



UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL

INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

Ruth and the Theology of Hope:
A Meaning Reconstruction Strategy for the Bereaved

A dissertation Presented to the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics

College of Humanities
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Pietermaritzburg Campus, South Africa
Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree Master of Theology
(Biblical Studies)

Student Name: Michelle Ann Black

Student Number: 992231536

Supervisor: Dr. Helen Efthimiadis-Keith (AKA Keith-van Wyk)

Date December 2018

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

DECLARATION –PLAGIARISM

I, Michelle Ann Black, declare that:

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicate, is my original research.
2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This thesis does not contain other person's data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
4. This thesis does not contain others persons' writing unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, and:
 - a. Their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced.
 - b. Their exact words have been used, their writing has been placed inside quotation makes, and referenced.
5. This thesis does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, with the source reflected in the thesis and in the Bibliography.



7th May 2019

Michelle Black

Date

As a supervisor, I agree to the submission of this dissertation

Dr. Helen Efthimiadis-Keith

Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the gentle prompting and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. I am grateful to God for His presence every step of the way.

I would like to thank my parents for the quiet, consistent and unfailing belief in me.

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Helen Efthimiadis-Keith, who supervised me during this work. Your guidance and insight assisted me to complete this thesis.

To all those who kept on encouraging me to complete this work. I am deeply grateful.

To my congregants, with whom I have journeyed through life to death, and through grief, you have been my inspiration.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my parents, who have taught me to believe and to look to God in hope.

ABSTRACT

This study posits that a narratological reading of *Ruth* will elicit responses to grief. This study acknowledges that loss and grief are part of life, and that those who are grieving often need to make sense of their loss in order to regain hope and meaningfully reconstruct their lives. Within this context of loss and grief, Naomi and Ruth manage to rediscover hope in God and find ways to reconstruct their lives. The study argues that even though Naomi and Ruth suffer major losses in their lives, they are able to cope, find meaning and hope, and have faith in God. This study shows that life-restoring hope is possible after loss, and that lives can be meaningfully reconstructed.

Through Contextual Bible Study (CBS), congregants can begin to work through their grief in a meaningful way. Ministers ought to be agents of hope to those who are grieving. As such, ministers should be able to help those who are grieving to move forward with God, and with hope. This, with the intention of enabling the one grieving to be able to meaningfully reconstruct their life, such that they can both see and believe in potential solutions. To be the agent of hope is what ministry is inherently and ultimately about.

ABBREVIATIONS

CBS	Contextual Bible Study
CG	Complicated Grief
COR	Corinthians
DEUT	Deuteronomy
DPM	Dual Process Model
ESV	English Standard Version
GNS	Good News Translation
GMRI	Grief and Meaning Reconstruction Inventory
MDD	Major Depressive Disorder
NIV	New International Version
PGD	Prolonged Grief Disorder
PTG	Post Traumatic Growth
THES	Thessalonians
UPCSA	Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa

Contents

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES	i
DECLARATION –PLAGIARISM	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ABBREVIATIONS.....	v
Chapter 1	1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY.....	1
1.1 Introduction to Chapter 1	1
1.2 Definition of terms.....	1
1.2.1 Grief.....	1
1.2.2 Loss	2
1.2.2.1 Types of Losses.....	3
1.2.2.2 Variables in loss.....	4
1.2.3 Bereavement	5
1.2.4. Mourning.....	6
1.3 Background to the research problem.....	6
1.4 Literature review	9
1.4.1 Grief, mourning, bereavement, and loss.....	9
1.4.2 Models of grieving.....	10
1.4.3 The Meaning-reconstruction model	13
1.4.4 The Bible as a tool for working with grief	14
1.4.5 <i>Ruth</i>	15
1.4.6 Christian perspectives on dealing with grief.....	16
1.4.6.1 A pastoral theology of hope.....	17
1.5 Key Research Question.....	17
1.6 Research Sub-Questions.....	18
1.7 Objectives.....	18

1.8 Theoretical Framework	18
1.8.1 Neimeyer’s theory of meaning reconstruction	18
1.8.2 Capps’ theory on agents of hope	19
1.8.3 The Book of Ruth and CBS.....	20
1.9 Research Methodology.....	22
1.9.1 Contextual Bible Study	22
1.9.2 Narratology	23
1.10 Limitations.....	24
1.11 Outline of Chapters.....	25
1.11.1 Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study	25
1.11.2 Chapter 2: Grief	25
1.11.3 Chapter 3: Neimeyer’s Theory of Meaning Reconstruction.....	25
1.11.4 Chapter 4: Pastoral Care: A Theology of Hope.....	25
1.11.5 Chapter 5: Grief, Loss and Recovery in the Book of Ruth	26
1.11.6 Chapter 6: An Intervention Strategy (CBS)	26
1.11.7 Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations.....	26
Chapter 2	27
LOSS AND GRIEF	27
2.1 Introduction to Chapter 2	27
2.2 Grief as a response to the loss of a loved one.....	27
2.3 Trauma and Grief.....	29
2.4 The impact of culture on grief and mourning	29
2.4.1 Cultural context and grief	30
2.4.2 Gender and mourning	32
2.5 Theories Pertaining to Loss, Bereavement and Grief	32
2.5.1 Freud’s Model of Bereavement.....	33
2.5.2 Kubler-Ross’s cycle of grief	34
2.5.3 The Dual Process Model (DPM) by Stroebe and Schut.....	38
2.5.4 Worden’s task-based model	39
2.5.5 Janoff-Bulman’s Assumptive World Theory	41
2.5.6 John Bowlby’s attachment theory as a framework for understanding the grief experience	42

2.5.6.1 The four main attachment styles	43
2.5.6.2 The attachment theory in grief	43
2.5.6.3 God as an attachment figure	44
2.6 Religious coping	45
2.6.1 Positive religious coping and grief	46
2.6.2 Negative religious coping and grief	47
2.7 The Bible and grief.....	49
2.7.1 The Scriptures as a source of comfort	50
2.8 Summary of Chapter 2.....	51
Chapter 3	53
NEIMEYER'S THEORY OF MEANING RECONSTRUCTION	53
3.1 Introduction to Chapter 3	53
3.2 'Meaning' and 'meaning-making'	54
3.3 Bereavement from the constructivist perspective	55
3.4 Grieving and the reconstruction of meaning	56
3.5 The Grief and Meaning Reconstruction Inventory (GMRI)	56
3.6 The search for significance: Toward a model of meaning reconstruction in bereavement.....	58
3.7 Therapeutic strategies that help those grieving navigate their way through ...	64
3.8 Growth through grief	68
3.9 Summary of Chapter 3.....	71
Chapter 4	73
PASTORAL CARE: A THEOLOGY OF HOPE.....	73
4.1 Introduction to Chapter 4	73
4.2 Hope and despair	73
4.3 A Threat to hope: despair	74
4.4 Allies of hope: trust and patience.....	74
4.5 Images of hope	76
4.6 Spiritual Hope	79

4.6.1 The Hope that Jesus offers.....	79
4.7 A Pastoral theology of hope.....	80
4.8 The minister as an agent of hope in pastoral counselling	81
4.9 Clinebell’s tasks of grief work.....	82
4.10 Summary of Chapter 4.....	95
Chapter 5	97
GRIEF, LOSS AND RECOVERY IN THE <i>BOOK OF RUTH</i>	97
5.1 Introduction to Chapter 5	97
5.2 Background to the <i>Book of Ruth</i> : The work of God in the darkest of times.....	98
5.3 A survival story with difficult beginnings.....	98
5.4 Famine as a season in life	98
5.5 Naomi’s isolation from others	101
5.6 The depths of Naomi’s grief	104
5.7 Ruth the companion to Naomi	106
5.7.1 Casting the blame on God for loss.....	107
5.8 Where is God in the time of crisis and great pain?	108
5.8.1 God’s promise to never leave us nor forsake us.....	110
5.9 God Almighty: <i>El Shaddai</i>	111
5.10 God’s grace in a surprising vessel	112
5.11 The Faithfulness of God	113
5.12 The journey to life	116
5.13 Your God and my God.....	116
5.14 Going to glean	118
5.15 A new garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness	118
5.16 A new birth.....	119
5.17 Summary of Chapter 5.....	120
Chapter 6	122
AN INTERVENTION STRATEGY	122

6.1 Introduction to Chapter 6	122
6.2 Contextual Bible Study (CBS).....	122
6.3 CBS 1: Ruth, Grief, and Loss.....	124
6.4 CBS 2: Hope.....	131
6.5 Summary of Chapter 6.....	134
Chapter 7	136
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	136
7.1 Introduction to Chapter 7	136
7.2 Conclusions drawn from the study.....	136
7.2.1 The need to understand loss	136
7.2.2 Meaningfully reconstructing life.....	137
7.2.3 Helping those who grieve to find meaning in their suffering.....	137
7.2.4 A ministry of hope	138
7.2.5 Surely there is a future.....	139
7.3 Recommendations.....	140
References	142

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Grief never ends, but it changes, it is a passage, not a place to stay. Grief is not a sign of weakness, nor a lack of faith... it is the price of love.

Unknown¹

Grief is the price we pay for love.

*Without attachment there would be no sense of loss.*²

1.1 Introduction to Chapter 1

This dissertation aims to construct an intervention strategy, based on the book of Ruth (henceforth *Ruth*),³ that might assist congregants in the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA) to meaningfully reconstruct their lives after the loss of a loved one. In this chapter, I begin by providing a definition of the main terms that I am using. I then introduce my dissertation by providing a background to the research problem and a literature review, I continue to pose the main research question, its sub-questions and the objectives of the study. I then discuss the theoretical frameworks upon which my study is based, namely Neimeyer's meaning reconstruction theory and Capp's theology of hope. Finally, I discuss my methodological approach and provide a chapter outline, before continuing to Chapter 2.

1.2 Definition of terms

1.2.1 Grief

While grief can be a response to various loss types (see 1.2.2), for the purposes of this study, I will limit the meaning of grief to the loss of a loved one, as that is my focus. In that sense, grief is a universal response to the death of a loved one, and can be

¹ Inspirationonline.com. Accessed online 25 November 2018.

² Mallon, B. *Managing Loss, Separation and Bereavement: Best Policy and Practice* (2001). Origin unknown.

³ This study makes the distinction between *Ruth* (italicised) to refer to the book of Ruth, and Ruth (unitalicised) to refer to the character herself.

defined as the experience of emotional pain resulting from the loss of a loved one through death (Louw 1994:179). In this sense, grief might be likened to the experience of a ghost limb. This experience of loss, with the frustration over helplessness and the pain of intense longing, broadly describes the crisis of grief experienced after the death of a loved one (Louw 1994:179). “Grief is like a bomber circling round and dropping its bombs each time the circle brings it overhead... for in grief nothing stays put. One keeps on emerging from a phase, but it always recurs. Round and round. Everything repeats” (Lewis in Dames & Dames 2009:41).

