

STEPS TO PEACE WITH GOD

STEP 1 GOD'S PLAN—PEACE AND LIFE

God loves you and wants you to experience His peace and life. The Bible says: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16, NKJV).

STEP 2 OUR PROBLEM—SEPARATION FROM GOD

Being at peace with God is not automatic, because by nature we are separated from God. The Bible says: *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23).

STEP 3 GOD'S REMEDY—THE CROSS

God's love bridges the gap of separation between God and you. When Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose from the grave, He paid the penalty for your sins. The Bible says: *"[Jesus] Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed"* (1 Peter 2:24, NKJV).

STEP 4 OUR RESPONSE—RECEIVE CHRIST

You cross the bridge into God's family when you receive Christ by personal invitation. The Bible says: *"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name"* (John 1:12, NKJV).

To receive Christ, you need to do four things:

1. Admit your spiritual need. "I am a sinner."
2. Be willing to turn from your sins (repent).
3. Believe that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross and rose from the grave.
4. Pray and invite Jesus Christ to come in and control your life through the Holy Spirit. (Receive Him as your Lord and Savior.)

When you make this commitment, you become a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) and a part of His family (John 1:12).

Here is a suggested prayer: *"Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe You died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior. In Your Name, Amen."*

If you've made a new commitment to Christ or would like more information about our ministry, please call us at: 1-877-2GRAHAM (1-877-247-2426) or visit our Web site: billygraham.org.

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COURAGE in GRIEF



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If you are facing a loss or walking through a time of grief, you know the very real anguish of a broken heart or a crushed spirit. You may be grieving over a divorce, a job loss, a chronic illness, or another issue. We hope you will take comfort in knowing that the Lord is close to you. Grief is a journey that each person passes through individually, but God promises to walk with you one step at a time.

"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18).

WHAT IS GRIEF?

Grief is an intense emotional suffering caused by significant personal loss. What qualifies as "significant" can vary from person to person and can be different at different stages in our lives. It involves deep sadness, emotional suffering, and perhaps an anguish that reaches deep into the heart and soul.

Grief is normally unwelcome and always painful. Grief often comes in waves of sorrow that recede only as the cycles of healing occur. Recognizing that process and allowing it to happen are important in order to endure and even grow richer through this universal experience. This cycle does not always happen in the same order, and certain points may occur more than once, but these are all natural elements of the grieving and healing process.

CYCLE OF HEALING

■ Initial shock: an intense emotional impact which sometimes leaves a feeling of emotional paralysis.

- Emotional release: a time often characterized by weeping.
- Loneliness and depression: a sense of loss, the depth of which depends on how dependent we have been on the person or thing we lose.

OUR FAITH, OUR VERY LIVES, DEPEND ON GOD, AND WHEN WE ENTER THE VALLEY OF GRIEF, WE NEED HIS HELP OR WE WILL NEVER CLIMB ANOTHER MOUNTAIN.

—BILLY GRAHAM

- Guilt: a feeling characterized by second-guessing—"I could have done more" or "I should have done something differently."
- Anger, blame, hostility: "Why did they do this to me?" and "Why did God do this to me?"
- Recognition of loss: For example, in a job loss, it may not be the job itself that is being grieved over. It may be loss of income, position, or even purpose in life. A chronic illness may impact our family relationships and our self-esteem as well as our future.
- Return to hope: "Life will go on." "I will be able to cope." "God will help me get over this."

- Return to normalcy: accepting the loss and adjusting to it.

Grieving and mourning are healthy responses to loss. They indicate that we have had something or someone of value in our lives. Jesus said, “*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted*” (Matthew 5:4). Grief is not predictable, and it’s not “one-size-fits-all.” Recognizing this can bring a great deal of understanding among different people who are experiencing grief over the same loss.

God wants to bear our heartaches and losses and give us His comfort, hope, and encouragement. Life may lose much of its meaning temporarily. God, however, is permanent. Jesus Christ is the solid rock, the foundation to build your life upon.

Indeed, the hope that each of us has for peace and healing lies in Jesus. If you know Jesus Christ and are trusting Him with your life, you can know that He will carry you through your grief.

MOVING FORWARD

- Read the “Steps to Peace With God” section. If you have never explored what it means to find the deep satisfaction and purpose in a relationship with Jesus, do so now. If you have already turned your life over to Jesus Christ, make your relationship with Him primary in your life (Matthew 6:33).
- Talk to God and to others about how you feel. Your feelings of guilt, anger, confusion, or despair should not be buried. They are understandable parts of the process. Acceptance and healing will come, though perhaps slowly.

- Expect God to bring something good from what has happened. “*And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them*” (Romans 8:28, NLT).
- Reach out to help others who are hurting. This will help you to learn to live fully again.
- Spend time with Jesus each day. Read the Bible—His love letter to you. Pray, sharing your heart with Him and allowing Him to share His heart with you. You may find special encouragement in beginning with the gospel of John or the Psalms. Pray for understanding, comfort, and peace in your life.

SCRIPTURE FOR MEDITATION

“*Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you*” (1 Peter 5:7, NKJV).

“*I will refresh the weary and satisfy the faint.’ At this I awoke and looked around. My sleep had been pleasant to me*” (Jeremiah 31:25–26).

“*He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint*” (Isaiah 40:29–31).

“*He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away*” (Revelation 21:4).

“*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).

HELPING OTHERS FACE GRIEF

Helping grieving people calls for authenticity, sensitivity, tenderness, and empathy. Depending on the Holy Spirit for guidance is crucial, especially because there are no easy answers. Our words must be sincere and meaningful, “tailor-made” for the situation, because real comfort for those who have suffered loss depends on where they are in the grieving process.

Many times, well-meaning Christians feel the need to be a cheerleader to a grieving person or to say something spiritually profound. But this can end up backfiring and sound trite or insensitive. It is not always wise to try to explain on behalf of God. Instead of needing to have an answer for everything, we need to admit that we do not fully understand God and His ways.

One of the best things we can do for a grieving person is simply to be a loving presence, listening and praying with him or her. Take the example of Job in the Bible. He suffered enormous loss, and three of his friends wisely chose to simply sit with him for a week. Their presence was a complete gift. When they spoke and tried to offer all kinds of advice, they did more harm than good.

If the person grieving seems overwhelmed with loss, help him or her to develop a support system. One’s energy levels and ability to plan ahead will often be sporadic. Re-establishing old contacts or hobbies, involvement in a church that lifts up Jesus and His Word, and participation in nonthreatening community events or a grief support group can do a great deal to fill the empty places in a person’s life. These activities can also allow the person to begin to

experience life in a positive fashion. In addition, encourage the grieving person to read the Bible daily. A concordance or topical Bible can be very helpful.

If grieving people express guilt over some aspect of the loss, encourage them to not second-guess their situation. The loss, and all that may have preceded it, happened in the past. They need to take their regrets to the Lord. Remind them of God’s forgiveness (1 John 1:9). They should confess anything they feel necessary to confess to God, but then let it go.

MOVING FORWARD

- Pray for him or her. Ask to do this when you are together. Do it privately as well.
- Encourage the grieving person toward God. If this is a new concept for him or her, begin a routine of seeking God together through Bible study and prayer. Be respectful of his or her vulnerability. Don’t press.
- Encourage the person to maintain or develop a support system in a Christian community.
- Listen and be present in the person’s daily life. Be a faithful friend and prayer partner during the process.
- If there are practical things that need to be done, such as writing a résumé or selling a home, help him or her to get started working toward that goal.
- Prepare a list of Scriptures that pertain to the person’s situation. (Consider Psalms 23, 25, 27, 34, 71, and 91.)

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