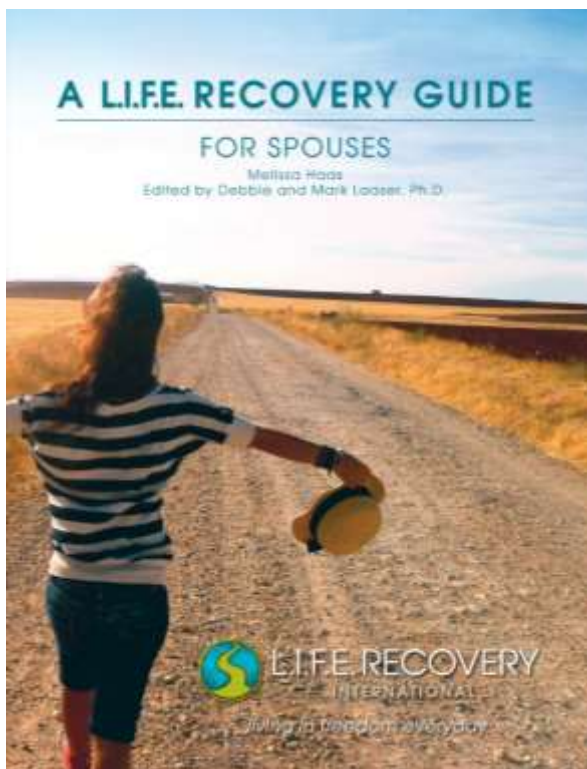


L.I.F.E. Guide for Spouses

Free Grieving Exercise

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A Time for Grieving

Welcome to the first tier of lessons and assignments in the L.I.F.E. Guide for Spouses. In this section, you will be focusing on grieving all of the losses associated with your spouses' sexual addiction. It is the necessary beginning of your journey to personal recovery and transformation.

We want you to know that we grieve with you over the many losses you have experienced, and we understand the confusion, pain, and anger you are feeling now. Our hope is that as you work through these lessons and begin to share your heart with other safe people in a L.I.F.E. Group, that you will begin to experience the healing God has for you. There *is* hope for healing, and we're glad that you have decided to take the journey.

In this section, you will be completing seven lessons and homework assignments. Ideally, you will complete one lesson and its assignment per

week. Depending on where you are in the grieving process right now, you may be desperate for answers and willing to spend great amounts of time and energy trying to make sense of your situation. If you find that you have completed a lesson before the week is over, we would ask that you wait until after your L.I.F.E. Group meeting before you begin the next week's work. We want you to fully process what is going on in your heart with God and others and not just zoom through this grieving work on a primarily surface level. Take time to feel and to become aware of what is going on in your heart. If you have extra time during the week, read other resources about sexual addiction. Several very good ones are listed on the L.I.F.E. Ministries website.

On the other hand, you may be so overwhelmed with despair right now that you find it very difficult to focus enough to complete the assignments. That's okay. We understand what it feels like to live in survival mode. What we would ask you to do is to spend just fifteen minutes a day working on your homework. Set the kitchen timer, take a long bubble bath while you work through the lesson, go for a walk in the woods, make yourself some tea or coffee, head out to your favorite fishing hole—whatever helps you to relax and think clearly. And then give yourself grace to do what you can and to wait for the next day to work some more.

In my time of grieving there was a passage of Scripture that gave me a great deal of comfort during the darkest days. Thousands of people had flocked to hear Jesus teach and to see Him heal the lame, the sick, the deaf, and the blind. Some of them came because they were hungry for truth. Some came because they were hungry for hope. Others came because they were suffering in some way and they wanted to be healed. And into their lives, Jesus spoke these words:

You're blessed when you are at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and His rule. You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you. You're blessed when you're content with

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just who you are—no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought. You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat. You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full’, you find yourselves cared for. You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your heart and your mind—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world. (Matthew 5:1-8, The Message)

Grieving the Losses:

Acknowledging and Mourning the Losses Associated with My Spouse’s Sexual Addiction

It was a Thanksgiving I won’t forget. I sat in shock as I listened to my brother describe the secret life my wife had been living for some time. At first I was numb. As I tried to sort through what I had heard, part of me wanted to deny what my heart knew was true and part of me was full of rage. She had dishonored me and betrayed me. An overwhelming feeling of inadequacy washed over me, fueling my anger. The scene that followed as I confronted her was ugly and emotionally brutal.

