

Peter Englert:

Welcome to the Why God Why podcast. I am here with our illustrious producer, Dylan Carnavale. Jana Maya our other co-host is off right now. But we're here with my friend and guest, Joyce Wagner and she is responding to the question, why is grief so complicated? So we are in a series about grief and one of the things I've been thinking about as we start this conversation that I think is important is, we find ourselves in 2021 and I think there's this perception that 2021 is going to be better than 2020. And I think we all hope that it is. But if we don't realize the grief of what happened, no matter how small or big or what loss, I think that that's the power of this series, and we're all grieving, in different ways. So Joyce, we're going to ask you the same questions that we've asked a few of our other guests, and we're going to go different because you're a counselor and stuff. But have you been thinking about the transition from 2020 to 2021 with grief and... I don't know, I'm just being curious.

Joyce Wagner:

Well, I have, especially thinking about this. And really, I think that we are in a season of grief. I mean, there's certainly the losses that we think about and people being sick and things like that, but there's just a collective loss that we have and there really is a sense that life will not go back to the way that it was. And that is, the definition of grief is there's a loss there. And so I think people are looking to 2021 to be better. But as you said, if you don't do the work, it'll just rebound on you. Yeah. Yep, yep.

Peter Englert:

So your basic definition of grief is loss?

Joyce Wagner:

Yep. This is my basic definition, the loss of someone or something. The response to loss to which a bond or affection was formed.

Peter Englert:

Wow. Okay.

Joyce Wagner:

There you go.

Peter Englert:

Did you look that up or write that yourself?

Joyce Wagner:

I looked up several things and then made my own. So basically, grief is loss.

Peter Englert:

So basically, grief is lost.

Joyce Wagner:

Yep.

Peter Englert:

So based on where our conversation's going right now, when you are in therapy with someone and you're walking them through it, so one of the things that we've been talking about grief, there are people, I think of our co-host, John, who lost his mother. There's people that lost things, and it's very much real, and they know it. But the reason we're even doing this series is, I can look at my life and it was like, I lost just my routine, I lost the ability to go to the store. We're wearing masks. We're not getting into a debate, but it's just, I think, even pro mask wearers would say, "We'd love for there to be a day that we're not doing it." So when you're in therapy and you're walking with someone, how do you know that they're grieving when they talk to you?

Joyce Wagner:

Wow, that's a good question. I mean, first of all, I think that just about everybody right now is in a season of grief. All right? So we're recording this on a Wednesday. So I see maybe seven or eight people a day. This is what people were grieving on Monday and Tuesday, the loss of a sister to mental illness, the loss of a vision, the loss of a dream, the loss of innocence, somebody was sexually abused. The loss of a marriage, the loss of youth, somebody was aging and was talking about that. The loss of freedom, like what you're talking about with COVID. And also miscarriage.

Joyce Wagner:

So I mean, one of the things that makes grief so complex... Nice but. One of the things that makes grief so complex is that it's universal. But it's also very, very unique. And one of the things that we do is we tend to... Well, we do two things. One is we compare our grief to others, "Oh, I only have to wear a mask and everything and you've lost a mother to COVID." And things like that. And so that's not helpful. So it's universal, but it's individual and comparing yourself to another person's grief is not helpful. And then we also we tend to think that it should be over before it's over.

Joyce Wagner:

How do you tell if somebody is in grief in counseling? Because that's what they want to talk about. That would be the number one thing, it's what they want to talk about. And trying to get them to change the subject, they come back and they come back and they come back. Because the thing that works with grief is talking about it. And that's where they are. And it also consumes the world, when we're in grief it consumes us. And so that's what it is. It's they want to talk. There's other things as well. I mean, I can go over the symptoms and things that people have with grief, but basically in counseling, it's like, wow, this is what is important to them right now.

Peter Englert:

So I think what I hear you saying, because counseling, there's professionals that do it, but you need some skills as a person to do this. So if I'm with a friend and they continue to talk about, "Man, I really wanted to speak at that conference." Or, "I really thought I was going to get this promotion." Now you've opened up this definition that, for us to call it what it is. Is that what you're talking about a little bit there too?

Joyce Wagner:

Absolutely. Because I think that we categorize, there's someone has passed away loss, and then there is all the other ones. And I always say to people, I didn't make this up, but those are the ones you don't get

casseroles for. Losing your sister to mental illness, you don't get a casserole for that. Having a miscarriage, it's often very alone, very lonely. And so if someone, yeah, wants to talk about it, then listen. And so yes, there are skills that you need to be a good friend and be a good listener and things like that. But with grief, the number one thing you can do is listen to somebody and just listen and listen and listen.

