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Discovering Life through Loss and Grief

Darcy L. Hansen

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PROJECT PORTFOLIO:

DISCOVERING LIFE THROUGH LOSS AND GRIEF



IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

PORTLAND SEMINARY

BY:

DARCY L. HANSEN

PROJECT FACULTY:

JULIE DODGE, DMIN

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2022



CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This certifies that the doctoral Project Portfolio of

Darcy Hansen

has been approved by
the Evaluation Committee on March 10, 2022
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Global Perspectives.

Evaluation Committee:

Primary Project Faculty: Julie Dodge, DMin

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Evaluation Committee Referee: Loren Kerns, PhD

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Dedication

For all those who shared and trusted me with their stories, this is for you, with the hope that in the future, people will become increasingly comfortable in their humanity, so they can be present in the grieving humanity of others.

Acknowledgments

Though I am a wilderness wanderer, I never wandered alone during this doctoral endeavor. This work would not have been possible without the unwavering support of Michael, Madeline, and Ian Hansen. Thank you for companioning me as I waded into the depths of death to emerge anew.

I am grateful for my prayer team and close friends who have held me up when I wavered or could no longer stand. For Kellie LaFollette and the quiet retreat space, numerous snacks, and countless prayers she whispered to help me on this journey, saying thank you will never be enough.

For the many stakeholders who gave voice to this work through the sharing of their stories and the shaping of its content, I am profoundly grateful. For my lead mentor, Jason Clark; project faculty advisor, Julie Dodge; and the team at Portland Seminary, the academic framework you created brought life to what was once just a dream. I am thankful for my LGP10 cohort who pushed, refined, and encouraged me through their vulnerability, humor, and wisdom. The healing of my broken and grieving heart through their compassionate presence was a surprising gift of grace. And for Nancy Blackman, whose mad editing skills and weekly chats sustained this work in ways she will never know.

Epigraph

The Coming and Going

By John D. Blase¹

A deep-yellow dove more
brilliant than gold came to
me to die. I said See I'm not
a doctor, and she said I know
but you look at the world and
into your heart at the same time.

So I spent her last day listening
to her sing of this world, what
she called the Suchness. I held
her in my fragile hands and felt
the shape of death. I held her to
the very end and then a little more.

¹ Used with permission from the author.

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Editorial/Research Method

This Project utilized a blended methodology that draws upon bibliographic resources, data derived from stakeholder collaboration, and human-centered design and iteration processes to create a heuristic-based, application-oriented Project.

Abstract

In times of loss, communities of faith come alongside bereaved individuals to offer support. That support is often short lived. When the casseroles stop, *grieving people feel isolated and underserved in communities of faith when pastors and community members are ill-equipped and unprepared to care for them.*²

The reason pastors and community members are ill-prepared to care for those grieving is historically, culturally, and theologically complex. Tackling such complexity is beyond the scope of this project. Implementing Occam's Razor, where the simplest solution, with the least moving parts, suffices, enables me to address my NPO in a creative way.³

For Christians, Jesus' life serves as a model of how to live and love in this world. Philippians 2:5-11 provides a concise and foundational text of Jesus moving proximate to humanity by becoming fully human. Proximity to humanity necessitated navigating loss and grief, and being present with others as they do the same. What does it look like for people who follow Jesus to personally and communally move proximate to their humanity, so they can be present with the humanity of others?

To address this question, I developed an 8-week, one-credit, graduate level spiritual formation course for Portland Seminary entitled "Discovering Life Through Loss and Grief." Through the metaphor of pilgrimage and developing the spiritual practice of *memento mori*, "remember you will die," students acknowledge their humanity by engaging with and integrating

² This is my working NPO. It was shaped after assimilating responses from the required discovery session and one-on-one interviews, hosted in November 2019, for my project portfolio.

³ Farnam Street, *The Great Mental Models, Vol. 1: General Thinking Concepts* (Ottawa, ON: Latticework Publishing, Inc. 2019), 160.

personal stories of loss and grief.⁴ Course resources and format invite them to practice companioning one another in grief as they listen to each other's stories of loss. Giving language to loss awakens us to the realities of what it means to be human. Speaking our stories reminds us we are not alone. In sharing, we discover new life emerges from death in profoundly unexpected ways.

⁴ Wikipedia, "Memento mori," accessed January 19, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memento_mori.

Introduction

Rose-colored satin surrounded her as she peacefully rested. Her hair was meticulously done. Her face was strangely pale, yet colored, and eyes gently closed. I thought any moment she would sit up and say hello. That would never happen, though, because my grandmother was dead. This was the first time I had seen a dead person. When my father died, his casket was covered in an American flag. As an airman, this was how his remains were treated, leaving my six-year-old mind to imagine who or what was really in the casket. But my grandmother was fixed in a curated position, ready for deterioration, staved off by a casket meant to protect her from the elements of nature. All my grandparents' remains were cared for in this way.

During my Pastoral Ministry class for a Master of Divinity degree, I developed my theology of death. Before this assignment, I had not considered how theology and death mingled. I had not heard sermons on death, outside of Jesus dying on the cross and being resurrected. When loved ones died, I was told they were in a better place. This happened instantaneously when they took their last breath. Unlike Jesus, they were not afforded three days in the grave before eternal life happened.

For class, I watched a short documentary about the green burial movement, and then read Mark Harris' *Grave Matters*. After learning what happens to dead bodies to make them look peaceful in those satin lined caskets, I could not sleep for three weeks. The knowledge of how bodies are processed for burial made me angry and sick to my stomach, causing countless theological questions to surface. I was awakened to the cultural and theological void regarding death and loss in my communities of faith and academics.

Death is a funny thing, an inevitable thing. Yet few speak openly about it. Although death is woven into the fabric of our lives, often in bold, disruptive colors and textures, few remarks about these disruptions are made. We prefer to pretend that death does not happen to others, so it will not happen to us. This myth is perpetuated by a medical profession supporting an “If you can, you should” mentality, where treatment, at all costs, is the only option for care.¹ It is also perpetuated by a death care industry that hides the corpse from the living inner circle of loved ones.² Within and outside of church settings, it is perpetuated where celebrations of life prevail and the dead are no longer present, except through favorite pictures presented in a slide show with emotionally moving music. We have lost the language necessary to navigate loss and death by becoming distantly proximal to death. “Without a shared language there is no way to have a shared understanding between dying people and those they love. There is no way to be sad together.”³

As a spiritual director and lay ministry leader, I noticed people experience isolation and loneliness when loss and death punctuated their lives. Few in their context were able to be present with them in grief. This reality deeply concerned me, especially in light of Jesus’ redemptive work through his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. If Jesus redeemed all things, then is death, itself not also redeemed? How can we, as Christians, navigate loss and death differently? How do we develop authentic, meaningful, and communally connective

¹ Stephen Jenkinson, *Die Wise: A Manifesto for Sanity and Soul* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2015), 23.

² Suzanne Kelly, *Greening Death: Reclaiming Burial Practices and Restoring Our Tie to the Earth* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 3.

³ Jenkinson, *Die Wise*, 325.

language and practices that reflect the life Christ came to give, not just in the eternal life given to the dead, but also in the lives of those left behind?

I entered the doctoral program at Portland Seminary with these questions and burdens. Exploration happened through a threefold process: Discovery, Design, and Deliver. In this introduction, I present a summary of each step in this process. I conclude with an evaluation of key learnings, examination of next steps for my project development, and reflection of my doctoral research journey.

Discover

By vocation, I serve as a spiritual director. I work independently of a specific organization or faith community, through Darcy L. Hansen, LLC. In the beginning, I envisioned my Need/Problem/Opportunity (NPO) ministry context would include non-denominational, evangelical communities of faith and/or their leadership teams in the Portland metro area. Because of my circle of influence, the initial audiences would consist of white, middle to upper class individuals, ranging in age from late 20s to mid 70s. While the faith community size may vary, the participation group size would be twelve to fifteen individuals per session to maintain an intimate setting for difficult conversations. My initial Need/Problem/Opportunity (NPO) statement was: *Fear and denial of death have contributed to an impoverished theological and spiritually formative framework for understanding and faithfully encountering death, including “small” deaths and physical death.*

I facilitated my Discovery Workshop in November of 2019, according to the project development guidelines. Participating stakeholders included a retired chaplain, parent/community activist, parent/advocate, parent/congregant, aged friend, and my spouse/son of aging parents. I opened the session with a moment of silence then moved to reading a poem,

“Notice Joy,” by Bethany Lee, and prayer. I explained the process and desired outcome for the morning. We worked on charting the audience and bringing focus to the NPO by examining specific needs, symptoms, and root causes. Desired outcomes were discussed, and all session pieces assembled to create the following Discovery Statement:

Considering spiritual leaders and their communities,

We have discovered people do not know what is ok surrounding death, which is caused by fear, lack of information, and incomplete theologies of suffering and death. If addressed, communities would have healthier journeys with the paradox of death/grief.

I also conducted one-on-one interviews with four stakeholders: an author/poet/pastor, pastor/missionary, pastor/non-profit ministry leaders, and a funeral home director/green burial advocate. Each interviewee received a summary of the Discovery Session prior to our conversation.

The information shared in the discovery session and one-on-one interviews was strikingly similar. All ten stakeholders agreed that Christians, especially Evangelicals, have little to no language or understanding of death, nor how to care for and support those who are grieving. Three key themes emerged:

- lack of knowledge of what to do/say when someone dies,
- lack of historical and theological grounding within evangelical faith communities,
- and the lack of understanding of basic logistics associated with dying and death.

Addressing these deeply rooted theological and cultural voids requires a holistic and formational approach at various levels within a community. First, educating communities in best practices of grief-care is a must to alleviate additional pain inflicted on those grieving within their midst. Second, pastors and spiritual leaders must be introduced to a broader understanding

of scripture and Christian traditions surrounding death and suffering. Lastly, resourcing communities with practical tools allows advance planning and conversation of necessary logistics in the dying and death process.

The Discovery process continued by examining historical, sociological, cultural, and theological factors that impact our ability to care for those experiencing death, loss, and grief. Assimilated information from the Discovery session, one-on-one interviews, and personal research, produced a refined NPO statement: *People who are grieving feel isolated and underserved in their communities of faith because pastors and community members are ill-equipped to care for them.*

Design

During Summer 2020, I reached out to the Executive Dean of Portland Seminary and requested access to the student population for the design and delivery portions of my project. I noted the curriculum gap regarding courses on loss and grief and explained the importance of equipping ministry leaders to better care for their communities specifically in this area. My request was enthusiastically approved, and the opportunity to develop a spiritual formation course for the 2021 Summer Studio Series emerged.

I hosted a virtual Design Workshop in November 2020. Five seminary students participated: two alumna and three current students. All were women who serve in different ministry contexts. We opened the workshop with a welcome, introductions, and prayer. We then set interaction ground rules. The NPO was reviewed and edited. I then led the participants through three brainstorming activities to define our target audience, identify what constituted an “ideal state” with steps to achieve that state, and identify values/ideas for prototyping consideration. Next, we developed Napkin Pitch ideas. The goal was three Napkin Pitch ideas,

but based on the assessment of themes, context (Portland Seminary), and content (Spiritual Formation course content), we honed in on two primary prototypes to answer the question: “What might be included in a Spiritual Formation course on dying, death, and grief?” Last, participants answered closing reflection questions. We concluded the workshop on time and in prayer.

Two Concept Pitch ideas emerged. The first was a course titled, “Attending to Grief and Loss.” The second was a course titled, “The Power of Story and Metaphor in Dying, Death, and Grief.” Five themes and multiple sub-themes were noted for incorporation into the concept prototypes. Benchmarks for success included ministry leaders identifying and navigating their own grief stories, developing of and/or refining a personal theology of grief, and increased understanding regarding the complexities of grief and supporting best practices. Student’s progression of understanding and internal transformation would be reflected through self-evaluation and through communication of course assignments. Further research is required for concept development, which include a better understanding of the ministry of presence (holistic listening), especially in end-of-life matters; *Memento-mori* activities; how creative practices facilitate transformation and understanding, regarding prioritized themes; implementing story with effective metaphors, in a holistic way; and the dangers of unprocessed grief.

Since the context of my project design and delivery is specific, my prototype tests needed to meet required academic expectations. I developed an eight-week, graduate-level Spiritual Formation course for Portland Seminary, entitled “Discovering Life Through Loss and Grief.” During the course, ministry leaders were invited to engage with and integrate their own personal and communal stories of loss and grief, enabling them to be increasingly present with people experiencing loss and grief in their ministry contexts. My prototypes consisted of content from

the introduction/initial class and week seven session of the spiritual formation course developed for my project.

For both prototypes, I sent introductory information, course expectations, and weekly assignments for stakeholders to engage with before our virtual sessions. Stakeholders were Caucasian, female, and current Portland Seminary students who live in the Pacific Northwest. Their ages ranged from mid-20s to mid-50s. Through their participation and feedback, I learned that utilizing diverse methods of communication, presenting content in an organized manner, and allowing for creative perspectives provided an engaging space of formational learning. Ensuring all requirements are clearly stated is important. Providing structure and flexibility gives students the freedom to share personal stories of loss and grief, while discovering life and hope in an authentic and transformative way. One area of weakness not mentioned is the incorporation of diverse voices in course content. I worked to implement such voices into the next project prototype. Overall, my prototype tests were instructional, and allowed me to continue refining and developing my project.

One-on-one interviews were also conducted. Stakeholders included two males affiliated with Portland Seminary, a professor and the admissions counselor/current doctoral student. The professor shared important logistical considerations for a spiritual formation course, while the counselor/student shared insights from his research regarding emotions and loss. Both posed questions for further consideration, which helped shape my project content.

Delivery

My curriculum is eight weeks, offered virtually through Portland Seminary's academic online platforms. To meet seminary course requirements for a one credit course, students are expected to engage in 45 hours of work over the eight-week period. This averages 5.25 hours

each week. Weekly expectations are included in the Course Syllabus, found in the Project section of this Portfolio.

Lectures and small group interactions occur during weekly Zoom gatherings. A final project, adhering to the project rubric, is required during the last week of the course. Grades are entered weekly, and final grades are posted upon course completion, as required by Portland Seminary. My personal weekly time commitment during project launch is approximately 8-10 hours, which includes lecture preparation, assignment grading, and correspondence with students.

Success benchmarks include:

- Eight to twelve students enroll before enrollment deadline for the course launch,
- Ninety percent of students have timely engagement with weekly course expectations,
- Seventy percent of students provide voluntary feedback via Google Forms at mid-term and course completion,
- Ninety percent of students who participated in voluntary feedback report incorporated one to two useful practices for grief and loss.

The timing of the project delivery required development and launch between January and July 2021. Project details and the launch timeline are in the next two sections. Student evaluations are in Appendix E—Supplemental Project Documentation. Project edits based on initial launch experience and student feedback are now in progress, as my project will launch again for Summer Studio at Portland Seminary in May 2022.

Implementing my project at Portland Seminary is a unique opportunity. It is also seasonal and unstable. Thus, I am establishing a backbone of content for my project, so I can modify

content based on the contextual needs of other communities. For example, I utilized adapted content in an undergraduate Pastoral Care and Counseling course taught Fall 2021. Loss and grief content will also be shared through workshops as part of an internship I am currently involved in. My hope is to engage with small groups in churches, community groups, or virtually, to develop language and practices that draw us deeper into our own humanity, equipping individuals to sit with others, especially in times of loss and grief.

Evaluation and Reflection

My project development journey included challenges and surprises. One challenge was that I was not involved in a specific faith community or organization when I began this process. I had ideas, but no people to collaborate with to see if ideas were viable. Thankfully, God filled those communal gaps with abundance. I met many beautiful souls along this journey, who shared tender stories of loss and grief with me. They trusted me to hold their pains gently, but also to create something to serve others well, in the future. A second surprise involved Portland Seminary's willingness to allow me access to its students to design and deliver my project. It felt serendipitous to design a class for students, by students.

In many ways, I knew that with such valuable input, the chance of failure was minimal. That gave me courage to push cultural and theological boundaries when developing the course content. Another challenge was that I was very nervous to lead as a seminary instructor because I had not served in a leadership role for almost four years. My approach to leadership had shifted during my doctoral journey. I was unsure how to take up space and facilitate learning, while coming alongside others. I knew I could not lead the way I once did, but I did not know how to lead now. Thankfully, a wise friend shared encouraging words with me. Paraphrasing words from Parker Palmer, he told me, "You don't teach from what you know, you teach from who you

are.” I knew that if I remained true to who I had become, all would be well. Those words helped me craft lectures and host a brave space for students to share their stories.

While student feedback was overwhelmingly positive, areas of continued development exist. My benchmarks need refinement to be more measurable. Implementing the same questionnaire at the beginning and end of the course will help students determine areas where change has occurred. The restructuring of the grading rubric and the shift from letter grades to a pass/fail format would allow students greater freedom not to do things right. Without a grade on the line, they would ask different questions and push against content to transform in a way that is authentic to who they are. One of the textbooks used was not ideal, but it achieved most of the goals. I am searching for another text to implement in the next iteration.

Many key learnings emerged during the project development process. First, prayer must be the undercurrent for all I do. When I tried to do the work on my own, it was a battle. After extended prayer and listening, thoughts flowed easily. Second, I entered this program, not sure why I was here. I knew God placed it on my heart. I knew it was important, but I could not imagine who would want to engage in conversations and learn about loss and grief. Then a pandemic hit, and I watched countless people flounder in their loss and grief. Life changed drastically in a short time span. None of us were prepared for the amount of death, loss, and grief that would come our way. This catastrophic event, that continues to this day confirms that the work I am doing is important and needed. Ministry leaders and community members need support. We all need to develop language around loss and grief, so that we can figure out how to be sad together, make meaning of loss together, and be human together.

I opened this project portfolio with a poem by John D. Blase. In many ways, his words hold the hope I have for this project. I hope, through this work, individuals will have an

increased capacity to look internally and externally, seeing the beauty around them, especially in times of death and grief. I hope they have courage to hold the shape of losses and deaths until the end, and beyond, fully present in the coming and going, of all that is and all that will be. This is what it means to be human. This is what it means to live like Jesus.

Project

Introduction

Death is a ubiquitous reality of life. Denial of the reality of death within the American culture is as ubiquitous as death itself. As a seminary student and local church congregant, I noticed conversations regarding death were extremely limited in frequency and scope. I wanted to understand why Christians, specifically, struggled with the realities of death, sidestepping the topic, while also allowing it to shape our death care language and practices. This is the impetus for my doctoral project.

My initial focus group consists of Evangelical Christians, both mainline and non-denominational. Discovery sessions integrated with research allowed me to formulate the following Need/Problem/Opportunity (NPO): *Grieving people feel isolated and underserved in communities of faith when pastors and community members are ill-equipped and unprepared to care for them.*

The reason pastors and community members are ill-prepared to care for those grieving is historically, culturally, and theologically complex. Tackling such complexity is beyond the scope of this project. Implementing Occam's Razor, where the simplest solution, with the least moving parts, suffices, enables me to address my NPO in a creative way.¹

For Christians, Jesus' life serves as a model of how to live and love in this world. Philippians 2:5-11 provides a concise and foundational text of Jesus moving proximate to humanity by becoming fully human. Proximity to humanity necessitated navigating loss and

¹ Farnam Street, *The Great Mental Models, Vol. 1*, 160.

grief, and being present with others as they do the same. If we are to live and die like Jesus, then what does it look like for ministry leaders to move proximate to their humanity, both personally and communally, so they can be present with the humanity of others?

To begin answering this question, I developed an eight-week, one-credit, graduate level spiritual formation course for Portland Seminary entitled “Discovering Life Through Loss and Grief.” Through the metaphor of pilgrimage, students are invited to journey in their humanity by engaging with and integrating their own stories of loss and grief. Course resources and format enables them to practice companioning one another in grief as they share personal stories of loss. The course is offered virtually through Portland Seminary’s academic platforms. Student expectations are included in the Course Syllabus. The scope of my project involves course development, launch, conclusion, and evaluation. My time commitment during project launch is approximately eight to ten hours per week, which includes lecture preparation, assignment grading, and correspondence with students. Success benchmarks include sufficient student enrollment for course launch, timely student engagement with weekly course expectations, voluntary evaluative feedback upon course completion, and incorporation of one to two formational practices for loss and grief. Quality benchmarks include students successfully meeting the course objectives.² Measurement of benchmarks happen through assimilation of student reflections and self-reporting of learning and transformation.

I now present my project in the following order: course syllabus, weekly lecture notes with corresponding PowerPoint presentations, and an overall project assessment utilizing the

² Benchmark details are located in the Appendix.

established project benchmarks. An appendix with student evaluations is located in Appendix E, and the project bibliography is in the portfolio bibliography.

Project Documentation

Course Syllabus³



Academic Year: 2020-2021 | Summer 2021 Semester

Course Name: SFAD 585 MLC, Discovering Life through Loss & Grief

Credit Hours: 1 credit

Instructor: Darcy Hansen

E-mail: hansend@georgefox.edu

Phone:

Zoom Account:

Course Starting Date: 05/10/21

Course Completion Date: 07/04/21

Zoom Times: 7:30-8:20 am, 05/13, 05/20, 05/27, 06/03, 06/10, 06/17,
06/24, 07/01

This course will meet fully online

³ The syllabus format is established by Portland Seminary. Particulars to course content are completed by me, while other academic details are provided by Portland Seminary in accordance with George Fox University standards. Details for hyperlinks within the syllabus are located beside the hyperlink and cited in the bibliography, as required.

Course Description

As pilgrims, we will spend the next eight weeks traveling ancient and contemporary roads of loss and grief, exploring death from the perspectives of Western culture and Christian mystics. We do not travel alone; we have one another, as well as the wisdom of others who have walked these roads before us. We will companion one another in our grief stories as we move proximate to loss in our lives. Mystery, silence, and movement accompany us into the unknown of God. Recognizing the limits of our breath and body invites us to become more human, more like Jesus, along the way.

Course Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Gain historical perspective of the evolution of death care practices in Western culture.
- Develop language for communicating realities of loss and grief.
- Embrace their humanity by recognizing their own mortality via the practice of *memento mori*, “remember you will die.”
- Attend to their physical limits by engaging in embodied activities.
- Discover life by embracing loss through contemplative practices.
- Practice giving and receiving the gift of presence for one another.

Required Texts/Materials

- Peterson, Christiana N. *Awakened by Death: Life-giving Lessons from the Mystics*. Minneapolis, MN: Broadleaf Books, 2020.
- Wolfelt, Alan D. PhD. *The Handbook for Companioning the Mourner: Eleven Essential Principles*. Ft. Collins, CO: Companioning Press, 2009.

- Other assigned PDFs, videos, or podcasts.

*Students may order from the GFU bookstore at: georgefoxshop.com.

Helpful (but not required) Texts/Materials

- Churn, Arlene, Rev, PhD. *The End is Just the Beginning: Lessons in Grieving for African Americans*. New York, NY: Random House, Inc., 2003.
- Cottrell, Stephen. *Striking Out: Poems and Stories from the Camino*. London, UK: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2018.
- Darwash, Mahmoud. *A Journal of Ordinary Grief*. Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2020 (original publication 1973).
- Devine, Megan. *It's OK That You're Not OK: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture that Doesn't Understand*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2017
- James, John W. and Friedman, Russell. *The Grief Recovery Handbook: The Action Program for Moving Beyond Death, Divorce, and Other Losses*. New York, NY: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2009.
- Lane, Belden C. *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Poetry: The Practice of Freedom. 2021. Chicago, IL: Poetry Foundation, Vol. 217, No 5 (February).
- Richardson, Jan. *The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times of Grief*. Orlando, FL; Wanton Gospiller Press, 2016.

- Zen Monks and Haiku Poets. Japanese Death Poems. North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 1986.

Course Requirements and Assignments

A. Faculty Commitment to Student Engagement

Seminary faculty promise to provide regular and substantive interaction with students

[ES 1.6.2] as follows:

- **Regular:** Faculty promise to interact with students in a predefined, consistent, frequent, and timely basis as follows:
 - Synchronously: In person during a synchronous engagement such as face-to-face class, a phone call, chat, or during audio/video conferencing.
 - Asynchronous: Through email, a forum discussion posting, voicemail, or facebook group posting (when appropriate).
 - The instructor will respond to emails within two business days (48 hrs).
 - If students have an urgent need, they may contact the instructor by email, marking it urgent, and/or by voice mail immediately. Additionally, they may contact the program administrative assistant.
- **Substantive:** Faculty promise to be the primary (though not exclusive) person to lead class conversations around the course subject and provide feedback on assignments, projects, or exams so as to allow students the opportunity to adjust their performance and adjust their understanding or misunderstanding of the material (two business days to a week for more substantive assignments or exams).

B. Course Assignments

The course consists of the following assignments that help to achieve the course objectives:

Attendance & participation in weekly Zoom sessions (30% of grade)

- Active participation in 8 weekly zoom sessions is required.
- If you cannot attend a zoom session, please let the professor know in advance so alternate participation arrangements can be made.
- Absences, tardies, and non-involvement in these sessions will be reflected in your grade and could result in failing the course.

Weekly Embodied Activity (10% of grade)

- Each week, as you are able, you will do 30 minutes of an embodied activity. This can include walking, hiking, visiting a labyrinth, yoga, going up and down stairs, etc. If you already engage in embodied movement, then you are encouraged to try new routes or engage in unfamiliar activities.
- You will report and submit your weekly activity and duration in your weekly journal entry through FoxTALE.

Weekly Forum (20% of grade)

- Each week you will submit a written post as a way of consolidating thoughts from interactions with your weekly reading. The post is due on Thursday by 11:55 PM PST.
- Posts should be approximately 300 words in length.

- There will be a couple writing prompts to highlight areas of interest. You can use those or highlight something else you discovered during the week.

Weekly Reflection Journals (10% of grade)

- Each week you will submit a journal entry where you can, in a “safe space,” process what you are learning, ask questions, and make connections between learning and life experiences. Each entry will be graded on depth of thought and level of engagement with course material.
- Each entry should be approximately 150-250 words in length.
- You will include a brief summary sentence of your embodied activity and duration in your journal entry.
- You will submit your journal entry through FoxTALE each week.

Final Project (30% of grade)

- You will prepare a final project as a way of consolidating your learning.
- There will be options as to how you approach this. Details will be given in the FoxTALE course site.

Course Schedule

Weekly flow: Monday- Sunday (approximately 5.25 hours per week) **

- Monday- Read, listen, watch- 2 to 2.5 hours
- Embodied activity- 30 min (anytime between Monday and Sunday)
- Wednesday- 45 min

- 300-word forum post due 11:59PM PST
- Skim 4 classmates posts in preparation for Thursday's Zoom
- Thursday- Zoom- 50 min- 7:30-8:20am PST
- Sunday- Journal- 30 min
- 150-250-word **journal entry with activity log due 11:59 PM PST**

*****Optional assignment to be used 1x- you can select to watch ONE of the following films in place of ONE week's assignments:**

Hope Gap (\$2.99 on Amazon Prime, PG-13—divorce)

Captain Fantastic (Netflix, Rated R—language, some nudity, suicide, death practices and cultural expectations)

Coco (Disney+)

Soul (Disney+)

Week 1 (Monday - Sunday, 05/10/21 - 05/15/21)

Zoom: 05/13/21 from 7:30 - 8:20am

Readings:

- Read: Peterson, Part I, pgs. 1-62 (2 hrs.); Wolfelt, pgs. 1-11
- Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moK4c3iOeNg>. **Warning: This video highlights the process of plastination. There are images of dead bodies and internal body systems.



- Contemplate this image of danse macabre:

<https://cdn.theatlantic.com/thumbor/Gps9-jkP0p50ubE->

[ImASW1uPT3c=/2x24:938x551/720x405/media/img/mt/2014/10/6860259856_1c23a28108_b/original.jpg](https://cdn.theatlantic.com/thumbor/Gps9-jkP0p50ubE-ImASW1uPT3c=/2x24:938x551/720x405/media/img/mt/2014/10/6860259856_1c23a28108_b/original.jpg)



- Contemplate this example of medieval memento mori:

<https://remedianetwork.net/2013/01/28/specimen-memento-mori/>



Assignments:

- See Weekly Flow

Week 2 (Monday - Sunday, 05/17/21 - 05/21/21)

Zoom: 05/20/21 from 7:30 - 8:20am

Readings:

- Read Peterson, Part II, pgs. 63-100 (1.25 hrs.); Wolfelt, pgs. 13-34 (0.5 hr.)

Assignments:

- Take some time to **map out your loss and grief timeline**. Mark times of physical death, lesser deaths, and seasons of grief. Choose one that evokes a stirring within and sit with that. What do you notice?
- See Weekly Flow

Week 3 (Monday - Sunday, 05/24/21 - 05/28/21)

Zoom: 05/27/21 from 7:30 - 8:20am

Readings:

- Read Peterson, Part III, pgs. 101-152 (1.5 hrs.); Wolfelt, pgs. 43-64 (0.5 hrs.)

Assignments:

- Songs hold stories of loss and grief for a generation. Select from the list of songs in the resources, or add your own, to begin creating a *memento mori* playlist. Which song has meaning for you and why?
- See Weekly Flow

Week 4 (Monday - Sunday, 05/31/21 - 06/04/21)

Zoom: 06/03/21 from 7:30 - 8:20am

Readings:

- Read Peterson, Part IV, pgs. 153-204 (1.5 hrs.); Wolfelt, pgs. 65-80 (0.5 hrs.)