1.2.2 Loss

Mitchell & Anderson (1983:6) state that any kind of loss can befall a person during their lifetime. Further, they infer that loss is inescapably painful, precisely because attachment⁴ is a human necessity (Mitchell & Anderson 1983:51). This implies by extension that to live in relationship is to be vulnerable to loss. One of the most devastating types of losses to be experienced is the death of a close relative or friend. One of the ways that I have used to explain loss to congregants in my capacity as their spiritual advisor, is that loss leaves a void an individual's⁵ life because something has been, sometimes suddenly and violently, removed. The experience of personal loss can often create the perceived sensation of an inoperable emotional ‘wound’ that cannot possibly promise to heal. However, over time, that void becomes surrounded by new relationships and activities, and in some way, these new relationships and activities begin to bring healing to the wounds caused by loss. All the losses in our lives contribute to the person we become. We will encounter numerous losses throughout our lives, and each loss will result in some form and expression of grief. These losses that are experienced throughout the cycle of life change us, possibly forever. It is the contention of this dissertation that through the experience of loss, positive emotional and spiritual growth can occur, and life can become meaningful again.

⁴ I will refer to Bowlby's attachment theory (1969) as well as attachment to God in Chapter Two, section 2.5.6 and 2.5.6.3 respectively.

⁵ I use the term individual predominantly because my experience is saturated by a Western perspective, as most of my ministry has taken place within a white South African context. I will temper the Western perspective with a more African understanding in Chapter Two section 2.4.

1.2.2.1 Types of Losses

According to Mitchell & Anderson (1983), there are six major types of loss that human beings undergo throughout their lives. Most experiences of loss are a combination of several types. For example, to be widowed means relationship loss. But widowhood may also mean role-loss as the widow discovers that she is no longer a wife, but now a widow, as well as experiencing changes to her social life. She may also undergo material loss, and intrapsychic loss, where due to a shift in her identity, she is no longer the wife to a husband. These losses are defined as follows:

(i) **Material loss:** “the loss of a physical object or of familiar surroundings to which one has an important attachment” (Mitchell & Anderson 1983:36). Material losses take many forms, such as the loss of a toy, a pet, a favorite item of clothing, or a home. Some material losses are replaceable, and so this may determine the grief response accompanying the loss. The grief may arise only when the replacement is never quite as good as the original.

(ii) **Relationship loss:** “the ending of opportunities to related oneself to, talk with, share experiences with, make love to, touch, settle issues with, fight with, and otherwise be in the emotional and or physical presence of a particular other human being” (Mitchell & Anderson 1983:38). The experience of death is the most intense form of relationship loss.

(iii) **Intrapsychic loss:** “the experience of losing an emotionally important image of oneself. Losing the possibilities of “what might have been”, abandonment of plans for a particular future, the dying of a dream”. It is itself an entirely inward experience (Mitchell & Anderson 1983:40). Very often what is lost is a secret, a hope or a dream that is seldom shared with others. Intrapsychic loss can also be experienced in times of change, or when a major task is successfully completed. The completion of a task can evoke sadness. When we lose our courage, our faith or our grip we are also expressing intrapsychic loss (Mitchell & Anderson 1983:40).

(iv) **Functional loss:** “powerful grief can be evoked when we lose some of the muscular or neurological functions of the body; we call this functional loss” (Mitchell &

Anderson1983:41). The loss of sight or hearing, the amputation of a limb, or the loss of mobility means a loss of autonomy. When people lose material objects, they replace them, however coping with functional loss requires a comparable “way around’ a restriction or handicap. The reaction or response to this loss is grief, which is often expressed though anger.

(v) **Role loss:** “the loss of a specific role or of one’s accustomed place in a social network” (Mitchell & Anderson1983:42). The more one’s sense of identity is related to the lost role, the greater the significance of the role loss will be. Examples of role loss are retirement, marriage, loss of a spouse, career changes and these can lead to loss and grief.

(vi) **Systemic loss** comes about “because of human beings belonging to some interactional system in which patterns of behavior have developed over time” (Mitchell & Anderson1983:44). Systemic loss takes place when a young adult departs from the family of origin. When someone leaves a family, the system must adapt to that loss. This type of loss is not the only variable in grief.

1.2.2.2 Variables in loss

The ways in which loss is experienced varies depending on circumstances and the ways in which one has learnt to deal with powerful emotions. There are other variables inherent in the loss itself, which add to the unpredictability of grief, and underscore just how many ways loss is experienced (Mitchell & Anderson 1983:46). These variables are:

(i) **Avoidable and unavoidable loss**

Many losses are unavoidable because they form part of the experience of life. However, losses may be avoidable when they stem from certain choices (Mitchell & Anderson 1983:47).

(ii) **Temporary and permanent loss**

Some losses may only be temporary. The knowledge that one might be able to regain what one has lost may dull some of the pain. Permanent loss brings with it a sense of

finality. A new life must be forged in the absence of the person who has been lost (Mitchell & Anderson 1983:48).

(iii) Actual and imagined loss

Imagined loss is that loss which we fear may take place. For example, within the context of a relationship where partners are separated for a period of time, they endure actual, although temporary loss. But when one of them begins to imagine that the other no longer loves them, is involved in an imagine loss (Mitchell & Anderson 1983:49).

(iv) Anticipated and unanticipated loss

Unanticipated or sudden loss of a loved one is for some more difficult to handle than others, holding a small degree of comfort that their loved one did not have to suffer, because their death was sudden. Anticipated loss allows the possibility of grieving before the loss takes place. It provides opportunities to restore broken relationships and 'say goodbye' before the loss occurs (Mitchell & Anderson 1983:50).

(v) Leaving and being left

Some people experience loss, as a result of the death of a love one, as being left. Feelings of hurt, anger and blame are expressed towards the person who is no longer there, where this absence is perceived to be a deliberate form of abandonment, regardless of whether or not the absent person had a choice in initiating the loss (Mitchell & Anderson 1983:50).

1.2.3 Bereavement

Bereavement is a typical response following the experience of various loss types, including the loss of a home; the loss of a personal relationship; the loss of health; the loss of hope; or the loss of meaning, and so on (Raphael & Dobson 2000:45). Neimeyer & Currier (2009:352) argue that "Bereavement may be distinguished among all major life-event stressors not only by its near inevitability but also by the high likelihood that we will all experience it repeatedly across the course of a normal life span". Research has shown that major depressive disorder (MDD) represents a common form of bereavement distress (Burke & Neimeyer 2014:1089).

1.2.4. Mourning

Mourning refers to the public display of grief, the social expressions or acts expressive of grief that are shaped by the (often religious) beliefs and practices of a given society or cultural group (Stroebe, Hanson, Schut & Stroebe 2008:5). Madden (1997:37) cites the experience of Mary Magdalene as contained in the New Testament as illustrative of what it means to mourn. According to the Gospels of Matthew,⁶ Mark,⁷ and John,⁸ Mary the mother of Jesus, arrived at his tomb, suffering acutely from the loss of her son. Her weeping reveals her grief and loss in Jesus' absence. Madden argues that the question posed to Mary by the resurrected Jesus, prior to her recognition of him, "Woman, he said, "Why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" (John 20:15 NIV), can be examined from the point of view of modern standard psychological theories. We mourn when we accept that we will be changed forever by such loss. We mourn when we accept that by the loss we will be changed, possibly forever. Perhaps mourning has to do with undergoing a transformation, the full result of which one cannot know in advance. There is a difference between loss itself, and the transformative effect of loss, and the latter of which can be neither charted or planned (Butler 2006:21).

1.3 Background to the research problem

The death of a close relative or friend is almost always painful and disturbing (Bonanno, Boerner & Wortman 2011:287). Grief is the term applied to the primarily emotional reaction to the loss of a loved one through death. It is a normal, natural reaction to loss: As Archer (in Stroebe, Hansson, Schut & Stroebe, 2011:5) indicates, "Grief...is the cost we pay for being able to love in the way we do". The personal struggle after the loss of a loved one leaves many unable to make a meaningful transition in order to reconstruct their lives, as Peck (2003:12) notes: "One of the greatest truths is that life is difficult, because once we truly see this truth we can transcend it."

⁶ Matthew 28:1-4.

⁷ Mark 15:47.

⁸ John 20:10-13.

In my experience as a minister⁹ in North Durban Presbyterian Church (a part of the UPCSA), life is indeed difficult for those who have suffered loss and who grieve as a result. Bereaved people often struggle to believe that beyond their 'difficulty' lies the hope of being able to reconstruct their lives meaningfully. I claim that this knowledge that life can be meaningfully reconstructed has the ability to infuse my congregants with life-restoring hope, where, in such case that there is hope, life flourishes.

I have also observed that many ministers do not have the expertise to give competent counsel to those who are grieving. During my ministry to many congregants who have lost a loved one, I as a minister have often felt poorly equipped to adequately counsel them through their grief, particularly regarding the perceived 'meaninglessness' of their loss. A common refrain I hear from bereaved congregants might be, 'God is punishing me', or 'God took my loved one from me', or even 'Why did God do this to me?' Congregants attempt to create meaning from their loss with rationalisations such as 'there must be a reason for this.' Simply to explain a theoretical model such as Kubler-Ross's (2005:7) 'stages of grief'¹⁰ to a bereaved person, ultimately proves insufficient as they attempt to reconstruct meaning in their lives. However, it may assist them to accept that denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance are natural parts of the grieving process.

Neimeyer (in Matthews & Marwit 2006:89) suggests that reconstructing meaning is the central process of grieving. There is no 'normal' way to grieve and adapt to the loss of a loved one. However, if sense can be made of the loss, and life can be meaningfully reconstructed, then hope can be restored.

As a minister in a pastoral context, I have observed that the bereaved need to draw upon their faith and hope in God, as this will enable them to see and believe that there can be a way towards meaningfully reconstructing their lives. I will therefore draw on Capp's pastoral theology of hope, as he says that the minister is an agent of hope,

⁹ I refer to my experiences as a minister often as these experiences are the starting point of my research, that which informs its inception and telos. By doing so, I do not mean to universalize them, being aware that others may have experienced grief and grief counseling differently.

¹⁰ Kubler-Ross's five stages of grief experienced by people who have lost a loved one, are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. I will refer to the five stages in my literature review and discuss them in detail in Chapter Two of my dissertation.

who can “turn a client’s eyes from the suffering present towards a fulfilment in the future” (Kwan 2010:55). My aim is to construct an intervention programme, in the form of a contextual Bible study. In my construction of an intervention programme, I will lean heavily on the work of the psychologist Neimeyer, who suggests that people coping with loss and trauma feel forced to attribute meaning to the event, that is, to make sense of the circumstances surrounding the loss (in Matthews & Marwit 2006:89).