Peter Englert:

So do you think 2020 there was more grief? Or do you think there was the same amount of grief, just the volume was turned on?

Joyce Wagner:

I think that when you feel an emotion, it brings up the other times that you felt that emotion. So first of all, I think that there was a lot of loss in 2020. And people looked around at everything. I didn't even mention the financial loss for people. You could turn to the right, you could turn to the left. And as soon, there was loss, everywhere. So people were very conscious of it, people were feeling it, are feeling it. And then it also brings up, "Oh, my goodness, what about in eighth grade when," I don't know, "I failed English." Or something like that. It brings up other losses in your life. So then we're also more cognizant of it. Yep.

Peter Englert:

Okay. What's your personal experience in grief?

Joyce Wagner:

I've experienced a lot of grief. Pretty normal childhood, but then in 1996, my sister who was 26 at the time, she passed away after an illness. In 1997, my mom passed away. And then in 1998, my dad passed away from cancer. So that's my trifecta of grief, would be those times. And then I've also... As the people talk about here, there's been dreams that I've lost, pets. I don't want to leave out pets because pets are important. There's been pets that I've lost. And there's just been, I think we go through seasons. I've had loss of what I thought I was going to do, what I am doing, what I'm going to do next. Lots of loss. But the three recognizable losses, and then also grandparents and things like that too. Oh, and my twin... Oh, so sorry, Janet. My twin sister passed away in May.

Peter Englert:

I was going to ask you about that, because I think that that's something unique that you bring up. I don't know if our listeners know this, both my parents are actually twins. Do you think you felt it differently because you were a twin? I mean, I'm just being curious.

Joyce Wagner:

Yeah, people ask that. There's two types of losses. There's the rapid someone was in a car accident and died. And then there is someone has an illness and they're dying. And one is an apple, one's an orange. One is not easier than the other. I knew that Janet was sick. And so I was more prepared for her loss. And so that that's one thing, but it's just weird. Anybody that's a twin out there, it's weird. You were born on the same day, you have the same birthday, you have all the same, almost all the same shared memories from childhood. And that person is out of your life now. It is, this sounds cliché, it is like a little piece of you died. The twin part of you died. Yeah.

Peter Englert:

Well, so I actually didn't know you were a twin till like last year.

Joyce Wagner:

Okay.

Peter Englert:

And I think some of our assumptions of even being a twin in grief is, Joyce and Janet are attached at the hip. I mean, did you feel like there was some independence from her or did you... I even think about this, with my siblings now, I think we're closer than when we lived in the house. In the great words of, who is it from, Golden Girls? Elaine, "There's two things I want from you silence and distance." I don't know, but... Or Dorothy. Dorothy.

Joyce Wagner:

Dorothy. I was going to say, yeah, yeah.

Peter Englert:

Dorothy. There's two things. So I don't know, was it different in that sense? Or do you feel like you didn't have the stereotypical twin?

Joyce Wagner:

Sadly, we didn't have the stereotypical twin bond. This is a little aside, there's a thing that can happen with twins, where one becomes good twin one becomes bad twin and it splits twins. And it's really a shame. Talk to twins and they will tell you that. And so Janet went one way and I went another, really like in high school and things like that. So more recently, we were working on things, but no, no. She lived in Texas and just had a very different life than what I have. So yeah. Yeah.

Peter Englert:

So how do that you're grieving? I mean, you shared about those losses. Also, you've talked about losses of dreams and things. When you stop and say, "Joyce, I'm grieving right now," what does that look like?

Joyce Wagner:

Preoccupation. Just like the clients, when I'm at rest and my mind wanders to whatever the grief piece is, that would be one. And again, we can talk about loss of appetite, difficulty sleeping, irritability. We can talk about dazed and confused is a big one. Especially right in the beginning. But no, for me, and I think for a lot of people, just your mind wanders there. And you ponder and you wander, you ponder, you think about it. And that's what your brain, again, wants to think about. So yeah.

Peter Englert:

If you're grieving, do you notice that clients go into... Because you're talking about pulling back, but I can imagine, and I've even had to think about it, there's times in my life when I'm grieving and I'm pushing the gas pedal.

Joyce Wagner:

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Peter Englert:

So you see a CEO, male or female, all of a sudden, they lose a close loved one, to find out that they're working 80 hours a week. Or they're producing more blogs, or I don't know, podcasts or something like that. How do you help some of those individuals sort that out?

