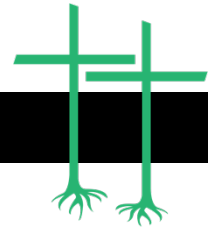


ROOTS TRANSFORMATION TEAM

Common Spiritual Issues



Week 5

How do our defense mechanisms detach us from the power of the Holy Spirit? How do our words and the words of others impact our lives? Do the sins of our ancestors still affect us? How do we help someone through grief or loss?

□ Inner Vows

○ The problem:

- Countless Christians struggle to thrive in various areas of their lives because they have chosen to prove themselves rather than admit their weaknesses and trust God.
 - **2 Corinthians 12:9–10** – But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.¹⁰ That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

○ What are inner vows?

- Inner vows are pride-statements, usually made as a means of self-protection or to prove oneself.
 - They usually come in the form of “I will never...” or “I will always...”
 - They’re usually reactions to trauma.
 - They are generally conscious commitments made in the heart but can also be subconscious.
 - They are typically formed during childhood and become part of the framework by which we live.
- “Inner vows are as multifarious as people are. Some are simple, like a boy who swears he will never sing (because of early embarrassments or a demanding parent) only years later to discover a rich voice released. Some are complex, like a girl who refuses to put her head under water in swimming, but counsel discovers it has nothing to do with early swimming experiences and everything to do with a vow never to be risked beyond her control. . . .
“People can make vows never to speak in public, or never to develop breasts, or never to grow up. Never to give not only of self but also of simple things like clothes, or to allow personal space to be invaded, or to

wear hand-me-downs. Many inner vows have to do with ambitions, or rebellions against them—‘I’ll never fail again,’ ‘I’ll be the best ever,’ or conversely, ‘I’ll never try again.’

“The most vitiating are those concerning personal relationships. Children can make other powerful determinations against parents than we have discussed earlier, which also destroy marital relationships. ‘I’ll get even with her’ (the mother or sister), later projecting a consequent unconscious need to take vengeance on all women, specifically on the wife and children. ‘I’ll never let him (brother or sister) get the best of me again’ (either in reaction to teasing or in sibling rivalry), which results in automatic hidden competitive and/or evasive mechanisms with a mate and close friends.

“Some inner vows set the being upon untenable courses that lead to breakdowns or explosions. ‘I’ll never let my temper go again; see what resulted when I did.’ Such a person thereafter may store up repressed angers until a merest spark sets off a holocaust. ‘Never again will I be unprepared when people ask me a question.’ Such a person may be tense in every group until he has figured out how to respond to every possible question. When he is put into too many situations involving too many quick adjustments, his inner vow becomes a major contributing factor to a **breakdown.**” (Sandford, John and Paula. *The Transformation of the Inner Man*. Victory House, Inc., 1982. pp.202–203.)

- Inner vows are determinations in the flesh, intended to make us safer and better people. But they rob us of the joy and ease of living “by grace through faith.”
- **“By grace through faith”**
 - **What is grace?**
 - **Grace** is the empowering favor of God that enables us to do things greater than would be possible without His favor.
 - **Grace enables us to live as God intends.**
 - **Titus 2:11–12** – **For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.** ¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age . . .

- **What is faith?**
 - **Faith** is active trust in God.
 - Faith is our appropriate response to God's faithfulness. It looks like earnestly seeking Him, knowing He is the solution to every concern.
 - **Hebrews 11:6** – And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.
 - Faith knows that God will do everything He has promised to do, and we can rest in our hearts, obeying God rather than relying on ourselves.
- **We are saved "by grace through faith."**
 - **Ephesians 2:8–9** – For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.
- **The entire Christian life is "by grace through faith."**
 - **Colossians 2:6–7** – So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him,⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.
- **Many Christians come to Jesus "by grace through faith" but then try to live the rest of their Christian life in their own strength, striving to prove themselves to God, others, and themselves.**
 - **Galatians 3:3–5** – Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? ⁴Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? ⁵So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?
- **As soon as I say, "I will never..." or "I will always..." I remove myself from the empowering favor of God's grace. Such inner vows assume that I can do anything of value in my own strength.**
 - **Proverbs 16:18** – Pride goes before destruction and a haughty heart before a fall.
 - **James 4:6** – But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."
 - **"By grace through faith" looks like:**
 - "I can do nothing without Jesus." (John 15:5)
 - "I know God has my back, even when I'm not perfect." (2 Timothy 2:13)
 - "I'm dead, and Christ lives in me." (Galatians 2:20)

