



Grief & Your Household

Facing the Empty Chair at the Table

The trash is piling up. The weeds are overgrown. Your budget isn't working, and it feels like the once well-oiled family machine is now rusted and broken.

The dynamics in your home may be different and the roles may have changed, but this week's video and Step by Step exercises will help you navigate the challenges your household may be facing. You'll discover:

- **How to deal with secondary losses.**
- **What to do with your loved one's possessions.**
- **Helpful tips for parenting grieving children & teens.**



Video outline

Use this outline to write down important concepts, encouraging words, or questions you may have while viewing the video.

Difficult decisions

Dealing with "secondary losses"

Dealing with your loved one's possessions

Rethinking your identity

Accepting others' grief styles

Helping grieving children

Facing life's milestones

Step by Step

Daily comfort & encouragement



Jamie's story

"After my wife, Lisa, passed away, I remember trying to figure out just how I was going to survive. She had had her tasks, and I had my tasks, and somehow all that was thrust upon me. I was trying to deal with things that were foreign to me. *How do you maintain that house? How do you prepare for family dinners? How do you prepare for significant events?* Because she had taken charge and led those."

Feeling overwhelmed by all the changes that occur after a loved one's death is normal, but there are things you can do to make these changes feel more manageable. In this week's exercises, you'll learn how to deal with secondary losses and why everyone in your family needs patience and support.



How to grieve secondary losses

You've lost more than your loved one's companionship—maybe you've lost your encourager, the one you confided in, the person who looked up to you. You've also lost the contributions he or she made in your daily life. These are called secondary losses. For instance, maybe you've lost the person who mowed the lawn, managed your finances, or walked the dog.

Identifying and grieving secondary losses is an important part of healing. Here's a way you can do that:

1. List what you've lost in that person's absence. For example:

- My cook, mechanic, bill-payer
- The bedtime story reader, carpool driver
- The one who makes me laugh, my cuddler
- My traveling partner, event planner, retirement buddy

2. **Say your losses out loud to God, and tell Him how each loss affects you.**
3. **Ask for God's comfort and guidance on how to deal with each one.**

Come back to this exercise as time goes on and add to your list.

2 Strength for the changes

"For all the years of our marriage, my husband took care of all decisions ... and I had this fabulous freedom to not have to concern myself with those things because someone else was handling them," shares Carla.

Losing a family member can cause a shift in roles and responsibilities. You may have to take on and learn new tasks that feel overwhelming or impossible. Or maybe you no longer have certain responsibilities. But God promises He is always with us, and we can rely on His strength when we feel weak.

God's message to you

"So do not fear, for I am with you. ... I will strengthen you and help you." (Isaiah 41:10a)

"The LORD ... sustains the fatherless and the widow." (Psalm 146:9a)

"I can do all this through him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:13)

1. **What roles and tasks have you been forced to take on? Or what responsibilities do you no longer have?**

2. **How could today's verses help you?**

3. **Name a friend or family member who is grieving. What could you do to help with a secondary loss?**

Remember

- ☛ God bears the burdens of those who are most in need of His help. Turn to God when you're feeling weak or anxious.
- ☛ "God has certainly called me to grow in some areas. He hasn't called me to do *everything*; He's called me to do *some* things. And I need to intentionally press into the Lord so I can do what I need to do," says Carla.

3 God will meet your family's needs

Each of your family members has unique needs right now. But rest assured that God will meet these needs. He knows what is best, and He often provides just what we need through other people. These GriefShare members share how God met their families' needs:

- Michael: "God provided an unexpected bonus at work."
- Maribeth: "He provided counselors to guide me when I was struggling [to start a new career]."
- Carla: "My kids recently developed an interest in hunting. God provided men to take my kids hunting."

God's message to you

"And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus."
(Philippians 4:19)

"A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling." (Psalm 68:5)

"For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" (Jeremiah 29:11)

1. **List some family members and the needs they have right now.**

2. Use this space to ask God to help them with these needs (and your needs too).
3. If you were to take these promises from God (today's verses) to heart—and remind yourself of them daily for a week—how do you think that would help your worry or anxiety?