Joyce Wagner:

I mean, that's very insightful. That is, yeah, the people that are willing to sit with it, are further along than the people that will be distracted. Grief makes us uncomfortable. All right? Let's talk about that. Grief is, it's the most powerful emotion. Most powerful emotion, you're actually allowed to feel a little psychotic when you're going through grief. If you tell me, "I saw my grandma, she came to my bed." I'd be like, "Okay." And I wouldn't be like, "Hey, strong, let's have Peter come in." So it's the strongest emotion. While it's universal, it's also very individual. How you feel it, how I feel it, very different. So that is a loneliness. Well, we don't want that. Now we've got a powerful emotion that's not joy. We've got, I feel alone in it. Now also, I might need to look at my own mortality. Wow, I don't want... Any numbers of psychologists will say that the death fear is the biggest fear there is. And so I don't want that. And so people do exactly what you're talking about. Let's get busy. And let's do this.

Joyce Wagner:

And so how do you help them? Usually, I mean, you can point it out to them. And I said this to someone recently, grieving people are not the most insightful people. That was not to say that they are not intelligent. At that moment in time, they're not insightful about what's going on. And neither would I be, neither would you. So you can say, "Boy, you're not sleeping, you're grinding your teeth, you're having panic attacks, you've been to the doctor for colon things or heart things or whatever, do you think that maybe we should just sit a little bit and just..." There's two responses, "No." Or, "Yeah, I guess I could." Sometimes you got to wait it out until the person themselves is ready, a little exhausted and ready to do that work. And I understand, I mean, I've got great empathy. It's very scary work. And it's deep work and it's darkish work. It's good, hard is not bad. But it is hard. And people, they shy away from it. So you got to wait. You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make them drink.

Peter Englert:

So you're a clinician, and I think that that sets us up well. We talked about the five stages of grief. Unfortunately, the picture that comes to mind is, there used to be this TV show called House, who was a doctor.

Joyce Wagner:

Oh, yeah.

Peter Englert:

He's one of the least-

Joyce Wagner:

Empathetic.

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Peter Englert:
... empathetic.

Joyce Wagner:
Yeah.

Peter Englert:
So he writes on the whiteboard, all five stages of grief. And you can only imagine this. So I think my concern is, we've talked about them that they're so cliché, but they need to be helpful. So why don't you walk us through the five stages of grief and then I have a few follow up questions for that.

Joyce Wagner:
Thank you for asking, Peter. So-

Peter Englert:
We don't have fun. People-

Joyce Wagner:
Not with grief.

Peter Englert:
People asked me, they were like, "How are you going to make this podcast?" I'm like, "You don't," but then you bring Joyce out.

Joyce Wagner:
I'll invite Joyce. So Joyce will, yeah. All right. And I knew you were going to ask that. So I did some research on it. First of all, did you know, they are not the five stages of grief?

Peter Englert:
See, this is why we bring professionals on.

Joyce Wagner:
They are the five stages of death and dying.

Peter Englert:
Ah.

Joyce Wagner:
And Kubler-Ross, her research and it stands up to this day. Because I want to get them in the right order, let me tell you. So it is, where is it? Maybe on page, three.

Peter Englert:
Folks, you're getting like free therapy here.

Joyce Wagner:

Free therapy. Oh, it's right on the first page. Okay. Here is her five stages of death and dying, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and then acceptance. And if you watch people who are bereaved, they are going through death and dying, they will go through those stages. Do they go through them linearly? No. Do they go through them 1,2,3,4,5? It's like one, three, two, five. They skip around. And I think that that is one of the ways that her work is misunderstood, is we, as people, she didn't say this in her books, we as people want to make it as, she would say as prescriptive as possible. So like, I just want it to be descriptive. I'm just telling you what I've noticed working with 1000s of people that are dying. That these stages happen and acceptance is one of the last of them.

Joyce Wagner:

So there's a guy that comes along, David Kessler, he's her student. And he, after she passes away, he's like, "It's so misunderstood. Could I please write a book?" He asked her family and the foundation, "You did of death and dying. Can I do of grief and grieving?" And he adds another one to the stages. He says, "The grief stages still are those five, not in that order, but they are still that five, and then the sixth one for someone who's grieving." So the end stage was someone who's dying as death. For those of us that remain, it is finding meaning. So how do you find meaning in the loss that you have endured? You have lost your wife, you can find meaning in her life, you have lost the promotion, you need to find meaning in that. And he's like, "And when you do that, that is healthy grieving."

Peter Englert:

So I want to make sure I'm understanding something.

Joyce Wagner:

Yep.

Peter Englert:

So you're saying it's not linear.

Joyce Wagner:

Nope.

Peter Englert:

And it's the same stages for grief and death, but you add the meaning one?

Joyce Wagner:

Yep.

Peter Englert:

So are you saying this, let's say I lost something, I lost someone. A year or two down the road, I could be at acceptance. But maybe two years down the road, I might go venture into bargaining. Or is one shoe crossed the acceptance line?