In the days that followed, I didn’t know what to do. My world had been turned upside down. Just going through the daily motions of life was difficult. My wife was remorseful and promised to change, but I struggled to trust her. For a while it seemed like she was doing better. I made a great effort to try to connect with her emotionally and to share some of the responsibilities in the home she had carried alone for many years. And I desperately wanted to believe she was changing. What I didn’t know was that she was still actively involved in her sexual addiction during that time.

Five years after I learned about her first affair, I got a call from one of the men she was involved with at the time. We separated, and she checked herself into an inpatient clinic for sexual addiction. In treatment she disclosed that she had been in affairs with over fifty different men. We went to counseling, but my wife would never stick with it. As I grew through the relationships I was forming in group, I began to see that my wife was still living in verbal reality—promising to change but never following through on her words. Eventually I discovered she was involved in another affair, and I realized that the marriage could not continue. Letting go of all of the time and energy I had invested in her and our relationship for seven difficult years was very hard. It was a very dark time in my life.—Norm

“Melissa, we need you to come with us.” I watched as Troy was led to another room with three of our missionary colleagues. The women and I walked into the living room and sat down. I shifted on the sofa, trying to get my very pregnant body comfortable. Inside my heart was beyond anxious.

“We have a very difficult thing to talk about today,” my friend and colleague said. “Some very serious accusations have been made against Troy by two women in Lodwar, and it is very possible that Troy will be on an airplane tonight for the States.”

I sat in shock. I knew that something was grievously wrong in our marriage, and I had even considered that Troy might be involved with someone, but two women? Besides, my husband was a missionary. Surely what these women were saying could not be true.

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But it was.

And so Troy left that night for a residential counseling center in California while I remained in Kenya with our two-year old daughter and a son that was due to be born in a week. I remember sitting in the living room that night after Troy had gone feeling totally numb. I was shocked but not shocked, full of despair and also greatly relieved. I had been praying for our marriage for several years, praying that Troy would love me, that somehow I could learn to please him so he wouldn't be so angry all of the time. I had tried everything and reached the point of hopelessness. But that night as my heart tried to process the grim reality of what was happening, I heard the still small voice of God. "Melissa, I'm answering your prayers." And then His presence enveloped me like a warm blanket.

Over the next few weeks and months I had much to grieve. Our son was born and Rachel celebrated her third birthday without Daddy there. I packed up our belongings and said good-bye to our friends and a place that had become home in the six plus years we had lived in Kenya. I mourned the death of many dreams—the dream of a marriage unbroken by infidelity, the dream of a career of missionary service, the dream of raising my children in a different culture, the dream of seeing the first Turkana accept Christ in the area we had worked in for so long to plant the seeds of the Gospel.

And then there were more things to grieve. I learned that the two women were just two of dozens of sexual relationships in which Troy had been involved. I discovered that some of the women were women I had called friends. I grieved their betrayal as well as my husband's. There was more: the grief of telling our friends and family members in the States why we were leaving the mission field, the grief of hurting our fellow team members and leaving them alone to serve in a difficult area, the grief of bringing dishonor to God's name and wounding many supporters who had believed in us. Oh, the losses...—Melissa

I look back at that time in my life and wonder how in the world I survived. Troy's betrayal was worse than a death in many ways. I kept looking at this man I thought I knew and wondering how I could have been so wrong about him and why the God I trusted let me marry him. I was angry, I was sad, I was numb, and I was confused. Some days I felt hopeful and at peace. And then there were the dark days when despair hung over my head like a black cloud. Of course, there were also the angry days when just seeing Troy triggered overwhelming feelings of rage. I felt so out of control. One minute I would be fine, and the next minute tears would be running down my face. I wasn't going crazy, though. I was simply grieving.

Can you relate to my feelings? Yes No

Make a list below of all of the feelings you have felt as you have grieved the losses associated with your spouses' sexual addiction.

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Did you have enough space? Depending on where you are in your grieving process, you may have written just one word in large print across the page—NUMB—or you may have filled up the space with dozens of feelings ranging from peaceful to murderous.