- Rather than “I will never...” or “I will always...,” a proper perspective is “Jesus will never...” or “Jesus will always...”
 - Instead of “I will never treat my wife the way my father treated my mom,” one could say, “Jesus will never treat my wife the way my dad treated my mom, and I trust Him to live through me.”
 - Instead of “I will always protect myself from manipulation,” one could say, “Jesus cannot be manipulated, and He lives in me. He will be as wise as a serpent and as gentle as a dove in me. And even if I miss His voice and fall victim to someone’s manipulation, I’m okay. Jesus will clean up the mess because He is faithful. My job is to love.”
- We can crucify all our inner vows because our trust is not in our willpower or vigilance but in God’s faithfulness.

○ **How to identify inner vows**

- When a ministry recipient seems unwilling or unable to address certain wounds or lies they have believed, it’s sometimes because they have found a sense of safety in their own strength. The carnal mind fights to stay off the cross. When an inner vow has been helpful, it’s hard for a person to stop trusting it and instead trust the Lord.
- Some (not all) compulsive behavior can be the fruit of an inner vow. (This is sometimes a response to trauma. For example, “I’ll never let me house get broken into again.”)
- Sometimes an inner vow will present itself as a person explains a traumatic experience or a neglectful childhood. Statements like, “That’s when I realized I was going to have to take care of myself,” or, “So I determined never to let a man hurt me like that ever again.” Take note of statements like these.
 - Such inner vows are generally attached to lies. In this case, perhaps, “God doesn’t care about me,” or “I have to protect myself at all costs.”
- Sometimes the Holy Spirit reveals inner vows that go back even to the womb. If you feel the Lord is revealing something, share it gently and humbly, allowing the person to determine whether they feel it might be relevant. If they’re willing, pray through the issue and see if it bears good fruit.

○ **Solutions to inner vows:**

- Ministry Tool #3: Real Repentance
- Ministry Tool #8: Addressing Bitter Roots
- Ministry Tool #13: Renouncing & Replacing

☐ Curses

○ Three types of curses: Law, Authority, and Personal Belief

▪ Curses applied through the Law

- Scripture details curses that are spiritual penalties for breaking God's laws. These impersonal curses are received through sin against God and are inescapable consequences, apart from the cross.
 - "The concept of a 'curse' is found throughout the Old Testament and frequently in the New Testament. Generally, it involves a wish that 'evil may befall another.' God's use of the word curse had the same meaning as in Israel's contemporary world. All peoples understood what the word meant. The purpose of a 'curse' was to protect the terms of a covenant by expressing the penalties that would be exacted if and when the covenant was violated.

"A curse is the penalty to be paid for the breaking of a law. Thus the biblical meaning regarding God's law is 'the consequence that will occur because of disobedience and rebellion against God's law.' . . . A curse will continue to search out the family line until the penalty is paid in full. Without the cross, however, the penalty can never be paid in full."
(Kylstra, Chester & Betsy. *Biblical Healing and Deliverance*. Chosen Books, 2003, 2005. p.79.)

▪ Curses applied through authority

- God has designed earthly authority for the sake of blessing us, but sin twists that original design and uses it for destruction.
- When a parent, caregiver, pastor, teacher, government official, or other authority figure in our life declares an ungodly destiny for us, they are proclaiming a curse, even if they don't realize it.
 - "You'll never do anything right!"
 - "You're such a klutz."
 - "I give up. You'll never understand."
- Some people react by forming inner vows.
- Apart from the cross, such curses become forces against which people must fight in order to thrive as life progresses.