Ministers usually refer to the Bible when journeying with people through their grief. As we enter the world of the Bible, we discover a crucified saviour, a God who bears the grief of that which he created, and carries its sorrow (Van Deusen Hunsinger 2011:19). The Bible contains stories about people who have suffered loss and it offers comfort to those who mourn. Psalm 34:18 ESV reads, “The Lord is near to the broken hearted and saves the crushed in spirit,” promising a nearness of comfort. Some examples in the Bible of people who have suffered loss include Genesis 49:29-50:14, which records the death of Jacob and his son Joseph grieving over his father; David’s grief over the death of Jonathan and Saul in 1 Samuel 1; and in *Ruth*, death and grief abounds. Naomi is bereft after the loss of her husband and both her sons, and Ruth and Orpah suffer the loss of their husbands. Naomi’s words (1:20-21, my italics) to the women in Bethlehem are an entry point into the reality of her grief. Sakenfeld (2003:130) writes:

Call me no longer Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi when the Lord has dealt harshly with me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me? (1:20-21)

In Naomi’s words, and throughout the *Book of Ruth*, there are suggestions that her cry might be appropriately considered as a biblical resource for counselling persons in the midst of grieving the loss of a loved one (Sakenfeld 2003:132). In this research, I will examine the *Book of Ruth* on these grounds, where it recounts analogies of the loss of loved ones amongst other losses, such as material loss. The story of *Ruth* is life-giving to those who have suffered loss (Taylor 2014:3). Life is difficult for the women in *Ruth*, but they are able to transcend their difficulties as they meaningfully reconstruct their lives. According to Branch, “Ruth leads Naomi as they begin a new season that involves both recovery and survival” (2012:4). I will examine *Ruth* as a paradigm, to

determine how the characters in the story were able to meaningfully reconstruct their lives. Alongside Neimeyer's theory, I will apply Capps' pastoral theology of hope.¹¹ Using *Ruth* as a primary text, I will then formulate an intervention programme for those suffering loss in the UPCSA, aimed at assisting the bereaved to meaningfully reconstruct their lives with God. I will do so in order to deal with the research problem underlying this dissertation, namely that UPCSA congregants (and ministers) do not have a tool that can assist them with the reconstruction of meaning after facing bereavement due to death.

1.4 Literature review

1.4.1 Grief, mourning, bereavement, and loss

Mbogori (in Magezi & Keya 2013:3) defines bereavement as “an objective realisation by a person of the loss by death of another who was significant in his or her life.” Mourning involves the expressing of grief, either privately or publically, often according to cultural prescriptions (Wong 2008:378). As Rosenblatt (1993:212) says, ‘cultures differ greatly in how grief is expressed. In some cultures, bereaved people are marked in some way that sets them off from others in the community—for example, their heads are shaved, or they wear special clothing. The cultural meanings of these ritual activities vary widely from society to society. Among the Zulu of South Africa, for example, widows typically are marked by wearing special black clothing for one year and are relatively isolated from others (e.g., they are not supposed to interact directly with others, or to attend various social events) (Rosenblatt & Nkosi 2007:215). Studies indicate that the given meanings and beliefs of death, as well as expressions of grief, are different from culture to culture (Irish et al. 1993) (Saito 2014:109). The whole process of grief and healing is shaped not in a vacuum, but in a particular cultural and social context. (Rosenblatt 1993:207-208). South Africa is a multi-cultural society. In an African context, the wisdom of the elders, the parents, the ancestors, the art of story-telling is relied on to guide people in crisis (Ward 2003:54).¹²

¹¹ I will discuss Capp's pastoral theology of hope in detail in Chapter Four.

¹² Ward makes no specific reference to any particular people group, but uses the term 'black' to refer to African clans of persons.

Gender is another factor influencing bereavement response. In his research on the Jahunda people of Zimbabwe, Moyo (2014:213) speaks of the 'gendered nature of mourning rituals, where men and women perform different death rituals, but widows have the responsibility to perform a greater number than their male counterparts'. These rituals include pre-burial rituals, rituals performed for unnatural death, and rituals for still born babies amongst others. These various rituals are coping mechanisms for various rites of passage, offering comfort to both the individual and the community as they cast their cares on God (Moyo 2014:216). Bereavement response is not only related to rituals, but also to cognitive behavioral responses. Research results by Bosnick, Small and Burton (2010:257) supports the finding that bereavement is associated with poorer memory performance with men. Bereaved men had a greater memory decline than bereaved women. Bereaved men have higher rates of mental health problems, especially depression (Bosnick *et al.* 2010:258).

Grief is a nearly universal response to the death of a loved one (Burke & Neimeyer 2014:1088). Grief is a reaction to the loss, and can be described as emotional pain experienced as a result of the loss, together with an experience of helplessness and powerlessness. Despite there being differences in gender and culture, grief has certain universal features. Loss can occur through numerous events throughout life, such as death, a broken relationship, a life change such as relocation, diagnosis of a life changing medical condition, or other similar events.

According to Massey, "grief is often an emotional rollercoaster that afflicts the whole person" (2000:472). At any point in the cycle of life it is possible to experience one or more of the many types of loss, such as material loss, relationship loss, intrapsychic loss, functional loss, role loss and systematic loss. The common reaction to all these types of loss invariably is a form of grief (Mitchell & Anderson 1983:42). In my research I will focus on grief pertaining to the loss of a loved one.

1.4.2 Models of grieving

(i) Stage Theories: There are numerous theories documenting stages of grief which include shock, numbness, disbelief, sorrow, stress and behavioural reactions, anger, guilt, parting anxiety, depression, longing and relief (Louw 1994:181-185). The highly influential work of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross identifies five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance (Kubler-Ross 1997:51-123). Worden (in Massey 1983:471) also identifies the bereavement process as going through various stages, accepting the reality of the loss, working through the pain of grief, adjusting to an environment in which the deceased is missing and to emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life and to rebuild faith and philosophical systems challenged by loss.

Even though stage theorists insist on the fluidity of the stages they propose, it is now recognised that grief reactions are highly idiosyncratic and affected by a variety of factors including “personality traits, cultural background and developmental level of the bereaved, the nature of the relationship with the deceased, mode of death, availability of social support, and previous concurrent stressors” (Servaty-Seib in Efthimiadis-Keith 2017:106).

Recent studies related to grief theory claim that meaning reconstruction in response to a loss is the central process in grieving (Neimeyer in Saito 2014:39). There are a number of theories involving meaning reconstruction that help people put their lives back together after loss. In this section I will briefly discuss some of these psychological models.

(ii) Dual Process Model: According to Stroebe and Schut’s Dual Process Model of grief, the drive that motivates the task of building a new life and identity after loss is the search for meaning, both in the lost relationship and in a newly reconstructed life. Stroebe and Schut suggest that grief operates in two main ways and people switch back and forth between them as they grieve. This theory of grief describes two ways of behaving: loss-orientated behaviour and restoration-orientated behavior (Stroebe & Schut in Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:36). Things that make you think about

your loved one and their death are called loss-orientated stressors. This may involve things like thinking about how much you miss your loved one, looking at old photos, and these stressors can bring up lots of emotions such as sadness, loneliness and anger. Restoration-orientated coping, refers to the activities by which one begins to build a new life and identity. As one grieves, one switches or 'oscillates', between these two different modes of being, hence the name "dual process", because two different processes are happening (Stroebe & Schut 2016)¹³.

(iii) Attachment theory: Each person has a different attachment style. These styles are: avoidant, anxious and secure style of attachment. These styles have implications for how a person grieves (Flynn 2014). Attachment theory originated with the seminal work of John Bowlby. Attachment is a deep emotional bond that connects one person to another. Bowlby formulated his attachment theory based on the link between early infant mother-child separations, and later maladjustment (McLeod 2009). Attachment theory is relevant to a meaning reconstruction model as it helps to identify which bereaved persons might be more likely to experience negative outcomes as they struggle to reorganize their lives and move forward (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:34). Bowlby suggested that those with an anxious attachment style find it more difficult to deactivate painful feelings, thoughts and memories related to the deceased attachment figure. Those with an avoidant style are more likely to suppress distressing feelings, thoughts and memories of the deceased (Flynn 2014:1).

Kelley argues further that a secure attachment to God assists someone who is grieving to adjust to their changed circumstances, she also says that, "In letting ourselves be loved by God, we form an attachment to the only One who cannot leave us" (2009:81). Importantly, Kelley focuses on meaning making in grief work by

¹³ Regrettably there were no page numbers available for referencing on the website.

drawing on the writings of Neimeyer (Gill-Austern 2014:102). In my research I will also endeavour to explore links between attachment theory and attachment to God.

Bennett (in Kelley 2009:92) suggests that when God functions as the ultimate secure base, a person is better able to negotiate separation and loss, as well as to discover an abiding sustaining presence even in the midst of things that are passing away. Kelley and Chan (2012:199) concur that a secure style of attachment to God is an important factor in the creation of meaning following a significant death. Attachment theory contributes to my study in that Ruth attaches herself to Naomi but also to God after the numerous losses experienced. It is the presence of God and his loving relationship with us that is ultimately our greatest source of hope in grief. It is God who holds us in the midst of our sorrow and pain, and this is what helps us to move towards restoration with hope and trust into the future (Kelley 2014:120).

(iv) Theory of shattered assumptions: Janoff-Bulman (in Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:34) elaborates on Cognitive Adaption, Trauma, and Coping Theories, explaining that overwhelming life experiences shatter the most fundamental assumptions held by a person. The theory of shattered assumptions says that people operate according to a conceptual system based on a set of assumptions about the world, the self, and others. These personally held assumptions help you make sense of the world and your role within it. This theory is most often applied to trauma as it helps to explain adjustment after an experience that has challenged a person's belief system of world view (Stern n.d.). Janoff-Bulman advocates, the most important process in successful cognitive adaption is finding *benefit* in the experience (Gillies & Neimeyer 1992:35).

1.4.3 The Meaning-reconstruction model

Constructivist theories propose that the process by which bereaved persons question, find, and make sense of their bereavement is central to the experience of grief (Neimeyer in Matthews & Marwit 2006:90). Drawing on all the theories listed above, Neimeyer proposes that people engage in three major activities in order to reconstruct meaning in response to loss: sense making, benefit finding, and identity

change (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:36. See 3.6 for more details). O'Connor observes that, "Implicit in this view of meaning reconstruction is the proposition that adaption to loss frequently involves constructing a new reality, in which survivors' assumptive worlds and their view of themselves are forever changed" (O'Connor in Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:36). The loss of a loved one often creates a sense of meaninglessness and hopelessness. In most cases, the bereaved struggle to make sense of what has happened and to reconstruct basic assumptions in order to accommodate the loss in building a new future (Wong 2008:379). Meaning reconstruction researches how people can rebuild their lives when faced with challenges. Neimeyer has immersed himself in the study of grief, bereavement and death – all in the name of formulating a method by which people faced with these challenges can rebuild their lives¹⁴. For this reason I intend to make practical use of Neimeyer's theories to assist UPCSAs grieverers in rebuilding their lives after experiencing loss.

1.4.4 The Bible as a tool for working with grief

As previously indicated, the Bible contains many accounts of persons who grieved as a result of their losses. For example, Job experienced traumatic loss and grief (17:1), David mourned the death of Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1:17-24). The book of Lamentations records the nation of Israel connecting their emotions of grief to the laments recorded therein (Massey 2000:481). The Psalms are full of words, images, and emotions that reflect the raw reality and pain of life. Such honest expression offers an invaluable tool for grief work (Massey 2000:481). There are a variety of valuable ways to use the Bible in pastoral care and counselling. The Bible offers comfort and strength to people in crisis, can be used as a means of diagnosis, Biblical wisdom can inform the counselling process, and the Bible can be used in prayer and meditation (Clinebell 1984:124).