Joyce Wagner:

So this is core work overall.

Peter Englert:

Okay.

Joyce Wagner:

I always say this to people in counseling, life is not like a box of chocolates, but it is like a bull's eye. So you do a piece of work and then you do another piece of work and then a deeper piece of work and then a deeper piece of work. I think once you have crossed over to finding meaning, truly finding meaning, you're not going to go... You certainly aren't going to go all the way back at all. You may go back and do another piece of work about, perhaps that loss or another loss. Oh, yeah, that's right. I was bargaining with that. Or yeah, oh, I still am mad about that. But you will get to the finding acceptance quicker.

Joyce Wagner:

Now, this is the other thing, and you said this, well, you have to, you can lay out those stages, what that makes us want to do is get through them, get through my, "Hey, I know I'm supposed to find meaning. And so I got to get there." The issue is, and we can talk about the wonderful things that happen when you get to the finding meaning and the acceptance and things like that, we can talk about it. And people do get there. However, one of the things that people that are grieving dislike the most and understandable, we would all, is, "Why aren't you over this yet?" You want to know, I talked to someone yesterday with a miscarriage, she's like, "I am so sick of being where I am. I am so sick of not having energy, I'm so sick of being depressed, I'm so sick of thinking about the baby." And she did the comparative loss too, she also said, "And my baby was only six weeks old." Or whatever. "And so I didn't even know the sex. And so people that have had other miscarriages are much worse than mine." I'm like, "First of all, don't compare. Don't compare, because grief is grief is grief."

Joyce Wagner:

And so don't compare and then also, understand that the person wants to be done with it. And there really is... So the secret of grief is there's no cure for grief except for time. It has to be time and you cannot rush it.

Joyce Wagner:

Now number two would be knowing that you are supported by friends and family. That's number two. But you have to give grief time. And you have to give the grieving person the room to go back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And not to chastise them, "Oh, my gosh, you're still irritable. You're still..." It's like, "Oh, wow. Yeah."

Peter Englert:

Oh, by the way, we are going to be interviewing a couple about-

Joyce Wagner:

[crosstalk 00:21:46]?

Peter Englert:

... the wife's miscarriage. So I think that's a great tier. But I want to make sure I'm understanding this because I can see our listeners start to think. So I lost my grandma in 2018, a few months or a few weeks. Actually, the last time I saw her, she held Haley.

Joyce Wagner:

Oh, right. Yeah.

Peter Englert:

So I might be at acceptance with the holidays. I might be at this place where, "Hey, I accept that she's not here for Christmas." But I could be, when I hit her birthday at anger and bargaining. Because we put it all in one funnel, but I think even what you're saying there's different tracks of grief. You might be ahead of schedule somewhere, but with other parts of grieving you might... Does that make sense?

Joyce Wagner:

Well, yeah. And again, I mean, really insightful. First of all, grief changes you forever. You've lost something, you've really have lost a piece of you. So you're always getting used to that loss. Number two, as you said, anniversaries and things. Grief is a funny, is a funny, not hahaha, funny thing. You think you've put it to bed, and it pops back up. And it may be an anniversary, or it may be March 6th. And everything. It's not like you run the basis and you get to finding acceptance and you stay there. No. Nor do I think that you do the arduous work of year one or year two over again.

Peter Englert:

I mean, the question that we're dealing with, why is grief so complicated? We almost treat grief like a strategic plan. And it's not by month six I'm at anger-

Joyce Wagner:

Yeah, no.

Peter Englert:

... so to speak? Okay.

Joyce Wagner:

And we're uncomfortable with it, and we put our discomfort on other people. Another thing that I, because I used to lead GriefShare with, little shout out to Janet Brought. She's the grief guru in Rochester. So we used to do GriefShare groups. And the biggest complaint of the people in the group is the well meaning, but very abrasive things that people would say. Especially the fresher the grief was because again, we're uncomfortable, we want to fix it for the person, we really do want to hurry the person along, which again, is all about us and our discomfort, because we don't want to sit with our stuff. So their discomfort makes us uncomfortable. And so we do all these things, and they've gone on for hundreds of years. I mean, you can know it, and you'll still put your foot in your mouth.

Peter Englert:

So let's walk through some scenarios. I think, it's funny, we ask, what makes grief complicated? That was just the whole, if you're tuning in now just rewind, go back. So I'm a person, I'm acknowledging that I'm grieving. I'm in the soup of the grieving process. I think I just heard a toilet, so I mean-

Joyce Wagner:

Ambience.

Peter Englert:

... ambience in the background. We're at a church here, we're real.