Skim:

- Cultural shifts are happening in end-of-life care, as noted by Jim Parker, in *Hospice News*: <https://hospicenews.com/2019/12/12/more-deaths-now-occur-in-homes-than-hospitals-nursing-facilities/>.
- What can animals teach us about empathy? Lynda V. Mapes, a *Seattle Times* reporter, documents the journey of a mother orca named Tahlequah and her dead calf: <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/after-17-days-and-1000-miles-mother-orca-tahlequah-drops-her-dead-calf/>
- Kay Manning, of the *Chicago Tribune*, notes how shifts in burial practices in America allow for more embodied care of the dead and for the land: <https://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/sc-fam-personalized-natural-burials-0514-story.html>

Assignments:

- Exercise: Locate (via google or maps) your nearest cemetery. Give details about its location, composition (traditional vs. natural), and proximity to you and your community. How does its presence and proximity shape the death narrative in your community?
- See Weekly Flow

Week 5 (Monday - Sunday, 06/07/21 - 06/11/21)

Zoom: 06/10/21 from 7:30 - 8:20am

Readings:

- Read Peterson, Part V, pgs. 205-252 (1.5 hrs.); Wolfelt, 81-94 (0.5 hrs.)
- A. Rochaun Meadows-Fernandez, of *Vox*, reports how black mothers, trapped in the double bind of racism, are being impacted by deaths experienced from Covid and police brutality: <https://www.vox.com/first-person/2020/5/28/21272380/black-mothers-grief-sadness-covid-19>.
- In “Sacrilege,” John D. Blase, shares feelings and events surrounding his father’s death in the time of Covid: <https://johnblase.com/2021/03/10/sacrilege/>.
- Kathi Gatlin shares her journey of grief following the death of her father due to Covid: <https://www.companioningcenter.org/blog/a-daughters-journey>.
- Deborah Villalon, of KTVU FOX 2, reports how one family has been significantly impacted by Covid: <https://www.ktvu.com/news/losing-both-parents-to-covid-is-unimaginable-heartbreak>
- Optional: View: Alexander Stockton and Lucy King, reporters for *The New York Times*, present a behind the scenes look at what it is like to be an ICU nurse in the time of Covid-19. **Warning- hospital images of patient care and death.
<https://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/100000007578176/covid-icu-nurses-arizona.html?campaignId=7JFJX>.



Assignments:

- See Weekly Flow

Week 6 (Monday - Sunday, 06/14/21 - 06/18/21)

Zoom: 06/17/21 from 7:30 - 8:20am

Readings:

- Wolfelt, pgs. 95-117 (0.75 hrs.)
- Read/Listen: In “The Aftermath,” Robert Draper, for *Texas Monthly*, investigates one of America’s first school shootings and the impact it had on those who witnessed the events.
<https://www.texasmonthly.com/articles/the-school-shooting-that-austin-forgot/>
- Read: Michael Simmons notes the importance of learning to befriend our emotions:
<https://www.companioningcenter.org/blog/befriending-our-emotions>
- MaryKate Morse highlights the importance of embracing a more disciplined and shared grieving process: <https://www.missioalliance.org/the-art-of-grieving-a-spiritual-practice-for-our-time/>.
- Watch: Nancy Berns, “Beyond Closure” (TEDx Des Moines) shares her discovery in the liminal space between grief and closure:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0rCfXSdYPE>.



- Kathi Gatlin shares what it looks like to companion others in their grief journey:

https://www.companioningcenter.org/blog/companioning-grief_

Assignments:

- See Weekly Flow

Week 7 (Monday - Sunday, 06/21/21 - 06/25/21)

Zoom: 06/24/21 from 7:30 - 8:20am

Readings:

- Listen- In the Prologue of Episode 731 of *What Lies Beneath*, Ira Glass shares a story about the profound impact a drawing has on a class of elementary students:
<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/731/what-lies-beneath/prologue-2> (13 min)
- Watch- Netflix: *Worn Stories*, Limited Series, Episode 2, (30 min) presents short stories of the diverse ways humans navigate loss and grief:

<https://www.netflix.com/watch/81192023>

OR if you do not have Netflix, LISTEN to:

On *Grief, Gratitude, and Greatness*, host, Sarah Shaoul visits with Kimberly Dixon to learn how the murder of Kimberley's son led her to advocacy (42 min):
<https://griefgratitudegreatness.com/episodes/2019/07/16/kimberely>.

- Read: John Behr posts in *Human Flourishing*, a theological perspective on Christ, and ways his humanity invites us to become increasingly human.

<https://www.christianflourishing.com/blog/2018/8/8/john-behr-dying-to-live-or-how-to-become-a-human-being>

Assignments:

- See Weekly Flow

Week 8 (Monday - Sunday, 06/28/21 - 07/02/21)

Zoom: 07/01/21 from 7:30 - 8:20am

Readings:

- Review texts, PDF, and journal notes for project preparation.
- Through this link: <https://artandtheology.org/2021/03/11/roundup-kyrie-death-chagall-isaiah-35-more/>

Listen to:

- “Kyrie / Oh Death,” a song performed by Susanne Rosenberg;
- SERMON: “Chagall at Tudeley” by the Rev. James Crockford, University Church, Oxford, April 7, 2019 (15 min).

Assignments:

- Complete final project:

Your final project can be a written reflection paper, 1200-1500 words. It can be a series of poems or artwork such as a painting, mixed media, collage, drawing, or sculpture. It can be an original song you write and record. You are invited to use your imagination and communicate

your learning and transformation in a way that best suits you. Your project needs to incorporate course content in a thoughtful way. Take time to reflect on the various *memento mori* resources you created, as well as discussions and your journal entries. Here are questions for consideration: How has *memento mori* impacted you these past 8 weeks? How will you incorporate *memento mori* into your life's journey? What has been most valuable to you during our pilgrimage? Most transformative? What did you shed along the way? What did you pick up? How have you experienced healing? How are you learning to live with grief in new ways?

- See Weekly Flow

Allotment of Course Hours

Assignment Name	hrs
Zoom discussions	8
Assigned reading, viewing, listening	18
Online forum post	8
Journal (4)/ Embodied activity (4)	8
Final project	3
Total	45

Grading Values of Each Assignment

Assignment Name	xx%
Zoom discussions	30
Weekly forum post	20
Weekly journal entry	10
Weekly embodied activity	10
Final project	30
Total	100%

Grade Scale

GPA	Percentage	Letter Grade
4.0	100-93	A
3.7	92.99-90	A-
3.3	89.99-87	B+
3.0	86.99-83	B
2.7	82.99-80	B-
2.3	79.99-77	C+
2.0	76.99-73	C
1.7	72.99-70	C-
1.3	69.99-67	D+
1.0	66.99-60	D
0	59.99-0	F

Forum Participation Rubric

Name: _____ Discussion # _____

	UNSATISFACTORY	COMPETENT	PROFICIENT	DISTINGUISHED
Substance	1-3 points	4 points	6 points	8 points
	Ideas expressed lack an understanding of the discussion topic. Comments are irrelevant, off-topic, and/or confusing to follow. Viewpoint, if given, is not supported with evidence or examples.	Ideas expressed in discussion posts show a minimal understanding of the discussion topic. Comments are general in nature and/or occasionally may not be relevant. Rehashes or summarizes ideas with limited analysis, original thought, and/or supported viewpoints.	Ideas expressed in discussion posts are mostly substantive and relevant to topic; some original thought. Demonstrates logical thinking, reasoning, and/or analysis for most part. Viewpoint is supported with evidence and/or examples.	Ideas expressed in discussion posts include original thought, substantial depth, and are relevant to the topic. Viewpoint shows strong logical thinking, reasoning, and analysis with evidence and examples. Construction of new meaning and insights are evident.
Word Count	1-3 points	4 points	6 points	8 points
	150 words (or more) over.	100 words over.	50 words over.	275-300 words

	UNSATISFACTORY	COMPETENT	PROFICIENT	DISTINGUISHED
Timeliness	1-3 points		4 points	
	Late post.		Timely posts within specified discussion period.	

Final Project Rubric

	Not Passing (B- or Below)	Good (B/B+)	Excellent (A/A-)	Outstanding (A)
Scholarship (20 points): project engages with materials related to course, and utilizes citations appropriate for the format.	0-15	16-17	18-19	20
Historical Context (15 points): project demonstrates an understanding of the socio-cultural context of the topic and its significance in contemporary practice.	0-10	12-13	13-14	15
Contextualization (50 points): project demonstrates the relevance and significance of course content for the student's personal spiritual formation.	0-15	16-17	18-19	50
Expression (15 points): project content is clearly expressed and demonstrates creative and/or thoughtful insights	0-10	12-13	13-14	15
Total	79 or below	80-89	90-96	100

Course Evaluations

Course evaluations are very important to the effectiveness of our learning community. The Dean and faculty routinely review course evaluations. Full time faculty and adjuncts are reviewed regularly through course evaluations. Course improvements are made because of these reviews. Our accrediting bodies, ATS and NWCCU, require regular evaluation so that the seminary is in a constant feedback loop to improve the learning experience for students and to accomplish program goals. Therefore, part of a course's requirements is the completion of the evaluation. Most evaluations happen at the end of a course with a survey taken online. Course evaluations are confidential.

Partial feedback from a few in a class is rarely helpful. Help us improve your learning experience by completing course evaluations.

D. COVID-Related Information

Wearing facial coverings in classrooms is required.

To help mitigate the transmission of COVID-19, it is required that all students wear masks or other face coverings in classrooms, laboratories and other similar spaces where in-person instruction occurs. The masks/face coverings must cover both nose and mouth, and be worn for the duration of class, inside all university buildings, and outside whenever you are or are likely to come within 6 feet of another person. Face masks are not required to join classes via Zoom. For any faculty, staff or students who have a medical condition that prevents safely wearing a covering directly over the nose and mouth, a clear face shield may be worn instead. If you have any questions about appropriate face coverings, please contact Tiona Cage at tcage@georgefox.edu

COVID-19 Health-Related Class Absences

Please evaluate your own health status regularly and refrain from attending local classes if you are ill. You are encouraged to seek appropriate medical attention for treatment of illness. In the event of contagious illness, please do not come to face-to-face classes or to campus to turn in work. For online courses, you have the freedom to determine if you are not able to join a Zoom session due to illness. If that is the case, please notify me by email about your absence as soon as practical, so that accommodations can be made. Please note that documentation (a doctor's note) for medical excuses is NOT required.

E. Course Learning Standards

Course Workload:

Hours of work / credit hour:

The total number of work hours including class time for a 3-credit course is 125-135 hours over the course of a semester. A 2-credit course is 85-90 hours over the course of a semester. A 1-credit course has 40-45 hours of work including class time over the course of a semester. Because people work at different rates, the actual number of hours per individual may vary.

Student Commitment to Learning:

Assignment Due Dates: You are required to meet all deadlines for assignments and activities as outlined in the schedule. Late work will automatically lose one letter grade following the submission deadline and a further grade for each week day it is delinquent beyond the due date. You will need to contact the professor, preferably in advance, for consideration due to extenuating circumstances. The professor will not accept late assignments beyond 3 days from the due date, except in cases of extenuating circumstances.

Learning Community Engagement: Class attendance and regular online participation is required in order to create a robust community learning environment. Therefore, if you are unable to engage online or in class for more than 3 weeks throughout the course, you will receive at least a letter grade reduction. If you miss 4 or more weeks throughout the course, you will not pass the class. In addition, hybrid courses require full participation at intensive F2F sessions. If you miss more than 3 hours of F2F in a hybrid course, you cannot pass the class.

General writing parameters

Final reflection essays should be formatted according to the following guidelines.

- Use Microsoft Word
- Title of file: "lastname_coursename_essay.docx"
- Title page with the following information:
 - Student Name
 - Course
 - Professor Name
- Doubled spaced
- 12-point font
- 1-inch margins
- "Times New Roman" font style
- Include a bibliography
- All footnote and bibliographic citations should follow consistent formatting guidelines according to Turabian/ Chicago Manual Style. This style is especially requisite if you intend on submitting your work to a conference.

In addition to demonstrating your understanding of the subject, your writing also reflects the level of investment you make in your work. Please take care to use proper English grammar (see such helps as the Chicago Style Guide or [Purdue's Online Writing Lab](#)). Considerations are made for those whom English is their second language. Always give credit to other peoples' work and respect Copyright guidelines. (See Module 7 "Writing Resources" of the [Seminary Student Information](#) course site in FoxTALE for more information on these issues.)

Final Artistic Endeavors must show thoughtfulness to incorporate course content and understanding.

- 2-D and 3-D art pieces must be well photographed and turned in via FoxTALE.
- Art pieces must have a 400-700-word summary of the process and imagery content/meaning (see above for writing guidelines).
- Original poetry, written word, or music must adhere to the basic writing guidelines for reflection essays. Creativity in spacing and font size is acceptable, as needed.
- Original audio recordings must be submitted via FoxTALE or emailed to the professor.

Inclusive Language

Portland Seminary endeavors always to treat the members of its community with respect and communicate with civility. We honor one another's differences, be they religious, cultural, gender-related, or political. Our belief that every person is created in God's image extends to how we treat one another.

We wish to challenge patterns of language that may be doing harm even when harm is inflicted unconsciously and without intention. We expect every member of our community, both

inside and outside the classroom, to avoid dehumanizing or exclusive language in conversations with one another. “Dehumanizing” means any language that diminishes another’s humanity; it includes not only insulting discourse, but also the refusal to pronounce someone’s name correctly, imposing nicknames on others without their consent, speaking of people using non-human terminology, failure to extend grace when one’s weaknesses become apparent, stereotyping and the presumption of attributes and roles based on race and/or gender, etc.

Inclusive language, images, and metaphors are to be used in both written and verbal communication, which extends to in-class presentations and the Bible translations we use.

Intellectual Property

The teacher’s entire classroom content—whether written or spoken, in lectures, discussions, PowerPoints, or handouts—is the intellectual property of the teacher. It cannot be cited, quoted, or propagated in any way, other than in the classroom or on the course’s FoxTale website, without the permission of the teacher. If you want to record a class lecture or quote from classroom content, please obtain the teacher’s permission via email beforehand.

In addition, the comments of other students should likewise be held in confidence. The purpose of this policy is to create a safe environment in which everyone can take risks in learning without fear of reprisal.

Academic Honesty

It is assumed that students at George Fox University will endeavor to be honest and of high integrity in all university matters. A lack of respect and integrity is evidenced by cheating, fabricating, plagiarizing, and the disruption of classes. Cheating is defined as ‘intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information or study aids in any academic exercise.’ It is assumed that whatever is submitted by a student is the work of that student and is new work

for that course. Fabrication is ‘intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise or form.’ Plagiarism is ‘intentionally or knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one’s own in any academic exercise.’ One who facilitates any of the above is equally responsible with the primary violator. Penalties may include restitution, an F on an individual paper or exam, loss of campus position or employment, an F on a course, disciplinary probation and suspension.

Online Community Netiquette

You will be joining colleagues in an online community. You’ll be working on a weekly schedule that establishes a community rhythm of communication. There will be times that you’ll be assigned to work in a small group. Please honor your colleagues by giving them your full participation. Here are some netiquette tips you may find helpful:

- Don’t use ALL CAPS. IT TRANSLATES AS SHOUTING!
- Unless your instructor has given specific word counts for discussions, it’s best to limit a posting to no more than a paragraph or two (i.e. no more than 100-150 words). You can always come back and add more to the group discussion. This gives everyone an opportunity to make a contribution, rather than have one person ‘cover all the ideas’ or control the conversation.
- Be sure to make contributions! Even if you feel everything has been said, you need to contribute more than “I agree” or “I think we’ve really covered it.” Your presence is important to your colleagues. If you don’t make postings, it will have a negative impact on your community.
- Be careful to stay on subject. If you want to pursue something off topic, you can move that discussion to the Conversations in the Commons.

- Treat all communication as confidential unless you've received permission to share outside of your learning group.
- Before communicating with your instructor privately (e.g. via email or phone) ask yourself, "Would my colleagues benefit by being included in this discussion?" Try to share questions and concerns in view of colleagues, since they may have the same question or concern in mind. Post your question in the appropriate forum and invite the instructor to respond (see Instructor Availability).
- Always give credit to the originator of a thought you are sharing.
- You'll be challenged by divergent viewpoints. Try to use "I" statements when pursuing a constructive debate:
 - What I hear you saying is...
 - Here is what I've experienced...
 - It would help me to know how you hear what I'm saying because I'm not sure I'm being understood.
 - I understand that your view is different from mine. Here's what I'm hearing...
- If you are angry, don't respond immediately. You might want to write a draft to organize your thoughts and come back to it later to make revisions and determine if it should be sent.
- Make an effort to demonstrate to your colleagues that you can objectively consider opposing views.
- Avoid criticizing and/or attacking opposing views. Be respectful of people whose views differ from your own.
- Seize every opportunity to genuinely affirm a colleague.

In the process, we hope your community will be able to share learning discoveries.

University Services

Disability Services Information

Portland Seminary is committed to providing equality of opportunity and meaningful access for qualified students with physical, psychological, attentional or learning-based disabilities in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. A qualified student with a disability at George Fox University is someone who, with reasonable or no accommodations, is capable of meeting George Fox's academic standards." (<https://www.georgefox.edu/offices/disabservices/policies.html>)

If you have specific physical, psychiatric, or learning disabilities and require accommodations, please contact the Disability Services Office as early as possible so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. You will need to provide current documentation of your disability to the Disability Services Office. For more information, go to <https://www.georgefox.edu/offices/dso/index.html> or contact Rick Muthiah, Associate Director of Learning Support Services(503-554-2314 or rmuthiah@georgefox.edu).

Help the Portland Writing Center (PWC)

What we do:

The [Portland Writing Center](#) offers one-on-one writing assistance free of charge for GFU students. Our mission is to empower you to become a better writer, not simply to craft a better paper. We offer assistance in many areas, including the following:

- Gathering your thoughts and beginning the writing process

- Organization and overall clarity
- Grammar, word choice, and academic writing style
- Following the rules of APA, MLA, and Turabian formats

Consultations:

Consultations are scheduled for 60 minutes and can be face-to-face, e-mail, or via Zoom video conference. You can access our user-friendly Google calendar scheduling system here: <https://goo.gl/7lrf96>. Once you have selected an appointment time, please email our Writing Center consultants with your desired medium (face-to-face, email, or Zoom).

Portland Writing Center Director:

Dr. Jennie A. Harrop, jharrop@georgefox.edu.

Inclement weather

George Fox University closure policy: <https://www.georgefox.edu/news/closures/>

Weekly Lecture Content

Pre-Semester Introduction Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZfKmRNFPgM&t=12s>

Welcome to SFAD 585: Discovering Life through Loss and Grief: A Pilgrim's Journey⁴

My name is Darcy Hansen. I will be your guide, companion, and fellow learner over the next eight weeks. Like you, I am a Portland Seminary student currently enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry (DMin) Leadership and Global Perspectives (LGP) program. I am also a graduate of Portland Seminary's Masters of Divinity (MDiv) program, with an emphasis in Spiritual Direction, having received certification in May, 2019. I love this community of learners. It has given me hope for the church as She moves forward in these difficult days.

As a student, I noticed very little conversation within or outside the walls of seminary and faith communities regarding death, loss, and grief. Four years ago, I began wondering and asking myself why. Those questions led me to this moment.

This course is unique. First, it is part of my DMin project, and second, it is intended to be a collaboration with you. Your participation helps shape how this course might be experienced in the future.

I invite you to join me to travel roads every human before us has traveled, and all who come after us will travel. These roads lead into and through loss, death, and grief. I extend this invitation with a large measure of humility, as no one has all the answers or understanding of

⁴ This content was written then shared via a YouTube video in the "welcome to the course" email sent out one week before class began. See link above.

what we will encounter along the way. Experiences of loss, death, and grief are as varied and unique as each created human being. While there is a measure of unknowing, by no means does it negate the need to walk the road that exists. Indeed, we do not have a choice. If we elect not to walk it, the road will eventually come to us, finding us ill-prepared to travel well.

Over the next eight weeks, the paths we walk will have a particular perspective. By no means is this the only perspective, but it is the one most familiar to us as Americans. We will note the landscape and experience the ruggedness of diverse terrains. We will prepare our hearts, minds, bodies, and souls to understand what was, is, and yet to come. History will provide direction for the way forward. The saints of old become the wind at our backs, and maybe at times, blow rudely into our faces.

This course is the first step, an awakening of a sort, to begin embracing our humanity. This is necessary to honor the humanity of others. It is a way of reclaiming language and reimagining practices that give meaning and purpose to loss, death, and grief. It is a catalyst for conversation and, hopefully, a community transformer. It is my hope that when you or your loved ones experience loss and grief, they realize they are not alone, and they have a companion to journey with them along the way.

My friend, Lisa Procter, is an artist. She once shared with me that when she is working on a painting, she must patiently notice what the painting needs to be. She can't force the painting to become something it isn't meant to become.

In many ways, the pilgrimage we will embark upon is similar. Though there will be some guidance, the outcomes aren't predetermined, as they will shape and become what it needs to be for each of us. There will be suggestions offered to start you, but there will also be options for you to make this journey completely yours.

As with all pilgrimages, you will begin, mostly prepared yet ready to adjust as needed. You will bring the fullness of whom you are to the journey, allowing your strengths and weaknesses to carry and shape yourself and others. You will shed what's too heavy to carry and pick up what is life-giving. You will make new friendships and, if needed, reconcile relationships long gone. You will experience the inescapable reality of loss and grief as you recognize and embrace the limits of your humanity.

It is my hope that by journey's end, you will also experience life in new ways, and you will, like countless other pilgrims, discover the transformative beauty of wholeness through wonder, and life through loss.

As we embark on this journey, I share these words with you from the poem "Holy Ground" by TRH Blue.⁵ May they be an encouragement for you to keep stepping even when you're not quite sure where to step.

The course site is live. Your assignments begin Monday, May 10. I look forward to seeing you on Thursday, May 13, at 7:30 am PST for our first Zoom session. If you have questions beforehand, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Week 1: An Introduction and Invitation to a Pilgrimage

What is a pilgrimage? A pilgrimage is a journey, especially a long one, made to a sacred place, as an act of religious devotion.

Every year, thousands of pilgrims pack up to venture off to travel one of the most famous destinations, the Camino de Santiago, or the Way of St. James. Numerous paths throughout

⁵ TRH Blue, "Holy Ground," Notesontheway.com (shop), accessed May 2, 2021.
https://www.notesontheway.com/products/poem-25?_pos=1&_sid=98c1c528e&_ss=r.

Europe lead to the tomb of St. James in Santiago de Compostela, which is in northwest Spain.⁶ Countless Christian pilgrims have walked upon the well-worn paths of the Camino since the Middle Ages. Their reasons for travel vary, but they often search for the sacred of God and the spiritual transformation that accompanies such an encounter.

In his reflections, while walking the Camino, Stephen Cottrell, Archbishop of York, noted, “God can only be found in this step, never the one beyond it. God is never someplace else. If you think God can only be found in a particular place, you will miss God in the here and now. Even God’s darkness is the shadow cast by God’s light.”⁷

While this course doesn’t allow us to physically travel a particular pilgrim’s path in search of the sacred, it does invite us to notice the sacred within the places which we reside and move daily, for God is there, with each step we take.

For those who have gone on a pilgrimage, you know preparation is imperative. That preparation includes:⁸

Your Itinerary:

- Choose your destination—your exact destination is undetermined, because journeying through loss and grief is different for each person. Uncertainty is something we will embrace along the way.

⁶ “Camino de Santiago: The Pilgrimage Routes of Santiago de Compostela,” Santiago-compostela.net (Home), accessed May 2, 2021, <http://santiago-compostela.net>.

⁷ Stephen Cottrell, *Striking Out: Poems and Stories from the Camino* (London, UK: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2018), 42.

⁸ Holy Land Pilgrimage Office, “How to Prepare for a Pilgrimage,” Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land in America, accessed May 2, 2021. <https://holylandpilgrimages.org/planning/travel-tips/how-to-prepare/>.

- Plan your route—your route is the syllabus, but you are asked to pick a route near your home to walk each week, or practice a physical action based on your abilities. It is your choice.

Your Body:

- We will be discussing death, loss, and grief. These are not easy topics. There may be triggers along the way that open dark, tucked away spaces in your heart causing visceral reactions in your body. What practices will you incorporate to navigate those—meditation, contemplative prayer, or something else?
- Be mindful along the way of what is happening internally and externally. Will your chosen weekly activity need to change? If so, what is an alternate activity you can incorporate? What are other supports needed to help you successfully navigate this course?

Your Backpack:

- What will you carry with you on this journey? What are the essentials?
- What needs to remain behind?

Your Soul:

- What is your purpose? Why did you register for this course?
- What is your prayer as you begin this journey?
- Start your journal. Keep it handy along the way to make notes on what you notice about yourself, culture, church, God, others. Ask questions. Be curious.
- Maintain a daily focus—we will use a visual reminder of *memento mori* (“that you will die”) as our focus. I have a bracelet I put on each morning. You can choose something as simple as a rubber band, a sticker, or post-it note. You are welcome to add another focus

if you'd like. It can be a specific scripture, a spiritual discipline (prayer or fasting), or a visual image (artwork or a picture of loved ones). If you have a difficult time choosing something, I have suggestions.

The pilgrim's journey often involves specific transitions or stages along the way. Those transitions include:⁹

1. **The Call:** The opening invitation of any spiritual journey, often in the form of a feeling or some vague yearning that expresses a fundamental human desire. Something in you prompted you to enroll in this course. Name that stirring if you can. Remember you were called on this journey.
2. **The Separation:** Pilgrimage, by its very nature, brings uncertainty. It rejects the safe and familiar. It asserts that one is freer when free from daily obligations of family, work, community, and the obligations of science, reason, and technology. Complete separation from our norms is difficult in this format. You are encouraged to tuck away or shut down as needed so you can step away from what you've known and step into the unknown.
3. **The Journey:** The backbone of a sacred journey is the pain of the journey itself. Physical suffering is the norm for a pilgrim. This personal sacrifice enhances the experience and elevates the sense of community one develops along the way. I encourage you to gently push back on the desire to avoid the pain that comes with remembered or current loss and grief. Remember, you do not travel alone. Others are here to hold your pain and help carry your suffering.

⁹ Bruce Feiler, "Sacred Journeys," Pbs.org, accessed May 2, 2021, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/sacredjourneys/content/pilgrimage/>.

4. **The Contemplation:** Some pilgrimages go the direct route, right to the center of the holy of holies, directly to the heart of the matter. Others take a more indirect route, circling the outside of the sacred place, transforming the physical journey into a spiritual path of contemplation. You are encouraged to be curious in your contemplation, ask questions and share reflections along the way. If something in the reading prompts you to think of something else, bring that along for the journey. Share it with your small group, incorporate it into your reflections.
5. **The Encounter:** After all the toil, trouble, anticipation, and expectation comes the approach—the sighting. The encounter is the climax of the journey. It is the moment the traveler experiences unity with the Creator. I don't know what this will look like for you. I can't even guarantee an encounter will happen. I hope we host space for one another that awakens the presence of God in our loss and grief.
6. **The Completion and Return:** At the culmination of the journey, the pilgrim returns home only to discover the meaning they sought lies in the familiarity of one's world. This is where your final project comes to play. Through poetry, song, dance, written or spoken word, collage, painting, essay, etc., you will communicate the journey you have taken. Include where you began, what transpired on your journey, and how you were transformed. What did you discover? What did you embrace? What did you lament or celebrate along the way? Who did you meet? Who did you forgive? Your journal entries will help make this final project meaningful and manageable.

Approximately 14 months ago, the world was thrown into a pandemic wilderness.

Isolation, uncertainty, death of loved ones, and loss of many things have prevailed. People have learned to be still, wait, and trust in systems beyond their control. Our adverse death culture has

had the threat of death breathing down our necks each day in a way that we never noticed before. We see gaps in our healthcare, funeral, and faith systems. The pandemic is forcing us to wrestle with loss and grief daily. It feels unrelenting because we are ill-prepared to navigate the wilderness of loss and grief.

How did we get here? How do we move forward in a way that honors the humanity of one another rather than become numb to the mounting death count of the people and experiences we love and treasure?

Pilgrims know it is important to know the landscape in which they will travel. They research, understand history, and trust the journey to reveal new truths. Our primary texts include *Awakened by Death* by Christiana Peterson, and *The Handbook for Companioning the Mourner* by Alan Wolfelt. Both give language to historical contexts and practices regarding deathcare and grief. I'll add some videos and articles along the way, as well. Other resources are listed in your syllabus, but are not required reading. Each week, we will practice *memento mori* through exercises, reflections, and offering the gift of presence to one another. Our weeks will have a particular rhythm to them, which, I hope, will be a known amongst unknowns. As pilgrims, we will work together, share ideas, ask questions, and hold each other's realities of loss and grief with open hands.

Take time with students to review the syllabus, required text, suggested text, and weekly rhythm.

Allow time for questions.

Week 1 PowerPoint Presentation:

**WELCOME TO SFAD 585:
DISCOVERING LIFE THROUGH LOSS
AND GRIEF**

A Pilgrim's Journey

ON PILGRIMAGE



PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

- ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
⁶ who, though he was in the form of God,
 did not regard equality with God
 as something to be exploited,
⁷ but emptied himself,
 taking the form of a slave,
 being born in human likeness.
 And being found in human form,
⁸ he humbled himself
 and became obedient to the point of death—
 even death on a cross.
⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him
 and gave him the name
 that is above every name,
¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus
 every knee should bend,
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue should confess
 that Jesus Christ is Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father.

PREPARATION

Itinerary
 Body
 Pack
 Soul



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STAGES OF A PILGRIMAGE

The Call
 The Separation
 The Journey
 The Contemplation
 The Encounter
 The Completion and Return



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Peterson, Christiana N. *Awakened by Death: Life-giving Lessons from the Mystics*. Minneapolis, MN: Broadleaf Books, 2020.
- Wolfelt, Alan D. PhD. *The Handbook for Companioning the Mourner: Eleven Essential Principles*. Ft. Collins, CO: Companioning Press, 2009.
- Other assigned PDFs, videos, or podcasts.

