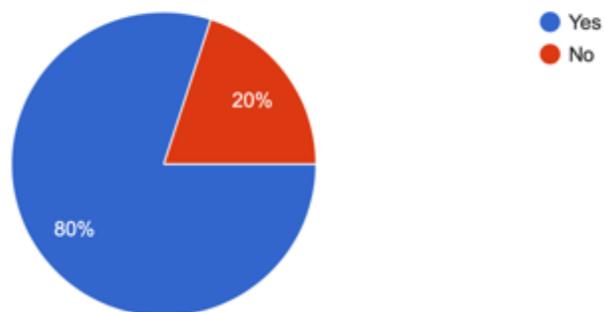
2c Was the participant able to explain their choices of color?

5 responses



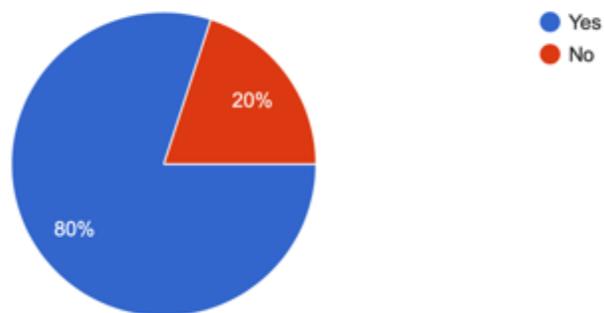
3a Did the participant bring materials from home for the shadowbox?

5 responses



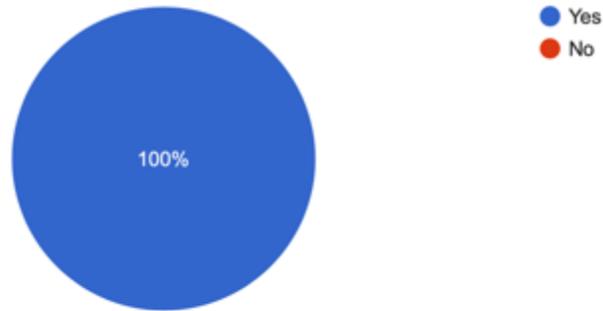
3b Did the participant's shadowbox reflect their loved one or grief journey?

5 responses



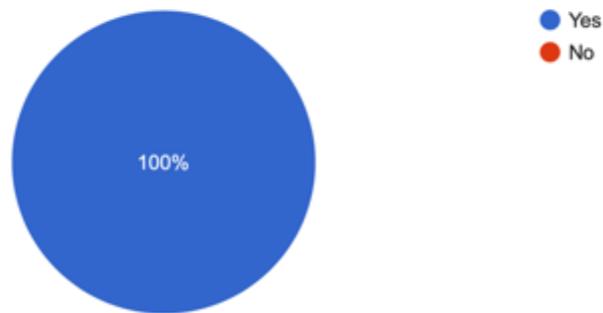
4a Does the broken flowerpot have more than 3 pieces?

5 responses

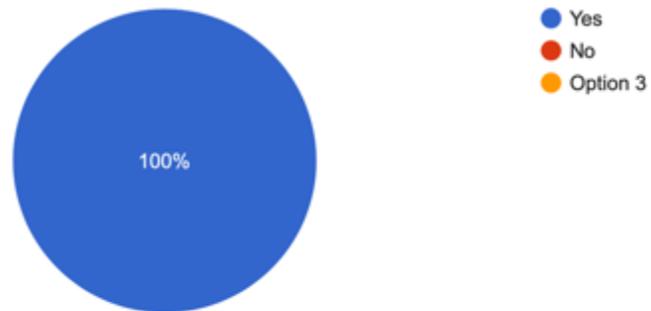


4b Did the participant define hope inside their pot?

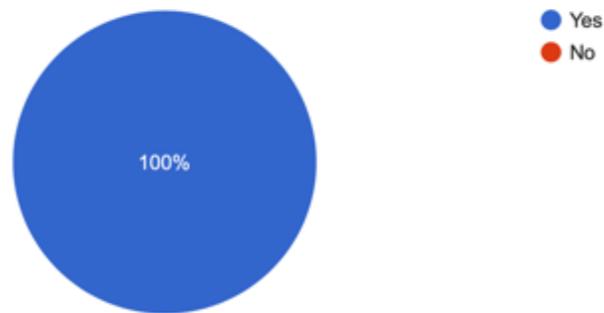
5 responses



4c Was the participant able to articulate the connection between the flowerpot and their grief?  
5 responses



4d Was the participant able to articulate the connection between the mosaic and their faith?  
4 responses



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