

## Productive Grief

There is a saying in the recovery movement that I have found helpful: “Grief is the pain that heals itself” (Lorie Dwinell). We need to grieve our losses for our pain to subside. Yet, not all grief lifts after tears. Our grief over our losses needs to be *specific* and as *fully expressed* as possible. And it helps tremendously when we can grieve in the presence of another caring person who knows how to come alongside us without trying to “fix” us. We benefit when we can share our sorrows with someone equipped to listen, comfort, and be present.

It is important to make our grief productive rather than general. Productive grief is specific. Just as Nehemiah inspected the broken walls around Jerusalem and wept, we need to inspect the broken pieces of our hearts and grieve them before we can mend. For grief to be productive, we need to identify which particular loss we are grieving, for our grief to accomplish what God designed healing-lament to do. Below are a few losses that we may need to grieve:

**EXERCISE 1** - Put a check mark next to the losses you identify with & add a few of your own:

- ☐ the loss of an intact nuclear family
- ☐ the loss of your partner’s love
- ☐ the loss of self-worth
- ☐ the sorrow over being lied to
- ☐ the loss of trust in the world
- ☐ the loss of feeling emotionally safe
- ☐ the loss of happy memories
- ☐ the loss of future dreams
- ☐ the sorrow of being blamed for his/her affair
- ☐ the loss of your identity as a beloved husband or wife
- ☐ the loss of your shared marital story
- ☐ the loss of trusting your own judgment or perceptions
- ☐ the loss of your home and/or financial security
- ☐ the loss of trust in God
- ☐ the loss of inner peace with God
- ☐ the loss of your self-confidence
- ☐ the loss of your self-respect
- ☐ the loss of feeling protected
- ☐ the loss of a home base
- ☐ the loss of certain friends
- ☐ the loss of your in-laws
- ☐ less time with your children
- ☐ the lack of a safe companion
- ☐ losing a cherished dog or other pet due to the divorce

(Add a few of your own):

- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_

## **EXERCISE 2:**

It helps to identify your feelings. **Highlight** the ones you most remember feeling during and immediately after your crisis. **Circle** the ones that you are feeling this week:

**CATEGORY A:** Discarded. Thrown away. Forsaken. Abandoned. Deserted. Rejected. Unchosen. Desolate. Alone. Stranded. Unwanted.

**CATEGORY B:** Injured. Wounded. Hurt. Decimated. Devastated. Anguished. Mortified. Distraught. Grieved. Heart-stricken. Tormented. Traumatized. Broken. Wrecked. Stricken. Fractured. Agony. Brokenhearted. Distressed. Shattered. Crushed. Sad. Ripped up. Anxious. Sorrow.

**CATEGORY C:** Demoralized. Dishonored. Stigmatized. Scandalized. Judged. Demeaned. Disgraced. Shamed. Ashamed. Deceived. Tricked. Fooled. Foolish.

**CATEGORY D:** Confused. Disoriented. Frozen. Helpless. Overwhelmed. Invalidated. Disallowed. Disempowered. Frightened. Terrified. Hopeless. Defeated. Shakey. Vulnerable. Scattered. Disconnected.

**CATEGORY E:** Angry. Enraged. Abused. Put down. Embittered. Angsty. Galled. Resentful. Vindictive. Jealous. Cheated. Ripped off. Jilted. Furious.

One at a time, bring your *losses* before the Lord, along with the *feelings* you associate with each. Weep in his presence and envision him coming to you as he appeared to Hagar. Expressing grief is more helpful when we know God sees and hears us. Remember him as your “El Roi,” the *God who sees you*, and your “Jehovah Shama,” *God listens*. He is your most caring witness.

Express each loss to the Lord with full emotion. Name it, grieve it. And as you do, imagine the Lord collecting all your tears and putting them in his bottle. Some people find it helpful to imagine Jesus sitting in a chair across from them as they share their feelings and weep. Others prefer to picture him sitting beside them with his arm around their shoulders, embracing them as they cry, or sitting on his lap, sobbing like a child would with a loving, comforting parent.