▪ Curses applied through personal belief.

- Similar to the above, when we speak things over ourselves or choose to believe ungodly things about our own identities, we curse ourselves and subject ourselves to the same spiritual forces against us.

- *"I'm such a failure."*
 - *"I'm such an inconvenience to people."*
 - *"God never answers my prayers."*
- Unlike curses applied from the outside, however, curses believed in the heart are often not fought. They're usually associated with hopelessness and despair.
- **For those who are dead in their sins, the only solution to a curse is death and rebirth with Christ.**
 - Such people need the gospel.
- **For the born-again Christian, curses only have as much power as we give them.**
 - Generic freedom is insufficient. You can believe that you're free from every curse but also, in your heart, still believe that you're a failure who can't do anything right.
 - We need to know our identities in Christ.
 - Such people *also* need the gospel.
- **How to identify curses:**
 - Curses often surface as people describe the problems they're experiencing—especially when describing painful childhood environments or traumas.
 - For example, "My dad never believed in me," or, "My grandmother always favored my sister and treated me like trash."
 - Statements like this are often felt because words were previously spoken to that effect.
 - Ask the person if they remember, in this case, the father or grandmother ever saying anything to that effect.
 - If so, you've found a curse. If not, there may still be self-curses believed in the heart. Either way, lies need to be replaced with truth.
 - Curses can also sometimes be unearthed through appropriate questions.
 - For example: "When did you first start having trouble in school?"
 - Perhaps the person then describes a teacher who told them that they would never amount to anything.
 - Sometimes you can read a person's facial expressions.
 - When presented with a statement about their identity in Christ, a person may grimace or flinch.
 - This is generally evidence that a lie or curse is believed in the heart, and the carnal mind is fighting the truth that's being presented.

- **Solutions to curses**

- Ministry Tool #3: Real Repentance
- Ministry Tool #12: The Forgiveness Cross
- Ministry Tool #13: Renouncing & Replacing
- Ministry Tool #14: Authority in Christ

- **Generational Issues**

- **Basic generational issues commonly encountered:**

- **Genetic predisposition** – Certain families, and even large populations, have genetic predispositions toward certain traits, both positive and negative.
 - Genetics
 - Certain physical conditions, personality traits, and behavioral tendencies can be handed down in the genetic code from one generation to the next.
 - Epigenetics
 - According to the CDC, “**Epigenetics** is the study of how your behaviors and environment can cause changes that affect the way your genes work. Unlike genetic changes, epigenetic changes are reversible and do not change your DNA sequence, but they can change how your body reads a DNA sequence.”
(<https://www.cdc.gov/genomics/disease/epigenetics.htm>)
 - In other words, through mind-renewal, habit-forming, and holistic transformation, certain aspects of your genetic code can be activated or deactivated. This applies to addictions, health, personality, and more.
 - Epigenetic Inheritance
 - Sometimes the “on” or “off” condition of these activated or deactivated genes are passed down to future generations.
 - “Epigenetic inheritance is an unconventional finding. It goes against the idea that inheritance happens only through the DNA code that passes from parent to offspring. It means that a parent's experiences, in the form of epigenetic tags, can be passed down to future generations.
“As unconventional as it may be, there is little doubt that epigenetic inheritance is real. In fact, it explains some strange patterns of inheritance geneticists have been puzzling over for decades.” (University of Utah.
<https://learn.genetics.utah.edu/content/epigenetics/inheritance>)