¹⁴ In an article by Greg Russell (2002), he writes that according to Neimeyer, "Grief is a subject that touches every single person at some point in their life. We all face it. Loss is not optional; it is part of the human condition. How we respond to it shapes who we are."

1.4.5 *Ruth*

I have chosen *Ruth* is because it is a story of reactions to grief and to managing various losses (Dresner 2006:133) such as the loss of land and of family , Even so, Fentress-Williams correctly summarises *Ruth* as “a story about survival” (2012:134). The text expresses, through Naomi, a number of themes and emotions related to loss, such as bitterness, anger, resentment, despair, grief, resignation, frustration (Sakenfeld 2003:137), withdrawal, and blaming God. However, it also expresses a different reaction through Ruth. Ruth chooses to follow Naomi and her God (Branch 2012:4) and acts proactively to secure her future and that of Naomi. As Karlin-Newmann (1994:128) indicates, Ruth takes the initiative of moving from death to life, and brings Naomi with her (Branch 2012:4). Arguably, it is Ruth’s journeying with Naomi that moves Naomi slowly back to life, hope, and redemption (Karlin-Newmann 1994:130). The experience of moving from death and mourning back to life and vitality, is one that most of us will repeat several times in our lives. *Ruth* is a phenomenology of that journey (Karlin-Newmann 1994:125), and shows us how to begin a new season in life (Branch 2012:1). Most significantly, for my study, *Ruth* shows the hand of God in the process of restoration (Branch 2012:10).¹⁵ When *Ruth* is read through the lens of personal crises, such as bereavement, an example of how to live successfully after experiencing major losses is provided (Branch 2012:1). The suffering of Ruth and Naomi bring with them agony, but the reader is also able to see how Ruth uses the crisis to make wise decisions and be proactive. Even so *Ruth* is a story that imitates life, and no easy answers are given to the questions we bring (Fewell & Gunn 1990:16).

By using a literary, narrative analysis, I will explore the grief of the women in this story and allow Neimeyer’s theory of meaning reconstruction to ‘speak’ into their recovery and survival. Neimeyer argues that “grieving is a process of meaning reaffirmation and reconstruction in which the griever can actively take part as an agent and make positive changes in life” (Neimeyer in Wong 2008:383). Particular attention will be paid to Neimeyer’s narrative approach, which will allow the women in *Ruth* to tell their life story. Naomi’s lament (see 1:20-21) expresses a

¹⁵ In *Ruth* we read of how God restores the lives of those who were left bereft and grieving through provision – food, a husband for Ruth, the birth of a son. The *Book of Ruth* is a story about God’s grace in the midst of difficult circumstances.

range of emotions that correlate with the themes of grief and loss. In line with the various attachment styles mentioned above, *Ruth* records two very different grief responses. In the face of their respective losses, Naomi holds God responsible, whereas Ruth turns to God, inviting God to intervene.

1.4.6 Christian perspectives on dealing with grief

As a minister, when caring for those who are grieving, my reference point is God. Faith in God provides the spiritual griever with a system for dealing with their grief. God is the One whom I personally lean on and the One into whose Presence I am to bring the one who is struggling with grief. When faced with grieving congregants, ministers should be aware of and wholly reliant on the Presence of Christ in pastoral encounters designed to offer comfort to those who mourn. Through his or her physical presence, the minister is a companion to the one grieving. Companioning is about remembering to pay attention to the Spirit, to be led instead of needing to lead (Massey 2000:477). God is already at work within the life of the parishioner. God is at work in all places in advance of, and often in spite of, what individuals might feel they can offer (Massey 2000:478).

As a Minister of Religion, my approach to care for those wrestling with grief is a pastoral one. According to Louw (1994:191), pastoral care for the bereaved should include the following: facilitation of the processes and phases of grief, the provision of support in making choices for the future, the mediation of hope through the use of Scripture, and acting as an interpreter between the pain of the griever and God's compassion.¹⁶ Clinebell (1984:103) asserts that spiritual healing and growth is the core task in all pastoral care. Using religious resources, such as prayer, meditation and Scripture people in crisis can be strengthened and led to growth (Clinebell 1984:124). Making use of a process called 'grief work', the wounds caused by grief are allowed to heal. Clinebell identifies five tasks of grief work, and the type of help that facilitates the completion of each task (Clinebell 1984:221). The five tasks of grief work are: experiencing shock; working through painful feelings; acceptance of the loss and putting one's life back; making decisions and coping with the new reality;

¹⁶ In Chapter Four sections 4.4 - 4.8 of my dissertation I will elaborate on Louw's (1994) goals in pastoral care and grief counselling.

putting one's loss in a wider context of meaning and faith, reaching out to others experiencing similar losses for help. The help that facilitates the completion of each task includes : a ministry of presence and spiritual comfort; a ministry of caring and responsive listening; a ministry of support in the difficult tasks of rebuilding ones' life; a ministry of facilitating spiritual growth; and a ministry of enabling outreach to others.¹⁷ As part of my pastoral approach, I will explore presence, companioning, hope, prayer and the gospel within the context of grief. In the construction of my intervention program, I will place alongside the five tasks of grief work, the help that is required to facilitate the completion of each task and in turn, will facilitate the spiritual healing necessary in the face of grief.

1.4.6.1 A pastoral theology of hope

A pastoral theology of hope enables those grieving to see and believe that there can be solutions, without disregarding the pain of the negative feelings associated with grief (Kwan 2010:66). If maintaining hope is the foundation of all healing, as psychotherapist Jon G. Allen attests, then the gospel has something fundamental to offer those afflicted by trauma (in Van Deusen Hunsinger 2011:21). Moltmann's theology of hope emphasizes that it is the resurrection of the crucified Jesus that makes Christian hope relevant to the suffering (Jones: 2012:34). Similarly, Capps suggests that "what makes the pastor unique amongst other professionals is that the pastor is fundamentally an agent or bearer of hope" (Capps 1996:325) For Capp's hope is the spirit, or fuel, of the ordained or lay minister's mission in caring for souls. Capps' and Moltmann's work is undergirded by that of Victor Frankl (1985:87), the founder of logotherapy, who argues that spiritual freedom cannot be taken away – that is what makes life meaningful and purposeful. Frankl argued that part of hope is a decision to choose to find hope despite the circumstances of one's losses.

1.5 Key Research Question

How can the *Book of Ruth* assist in developing an intervention strategy which can aid UPCSA congregants to meaningfully reconstruct their lives after loss?

¹⁷ In Chapter Four of my dissertation, I will explore these five tasks and the type of help that facilitates the completion of each task in detail.

1.6 Research Sub-Questions

1. What perspectives of grief, loss and recovery are present in the Book of Ruth?
2. How can the *Book of Ruth* be read through Neimeyer's theory of meaning reconstruction and Capp's pastoral theology of hope, so as to contribute towards developing a spiritual intervention programme that can assist UPCSA congregants to work through their grief in a meaningful way?

1.7 Objectives

1. To discern and discuss the perspectives of grief, loss and recovery as present in *Ruth*.
2. To determine how *Ruth* may be read through Neimeyer's theory of meaning reconstruction and Capp's pastoral theology of hope, so as to contribute towards developing a spiritual intervention programme that can assist UPCSA congregants to work through their grief in a meaningful way.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

This is an interdisciplinary study that will draw upon grief theory and an analysis of the *Book of Ruth*. This study is framed by Neimeyer's theory of meaning reconstruction, Capp's pastoral theology of hope, and the transformative philosophy of Contextual Bible Study (CBS).

1.8.1 Neimeyer's theory of meaning reconstruction

As will be discussed in Chapter 3, Neimeyer (cited in Matthews & Marwit 2006:87) argues that "people coping with loss or trauma often feel forced to make sense of the circumstances, to find *meaning* in the event". Capps concurs that hope and future are interconnected, and establish a spiritual framework for meaningful change (Louw 2015:30). Neimeyer makes use of the constructivist perspective on grief and bereavement, paying particular attention to experiences that disrupt people's worlds of meaning and that impel them to seek sense and significance in their loss. The constructivist viewpoint emphasises the need for people to impose meaning on their difficult and challenging life experiences (Neimeyer, Burke, Mackay & Van Dyke Stringer 2009:2). Neimeyer includes the narrative approach in his meaning

reconstruction theory, suggesting that our own life stories are self-authored, as we reflect, interpret and reinterpret what happens in our lives, telling and retelling our stories to other people and ourselves. Meaning, then, is embedded in our life stories, and can be evoked by accessing people's stories in their own words. This approach is referred to as the narrative approach (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:38).

1.8.2 Capps' theory on agents of hope

Capps observes that a "narrative approach" to pastoral care is pertinent, in that much of pastoral care involves the telling and the hearing of stories (Carlin 2016:621). Capps' work relates to that of Neimeyer and Frankl, where he argues that one of the tasks of pastoral counsellors is to help persons find a motivating meaning for their lives. The recovery of a meaningful life may begin with one's relationship with God (Capps 1990:137). When God is experienced during grief, then this experience of God is one of hope. Faith in God, provides hope or trust within the context of grief and loss. Grief is the context for understanding Christian hope in "the resurrection of the dead" (Rogers-Vaughn 2009:8).

As a minister, involved in the pastoral care of congregants, I have found that it is the love, faithfulness and the comfort of God that those grieving most require. According to Van Deusen Hunsinger (2001:9), pastoral theology is first and foremost a theology of God's care for the world in Jesus Christ, in which we are invited to participate. This means that all pastoral care depends upon prayer, leads to worship, and trusts in the promises of God. Such an orientation leads us to confess that though we ourselves cannot truly redeem traumatic loss, we cling in hope to the One who can and does. Capps suggests that being an agent of hope is to turn the eyes of the bereaved from the suffering present towards a fulfilment in the future. He contends that pastors are called to become agents of hope (Capps 1995:1). The opposite of hope is despair and desperation. According to Capps, if people are given hope then they can move forward with patience (Kwan 2010:54). To reclaim hope in a time of loss is a journey leading to restoration, which takes time.

As agents of hope, ministers ought to be able to help those who are grieving, to move forward with God, and with hope, with the intention of enabling those that might be

grieving to be able to meaningfully reconstruct their life, such that they can see and believe in solutions. To be an agent of hope is what ministry is inherently and ultimately about (Capps 1995:2).

1.8.3 The Book of Ruth and CBS

My narrative reading of *Ruth*, which aims to draw out the characters' responses to grief, will complement Neimeyer's narrative approach in his meaning reconstruction theory and Capp's narrative approach to pastoral care. Niemeyer's theory of meaning reconstruction and Capps' pastoral theology of hope will frame my reading of *Ruth*. I will endeavour to produce a spiritual intervention programme for grievers as a method of meaningfully reconstructing their lives after loss. This spiritual intervention programme will take the form of a CBS on *Ruth*, which aims to: a) assist congregants to engage with the text through the lens of their grief experiences; and b) formulate ways in which they can utilise their learning to foster meaning reconstruction and hope in their own lives, as well as the lives of other grievers within their community/communities.