WEEKLY RHYTHM

- Mon-Wed - Read, listen, watch (approx. 2 hours)
- Wed- Online Post (45 min)
- Thurs- Zoom- Lecture/Small Group Discussion (1 hour)
- Walk/Embodied activity (30 min)
- Sun- Journal entry with activity log due 11:59 PM PST (30 min)

"THE WILDERNESS CAN BE A FEROCIOUS TEACHER, RAPIDLY STRIPPING DOWN THE EXPERIENCED OR THE CARELESS. IT IS EASY TO MAKE THE MISTAKES THAT WILL BRING ONE TO AN EXTREMITY' (GARY SNYDER). BEING BROUGHT TO THE END OF ONESELF IS THE TERRIFYING (AND ENTHRALLING) POSSIBILITY THAT THE DESERT ENJOINS. HERE IT IS THAT WE ENTER AN INTERIOR WILDERNESS MORE FEARFUL AND PROMISING THAN ANYTHING CHARTED ON TERRESTRIAL MAPS. THE WILDEST, MOST DANGEROUS TRAILS ARE ALWAYS THE ONES WITHIN"

BELDEN C. LANE, *THE SOLACE OF FIERCE LANDSCAPES*, 117.

Week 2: A Life of Loss and Grief

One of the ways pilgrims connect over the miles is through story. Chatter over random subjects moves into meaningful conversations about the complexities of life, as our souls find space to breathe along the long trail or vast terrain in which the pilgrims walk. Today I share vignettes of loss and grief from my life. I share the moments and events that have shaped my life in hard, profound, and beautiful ways. I share them to show you I am human and invite you to be the same.

His name was Richard Makurat. He and my mom were reckless, young, and in love when they married. They divorced a few years later, just after my younger brother was born. I was only three and don't remember the divorce, but it significantly impacted my life. That was my first experience of death. The absence of his larger-than-life physical presence created a void that I didn't know how to navigate.

I never asked questions about my childhood until a few years ago. When I asked my mom how I handled the divorce and the subsequent transitions, she told me I handled it all fine. Then, as almost an afterthought, she added, I screamed every night for hours on end during the first week in our new apartment. She had no idea why or how to console me, so she called her mother and asked her what to do. My grandmother said, "Place her in the shower and turn on the cold water. That will make her stop screaming." At her wit's end, my mother followed her mother's counsel. When the cold water hit my small body, I stopped screaming immediately. I do not remember this happening, but when my mother told me this story a few years ago, I knew it was true in the cells of my being. Tears welled up in my eyes, and my breath caught in my throat as I listened to her recount the events. My mom didn't realize that though my screaming

stopped externally, it didn't stop internally. All those screams produced by my young voice were stuffed deep within like a corpse tossed into a mass grave.

I learned early in life that I had to "carry on" and "keep my chin up." Loss did not integrate into my life. There was no moving through grief or learning to live with grief. Instead, I avoided grief. My grief was too much, and I was too much while also not being enough. It was not enough for my dad to stay or my mom to tenderly extend care. In many ways, as I silenced my grief, I became invisible. I became an expert at doing what others asked of me, blending in, and lending a hand to feel seen and loved. As I morphed into whatever my circumstances required, my identity slowly died along the way until I had no idea who I was or why I was on this earth.

This death process was exasperated when my father, who lived in California with his new wife, was killed in an accident. I was in first grade and lived in Kansas with my stepdad. I remember crying when my mom told me the news. She and I flew to California to attend his funeral. I have snapshots of his funeral in my mind. There was a casket covered with an American flag, a huge floral arrangement, and family members—many of whom I didn't know. They were enjoying lunch around a banquet table. I do not remember anything else. Upon returning home, life proceeded as it had before.

Two cross country moves, and six years passed when death came knocking at my door again. I was in the eighth grade. My best friend, Dawn Yance, was vivacious and curious, clever, and keen. She could sing, play multiple instruments, and dance. She was a ventriloquist, and Rodney was her sidekick. She had a sweet, sassy way about her, and was the freest person I knew. Her sense of humor and love for all living things flowed endlessly. Dawn was like the sister I never had.

We spent countless days swimming at the pool, turning flips in the gym, or adventuring in the woods near her home. For her birthday, she sweet-talked her parents into getting her a Honda Scooter.

On June 10, 1985, Dawn was involved in a fatal collision while riding her scooter. Her death flipped my world upside down. Grief consumed me. For reasons I cannot remember, I did not attend her funeral. Friends told me it was a lovely time of remembering. They even played recordings of Dawn singing hymns and sharing the Gospel, which she often did. When I heard about the funeral details, I was glad I didn't go.

This week, I asked my mom if she could remember why I didn't go to Dawn's funeral. Her response was striking, "She died?"

I responded, "Yes, she died when her scooter collided with a car. Remember?"

She didn't remember. Funny how the mind works. My mom didn't remember, and I never forgot. Dawn's death continues to haunt me in ways I could not have predicted.

The six years after her death were hard, though I can't articulate why. I spent my days searching for some sort of relief from the pain and emptiness in my heart. Some would say I was searching for God, but I know that wasn't true. I prayed to God when Dawn was in the hospital, and this "good and great" God I'd heard of had no power to bring healing and life to my friend. I wanted nothing to do with such a God. So, I became numb, pouring myself into academics, alcohol, and a series of dysfunctional and damaging relationships. I was lost, dying slowly under the weight of grief with no way to articulate what was happening inside.

During my junior year in college, I slowly moved out of the haze of living numb, and started asking questions about faith and life. Those questions led me to church, which led to

more questions. Eventually, I discovered God, or if you believe the parable of the lost sheep, God found me and began the slow process of healing my broken heart and soul.

With God's help, I was able to embrace the deaths of my grandparents. Each one felt timely, for they had lived full lives. Grief was present, but it was expected and welcomed.

On October 3, 2009, death arrived in a fierce way again as I received news that Olivia Ray had been killed. An impaired driver hit her while she was walking in a crosswalk. She and her sister were on their way to a Saturday morning fun run, less than a mile from their home. Olivia was ten years old. She and my daughter played soccer together when they were younger. My husband was their team's coach. Her parents, John and Jane Ray, were our friends.¹⁰ When I heard of Olivia's death, the news sucked all the air out of my lungs. I collapsed on the ground, sobbing. Since we no longer lived in the same town as the Ray's, I could not attend the celebration of life. Instead, I was left to wrestle with God about the injustice of a beautiful life snuffed out too soon. Olivia was much like my friend, Dawn. She was bigger than life. You always knew if she was present because she was fearless and fashionably quirky. She cared little about what others thought of her. However, she cared deeply about others, always ready to extend a compassionate helping hand. The world got a little darker when she died.

Olivia's death opened a grief wound in my heart. It was as if a band-aid was ripped off, and what came out was festering pus, formed through decades of inattention. I screamed countless questions toward the heavens, toward God, and most were met with silence. Only once did I perceive a response. When I asked God why Olivia and Dawn had to die at such young ages, all I heard was, "Do you trust Me?" This dialogue happened when I was out on my

¹⁰ The Rays gave permission to use their names and images in my project.

morning run. When I heard God's response, all I could do was sit down on a curb and sob.

Thankfully, I was in a place in my spiritual walk where I could answer, "Yes." I didn't know what that yes really meant, but I spoke it instinctively from the depths of my being.

Death is often portrayed as having two faces. Sometimes it comes as a monster—an enemy to be conquered. Other times it comes as a teacher, even a friend. Artists embrace this reality through their drawings and words.

Death was one of the most persistent themes in Käthe Kollwitz's work. It continued to exert an inexorable pull near the end of her life and served as the subject of her final print cycle. Ten years before completing the portfolio, Kollwitz noted in her diary, "I must do the prints on Death. Must, must, must!" She chose lithography, her preferred technique for creating emotionally powerful images with universal resonance, as the medium, but struggled to shape her ideas, executing the first five prints in 1934. [And] add[ing] three more lithographs to the series in 1937.¹¹

In Western mythology, death is a fierce dragon, ugly, vicious, capricious, ready to kill at a moment's notice. In our death-adverse culture, this image of death lurks in the shadows of our subconscious. In contrast, dragons in Eastern culture are portrayed as "beautiful, gentle, and friendly. They may bring change and even death, but they do so as promise instead of threat. They symbolize an ancient wisdom, the quiet rhythms of nature as opposed to the savagery of disorder."¹²

God has shown me, through my friends, John, and Jane Ray, as well as subsequent physical and lesser deaths in my life, the harsh yet quiet grace of loss and grief. Watching the Rays learn to live *with* loss and grief, I slowly learn to do the same. Death isn't an enemy to be vanquished, for Christ has already done that through His life, death, and resurrection. Rather,

¹¹ Käthe Kollwitz, *Woman Entrusts Herself to Death*, 1934, lithograph, Germany, accessed May 19, 2021, https://www.moma.org/s/ge/collection_ge/objbytag/objbytag_tag-vo77440_sov_sort-5.html.

¹² Belden C. Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 95-96.

I've found death extends me an invitation to live fully into my humanity, to become whole and healed.

I have discovered, the more I say yes, the more I become like Jesus, and the better I am to walk with others, extending the same invitation. I've learned to rest in the paradox of death and grief, knowing that yes, "it is a terrible thing, and yet it is also an ordinary dimension of our passage through life."¹³

¹³ Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes*, 96.

Week 2 PowerPoint Presentation:

A LIFE SHAPED BY LOSS AND GRIEF

RICHARD MAKURAT



DAWN YANCE



OLIVIA RAY



DEATH: FOE AND FRIEND

[KÄTHE KOLLWITZ](#) (GERMAN, 1867–1945)

DEATH GRABBING AT A GROUP OF CHILDREN (TOD GREIFT IN EINE KINDERSCHAR) FROM THE SERIES DEATH (TOD). LITHOGRAPH 1934

[HTTPS://WWW.G/OBJBYT.](https://www.g/objbyt)



[HTTPS://WWW.G/OBJBYT.](https://www.g/objbyt)

[KÄTHE KOLLWITZ](#) (GERMAN, 1867–1945)

CALL OF DEATH (RUF DES TODES) FROM THE SERIES DEATH (TOD) LITHOGRAPH 1937.

[HTTPS://WWW.MOMA.ORG/S/GE/COLLECTION_GE/OBJBYTAG/OBJBYTAG_TAG-VO77440_SOV_SORT-S_PAGE-5.HTML](https://www.moma.org/s/ge/collection_ge/objbyt/objbyt_tag-vo77440_sov_sort-s_page-5.html)



FACES OF DEATH

(IMAGE TAKEN FROM PINTREST, DEVIANART.
[HTTPS://WWW.PINTEREST.COM/PIN/508977195370794046/](https://www.pinterest.com/pin/508977195370794046/))



JOHN AND JANE RAY



Week 3: Into the Wild

Please listen as I read “Heartwood Is Made from What Has Died” by Bethany Lee.

When I came to you
 With my soul in my hands
 Opened them to show you the seed
 I was beginning to sense it held
 And asked if you thought
 It might grow into a tree

You said no
 That my seed was not
 The right kind of seed
 That it was too big
 And too small
 That it was not a seed at all

You said it hurts to sprout
 That there is no more room
 In the forest where you stand
 That trees just get cut down anyway

And though I believed you for awhile
 I kept one hand on my heart
 Where the husk lay broken open
 And you were right about one thing-
 It hurts to sprout

But now that there is a sapling
 Roots firmly planted in her mother
 And the promise of fruit and shade
 At the edge of the branches
 It feels almost safe to say
 What I never wanted to be true

To live and die a tree
 I had to turn away from you¹⁴

¹⁴ Bethany Lee, *Etude for Belonging: Poems for Practicing Courage and Hope* (Newberg, OR: Fernwood Press, 2021), 93. Used with permission from the author.

In August 2017, God prompted me to schedule a meeting with the senior pastor of the large, non-denominational church my family and I had been actively involved in for seven years. In the meeting, I invited the pastor into a conversation about why the church didn't have any female pastors. I shared pieces of my seminary journey and how God was calling me to preach, teach, and have a more pastoral role, not just women and children, but the whole body of Christ. I shared how I researched the church's structure and beliefs for seminary assignments. I noted over the years that while there is no specific mention in the Statement of Faith forbidding women to lead men in the church, it was not embraced. Women in leadership held titles of Director or Executive Director, and there were no women on the teaching team. They were placed in leadership roles for children and women's ministries. There was no explanation of why that was. So, I asked questions.

In two meetings with the senior pastor, my questions were met with silence or dismissal. He was unwilling to engage in honest conversation regarding the church's doctrinal position of women in leadership. I asked if there was room to grow into what I believed God was calling me to be and do. He said, "No, there won't be any opportunities for you anytime soon. You would do well to explore other options, but know the doors here are always open if you want to return."

With that response, I knew it was time to go. I walked out of the church with my broken heart in my hands. I knew I had done what God asked me to do, but I didn't realize the deep loss and grief that would accompany leaving. I didn't realize how intertwined my identity was in that space and place. I wasn't aware how isolated I would feel removed from my primary community of involvement.

It's been almost four years since I left the church. I left not only my primary connection to community but also many ministry responsibilities. These ministry responsibilities consumed

much of my time for so long, and I was disoriented when those responsibilities were no longer required.

Well-meaning friends said kind things like “God has BIG plans in store for you” or “amazing things will come your way.” If I’m honest, I expected those big and amazing things to happen, and I thought God would reward me for my obedience. Most days, I was doing well, keeping my head above water with course work and the mundane of life while giving myself space to grieve deeply the loss of my faith community. Four years feels like a long time to be in the in-between.

During this time, in what I call the wilderness, God continually invites me to die to myself by redefining what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Church, service, and worship have taken on new meanings. Little in my spiritual or daily life looks like what good Christians would consider “good.” I rarely read my Bible, much less study it. I infuse quiet time throughout my days. Worship happens when I’m hiking trails or covering distance on the road. Church looks like coffee or a shared meal with dear friends, and I spend a lot of time alone with God. Our relationship is open and true but vastly different than what it once was. Silence and darkness are more common than revelation and light.

For years, I’ve been waiting for the next to come. What I am learning is that the next is now. I kept waiting for God to show up big, to provide a platform and purpose. “But God can only be found in this step, never the one beyond. God is never someplace else. Even God’s darkness is the shadow cast by God’s light.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Cottrell, *Striking Out*, 42.

Instead of showing up big, God is showing up quietly, like a friend inviting me to sit next to Her on the park bench, or go for a walk alongside the river. In this, I'm learning to be content in the silence, solitude, and waiting. Reorientation and rest are constant companions as I lean into wounded places of my heart and seek God for healing and wholeness. In this slowing, shalom is replacing the fear-based religion, which compelled me to serve with tireless excellence. My reward for obedience isn't a platform but rather a humble posture, bowed down, and trusting, and I am met with grace upon grace.

In *The Art of Solitude*, Stephen Batchelor writes, "Solitude is not a luxury for the leisurely few. It is an inescapable dimension of being human."¹⁶ The invitation is to become more human, to become increasingly one with Christ, as Christ is one with God. It is an invitation to "allow the mud to settle and the water to clear," to see "space as substance," and presence as a profound gift that allows others and myself to connect with what's important in this world.¹⁷

Before I can companion others in their loss and grief, I must be comfortable listening in silence, noticing Spirit's movement in stillness, and being at peace in the mysterious wait that accompanies dying, death, and grief. Poet Sadiqa de Meijer writes, "In English, death has a rare sound, and the only ordinary word that rhymes with it is breath, which is a rather lovely grouping."¹⁸ In many ways, discovering the lovely in the hard and holy of life is our daily invitation as we meander our way through breaths unto death in our ultimate oneness with God.

¹⁶ Stephen Batchelor, *The Art of Solitude* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), xii.

¹⁷ Diana Renner and Steven D'Souza, *Not Doing: The Art of Effortless Action* (London, UK: LID Publishing Limited, 2018), 120, 129, 136.

¹⁸ Sadiqa de Meijer, "The Ebbing Language." *Poetry Magazine*. (August 2019), 30, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/articles/150735/the-ebbing-language>.

This week I'm asking you to build a playlist of songs centered on loss and grief. These songs represent both a cultural and generational perspective. You may select songs that span decades or even centuries. Your songs can be Christian or secular, or if you're like me, you've discovered the sacred is often woven into what many consider secular.

I'm going to share one of the songs from my loss and grief playlist. It is called "The Wild" by Mumford and Sons. The first time I heard this song, I was 18 months post-church departure. I was driving in my car and had to pull over as tears spontaneously fell from my eyes. I was caught off guard. The words seemed foreign at first, but as my spirit settled into the music, the words permeated my soul. They speak of birth, death, dust, and fear in a wild place, a vast open wilderness space. The words gave language to my reality. Something about the simplicity of the lyrics combined with the deep tone of string instruments brought comfort to my grieving heart. Even though much healing has happened since that day, this song will always be woven into my grief story.

After listening, I will break you into your small groups for a time of connection and discussion.

Share video through PowerPoint Presentation

In your groups, share how you're showing up today. What has been heavy on your heart? What joy or new life have you discovered? Share a story or a song that impacted how you navigate loss and grief. How did those stories facilitate transformation in your life? Be present with one another. Listen with your heart. Bear witness to each other's struggles. I'll close the breakout rooms after twenty minutes. We can collectively share observations, ask questions, and then I'll close us in prayer.

Week 3 PowerPoint Presentation:

INTO THE WILD

HEARTWOOD IS MADE FROM WHAT HAS DIED BY BETHANY LEE FROM ETUDE FOR BELONGING

When I came to you
With my soul in my hands
Opened them to show you the seed
I was beginning to sense it held
And asked if you thought
It might grow into a tree

You said no
That my seed was not
The right kind of seed
That it was too big
And too small
That it was not a seed at all

You said it hurts to sprout
That there is no more room
In the forest where you stand

That trees just get cut down anyway

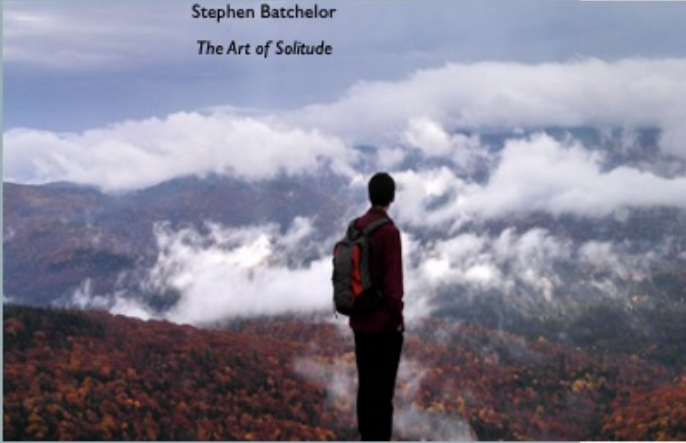
And though I believed you for awhile
I kept one hand on my heart
Where the husk lay broken open
And you were right about one thing-
It hurts to sprout

But now that there is a sapling
Roots firmly planted in her mother
And the promise of fruit and shade
At the edge of the branches
It feels almost safe to say
What I never wanted to be true

To live and die a tree
I had to turn away from you

"Solitude is not a luxury for the leisurely few.
It is an inescapable dimension of being human"

Stephen Batchelor
The Art of Solitude



"IN ENGLISH, DEATH HAS A RARE SOUND, AND THE ONLY
ORDINARY WORD THAT RHYMES WITH IT IS BREATH,
WHICH IS A RATHER LOVELY GROUPING"

SADIQA DE MEIJER

THE WILD
BY MUMFORD AND
SONS

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4P7mLMu_mOrw



Week 4: Unheard Voices

Please settle in and listen to a poem by Seven Scott.

Burial Details

BY SEVEN SCOTT

On a cool morning of false rain,
cruel and complicit
when the low and shameless gray sky
refuses to shed tears,
our rusting spades bite chunks from the hard red clay.
We make slow but steady progress,
as if the iron earth will refuse him too.

'Bout halfway down to the Promised Land,
having buried our lifeless criticisms of incarceration,
the four of us've said nothing,
beyond weary sighs and shifty eyes
at the shoddy fit of the box of yellow pine
featuring only an ancient prisoner ID# in flat-black paint.

Of a sudden, clouds rend for a paternal sun,
peering down to impart a gentle wisdom:
at the four corners where meet
Ignorance and Knowledge, Brutality and Culture,
we will find the merciful dignity
with which to treat our honored dead.

Noses rebelling against musts of labor and mortality
upon lowering him into the cold ground,
our spades direct an onomatopoeia of dirt pattering onto the box,
lending this prisoner, this *man* his final voice—
ha-rumpf... *ha-rumpf*... *ha-rumpf*—
to continue in death the path he chose in life;
he who would refuse all who would refuse him.¹⁹

Seven Scott “spent twenty-six years in prison. This poem, ‘Burial Details,’ argues against the apathy and banality of prison life, as seen in the unidentified inmate by his four

¹⁹ Seven Scott, “Burial Details,” Poetry Foundation, February 2021,
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/155239/burial-details>.

contemporaries.”²⁰ Seven invites us to move proximate to death and grief in the overlooked and forgotten population of incarcerated humans.

As I watched the news the other night, I saw a backhoe digging into green grass in the city of Tulsa, OK. City officials were searching for a mass grave “...located near the headstones of the only two known massacre victims buried in the Black section of the Potters Field at Oaklawn (Cemetery). One hundred years ago, Greenwood was an affluent area of Tulsa known as "Black Wall Street" and was home to 1,200 black residents and hundreds of black-owned businesses. What began as a confrontation between groups of white and Black residents following the arrest of a young Black man named Dick Rowland ended with 35 city blocks being burned to the ground. Historians believe that as many as 300 people were killed as white mobs destroyed homes, businesses, churches, schools, hospitals and other buildings from May 31 to June 1, 1921. One hundred years later, many of the massacre victims' bodies have never been found.”²¹

So, we move proximate.

Hours later, I read about 215 Indigenous children discovered in a mass grave in Canada. The Indigenous children were forced into “government-run boarding schools as part of policy to attempt to assimilate Indigenous children and destroy Indigenous cultures and languages. The school, (which was Canada’s largest residential school), operated between 1890 and 1969, (and) held up to 500 Indigenous students at any one time, many sent to live at the school hundreds of

²⁰ Seven Scott, “Contributors” *Poetry Magazine* 217, no. 5. (February 2021): 571.

²¹ Kiara Brantley-Jones, Tonya Simpson, and Jenny Wagdon Courts, “As Tulsa Commemorates 100th Anniversary of Race Massacre, Officials Work to Identify Remains in Mass Grave,” ABC News, June 2, 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/tulsa-commemorates-100th-anniversary-race-massacre-officials-work/story?id=77950440>.

kilometers from their families. Thousands of children died in residential schools and their bodies rarely returned home. Many were buried in neglected graves.”²²

So, we move proximate.

Can we hear the silent screams of countless children, women, and men? What are they saying? What are they asking us to do or be?

William E. Gladstone, statesman and four-time prime minister of Great Britain, said, “Show me the manner in which a nation cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender mercies of its people, their respect for the laws of the land, and their loyalty to high ideals.”²³ Our Western civilization is terrified of death. We do everything in our power to minimize disease and death in our midst. Over centuries, we have professionalized and medicalized the death-care and funeral industries, making our proximity to death next to none. And yet, we continue to kill Black and Indigenous peoples through acts of individual racism and maintenance of racist systems in our land. To become tender and respectful, we must first die to our idealism, denial, and fear. How do we begin doing that?

In *Die Wise: A Manifesto for Sanity and Soul*, Stephen Jenkinson repeatedly asks, “What does dying ask of us?” Here are a few of his observations:

- It asks us to be willing to learn and wonder²⁴
- It asks us to suffer—to sit in uncertainty²⁵

²² Holly Honderich, “Why Canada Is Mourning the Death of 215 Children,” BBC News, June 2, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-57325653>.

²³ William E. Gladstone, “William E. Gladstone Quotes,” AZ Quotes, accessed June 2, 2021, <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/934227>.

²⁴ Stephen Jenkinson, *Die Wise: A Manifesto for Sanity and Soul* (Berkley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2015), 283-284.

²⁵ Jenkinson, *Die Wise*, 290.

- It asks us to collapse and have courage—allows our hopes of *not* dying to collapse and our courage to *stop trying not to die* to die²⁶
- It asks us to be sad—to be ok to say “enough, already”—to be weak²⁷
- It asks us to share our experience with others—honestly, openly, candidly—so one day they will know how to die²⁸
- It asks us to be faithful listeners—to get out of the way and be supple in our understanding—to see things as they truly are²⁹
- It asks us to speak, to give language to what is, for “If you can’t say something, you can’t see it either.”³⁰ There is no shared understanding without a shared language, and therefore there’s “no way to be sad together.”³¹

Language invites us to move proximate to death, to confess our humanity, and acknowledge the humanity in others. It forces us to see others as human. When we don’t speak the truth in death, it strips others of their dignity and humanity, denying the *Imago Dei* within them and us.

For honor, dignity, and life to emerge, we must move proximate to death and reclaim language and practices that provide meaning within the mystery.

²⁶ Jenkinson, *Die Wise*, 292.

²⁷ Jenkinson, *Die Wise*, 298-301.

²⁸ Jenkinson, *Die Wise*, 310.

²⁹ Jenkinson, *Die Wise*, 319.

³⁰ Jenkinson, *Die Wise*, 321.

³¹ Jenkinson, *Die Wise*, 325.

I'd like you to watch this six-and-a-half-minute video about Andy Goldsworthy. Andy Goldsworthy is a British sculptor, photographer, and environmentalist who produces site-specific sculptures and land art in natural and urban settings. He lives and works in Scotland.³² Upon its conclusion, I will send you to your breakout rooms for your small group discussions.

³² Wikipedia, "Andy Goldsworthy," Wikipedia.org, accessed June 2, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andy_Goldsworthy

Week 4 PowerPoint Presentation:

MOVING PROXIMATE TO DEATH

BURIAL DETAILS
BY SEVEN SCOTT

On a cool morning of false rain,
cruel and complicit
when the low and shameless gray sky
refuses to shed tears,
our rusting spades bite chunks from the hard red clay.
We make slow but steady progress,
as if the iron earth will refuse him too.

'Bout halfway down to the Promised Land,
having buried our lifeless criticisms of incarceration,
the four of us've said nothing,
beyond weary sighs and shifty eyes
at the shoddy fit of the box of yellow pine
featuring only an ancient prisoner ID# in flat-black paint.

Of a sudden, clouds rend for a paternal sun,
peering down to impart a gentle wisdom:
at the four corners where meet
Ignorance and Knowledge, Brutality and Culture,
we will find the merciful dignity
with which to treat our honored dead.

Noses rebelling against musts of labor and mortality
upon lowering him into the cold ground,
our spades direct an onomatopoeia of dirt pattering onto the box,
lending this prisoner, this *man* his final voice—
ha-rumpf ... ha-rumpf ... ha-rumpf—
to continue in death the path he chose in life;
he who would refuse all who would refuse him.

Seven Scott. 2021. "Burial Details." Poetry Foundation. February. Accessed June 2, 2021.
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/155239/burial-details>.

MASS GRAVES FROM THE RACE MASSACRE ARE DISCOVERED IN TULSA



CANADA MOURNS THE DEATH OF 215 INDIGENOUS CHILDREN



The discovery has prompted an outpouring of grief

WILLIAM E. GLADSTONE

“Show me the manner in which a nation cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender mercies of its people, their respect for the laws of the land, and their loyalty to high ideals.”



IN *DIE WISE: A MANIFESTO FOR SANITY AND SOUL*, STEPHEN JENKINSON REPEATEDLY ASKS, “WHAT DOES DYING ASK OF US?”

- It asks us to be willing to learn and wonder (283-284)
- It asks us to suffer- to sit in uncertainty (290)
- It asks us to collapse and have courage- allow our hopes of *not* dying to collapse and our courage to *stop trying to not die* to die (292)
- It asks us to be sad- to be ok to say “enough, already”- to be weak (298-301)
- It asks us to share our experience with others- honestly, openly, candidly- so one day they will know how to die (310)
- It asks us to be faithful listeners- to get out of the way- be supple in our understanding- to see things as they truly are (319)
- It asks us to speak, to give language to what is- “If you can’t say something, you can’t see it either” (321) Without shared language there is no shared understanding, and therefore there’s “no way to be sad together” (325).

ANDY GOLDSWORTHY

- <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=andy+goldsworthy+video&docid=608038597474017617&mid=B05C5238A09B2B7AF9B3B05C5238A09B2B7AF9B3&view=detail&FORM=VIRE>

Week 5: The Demise of Social Capital and Death

On May 27, 2020, the US hit 100,000 COVID deaths. The New York Times ran a front-page article entitled, “An Incalculable Loss.” Small human images filled the page, representing those who had died. New York Times journalists searched obituaries nationwide to fill in details of who those people were, in an attempt to invite us into the grim reality this pandemic has had on humanity. Here are a few of those mentioned:

- Donald Raymond Haws, 88, Jacksonville, FL—Administered holy eucharist to hospital patients.
- Dez-Ann Romain, 36, New York City—Innovative high school principal.
- Landon Spradlin, 66, Concord, NC—Preacher and guitarist.
- Sandy Pratt, 92, Bellevue, WA—Engineer forever chasing the wind.³³

On May 30, 2021, The New York Times front page had a prominent image of Tulsa’s Greenwood community before the Race Massacre. It also had a smattering of headlines which read:

“Orphaned by Covid, Two Teens Find Their Way”

“From Russians, Ransomware, Made to Order”

“With No Panel, Riot Questions Sure to Linger”

“Gun Sales Surge in US Torn by Distrust”³⁴

As of June 7, 2021, approximately 597,000 people have died in the US from Covid. Each person has a name, story, family, and friends, and few are making the front page of America’s

³³ The New York Times, “An Incalculable Loss,” *The New York Times*, May 27, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/05/24/us/us-coronavirus-deaths-100000.html>.

³⁴ The New York Times, Sunday Edition, Front Page, May 30, 2021.

media publications. It has been twelve months since the “Incalculable Loss” milestone. With almost 400,000 more deaths, evidence of division, distrust, and denial permeates society.