Joyce Wagner:

As long as they have a mask on in the bathroom.

Peter Englert:

There we go. So someone says to me, "Let go and let God." And I thought as a pastor, but as a therapist, how would you help that person respond in that moment?

Joyce Wagner:

Well, you hope the person isn't in anger at that particular moment, because they might bop the person, on the nose and stuff like that. So what I would say to the person who says it, which is all of us, let's all put ourselves in that person's shoes, we all say something similar to that, is shh. Be quiet. Be quiet. Understand that you're uncomfortable, and just shut up. Just sit with your own discomfort and listen to your friend or your family member. So shh, just be quiet. Because you're going to put your foot in your mouth, if you don't.

Joyce Wagner:

So then the person who is grieving, who has been told that, then we have to unpack it. And so there is, you would say, "Well," you try to foster empathy, the shoe's been on the other foot, I'm sure you've said things and stuff like that, too. Let's think about why they would have said it. And they probably meant well and things like that. And then you actually have to sit with the person while they process all the feelings, which might be more loss. Unfortunately, because now I feel like I can't connect with that person now I feel like... Or I'm mad at that person. So now there's another disconnect in everything in there. So you have to sit with them, while they process that, while they get to the other side of that. Because people's emotions are also extremely raw.

Joyce Wagner:

So you don't even have to say, let go and let God. You could say, "Hey, want a cup of coffee?" And that could be misconstrued because people's emotions are very, very raw. So you sit with them, now you've added a layer. You've added a layer of what the person has to get through. And if it's going like, God, well, now let's talk about how I view God in all of this. And the way you talk to people about grief, it's going to be... The person that I was talking to yesterday, I'm not sure that God is the same person that I thought that He was. Why do bad things happen? I think there's been a podcast of... So you bring up all these other existential questions.

Joyce Wagner:

So when people try to do a nice, quick, simple fix, and even on sympathy cards. And the things that we say, "Oh, Jesus needed another angel in heaven." Or, "The person is just asleep." Just say what it is. And that's even for kids. We don't say those. It's age appropriate, but we don't make up things about God and put it on God.

Peter Englert:

I want to come back to this. So there's different levels. So I'll just share personally, I think I've shared this in the past. But again, I talked about my grandmother, that was the last big death in my life. I don't feel like I went through the grieving process. Because I felt like I was at a stage with her life that seeing her hold Haley was like the crowning moment. And so I could, and I don't know, I have to talk to [Charlie Coate 00:28:41] my counselor, maybe I'm really grieving and I don't know. But I felt like I got to that moment, I had to officiate the service. And my sadness was more for my parents or my siblings. And so I guess what... So some people would be like, "Oh, how are you doing with your grandma?" And I'm like, "I'm really okay." She was 90, versus something really raw. So help out our friends that are almost saying, "Should I be grieving more?"

Joyce Wagner:

So what had happened Peter, so the loss of your grandma happened probably 10 years before she died. You probably let go of your grandma for like 10 years. And so when she died, you'd already done grief work. You'd already done it. And Haley, that's the crowning moment, that's finding acceptance. My grandma led a good life. And here's the jewel in her crown, is she got to hold her great granddaughter.

Peter Englert:

Yeah.

Joyce Wagner:

So you're already at finding meaning. So no, you can't just... Everybody grieves differently. But just because someone has passed away many times, and this is my story with Janet, I had been letting go of Janet for, oh, five or 10 years and stuff like that because of her life circumstances. So when she died, it was, I mean, it shakes you because she was 49. So it shakes you. So yes, I am 50. Even I thought about that, she didn't make it to our 50th birthday. So on my 50th birthday this year, now I have to call it mine, I made it so that it was both of our birthdays. I set it up so that it was both of our birthdays this time. Because it was our 50th.

Joyce Wagner:

But there was not the deep wailing, gnashing of teeth, tear the cloth when Janet died or when your grandma died, we'd already done grief work before. And that's true. I mean, you'll find that more and more, someone has a real difficult relationship with a mother or father. And they have to grieve it. Somebody before they leave a job, if they leave a job, they've actually grieved that job in the job, and then they've left. The loss of, I can't get promoted here. I don't make enough money, I can't stay here, whatever it is, you've already grieved that loss, and then you quit. And you might feel relief when you quit. That doesn't mean that you didn't grieve, but you didn't do it on what we think is the right timetable.

Peter Englert:

It almost sounds like what you're saying is the grieving person sets the agenda and the conversation.

Joyce Wagner:

Oh, yeah, absolutely. You have to fall one step behind them and just watch where they're going. And again, it's anything but linear. Anything. People will call it an emotional rollercoaster. So we want to be

nice, flat, prepare you the way of the Lord, get rid of all the potholes. But grief is like this. Grief is up and down and up and down and up and down.