CBS has its origins in the so-called See-Judge-Act method, where the Bible study process begins with the analysis of the local context (i.e. see), and then re-reads the Bible to allow the Biblical text to speak to the context (i.e. judge), after which it moves to action, as the participants respond to what God is saying (i.e. act) (West 2015:4). CBS is situated within the needs of a particular community (West 2015:4). The needs of the community I serve include the grief of those having lost a loved one. It is the participant's perspective on reality that shape the Bible Study (West 2015:4). The participants bring to the CBS their own experiences of loss and grief. The Bible is read carefully and closely in order to hear its distinct 'voice' within its own literary and socio-historical context (West 2015:4). Through reading *Ruth* carefully and closely, participants can grapple with the text, as well as their own experiences of loss and grief through the text.

CBS is used within faith communities, as it is designed and used here. The CBS will allow the participants to grapple with *Ruth*, as well as their own experiences of loss and grief through the text, powerfully allowing participants to articulate and own their

own interpretation of a text in relation to their context (West 2015:12). CBS will also ask them to identify resources they can use to assist other grievers, as well as come up with a plan of action (Act) (West 2015:13).

CBS is uniquely suitable to the faith community of grieving persons under scrutiny here. Through a careful reading of *Ruth*, and by the participants bringing their own experiences to the text, it will afford them the opportunity to have their hope restored, as well as to begin a process of meaningfully reconstructing their lives with God. The participants could become agents of hope to others who are grieving, as the CBS will challenge them to come up with a plan of action. CBS makes use of a narrative approach, as does Neimeyer and Capps. CBS, Neimeyer and Capps are all transformative in their respective approaches. CBS is transformative in the sense that it can cause a shift in viewpoint, as participants see that through *Ruth*, they are able to identify the themes of loss and grief as pertaining to their contexts. Neimeyer's theory of meaning reconstruction is transformative in the sense that it inspires change by encouraging those who are grieving to make sense out of their loss. Capp's pastoral theology of hope is transformative where encourages the minister to be an agent of hope, and in doing so the minister facilitates a process of hopeful change in the lives of those grieving.

In *Ruth* 1:16 Ruth begins her new life with a conversion. She chooses to follow the God of Israel. Ruth's attachment and commitment was to Naomi, but also to God. Through her commitment to Naomi, Ruth is willing to give up everything to care for Naomi, whilst modelling what it means to be a companion to someone who is grieving. Pastoral counsellors function as companions alongside those who are grieving, and, as such, provide an alternative form of attachment for the bereaved. Ruth illustrates this model in pastoral counselling through her decision to accompany Naomi. Her attachment to Naomi is intense, based on her affection for her. Naomi on the other hand, is willing to detach herself from Ruth. In moments when death seems intractable and the only reality, it may prove to be the case that another human soul can be an auxiliary in the progression from suffering and journeying towards hope (Karlin-Newmann 1994:130).

The combination of Neimeyer's theory of meaning reconstruction, Capps's pastoral theology of hope, the Biblical *Book of Ruth* (see below) and a CBS, should go a long way in helping me to develop a meaning reconstruction strategy for those who are grieving. As Burke and Niemeyer argue, when grief is contemplated through the lens of faith, meaning can be re-discovered (2014:8).

1.9 Research Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature. It is conducted by means of collecting and analysing data from existing literature. Methodologically, the study employs a narrative analysis of *Ruth*. The study will culminate in the development of a CBS that may be used as an intervention strategy to help bereaved congregants reconstruct meaning in their lives after bereavement due to death. However, the testing or running of the CBS will occur outside of this dissertation. In other words, the study will not be informed by empirical data.

1.9.1 Contextual Bible Study

CBS asks two types of questions: a) those about the context of the participants; and b) those about the Biblical text. The Bible study always begins and ends with contextual questions, as these provide the framework for the CBS. These contextual questions are called 'community consciousness questions', because they draw on the lived experiences of the participants. Textual questions force the group to engage with the Biblical text. These textual questions are called 'critical consciousness questions'. Such questions draw on the resources of biblical scholarship. The questions need to be constructed in such a way that they open up the biblical text for it to address the context of the participants (West 2015:10).

The three dimensions of the text that receive focus are:

- a) Behind the text (focusing on the socio-historical world that produced the text) (West 2015:10);
- b) On the text (focusing on the text itself as a literary composition) (West 2015:10);
and
- c) In front of the text (focusing on the possible worlds that the text projects beyond itself towards the reader) (West 2015:10).

A CBS begins with an in-front-of-the-text focus. This allows participants to express what they think the text is about, and what the text says, or means to them. The reading then moves to on-the-text. Questions are designed in such a way so as to allow the readers to read slowly, closely, and carefully. Next, questions, are designed in such a way as to allow the participants to probe the world behind the text. The questions that have been designed, allow participants to explore the social and historical world from which the text originates. Finally, the focus returns to in-front-of-the-text questions. This allows participants to re-read the text and ask once again what it means to them (West 2015:11).

1.9.2 Narratology

In my reading of *Ruth*, I use a literary, narrative analysis. Literary analysis explores and makes explicit the conventions of biblical literature in order to understand the message it intends to carry (Longmann 1987:60). According to Fewell & Gunn (1990:13) when we read *Ruth* we read it as we would a novel or short story. In doing so, we seek to be sensitive to the shifts in the plot, to the characters, and to the play of language that focuses our attempts on finding meaning in the story. Biblical narrative makes extensive use of speech and actions of characters to further the plot and to create characterisation (Berlin 1983:38). It is through the words of Naomi that the themes of loss, despair and grief are communicated to the reader. I argue that *Ruth* is a 'life-giving' tool for the UPCSA, by uncovering the narrative's strategies for recovery and the determination to survive. Using *Ruth*, this research aims to create an intervention programme to assist those grieving to be able to meaningfully reconstruct their lives with God. The spiritual intervention programme constitutes two Contextual Bible Studies.

Salient aspects of narratology include textual meaning, reading the text as a literary artefact, narrators and modes of narration, character and characterisation, and aspects of structure (Oosthuizen 1994:85). The setting, the characters, the events, what the characters think or say, are all important for narrative analysis (Tolmie 2012:20). In order for me to explore the characters of Ruth and Naomi and their responses to the loss that they experience, as well as to be able to uncover their elements of recovery in the text, these aspects of narratology receives attention here.

Reading the text as a literary artefact challenges the readers to probe its communicative strategies. According to Longmann (1987:85), language has an emotive function, where in this research I probe the 'message' of loss, recovery, and hope as communicated by the characters in the *Book of Ruth*.

By looking at the characters, plot, setting and narrative, I identify themes, or feelings towards grief. A literary theme that I will examine is that of tragedy. The narrative of Ruth, the famine that occurs, the fact that Ruth and Orpah are barren and the death of their husbands, are all motifs of emptiness, which emphasise the element of tragedy.

The methodology is chosen to suit the theoretical framework, which aims to identify activities that bereaved people must undergo in order to meaningfully reconstruct their lives after loss, and explore a pastoral theology of hope. The results thereof will be to propose a spiritual intervention programme for those who are grieving.

In summary:

1. The study pursues a narratological reading of the book of *Ruth* in order to identify the themes of tragedy, loss and despair, and examine the characters and their responses to grief.
2. I explore Neimeyer's theory of Meaning Reconstruction, and his argument that life can be meaningfully reconstructed after loss. Ministers are involved in pastoral care and counselling, particularly in the area of grief work, and so I will make use of Capp's pastoral model to help persons find a motivating meaning for their life.
3. An end result of the research the development of a CBS for spiritual grievers using the themes of hope and meaning reconstruction as derived from the work of Neimeyer and Capps as well as the *Book of Ruth*.

1.10 Limitations

North Durban Presbyterian Church is part of the UPSCA, and situated within a middle-to upper-class suburb in Durban North. The congregation is also home to some

working class and retired persons, male and females of all ages, about 75% of which are white, with the rest being black or Indian members. This research is tailored to this church context but may find applicability with other Christian ministers. The study is limited where it excludes empirical research. However, this limitation is consonant with the study's qualitative methodology and its aim of *developing* an intervention strategy, namely a CBS on the *Book of Ruth*. The CBS that is developed will be run several times outside the bounds of the study in order to hone it and make it more conversant with congregants' needs.

1.11 Outline of Chapters

1.11.1 Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

This chapter explains the rationale for the research, a literature review, the research questions, objectives, the theoretical framework informing the research, the methodology it employs, and the overall structure of the dissertation.

1.11.2 Chapter 2: Grief

This chapter will broadly examine the subject of grief. It considers grief as an emotional response to loss, the impact of culture and gender on grief and mourning, and grief in the Bible, as an invaluable tool for grief work among Christian believers. The stage theories of grief are introduced, along with some of the psychological models that refer to the role of meaning in grief.

1.11.3 Chapter 3: Neimeyer's Theory of Meaning Reconstruction

In this chapter, I thoroughly examine Neimeyer's theory of meaning reconstruction. Neimeyer suggested a move towards a constructivist approach to grief. This is the idea that coping with grief builds new meaning for one's life after the death of a loved one.

1.11.4 Chapter 4: Pastoral Care: A Theology of Hope

My research is approached from the premise of faith. The tasks of grief work, as described by Clinebell, will lead to an exploration of the minister's role of active listening, companioning, comfort, and presence. The important work of Capps (2001),

who explores a theology of hope, provides the filis rouge for the pastoral care approach presented here, centering on the fundamental spiritual concept of *eternal hopefulness*.

1.11.5 Chapter 5: Grief, Loss and Recovery in the Book of Ruth

In this chapter, I read *Ruth* from a literary perspective, examining the themes of grief, loss, tragedy, trauma and recovery, as presented in Ruth. I intend to apply Neimeyer's theory to the lives of the women in the book of Ruth, thereby arguing that through their grief they were able to meaningfully reconstruct their lives.

1.11.6 Chapter 6: An Intervention Strategy (CBS)

In this chapter, the work done in the previous chapters is be used to design an intervention strategy for UPCSA congregants who are grieving, to meaningfully reconstruct their lives with God.

1.11.7 Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter summarizes all of the above work designed to ultimately develop an intervention strategy for the UPCSA in the field of grief.

Chapter 2

LOSS AND GRIEF

“God is our refuge and strength, always ready
to help in times of trouble.”

(GNS) Psalm 46:1

2.1 Introduction to Chapter 2

Throughout life, everyone has to face loss, whether it be the loss of a job, loved one, or a life. Grief accompanies loss, where both grief and loss are profoundly personal. This dissertation focuses on grief caused by the loss of a loved one, and this chapter will begin by situating grief within the broader category of loss. It then discusses grief and mourning as a result of the loss of a loved one, and includes a discussion of the different types of losses, as well as definitions of grief, mourning and bereavement as a reaction of response to loss. It focuses on grief in the Bible as the Bible is an invaluable tool for grief work among Christian believers, and considers the manner in which Scripture deals with the subject of grief. This chapter explores theories of the stages of grief, as well as some of the psychological models that refer to the role of meaning in grief.