In *Awakened by Death*, Peterson writes, “Americans, as a whole, have lost trust in their institutions. We don’t trust our government or politicians, we’ve moved away from our families, we’ve been hurt by our churches, and we increasingly lack trust in our neighbors.”³⁵

What factors have contributed to the demise of our communal spaces?

In *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Robert D. Putnam argues that a primary contributor to the breakdown and mistrust of systems and individuals is diminishment of “social capital.” In other words, there is value that comes from community connectivity through strong, trustworthy, and collaborative relational networks.³⁶ “The core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value.”³⁷ These social networks provide stability and feasibility to community life, building trust, goodwill, and reciprocity. Social capital is good for individuals and communities and is fostered through various avenues of civic engagement.

Trend analyses in civic engagement and social capital revealed that civic engagement sharply escalated in the first half of the 20th century and peaked around 1960. Since then, the decline in participation is evident in politics, civics, formal and informal interactions, and work and social settings. As participation declined, mistrust, cynicism, and disconnectedness

³⁵ Christina N. Peterson, *Awakened by Death: Life Giving Lessons from the Mystics* (Minneapolis, MN: Broadleaf Books, 2020), 211.

³⁶ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2000) 19.

³⁷ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 18-19.

increased.³⁸ Social movements and grassroots endeavors that once created and maintained social capital not only declined but also transitioned from participation to being a consumeristic endeavor by its members. Individuals who once rolled their sleeves up to work side-by-side with others, now opened their checkbooks to provide funds for others who would do the work of bringing change.³⁹ The small groups that once connected people within communities morphed into massive groups of disconnected individuals who believed in a common cause. Those causes are as diverse and dispersed as the individuals who support them.

Putnam examined several influences and found that no sector of society is immune to a decrease in social capital. It impacts communities regardless of age, region, race, or socioeconomic status. He also discovered that no one external influence was primary in the decline.⁴⁰ Busyness and economic stressors play a modest role.⁴¹ Increased mobility and residential sprawl are other contributing factors.⁴² Electronic screen time encourages heightened isolating behaviors, which diminish civic engagement. These activities decrease awareness of current events and interest in public affairs.⁴³ Generational change seems to be a dominant factor in the social capital decline, as younger, less engaged generations replace and outnumber older individuals who were highly engaged in civic endeavors.⁴⁴

³⁸ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 33-147.

³⁹ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 149-180.

⁴⁰ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 183-187.

⁴¹ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 203.

⁴² Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 215.

⁴³ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 216-246.

⁴⁴ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 283.

What does it matter if social capital is declining? How does that impact our communities? Social capital, evidenced collectively through trust and community participation, produces positive outcomes in society. It allows people to effectively solve problems, decreases the cost of doing business because people are working together, and improves awareness that we are all connected. Thus, our success and failure are dependent upon one another.⁴⁵ By building social capital within communities, individuals and communities experience a higher propensity for the betterment of all people.

Fifteen months ago, the world was thrown into pandemic chaos. On a global scale, uncertainty ensued. Leaders of nations, states, and cities had relatively no idea how to navigate a pandemic.

As the Coronavirus (COVID) spread across the globe, we quickly learned the virus was not partial to specific demographics. COVID didn't care about a person's age, culture, or gender. Still, health complications or socioeconomic situations made some populations more susceptible than others. Those populations highlighted the diminishing social capital in society where large segments of people moved to the margins. Additionally, there was a breakdown of trust in civil systems which led to behaviors that perpetuated a viral spread rather than curtailing it. Nations with higher levels of social capital and are more communally minded, banded together. They worked for the betterment of all, while nations with lower social capital saw individualistic behaviors dominate.

COVID forced much of the world into a pandemic wilderness, revealing the indifference that accompanied such a wild space. Our external reality told us this pandemic wilderness

⁴⁵ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 288.

doesn't care if a person is alive or dead, if businesses are open or not, or if people are working or unemployed. This wilderness indifference forced people into an "interior wilderness more fearful and promising than anything charted on terrestrial maps. (It revealed that) the wildest, most dangerous trails are always the ones within."⁴⁶ In isolation, stillness, and uncertainty, people had to reckon with their interior worlds just as they would their exterior world.

These internal trails we've been traveling the past 15 months have required us to embrace loss and grief in new ways. Not only have we had to navigate the deaths of loved ones, but we've also had to figure out how to navigate how to lower community deaths on a daily basis. While these realities existed during non-pandemic times, their unrelenting presence during this pandemic makes moving through our days with a fight-flight-or-freeze posture especially difficult. Though the paradox of a wilderness path is profoundly lonely, it is also deeply communal. In that paradox, a unique invitation exists.

How do we walk with others in our loneliness? What does it look like to care for one another during and after a global pandemic? What does it mean to be human during days that are filled with so much loss and grief?

Putnam argues that building social capital is the way toward a more unified society. He suggests that to move forward, we must look back. He highlights how our predecessors, living at the turn of the 20th century, experienced similar challenges when "Urbanization, industrialization, and immigration had undermined neighborliness."⁴⁷ Rather than wallow in despair, people began to reimagine connecting to individuals and strengthening civic bonds. The

⁴⁶ Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes*, 117.

⁴⁷ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 379.

strengthening occurred primarily through a “boom” in civic association building when countless volunteer opportunities had created better communities and facilitated relationships amongst people. Organizations such as the Shriners, American Nurses Association, 4-H, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) emerged. Religious institutions also played a major role in connecting people, providing a cohesive identity. Progressive reforms took place through these organizations and impacted all of America. Putnam suggests implementing similar initiatives, in contextually relevant ways, to counter the social capital declines we face in our generation.⁴⁸

While I don’t disagree with Putnam’s evaluation and correctives, I wonder if there isn’t something more we could do to connect in meaningful ways, especially in light of our current pandemic reality. I wonder if instead of joining a club and doing collective work, what it would look like to invite our neighbors to move proximate to loss and grief? What would it look like to practice *Memento mori* communally and companion one another with compassion and presence? Would social capital increase in our communities if “we all kneeled closely to the ground, with ears alert, listening for something we cannot name, (and) attended as honestly and faithfully as we’re able to those who have gone before us”?⁴⁹ Would we be able to “discern the differences between what is dying around us and what is trying to be born”?⁵⁰ Would we be able to see “the wilderness and the dry land be glad, the desert rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing...” (Isa 35:1-2)?⁵¹

⁴⁸ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 380-401.

⁴⁹ Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes*, 123.

⁵⁰ Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes*, 123.

⁵¹ Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes*, 123.

Week 5 Power Point Presentation

MEMENTO MORI AND A PANDEMIC PILGRIMAGE

HAMMER IS THE PRAYER BY CHRISTIAN WIMAN

There is no consolation in the thought of God,
he said, slamming another nail
in another house another havoc had half-taken.
Grace is not consciousness, nor is it beyond.
To hell with remembrance, to hell with heaven,
hammer is the prayer of the poor and the dying.
And the wind in some lordless random comes to rest,
and all the disquieted dust within,
peace came to the hinterlands of our minds,
too remote to know, but peace nonetheless.



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AN INCALCULABLE LOSS

[HTTPS://WWW.NYTIMES.COM/INTERACTIVE/2020/05/24/US/US-CORONAVIRUS-DEATHS-100000.HTML](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/05/24/us/coronavirus-deaths-100000.html)



AWAKENED BY DEATH

"Americans, as a whole, have lost trust in their institutions. We don't trust our government or politicians, we've moved away from our families, we've been hurt by our churches, and we increasingly lack trust in our neighbors" (Peterson, 211).



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SOCIAL CAPITAL

- Social networks have value
- Social networks provide stability and feasibility to community life
- Social networks are built on trust, goodwill and reciprocity
- Social capital is fostered through various avenues of civic engagement.



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HOW HAS CIVIC ENGAGEMENT CHANGED?

- Participation in communal activities declined
- Social movements and grassroots endeavors not only declined, but also transitioned from a participatory to a consumeristic endeavor; meaning members open their checkbooks to pay others to do civic works.
- Small, close knit community groups became massive and disconnected, unified only by a common cause.

FACTORS THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE DECLINE IN SOCIAL CAPITAL:

- Busyness and economic stressors
- Increased mobility and residential sprawl
- Technological screen time
- Decreased awareness of current events and interest in public affairs
- Generational change



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HOW DO WE REBUILD SOCIAL CAPITAL?

- Reimagine how to connect individuals and strengthen civic bonds

HOW MIGHT LOSS AND GRIEF BUILD SOCIAL CAPITAL?

- Invite neighbors to move proximate to their loss and grief through shared language and rituals within communities
- Practice *Memento Mori* is a communal way
- Practice humility and compassion while companioning others in their loss and grief
- Take time to acknowledge and honor the humanity of one another
- Remember those who have gone before us
- Name the deaths; recognize the emergence of new life



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Week 6: Guest Speaker

Guest Speaker: John Ray

Week 7: From Death to Life

I wanted to take time today to share about the old brown chair that sits in my home. It belonged to my grandparents; it was their first piece of furniture. When I sit in it, I remember them and how my Gram told me about the days when they would come home from work, squish into the chair together, and read the newspaper. I wanted to tell you about the Nativity set I have from my grandpa's Hummel collection. Upon his death, my mom and her siblings agreed it should be given to me. But as I prayed about what to share, God continued to impress upon my heart something else.

The story I share is not just my story. It is the story of my family.⁵² I tell it in the first person, not to negate the impact or presence of others in the story, but to be cognizant that the perspective I share is mine, not theirs. If my daughter, son, or husband were to tell this story, it would sound and feel different. I share it as an offering of what it has been like to surrender to death so life may emerge. I share it as a way of showing you what *memento mori* looks like for me.

The story began when my daughter was nearing the end of seventh grade. Anxiety and depression engulfed her, but I didn't have language for what I was witnessing. I prayed and sent her to youth group and prayed more, hoping it was a phase that would quickly pass. As her symptoms escalated by the end of eighth grade, her ability to hide her reality increased. My girl became skilled at putting on a happy face, making it through her middle school days. What she couldn't hide was the fact that her slight frame became more pronounced as she lost weight. Her clothes hung loosely, and her shoulder bones became prominent.

⁵² My family has given permission to share our story and its accompanying images.

We didn't talk about weight or emotions because I wanted to be a "good Christian parent." Instead, we talked about eating healthy, exercising, and accepting our bodies as they are because God made them that way. We talked about the importance of faith and how emotions were not to be trusted. With each conversation, my daughter retreated inward. This resulted in internal chaos, which she managed with self-harm, sneaking over-the-counter meds, not eating food, and reckless behaviors. Each of these actions made her feel alive even though she wanted to die and stop hurting.

The more my daughter struggled, the darker my world became. As a first-generation Christian parent, I had utilized all the best Christian parenting strategies, taking her to bible studies, Sunday school and mission trips. She memorized bible verses for prizes, and we prayed consistently through the days. Over the years, I worked diligently to check all the boxes, ensuring my child knew Jesus loved her. At a loss for what else to do, I enlisted an army of prayer warriors. I sought counsel at our church and I shared with friends. Often, they met me with blank stares, faint smiles, and bible verses, reminding me that God has a plan. I quickly discovered that the church and many friends had little to say and even less to offer in support for us during this darkness. I also discovered that God didn't have much to say either. Darkness and death lingered in my days, bringing emptiness and silence. Worship felt empty. Prayers felt unheard. Scripture was but ash in my mouth.

I remember one particular Saturday morning interaction. Words between my daughter and I flew through the air like bullets on a battlefield, leaving deep, gaping wounds. It was not the best way to begin the day. Still, there we were, once again, in an emotionally explosive situation with no real hope in sight. For months, the darkness settled in as circumstances with our daughter went from bad to worse. What we thought was "just normal teenage hormones" became

more--so much more. The possibility for flight or suicide was high. That morning's argument ended and I left her alone while I went to my son's soccer game. We both needed space to breathe. Angry tears flowed as I made my way to the fields. After regaining my composure, I watched the game, but not without carrying the heaviness of "Will she be ok when I get home?"

It was during this season of life that "Oceans" was sung almost every Sunday at worship. The more it was sung, the more I thought, "What a ridiculous song." Being pulled into the dark abyss of faith was not looking glamorous in my life. Everything in my being rejected the darkness consuming my daughter, myself, and our family. My arms flailed as I continued to sink. Did I call on God's name? Yes, but my cries were met with deafening silence as the visualization of the shores of security diminished. I could only imagine how Jonah felt as he sank deep into the stormy waters.

For my doctoral program, I read *Not Doing* by Renner and D'Souza. In it, they highlight free-diving specialist, Michael Adams, who walks the reader through what it feels like to dive into the depths of water without scuba apparatus. Before he descends, he releases all fear in his body by focusing on the Beatles' song, "Let it Be." He then begins his gentle journey down, utilizing the least effort possible. At the 10-meter mark, he "hangs" in the in-between, where his body weight and the water's weight are canceled. Eventually, he begins to fall until he reaches the depth where the ocean hugs him.⁵³ He calls this place the "liminal space between life and death. A point of balance."⁵⁴ Reading his diving account, I wondered if Jonah experienced such a state of being during his downward journey?

⁵³ Renner and D'Souza, *Not Doing*, 176-177.

⁵⁴ Renner and D'Souza, *Not Doing*, 177.

Science tells us this liminal space between life and death causes the “mammalian dive response, the most powerful autonomic reflex known in the human body. This reflex optimizes respiration by preferentially distributing oxygen stores to the heart and brain, allowing divers to stay underwater for extended periods of time.”⁵⁵ When I read this description, I thought, “That’s what I call breathing holy.”

Somehow in the dark, silent, oxygen-deprived depths, God taught me how to breathe holy. I’m not sure exactly when it happened, but I think it began when I returned home from the morning soccer match. I remember walking to the front door, tears in my eyes, not sure what I would find behind that door. Did my daughter run away? Was she dead in the tub? My heart pounded in my chest. As I exhaled and turned the doorknob, I sensed God whisper, “No matter what you find, you need to know you’ve done your best. I’m with you. I love you.” On my next inhale, I chose to let go “of the perceived security of the shore...and become more open to the opportunities of the current” found in God’s grace.⁵⁶

Over the course of three years, God held me in that liminal space. Though it was dark, God provided tangible glimmers of light, just enough to remind me I was not alone. Those glimmers transpired in two particular ways. The first was through Portland Seminary. My professors, classmates, and coursework held me during a time when I just wanted to run away from anything faith-related. Similar to what John Ray shared last week, God worked through the Portland Seminary community to remind me I wasn’t alone.

⁵⁵ Renner and D’Souza, *Not Doing*, 177.

⁵⁶ Renner and D’Souza, *Not Doing*, 178.

The second way God revealed light in the darkness was through what I call glimmers of grace—heart-shaped items, that I discovered throughout my days. My counselor calls them love notes from God. Other friends call them little God winks. I see them as God’s tangible presence woven into my days. Whenever I spot a glimmer, I remember to breathe. I remember God is with me, loves me, and loves my girl. I remember to whisper the prayer Jesus cried out in the Garden, “Not my will, but Yours.” I remember to say thank you. I remember that regardless of life’s circumstances, God continues to invite me to abide in Jesus and allow Jesus to abide in me fully. For reasons beyond my comprehension, I have found that it happens best in times of suffering, and in some crazy way, is purposeful and produces life.

John Behr writes:

If, then, our initial state as we come into this world is one of necessity and mortality, what Christ opens up to us is the possibility of using this mortality, voluntarily, to change the ground of our existence into freedom and self-sacrificial love, which is nothing less than the very existence of God himself. Through using our breath, not to preserve our own so-called life, but to live for the other in a Christ-like self-sacrificial manner, we will already begin to live a life which cannot be touched by death, because it has been entered upon through death; death is now turned inside out, and becomes the entry into life.⁵⁷

With this in mind, my death-infused life, this course, my work as a spiritual director, and every breath I take is my *memento mori*—a reminder that death has been turned inside out. As I serve others sacrificially, life will emerge in new and beautiful ways. I see that life in each of you, through your stories of loss and grief. I also see it in my daughter, who is now 22 years old and a college senior. She still struggles with severe anxiety and depression. She still battles demons that seek to haunt her. Nevertheless, she works diligently to pull out survival tools that help more than harm. She partners with her counselor and various medical professionals to

⁵⁷ John Behr, “Dying to Live? Or How to Become a Human Being?” Christian Flourishing, August 8, 2018, <https://www.christianflourishing.com/blog/2018/8/8/john-behr-dying-to-live-or-how-to-become-a-human-being>.

navigate ways to remain grounded and present in life. She faces death head-on and has discovered an “entryway into life.”⁵⁸ That doesn’t mean her life, or ours, has been tied up with a lovely red bow, and all is well. It does mean we become something we would never become if it weren’t for our time in liminal depths of grace, hanging between life and death, trusting in a God that transcends comprehension, enabling us to breathe holy and become more human—one breath at a time.

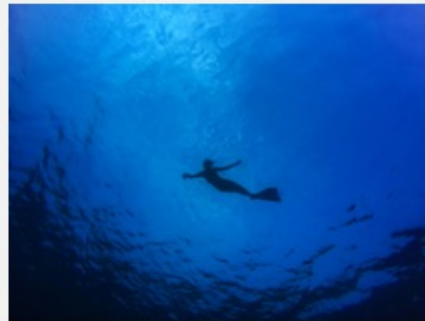
⁵⁸ Behr, “Dying to Live? Or How to Become a Human Being?”

Week 7 PowerPoint Presentation:

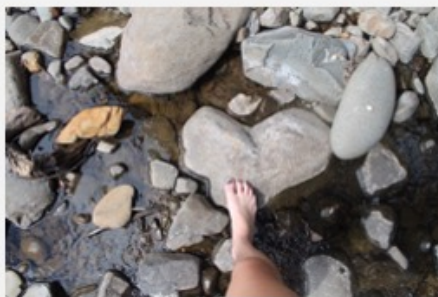
FROM DEATH TO LIFE

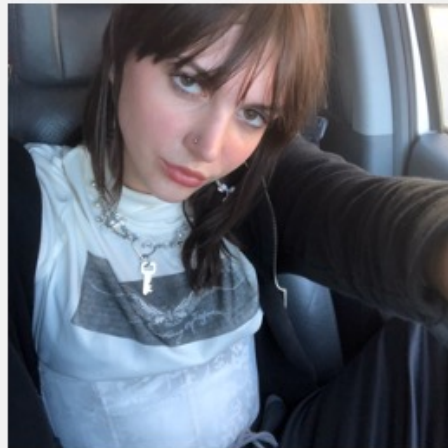
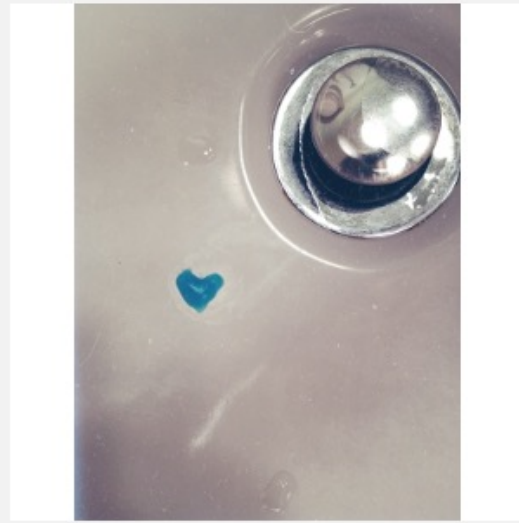
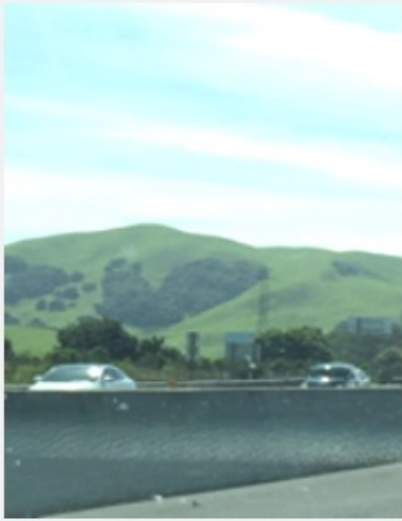


A POINT OF BALANCE:
THE LIMINAL SPACE BETWEEN LIFE AND
DEATH



GLIMMERS OF GRACE







Week 8: Not What I Planned

I began my doctoral journey overwhelmed by the immensity of the topic of loss and grief. This overwhelming, nuanced, and inescapable reality that comes to all living creatures threatened to pull me into the abyss. As I prayed, God led me to the Portland Art Museum. While there, an exhibit captured my attention. Images of Christ on the Cross and Christ with his mother, Mary, covered various walls. As I sat on the leather-covered bench in the center, my eyes were drawn to the following images:⁵⁹

- (Francesco Granacci, *Madonna and Child with Two Angels*, ca. 1495, tempera on wood, Portland Art Museum)
- (Sandro Botticelli, *Christ on the Cross*, ca. 1500. tempera on wood, Portland Art Museum)
- (Giannicola Di Paolo, *The Crucifixion*, ca. 1520, tempera on wood, Portland Art Museum)

Over time, as I pondered these images, listened to participants' stories in my discovery session, prayed, and researched, the invitation I sensed God extending was to become incarnational. This invitation led me to Philippians 2:5-11, which became my foundational verses:

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:
 Who, being in very nature God,
 did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
 rather, he made himself nothing
 by taking the very nature of a servant,
 being made in human likeness.
 And being found in appearance as a man,
 he humbled himself

⁵⁹ Referenced image is a digital photograph shot on iPhone 6s by Darcy Hansen, taken November 2020, at the Portland Art Museum. The image is displayed in Week 7 PowerPoint presentation.

by becoming obedient to death—
 even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place
 and gave him the name that is above every name,
 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father.

Like Christ, I was born from the womb of a woman. Like Christ, I am made of flesh and bone. Like Christ, I walk, talk, breathe, and dream. Like Christ, I feel emotions from anger to love. Like Christ, I will die. However, because of Christ, I live in the fullness of Him, now and eternally. I'm still working out what it means to be incarnational. Thankfully, there is no shortage of opportunities for becoming.

On June 28, 2021, at 5:13 pm PST, my best friend's husband died after a week-long rollercoaster of unresolved and misdiagnosed acute health issues. The past five days have been gut-wrenching and altogether bewildering. How does a relatively healthy 50-year-old man die of supposed back pain in just six days? My mind and heart are unable to comprehend all that has transpired. The day after, my friend summoned three of her closest friends. We gathered in a familiar space to listen to my friend recount the events and emotions that transpired the past week. We were together for five hours, giving her space to share her experience. We sat cozy under blankets, tears rolling down our faces, bearing witness to grief breathed in the holiest of ways—open, honest, and true. She shared, in detail, the suffering and sorrow, weaving threads of God's mercy and grace into the story.

I listened to her share how she sensed Jesus and Spirit walking arm-in-arm with her down the hospital hallway to her husband's room, where his life support would be discontinued. I was reminded of the images from the museum presenting the pain of labor of which Jesus was birthed and put to death in this world. No one gets a pass.

At points in our lives, we must do the work of birthing death. It is painful and takes copious amounts of intention and effort. She knew the language of dying because of conversations my friend and I had about loss and grief over the years. She knew the work required of her. She knew the time had come to stop trying to keep her husband from dying. She knew when it was time to say enough and release her husband into the mystery that is death. Her knowing these things didn't make the work any easier. Everything in her being ached in the aftermath of faithfully accompanying her husband to his end. Still, as I listened to her experience, I noticed something else woven in between the lines. Her willingness to engage in the work of dying required her to acknowledge the humanity of her husband. It required her to acknowledge the humanity of the medical team and her family. It required her to embrace her own humanity. As she did this, she saw beauty amidst the ashes. She felt love amidst the loss. She experienced mercy in a situation that was brutal to behold.

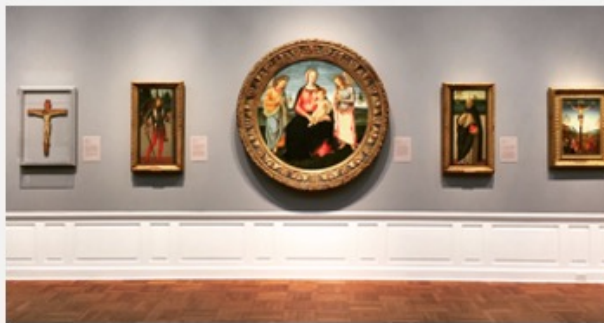
As I listened to her experience, I was reminded of our reading this week and how Chagall's stained-glass window invites light to shine through suffering, illuminating the holy in what often feels hopeless. The stained-glass serves as a *memento mori* for generations of residents and visitors in the village of Tudeley, Kent, England. God often provides the tangible to help us navigate the intangible. On this last day of class, what image or object have you brought to represent your journey of *memento mori*? In what ways have you experienced life? In what ways have you experienced death?

Week 8 PowerPoint Presentation:

NOT WHAT I PLANNED

Transformations While on Pilgrimage

JESUS: THE PILGRIM



PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

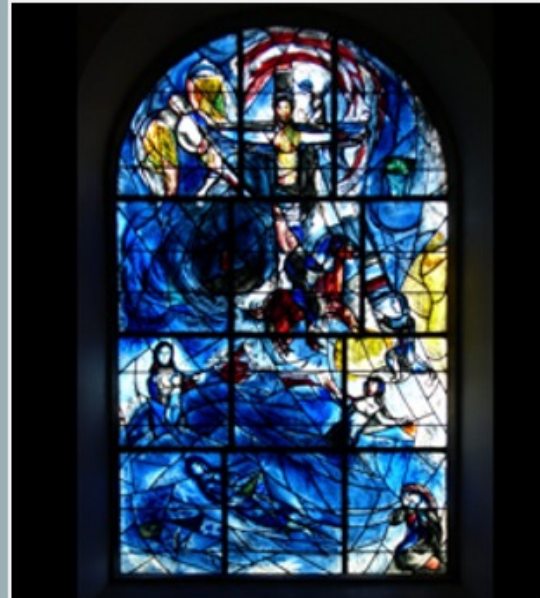
In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,
 did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
 rather, he made himself nothing
 by taking the very nature of a servant,
 being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,
 he humbled himself
 by becoming obedient to death—
 even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
 and gave him the name that is above every name,
 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father.

MARK CHAGALL

All Saints' Church, Tudeley, England



PRAYER OF EXAMEN

What image or object have you brought to represent your journey?

- Consolation- In what ways have you experience life?
- Desolation- In what ways have you experience death?

Project Assessment

Assessment is an integral component in determining project viability and efficacy. Four “success” benchmarks were set, and included enrollment, weekly student engagement, voluntary participation in end-of-course evaluation, and incorporation of meaningful practices. First, fifteen students enrolled in the course before course start, which exceeds the eight to twelve benchmark goal. Second, all fifteen students consistently engaged with course content on a weekly basis. Third, eleven of the fifteen students completed the end-of-course reflection/evaluation, providing valuable feedback for future course iterations. Lastly, ten of eleven students providing feedback noted one to two practices that were meaningful to them.

Five “quality” benchmarks were established. Evaluation of those benchmarks occurred as students completed two different Google forms for project feedback. Completion of the forms was voluntary and anonymous. The first form was sent on May 30, 2021, at semester mid-term. Three short answer questions were asked. Seven out of fifteen students gave responses. The second form was sent on June 20, 2021, during week seven of the semester, allowing students extra time to reflect and provide feedback before semester end. The feedback form had nine short answer, reflection questions. Eleven of the fifteen students gave feedback. Feedback questions and responses for both forms are in the Appendices.

Mid-term feedback revealed students entered the course with a range of expectational postures, from trepidation to anticipation. They expected to learn about ways to navigate loss and grief, especially as ministry leaders caring for others. Some did not expect to do personal, internal work, but appreciated the invitation to do so. They found the course content, including textbooks, multimedia, and lectures, to be informationally rich and the online gathering spaces invitational. Gaining a historical perspective was helpful. Some students were surprised that

internal shifts and healing were happening. A few appreciated gaining a heightened awareness to the closeness of loss and grief in daily life. Of those who responded, initial course expectations were met.

Semester-end feedback revealed course content and diversity in content presentation (text, podcast, TED Talk, articles, etc.) were appreciated. Wolfelt's *The Handbook for Companioning the Mourner* text and TED Talks were helpful in providing practical ways to hold another's loss and grief story. Two students mentioned Paterson's *Awakened by Death* was least helpful, and at times felt disjointed from weekly themes. Graphic videos of death or those dying were less helpful, while listening to one another's loss and grief stories were most helpful. Students noted developing the practice of *memento mori* most transformative. Diverse, practical ways of developing that practice were helpful, as students connected more with one practice or another, i.e., some appreciated weekly journaling while others found the embodied activity more transformative. Students agreed that modeling the sharing of loss and grief stories by the instructor and guest lecturer was helpful in facilitating a space where vulnerability was welcomed and embraced. Listening to other's stories in a small group setting reinforced the truth that there is no one way to navigate loss and grief. Students unanimously agreed that the course outcomes as laid out in the syllabus were achieved at course completion. Students unanimously agreed eight weeks was not enough time to cover all the areas of loss and grief that interested them. They would recommend the course to other ministry leaders or other individuals who are interested in engaging in this topic.

I learned that just as there are multiple ways to grieve, multiple forms of content delivery and diverse content are needed to engage people in different ways. While not every text, story, video, or podcast will connect with all people, they will connect with some. People feel seen and

connected when given space to engage openly with others in their grief. Simple, contemplative practices, like journaling or engaging in an embodied activity, facilitated spiritual transformation, as reflected in both the feedback form and in students' weekly and final reflections. My biggest take away from this my project delivery is that I cannot force spiritual transformation to happen, but I can provide the resources and space for God's Spirit to move and the possibility for spiritual transformation to occur.

Project Launch Plan

Project Description

My NPO statement is as follows:

Grieving people feel isolated and underserved in communities of faith when pastors and community members are ill-equipped and unprepared to care for them.