In the weeks to come you will be working through the seven principles of L.I.F.E.—principles that will lead you on a journey of inner transformation. But before you can begin to allow the Holy Spirit to transform your heart, you must first allow your heart to grieve. The pain and anger you are experiencing are just as real as your spouse’s sinful choices. So, our initial time together will be focused on walking with you through your grief. Our goal is to eventually arrive at a place together where you feel ready to join God in the transforming work He wants to do in your heart and life.

Let’s start by talking about the grieving process. ***When you think about grieving, what comes to mind?***

For many people grieving is associated with the physical death of someone they love. But we can grieve other losses as well. Dr. Glen W. Davidson describes four stages of grief that we can identify with as spouses who have experienced betrayal in our marriage relationship.¹

- Shock/Numbness
- Searching/Yearning
- Disorientation
- Reorganization

Let’s take a look at each of these stages of grief and the primary emotions we feel in each of them.

Shock/Numbness

I call this the “zombie” stage of grief. You feel totally numb—disconnected from your emotions. The world seems to be moving in slow motion and you seem frozen in a moment of time. There is a sense that the situation is unreal, and your emotions can’t respond to the horrible reality of what you’ve learned. You may be able to carry on with other activities of life, simply surviving, but your heart is not engaged.

Searching/Yearning

¹ Dr. Glen W. Davidson. *Understanding Mourning: A Guide to Those Who Grieve* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984).

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In this stage of grieving, you are no longer numb; you are overwhelmed by anger, and you also struggle with feelings of guilt and regret. Your mind understands the reality of what has happened, but your heart can't accept it. You long for things to be "normal" again. I call this the "Why?" stage of grief. It's the time when we typically verbally assault our spouses with a barrage of questions and unload our own commentary on them and their behavior.

The "Why" questions are about them—"Why did you lie to me? Why did you betray me? Why did you do this?" And they are also about us—"Why did my spouse choose this person over me? Why am I not enough? Why couldn't I see what was happening before it was too late?" We search for answers to make sense of our pain, hoping in the process to find some way to lessen the intensity of our hurt. It is in this stage that we most often assign blame. Someone has to be responsible for this loss in our lives. We may blame ourselves, our spouse, an affair partner, our society, Satan, God, or any combination of these. Our overwhelming feeling is anger, and sometimes our anger is so great that we lash out both verbally and physically at our spouses.

Disorientation

The next stage of grieving is the longest and, in many ways, the most difficult. Everything you have known has been shaken, and you struggle to make sense out of life again. In this stage of grief the primary emotions you feel are anxiety and extreme sorrow. You feel lonely and sad much of the time, and the questions in your heart continue. But now the questions are about the future—"What am I going to do?" and "What will my life be like from now on?"

At this point in the grieving process it really doesn't matter why your spouse made hurtful choices. You have come to a place of understanding the reality of the situation, and having accepted reality, are trying to somehow deal with it. It is not uncommon during this time of disorientation for a grieving spouse to move from despair into depression. If you find yourself sleeping during the day, isolating yourself from others, unable to care for yourself or other family members, experiencing overwhelming anxiety, or having thoughts of suicide, it is time to see a physician. You may need medical help in order to make it through this stage of grief without getting stuck in depression.

Reorganization

When life begins to make sense again and a feeling of wellness and hopefulness returns to your heart, you have reached the final stage of the grieving process. At this point in the journey you can smile again and really mean it. Your heart feels lighter, and you are able to enjoy life again. With increasing frequency you feel peaceful rather than anxious, and there is a bounce in your step that hasn't been there for a while.

There may be some days when you experience sadness or even twinges of anger, but they occur less and less frequently. Many of the negative feelings have lost their power to overwhelm you. You are aware of the pain in the past, and your wounds are still tender, but you are functioning again and able to look toward the future with some anticipation of what God has for you.

As you think about these four stages of grief, where do you see yourself now? _____

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I do want to comment that the grieving process is not a linear process. You don't start out numb, move to searching/yearning, then find yourself disoriented, and finally reach the reorganization stage. Grieving is a circular process that involves moving in and out of the different stages of grief over a period of time. What that means practically is that one day you can be numb, the next day be very sad, the following day be so angry you can't see straight, and then three hours later feel almost peaceful. Don't worry. You are not going crazy; you are simply grieving. Eventually, as all of the hurt and anger are processed by your heart, you will find yourself coming to terms with the losses and able to move on with life.