Remember

- God has compassion for you and wants to help you and your family.
- God often provides for your needs through other family members, friends, neighbors, and even through people you've never met.



3 financial and legal tools

On top of changing household responsibilities and roles, you might also be struggling with financial and legal concerns. These downloadable worksheets will help you get organized and know what to do next.

1. **Financial affairs: Steps to take after a death**

This helpful checklist includes steps to take, organizations to contact, and items to gather/prepare for handling financial affairs after a death.

2. **Budget worksheet**

With this detailed budget worksheet, you can track your spending, prioritize expenses, and stay out of debt.

3. **Managing an inheritance wisely**

If you've received an inheritance, these tips will help you make decisions in relation to taxes, investing, spending, and other considerations.

Download these FREE resources at griefshare.org/my.

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Healing through *Writing*

Processing your grief

Everyone grieves in his or her own way. And that's okay. These prompts can help you process your emotions, thoughts, and experiences:

- **What worries you about going through your loved one's belongings?**
- **How are you and your family members experiencing grief (and comfort) differently? How can you talk about these differences and be patient with one another?**
- **Where are some favorite places you and your loved one liked to go (e.g., restaurants, parks, trips)? If you've been able to return, describe the experience.**

Chart your progress

Place a check in the boxes to identify how you are feeling this week: emotionally, physically, etc. Or, even better, insert a word to describe how you are doing.

	BAD	OKAY	GOOD	GREAT
Emotionally				
Physically				
Spiritually				
Relationally				
How your life is in general				

My Healing

Jamie's story

"I remember just trying to figure out, *How do I do this?* A practical thing I got was a perpetual calendar. It has all the dates and no days [of the week]. I can just open it up and know on January 6th, this event happens; on February 19th, this event happens; etc. That's just a small story of something I had to figure out quickly to keep the family going and keep the family connected."

Next session

How to respond to people who don't get it.

Caring for Grieving Children

If you're struggling to keep your own life together, the thought of caring for your children can feel overwhelming. Maybe you're worried that you're too distracted by your grief and circumstances to be fully there for them. No matter what you're feeling, the good news is that there are practical things you can do to care for your children while you're all grieving.

- **Be real** – Your kids are watching you for direction on how to handle their own grief. If you hold your emotions in, your kids will think that's what they should do too. Instead, show them that it's okay to cry, be sad, and talk about your loved one. Let them know the ways you're turning to God for help; invite them to be part of it.
- **Understand that children grieve intermittently** – Children will experience strong emotions, then take a break. They might be upset one moment, and the next thing you know, they're playing, laughing, and having fun. Recognize that your children are grieving, and be there to help, but also allow your kids to be kids.
- **Understand they may not grieve the same way you do** – Just because your children do not express grief as much or in the same way as you does not mean they aren't grieving deeply. Provide opportunities for them to express themselves, and acknowledge their feelings.
- **Give truthful, age-appropriate responses to their questions** – “You need to give as much information as the children can handle according to their age level, and you've got to be honest,” says grief therapist H. Norman Wright. What this looks like for each child will take some time to figure out. Be patient with your kids—and yourself.
- **Be on the lookout for abnormal behavior** – It's normal for grades to suffer, eating habits to change, and a child to be sad. But if your child begins behaving erratically—particularly in a way that's counter to his or her personality—consider seeking the counsel of someone experienced in helping grieving children. If your child talks about committing suicide, immediately seek a professional's help.
- **Get help** – Your child is your responsibility, but it's helpful to ask a relative, friend, or pastor to spend time with your child and help the child deal with his or her grief. This will give your child someone else to talk to about his or her feelings.
- **Clarify family roles** – If a member of the household died, make sure everyone understands what roles each person should take on. For example, who will now do the dishes, take out the trash, and walk the dog? Clarifying family roles will help avoid confusion and lead to stability and routine.