2.2 Grief as a response to the loss of a loved one

Burke and Neimeyer’s (2014:1088) research concluded that when losses resulted from natural causes, bereaved individuals respond with characteristic resilience, where distress subsides rather quickly. Other mourners continue to “experience acute grief symptoms for a year or two after the loss, but ultimately cope adaptively resulting from natural causes.” Grief may, in certain instances, prove to be acutely distressing and functionally impairing. A subset of grievers struggle for a prolonged period, evidencing a profoundly disruptive grief response, known as complicated grief (CG), or prolonged grief disorder (PGD) (Burke & Neimeyer 2014:1088).

All grief is personal, and I am of the opinion that everyone grieves differently, where there is no right or wrong way to grieve. A meaning reconstruction view emphasises the subtle nuances of difference in each griever’s reaction or response, in the sense

that no two people can be presumed to experience the same grief in response to the “same” loss (Gilbert in Neimeyer 1999:68). Author Sheryl Sandberg (2017:10-11) explains her grief after the death of her husband, noting that “there is no right or proper way to grieve or face challenges, so we don’t have perfect answers. There are no perfect answers.” Sandberg & Grant (2017:10) argue “Loss, grief and disappointment are profoundly personal. We all have unique circumstances and reactions to them. The darkness will pass, but you have to help it along”.

Grief is often described as what someone might think and feel on the inside after someone they love dies. In my experience, of having to comfort and walk alongside those who are grieving the loss of a loved one, it is not time that heals, but rather the acceptance of having to learn to live over time with the loss of their loved one. My prayer upon entering those situations has often been the serenity prayer¹⁸ originally written by the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr as follows:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can: and wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will; that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next.
Amen.

Underlying this emotional process of grief, is the inherent fear of separation, isolation, rejection and loneliness common to all of humanity (Louw 1994:179). Grief is thus the reaction to separation in which the normal rhythm of life has suddenly been disturbed and disrupted (Louw 1994:179). As Archer expresses it, “Grief ...is the cost we pay for being able to love in the way we do” (1999:5).

¹⁸ The Serenity Prayer is a common name for a prayer written by the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971). This prayer has been adopted and popularised by Alcoholics Anonymous and other twelve-step programmes. Accessed online. <https://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer> Accessed 8 June 2018

2.3 Trauma and Grief

The death of a loved one can result in significant psychological trauma for those that are left behind, particularly if the death has been violent and unexpected (Magezi & Manda 2016:2). When something triggers the memory of the trauma of loss, for example a certain tone of voice that may remind the person of their deceased loved one, a 'flashback' may occur (Van Deusen Hunsinger 2011:14). Traumatic events can also result in Post-Traumatic Stress (PTSD). When feelings of intense fear, loss of control and helplessness persist for more than a month after the tragic event, then PTSD can be the diagnosis (Van Deusen Hunsinger 2011:11). In studies by Janoff-Bulman, it was concluded that traumatic life events can have a long-term impact (Janoff-Bulman 1989:131). Years after the sudden and unexpected loss of a loved one, it was found that these losses resulted in enduring difficulties. Years after experiencing a traumatic event, these persons reflected negative views of themselves and the world (Janoff-Bulman 1989:131).

Resilience is the ability of individuals exposed to disruptive events "to maintain both healthy psychological and physical functioning and the capacity for emotional resilience" (Bonanno 2010:np).¹⁹ According to West, CBS is a resource in the construction of resilience. Participants in contextual Bible studies draw on the Bible as a resource to help them cope with their struggles in life (West 2016:224).²⁰ The intervention programme here will involve two CBS's on *Ruth*, which will allow participants to draw on the salient aspects of the Book that pertain to loss, grief, trauma and hope. The gospel has something fundamental to offer those afflicted by trauma (Van Deusen Hunsinger 2011:21).²¹ Studies suggest that spirituality and our understanding of God affect whether we cope with trauma, as well as how we cope with trauma in our lives (Magezi & Manda 2016:7). It is fundamental to competent pastoral care that a traumatic reaction is treated as valid and not minimised or discounted by those offering the pastoral care (Van Deusen Hunsinger 2011:12).

2.4 The impact of culture on grief and mourning

¹⁹ Regrettably I am unable to source the page number. Accessed online 8 October 2018.

²⁰ Two CBS's on the book of *Ruth* have been devised as part of this study as a resource to help people who are grieving.

²¹ I will discuss this further in Chapter 4.

All groups, people, societies and families have a culture, which is a way of doing things and a set of norms about how things ought to be done. One of these things is grief (Walter 2010:5). Every society has norms that frame grieving. These norms include feeling, thinking and spiritual rules (Doka 2008:225). According to Neimeyer, “the very terms in which we construe death and grief are cultural artifacts, as are the social roles we assign to survivors” (Neimeyer 2000:554). Those who are grieving draw on the resources and rituals of the cultural traditions in which they are situated and reinterpret these at personal and interpersonal levels (Neimeyer 2000:554).

Numerous variables have an influence on the process of grief within cultures, for example the meaning of death may vary widely from culture to culture, and cultures differ greatly in how grief is expressed. I have decided to discuss two variables that influence the process of grief within the culture, namely, the cultural context and gender. My cultural context is that of a white Western, Christian perspective. It is important to note that my congregational membership is 80% white, and the remaining 20% are either Indian or black. In my pastoral context, I have also observed a difference between the way men and women grieve and mourn.²²

2.4.1 Cultural context and grief

People from different cultures often show wide variations in the way they express grief. “What we believe about what happens to our loved one after death, our new positions in the world in their absence, and even how to go about grieving, are informed by our social and cultural environments” (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:58).

Despite variations in mourning rituals and expressions of grief across cultures, “the death of a close relationship elicits profound distresses everywhere in the world” (Mikulincer & Shaver 2008:94). We all belong to groups that have norms for how we are expected to grieve (Walter 2010:5). Bereaved people from one ethnic group may experience (or express) feelings of grief that vary in nature and intensity from those experienced or expressed by other ethnic groups (Stroebe et al., 2008:5). Contemporary western culture is dominated by what might be termed an essentialist

²² Other relevant variables are: disenfranchised grief, when a person does not have the ‘right’ to claim sympathy and support during their grief; socially defined loss, such as the loss of an animal not seen as a credible cause for intense grief.

understanding of grief, a view that grief represents a natural response to profound loss, one characterised by presumably universal symptoms, stages or struggles (Neimeyer, Prigerson & Davies 2002:236). This perspective further situates grief within persons, keeping with a strong cultural emphasis on individualism and a tendency to attribute human distress to inner states or traits of the affected persons, rather than to broader social systems and structures (Foucault in Neimeyer et al., 2002:236).

Within an African context, bereavement is the concern of the entire community, and as such, the community assists in the process of bereavement healing. Rituals²³, sacrifices, and ceremonies are practiced with the aim of bringing consolation, healing, and meaning following the death of a loved one, to the community as a whole (Magezi & Keya 2013:4). Singing and poetry can also be included as part of ritual practices. Within a Western context, singing and poetry is often also part of ritual practices. These practices often take place within the context of the funeral service. These rites allow the bereaved to express their pain through eulogies, crying and remembrance (Magezi & Keya 2013:4). Rituals are passed on from one generation to the next. Death is also a gateway to life with the ancestors. A strong belief exists that ancestors are closer to God than the living (Moyo 2014:215). Those who have died are accessible, so ritual practices are carried out in order to please them so that the ancestors can bring prosperity to the living.

In traditional Christian belief, death is not seen as the end of existence, life, in some form, continues beyond physical death, which we call eternal life²⁴. Cultural rituals, for example in the form of a traditional Christian memorial service, provide structure for the emotional chaos of grief, conferring a symbolic order on events, and facilitating the *construction of shared meanings among members of the family or community* (Neimeyer et al., 2002:237). Funerals or memorial services play a role in enfranchising grief. The funeral becomes the vehicle by which both the person who has passed and the grief at their passing can at once be acknowledged, as well as the space where

²³ The words rite and ritual are closely connected. A rite refers to a particular religious or other solemn ceremony or act. The detailed enactment is a ritual which constitutes a rite. Oxford Dictionary Online. Accessed 1 April 2019.

²⁴ In the Biblical view, human beings are not naturally immortal. Immortality belongs to God alone, though it is bestowed on believers as a gift. The destiny of believers is an act of God's grace. Those that die will be resurrected and transformed when welcomed into the presence of Christ (1 Thes 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:35-57) (Ferguson, & Wright 1988:230).

support can be extended to those in mourning (Doka 2008:227). Having discussed how culture shapes grief in various contexts, I will now discuss gender differences in grief, which are also culturally cued.

2.4.2 Gender and mourning

In his research amongst the Jahunda people of Zimbabwe, Moyo (2014:213) recognises or identifies that gender plays a role in mourning rituals, as men and women perform different death rituals. In research conducted by Rosenblatt and Nkosi on isiZulu widows, it was shown that they are obliged to undergo demanding mourning rituals. These rituals in some ways estranged them from others, because these women deemed to be dangerous (Rosenblatt & Nkosi 2007:78). Following the death of a husband, as part of the mourning ritual, some isiZulu widows wear special black mourning garments for a year, shave their head, and comport themselves so that people know that they are grieving, and remain relatively isolated from others for the first year of mourning (Rosenblatt & Nkosi 2007:78). Some of these mourning rituals and cultural beliefs can have a negative psychological effect on isiZulu widows. Widows are framed as otherworldly, and as persons to be feared and avoided. A widow's grief is therefore shaped by isolation within the community, as she has little opportunity to develop intersubjective grief narratives through conversing with others (Rosenblatt 2008:215).

In most Western societies, women grieve more expressively than men, and in many traditional cultures women do the lamenting on a group's behalf (Walter 2008:251). Research results by Bosnick, Small and Burton (2010:257) supports the finding that bereavement is associated with poorer memory performance with men. Bereaved men have higher rates of mental health problems, especially depression (Bosnick et al. 2010:258). Research has shown that grandmothers are more likely to express a desire to talk about the child who died than grandfathers (Hayslip & White 2008:447). Religious beliefs are also more often found to be the source of comfort and recovery for women, when compared to men (Hayslip & White 2008:447).

2.5 Theories Pertaining to Loss, Bereavement and Grief

Since Freud, grieving and mourning have been conceived as the processes whereby the bereaved person adjusts to the reality of their loss.

2.5.1 Freud's Model of Bereavement

Most models of grief suggest that the bereaved need to engage with their loss and work through it, so that life can be reordered and meaningful again. The first major theoretical contribution on grief was provided by Freud in his paper *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917/1957), and shaped professional intervention for nearly half a century. Freud describes mourning as detachment from the loved one (Strachey, Freud, Strachey & Tyson 1914-1916:244). He suggested that in grieving, the bereaved let go of attachments that were involved in the formation of a relationship. In doing so, when the loss is accepted, the bereaved search for new attachments.²⁵ For Freud, working through grief, involves a process of breaking the ties that bound the survivor to the deceased. This 'psychic rearrangement' involves three elements: (1) freeing the bereaved from bondage to the deceased; (2) readjustment to new life circumstances without the deceased; and (3) building of new relationships. Freud believed that the bereaved needed to work through their, otherwise the grief process would become complicated and there could be a risk of mental and physical illness, where recovery could also be compromised (Hall 2014:8).