To address my NPO, I developed an 8-week, graduate level spiritual formation course for Portland Seminary entitled “Discovering Life Through Loss and Grief.”

Audience

The primary audience for my project involves the denominationally diverse community of students at Portland Seminary. Students from various master’s degree programs can participate since the course is offered as a summer studio elective. During the course, I invite ministry leaders to engage with and integrate their own stories of loss and grief, on both a personal and communal level. This enables them to be increasingly present with people who are experiencing loss and grief in their particular ministry contexts.

Development Plan

Noticing a void in the Portland Seminary curriculum pertaining to loss and grief, I asked Executive Dean, Dr. MaryKate Morse, if I could invite students to help develop and execute my project. Portland Seminary agreed and provided the opportunity to develop and launch my project as a spiritual formation course for their master’s students. The one-credit course was offered Summer Semester 2021. Because of the timing of the opportunity, project development,

launch, and feedback occurred from January 2021 to July 2021. Timeline requirements were met, as follows:

- Prayed and fasted before project development- three days in January and three days in March.
- Developed course requirements and content- January 10- March 30; retreat intensive March 16-19, 2021.
- Input requirements and content into course syllabus according to Portland Seminary format- March 16-19, 2021.
- Submitted syllabus to Portland Seminary for approval- April 12, 2021.
- Reviewed syllabus and course content on FoxTALE (course content and links were entered by a student worker)- April 26, 2021.
- Selected Student TA to help facilitate course- April 7, 2021.
- Prepared weekly lectures- weekly May 3- June 30, 2021.
- Secured guest speaker for week six and met with them before class start- May 17 secured. Met June 16 pre-class preparation.
- Made introduction video, uploaded to YouTube, prepared and sent welcome email with pertinent information for students- May 2, 2021.
- Developed mid-term and end-of-term Google feedback forms for voluntary, anonymous student feedback- sent May 30 and June 20, 2021.
- Worked with TA to evaluate weekly forum and journal posts, enter grades into system, and give feedback to students when appropriate- Weekly May 10-July 4, 2021.

This course will be offered again Summer 2022. Subsequently, a similar launch timeline will be followed.

Development Process

The development process for my project is iterative, specifically in regard to a seminary course offering. I am already utilizing student feedback from Summer 2021 to adjust course content for the course offering in Summer 2022.

As a spiritual director who has freedom to serve in various capacities, I've discovered having a fluid and flexible project framework is integral to successful project development and efficacy. This was exemplified during this academic year when I had the opportunity to implement many of the principles developed in my course into other, non-seminary contexts. The first was through Northwest University Oregon's undergraduate course, "Pastoral Care and Counseling," which I taught as an adjunct professor, Fall 2021. Weaving loss and grief concepts and integrating exercises into the established course content made for an experiential and meaningful experience for the students. Another opportunity to iterate and adapt content has occurred my current internship at a local retirement community. Conversations with residents suggested that they want to engage in grief discussion, and that four, one-hour workshops on grief care would be more appropriate. Those workshops will be developed and launched Spring 2022, pandemic restrictions allowing.

Future project development and timeline launch is dependent on contextual needs, and will be assessed before engaging with a particular community. Benchmarks will be adjusted and evaluation methods applied as appropriate. Participant self-reflection questions will be asked to determine personal experience and project effectiveness. Survey format will include google forms or paper and pen options.

Appendices

Appendix A—Milestone 1 The NPO Charter

Personal Research Manifesto

I commit to embracing creativity, humility, and uncertainty in my research process by gathering comprehensive data from diverse perspectives, to make informed decisions and facilitate transformational possibilities for my NPO.

NPO Statement

People who are grieving feel isolated and underserved in their communities of faith because pastors and community members are ill-equipped to care for them.

NPO Scope

By the end of this doctorate program, a pilot program will exist to equip pastors and laity from evangelical/non-denominational faith communities with resources that would enable them to compassionately and holistically care for grieving individuals. At this point in the development process, it is difficult to estimate the exact scope and cost associated with the final product. Extent, boundaries, and costs will be evaluated and incorporated as the process progresses.

NPO Context

My NPO ministry context includes non-denominational, evangelical communities of faith and/or their leadership teams. These communities will be primarily situated in the Portland metro area. Because of my circle of influence, the initial audiences will consist primarily of white, middle to upper class individuals, ranging in age from late 20s to mid 70s. While the faith

community size may vary, the participation group size will be capped at 12-15 individuals per session to maintain an intimate setting for difficult conversations.

Root Causes

A significant root cause for my NPO is the lack of historical practices and theological understanding surrounding death and suffering. Evangelical communities lack language and consistent opportunities for holistic discipleship and worship regarding grief and death. Theology focused primarily on themes of victory and joy provides a skewed and often inflexible framework, making the paradox of death, or the deep sorrow *and* joy that the living experience when a loved one dies, difficult to navigate. Ignorance of this paradox is evidenced in a community's inability to compassionately, effectively, and sustainably care for those who are grieving.

Discovery Session Stakeholders

The stakeholders in my discovery session included a retired chaplain, parent/community activist, parent/advocate, parent/congregant, aged friend, and my spouse/son of aging parents.

One-on-One Interviews

My one-on-one interviewees included a poet/author/pastor, pastor/missionary/non-profit ministry leader, pastor/non-profit ministry leader, and a funeral home director/green burial advocate.

Academic Resources

Within my field of research, primary voices include Stephen Jenkinson (MDiv, MSW), a palliative care specialist; Thomas G. Long and Thomas Lynch, theologians; Paul Sheppy, theologian; James K.A. Smith (PhD), theologian; Henri Nouwen, theologian, priest; and Frank Ostaseski, hospice care provider, Buddhist teacher. Other areas of research include the

importance of story, poetry, and art in navigating grief, as well as practical resources for end-of-life logistics. Understanding a historical framework for the lectionary and its use in evangelical communities is also on my radar. Biblically, I will explore lament and surrender, specifically in regard to Christ's walk to the cross and tomb.

Appendix I

Discovery Session and One-on-one Interviews Report

Discovery Session Description

My discover session was held on November 9, 2019, in my home, from 9am-12pm. The following were in attendance:

- Retired Chaplain/Hospice Care Professional
- Parent/Congregant
- Parent/Community Advocate
- Parent/Advocate
- Aged Friend
- Spouse/Father/Son

Three people attended via Zoom; the other three were present in person. The session followed the pre-determined format as given in our DMIN 750 syllabus assignments. Coffee, water, tea, and morning snacks were available. The question they came ready to discuss was "What challenges do Christians face when navigating death?"

Discovery Statement

Due to the sensitive nature of my NPO, after introductions and setting communication guidelines, I opened the session with a moment of silence; the reading of the poem "Notice Joy,"

by Bethany Lee; and prayer. I explained the process flow and desired outcome for the morning. We then worked on charting the audience and bringing focus to the NPO by examining specific needs, symptoms, and root causes. Desired outcomes were discussed, and all session pieces assembled to create the following Discovery Statement:

*Considering spiritual leaders and their communities,
we've discovered people don't know what's ok surrounding death,
which is caused by fear, lack of information, and incomplete theologies of
suffering and death.*

*If addressed communities would have healthier journeys with the paradox of
death/grief.*

After settling on the Discovery Statement, I asked two more questions: “What am I missing?”, and “What else do you have to say that didn’t come out in the process already?” I then asked for completion of the statement, “If I were you, I would make sure to...”

The question that now needs be asked is “How do we educate/transform our spiritual leaders and communities so as to not increase pain and suffering on those who are grieving?”

Critical Insights from Discovery Session

After the audience was determined to be pastors/spiritual leaders and their communities, we worked through symptoms, root causes, and hopes. Symptoms included fear, isolation, silence, added pain (of those grieving) due to others not able to hold the paradox of death/grief, pain avoidance, lack of empathy, limited perspective, and desire for quick fixes. These are caused by ignorance to historical traditions, individualism, narrow theological perspectives of death/suffering, and lack of proximity to the dead. If these causes were addressed, then

communities would be better equipped to support those who experienced death of loved ones. Lastly, three key themes emerged: lack of knowledge of what to do/say when someone dies, the lack of historical and theological grounding within evangelical faith communities, and the lack of understanding of basic logistics associated with dying and death.

Most surprising was the uniform desire by all present to educate pastors and their communities in a way that would help decrease the amount of “stupid” those grieving are forced to endure from those who “mean well.” A second surprise was the importance of the role sharing personal story plays in the grief process.

One-on-One Interview Discoveries

The feedback I received from conducting four on-on-one interviews was overwhelmingly positive. All interviewees agreed with the Discovery Session Synopsis shared with them prior to our conversation. **A**, and author/poet, noted the importance of community liturgy through the Christian calendar, the “ministry of presence,” the role of story in healing, and acknowledging the “different faces of grief.” **B**, a pastor/missionary, discussed the importance of repentance, dismantling the “celebrity pastor” paradigm, development of more robust discipleship utilizing the lectionary, implementing long term care teams for the grieving, and unifying communities through practices of mourning and celebration. **C**, a pastor/non-profit ministry leader, noted the importance of intergenerational congregations for understanding life’s seasons, capturing the stories of those nearing life’s end, communally leaning into lament during national and local tragedy, eliminating/not tolerating “stupid/insensitive” language surrounding grief, and holding celebration and solemnity together in a way that gives hope. Lastly, **D**, a funeral home director/green burial advocate, began and ended our conversation noting the importance of acknowledging and accepting the messiness of life’s journey. She noted how stigma and taboo

make it difficult for Christians to talk about death, thus holding the hand of others in grief is even more challenging.

Synthesis

The information shared in the discovery session and one-on-one interviews was strikingly similar. All ten stakeholders agreed Christians, especially Evangelicals, have little to no language or understanding of death, nor how to care for and support those who are grieving. Three key themes emerged:

- lack of knowledge of what to do/say when someone dies,
- lack of historical and theological grounding within evangelical faith communities,
- and the lack of understanding of basic logistics associated with dying and death.

Addressing these deeply rooted theological and cultural voids will require a holistic and formational approach at various levels within a community. First, educating communities in best practices of grief-care is a must, to alleviate additional pain inflicted on those who are grieving within their midst. Second, pastors/spiritual leaders must be introduced to a broader understanding of scripture and Christian traditions surrounding death/suffering. Seasonal worship practices that create sustained habit and language, are needed to embody a deeper communal knowing of how to sit in the paradox that death brings. Lastly, resourcing communities with practical tools allows advance planning/conversation of necessary logistics in the dying/death process. In summary, through Christ, we have great hope in life and death. Avoiding discussion of the latter perpetuates fear, isolation, and suffering, individually and communally. We must do better.

Next Steps

Areas for further academic research include exploring best practices for grief-care on a communal level, examining the history and use of the lectionary/Christian calendar in faith communities and the role worship plays in preparing Christians for death, and consolidating the plethora of death-care information to allow advance preparation, thus making navigating death logistics less frightening and burdensome.

Appendix II

Discovery Session Synopsis for Stakeholders

On Nov. 9, 2019, I met with six individuals to methodically discuss the broad question:

What challenges do Christians face when navigating death?

This is the initial question surrounding my Need/Problem/Opportunity (NPO) for my DMin project at Portland Seminary. During our session we examined audience, symptoms, cause, and hopes to develop a more concise NPO statement.

The **audience** which would benefit the most from possible solutions was found to be pastors and their respective communities, which were identified as the second circle of grief impact. This audience was determined to be the primary focus, instead of individuals directly impacted from a loved one's death, such as family and immediate relatives.

Symptoms experienced: fear, isolation, silence, added pain (of those grieving) due to others not able to hold the paradox of death/grief, pain avoidance, lack of empathy, limited perspective, desire for quick fixes.

Causes of these symptoms included:

- lack of historical practices or traditions surrounding death,
- lack of conversation regarding death,

- individualism,
- Christian stoicism,
- inflexible lens of scripture (victory over death narrative only),
- incomplete theology of suffering/death,
- lack of preparation for interrupted life cycle,
- lack of proximity to the dead.

Hopes the group would like to see achieved included:

- acceptance the messiness of life's journeys,
- healthier citizenship within a community,
- no additional or consequential pain added to those grieving,
- elimination educational role sufferers communicate to others regarding what's helpful/not helpful in the grieving process,
- decrease the amount of ignorance and ineptness of those who support the grieving,
- increased ability to wait and walk with others in their grief,
- eliminate the death/grief as possibly "contagious" factor.

There were three main NPO themes discovered:

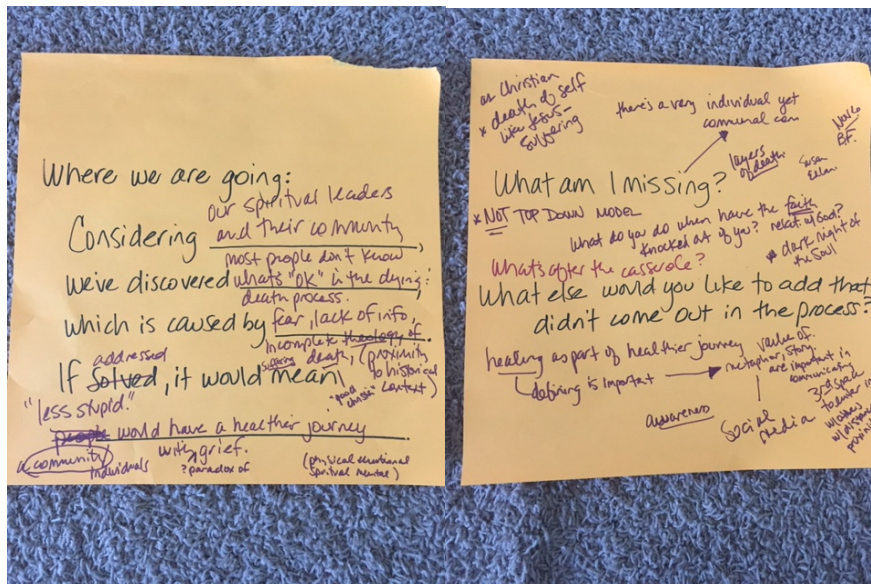
- What's ok to do/say when someone dies?
- Lack of grounding both historically and traditionally within the evangelical denominations
- Lack of understanding of basic logistics (funeral arrangements, memorial service, etc.)

The group developed the following statement:

Considering spiritual leaders and their communities, we've discovered people don't know what's ok surrounding death, which is caused by fear, lack of information, and incomplete theologies of suffering and death.

If addressed communities would have healthier journeys with the paradox of death/grief.

Edited NPO: How do we educate/transform our spiritual leaders and communities so as to not increase pain and suffering on those who are grieving?



1x1 Interview Synopsis

Interviewee A- author, poet

- Agrees with inflexibility of scripture
- Lack of language for fruitful conversations
- Acknowledge different faces (complexities and uniqueness) of death
- Liturgical calendar allows natural seasons to address suffering and death
- Evangelical pastors and communities will need permission to incorporate creative ways to incorporate sermons/seasons on death
- Shame and fear often predominate
- Take care to know audience and have sensitivity training
- Ministry of Presence (physical presence>words, prayers, etc)
- Power of poetry to plant seeds of change and stir up conversation and transformation
- Noted all grieve differently, avoid lock-step approach
- Importance of story and capturing the essence of a human when remembering brings healing and hope
- Suggested books: Joan Dideon- *The Year of Magical Thinking*; Nicholas Wolterstorff- *Lament for a Son*

Interviewee B- pastor (non-denominational), missionary, non-profit ministry developer

- Lack of language and proximity for/to death
- People are forced to deal with it at the time of greatest stress; ill prepared
- Appalling how common it is, and how traumatic it can be, yet people don't return to it for thoughtful consideration
- Huge missing piece in discipleship
- Seeks to isolate; community needs to be equipped to know what those grieving need and then courageously care for them

- Develop a holistic longer-term care approach
- Doesn't believe current celebrity pastor/consumer model can facilitate true death/suffering discipleship needs
- Reform needed: liturgy, lectionary (develop language), communion, repentance, architecture, enlist/equip care volunteers to support pastoral team
- Awareness of community involvement and impact needed
Interviewee C- pastor (Foursquare), non-profit ministry partner
- Important to steward end days
- Not surprise to long term members of a community that is intergenerational and intimate
- Ways of incorporating death, grief, suffering into church rhythms: Christmas Eve memorials for deceased, capture stories of older members of community, lean into national and local tragedies, integration of lament and celebration provides holistic environment, Ash Wednesday and Lent practiced, utilize Grief Share, callous language is called out and not tolerated
- How can we breathe life into "celebrations of life" and help alleviate burden on family?
- Significant influencer- Jean Vanier
Interviewee D- funeral home director, green burial advocate, radio show host
- Embracing and accepting the messiness of life is key
- No two people grieve alike
- She has found many Christians defer to Bible as having all answers on death; they usually shut down the conversation rather than engaging in what the Bible actually says about death; conversation is not welcomed.
- Bringing in the humanity of us all is important

- Create connections for conversations; step away from right/wrong thinking/answers
- How can we actually hold the hand of another?
- Active listening is important
- Important for people to express death care wishes before dying, so loved ones don't have to guess
- Must increase our capacity to sit in the paradox of grief with others
- Grief and suffering are a gift, to rob others of that leads to emptiness and lack of validation of their humanity.
- Music speaks powerfully to her in times of grief, like a prayer being answered
- Death has a way of reconciling families
- Some individuals decide to live fully in wake of dying news.

Appendix B—Milestone 2 The NPO Topic Expertise Essay

Introduction

Despite knowledge of the redemptive work of Christ, many Evangelical Christians remain afraid of death. This fear primarily emerges from the complex sociological structure Evangelicals find themselves in as Americans and these structures “stave off the chaos brought by death.”¹ Such chaos is managed through a society’s response to death and often includes, but is not limited to, medical, religious, and cultural constructs. While death on a national scale prompts social solidarity,² within Evangelical communities of faith, people who are dying or grieving death feel profoundly isolated and underserved, as pastors and community members are ill-equipped to care for them.³ When a person has not experienced or witnessed physical death, there is an added ineptitude because of the diminished capacity to embrace both one’s own humanity and the humanity of others. It has been shown, as well, that there is an added reinforcement to the aversion of death and/or professionalization of death by Westerners over the past 150 years.⁴ This essay will explore biblical and theological foundations, historical context, and current circumstances regarding death care in order to instigate awareness and facilitate

¹ Tony Walter. “Sociological Perspectives” in *Death, Dying and Bereavement: Contemporary Perspectives, Institutions, and Practices*, edited by Thomas Attig and Judith Stillion. (New York: Springer, 2014) 31.

² Walter, 32.

³ This conclusion was made after assimilating responses from the required discovery session and one-on-one interviews, hosted in November 2019, for my project portfolio.

⁴ Suzanne Kelly. *Green Death: Reclaiming Burial Practices and Restoring Our Tie to the Earth*. (Lanham, MD: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2017) 35-40.

change toward more holistic and human care for the dying, dead, and grieving in our faith communities.

Biblical and Theological Foundations

The artwork, shown below,⁵ gives a visual representation of what it can mean to be fully human. Granacci's "Madonna and Child with Two Angels"⁶ is connected on either side by Botticelli's "Christ on the Cross"⁷ and di Paolo's "The Crucifixion."⁸ This imagery is rooted in Christ incarnate and reveals both the wonder of new life and the suffering of death. By tapping into Evangelicals' deep love of scripture and intimate association with the Cross for salvation, Christ's incarnation, suffering, and death provide the biblical and theological foundation upon which we build the discovery of our true humanity.

⁵ Photo taken by Darcy Hansen on an iPhone 6s during a visit to the Portland Art Museum in November 2020.

⁶ Granacci, Francesco. 1495. Madonna and Child with Two Angels. Tempra on wood. Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR. Accessed April 21, 2020.
<http://www.portlandartmuseum.us/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=11944;type=101>.

⁷ Botticelli, Sandro. 1500. Christ on the Cross. Tempra on wood. Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR. Accessed April 21, 2020.
<http://www.portlandartmuseum.us/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=11961;type=101>.

⁸ Di Paolo, Giannicola. 1520. The Crucifixion. Tempra on wood. Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR. Accessed April 21, 2020.
<http://www.portlandartmuseum.us/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=11934;type=101>.



Incarnation

*“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of
God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.”*

Philippians 2:5-7

Within the Evangelical movement, incarnational theology is eclipsed by crucicentrism—the theology of the cross. Crucicentrism is one of four foundational beliefs, and “to make any theme other than the cross the fulcrum of a theological system (is) to take a step away from Evangelicalism.”⁹ There is an argument for such a limited theological focus in that it actually

⁹ D. W. Bebbington. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Abingdon, Oxon: Unwin Hyman, Ltd., 1989) 3, 15.

diminishes the reconciliatory work achieved through Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. One aspect does not outweigh the others; all are necessary for creation to once again experience shalom. Utilizing Jon L. Berquist's *Incarnation* as a tool for deeper understanding, we will highlight revelations of God incarnate in creation, and specifically in Christ.

"In the Bible, God's relationship with humanity is incarnate...an embodied relationship like all of our human relationships and loves. This is not just a mystical connection."¹⁰ When using the word "incarnation," one typically thinks of God with us, the Christ child, and the focus of our Christmas celebrations. While God incarnated in Christ is a unique revelation, it is not the only time God has come to the created realm in which we exist. In Genesis, God created humankind in God's image, both male and female.¹¹ Life was given to them by crafted minerals of the earth and air breathed into them.

From the beginning, God was present with humans as God walked and talked with them in the garden. After humans chose to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God cursed and banished humans from the garden.¹² This banishment instituted a relational death but did not entirely sever the relationship between God and humans over time. With Abraham, God revealed God's self through visions and dreams, but also in physical form to reinforce covenantal promises God made with Abraham and Sarah.¹³ Later we see God interact in physical form as God allows Moses to have a glimpse of God's back.¹⁴ Keeping God's promise to God's people,

¹⁰ Jon L. Berquist. *Incarnation* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1999) 8.

¹¹ Genesis 1:27.

¹² Genesis 3.

¹³ Genesis 17, 18.

¹⁴ Exodus 33:19-33.

God's presence takes the shape of a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night, as they escaped Egypt and wandered in the wilderness.¹⁵

God's presence remains with God's people, not only on occasion, as a physical form, or a form crafted from creation, but through *ruach* or *pneuma*, which means the "wind of God," or "the spirit of God."¹⁶ Evidence of God's Spirit is woven throughout scripture in the creation narrative, in encounters with disheartened prophets, through witness and guidance for the Son of God, and filling followers of Jesus at Pentecost.

Berquist notes, "The spirit of God and the words of God are tied together. God's breath empowers the pronouncement of words, and in this speech is the spirit of God."¹⁷ Nowhere is this more evident than in the uniquely mysterious incarnation of God in Jesus, where the eternal Word becomes flesh to dwell among humans.¹⁸ Since its inception, "the church's theology has struggled to define and explain what happened in Jesus."¹⁹ In what Christians believe to be an early hymn, Paul shares how Jesus, "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men."²⁰ The Greek word "kenoo" means "to empty, evacuate; to divest one's self of one's prerogatives."²¹ This word leads to what is referred to as a "kenotic Christology."

¹⁵ Exodus 13.

¹⁶ Berquist, 46.

¹⁷ Ibid., 53.

¹⁸ John 1:1, 14.

¹⁹ Berquist, 82.

²⁰ Philippians 2:6-7, English Standard Version.

²¹ Philippians 2:7, from the Step Bible. Accessed February 22, 2020.
<https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=ESV|reference=Phil.2&options=HNVUG>.

Jesus, who “becoming a human being... limited or temporarily divested himself of (divine properties and prerogatives). This act of self-emptying has become known as ‘kenosis.’”²²

In over twenty-five years of teaching at theological institutions, Gordon Fee discovered, “Evangelical students tend to regularly hold to a kind of naïve Docetism, where Jesus appeared as a real person, but who was God in such a way that it superseded anything truly human about him except for the accidents of his humanity-basically his bodily functions: eating, talking, sleeping, and so on.”²³ This interpretation of Jesus incarnate makes Jesus a superhero rather than fully human, as God intended. This perspective is not only found within schools of learning but also in evangelical communities of faith. Indeed, centuries of theologians and Christ-followers have struggled with understanding the nature of Jesus’ humanity. There is not enough time or space to thoroughly examine these controversies. Therefore, this essay will show the perspective of Jesus fully human.

To clarify, for Jesus to be fully human, the Spirit interacted intimately with Mary, thus creating new cells in the form of an embryo, which then brought forth a human. He who was once infinite and integral in bringing forth creation became finite and lived in creation, experiencing all that comes with life. Scripture affirms this in Hebrews, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.”²⁴

²² C. Stephen Evans. 2006. “Introduction” In *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*. Edited by C. Stephen Evans, 4. Oxford: University of Oxford Press, republished 2010, Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing.

²³ Gordon D. Fee. 2006. “The New Testament and Kenosis Christology” In *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*. Edited by C. Stephen Evans, 25. Oxford: University of Oxford Press, republished 2010, Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing.

²⁴ Hebrews 4:15.

It is this fully human Jesus who was affirmed by God, led into the wilderness, and tempted by Satan. He turned water into wine, healed lepers, raised the dead, and fed the hungry. He interacted with those on the margins and reinterpreted Jewish teaching on Sabbath. The love he demonstrated for humanity was immense and imaginative, beautiful, and sacrificial. Being human meant Jesus not only lived but was subject to death, both physically and relationally, apart from God the Father. It is to this reality of Jesus' life which we now turn.

The Theology of the Cross

*“And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.”*

Philippians 2:8

Was there an internal pull that drew him to the edge of the Jordan River to meet John? What was it about those dark waters that called to him to enter and be baptized? He was sinless. Repenting was not required. Nevertheless, there he was, listening to the words of John, “I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”²⁵ Jesus completely immersed. When he emerged, heaven opened up, and the Spirit of God descended

²⁵ Matthew 3:11.

upon him like a dove. A voice from heaven said, “This is my Son whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”²⁶

William Willimon remarks, “Whatever the gospel means, we tell ourselves it could not mean death.”²⁷ Yet, even in his baptism, Jesus was framing his life and death. Jesus was ushering in a new understanding of what it means to be fully human. As James and John requested to sit at Jesus’ sides in his glory, Jesus replied, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”²⁸ To be fully human required complete self-denial and transformation. Jesus revealed baptism begins in the waters, but it ends at the cross, and “nothing less than daily, often painful, lifelong death will do.”²⁹

Jesus modeled this daily, lifelong death by doing only the will of God.³⁰ This was most obvious when Jesus entered Jerusalem for the Passover celebration, knowing death was imminent. After concluding the Passover meal with a hymn, Jesus went to Gethsemane to pray. The intensity of suffering is evident, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.”³¹ Luke records Jesus, “being in anguish, prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.”³² In his prayer, Jesus asked three times for “this cup” to be

²⁶ Matthew 3:16-17.

²⁷ William Willimon. 2003. “Repent” In *Bread and Wine: Readings for Lent and Easter*. Edited by an unnamed group of editors, 7. Walden, NY: Plough Publishing House.

²⁸ Mark 10:38.

²⁹ Willimon, 9.

³⁰ John 5:19.

³¹ Matthew 26:38.

³² Luke 22:44.

taken from him, but when met with silence from Abba Father, Jesus whispered, “Yet not what I will, but what you will.”³³ It was in these words, Jesus stopped trying not to die, and submitted to God’s plans. Christ’s suffering continued as disciples betrayed and denied him, Jewish leaders illegally tried him, and Pontius Pilate ordered his crucifixion. Brutally beaten and forced to carry his heavy cross to Golgotha, Jesus finds aid from a Cyrenian. Hung between two criminals, Jesus endured insults and crucifixion.³⁴ In his suffering and death, Jesus reconciled not only all of creation, but death itself. Jesus did not desire to suffer and die. He requested to be freed from it three times. However, in the end, he chose submission to God’s will, because it is requisite to experience pain, suffering, and death if he was to be fully human *and* redeem all of humanity.

Words like “suffering” and “death” are almost non-existent within contemporary, Evangelical circles. Established in the 1700s, Evangelicalism has deep roots in Protestant Reformation, where Martin Luther’s “theology of the cross” became a dominant doctrine.³⁵ Luther believed “it is only through ‘suffering and the cross’ that God can be known at all, and then, as with Moses, it is only the backside of God, God hidden in revelation, that is finally known.”³⁶ The Reformation denounced salvation by works and stood firm that salvation only comes from God’s grace through faith. Over time, works became accepted as evidence of the reality of divine grace in the life of a believer. In a time when doubt of salvation filled the minds of Christians, the doctrine of assurance emerged. Promoted by early Evangelicals such as John

³³ Mark 14:36.

³⁴ Mark 15: 21-32.

³⁵ Charles B. Cousar. *A Theology of the Cross: The Death of Jesus in the Pauline Letters*. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1990) 7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

Wesley, and underscored with John Calvin's teaching on predestination, "assurance is the common privilege of the children of God...not only in the present state of grace, but also in their future glory."³⁷ Within the context of the emerging industrial revolution, this doctrine of assurance mingled with the understanding that living an ascetic life, a disciplined life of calling, evidenced by tireless labor, lead to material blessing and assurance of belonging to those predestined and chosen by God.³⁸

While Evangelicals believe in the supremacy of scripture and cling tightly to the saving significance of Jesus' death on a cross, few within American Evangelicalism would acknowledge suffering and death are evidence of God's presence in one's life. Closely mingled with the doctrine of assurance is the theology of glory, where "life becomes a ladder. Each little victory or improvement brings us one rung closer to the top-which is always just out of sight. At death, if all goes according to plan, we enter the heavenly courts with a nicely wrapped gift for God that includes an equitable balance of our good versus bad actions, our moral scorecard, if you will. And... grace (is but) a supplement to whatever is left of human will and power."³⁹

Those immersed in such theology would find "a theology of the cross to be highly suspicious of evangelical techniques and methods of church growth that offer faith as a quick fix to the personal and societal complexities of contemporary life."⁴⁰ Thus, Evangelicals decidedly

³⁷ Bebbington, 44-45.