Peter Englert:

I don't know if you remember this, you had me... So Joyce teaches seminary classes. And you were teaching this class for pastors, and-

Joyce Wagner:

Oh, yeah.

Peter Englert:

... you had me on this video. And I remember Doug [Kollme 00:32:15], Doug, we love you. Doug was there. And I think we were talking about crisis moments. And I just remember saying, again, I want the other person to set the agenda. I've said this in past podcasts, I know a couple that lost a child, I asked them, "Would you like me to bring this up?" And they said, "Please do." And there's other people where it's like, nope. So I remember talking with him, saying, when I get there, set the agenda. We might be talking about the Bills. They're actually in the playoffs. There we go. Hopefully, by the time this airs they-

Joyce Wagner:

So there may be a group for the grief, because it could be the loss of a dream or not. Or not.

Peter Englert:

There's still another season.

Joyce Wagner:

Somebody will be grieving on Super Bowl Sunday.

Peter Englert:

Yeah.

Joyce Wagner:

We hope it isn't Buffalo.

Peter Englert:

There we go. There we go. Well, anyways, so and I'll never forget what he said was he just, it was so gracious. I think he said, "Hey, I think that's important, but we have to make sure we pray with them." And it's knowing your role. So as a pastor, my role, I might spend an hour or two with someone, we might not talk about the grief or the crisis, but at some point, I have to sit there and pray and not have to, but just say, "Hey, can I pray for you?" And sometimes people will say no. And I want listeners, I want to encourage you, if you don't want to pray, that's okay. But even if you're a friend, if you're walking with someone through grief, it's almost just asking them some certain permissions along the way.

Peter Englert:

And I think even, I'm thinking of some of our listeners, we brought this up before, we get to Romans 8:28, God works on all things together for good. And I don't feel like it's good at that moment. I may never feel like it's good at that moment.

Joyce Wagner:

Right, right. Right. Right. I mean, there's a lot in there. You follow the person, definitely. I want to say as a friend, you want to err on the side of talking about it. We tend to think that people don't want to talk about their son who died seven years ago. Yes, they do. They want to make sure that people remember their son who died seven years ago. They want to know that you remember the anniversary of grandma's death. They really do. So you want to ask permission and err on the side of that.

Joyce Wagner:

This is a little bit different than what you're talking about, but it dovetails. Again, I put it on my Facebook page and then I put it on the Restoration Counseling page, I'm going to go talk about grief. What do you think I should say? And it was fantastic. Because again, grief is universal, the resources, the thoughts that people had. And one of the best things that somebody said was, "When I'm around someone who's in fresh grief, I don't just say to them, let me know if there's something that I can do for you." Because the person who's in, especially fresh grief, and remember that fresh grief, maybe because you just got a diagnosis, of something. It isn't because someone necessarily passed away. But something has happened where a loss has been triggered in somebody's life. Or loss of a job or something like that. They're swimming. When the loss is fresh like that, they are swimming.

Joyce Wagner:

So don't say, "Hey, if there's anything I can do for you," that puts it on the person. "Now, here's one more thing take care of me because I really want to help you, but tell me how I should do it." No. Say, "What I'd like to do is make a meal for you. Would that be okay?" If not, "What about if I ran around and did some errands for you? Or got you a gift certificate? Or took the kids on Friday night?" So that person, Julie [Rushig 00:36:22], is her name, very wise person, she says all that. And I think it's good. It shows the person you have a plan, it shows the person that you want to help them, and instead of an open-ended question, you give them multiple choice.

Peter Englert:

Well, and I think something that I do is, again, because I feel like at times, when you start doing stuff, it can overwhelm people. So I even tell people, like yesterday, I was on a phone call with an elderly person that sold their house and just it's really hitting them hard. I said, "Hey, I'm going to call you in two weeks. And until you tell me no." Because I think a lot of times we... There's a family I know of that their husband has a brain tumor and they removed the tumor. So even just some of that is, there's a lot of complications. What is the lowest hanging fruit that we can do? And we'll do it till you say no. Because, again, not that we love talking about the Enneagram here, but I'm an Enneagram 2.

Joyce Wagner:

Yep.

Peter Englert:

And John Lamaio and I have had this conversation where Enneagram 2s, they're called the giver or the helper. The worst question you can ask me is, how can I help you? But if you come to me, and you go, kind of what you said, I'm going to give you a \$35 Wegmans's gift cards. I don't have to think. And some people will tell you no. But I think you're right about all of that.

