Grief and End of Life Coaching

Overview:

Grief and End of Life Coaching is a process of being with people who are dying and those who are grieving. This process, also known as The Coach Approach, recognizes the person (the one who is dying or the one who is grieving) as the expert of their life. An End of Life/Grief Coach is responsible for creating a 'safe place' in which the person feels free to share without self-censorship. The End of Life/Grief Coach asks powerful questions: questions that are born out of the coach's deep listening. These questions invite the person to look within to find the answers that are already there yet have gone unacknowledged. The Coach affirms the normalcy of the process of dying and the process of grieving. This particular form of being with another offers a person someone to walk alongside them without offering advice, fixing them, or assuming to know what is right for them. The Coach Approach honors the person's wisdom and explores ways for them to live from it. Transformation occurs when the person is seen and heard in this deep way.

Relevance for today:

Loss is inevitable. It is a part of living on this earth. Most people understand this and feel the impact of loss when a loved one dies.

We are not only experiencing the Covid-19 pandemic. We are experiencing a grief pandemic – a global outbreak of grief. We have all experienced loss and continue to do so on a regular basis.

The way we will face this grief depends in large part on our mindset – our way of thinking. A mindset arises out of a person's worldview or philosophy of life; likewise, a grief mindset arises out of our view or philosophy of grief. Church leaders not only care for themselves by tending a healthy grief mindset, but can learn to coach others into one as well.

What is your mindset concerning grief?

When asking that question, the answers I often receive are,

"Don't even talk about that. It's not something I even want to think about."

"Grief is the worst thing one can experience."

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"Grief is something people need to 'get over' as soon as possible."

In contrast to the typical responses I hear, allow me to suggest 8 core elements of a healthy grief mindset.

- **Acknowledge that loss is an inevitable reality**

There is no one who escapes the experience of loss. From the moment we are born, our lives include losses. We are nursed by our mothers and then we are weaned. We attach to our families and then we must detach to go to school. Pets die. Relationships are broken. Parents divorce. Loved ones die. We lose jobs. Covid-19 is unleashed. Although most losses surprise us, it is not a surprise that there are losses. Loss is an inevitable reality of life on this earth.

- **Understand that grief hurts**

Because we do not talk much about grief, most people do not realize how painful it can be – physically, emotionally, spiritually – in every way. Embodying a healthy grief mindset means understanding this reality. Then one will not be shocked by extreme hurt. It is expected as the norm.

- **Give yourself permission to be raw and real**

The best thing one can do when experiencing the pain of grief is to express it – to let it out. Some common ways of expressing grief are crying, talking about our loved ones who have died, or describing the "living losses" we experience as a result of the pandemic. Yet many feel embarrassed to express their grief in this way. They feel it is not proper, or not the "Christian" thing to do. Embodying this grief mindset means giving ourselves permission to be ourselves. It means being raw and real. It means not hiding what we are feeling or experiencing, but rather sharing without self-censorship.

- **Seek continually the "safe" places where you are always welcome**

In order to be raw and real and to share without self-censorship, one must find safe places to do so. This can include "safe" people, meaning people who let us share without telling us to stop, trying to fix us, or trying to make us feel better by shutting down our feelings. It also includes "safe" places: churches, hobby groups, work environments, family units, etc. One must continually seek out and find those safe people and safe places. Most of us are surprised to discover those who truly are "safe" and those who are not.

- **Engage regularly in "end of life" conversations**

Unfortunately, having preemptive conversations about the end of life is not very common. In many circles, it is taboo. Many of us don't like to talk about the fact that we will all die. Thus we avoid talking about grief, and the effects of loss in our everyday lives. The reality, however, is that it is healthy to talk about such topics. Being reminded that we will all die enables us to live more fully. Relationships can be stronger and more intimate when end of life conversations are the norm. Embodying a healthy grief mindset means engaging

regularly in these conversations, and knowing it is healthy to do so. It includes having these conversations whenever the opportunity arises, whether in the home, in the workplace, or in the faith community. Adults and children, couples and groups will all benefit from these conversations.

- **Develop communal support**

Everyone must grieve their own losses. Mourning is not something that anyone else can do for you. Yet being surrounded by others who are also grieving a loss can be a great source of comfort. Listening to others share their stories reminds us that we are not alone. Doing so alerts us to the fact that what we are experiencing is not unique. Being with others who have experienced loss provides an outlet for mourning and for sharing our personal stories. Grief groups are an invaluable gift for many in grief. The comment I hear over and over from people experiencing loss is, "I would not have made it if it wasn't for my grief group." Embodying a grief mindset means developing that communal support, so when it is needed, we know where to turn.

- **Continue to do your own work**

Grief is not something that we get over – nor is it something that ends. I have no doubt that long after this Covid-19 pandemic is over, many will continue to grieve the losses that have occurred during this time. Even when we are living life fully, and finding a regular smile on our face, there are many things that can stir up our sense of loss. In a moment we can find ourselves crying, or feeling really sad and alone. Experiencing another loss can bring up past losses. Being with someone else who is grieving can stir up our loss. A smell, a familiar place, a song, a favorite food, a holiday or special day, and many other things can stir up our feelings of grief. It is wise to not to be caught off guard when that occurs. Embodying a grief mindset means that we are continually in the process of doing our own work concerning our grief.

- **See grief as an opportunity**

Rarely does one choose to experience loss. Grief, to most people, is an inevitable, unwelcomed reality. Yet the fact remains, grief is most often a source of incredible growth for people. It provides opportunities that can be found nowhere else – personally, relationally, spiritually, and financially. Some grieving people learn how to do things they could never do before. Others find themselves caring for other grieving people, using what they learned from their own experience. Many find that life is now fuller and richer, because of the new mindset they have adopted. Even given the growth, most would choose to have their loved one still with them, if they had the choice. But the opportunities for growth and enhancement are there nonetheless. Seeing grief as an opportunity is the final part of embodying a grief mindset. It is the part that gives us hope.

- **What about those losses that don't involve death?**

Think of the losses involved in moving, or losing a job, or living with a chronic condition. How about financial losses, or the breakup of a relationship, or the death of a dream? These are examples of living losses. Many living losses must be faced and mourned in the same way as losses involving death. Both living losses and death losses are easier to face with the help of a grief coach.

Coaching at End of Life/Grief Coaching equips people to walk with those who are facing all the losses of life.

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