³⁸ Max Weber. *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism*. (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2002) 77.

³⁹ Tullian Tchividjian. 2012. "Theology of Glory vs. Theology of the Cross" The Christian Post. Thursday, July 12. Accessed April 22, 2020. <https://www.christianpost.com/news/theology-of-glory-vs-theology-of-the-cross.html>.

⁴⁰ Cousar, 180.

choose “to look *past* the cross, rather than *through* it.”⁴¹ In doing so, they have lost their identity and ability to *become* human as Jesus was human, which aids in the transformation process. By leaning heavily on a theology of glory and the world’s understanding of blessing, Evangelicalism has silenced the “theology of the cross, with its demand for honesty and realism.”⁴² Rather than standing empathetically and resolutely in facing death, Evangelicals perpetuate fear by minimizing difficulty and pain through positive thinking, optimistic encouragement, and empty supports to build up another’s self-esteem.⁴³ Such posturing is the antithesis of the life Jesus modeled and has been shaped not only by theological foundations but also cultural and societal norms. It is to those foundations we now turn.

Topic History and Key Voices

History

In the early days of the American Nation, preparing a body for burial was an integral component of life and culture. Death often occurred in the home where family, most often women, cared for the dead. This act was an extension of women’s domestic responsibilities, which also included childbirth, child-rearing, and care for the sick. Thus, not only did women birth life, but they also birthed death.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ibid., 181.

⁴² Ibid., 186.

⁴³ Tchividjian.

⁴⁴ Suzanne Kelly. *Greening Death: Reclaiming Burial Practices and Restoring Our Tie to the Earth* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015) 43.

Before the American Civil War, systemic changes occurred in Great Britain and France, which also impacted the United States. Urbanization gave rise to increased populations and created concern for what humans ingested, excreted, and with what they became infected. Science produced significant health reforms, especially in the realm of sanitization of municipalities. Sweeping changes took place ranging from the basics of water and food supply, and disposal to hospitals and sanitariums care for the sick. Decay and death became public health threats, pollutants to the population and environment. The smell of death was linked to the transmission of disease, and needed to be eradicated, for “if the stench of things...could be eradicated, the theory went, the living might fare okay.”⁴⁵ Quarantine, deportation, and isolation were solutions to manage illness and death. In short, humans longed to live without dirt or decay, and in time the social pollution of the corpse had to be “put to rest” or “radically excluded” from society. This exclusion gave rise to the rural cemetery, a “peaceful setting” to counter the death narrative images of disease and waste associated with urban graveyards. The removal of burial places led to a secularization of death practices and rituals, which included a standard and mechanized system for cemeteries. Well-manicured cemetery lawns emerged with orderly pathways, masking the effects of death and decay.⁴⁶

During the American Civil War, the dirtiness of decay and death came to the forefront of society, as countless individuals died in battle. Indeed, the Civil War was the turning point for societal death care in America. Over four years, forty thousand dead Union soldiers needed to be shipped home for burial. Embalming, though once prohibited, now became a temporary solution.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 36-37.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 39-40.

Embalming techniques stayed the process of decay, allowing preservation of bodies to occur until their final burial. While a temporary solution had been found for deceased soldiers, the lynchpin came with the death of President Abraham Lincoln. His embalmed and peacefully resting body, paraded for citizens to see, provided an alternative to the carnage of war and division, giving hope to the masses that it was possible to overcome the nature of death.⁴⁷

This significant shift in the perception of death gave rise to professionalized trades. These trades built and substantiated their industry upon the following lies: embalming provided preservation of a “faux fresh state forever” and embalming was a sanitary practice. Both premises predicated upon the belief that eliminating the body of death contaminants and replacing the internal cavity with chemicals would prevent decay from occurring and disease from spreading. All levels of society bought into these lies. Though the World Health Organization (WHO) has scientifically dispelled the myth that embalming is necessary for sanitization, the American funeral industry continues to propagate this message. In doing so, these “caretakers of the dead” have “grab(bed) the reigns of our death rites,” while eradicating the work of women, desecrating the human-land connection, and propagating a culture of fear regarding death.⁴⁸

The incorporation of caskets and vaults exacerbates the fear surrounding death and decay. Historically, simple wooden boxes (coffins), cut to the shape of a human body, were used to bury bodies. These boxes morphed into nondescript, rectangular caskets made of metal, boasting protection from the elements of nature. Vaults, though rarely seen by the living, were once

⁴⁷ Ibid., 41.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 43.

considered necessary to prevent grave robbing. Now they provide convenience for cemetery maintenance to prevent the natural settling of the soil. Thus, vaults are marketed as an added barrier in preventing bodily decay. Both of these “protections” eventually fail, giving way to nature’s decomposition process.⁴⁹

These artificial protections are but an illusion and require copious amounts of resources. The majority of Americans submit to the illusion out of fear, ignorance, or both. “Death rituals have always varied in the United States, especially with respect to race, ethnicity, class, nation of origin, and religion. And yet, (there are) only two methods of disposition (primarily) called upon in the United States—interment and incineration.”⁵⁰ Both involve highly skilled professionals and, unless influenced by religious tradition, are often void of assistance from surviving family members or friends.

Just as the Civil War catalyzed the death care industry, World War II transformed the medical industry. War efforts fueled by research and development in physics and chemistry produced nuclear science, which in peacetime, translated into medical technology.⁵¹ Medical technology became the weapon of choice, wielded in the war zone of health care, to prolong life at any cost. In many ways, medical technology became the Western culture’s new religion. The foundational belief of this religion is: “If you can, you should.”⁵² Individuals are encouraged to exhaust all health treatment options available for their circumstances. Patients learn “early in the

⁴⁹ Ibid., 46-48.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 36.

⁵¹ Stephen Jenkinson. *Die Wise: A Manifesto for Sanity and Soul*. (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2015) 18.

⁵² Ibid., 23.

diagnostic and treatment process that they owe their families and their close friends the unspoken, unwritten, and unsuspected debt of trying everything there is at least once, until health and wealth, and sanity...are exhausted.”⁵³ Death must be held off at all costs. As a result, death is managed through various care options, primarily palliative and hospice care, where certainty replaces uncertainty, technology replaces religion, and “miracles are more engineered than they are prayed for.”⁵⁴

Traditionally practices within death care and medical industries have distanced us from death in such a way that we no longer have language, practice, or meaning surrounding death. These gaps allow for an inability to care for the dying or dead, much less grieving. They have made death a fearful and controlled, industrialized event, rather than a transformative, mysterious, even holy process to be embraced. Many care professionals, seeing the damaging effects of living in a death-phobic culture, are speaking up, asking questions, and reimagining what it means to die. We now turn to voices in the death care industry, medical community, and pastoral/spiritual formation realm to examine critiques and reparatives for the challenges we face as a death-phobic society.

⁵³ Ibid., 24.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 23-26.

Key Voices

Death Care Industry

One of the earliest voices to critique the American process of death was Jessica Mitford, a British aristocrat turned American journalist. She wrote a scathing account of the funeral industry practices that was published in 1963. *The American Way of Death* provided a behind-the-scenes look into an industry few knew little about, but which impacted many. “Mitford questioned the dignity and utility of the invasive embalming procedures and baulked at the fact that death was being prettified and sanitized, masking the brutal facts about our mortality. Mitford decided (it) was time for the public to look death in the face.”⁵⁵ Her analysis did not stop with graphic details of the embalming process. She also attacked the corrupt and predatory sales practices of the funeral industry.”⁵⁶ Her investigative reporting led to reforms in the funeral industry, protecting consumers from unscrupulous business practices. Sadly, once funeral industry activists “were convinced that consumers had what they needed, social activism waned.”⁵⁷ While Mitford’s voice was prominent and productive in raising awareness about our death practices, it focused more on the consumeristic aspects of death, rather than the human aspects.

Another forerunner is Dr. Billy Campbell. After experiencing the death of his father, and participating in the American death rituals, Campbell made changes for the care of the dead

⁵⁵ David Robson. 2016. “The Woman Who Forced Us to Look Death in the Face.” BBC Future. July 21. Accessed April 8, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20160721-how-jessica-mitford-changed-our-ideas-about-death>.

⁵⁶ Molly Finnegan. 2006. “The Indomitable Jessica Mitford.” The Atlantic. October. Accessed April 8, 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/10/the-indomitable-jessica-mitford/305322/>.

⁵⁷ Jessica Mitford. *The American Way of Death*. (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1963, revised 1978) 271.

within his community. He reasoned that if people understood what was happening to their loved ones, they would choose alternate ways to bury them. His main goal was to preserve the land and create death rituals that reconnect people with the land.⁵⁸ In 1998, he and his wife developed thirty-eight acres in the Appalachians called the Ramsey Creek Preserve. This Preserve was the first of its kind in the US and provided an ecological and embodied experience of burying the dead.⁵⁹ He found that families actively participating in the burial process—digging the grave, carrying the dead to the grave, adorning the grave with natural flowers and simple stone markers—brought healing and hope to the living. When returning to the Preserve to reflect upon their loved ones in a lush, life-filled space, people experience great comfort.⁶⁰ The green burial movement is still in existence today. In 2005, the Green Burial Council (GBC) formed to provide oversight and regulation to green burial practices and spaces. Though challenging to ascertain the exact number, it is estimated there are over one hundred sites that provide green burials, half of which are certified by the GBC. Seven of the certified sites are also ecological conservation sites.⁶¹ Change, while slow, is happening.

Additionally, there is an undercurrent, which longs to reengage with the death of loved ones. Home funerals are emerging to meet that need. A home funeral allows space for family and friends to engage with their loved ones in a familiar setting. With the assistance of death-care doulas, who equip families with practical information and emotional support during the death of

⁵⁸ Tripler, Ellen, Director, “Dying Green” (video) Amazon Prime, 2013, accessed Oct 29, 2017, https://www.amazon.com/Dying-Green-Ellen-Tripler/dp/B00DFK4SKK/ref=sr_1_1?s=instant-video&ie=UTF8&qid=1509332953&sr=1-1&keywords=dying+green.

⁵⁹ Mark Harris. *Grave Matters: A Journey Through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial* (New York: Scribner, 2007) 162-163.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 173-176.

⁶¹ Kelly, 87-88.

a family member,⁶² old death traditions are resurfacing, and care of the dying and dead are being placed back in the hands of the family. Family members play an integral role in preparing the body for burial by “washing and dressing the body, laying it out for vigil, holding a memorial service, and transporting the deceased to the cemetery or crematory.”⁶³ The primary disadvantage of the home funeral is that it is more labor-intensive and requires significant support from family and community. It is also not legal in all states. For those who have chosen a home funeral for their deceased, they found the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. The hands-on care allowed them significant time with their loved one’s corpse, maintaining an intimate connection with them until the actual burial. Moving through the death care process at their own pace helped bring acceptance of the death that occurred.⁶⁴ While the deceased are not always buried in green cemeteries, the home funeral process has become a way to sociologically rediscover and embrace a more holistic and natural death narrative.

Finally, Caleb Wilde, a sixth-generation funeral director, realized his position was well suited to help draw people closer to death rather than hold them at a distance through the professionalization of the funeral industry. He observed, “...our fear of death is because there’s such a lack of certainty in the wake of its silence. Perhaps we fear the silence just as much as we fear death. Perhaps we fear silence more than death...I believe we can only see the positive in

⁶² Danae King. 2019. “Death Doulas Provide Comfort and a New Option for the Dying and Their Families.” USA Today. December 3. Accessed April 23, 2020. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2019/12/03/death-douglas-what-they-do-and-why-people-get-them/2596285001/>.

⁶³ Harris, 118.

⁶⁴ Jaweed Kaleem. 2017. “Home Funerals Grow as Americans Skip the Mortician for Do-It-Yourself After-Death Care.” Huffington Post. December 6. Accessed April 22, 2020. <http://www.us-funerals.com/funeral-articles/directory-of-green-burial-sites-in-the-united-states.html#.XqDrWC2ZPGI>.

death when we learn to accept the silence.”⁶⁵ Sitting in silence, attentive to the unknown, or for some, the Eternal is difficult for Americans. In doing so, they must relinquish control of the trivial. Leaning into the silence of death makes one more aware of one’s mortality. Several things happen—1) one sees goodness and beauty; 2) there is growth in compassion and understanding; 3) an appreciation for a life lived now occurs; 4) one revels in wonder versus fear; and 5) one embraces life, love and forgiveness a bit more humanly.⁶⁶

Medical Community

Surgeon and best-selling author Atul Gawande explores human mortality and the limitations and failures medicine has contributed toward end-of-life care in *Being Mortal*. Gawande remarks, “Our reluctance to honestly examine the experience of aging and dying has increased the harm we inflict on people and denied them the basic comforts they most need.”⁶⁷ Reflecting upon his Indian ancestry and its communal and holistic care for the elderly, he contrasts such care with the American medical systems, where age and death are avoided at all costs. In America, the sick and aging populations are relegated to institutions for professional care. This is due to the lack of extended families, which, in Indian culture, are able to offer competent care for their loved ones. The institutions provide a safe, medicalized environment, but are devoid of anything humans truly care about, such as personal agency, authenticity, and emotional intimacy. Professionals “concentrate on repair of health, not sustenance of the soul. Yet, (these are the people) we have decided should be the ones who largely define how we live

⁶⁵ Caleb Wilde. *Confessions of a Funeral Director: How the Business of Death Saved My Life* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2017) 82.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 172-174.

⁶⁷ Atul Gawande. *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End*. (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2014) 9.

our waning days.”⁶⁸ Though sudden catastrophic illnesses do happen, they are the exception. Most people die “...after a long medical struggle with an ultimately unstoppable condition. In all cases, death is certain, but the timing isn’t. So, everyone struggles with the uncertainty.”⁶⁹ We have a surplus of technological options, but little supply of empathetic and honest terminology and resources to provide dignity to individuals in such inevitable circumstances. Current resources available for end-of-life are palliative and hospice care. Both have developed in response to a culture that is unable to navigate death in a healthy, holistic way.

Kathryn Mannix, a long-time palliative care physician, notes, “The death rate remains 100 per cent, and the pattern of the final days, and the way we actually die, are unchanged. What is different is that we have lost the familiarity we once had with that process, and we have lost the vocabulary and etiquette that served us so well in past times, when death was acknowledged to be inevitable.”⁷⁰ Through story and reflection, Mannix highlights intimate experiences at the palliative care bedside. For her, palliative care is not only about medical care for people in their last months of life, but also about walking with them as they live knowing they are dying. One of her passions is to name death, to call it what it is. She has found, “Open discussion reduces superstition and fear and allows us to be honest with each other at a time when pretense and well-intentioned lies can separate us, wasting time that is very precious.”⁷¹ Often, this open discussion involves addressing one of the most common fears, the last physiological moments of

⁶⁸ Ibid., 128.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 156-157.

⁷⁰ Kathryn Mannix. *With the End in Mind: Dying, Death, and Wisdom in the Age of Denial*. (New York, NY: Hachette Book Group, 2018) 2.

⁷¹ Ibid., 107.

a person's life. She has found that when the dying and their loved ones understand what *will* happen, they are more willing to allow death *to* happen. When people enter into that space of surrender with vocabulary and realistic expectations, they can be fully present, calmly and lovingly.⁷² Modeling a willingness to receive the truth that is often concealed behind cultural and medical norms, sitting with another's deep anguish and not shutting it down, encourages others to do the same. It is here on the edge of death, where the best of our humanness is often clearly revealed.⁷³

Frank Ostaseski's long time experience in hospice care echoes that of Mannix. In *The Five Invitations*, Ostaseski consolidates years of experience and wisdom into five ways that death transforms the way we live. He opens with, "Life and death are a package deal. You cannot pull them apart. Death is always with us, in the marrow of every passing moment. She is the secret teacher hiding in plain sight. She helps us to discover what matters most."⁷⁴ Nothing can fully prepare a person for death but developing habits along life's path do help lay a foundation.⁷⁵ Ostaseski notes, "Dying a 'good death' is a myth. Death is messy."⁷⁶ He suggests rather than classifying the death as good or bad, "cultivate non-judgmental attention and commitment to being with the truth of whatever is present. (Doing this requires) mental clarity,

⁷² Ibid., 34-36.

⁷³ Ibid., 160, 273, 276.

⁷⁴ Frank Ostaseski. *The Five Invitation: Discovering What Death Can Teach Us About Living Fully*. (New York, NY: Flatiron Books, 2017) 1.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 52.

emotional stability, an embodied presence...and fluid resilience.”⁷⁷ Five invitations foster these qualities:

- 1) Do not wait to be grateful or to say, “I love you,” or to be kind, compassionate and forgiving.
- 2) Welcome everything, push nothing away—be fearless in receiving the unknowns of life.
- 3) Bring the whole self to the experience by embracing suffering, vulnerability, and healing.
- 4) Remain calm and present in each moment, being attentive and alert to the now.
- 5) Cultivate a mind of curiosity and wonder, releasing control and embracing surrender—open to surprises that do not always have answers.

In accepting these invitations, people enter “the eternal now” where the past is gone, the future is still to come, and time no longer holds sway. In that space, love replaces fear and there is capacity to be more fully human.⁷⁸ In this fear-less place, one can ask honest heart questions, which arise from deep love to discover that which is true. Only through those uncomfortable questions will one discover who one is and why one is here.⁷⁹

A provocative voice in the medical community is Stephen Jenkinson. In *Die Wise*, he asks many of the uncomfortable heart questions to which Ostaseski eludes. Jenkinson’s twenty-plus years working in social work and palliative care, combined with his theological education

⁷⁷ Ibid., 52.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 279.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 2.

and indigenous perspectives, compels him to examine our death-phobic culture in critical ways. In his manifesto, Jenkinson repeatedly asks, “What does dying ask of us?” Dying asks a person to be willing to learn and wonder, to suffer and sit in uncertainty. It allows the collapse of immortality and, instead, a courage to die be a hope.⁸⁰ Dying also asks us to be weak, sad and/or to say enough already.⁸¹ It asks people to share experiences with others, in an open and honest way, to listen and be faithful to see things as they truly are.⁸² Most importantly, dying asks people to give language to what is. “If we don’t have language for dying, we cannot see dying when its present among us. That means dying people are invisible to themselves and others as dying people, which proves usually to be chief among all the indignities that will be meted out to them during the course of their dying time”⁸³ Lack of language and the inability to effectively and honestly communicate, strips the dying, dead, and the grieving of their humanity. People become invisible, not because they are not present, but because others refuse to see them in the fullness of their human suffering.

Entering into spaces of suffering and death is difficult, because it is a liminal space of unknowns. As Christians, we have a greater hope in Jesus. How are Christians to navigate death in a culture that is afraid of death? It is to the pastoral voices we now turn.

⁸⁰ Jenkinson, 283-284, 290, 292.

⁸¹ Ibid., 298-301.

⁸² Ibid., 319.

⁸³ Ibid., 325.

Pastoral Community

Henri Nouwen reminds us that “Jesus died for us so that our death no longer be a separation, (but rather) a way to communion and union. To care for the dying means to help them live their dying as a way to gather around them not only those who come to visit, not only family and friends, but all of humanity, the living as well as the dead.”⁸⁴ Dying is a profoundly human and relational experience. It requires presence and care, love and longsuffering. Caring well for the dying and dead allows people to “gently lead our dying brothers and sisters always deeper into the heart of God and God’s universe.”⁸⁵ The heart of God lies in the loving resurrection of Jesus. “Resurrection does not solve our problems about dying and death. (Rather) the resurrection is the expression of God’s faithfulness to Jesus and to all God’s children; it reveals to us that love is stronger than death. After that revelation, we must remain silent, leave the whys, wheres, hows, and whens behind, and simply trust.”⁸⁶

One way we usher people into that space of trust is through the Christian funeral or memorial. Conversations before death and actions after for the loved one, set the stage for what Christians truly believe. As humans in relation with God and others, the way we die and care for our dead must be deeply relational. Sadly, culture, more than Christian belief, has dictated how death has been viewed and practiced in the church. “Jesus does not reveal what it means to be ‘fully Christian,’ but rather what it means to be fully human. Part of being human is confessing

⁸⁴ Henri Nouwen. *Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring*. (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994) 73.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

that we are *humus*.”⁸⁷ Humans are creatures bound to the dirt, birthed from dust, and to dust, humans will return. Culture and customs dictate how this is done.

Offering pastoral care during times of grief is difficult when professionalized care and popular cultural norms distance families from their dead. Whether the loved one is buried in a coffin or cremated, family members and faith communities rarely interact with the deceased’s body. The absence of a body is especially noticeable at the memorial or celebration of life. Both non-religious and religious groups hold memorials or celebrations of life. Strikingly, the order of service is similar though the content may vary depending on beliefs.⁸⁸ Regardless, both have a more upbeat, positive atmosphere compared to a traditional funeral. They usually comprise of favorite musical selections, a welcome, selected readings, eulogy, music, time for family and friends to share memories, a slideshow of images from the deceased’s life, more music, closing words, and a reception. After this event, many people leave and move on with their lives, leaving family members feeling isolated and wondering what happens now that the “casseroles have stopped coming?”⁸⁹

To be human is to deal with death. This culturally learned model of care is not an aside, but rather a foundational element of loving others well. Carrying the weight of the dead in tangible ways is part of what makes us human, it gives meaning and purpose to the dead and the living. Doing this within the Christian narrative “is not simply a way to be more religious; it’s a

⁸⁷ Thomas G. Long. *Accompany Them with Singing: The Christian Funeral*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009) 9.

⁸⁸ To compare secular memorials, celebration of life, and funerals, see: <https://ffrf.org/publications/secular-funerals#sample>, <https://www.thespruce.com/what-is-a-celebration-of-life-4583830>, and https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/the-funeral-as-we-know-it-is-becoming-a-relic--just-in-time-for-a-death-boom/2019/04/14/a49003c4-50c2-11e9-8d28-f5149e5a2fda_story.html.

⁸⁹ These feelings were expressed by all of the participants in my discovery session held in November 2019.

way to be more fully human. Caring for the dead...is a labor of humanity. We cannot be fully alive, fully humane, if we do not tend to the dead.”⁹⁰ The life of a loved one is shared by being present with the corpse and gathering with mourners and communicating the transformational hope of the gospel. The dead are transported to their place of “blissful rest, where the dead are refreshed as they await the dawn of the new day.”⁹¹ This also gives assurance to those still present on earth, of how they will be ushered into the great cloud of witnesses that surround.

Synthesis and Conclusion

Americans face significant challenges in how care for the dead is managed—the dominant being fear. Research reveals how sociological structures surrounding death care perpetuate this fear but shifts in culture are beginning to take hold. Conversations about death are happening around the world in Death Café gatherings.⁹² Home funerals, death doulas, and green burials are helping families care for loved ones outside the established institutions of death care. “For the first time in more than half a century, more people are dying at home than in hospitals.”⁹³ This is due to the increased availability of hospice and palliative care within medical communities. Furthermore, numerous avenues of grief support are available via books and articles from leading grief experts, grief counselors, and groups hosted by Grief Share, to name but one.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Ibid., 174-175.

⁹¹ Thomas G. Long and Thomas, Lynch. *The Good Funeral: Death, Grief, and the Community of Care*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013) 189, 203.

⁹² For more information see: <https://deathcafe.com/what/>.

⁹³ Rachel Nania. 2019. “More Americans are Choosing to Die at Home.” *AARP*. December 19. Accessed April 23, 2020. <https://www.aarp.org/health/conditions-treatments/info-2019/more-dying-at-home-than-hospital.html>.

⁹⁴ For more information see: <https://www.griefshare.org/about>.

While these initiatives are making great strides in how Americans view death, a gap still exists within Evangelical faith communities. Conversations surrounding death still occur in hushed tones, tucked away on the sides.⁹⁵ The dead are no longer at their own memorials, unseen by the public eye, and the grieving loved ones experience the same invisibility. It is those who are dying, dead, or grieving who sit in the depths of what it means to be human, and they often do this alone. MaryKate Morse says, “(Our) need to construct a happy, victorious face leads to our collective anxiety. Anxiety is an ancient fear, the root of all paralyzing emotions.”⁹⁶ It is this fear that prevents us from discussing death, much less embracing it, and compels people to speak Christian platitudes and suggest easy “biblical” answers to those deeply grieving.

Grieving people need others who will sit and be present with them in their grief. They need incarnate people of the cross, people who are willing to enter into suffering and death as Jesus did, so that they can walk *through* the cross, rather than just breeze past it to the empty tomb and the ascended Jesus. They need a community that has language and embodied practices that acknowledge the humanity of Jesus, itself, and others.

In “Leading Change,” Marshall Ganz notes, “Social movements emerge as a result of the efforts of purposeful actors to assert new public values, form new relationships rooted in those values, and mobilize the political, economic, and cultural power to translate these values into

⁹⁵ This information was gained through my discovery session, one-on-one interviews, and through numerous conversations with those grieving the death of loved ones.

⁹⁶ Mary Kate Morse. 2020. “A Need for Lament.” *Missio Alliance*, February 26. Accessed February 27, 2020. https://www.missioalliance.org/our-need-for-lament/?utm_content=buffer243cc&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer&fbclid=IwAR3JZ7nW6tK8U85SSux4h2bLY_i-ZZY0hmPfGC8qoVEBrIkrrnJgrKbG1n5A.

action. (They don't just focus) on winning the game, but also changing the rules.”⁹⁷ In order to move this conversation from the cultural community into our faith communities, a social movement is needed. This movement happens as interpersonal relationships are leveraged, networks are connected, and organizations with a common purpose are linked. The economy of such a movement depends on “social capital: a relational capacity that can facilitate collaborative action of all kinds.” While recruitment, training, and coaching are necessary to maintain the momentum, these cannot be achieved without first tapping into the moral and emotional collective of a group.⁹⁸

The implementation of this strategy is evident in the various secular groups working to initiate change in the death care industry. However, how can this happen within our communities of faith? What questions must we ask to reveal our motivations and values? What role does emotion play in our willingness to enter into the conversation of this most uncomfortable reality of life? For decades, “inertia, or the security of habitual routine, (has blinded) us to the need for action, but urgency and anger get our attention. Hope inspires us, and in concert with self-efficacy and solidarity, can move us to act.”⁹⁹ What will propel communities of faith to move from apathetic inaction, into catalyzing lasting change that leads to better care for the dying, dead, and grieving in their communities? Are communities willing to ask the hard questions, have the difficult conversations, and walk the path of suffering toward Golgotha as Christ did?

⁹⁷ Marshall Ganz, “Leading Change: Leadership, Organization, and Social Movements,” in *The Handbook of Leadership Theory and Practice*, ed. Nitin Nohria and Rakesh Khurana (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2010), 527.

⁹⁸ Ganz, 532-534.

⁹⁹ Ganz, 536.

Resurrection only happens after death. Therefore, it is by allowing old ways and gripping fears to die that the hope of Christ can be realized for the dying, dead, and grieving in faith communities.

Appendix C—Milestone 3 Design Workshop Report

NPO Statement

Grieving people feel isolated and underserved in communities of faith when pastors and community members are ill-equipped and unprepared to care for them.

NPO Scope

By the end of this doctorate program, a spiritual formation pilot course at Portland Seminary on grief and loss will exist. Course development will take approximately 100 hours of research and planning. Cost for all aspects of project development range between \$750 to \$1000 over the course of three years. Course boundaries and expectations are determined by Portland Seminary.

NPO Context

The ministry setting for my NPO is Portland Seminary, a “Christ-centered, church-focused, culturally relevant, spiritually intentional, biblically based, broadly seminary” located in Portland, OR. The course will invite ministry leaders from diverse evangelical faith communities to embark on an interior journey, exploring personal experiences of grief and loss. In doing their own grief work, leaders are better equipped to care for others in times of grief and loss. The one credit course will be offered Summer of 2021 in an online, studio format. A maximum of 15 students will participate.

Root Causes

A significant root cause for my NPO is the lack of historical practices and theological understanding surrounding death and suffering. Evangelical communities lack language and consistent opportunities for holistic discipleship and worship regarding grief and loss. Theology focused primarily on themes of victory and joy provides a skewed and often inflexible

framework, making the paradox of death, or the deep sorrow *and* joy that the living experience when a loved one dies, difficult to navigate. Ignorance of this paradox is evidenced in a community's inability to compassionately, effectively, and sustainably care for those who are grieving.

Definition of 'Done'

Ministry leaders who identify and navigate their own grief stories experience internal transformation evidenced in an increased ability to be present with others in grief and loss.

Three Big Ideas

Three big ideas for focused course content I will prototype include:

- recovering from grief and loss, an experiential journey
- embracing our humanity to better live with grief and loss
- grief and loss through the lens of story and creativity.

Three Napkin Pitches

NP #1:

Big Idea: Spiritual Formation Course- Recovering from Grief and Loss

Audience: Enrolled students at Portland Seminary

NPO: Grieving people feel isolated and underserved in communities of faith when pastors and community members are ill-equipped and unprepared to care for them.

Benefit: When ministry leaders do their own grief work, they are better equipped to care for others in grief and loss.

Approach: Primary text- The Handbook of Grief Recovery by James and Friedman.

Incorporate experiential opportunities within triad groups to walk through the process laid out in the text.

Risks: Pushback from students because it is an uncomfortable topic, pain avoidance/deference, course becomes a therapy group

Assumptions to test: Few ministry leaders navigate personal grief well.

Benchmarks of success: Ministry leaders are able to name and navigate personal grief, as well as be more attentive to the grief of others in their small group.

NP #2:

Big Idea: Embracing Our Humanity through Grief and Loss

Audience: Enrolled students at Portland Seminary

NPO: Grieving people feel isolated and underserved in communities of faith when pastors and community members are ill-equipped and unprepared to care for them.

Benefit: When ministry leaders do their own grief work, they are better equipped to care for others in grief and loss.