- Sometimes the genetic impact of trauma is passed down to future generations.
- **Ungodly modeling** – Children tend to pattern their lives more after their parents’ actions than their words. Poor modeling in the parents leads to poor practice in the children.
 - When a particular negative behavior or attitude is modeled in the home, children grow up to believe that such behaviors or attitudes are normal.
 - This poor modeling generally comes with myriad wounds in a person’s life—inner hurts from trauma, neglect, abuse, and so on. This often includes judging parents, which generally turns into *becoming* what we judge in our parents (Romans 2:1). Furthermore, our bitter root judgments defile those around us, causing us to continue reaping the seeds we have sown in judgment against others.
 - Sometimes you can’t smell the filth you’re sitting in. When sin has been normalized, the conscience is often seared. The lie is that “this is normal behavior.” Experience needs to be confronted with the truth found in Scripture.
- **Generational sowing and reaping** – Apart from Christ, we reap from our ancestors’ sowing, bearing generational guilt for sins we didn’t choose but somehow technically performed through their choices.
 - We reap the corporate ramifications—both good and bad—of the family to which we belong.
 - “There is a mystery connected with the loins that far surpasses our understanding: ‘And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for *he was still in the loins of his father* when Melchizedek met him’ (Heb. 7:9-10, emphasis added). The mystery is only partially solved when we come to understand that the Hebrew worldview is quite different from our own. They had a corporate understanding of community and family. In their culture, it was understood that what one person does affects all, including his descendants, for better or for worse. Thus, all of Adam’s descendants were negatively affected by his sin. Our own sins affect future generations. (See Deuteronomy 5:9.) On the other hand, blessings are also passed down. Jacob blessed his twelve sons (Gen. 49), and centuries later, the twelve tribes descended from them were still living out many of those blessings. But Paul’s statement about Levi seems to extend this principle farther than our Western minds can stretch. In some unexplained way, Levi blessed another through his ancestor, although he was not present at the time.” (Sandford, John and Paula. *Transforming the Inner Man*. Charisma House, 2007. Kindle Edition. Loc.1998.)

- Sometimes, the generational reaping is related to curses declared over various ancestors. The cross cancels every curse, but born-again believers can still give voice to those curses *if* we choose to believe them.
 - For example, suppose a woman’s great grandfather said to her grandmother, “You can never do anything right! You’re a failure, and everything you ever do is trash.” The great-grandmother believes those words and lives under the weight of that curse. When she later marries and has a child, she sees him as one of her many failures, perpetuating the curse through her actions and words, wounding her son with the same wound she received. Thus, the woman’s grandfather grows up, feeling like a failure who can’t do anything right, and this continues down the family line to the woman receiving ministry. This woman may be a born-again Christian, but if she believes the lie that she is a failure, then she is allowing the wounds reaped from her great grandfather’s curse to speak more loudly than the gospel.
 - Alternatively, some curses are born not from anger or hatred but from observation. If at some time in the past a series of accidents or illnesses caused a husband and a couple sons to die premature deaths, a grieved mother might say something to her daughter like, “All the men in our family died young.” Then, if that daughter’s husband dies young, she is likely to pass on the curse to future generations: “All the men in our family die young.” If a born-again Christian continues echoing that curse, he or she gives it power in their own life.
- Sometimes no curse is spoken, but a pattern is noticed that becomes a curse to the person who believes in its power.
 - Suppose a 47-year-old person’s grandfather died at the age of 49, and their father died at the age of 49, and now that person is counting down to their 49th birthday, feeling like their life is almost over.
 - Or suppose heart attacks run in the family, and the person lives in fear of their own future heart attack.
 - Such people may even think these are only genetic issues and not curses, but they still give

the lie power by allowing their expectations to be molded by hopelessness rather than the gospel. They believe their destiny is in the hands of their genetics or a family curse rather than our loving Father.