Joyce Wagner:

And we don't trump on anybody's boundaries. But no, yeah. And that's, I have a friend right now with a diagnosis of cancer. So I do think I'm in a season of grief for her and what they're going through. Because again, we compare everything. I've got a friend who's a baker and is making this person pies and everything. And I just said, "I'm not going to roll out anything for you. You'll never hear me say I'm going to roll something out. But can I pick you up something from the city and bring it out to you?" And stuff like that. Can I bring you some hummus? There's a lot of things, and what you can do for someone is not what I can do.

Joyce Wagner:

So if you're the friend, the caregiver just... And the biggest thing is just showing up. And Peter, I don't know if this is like this for you, but when I think back on my dad's death and my sister's death, back when I was in my 20s, what I remember are the people that showed up, even for the funeral, at the grave site and things like that. I still remember those people today. And that is how your brain's hard wired, by the way, too, you remember the really good and the really bad. And so you remember the people that took the time to just show up. If you're not a person who can do something for somebody, I mean just listen. That's still the biggest thing. Groceries are great, listening is best.

Peter Englert:

Well, and even just again, to close up this section too, the work that you need to do to help someone that's grieving that's complicated, is you write down a to-do list you say, three months from now I'm going to check. Six months from now. I think I told this story before. Again, I think it's good to be repeated. One of the best books I've read on this is Everything Happens for a Reason with Kate Bowler. And she talks about she had stage four cancer, I think she's still walking through it. She's in remission. There was a family that would send her a gift card to Amazon every month. And she finally said to stop but just that consistency was huge.

Joyce Wagner:

And anybody, this has back from the GriefShare group, anybody in there would say, wow, there's this overwhelming sense at the funeral, all the flowers, all the meals, all the cards, and then about two weeks later, that's actually... Because remember, the person who's just lost a person, they're swept up in several things they have to get done. They're probably not doing a... I'm not saying they're not doing a ton of grieving, but it's a very crisis type of grieving. They're quiet grieving starts after all that goes away. So sending the card, put it on your to-do list, send the card one month, three months, six months after, I still remember. It's long suffering with the person, and it matters a great deal to them.

Peter Englert:

Well, and the adrenaline. I go back to my grandma, because this is... The adrenaline rush for me was, I'm the youngest in my family in this generation. And it's like plan the service, check with the uncle. And my family was great. They were fantastic, but afterwards, I mean, I was exhausted. And you can only

imagine if someone hadn't gone through the grief process before, two weeks afterwards, that's when the adrenaline Yeah, comes off.

Joyce Wagner:

And you bring up a... Just because I want to say this, because this is very practical. When I'm around someone who's been in recent grief, that adrenaline rush makes it so that you do not sleep. Okay? And so let's say that somebody has lost their husband and is fresh in grief, fresh. And they're not sleeping. Here's the deal, and any doctor, any doctor will tell you, "You may need some sleep aids at that point in time." Because your body is full of adrenaline, and also the fight or flight of I can't go to sleep, I can't let down. Because this needs to get done. This needs to get done. And my emotions are so raw.

Joyce Wagner:

It's one of the things that I say to people, don't be afraid to... And you may really, really need to, especially the first couple of days be on some medicine to help counteract the adrenaline that's running in your body. So it's a grief symptom, but it's biological, it's physiological. And that's the last thing you need, is to stay awake when you're grieving.

Peter Englert:

Wow. That's just super practical.

Joyce Wagner:

It's super practical. Yeah.

Peter Englert:

I mean, we can go on and on, we're going to have you back, don't worry. Whatever the next series is. Dylan over here is doing a dance. We love that. So he's just-

Joyce Wagner:

Hi, Dylan.

Peter Englert:

... he's just glad the camera's not on him. We try to be real as much as we can. So we always close with the question, what would Jesus have to say about grief being complicated? So as a pastor, I'll go first and if I say any heresy, or if I ruin anyone mentally, you can jump in and save us.

Joyce Wagner:

Yeah. And same thing for me, I'm going to flip to the Jesus page.

Peter Englert:

See, aren't you also excited about video right now, you can see this wonderful-

Joyce Wagner:

Christian thoughts, Jesus in grief.

Peter Englert:

There you go. There you go.

Joyce Wagner:

So if you say anything that isn't on the page, I'll let you know.

Peter Englert:

Oh, there you go. So I would encourage all of you to do a deep dive into what the Bible says. And the example that I'm going to give, is not, it's complicated. So I'm thinking about, it's the end of Deuteronomy, Moses, who in the Old Testament has led all of the Israelites and he disobeys God and can't go to the promised land. So I think about that, and some people might say, "Hey, it's unfair, that he disobeyed God, God told him, "Your punishment is, you're not going to go.""