Approach: *The Handbook of Grief Recovery* by James and Friedman, accented with David Benner's *Spirituality and The Awakening of Self* and DeLeo's *Present Through the End*. Incorporate experiential opportunities within triad groups to walk through the process laid out in the text.

Risks: Pushback from students because it is an uncomfortable topic, pain avoidance/deference, course becomes a therapy group, others centered vs. self-centered.

Assumptions to test: Few ministry leaders navigate personal grief well.

Benchmarks of success: Ministry leaders are able to name and navigate personal grief, as well as be more attentive to the grief of others in their small group.

NP #3:

Big Idea: Grief and Loss Through the Lens of Story and Creativity

Audience: Enrolled students at Portland Seminary

NPO: Grieving people feel isolated and underserved in communities of faith when pastors and community members are ill-equipped and unprepared to care for them.

Benefit: When ministry leaders do their own grief work, they are better equipped to care for others in grief and loss.

Approach: Primary text- The Handbook of Grief Recovery by James and Friedman. Utilize aspects of Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Incorporate experiential opportunities within triad groups to walk through the process laid out in the text, implementing creative opportunities such as drawing, painting, collage, poetry, and song from various cultural traditions.

Risks: Pushback from students because it is an uncomfortable topic, pain avoidance/deference, course becomes a therapy group, "I'm not an artist" mentality

Assumptions to test: Few ministry leaders navigate personal grief well.

Benchmarks of success: Ministry leaders are able to name and navigate personal grief, as well as be more attentive to the grief of others in their small group.

Design Workshop Stakeholders

Five seminary students participated in my design workshop: two alumna (MASF, Spiritual Direction certification in progress) and three current students (MASF, MDiv, MATS).

All were women who serve in various ministry contexts, their ages ranged from late 20s to mid-50s, and they're geographically scattered in states across the Pacific Northwest and South.

1x1 Interviews

I interviewed two men associated with a local seminary. One is a professor. The other is an admissions counselor and current Doctor of Ministry student.

Annotated Bibliography

Churn, Arlene Rev., PhD. *The End is Just the Beginning: Lessons in Grieving for African Americans*. New York, NY: Random House, 2003.

Dr. Rev. Arlene Churn is an ordained Baptist minister and grief counsel specialist. Born from personal grief and loss, she utilizes testimonials and wisdom curated specifically from and for African American readers. Dr. Churn highlights the need for contemporary culture to reclaim historical traditions. She notes how grief varies depending on circumstance. She further highlights the importance of mourning rituals and cultural context. Poetry and story are woven throughout the text. She concludes each chapter with "lessons of healing" and "healing words." A significant challenge within a seminary that is comprised primarily of dominant culture students, is hearing voices from other cultures and backgrounds. Churn's words will help expand student's imagination regarding grief within the African American experience.

DeLeo, Kirsten. *Present Through the End: A Caring Companion's Guide for Accompanying the Dying*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2019.

With more than 20 years as a counselor and spiritual trainer, DeLeo draws from a well of experience and research to provide reflective and practical steps to care for those

who are dying. Though she comes from the Buddhist tradition, the contemplative practices presented are universal in application and can be extrapolated to situations where loss of any kind has occurred. DeLeo notes, “When people experience deep suffering, what helps them most of all- more than anything we can say or do- is *how we are*. What matter most is love: being a loving, caring, presence for the dying person.”¹ Many in our culture do not know how to simply be present in suffering, grief, and loss. This text helps bring a heightened awareness to our internal posture, which is reflected in our external posture, whether that be when navigating personal loss or loss experienced by others.

James, John W. and Friedman, Russell. *The Grief Recovery Handbook (20th Anniversary Expanded Edition)*. New York, NY: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2009.

Born out of personal grief and research, the authors of *The Grief Recovery Handbook* provide a comprehensive guide for navigating loss. James and Friedman are founders of the Grief Recovery Institute and have been working with grieving individuals and bereavement professionals for over thirty years. The book invites readers to examine and explore unresolved grief, so as to regain a sense of well-being through open hearted living. The expanded edition examines a variety of losses for contemporary readers, such as death, job loss, declining health, trauma, and faith. This resource facilitates personal reflection and encourages practical action steps, both of which are valuable in a spiritual formation course.

¹ Kirsten DeLeo. *Present Through the End: A Caring Companion's Guide for Accompanying the Dying*. (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2019) 13.

Smartt, Lisa. *Words at the Threshold: What We Say as We're Nearing Death*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2017.

Lisa Smartt is a linguist, poet, and educator. As her father neared the end of his life, she transcribed his final words, noting how his language transformed closer to his death. This made her curious, causing her to research what others say near life's end. Her book is the first systematic study of end-of-life conversations. It is comprised of data collected from the United States and Canada. She discovered the language used near death is filled with metaphor and can often be confusing for those listening; in many ways, Smartt deems these utterances to be a new language. When considering grief and loss, story is key. Most stories are infused with metaphor. Learning to listen to and acknowledge truths spoken through metaphor gives dignity to those walking in grief and loss. Components of this text will be helpful in identifying nuance in the grief journey.

Taylor, Barbara Brown. *When God is Silent*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998.

Barbra Brown Taylor is an author, teacher, and Episcopal priest who has served as faculty at a number of religious academic institutions. The content in *When God is Silent* was originally presented as a lecture series for seminarians, professors, and lay people, at Yale Divinity School in 1997. God's silence is times of grief and loss can be deafening. Taylor encourages readers to thoughtfully cut through the noise of society, the constant barrage of words, and attune their ears to hear God anew in silence. Her words are directed specifically to preachers, an invitation to contemplate the limits and limitless

possibilities contained within language, and how our words are more accentuated with silence. Having such knowledge is vital when caring for others in times of grief and loss. Excerpts from this book may be helpful in my course development.

Appendix

Summary of the Design Workshop

I hosted my virtual Design Workshop on November 7, 2020, from 9am to 3:30pm PST. I had five seminary students participate: two alumna and three current students. All were women who serve in different ministry contexts.

We opened the workshop with a welcome, introductions, and prayer. We then set interaction ground rules. The NPO was reviewed and edited. I led the participants through three brainstorming activities to define our target audience, identify what constituted an “ideal state” and steps to achieve that state, prioritize identified values/ideas for prototyping consideration. We then developed Napkin Pitch ideas; the goal was three Napkin Pitch ideas, but based on valuation of themes, context (Portland Seminary), and content (Spiritual Formation course content), we focused closely on two primary prototypes focusing on “What might be included in a spiritual formation course on dying, death, and grief?” Lastly, participants answered closing reflection questions. We concluded the workshop on time and in prayer.

Working NPO: Grieving people feel isolated and underserved in communities of faith when pastors and community members are ill-equipped and unprepared to care for them.

Napkin Pitch #1: Course Title: Attending to Grief and Loss

Primary themes and subthemes to be examined and incorporated into course content, in order of priority, not in order of actual presentation:

- Presence: empathy and listening, embodied witness to a variance of emotion
- Layers of grief: light and dark, shifting of grief over time, embracing the messiness, stepping away from traditional stages.
- Permission to grieve: permission to be present (or not), respecting boundaries, acceptance
- Identity: changing identity, how do others see those grieving, how do they see themselves
- Community: Integration in community throughout grief is goal, importance of food (pass the casserole stage) and time with others at the table, discovery of hope.

Napkin Pitch #2: Course Title: The Power of Story and Metaphor in Dying, Death, and Grief

Possible metaphors: Ocean, Seasons, Dismemberment, Journey, Tunnels, “Psychotic tornado”

Same primary themes, as noted above.

Success benchmarks:

- Ministry leaders identify and navigate their own grief stories.
- Personal theology of grief developed or refined throughout the semester
- Ministry leaders have increased understanding regarding the complexities of grief and support best practices.

- Progression of understanding and internal transformation as communicated in assignments.

Further Research: Ministry of presence (holy listening), especially in end-of-life matters; *Memento-mori* activities; how do creative practices facilitate transformation/understanding regarding prioritized themes; dangers of unprocessed grief; if possible, visit hospice center for in-depth perspective; transition of identity/transformation.

Design Workshop Activities

Activity #1- Empathy Map

Who is our target audience? Draw a person's head on your cardstock and give them a name:

- The ministry leader - especially the one who teaches/leads other leaders
- A congregant who has recently lost a spouse
- A ministry leader who is grieving the death of her mom
- A congregant who is grieving the loss of a loved one.
- A person who is moving through the traumatic loss of his daughter

What is this person hearing?

- It's their job to get them past this
- You can't bring your grief to your ministry work.

- “Everything will be Ok.” “He is in a better place.” He is rejoicing with Jesus.”
- Bible verses, cliches, silence.

Feeling?

- Overwhelmed / I need to get this right / I’m uncomfortable /
- Helpless, angry at the person who died, angry at the world, sad, overwhelmed, alone
- Sorrow, despair, numbness, anger.
- Grief, exhaustion
- Anger - exhaustion - a disconnect - deep pain

Thinking?

- I need to say the right things/ what I say matters
- “I’ve got to stay happy, positive.” “I can’t talk about my feelings... I will burden others.”
- What if? Why her? Could I have changed something? The last conversation we had
- “Life is over.” “I need help.” “I have questions.” “I want to be left alone.”
- I’m too busy to deal with it now. I have to wait to grieve until I have time. I have to be strong.

Seeing?

- The pain of the survivors and the lack of ability to help / The community needing to be protected or stay apathetic
- People living their “normal” lives as if nothing happened.
- Awkward smiles, downcast glances, minimal eye contact.
- Tasks are piling up. Others going on with their lives unaware of the pain.
- Seeing them everywhere

Doing?

- Visiting / organizing food / being busy and encouraging the mourner to find joy
- Stay busy. Acting normal.
- Isolating or over functioning and doing for others
- Busy work then total exhaustion, unable to do anything - reconnecting to his art to help process - sitting outside
- Work as usual, some church events, acting fine/normal.

Saying?

- As Christians, we have hope. We don’t have to despair or grieve deeply.
- “I’m doing okay.” “Everything’s good.” “I don’t need anything.”
- Platitudes / scripture / “right” words / thinking words matter
- I’m OK! I’ll be fine! I will never get over this.

What does this person want?

- To be seen - to be known that they are not ok right now
- To remember and honor her mom while being faithful in her ministry
- Help with helping. Maybe someone else to do this :) Tools (complex grief, ambiguous grief).
- Answers, pain to go away
- Presence, someone to be with them. A listening ear.
- Someone to listen to him, even (or especially) if the questions or thoughts are hard or taboo.
- Safe space to grieve
- To know their grief doesn't mean they are "going crazy" or a bad Christian

What forces are motivating this person?

- The desire to take away the pain they are seeing
- Pain and anger a need to have the pain stop - a need to move back into "normal"
- A sense of responsibility; a desire to do the right thing
- Trying to be a "good" Christian. Not being a burden to others or making others feel uncomfortable.
- Guilt
- Shame
- Out of control
- Get it over with-urgency-discomfort/disorientation
- Grief and hope.

- These vary based on where in the process the griever is - it later changes to wanting to not be the “grieving, downer Debi”

What can we do to support this person?

- Just be there - sit with them, share a cup of tea or coffee - listen to them - offer to run errands
- Listen, give them time and space to process, our presence.
- Give them permission and a place and time to grieve; listen.
- Determine how much or how little contact or engagement they want, don't overwhelm them, let them know that their pain (and loved one) are not forgotten.
- Help them understand grief from a different perspective - see the beauty in pain - recognize Jesus in pain - pain is not to be feared or avoided

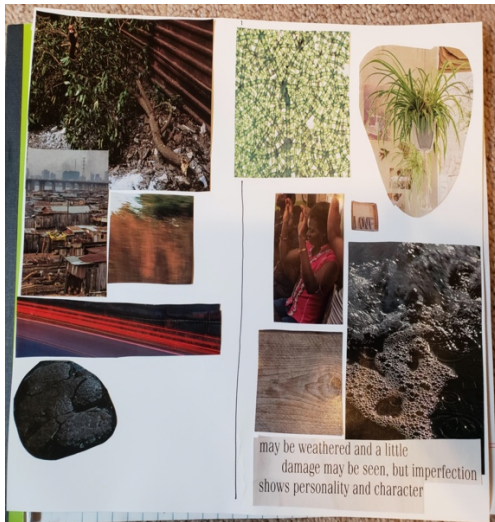
Consolidate: What have we learned?

- Learn directly from the person grieving what they want and/or need, whether it's verbal or not. Take cues from their body language and what they don't say as much as what they do say.
- People need to be accompanied through grief - for the long haul - not helped past it.
- Give time - give space - allow for grief to move as it needs to - let the person know they are ok, whatever they are feeling, listen/listen and listen some more - let them know they are not alone

- Grieving Christians need to be seen and heard, to know their grief is okay. They may need support over an extended period of time.
- Grieving people need presence, acceptance, time, a voice, to be listened to, and permission to grieve.
- <https://whatsyourgrief.com/providing-good-grief-support/>

Participant 2- above

Participant 3-



Participant 4-



Participant 5- did not choose to submit their collage

Activity #3- \$100 Test

	Item/Topic/Issue	\$\$\$ Value	Notes
1	Layers of grief - over time; differing layers of light and darkness; messiness	25	3 weeks; learning about grief and what it looks like; what is your experience of grief and what do you think of it; learn from someone who has experienced grief; a place for learning about little griefs; naming that it is okay for Christians to grieve; experiential theology
2	Permission to grieve; permission to be present (or not) - respecting boundaries; acceptance	20	2 weeks
3	Presence - empathy and listening; embodied witness to a variance of emotion	30	3 weeks. Say Back Exercise: one person talks; then the other says back what the other said. It is an exercise for practicing presence.
4	Identity - changing identity; how do other people see me; how do I see myself	15	1 weeks
5	Community - food, table, hope	10	1 weeks; the end goal - important, but not where we need to spend time
		100	

Napkin Pitch Worksheet

Big Idea #1:

Course Title: Attending to Grief and Loss JD

Course title: Grief, Loss, Hope (km)

Course title: The Reality of Grief LM

What is our approach to meet the need? How is it novel?

- Discussing, learning from, and working through grief, death, and loss in an open and uninhibited way.

- Name it. Name grief, name our inadequacies, name our discomfort, name, name, name.
- What is your experience of grief and loss? Discussion or reflection paper.
- Spiritual disciplines: journaling about losses; **momento mori**-related reflection (such as writing own obituary)

How does the user benefit? How do you benefit?

- They are better able to actually minister and support those in grief and help them see Jesus in the process - not just eternity or providence - and offer beauty and hope. They are also better able to lead their community to be better lovers of the hurting.
- Introduces them to different layers of grief - how people move through those layers so they develop empathy, understanding, and learn how to be present with someone, even if that someone is themselves -
- Awareness of their own emotions and experiences of death and loss
- Through increased understanding of death and grief, they will be able to wait with others in their own grief journeys.
- Recognizing their own blocks to grief so they can help and not hurt those grieving. Normalizes death, dying and loss.
- Gives them a way to engage and interact with others who are grieving, and know what to do, as well as what NOT to do.

How are others addressing this NPO? What sets it apart?

- Hospice and the Dougy Center address this by naming grief and making it “normal”. In christian circle, death and grieving seem to be artifacts of sin and therefore avoided.
- Others offering grief education - including WhatsYourGrief.com - It provides grief education (for both those grieving and those who care for griever - professional or otherwise). Training is secular though, and is missing the theological and spiritual component that this NPO addresses.
- In some churches, Stephens Ministry offers training for caring for people who are grieving, but is less in-depth than a seminary course. GriefShare offers grief support groups for people grieving.
- It is training for ministers and supportive congregations.
- Ministers focus on caring for others, may need support dealing with their own pain, losses etc..
- Your class is not just teaching about grief - the nuts and bones of it - but helping your student understand where they are with the grief process so that can be fully present with someone who is experiencing grief - exploring this spiritually not just secularly,
- This program is helping seminary students to understand what others may be experiencing when grieving. It’s giving them a blueprint to use, and it’s helping them understand the nuances and uniqueness of each grieving person.

Why might it fail?

- People might distract because they are uncomfortable.
- It goes against the mainstream of behavior and therefore might be hard to implement - pastors might get pushback from their community.
- Some students may not be open to discussing grief and loss in an uninhibited way, and what they experienced (the positives and negatives) from their faith community. Students may feel uncomfortable with the idea of grieving with someone else, which is what they will ultimately be doing.
- Uncomfortable topic
- Caring for grieving people is tricky; even with a 1 credit class, people may not feel fully equipped.
- Ministers focus on caring for others, may need support dealing with their own pain, losses etc. May avoid their own pain through serving roles.
- May raise uncomfortable theological questions

What assumption or hypothesis does this prototype test?

- Ministry leaders are ill equipped and uninformed about how to deal with grief in others. Their “Grief Theology” needs to be tweaked.
- The lack of understanding, and the sometimes-unconscious willingness to get down in the dirt with someone who is grieving, and truly grieve with them.
- With training, ministry leaders can become more equipped to care for people who are grieving.

What is needed to confirm or disprove that hypothesis or assumption?

- Maybe have them do a paper or power point where they walk through the steps of helping someone who is grieving - include in it why they chose the approach they used
- Student feedback, mostly, or class discussions. What they may have experienced with their faith community involving grief and loss.
- At the end of the course, when asked about their “Grief Theology”, students can distinguish a change. Maybe a before and after 1-page paper.
- Feedback: how they have changed through the course?
- Students are better able to be present to each other’s grief and losses.

Big Idea #2: Metaphors of Death

What is our approach to meet the need? How is it novel?

- A wave
- Seasons
- Dismemberment- differently able?
- Journey: “can’t go over it, can’t go around it, got to go through it”
- A perpetual tunnel.
- “Psychotic tornado” - Kelley Lynn Shepherd, *My Husband is Not a Rainbow: the Brutally Awful, Hilarious Truth about Life, Love, Grief, and Loss*

How does the user benefit? How do you benefit?

- Gives them something to hang on to and remember - comes with a new perspective.
- Metaphor offers new pictures for understanding grief - engages us emotionally and intellectually
- Offers a way in, in a roundabout way - so that if people have blocks, it may be easier to move those blocks -
- A metaphor gives a word picture to grief, loss, and death. Gives a framework for processing our story. Creative process for grief.

How are others addressing this NPO? What sets it apart?

Most follow a system - 5 stages of grief, etc. This gives it color.

Why might it fail?

- Metaphors can always get taken a different direction and it can always be made to be tied up with a nice, neat bow when part of this discussion is that there is no nice, neat bow.
- Metaphors almost always have limitations, and the student can get lost in the metaphor.
- No single metaphor will be enough.

What assumption or hypothesis does this prototype test?

- Grief is more fluid and dynamic - not a straight line. There are other ways to view death. Metaphor makes it more approachable.
- That many people need something other than tangible death to help them process or understand death.

What is needed to confirm or disprove that hypothesis or assumption?

- Have the students discuss how the metaphor informed their view of grief.
- Needs to resonate with the participants
- Discuss the positives and limitations of the metaphors.

Concluding Questions and Notes

What should I be sure to examine?

- Examine what preconceived ideas are out there.
- Examine other classes at other schools that have taught this; what was successful and unsuccessful.
- Explore the different cultures and how they grieve. Explore expectations of different cultures and churches.
- Visit a Hospice group or Dougy Center group in person. Explore different grief groups as a resource to students.
- PTSD as part of the grief process; being named, acknowledged, welcomed.
- www.whatsyourgrief.com

What are the potential blindspots that I need to explore?

- I haven't experienced deep grief. Ensuring there are people around to check me.
- Bringing in a speaker from the Dougy Center or grief group to discuss steps of being in grief group or their grief experiences; someone from different cultures or religions to discuss how they process grief/death.
- Hospice worker or grief counselor as guest speaker. Someone who deals with death daily.

What are potential pitfalls to avoid?

- Pain-avoidant society. Diving into pain is a tough place to take people.
- May be uneven. Different stages of grief and pain amongst students.
- May be rich or may be a challenge.
- Ensuring that boundaries and expectations of class are set.
- Be aware that people will be all over and carrying different things; grief is an emotionally loaded topic.
- Resources available for people who get triggered by the topic. Have a way out of taking class if they're not emotionally prepared.
- Having immediate resources; an out if class is overwhelming or help and support. Caveat in course description; class can produce pain.
- Doesn't need to be a grief group but can be an example of how to engage; a pitfall can be that class or response can get too academic.

What do I need to research? Extra areas before prototyping the course?

- Ministry of presence. Holy listening. How do we introduce this, especially to students with different degree paths?
- Memento-mori activities.
- Activities/metaphors that grief counselors or Hospice workers use.
- Tapping into arts, poetry, music.
- Dangers of unprocessed grief

1x1 Interviews Summary

Interview 1

Seminary professor

Zoom interview conducted on November 9, 2020

Take away:

- First reflect on own sense of grief and loss
- Be careful to keep course content very focused on the interior journey; it is not about pastoral leadership or ministry
- Course will likely be online: 1-credit is 45 hours of content and participation
- The student's spiritual journey is most important- thus have opportunity for students to acknowledge and process own grief and loss through experiential practices and communal engagement.

- Ask: What do I really want to accomplish and what is needed to achieve that goal? How does this make us more Christ-like? What makes grief/loss essential to our spiritual journey?
- Then build the backbone of the course by attending to detailed constraints and expectations: required reading, online forums, weekly assignments, etc.
- Less is better: pick 2-3 key things. Focus on those.
- Consider sources- utilize PDFs, sections of eBooks, specific/relevant chapters of text, video, podcasts- diversify and be mindful of timing.

Interview 2

Seminary admissions counselor, current DMin student

Zoom interview conducted on November 9, 2020

Take away:

- Best to consider grief and loss, as opposed to grief and death
- Explore core emotions: joy, fear, anger, sadness. These are the cornerstones of emotional awareness.
- What are the counter-emotions, defense mechanisms? What happens when we grieve incompletely?
- Suggest The Grief Recovery Handbook
- Also- lack of sacramental theology= loss of embodiment= loss of humanity. “Pastors aren’t equipped for humanity.” MS
- Ask: How do we invite pastors into their humanity? They have to do their grief work. Must step into ambiguity

- Story is effective in communicating the ambiguity of grief and loss. Suggestions: write own eulogy, examine/create rituals, take a panoramic view of life, incarnational living (acknowledging human limitations)

Appendix D—Milestone 4 Prototype Iteration Report

Introduction

This Prototype Iteration Report includes the summary and findings from each prototype test, reflection on the most viable prototype, and prototype testing appendices. My prototype test sessions were hosted digitally on February 27 and April 10, 2021, in concordance with project portfolio requirements.

Prototype #1 Summary and Findings

Prototype Description: Prototype #1 utilized a course description, virtual gathering, syllabus, intro lecture, reflection exercise, facilitated group discussion, and evaluation. (18)

Goldilocks quality strategy: The prototype was introduced and conducted in the format of a spiritual formation course at Portland Seminary.

Research question: Does the pilgrimage metaphor and content presentation allow space for transformation learning to happen?

Assessment benchmarks: Participants will understand content overview and course expectations upon test completion.

Prototype participant demographic description: Participants were Caucasian, female, current Portland Seminary students, who lived in the Pacific Northwest. Their ages ranged from mid-20s to mid-50s.

Things I learned: The introduction content (video, syllabus, and test session) was mostly clear, concise, and effective at communicating the goals and direction of the course. More detailed directions were needed in laying out online workload expectations. Suggestions were made for hosting a space for safe, relationship development via various course platforms. The

importance of providing both structure and flexibility within the weekly flow was communicated.

Important discovery: I learned students need particular structures and expectations in place so as to facilitate intimacy and trust in the online learning space.

Documentation: See Appendices.

Prototype #2 Summary and Findings

Prototype Description: Prototype #2 involved the concept *memento mori*, “remember you will die,” and how art and language enable us to discover life in death.

Goldilocks quality strategy: SFAD 585 Week 7 course content and the zoom link were emailed in advance. A video was shown as a springboard for integrating discussion in our zoom meeting.

Research question: Were the diverse assigned readings/podcasts/videos effective at highlighting ways to discover life in loss and death?

Assessment benchmarks: Students are able to make connections between the practice of *memento mori* and discovering life amongst loss.

Prototype participant demographic description: Participants were Caucasian, female, current Portland Seminary students, who lived in the Pacific Northwest. Their ages ranged from mid-20s to mid-50s.

Things I learned: Diverse formats for content were appreciated. New perspectives were gained as students interacted with the material and one another. The article with theological reflections received no mention of engagement.

Important discovery: Presenting complementary content in the zoom session is important in reiterating weekly concepts, and gives those who did not do weekly assignments a way to participate in discussion.

Documentation: See Appendices.

Most Viable Prototype

Both prototype #1 and #2 were viable. Utilizing diverse methods of communication, presenting content in an organized manner, and allowing for creative perspectives provided for an engaging space of formational learning. Ensuring all requirements are clearly stated is important. Providing structure and flexibility gives students freedom to share personal stories of loss and grief, while also discovering life and hope in an authentic and transformational way. One area of weakness not mentioned is incorporation of diverse voices in course content. I will work to implement such voices into the next project prototype. Overall, my prototypes were instructional, and allow me to continue to refine and develop my teaching and facilitating sacred space skills.

Appendices

Storyboards

Prototype #1

HANSEN PROTOTYPE #1	STORYBOARDED - SEMINARY SF COURSE	
<p>* include course description</p> <p>You're Invited</p> <p>Send invitation via email & social media</p>	<p>gather email addresses from RSVPs - send zoom link for scheduled day</p>	<p>Welcome people for virtual gathering -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * introductions * safe sharing guidelines * modify as needed <p>(5-10 min)</p>
<p>Begin short lecture</p> <p>(5 min)</p> <p>Screen share content</p> <p>* syllabus overview</p> <p>* intro content</p>	<p>Have participants read short poem or PDF</p> <p>(2 min)</p> <p>Roses are red violets are...</p>	<p>provide reflection questions - compare contrast - post response into shared google doc for online discussion</p> <p>(5 min)</p>
<p>gather again via zoom to debrief @ discussion board</p> <p>(10 min)</p>	<p>closing prayer / poem</p> <p>(2 min)</p>	<p>course evaluation link</p> <p>What did you like?</p> <p>What did you dislike?</p> <p>How would you describe course to friend?</p> <p>How would you improve this course?</p> <p>(5 min)</p> <p>Submit</p>

Prototype #2

HANSEN PROTOTYPE #1	STORYBOARDED - SEMINARY SF COURSE	
<p>* include course description</p> <p>You're Invited</p> <p>Send invitation via email & social media</p>	<p>gather email addresses from RSVPs - send zoom link for scheduled day</p>	<p>Welcome people for virtual gathering -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * introductions * safe sharing guidelines * modify as needed <p>(5-10 min)</p>
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Interview Script

The following are questions utilized in the test evaluation group discussion:

- What is the course about?
- What worked well?
- What didn't work well?
- What needs clarification?
- What would you change?

Documentation of Prototype

Prototype #1

Introduction Video Script:

Welcome to SFAD 585: Discovering Life through Loss and Grief: A Pilgrim's Journey

My name is Darcy Hansen. And I'll be your guide, companion, and fellow learner over the next 8 weeks. Like you, I am a Portland Seminary student. I am currently enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry Leadership and Global Perspectives program. I'm also a grad of Portland Seminary, having earned my MDiv with emphasis in spiritual direction in May of 2019. And if that wasn't enough involvement in Portland Seminary, I have also received my SD certification from this school. I absolutely love this community of learners. It has given me such hope for the church as She moves forward through these difficult days.

As a student, I noticed very little conversation either within or outside the walls of seminary and faith communities regarding death, loss, and grief. 4 years ago, I began asking questions about why that was. Those questions have led me to this moment in time.

This course is unique. First, it is part of my Doctor of Ministry project. And second, it is intended to be collaborative in that your participation is helping shape how this course might be experienced in the future.

I invite you to join me in traveling roads that every single human before us has traveled, and all who come after us will travel. These roads lead into and through loss, death, and grief. I extend this invitation with a large measure of humility, as no one has all the answers or understanding of what we will encounter along the way. Experiences of loss, death, and grief are as varied as each uniquely created human being. While there is a measure of unknowing that exists along the way, that by no means negates the need to walk the road. Indeed, we do not have a choice. If we elect not to walk it, the road will eventually come to us, and find us ill-prepared to travel well.

Over the next 8 weeks, the paths we walk will have a particular perspective. By no means is this the only perspective, but it is the one most familiar to us as Americans. We will note the landscape and experience the ruggedness of diverse terrains. We will prepare our hearts, minds, body, and souls to understand what was, is, and is yet to come. History will provide direction for the way forward. The saints of old will be the wind at our backs, and maybe at times, blow rudely into our faces.

This course is a first step, an awakening of sort, to begin embracing our own humanity. This is necessary so that we can honor the humanity of others within our lives. It is a way of reclaiming language and reimagining practices that give meaning and purpose to loss, death, and grief. It is a catalyst for conversation and hopefully a community transformer. It is a hope that when you or your loved one's experience loss and grief, they realize they are not alone, that they have a companion to journey with them along the way.

My friend, Lisa Procter, is an artist. She once shared with me that when she is working on a painting, she has to patiently notice what it is the painting needs to be. She can't force the painting to become something it isn't meant to become.

In many ways, the pilgrimage we will begin to embark upon is very similar. Though there will be some guidance, the outcomes aren't final, as they will shape and become what it needs to be for each of us as individuals. A primary pathway will be given, but options to take divergent paths will continue to be available.

As with all pilgrimages, you'll begin at the start, mostly prepared, yet ready to make adjustments as needed. You'll bring the fullness of who you are to the journey, allowing your strengths and weaknesses to both carry and shape yourself and others. You'll shed what's too heavy to carry and pick up that which is life-giving. You'll make new friendships and if needed, reconcile relationships long gone. You'll experience the inescapable reality of loss and grief as you recognize and embrace the limits of your humanity.