- **Idolatry, false religions, and occult involvement** – Participation in witchcraft and other such practices invites spiritual darkness into the family. This is a common entry point for familiar spirits, but it can sometimes also have broader consequences.
 - “Occultic sins create the most destructive patterns we have seen. In checking family histories in order to stop generational sin, Paula and I routinely ask whether anyone in the family has been involved in the occult. For occultic sins, the law requires, ‘I will also set My face against that person and will cut him off from among his people’ (Lev. 20:6). Immediately the law begins to operate, so that the blessing of God is withdrawn, and succeeding generations reap multitudinous ways of being cut off. In some, the male line, which, of course, carries the name, ceases—no male children are born, or tragic deaths or divorces prevent succession. In some, financial tragedy occurs in generation after generation. The telling mark of descent of harm from occultic sin is that there is a curse upon the family. Whatever shape it takes, whether deaths, divorces, finances, illnesses, accidents, or other tragedy, it is not difficult to see a pattern—a design behind these happenings. Happenstance plagues all of us occasionally, but in these families so much happens so inter-connectedly that even impartial observers are forced to admit, ‘This is too much—it can’t all be coincidence!’ Truly there is a curse that is irrevocably prescribed by law! ‘I will cut that man off.’” (Sandford, John and Paula. *Transforming the Inner Man*. Charisma House, 2007. Kindle Edition. Loc.2143.)
 - The word “**occult**” originally meant “concealed, hidden, or covered over.” A fascination with darkness generally leads to demonization, and this can have a generational impact.
 - The King James Version of the Bible coined a term that is often used among deliverance ministers: **familiar spirits** (Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 27).
 - Here the word “familiar” refers to intimate acquaintance.
 - For example, Paul and his entourage encountered a servant girl who had a spirit of divination by which she earned money for her owners through fortune-telling.
 - **Acts 16:16–18** – Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by

fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” ¹⁸ She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her.

- When a person becomes intimately acquainted with a particular demon, that demon, in turn, gets to know that person and their sphere of influence. We know from Scripture that demons don’t like leaving the places where they’re comfortable (Mark 5:10), nor do they enjoy the search for a new host (Mark 5:12). Often, they find no rest in unfamiliar places and return to the person they originally left (Matthew 12:43–44). Accordingly, if a demonized person dies, it is reasonable to expect that the demon(s) associated with that person would rather try to gain access to someone in that person’s family than try searching elsewhere. Thus, familiar spirits are often passed down through family lines.

- “Sins of the fathers and resulting curses work hand in hand with demons to create an ugly, vicious cycle. The initial sin gives an opening through which demons can oppress. Then, once established, the demons endeavor to continue down the family line, where they exert pressure on the descendants to sin in the same way as their fathers. The sin provides license for the demons to continue their oppression, causing the cycle to continue generation after generation. In many cases, demons are the agents (or mechanisms) that carry out the curses coming from the sins of the fathers.” (Kylstra, Chester & Betsy. *Biblical Healing and Deliverance*. Chosen Books, 2003, 2005. p.60.)
- “Some inconsistencies do exist in the way that generational sins operate and affect people. Sometimes certain sins may skip a generation or two. Other times, there seems to be a concentration or amplification of curses manifesting in a

particular individual. *When one descendant seems to be a focus of the iniquity, past ancestral occult involvement is often the reason.* The results can be devastating.

“We have seen occult focuses on one or more individuals in the family line, resulting in unbearable oppression. Other family members, however, will seem not to be particularly affected. The occult iniquity keeps bouncing from here to there, wreaking its havoc on individual lives.”

(Kylstra, Chester & Betsy. *Biblical Healing and Deliverance*. Chosen Books, 2003, 2005. p.76.)

- **Jesus provided a full solution to sin’s generational impact**
 - **Generational sins and curses are not part of the New Covenant.**
 - **Jeremiah 31:29–31** – “In those days people will no longer say, ‘The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’³⁰ Instead, everyone will die for their own sin; whoever eats sour grapes—their own teeth will be set on edge.³¹ “The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.”
 - **Jesus did not identify with His earthly genealogy but with His heavenly genealogy.**
 - **Mark 3:31–35** – Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him.³² A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.”
³³ “Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked.
³⁴ Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!³⁵ Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”
 - **We are invited to the same lifestyle—identifying not with our earthly genealogy but with our heavenly genealogy.**
 - **John 1:12–13** – Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