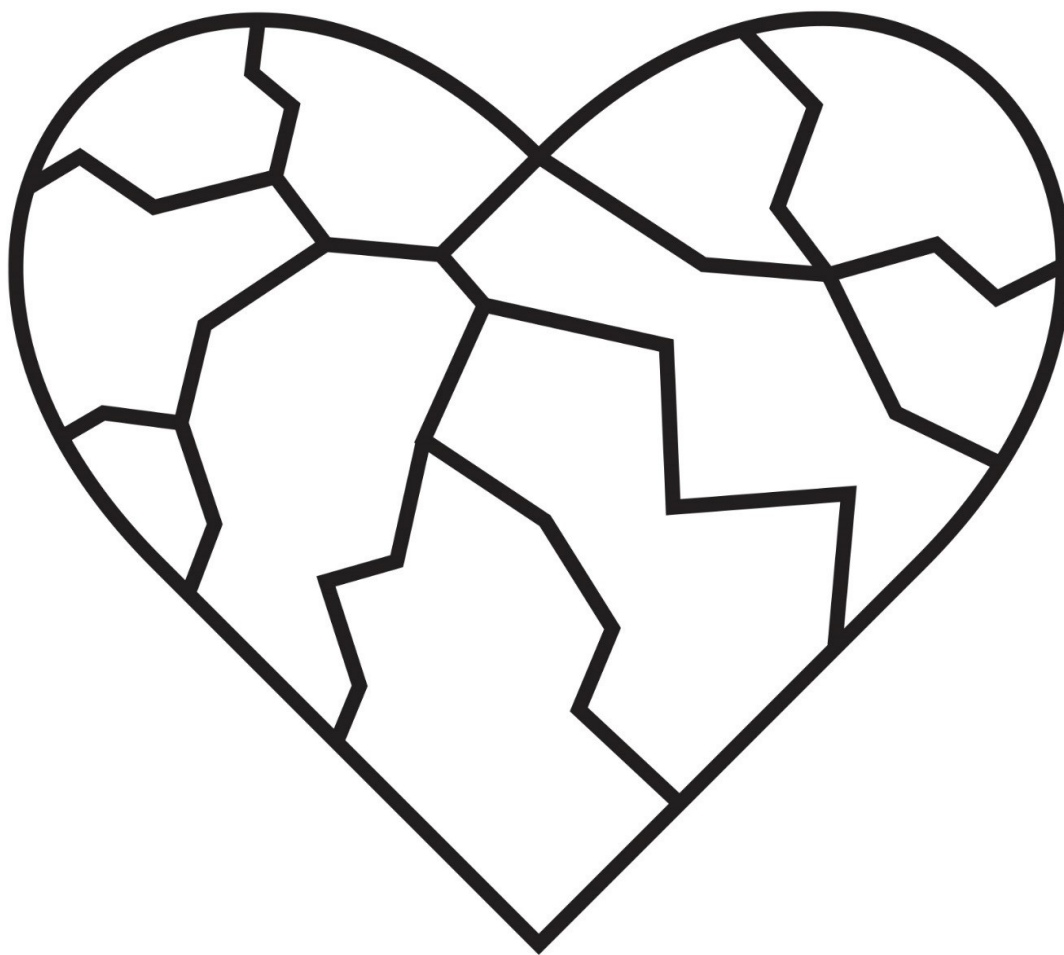
**Choose some of the above *losses* you identified from the exercises on page 1 and the *feelings* you identified from page 2, and fill them into the pieces of the broken heart drawing on the next page for Exercise 3.**

**EXERCISE 3:**

“God can heal a broken heart. But you need to give Him all the pieces.”

~Anonymous

Write down the losses and wounds you are grieving on the shattered pieces of the broken heart below.  
You can draw more “cracks” to add more spaces if you need to.



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If you have a friend or therapist willing to sit with you as you grieve, use that opportunity. Grieving in the presence of a caring friend or relative can be a validating and comforting experience.