How long do you think the grieving process lasts? _____

Well, my friend, I don't want to dishearten you, but there is no set time limit for grieving. For some people the intense feelings of anger and despair last for a few weeks. Others experience deep grief for months. Every individual deals with internal pain differently, and if you have unhealed wounds from your past in addition to the betrayal of your spouse, it will probably take you longer to grieve.

The good news is that you won't be grieving forever. This is only a season in your life, not the end of life. And although you may not be able to accept this truth right now on your journey, you are not alone. There is a Savior who has walked the road of betrayal and has endured your pain already. It is by His stripes that you will be healed. So, take heart, there is hope.

That brings us to your first two assignments. One of them is an assignment you will do every day for the duration of our grieving time together, and the other assignment is a focused time of journaling specifically about grieving.

Daily Check-In Exercise

Each day as you work through these grieving lessons, you will take a personal inventory of what you are feeling and record your thoughts in your journal using the following format.

Today I feel... (feeling word)

When I feel this way the thoughts that go through my head are...

When I feel this way and think these thoughts, what I want to do is...

My choice today is...

My prayer today is...

Let me make one other comment here before I give you the second exercise. During the time that you are grieving it may be very difficult for you to focus your thoughts in a time of daily devotion or meditation. Journaling can be very beneficial to you when your mind is thinking a million things at once because writing helps focus your thoughts. So, I want to encourage you to spend a minimum of fifteen minutes a day in a quiet place journaling your daily check-in exercise and connecting with God in some way—praying, listening to music that draws you to Him, enjoying His creation, reading your

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Bible or a devotional book. Remember, God wants to love you and heal you through His presence—not judge your performance as His child. He longs for relationship with you, so allow Him to comfort you as you grieve.

Journaling Exercise: Grieving the Losses

On the top of a new page in your journal write the heading “My Losses.”

Make a list of all of the things you have lost as a result of your spouses’ sexual addiction and sexual behaviors in the following areas of your life:

Personal Losses—What have I lost personally as a result of my spouses’ addiction?

Losses in the Marriage—How has my marriage been damaged?

Family Losses—How has my family, our children, suffered because of this?

Financial Losses—What have we lost financially because of these behaviors?

Losses in Relationships with Friends/Family Members—How have my relationships with others been hurt/negatively impacted because of my spouse’s struggle with addiction?

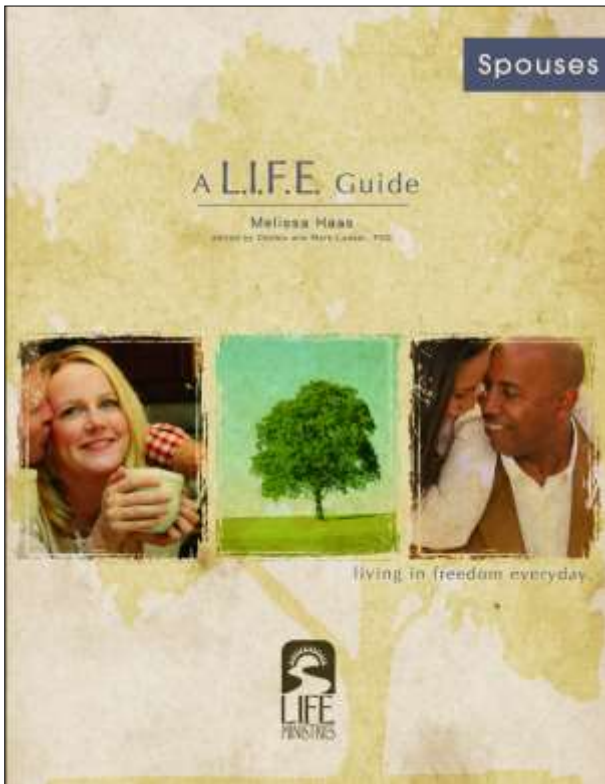
When you have finished journaling, invite the Lord to look at all of the losses in your life. Ask Him to give you His strength and comfort and to reassure you of His love. Then call a safe friend or a person from your small group. Share your list of losses as well as your feelings about them with your friend.

I’m grateful for your courage. Thanks for doing this difficult work today.

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