- **How can a Christian be impacted by generational issues?**
 - In a full reception of the gospel, Christians are free from all generational issues. But not everyone fully embraces all the benefits of the gospel at salvation.
 - **Genetic Predisposition** – Some Christians make excuses for sin because of their genetics. But we know from the study of epigenetics that certain environmental and behavioral changes can turn on and off certain parts of our DNA. We are not slaves to our genetics. The Holy Spirit is stronger than genetics, and with His help, we can see any unholy aspects of our genetic code deactivated and healthy parts activated.
 - **Ungodly modeling** – Again, when sin is normalized, it can lead to a seared conscience (1 Timothy 4:2). Some Christians accept the normalcy of sin as a reason to shrug it off. If we use each other as our standard of judgment rather than Jesus and the Scriptures, then we will inevitably lower our standards and experience the death that our sins bring.
 - **Generational sowing and reaping** – When we identify with our earthly family more than our heavenly family, we subject ourselves to reaping the sinful harvest of our earthly family rather than the righteous harvest of our heavenly family.
 - **Idolatry, false religions, and occult involvement** – When ancestors engaged in occult activity, they opened the door of their lives to demons (which generally try to stay with familiar people, places, and situations). When that ancestor dies, those demons move on to people who were close enough to the original person to have been defiled with unholy mindsets and actions, seeking a new place to rest. Demonic destruction continues in a family until it is confronted with the blood of Jesus through the cross. Any Christian presently partnering with an evil spirit should repent of the lies believed, renounce that spirit's influence, and probably receive deliverance ministry.
 - **Generational pride** – Even the good things have to die. No matter how good and godly our inherited traits may be, they will always be inferior to the divine nature, which God gives us by His Spirit.
 - **2 Peter 1:3–4** – His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴Through these he has

given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

- As long as we give sole or primary credit to our earthly upbringing or heritage for the godly traits we display, we will continue to live within the limits of our earthly upbringing and never quite grow beyond it to be like Christ. Additionally, we will continue to live in our own ability rather than grace.
- “Though we are positionally totally dead in Christ when we first receive Him, He has left it so that step by step we must reckon our flesh as dead on His cross (Rom. 6:4). In like manner, apparently we must see and stop generational patterns of sin by direct action in prayer. I personally cannot understand this, unless God knows we shall only be built up to stand as warriors in Him if we have to exercise discipline to claim our freedom. Perhaps it would be too much a matter of cheap grace, or too sudden a change, if everything were done all at once. Suffice it to say that the evidence for us is undeniable; we have seen countless longtime Christians suffer from generational patterns until someone by God's grace prayed effectively to stop that destruction.” (Sandford, John and Paula. *Transforming the Inner Man*. Charisma House, 2007. Kindle Edition. Loc.2173.)
- **Solutions to Generational Issues:**
 - Ministry Tool #3: Real Repentance
 - Ministry Tool #6: Applying the Gospel to Family Identity
 - Ministry Tool #8: Addressing Bitter Roots
 - Ministry Tool #12: The Forgiveness Cross

☐ Grief and Loss

- **Not every problem is a problem.**
 - Sometimes a person may come to you with feelings of numbness, despair, or depression. When these things are rooted in sin, they need to be crucified. But sometimes these things are rooted in loss. In such cases, they need to be felt and processed healthfully with a loving friend.
 - Grief is not a problem to be fixed. It's an appropriate human response to loss that must be felt.
 - Grief doesn't feel good, so people are often eager to escape it. Sometimes just hearing from a trusted friend that their feelings are appropriate and important can give them permission to let themselves feel the pain.