It is my hope though, that by journey's end, you will also experience life in new ways. And you will, like countless other pilgrims, discover the transformative beauty of wholeness through wonder, and life through loss.

As we embark on this journey, I share these words with you from the poem "Holy Ground" by TRH Blue.¹ May they be an encouragement for you to keep stepping even when you're not quite sure where to step next.

¹ TRH Blue, "Holy Ground," Notesontheway.com (shop), accessed May 2, 2021.
https://www.notesontheway.com/products/poem-25?_pos=1&_sid=98c1c528e&_ss=r.

Draft Syllabus for SFAD 585:

SFAD 585: Discovering Life through Loss and Grief: A Pilgrim's Journey

Instructor: Darcy Hansen, MDiv, Spiritual Director

Email:

Zoom Room:

Academic Year 2020-2021

Summer Semester 2021

Course Start Date: May 10, 2021

Course Completion Date:

Credit Hours: 1

Prerequisites: None

Zoom Sessions:

May 13

May 20

May 27

June 3

June 10

June 17

June 24

July 1

Course Description

As pilgrims, we will spend the next eight weeks traveling ancient and contemporary roads of loss and grief. We will explore death from the perspectives of Western culture and Christian mystics. We do not travel alone; we have one another, as well as the wisdom of others who have walked these roads before us. We will companion one another in our grief stories as we move proximate to loss in our lives. Mystery, silence, and movement accompany us into the unknown of God. Recognizing the limits of our breath and body invites us to become more human, more like Jesus, along the way.

Course Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Gain historical perspective of the evolution of death care practices in Western culture.
- Develop language for communicating realities of loss and grief.
- Embrace their humanity by recognizing their own mortality via the practice of *memento mori*, “remember you will die.”
- Attend to their physical limits by engaging in embodied activities.
- Discover life by embracing loss through contemplative practices.
- Practice giving and receiving the gift of presence for one another.

Required Texts

Peterson, Christiana N. *Awakened by Death: Life-giving Lessons from the Mystics*. Minneapolis, MN: Broadleaf Books, 2020.

Wolfelt, Alan D. PhD. *The Handbook for Companioning the Mourner: Eleven Essential Principles*. Ft. Collins, CO: Companioning Press, 2009.

Other assigned PDFs, videos, or podcasts.

Suggested Texts

Cottrell, Stephen. *Striking Out: Poems and Stories from the Camino*. London, UK: canterbury Press Norwich, 2018.

Devine, Megan. *It's OK That You're Not OK: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture that Doesn't Understand*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2017

James, John W. and Friedman, Russell. *The Grief Recovery Handbook: The Action Program for Moving Beyond Death, Divorce, and Other Losses*. New York, NY: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2009.

Lane, Belden C. *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Richardson, Jan. *The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times of Grief*. Orlando, FL; Wanton Godspiller Press, 2016.

Course Assignments

The course consists of the following assignments that help to achieve the course objectives:

Attendance & participation in weekly Zoom sessions (30% of grade)

- Active participation in 8 weekly zoom sessions is required.
- If you cannot attend a zoom session, please let the professor know in advance so alternate participation arrangements can be made.
- Absences, tardies, and non-involvement in these sessions will be reflected in your grade and could result in failing the course.

Weekly Embodied Activity (10% of grade)

- Each week, as you are able, you will do 30 minutes of an embodied activity. This can include walking, hiking, visiting a labyrinth, yoga, going up and down stairs, etc. If you already engage in embodied movement, then you are encouraged to try new routes or engage in unfamiliar activities.
- You will report and submit your weekly activity and duration in your weekly journal entry through FoxTALE.

Weekly Forum (20% of grade)

- Each week you will submit a written post as a way of consolidating thoughts from interactions with your weekly reading. The post is due on Thursday by 11:55 PM PST.
- Posts should be approximately 300 words in length.

- There will be a couple writing prompts to highlight areas of interest. You can use those or highlight something else you discovered during the week.

Weekly Reflection Journals (10% of grade)

- Each week you will submit a journal entry where you can, in a “safe space,” process what you are learning, ask questions, and make connections between learning and life experiences. Each entry will be graded on depth of thought and level of engagement with course material.
- Each entry should be approximately 150-250 words in length.
- You will include a brief summary sentence of your embodied activity and duration in your journal entry.
- You will submit your journal entry through FoxTALE each week.

Final Project (30% of grade)

- You will prepare a final project as a way of consolidating your learning.
- There will be options as to how you approach this. Details will be given in the FoxTALE course site.

Allotment of Course Hours

Zoom 8 hrs

Online forum post 8 hrs

Assigned reading, viewing, listening 18 hrs

Weekly walk 4 hrs

Weekly journal 4 hrs

Final project 3 hrs

Total 45 hrs

Course Schedule

Weekly flow: Monday- Sunday (approximately 5.25 hours per week) **

- Monday- Read, listen, watch- 2 to 2.5 hours
- Embodied activity- 30 min (anytime between Monday and Sunday)
- Wednesday- 45 min
 - 300-word forum post due 11:59PM PST
 - Skim 4 classmates posts in preparation for Thursday's Zoom
- Thursday- Zoom- 50 min- 7:30-8:20am PST
- Sunday- Journal- 30 min
 - 150-250-word **journal entry with activity log due 11:59 PM PST**

**All times are approximate as some students work more quickly and more slowly. If at any time the workload is excessive, too minimal, or not engaging, please let me know and adjustments can be made. Remember, this course, in and of itself, is becoming, as you are becoming. Your feedback along the way matters.

Zoom Session Lecture:

Introduction

Invitation to a pilgrimage:

What is a pilgrimage?

a journey, especially a long one, made to some sacred place as an act of religious devotion (<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/pilgrimage>)

Every year, thousands of pilgrims pack up to venture off to travel to one of the most famous of destinations, the *Camino de Santiago*, or the Way of St. James. Numerous paths throughout Europe lead to the tomb of St. James, in *Santiago de Compostela*, which is located in north-west Spain.² The well-worn paths of the *Camino* have been walked upon by countless Christian pilgrims since the Middle Ages. Their reasons for travel vary, but often they are in search of the sacred of God and the spiritual transformation that accompanies such an encounter.

In his reflections while walking the *Camino*, Stephen Cottrell, Archbishop of York, noted on Day 17 in his journal, “God can only be found in this step, never the one beyond it. God is never someplace else. If you think God can only be found in a particular place, you will miss God in the here and now. Even God’s darkness is the shadow cast by God’s light.”

While this course doesn’t allow us to physically travel a particular pilgrim’s path in search of the sacred, it does invite us to notice the sacred within the places in which we reside and move on a daily basis, for God is there, with each step we take.

For those who have gone on pilgrimage, you know advance preparation is imperative. That preparation includes:

Prepare your itinerary-

- Choose your destination- Your destination is still undetermined, and it may be different for each person. Uncertainty is something we will embrace along the way.

² <http://santiago-compostela.net>.

- Plan your route- your route is our syllabus, but you are also asked to pick a route near your home to walk each week or a physical action to practice. Based on your abilities, you choose.

Prepare your body-

- We will be discussing death, loss, and grief. These are not easy topics. There may be triggers along the way that open up dark, tucked away spaces in your heart, and that cause visceral reactions in your body. What practices will you incorporate to navigate those? Meditation, contemplative prayer, other?
- Be mindful along the way of what is happening internally and externally. Will your chosen weekly activity need to change? If so, what is an alternate activity you can incorporate? What other supports are needed to help you successfully navigate this course?

Prepare you pack-

- What will you carry with you on this journey? What are the essentials?
- What needs to remain behind?

Prepare your soul-

- What is your purpose? Why did you register for this course?
- What is your prayer as you begin this journey?
- Start your journal. Keep it handy along the way to make notes on what you notice about yourself, culture, church, God, others. Ask questions. Be curious.
- Maintain a daily focus- we will use a visual reminder of *momento mori*- “that you will die” as our focus. You are welcome to add another focus if you’d like- it can be specific scripture, a spiritual discipline like prayer or fasting, or a visual image, such as artwork or

a picture of loved ones. If you have a difficult time choosing something, I have suggestions.

The pilgrims journey often involves specific transitions or stages along the way. Those transitions include:

1. **The Call:** The opening invitation of any spiritual journey. Often in the form of a feeling or some vague yearning, that expresses a fundamental human desire. *Something in you prompted you to enroll in this course. Name that stirring if you can. Remember you were called to this journey.*
2. **The Separation:** Pilgrimage, by its very nature, undoes certainty. It rejects the safe and familiar. It asserts that one is freer when one frees oneself from daily obligations of family, work, and community, but also the obligations of science, reason, and technology. *Complete separation from our norms is difficult in this format. You are encouraged to tuck away or shut down as needed so you can step away from what you've known and step into the unknown.*
3. **The Journey:** The backbone of a sacred journey is the pain of the journey itself. *Physical suffering is the norm for a pilgrim.* This personal sacrifice enhances the experience and elevates the sense of community one develops along the way. *I encourage you to gently push back on the desire to avoid the pain that comes with remembered or current loss and grief. Remember, you do not travel alone. Others are here to hold your pain and help carry your suffering.*
4. **The Contemplation:** Some pilgrimages go the direct route, right to the center of the holy of holies, directly to the heart of the matter. Others take a more indirect route, circling around the outside of the sacred place, transforming the physical journey into a spiritual

path of contemplation. *There will be space for you to make choices of what you will read and watch, what you will consider as you navigate your way through this course. You are encouraged to be curious in your contemplation, to ask questions, and to share reflections along the way.*

5. **The Encounter:** After all the toil and trouble, after all the anticipation and expectation comes the approach, the sighting. The encounter is the climax of the journey, the moment when the traveler attempts to slide through a thin membrane in the universe and return to the Garden of Origin, where humans lived in concert with the Creator. *I don't know what this will look like for each of you. In fact, I can't even guarantee such an encounter will happen. My hope is that we will host space for one another in such a way that awakening to the presence of God in our loss and grief is increasingly possible.*
6. **The Completion and Return:** At the culmination of the journey, the pilgrim returns home only to discover that meaning they sought lies in the familiar of one's own world. *This is where your final project comes to play. Through poetry, song, dance, written or spoken word, collage, painting, etc., you will communicate the journey you have taken, including where you began, what transpired on your journey, and how you transformed upon your return. What did you discover? What did you embrace? What did you lament or celebrate along the way? Who did you meet? Who did you forgive? Your journal entries will help make this final project meaningful and manageable.*

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/sacredjourneys/content/pilgrimage/>.

Lecture:

Approximately 12 months ago, the world was thrown into a pandemic wilderness. Isolation, uncertainty, death of loved ones, and loss of many things have prevailed. People have had to learn to be still, to wait, and to trust in systems beyond our control. Our death adverse culture has had the threat of death breathing down our necks each and every day, in a way that we never really noticed before. We are seeing gaps in our healthcare, funeral, and faith systems. The pandemic is forcing us to wrestle with loss and grief daily. It feels unrelenting because we are ill-prepared to navigate the wilderness of loss and grief.

How did we get here? How do we move forward in a way that honors the humanity of one another rather than becoming numb to the mounting death count of the people and things experiences we love and treasure?

All good pilgrims know it is important to know the landscape in which they will travel. They research, know the history, and trust the journey to reveal new truths. Our primary texts include *Awakened by Death*, by Christiana Peterson, and *The Handbook for Companioning the Mourner*, by Alan Wolfelt. Both give language to historical contexts and practices regarding death care and grief. I'll add some video and articles along the way, as well. Other resources will be available, though not required. I have a list of crowd sourced songs pertaining to loss and grief so if you want to make a play list on your favorite streaming platform you can. I'll also share some social media accounts and my ever-growing bibliography. Our weeks will have a particular rhythm to them, which, I hope, will be a known amongst unknowns. As pilgrims, we will work together, share ideas, ask questions, and hold each other's realities of loss and grief with open hands. Are you ready? Do you have any questions before we get going?

Review syllabus. Required text. Suggested text. Weekly rhythm.

Time for questions

Zoom Session Video: Not included for confidentiality purposes.

Prototype #2

Content emailed before zoom session:

- Listen- <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/731/what-lies-beneath/prologue-2> (13 min)
- Watch- Netflix: Worn Stories, Limited Series, Episode 2, (30 Minutes).

<https://www.netflix.com/watch/81192023>

OR if you do not have Netflix, LISTEN to:

<https://griefgratitudegreatness.com/episodes/2019/07/16/kimberely>

- Read: https://www.christianflourishing.com/blog/2018/8/8/john-behr-dying-to-live-or-how-to-become-a-human-being?fbclid=IwAR0ErsajT0IbQmmczlIR_1tU_OBKwQUiVpDjsaPlhfhRea7KjZD8JWRSkOg

A theological perspective on Christ and his humanity and our invitation to become increasingly human.

Revised course syllabus, which meets all Portland Seminary syllabus requirements, was also emailed in advance.

Zoom Session Presentation: See attached PowerPoint

Zoom Session Video: Not included for confidentiality purposes.

Overall Group Discussion Takeaways

- Give clear expectations.
- Make sure the syllabus matches FoxTALE instructions.
- Provide structured discussion online in forums, but allow for more organic discussion in the zoom breakout rooms.
- Take care to not give more work than a 1 credit class requires.
- In zoom lectures, provide different but complementary content to what was assigned via FoxTALE in the weekly assignment.
- Things appreciated: diverse content, different spiritual practices, “movie pass” option, optional comments/responses to classmates’ weekly posts.

Appendix E—Supplemental Project Documentation

Benchmarks

Success:

- Eight to twelve students enroll before enrollment deadline for the course launch.
- Ninety percent of students have timely engagement with weekly course expectations.
- Seventy percent of students provide voluntary feedback via Google Forms at mid-term and course completion.
- Ninety percent of students who participated in voluntary feedback report incorporated one to two useful practices for grief and loss.

Quality:

- Students demonstrate understanding of historical perspectives regarding loss and grief that are provided in Peterson’s *Awakened by Death* and other weekly content as measured by self-reflections captured in weekly online posts (300 words) and journal entries (150-200 words) answering the questions “What new perspective did you gain?” and “What made you uncomfortable or comfortable and why?”
- Students incorporate basic and complex loss and grief language into self-reflection assignments, i.e., evidence of terms such as death, dying, sorrow, grief, mourning, pain, etc., are used within story, metaphor, and simile, to communicate internal realities of external events.
- Students embrace embodied activities (minimum of 30 minutes per week by walking, running, gardening, sitting, hiking, meditating, etc.) to notice the limits of their humanity

and existence. These are demonstrated through weekly self-reflective journal entries throughout the entirety of the 8-week course.

- Students incorporate *memento mori* practices to develop an understanding of their own mortality. This is accomplished weekly by developing and engaging with their loss and grief timeline; curating a playlist of loss and grief music; writing poetry or story; and reflecting upon material items that represent memories of deceased loved ones throughout the entirety of the 8-week course.
- Students practice listening to and sharing personal stories of loss and grief to notice one another's humanity. They implement the eleven key principles laid out in Wolfelt's *The Handbook for Companioning the Mourner* during twenty-minute small group meetings during weekly class sessions.

Student Evaluations

Mid-Term Evaluation

Upon initial review of the course syllabus, what did you expect from this course?

- Discovery of life through loss, pain and grief.
- I was hopeful to walk through what it looks like to companion those in their grief, while also looking at the impact death has on an individual, a community and a culture.
- A coerced deep dive on suffering and death. I felt hesitancy - a "am I really gonna go there?" kind of posture.
- I liked the idea that life can come from loss and grief. I expected to explore deeper and perhaps different ways of dealing with loss and grief.
- Even after reading the syllabus, I wasn't sure what to expect. Not in a bad way, but in a way, I didn't know what to expect from God.
- I expected a bit more direct education about grief and loss....but, this has been more internal work and I have been surprised with HOW MUCH I have gleaned!!!
- I expected to learn about loss and grief

To date, how have your expectations been met or not met? 7 responses

- My expectation is been met and I appreciate the class a lot.

- Above and beyond
- I'm very grateful for the invitational tone of the class, and the richness of the readings (both the assigned readings and the content shared in class). We have been welcomed to process and explore new insights and understandings.
- Learning about different aspects of loss and grief from history has been an enjoyable experience. I admit, I'm still looking for more ways to go deeper in this area.
- Far exceeded.
- met
- Each week we examine different ways to engage with loss and grief

What, if anything, has caught you off guard or taken you by surprise? 7 responses

- The reality of death in videos and interviews
- I have appreciated how reflective this class has been, I have also LOVED the exercise. So many practical tips, putting together a playlist, practicing embodiment and many more.
- New awareness, the sense of an internal shifting, perhaps the beginnings of some healing.
- Nothing, yet, but there's still four weeks to go.
- Nothing yet other than how death has not been on my radar at all.
- I would love a bit more direction when we are sent off to break out rooms. I have a great group so we have done ok but each of us would like more direction
- I'm surprised that regardless of where we are in life, loss and grief are always just below the surface

End-of-Term Evaluation

Regarding weekly reading/listening/viewing content, what was most impactful? What was least impactful?

- I really enjoyed our textbooks.
- Most impactful: Companioning the Mourner, TEDTalks on grief, Dr. Grayson article, the NY Times interactive article on Covid. Least impactful: I've honestly enjoyed all of the content so far.
- Companioning the Mourner was the most impactful. I'm not sure there was anything that was least impactful (I know that's not helpful)
- The campaigning book was great! The Ted Talks awesome! The Awakening by Death-least impactful
- Most impactful was Kimberly Dixon's talk in Grief, Gratitude and Greatness.
- I was most impacted by listen to others stories of grief.
- Handbook for Companioning the Mourner

- Most impactful were the two books we read because they were both great but had different approaches and the TEDx talk by Nancy Berns. The least impactful was the platinization video for me as it was hard to watch
- Most impactful were the two TED talks. I appreciated the openness of the presenters. The least helpful for me was the article from Behr.
- The Handbook for Companioning was incredibly helpful as well as listening and holding one another's stories. The book Awakened by Death was difficult for me to stay engaged with. I found some components of the reading incredibly fascinating while other parts felt disjointed from the context of the course.
- Companioning Book - most impactful
- Chagall at Tudeley, Thalequah's 17 days and 1000 miles were both very impactful.

Was there enough variety in course content format (podcasts, articles, text books, videos, etc)? Which format did you prefer most or least?

- I enjoyed all the formats; I loved the variety.
- Yes! More so than most classes I've taken over the last 2 years. I am not sure that I could name just one format that I enjoyed the most because they each offered a unique perspective.
- I would have enjoyed more podcasts, maybe just for "extra resources". I think I prefer articles the least
- Podcasts, videos were the preferred but there was a good variety.
- I liked the variety and found each contributing to my learning.
- The variety was ideal. I loved the podcasts. Hearing others talk about their grief opened my heart to my own.
- Yes, loved the variety, esp. Chagall at Tudeley
- I did like the variety in content. I liked having the larger chunks to read in the books and the videos the best. The podcasts were my least favorite.
- The variety was good. I liked all the formats.
- Yes! I really enjoyed the various modes of information. I enjoy podcasts a lot because you can hear the tone and influx in a person's voice.
- yes. least preferred online articles - enjoy writing in books my reactions and thoughts
- There was excellent variety.

Regarding course themes and spiritual practices, what was most impactful/transformative for you? What was least impactful/transformative?

- I have really enjoyed the embodiment activity, connecting my body and my mind is really impactful and helps be grief and work through things. But I have also enjoyed the looking at cemetery's, memento more playlist, the journal as well.

- Most impactful: the attention to weekly embodied practice, the tangible symbol of memento mori, and the emphasis on moving through, not beyond, grief. Least impactful: I honestly can't think of any content that was not thought-provoking or meaningful in some way.
- Memento Mori, specifically the playlist was the most transformative. I think the embodied activities were the least impactful for me, but not because they weren't helpful, I think because walking into year 4 of seminary these are things, I've become accustomed to anyways.
- The weekly journaling was more impactful. The daily memento mori was the least.
- the practice of remembering with an eye to what God was/is doing with it.
- The cultural perspective of death and the embodied experiences were the most impactful. The combination of fear of death and social justice issues was probably the least transformative, but was still very helpful.
- Memento Mori (most), plastination (least)
- I liked the idea of memento mori and how we kept coming back to reflect on that throughout the course. And the poems and readings brought up during our Zoom sessions. I can't think of a theme or practice that was not impactful or transformative.
- The most impactful theme was the journey made with other pilgrims. For me, this theme set the stage for being able to bond quickly and share deeply.
- I found the topic of burial practices throughout history to be very interesting. Hearing the personal stories of losing parents to COVID and experiencing violence and loss were very impactful. I do not have these kinds of stories in my life, so to hear the pain and anguish of others was heart wrenching.
- Our guest speaker and the article about the school shooting Austin forgot and the videos of the nurses working in COVID units was impactful. Untimely deaths are the ones I have the most trouble accepting. Practicing memento mori was the most transformational.

If this course was offered in a 15-week format, what topics/themes would you like to see covered or expounded upon? Or deleted/removed?

- Burial Practices Across Cultures, mourning in England like regency era or earlier (Full morning, half morning, Clothing colors length of time for different family members and relationships, what was permitted at each stage). Euthanasia, Capital Punishment, Miscarriage or Stillbirth, abortion, Death of the mind or Body like Alzheimer's, dementia, M.S., Parkinson's, A.L.S., Etc.
- Expand on mourning/death in the home vs. outside. What the American funeral/death practices look like and how they can be reimagined.
- There is so much more around grieving that could be covered, but really the 15 week format would be more powerful to spend more time reflecting, talking, sharing vs. everything so fast.

- In a longer format, I'd like to see more about companioning others covered.
- Expound on companioning & embodied exp.
- I would appreciate more time to spend in breakout sessions with classmates. Staying in the same small groups and having space to process together was great. I would appreciate more time spent on the need to create space to grieve the lesser deaths in our lives.
- I think it would be good to explore more what lessons are to be learned from grieving and ways to incorporate those lessons more into our lives.
- I would love to hear more about other cultures and their mourning customs and burial traditions.
- companioning could be more fleshed out and challenged.
- Most of the topics and themes could be discussed over two weeks. I think a face-2-face component would be very helpful for practicing being present to one another and doing some kind of embodied activity together, visiting a cemetery near Portland maybe. Grieving a suicide is another topic that would be helpful to consider. It is prevalent enough that many of us will have been impacted by this type of death. The grief is complex.

In what way did the lectures enhance or deter from the weekly content? Is there something you would change about that time? If so, what?

- I have liked the openness and vulnerability of the lectures. Death needs this kind of space and words.
- They enhanced everything for me. To allow for a vulnerable space to be engaged in, allowed much of the material to come to life for me.
- We needed more time in our small groups. But that doesn't mean less lecture, it means more time. More weeks of class?
- Exploring more why closure is the wrong word/concept and more about moving forward and how to help others do that.
- I loved every lecture and wouldn't change a thing. Opening and closing with poetry was powerful.
- I loved them & wouldn't change the lectures
- I liked having visuals in a slideshow during the lecture time and how Darcy led from a place of authenticity and vulnerability in those through sharing her own story. I thought these were a good mix of personal story and information.
- The lectures strongly reinforced the invitation to be open to the grieving process and to practicing the disciplines of listening and space holding.
- I appreciated Darcy's vulnerability in sharing her own stories of loss. I liked that the discussion was short so we could gather in small groups.
- the lectures were really good - as was the timeframe. I would encourage Darcy to be a bit more constrained with her insecurities and raw honesty - as it pertains to teaching

because it put unnecessary doubt in the minds of the students and had us worrying about the professor instead of the content - and it was warranted because Darcy was a strong teacher with great content. On a small note - when Darcy would move her papers for the lecture they must have been near the microphone because they made a very loud noise - that could be adjusted in the future :)

- The lectures were great. I really benefited from hearing stories and examples of what a grief journey might look like.

Did you miss engaging in online discussion forums? Were the small group breakout sessions helpful? What would you keep or change about that format?

- I don't like discussion forums, they feel impersonal. I loved the small group breakout sessions; they are life giving. I think perhaps a maybe one starter question for the breakout sessions, I like the free discussion of the forum post, but would like a little more structure just one question would be enough.
- I loved the small group breakout sessions and the comforting routine of knowing who I would be connecting with on a deeper level every week. I did miss engaging in online discussion forums because so many people shared such meaningful and vulnerable reflections every week, but I usually ended up emailing or private messaging them throughout the week to share a response, and that worked out fine for me.
- I did not miss engaging in online discussions; however, I think the group would have been more impactful if there would have been more people in my group. I don't know if that was just specific to my group though. I also really liked having the ability to read everyone's posts.
- SO GLAD we didn't have to respond to online forums. Liked the small group. wanted more time in small group.
- I liked the small group breakout sessions but they were short.
- I did miss online discussion at times, but the way we were able to share in our online forum seemed like a holy space of listening to others. Turning that receiving of others into an online discussion would probably diminish the listening experience. Breakout sessions were helpful.
- No, I liked receiving classmates' posts, breakouts were good
- I really liked the online discussions and especially the breakout sessions in the same group all semester. I think I would nix the time spent having people share at the end after breakout sessions and just keep the benediction/wrap up from Darcy during that time. That would give more time for being in breakout sessions which was what I found most impactful.
- I liked the small groups more than a discussion forum. It would be great to figure out a way to make the discussion groups longer. Being an introvert, I felt I was just getting started when the breakout group ended.

- Not at all! I would much rather talk with and listen to my small group than writing and commenting.
- the small groups were great and I appreciated that we stayed in the same groups each week. Made it much easier for me to open up. I always wanted discussion direction, but Darcy felt differently and I guess I can see her point.
- I did not miss engaging in online discussion forums; it wasn't the right tool for this type of learning. I liked reading and receiving the words written by classmates without comments. I would keep the small group breakout times. It was a good practice to have no agenda except listen and be present to others. There were no questions to answer, or hide behind, we had to bring ourselves to the group and that was a good challenge.

Course Learning Outcomes: 1) Gain historical perspective of the evolution of death care practices in Western culture. 2) Develop language for communicating realities of loss and grief. 3) Embrace their humanity by recognizing their own mortality via the practice of memento mori, "remember you will die." 4) Attend to their physical limits by engaging in embodied activities. 5) Discover life by embracing loss through contemplative practices. 6) Practice giving and receiving the gift of presence for one another. In your experience, were these outcomes achieved?

- YES!
- 150%.
- I think I would have liked a clearer idea of "physical limits" in embodied activities. The other outcomes were clearly achieved for me.
- Yes and no. Not deeply as everything was so short.
- Yes.
- They were all achieved well.
- Yes, absolutely
- Yes, I feel these were met. The areas I see that might have been improved were embodied activities and contemplative practices.
- Yes. The only one I had trouble figuring out how to do and the end point of it was the embodied activities.
- yes
- Yes, but I would have like a lot more direction concerning EMBODIED AACTIVITIES. I was always a little confused if I was doing it right.
- Yes. I especially appreciated the time given to being present in small groups.

Would you recommend this course to other students? If so, why? If not, why?

- Yes. It is not spoken about nor are we usually educated as ministers and spiritual caregivers. Death, lesser deaths, grief, loss are constants in life. We need a course/space to share/Space to cultivate practices/a space for tears. This needs to be taught to everyone one planning on being in a ministry of some kind.
- Absolutely. I think this turned out to be one of my all-time favorite classes I've taken at the seminary so far, even though I wasn't sure what to expect ahead of time. In fact, I loved it so much that I signed up to take a trauma-informed course on grief in the fall. The content feels particularly timely in light of all that has transpired since Covid first started; but even beyond that, it helps give a gracious, meaningful, and integrative perspective on all of the losses we inevitably bump up against throughout our lives, whether the losses belong directly to ourselves or to a loved one. I also think you are a kind, authentic companion who successfully facilitated a wonderful learning space to practice showing up for one another the way we hope to do with others outside of the course.
- Absolutely. As pastors, chaplains, and spiritual directors we encounter death often, walking with those bereaved.
- Yes
- Yes. It's an excellent beginning to a long-neglected part of life.
- I would highly recommend this course to other students and encourage them to take it in a 15-week semester. The transformation and growth I've experienced in these 8 weeks has been challenging, but is one of the highlights of my seminary experience to date.
- Absolutely would - it transformed how I view grief
- Yes! It was so helpful to learn and walk alongside others through this course material. Everyone has their own story of grief and loss and could benefit from the space to process this.
- Yes. This type of course is sorely needed today. Unfortunately, our culture today doesn't know and doesn't seem to seek healthy ways to grieve. This is an excellent starting point.
- yes, grief and loss are not something that our culture does well, so I think we would all benefit in some way through this courser
- absolutely. It was so subtle, relatable and powerful.
- I would wholeheartedly recommend this course to other students. I think it should be required for those in the chaplaincy, pastoral ministry, and spiritual direction. It teaches us how to engage with grief, death and honor others experiences.

Any final thoughts or suggestions?

- Please, please continue to teach this. This course has been very impactful on my life and healing journey. Your openness and vulnerability during the course, has helped me

open my heart to grieving. Thank you for doing this work and following God's prompting.

- Thank you so much!
- Thank you. Thank you for giving fully of yourself in this class.
- Maybe a little more focused around grieving outside of physical deaths?
- For the future, I think it would be good to bring in the joy of remembering the dead when it's applicable.
- This course has been healing, challenging, live-giving, informative, and has changed my perspective on how I engage my own grief and how I will companion with others in their grief as well. This perspective and process is much needed and I'm so grateful to have been a part of this experience. Darcy has done an excellent job in designing and guiding this transformative experience.
- Thank you so much for providing us with a space to process our own stories of grief and loss. I had anticipated the class being more about walking alongside others and how to do that well and not anticipated how much of my own story we would touch upon. While hard at times, this was very helpful and healing!
- Thank you! I appreciated this course!
- Darcy should feel proud.
- This is one of the classes where I've felt "known" at PDX seminary.

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