Recent research proposes that resolution of grief is resolved by the integration of the deceased, and not by detachment. In 1996, Dennis Klass proposed the theory of Continuing Bonds, which suggested a paradigmatic shift in understanding the severing bonds with the deceased as not always necessary, and maintaining a continued bond with the deceased can be healthy and helpful. There are many meaningful ways to maintain bonds with the deceased, for example, living your life in a way your loved one would be proud of; thinking about the advice a loved one may have given; and ongoing rituals to honour and remember someone (Williams & Haley 2018:np).²⁶ The work of Rosenblatt is instructive here, as it supports the theory of continuing bonds with the deceased. Rosenblatt argues that the bonds with the deceased do not need

²⁵ Regrettably, there is no author named in this article. AIPC Article Library 2010. Theories of Loss and Grief. Available at: www.aipc.net.au/articles/theories-of-loss-and-grief/. Accessed 13 September 2018.

²⁶ Regrettably there was no page on this website. Accessed online 8 November 2018.

to end after a prescribed period of time, but can be continued in meaningful ways thereafter.

2.5.2 Kubler-Ross's cycle of grief

In Kubler-Ross's seminal work, *On Death and Dying* (1989), she introduced her five-stage model of approaching death. Although this model was originally intended for patients with a terminal illness, she later broadened her focus to suggest that it is applicable for anyone who has experienced a catastrophic loss allowing a bereavement, or when faced with tragic news or when having to deal with extremely difficult situations (Kubler-Ross 1989:122). Her model has been criticized by those who say that individuals who experience loss do not proceed through a linear set of stages, and that reactions to loss are as diverse as the people who experience them (in Holland 2014). Kubler-Ross defends her argument, saying that "these stages have been widely used and misused" (2005:23). She goes on to note that the stages "were never meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages. They are responses to loss that many people have, but there is not a typical response to loss, as there is no typical loss. Our grief is as individual as our lives" (2005:7). The five stages are tools to help frame and identify what someone who is grieving may be feeling, and a way of equipping them to cope with life and loss. They are not stops on a linear timeline of grief. Not everyone will go through all of them, or go through them in a prescribed order (Kubler-Ross 2005:7). Kubler-Ross speaks about those who are grieving as "going back and forth emotionally" (2005:34).

The first stage is denial and isolation. The person in denial is grieving the loss of a loved one (Kubler-Ross & Kessler 2014:25). This first stage of grieving helps to survive the loss, through denying that it has occurred. In this stage, the world becomes meaningless, overwhelming and life makes no sense (Kubler-Ross & Kessler 2014:26). Denial functions as a buffer after unexpected or shocking news and allows the person to collect themselves (Kubler-Ross 1989:35). Janoff-Bulman concurs with Kubler-Ross, saying that denial slows the process of change down and further states that immediately following a traumatic experience the highest levels of denial can be expected because the potential shock is the greatest (1989:123).

Denial is usually a temporary defense and is eventually replaced by partial acceptance (Kubler-Ross 1989:36).

The second stage is anger. When the first stage of denial cannot be maintained any longer, it is replaced by feelings of anger, rage, envy and resentment. Our first reaction to catastrophic news is “No! It is not true, no it cannot involve me.” The logical next question becomes: “Why me?” Anger can be very difficult to cope with from the point of view of the family. Anger is displaced in all directions and projected onto people randomly (Kubler-Ross 1989:45). Anger is also often expressed towards God, with statements such as, ‘Why did God not help?’, ‘Why does God cause bad things to happen to good people?’ During this stage, a person’s faith may feel shattered (Kubler-Ross & Kessler 2014:30). Often anger is expressed when someone cannot control a situation. Their loved one could not be spared death, they could not intervene, therefore this phase of anger is experienced in the grieving period. The process of grief always includes some elements of anger. These emotions are often disguised or repressed, and prolong the period of grief, or show up in other ways (Kubler-Ross 1989:4). We are not to judge such feelings as bad, but to understand their true meaning and origin as something very human. For example, the five-year-old who loses his mother is both blaming him/herself for their disappearance, and expressing anger at their mother for having deserted him/her and for no longer gratifying his/her needs (Kubler-Ross 1989:4). Anger is a necessary stage of the healing process of grief. In the process of grieving there are many recurring moments of anger in its many forms (Kubler-Ross 1989:27). Anger can be extended to loved ones, the doctor, family, friends, even to the loved one who has died as well as to God. During grieving, anger is to be expected as a natural reaction to the unfairness of loss (Kubler-Ross & Kessler 2014:31).

The third stage is bargaining. Bargaining is really an attempt to postpone the inevitable (Kubler-Ross 1989:73). Bargains that are made with God are usually kept a secret, or only mentioned to someone highly trusted (Kubler-Ross 1989:74). An example of a bargain with God is, ‘Please God if you heal my loved one then I will always be an honest and kind person.’ In my pastoral ministry, people have shared with me how they have attempted to talk God into ‘changing his mind’ in this way.

The fourth stage is depression. If grief is a process of healing, then depression is one of the necessary steps along the way (Kubler-Ross & Kessler 2014:35). When grief enters our lives on a deeper level than we ever imagined, and empty feelings present themselves, then the stage of depression has been entered into. Depression is a befitting response to a great loss (Kubler-Ross & Kessler 2014:34). Life may seem pointless, daily activities may seem empty, and there may even be thoughts, asking and wondering, what, if any, the point may be of continuing (Kubler-Ross & Kessler 2014:34). Depression may leave, but it will return from time to time, as grief is cyclical (Kubler-Ross & Kessler 2014:35). This stage is reached when the person grieving realises that they have now lost some of their dreams. This is particularly prevalent when a child dies. The parents of the deceased child, lose their dream of planning a wedding for their child or no longer being able to see their child attend university. Their dreams for their child are now lost with the death of their child. When a spouse dies and the realisation occurs that the couple will never grow old together, this can cause the onset of depression, as dreams for their future life together are now lost.²⁷

The fifth stage is acceptance. This stage is about accepting the reality that the loved one is gone and recognising that this new reality is the permanent reality (Kubler-Ross & Kessler 2014:37). It is not something that we like, but eventually we learn to accept it, and live within this new norm. This is the part of the process where healing and adjustment begin to occur and anger towards God and others subside, an acceptance begins to take place (Kubler-Ross & Kessler 2014:37). When allowed time to work through the previously described stages, a person will reach a stage during which they are neither depressed nor angry about their situation (Kubler-Ross 1989:99). I believe that time does heal the wounds of grief, but more significantly, those who are grieving learn to live with their loss over time. Neimeyer says that, "Our research tells us that it is not what time does for the bereaved person that counts, it is what the bereaved person does with the time" (Russell 2017:2). It is not a simple, stage-like process. Neimeyer's research points towards what can be done usefully with that time in order

²⁷ Here I focus on depression within the context of grief after the loss of a loved one. But it is also important to note that if, for example, employment is the loss that has occurred, then one's spouse may have to become the breadwinner, and the children may feel deprived of the attention they previously had from that parent able to devote more of their time to the children.

to gain a perspective on the loss (Russell 2017:2), for example, to make sense of the loss, and to find benefit in it (for further discussion on these points see 3.5).

Experiencing an emotion in one phase does not indicate that the previous stage has been mastered. Grief comes and goes like the waves of the ocean (Brown, 1999:58). This model implies that failure to complete any of the stages can result in a variety of complications, and as such, Brown has been criticised for suggesting that individuals must move through all these stages, as this is the way grief is experienced (Hall 2014:8). However, Kubler-Ross's model acknowledges emotions experienced in the various stages to reoccur throughout the grieving process. All the various stages are responses to feelings that can last for minutes, to hours, or even weeks or months; where each stage can be flipped into or out of and then reentered. No stage is entered into, or left in a linear fashion (Kubler Ross & Kessler 2104:33).

Stage theories have an appeal in that they bring a sense of conceptual order to a complex process, and offer the emotional promise of 'recovery' and 'closure'. There appears to be no linear path to grieving, but rather, a twisting and turning of paths requiring adaptation and change. Stage theories do not address the multiplicity of physical, psychological, social, and spiritual needs experienced by bereaved people (Hall 2014:8). Stage theories also understate the extent to which people differ in the emotional states they experience following loss. Another criticism of stage theory is that these theories could encourage inappropriate expectations of the course of grieving (Weiss 2008:33). Even though stage theory is criticised, it can help a bereaved person think about what may be expected over the course of grief (Weiss in Stroebe et al., 2008:34).

Stroebe and Schut (1999) proposed the Dual Process Model (DPM), whereby the grieving individual at times engages in emotion-focused coping, at other times engages in problem-focused coping, and at yet other times, may even circumvent the different tasks of grieving.

2.5.3 The Dual Process Model (DPM) by Stroebe and Schut

A more recent and significant advance in the understanding of grief work is the Dual Process Model or DPM (Stroebe & Schut, 1999, 2001). Stroebe and Schut argue that in order to come to terms with the loss of a loved one, the bereaved has to confront their experience of bereavement (Stroebe & Schut 2009:199). The DPM is not a phasal model, as there are no stages proposed that the bereaved work through, but rather a waxing and waning, that is, an ongoing flexibility over time (Stroebe & Schut 2009:213). The model reflects the need to deal with primary and secondary stressors, as well as taking time away from both these stressors; and then at other times, avoiding the different tasks of grieving.

The DPM recognises that bereaved persons face both emotional and practical issues associated with their loss. The DPM, holds that the bereaved oscillate between two styles of coping, namely loss-orientated coping, and restoration-orientated coping. Loss orientated coping refers to those activities that deal with separation from a lost attachment figure, and include: the relationship as it had been; the circumstances surrounding the death; crying about the death of the loved person; missing or yearning for the deceased; looking at old photographs; remembering and all activities dealing with the loss itself; and other challenges often referred to as “grief work.” A range of emotions are involved, from pleasurable reminiscing, to painful longing (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:36).

Restoration-orientated coping, on the other hand, focuses on managing the secondary stressors that accompany loss, such as financial strain; as well as loneliness and disruption in one’s social life (Stroebe & Schut 2009:2124). When a loved one dies, other than grief, these additional sources of stress add to the loss and anxiety that is experienced. They include, for example, the role and intrapsychic losses of having to know how to do the tasks that the deceased used to undertake (e.g., doing the finances or cooking); the development of a new identity from “spouse” to “widow(er)”; or from “parent” to “parent of a deceased child” (it is noteworthy that there is no terminology in English for this identity) (Stroebe & Schut 2009:214).