Peter Englert:

But I think that that encapsulates the human condition of grief being complicated. Moses was old. Moses realized he failed and made mistakes. Moses also realized that there are moments that God brought him through. And if we can step back a little bit from a 21st century mindset and step in on a first century mindset, the whole book of Deuteronomy, I think about finding meaning, the whole book is, I'm not going to be there. But I hope that you enjoy what God does. And I just think that that's powerful in our conversation of grief because, one thing we didn't talk about either is, sometimes we grieve because we fail.

Joyce Wagner:

Yeah, absolutely. Oh, absolutely.

Peter Englert:

We grieve, because we realize we messed up. And grief isn't this, I mean, we didn't even talk about conflict but grief isn't this, Peter is 100% wrong and Joyce's 100% right.

Joyce Wagner:

Right.

Peter Englert:

It's one of those again, it's more murky. So I think of that story and Moses and how the Bible is, and Jesus is just attuned to these complications. Attuned, it's not this, you can read it as black and white, but for some reason, Moses must have experienced enough grace to say, "You know what? I want the next generation to experience God's grace."

Joyce Wagner:

Yep. That's good. That's good. And what a loss.

Peter Englert:

Yeah.

Joyce Wagner:

What a loss. If you can picture him, standing there, that's a loss. A terrible loss. But somehow, and again, I wish that there were five easy steps to it. And they are not the five steps of death and dying. But somehow he found meaning in it. And then was able to pass it along to others, which, yay, go Moses. Yeah. Yeah.

Peter Englert:

What about you, Jesus in grief, what do you got?

Joyce Wagner:

All right. So I found three passages, John the Baptist's death and what he did with that. It says, He got on a boat and went to a desolate place. Matthew 14. When he heard about Lazarus' death, deeply disturbed in spirit, deeply moved, deeply troubled, begins weeping. And then also, Jesus and his disciples meet a funeral procession. And it says that He has compassion on the widow. So these are not my thoughts, because they're wiser than me. If you want to know what did Jesus do with grief, this is what people on the internet, pastors on the internet said, He was heartbroken and wanted to spend time alone with God praying and thinking. We also see that He wants to be with and gather support from His close friends. So first, he's alone with God then he wants support. Then He goes and He ministers to others.

Joyce Wagner:

Sorrow can empower us to love, serve and show compassion to others. So when we do the grief work, out of that... The grief that I've been through of this, this, this, it makes me able to sit more with people. It's like, okay, your grief will not overwhelm me. And I know what it's like to get to the other side. So I'll sit with you in the pond, the mess of your grief, and we can sit here and we can row the boat in a circle as long as you want. And then it's going to be great when you get to the other side. And you also really do understand that when you get to the other side of grief, there is joy. Weeping endures for the night, but joy comes in the morning, also biblical.

Joyce Wagner:

All right. So then we say, we see how Jesus grieves with us. He enters our pain. He wanted, again, with John or with Lazarus, He wanted to spend time with prayer then with close friends again. Then He goes to the tomb and raises Lazarus. Our faith is one of consternation, comfort and hope. So first you're alone, and again, and grief is a lonely, isolating experience, even though it's universal, then He's with His close friends. And Jesus, gathers support from them. And then He ministers to others. Then that's where the compassion comes. So I thought that I'd never thought of it that way till I read about it online. And I thought, what do you think?

Peter Englert:

I think it's great. I think that's a great way. And I think what's important about what you just said is the Bible is set up to deal with grief. And I think our assumptions about the Bible and for those that are de-churched and unchurched, I think it's really important.

Joyce Wagner:

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Oh, grief is a meta theme of the Bible. If you can go back to the Garden of Eden and they lost their innocence. I mean, grief is the very first and almost the very last thing. There's the perishing of the old this, and the regeneration of the new. So no, no meta theme of the Bible and obviously the Bible says, He was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. At least prophetically it says that about Jesus. And He was.

Peter Englert:

Well, folks, you can read the transcript of this episode, Joyce has got probably some great one liners. Also, you can find her at restorationrock.com? We'll tag your website. And-

Joyce Wagner:

Yes. Yes. I should know my own website. Yeah. Do Restoration Council of Rochester, it'll come up.

Peter Englert:

Very good.

Joyce Wagner:

Or do Christian Counselor Rochester.

Peter Englert:

Christian Counselor Rochester. So we're so glad to have you. We'll tag Joyce and make sure that you can follow her some more. She has some great videos also. Use the #WGW podcast. Remember, one of the best ways to share more about this podcast is to write a review, and review us on your podcast app. We'd really appreciate that. And I just want to encourage you to email, text us to a friend you might know, someone that's grieving and we thank you so much for joining us.