- **Stages of Grief**

- Everyone grieves differently and over different lengths of time, but psychologists generally agree on a few basic stages in the process (which may happen in any order but generally as follows):

- **Shock**

- “Shock is nature’s built-in cushion, insulating us from the severity of the blow. Shock is a physical sensation, a ‘spaced out’ feeling, a tight knot in your stomach, or even the loss of your normal appetite.
“You may notice that you become distressed over little things which normally would not mean that much to you. . . . Or, you may not be able to remember small, common things . . . These ‘memory blocks’ are also a normal part of the shock stage. . . . During this stage you may say, ‘I don’t know what is happening to me,’ or ‘Why can’t I do something, why can’t I think this through?’ or even, ‘Why don’t I care about others?’ All these reactions are normal for shock . . .” (DeKoven, Dr. Stan. *Grief Relief: Biblical Solutions for Overcoming Personal Loss*. Vision Publishing, 2004. pp.65–67.)
- Sometimes this stage of grief can cause conflict with others. One’s forgetfulness, stress over trivial things, and lack of care for others can offend people or create relational problems.
 - Help everyone involved understand the shock stage of grief, and give the person a little room to work out their emotions.

- **Denial**

- This could manifest as:
 - Carrying on with former behaviors as though nothing happened (like setting a plate at the table for a deceased loved one).
 - Avoiding conversation about the subject of the trauma or the circumstances surrounding it (anything that reminds the person of the trauma).
 - Isolating oneself from others who force acceptance of reality.
 - Struggling between fantasy and reality—trying or longing to continue with life as it once was, as though the trauma never occurred.
- This stage is understandable for a season but needs to be moved past. If it continues for several months, loving intervention is needed. (See “Roadblocks to Proper Grieving” below).

- **Anger**

- Anger is entirely understandable during the grieving process.
 - Sometimes this anger is directed solely at the person who caused the trauma.
 - Sometimes this anger is misdirected at others (including you, as a friend or minister).
 - Sometimes this anger is directed at God.
 - Remind the person that if God wanted things like this to happen, He never would have sent Jesus to eradicate it from the earth. Nor would He have sent you to love them through the painful aftermath.
- Anger is not sin, but bitterness is. So is revenge.
 - **Ephesians 4:26–27** – “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold.
 - In matters of mild offense, help the person process through anger before the end of the day.
 - In matters of trauma-related grief, realize that this is a psychological and spiritual process that is understandable and may take a while to overcome.
 - Help the person to express their anger appropriately, and do what you can to help them feel heard.
 - Validate the cry for justice, and help the person see what Jesus accomplished on the cross.
 - Always advise the person away from revenge and toward trusting God to make things right.

- **Bargaining**

- This stage is full of “what ifs” and “if onlies.”
 - “If only he had gone to the doctor sooner, this condition could have been caught.”
 - “What if I had been a better spouse? Maybe they wouldn’t have cheated on me.”
- Of all the stages of grief, this stage is the most appropriate to try to accelerate.
 - Remind the person that they can run themselves ragged with “what ifs,” and we just need to deal with “what is.”
- Many times, the “what ifs” are self-directed. With this can come feelings of guilt and shame.
 - Some of these feelings are legitimate (because the person sinned), and some are unfair assumptions (in which the did nothing technically wrong).

- If the feelings are legitimate (if they actually did play a role in their own trauma through action or inaction), identify the sin and express God's forgiveness to the person in Jesus' name (see John 20:23).
 - If the feelings are based on unfair self-blaming, share your objective opinion with the person. Show them love and compassion.
 - In both situations, remind them that the other person is responsible for their own actions.
- **Depression**
 - This stage of grief is different from clinical depression, which is a medical condition.
 - People in this stage of grief can feel a heaviness or confusion. Their thoughts may be foggy. And they may emotionally shut down or isolate themselves from others.
 - When short-lived, this is a healthy part of the grieving process.
 - If this has gone on for a week or two, reach out with understanding, offer prayer, and remind the person you're there for them.
 - If this has gone on for a couple months, encourage the person to seek professional help.
 - There is a difference between appropriately felt depression and unhealthy despair.
 - Hopelessness is not uncommon in this stage.
 - Let the grieving person borrow your hope. In other words, listen to them, and let them know that whether they feel it or not, you are hopeful.
 - Explain the outcome you believe is available when we place the situation in God's hands.
 - Plant seeds of truth that will hopefully help the person reframe their situation.
- **Acceptance**
 - "Sooner or later you will come to realize that your loss is real, and the pain of this reality will penetrate to your deepest self. You will sob and weep—from deep within your inner self. . . . You may even feel as though you are losing control of your feelings and emotions, but this should not be of any real concern. . . . After this grief release, much of your physical and emotional pain will fade away.

Certainly the most noticeable and obvious signs of grief, such as shortness of breath, nausea, or choking sensations, will disappear.” (DeKoven, Dr. Stan. *Grief Relief: Biblical Solutions for Overcoming Personal Loss*. Vision Publishing, 2004. pp.69–70.)

- Acceptance doesn’t mean approving. It simply means you’ve appropriately processed your emotions about the painful event.
 - You’ve most likely reached acceptance when you feel ready for the story to be a testimony that can help others.
 - You’ve most likely reached acceptance when you can identify (and are comforted by) God’s hand setting things right and are grateful for His intervention in the midst of a terrible situation.
- **Roadblocks to Proper Grieving:**
 - **Avoidance or prolonged denial.**
 - Remember that a short period of denial is normal. But when denial continues for months on end, something is wrong. Generally, the person is avoiding the grieving process, probably for fear of the pain they know will be felt.
 - Let the person know that it’s safe to grieve. The Holy Spirit is the Comforter, and He is with them.
 - **Wrong beliefs about God.**
 - Sometimes people need to think through the goodness of God and properly ascribe blame to His enemies—sin, death, and evil spiritual forces.
 - Remember, how we see God influences how we think and live. (See Week 4: How We See God)
 - Share the gospel with the person in a loving, gentle way.
 - **Wrong understanding of one’s role.**
 - Some believe they need to “be strong” for the person they lost. They adopt an inner vow and fight in their flesh to maintain appearances, sometimes suppressing grief until a later time.
 - Renounce and replace the lie (Ministry Tool #13)
 - **Having unresolved conflict with the person who was lost.**
 - Sometimes bitterness lingers in the heart and keeps a person from properly grieving.
 - In such cases, sin must be discussed—both the wrongdoer’s sin and the victim’s sinful response. It may be important to discuss justice.

- Sometimes people are mad at the departed person for leaving them or “doing something stupid” that caused their death—especially likely in cases of suicide.
- Work through the forgiveness principles taught in Week 3. (Ministry Tool #12: The Forgiveness Cross)
- **Unforgiveness toward those who took a life.**
 - In the cases where someone’s death was caused by another—whether an individual or even a company’s negligence, faulty equipment, or deliberate actions—the grieving person likely needs to forgive the faulty party.
 - Work through the forgiveness principles taught in Week 3. (Ministry Tool #12: The Forgiveness Cross)
- **Lacking a formal opportunity to express grief.**
 - Sometimes people are unable to attend a funeral. Or sometimes certain situations (like miscarriages) may be treated unceremoniously. Or sometimes a person dies in war or in a tragedy in which their body is never recovered.
 - When people miss an opportunity to formally express their grief, they sometimes continue carrying a measure of grief, waiting for an opportunity to honor the person they lost.
 - Sometimes this need can be met in a private prayer session with a trusted friend, and sometimes people find ways of meeting the need—perhaps vacationing alone to a favorite destination, holding a small memorial service, or finding a way to honor the person’s memory in a tangible way.
 - Have the person ask the Lord how to properly memorialize the lost loved one and honor their memory.
- **Solutions to Grief:**
 - Ministry Tool #5: Encouragement & Giving Peace
 - Ministry Tool #10: Presenting Jesus
 - Ministry Tool #18: Presence, Love, Patience, & Truth

MINISTRY TOOLS ASSOCIATED WITH THIS LESSON:

- ☐ **MINISTRY TOOL 14:** Authority in Christ
- ☐ **MINISTRY TOOL 6:** Applying the Gospel to Family Identity
- ☐ **MINISTRY TOOL 18:** Presence, Love, Patience, and Truth
- ☐ **MINISTRY TOOL 5:** Encouragement and Giving Peace