One of the distinguishing components of this model is the dynamic process fundamental to successful coping, called oscillation (Stroebe & Schut 2009:215). Adaption involves oscillating between loss and restoration-orientated coping, until a point of contentment can be achieved and maintained in both areas (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:36). At certain times, the bereaved will be confronted by their loss, while at other times will avoid aspects of it, such as memories, seeking relief, or being distracted by other things. This is a dynamic, back and forth process as the bereaved oscillates between painful thoughts and more pleasant thoughts. Stroebe and Schut identified the central drive that motivates these tasks as the search for meaning, both in the lost relationship and in the newly re-constructed life (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:36). In the following chapter, I will discuss meaning reconstruction in the grieving process.

Stroebe and Schut's DPM is compatible with Worden's Task Model, but specifies additional tasks to incorporate the restoration-orientated dimension (Stroebe & Schut 2009:215). I now discuss The Task Model by Worden, including the compatibility of the DPM.

2.5.4 Worden's task-based model

In 1991, Worden formulated a model of grieving, in which he identified four tasks to the bereavement process; which, unlike the potential passivity of the Stage model, present a dynamic action within the mourner's power, allowing them to do something about their grief. Worden's tasks are as follows: Task One is to accept the reality of the loss. While accepting the reality of the loss the griever confronts their loss straight on (Massey 2000:471). According to Stroebe and Schut, it is also necessary to accept the reality of the changed world (Stroebe & Schut 2009:215). Task two is to work through the pain of grief instead of suppressing it (Massey 2000:471). Stroebe and Schut argue for the additional necessity of taking time off from the pain and grief (2009:215). Once the griever has confronted their loss, they can embark upon working through the pain of the grief. Task Three involves adjusting to an environment in which the deceased is missing, referring to external (secondary stressors), as well as internal adjustments (self-assessments) and spiritual adjustments (i.e., how one views the universe etc.). Stroebe and Schut (2009:215) would add the need to reconstrue the

(subjective) environment itself. Task four involves emotionally relocating the deceased and moving on with life. Worden (1991:16) stresses that this “does not imply mechanically withdrawing all emotional investment in the deceased, or giving up on them, rather it can be seen as relocating or evolving a new relationship with the deceased that leaves room for new relationships and growth”(cited in Dames & Dames 2009:38). This task of mourning could be hindered by holding on to the past attachment rather than forming new ones. Stoebe and Schut (2009:215) argue that, in addition, bereaved persons need to develop new roles, identities and relationships. Kenneth Doka (1993) adds a fifth task to Worden’s schema, and this task is to rebuild faith and the philosophical systems challenged by loss (Massey 2000:471). Worden’s tasks enable the bereaved person to work through the emotional pain of their loss and adjust to the changes in their life. The tasks are complete when the bereaved person has integrated the loss into their life and let go of emotional attachments to the deceased, and this allows them to invest in the present and the future. This “letting go” is viewed as essential for “moving on” with one’s life, eventual recovery from depression, and a return to “normal” (Neimeyer 2001:np).²⁸

The models of Kubler-Ross and Worden maintain that after working through all the steps their models propose, that the bereavement issues can be resolved. New models have emerged since, that regard bereavement as a flexible and ongoing process that does not necessarily “resolve” in a traditional sense (Smikelsky & Neimeyer 2018:4) One of these models is the Meaning Reconstruction Model, which emphasises finding significance in the loss and the need to reconstruct life after the loss.

I will now discuss Janoff-Bulman’s assumptive world theory, which argues that trauma stems from the shattering of the assumption that the world is meaningful.

²⁸ Regrettably there is no page number on this article. Accessed online <https://griefjourney.com/startjourney/for-professionals-and-caregivers/articles-for-professionals-and-caregivers/theories-of-grief/Theories of Grief>. Accessed online 27 April 2018.

2.5.5 Janoff-Bulman's Assumptive World Theory

Parkes (1971) used the term “assumptive world” to refer to “a strongly held set of assumptions about the world and the self which is confidently maintained and used as a means of reorganizing [sic], planning and acting. Assumptions such as these are learnt and confirmed by the experience of many years” (Janoff-Bulman 1989:114). Janoff-Bulman proposed the assumptive world theory as an alternative cognitive theoretical perspective for understanding the negative impact of traumatic events (Janoff-Bulman 1989:113). Janoff-Bulman discussed what happens to one's assumptive worldview in the face of traumatic life events such as bereavement (Matthews & Marwit 2006:91). Bereavement forces people to rebuild previously held assumptions about themselves and the world. Janoff-Bulman suggests that these traumatic life events shatter beliefs and fundamental assumptions and leave individuals less likely to believe in a meaningful world (Orbach 2008:299). On the other hand, if an individual has not experienced a traumatic life event, then they are able to maintain a positive perception of themselves and others and believe in a meaningful world (Orbach 2008:299). This theory is most often applied to trauma as it helps to explain adjustment after an experience that has challenged a person's belief system or worldview (Janoff-Bulman 1989:131). Janoff-Bulman advocates, the most important process in successful cognitive adaptation is finding *benefit* in the experience (Gillies & Neimeyer 1992:35). People that have suffered traumatic experiences have reported benefits that they have gained. These include self-knowledge, a re-ordering of priorities, and a reappraisal of their life. These benefits derived, or lessons learnt, reduce the trauma attack on the person's assumptive world (Janoff-Bulman 1989:123). Contrary to the traditional views of bereavement, which maintain that the bereaved ‘work through’ their loss, and experience a timely resolution to their difficulties, Janoff-Bulman concludes that years after a traumatic event, people can still view the world differently than before their traumatic event, because their assumptions about themselves and the world has changed (1989:131).

In the following section, I discuss attachment theory as a framework for understanding grief, as well as explore loss through the lens of attachment to God.

2.5.6 John Bowlby's attachment theory as a framework for understanding the grief experience

Attachment theory was developed by British psychiatrist John Bowlby. Attachment can be defined as “an emotional connection to someone, evidenced by proximity seeking, feelings of security in the person's presence and protest from separation of this attachment figure” (Stroebe & Archer 2013:29). Attachment theory is a frame for understanding loss that illuminates grief (Kelley 2009:88). Human beings form deep emotional bonds with “attachment figures” and their powerful emotional reactions to the loss of their attachment figure can include, anger, protest, and despair (Mikulincer & Shaver 2008:88).

Bowlby's theory of grief has three parts. Firstly, it sees grief as a response to the loss of an attachment figure. An attachment figure is “someone whose accessibility had fostered a sense of security” (Weiss 2008:36). “Grief is expressed as a restless preoccupation with that lost person, because the griever is possessed by the need to regain that figure's presence, and as the griever accepts that the figure is permanently lost” (Weiss 2008:36) The loss of an attachment figure is a devastating event that triggers distress, because the person cannot imagine regaining a sense of love and security without this person's availability (Mikulincer & Shaver 2008:92). Secondly, Bowlby developed a “theory of relational styles that provides explanations for what otherwise might be considered change-driven individual differences in response to loss” (Weiss 2008:36). Thirdly, Bowlby “developed a theory of the way grief changes and abates with time” (Weiss 2008:36). Bowlby (1969) argues that “once the loss has been accepted then the griever returns to earlier levels of functioning” (in Weiss 2008:36).

Bowlby was primarily concerned with the bond linking children to parents. In his work on grief, he also accepted that bonds between spouses and other committed people were also forms of attachment. However, he concludes that “the basis for the understanding of reactions to loss is founded in the basic paradigm of the mother-infant relationship” (Raphael & Dobson 2000:46). Thus, early childhood attachment patterns can affect responses to bereavement by configuring the meaning of the loss, in such a way that it is more threatening for individuals with less secure attachment histories. For these bereaved persons they are more likely to be predisposed to prolonged and complicated grief (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:34). Attachment theory

rejects the notion that supportive friends can compensate for the loss of an attachment figure. Bowlby proposed that the attachment figure, unlike other people in the social environment, is uniquely able to foster general feelings of security and that other people could not simply take over this function (Stroebe, Stroebe & Abakoumkin 1996:1242).

2.5.6.1 The four main attachment styles

Ainsworth and Bowlby described three attachment styles. These are, secure attachment, anxious attachment, avoidant, and disorganised attachment. Grief is processed differently, by people who are secure, anxious or avoidant in their attachments (Mikulincer & Shaver 2008:88). People classified as securely attached experience lower levels of bereavement related anxiety, grief, and depression. Anxiously attached people experience higher levels of distress after loss. With regard to avoidant attachment, there is no known, significant association between this attachment style and grief (Mikulincer & Shaver 2008:106). One's attachment style influences how grief is experienced. For example, someone who is secure may move through the stages of grief fairly quickly, while someone who is anxious or avoidant may get stuck on yearning or searching or despair and disorganisation (Ackerman 2018:np).²⁹ Viewing grief through the lens of attachment theory can bring insight into our unique grieving processes and help us understand why some people get 'stuck' after a loss, and struggle to move forward.

2.5.6.2 The attachment theory in grief

Bowlby and Parkes broke down the response to grief into four stages. The first stage is shock and numbness. In this phase, the sense of loss is not real and does not seem possible to accept. If we do not progress through this phase we still struggle to accept and understand our emotions and communicate them, and then emotionally shut down and do not progress through the phases of grief. The second phase is yearning and searching. In this phase there is acute awareness of the void left in our lives from the loss. The future we imagined is no longer a possibility. There is a search for the person who has died, and a constant search for reminders of them and ways to be close to

²⁹Regrettably there is no page number available. Accessed online 6 September 2018. <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/attachment-theory/#grief-attachment-theory>.

them. If we don't progress through this phase, then we will remain preoccupied with the person we have lost. The third phase is despair and disorganisation. In this stage we have accepted that everything has changed and will not go back to the way it was. Life feels as though it will never make sense again without the presence of the person who died. If we do not progress through this stage then we will be consumed by anger, depression and our attitude towards life will remain hopeless. The final phase is re-organisation and recovery. In this phase our faith in life starts to be restored, as the grief subsides. New goals are established, and we start to rebuild and realise life can be positive, even after the loss (Bowlby).³⁰

Shear notes that "The permanent loss of an attachment relationship is highly impactful" (Shear 2010:360), while Bowlby believed that the bereaved must resolve their loss before they move on (Shear 2010:363). The Dual Process Model (DPM) suggests otherwise, and posits that mourners oscillate again and again between loss and restoration-focused coping (Shear 2010:363).

2.5.6.3 God as an attachment figure

I have discussed attachment theory as a framework for considering loss and grief. Kirkpatrick's work suggests that a relationship with God can be described as an attachment bond. He suggests that "attachment theory is an important psychological framework for understanding religious experience because a personal relationship with God is at the core of monotheistic religions, especially Christianity" (Kelley & Chan 2012:201). He posits that for many people, their relationship with God is at the core of their religious beliefs, and that this relationship provides a form of love like that present in the infant-mother relationship (Kelley 2009:92). Research shows a strong correlation between attachment to God, and attempts to cope with loss (Kelly 2009:89). Religious beliefs portray God as the ultimate secure base, and as being able to provide comfort during times of grief.³¹ God's omnipresence and omniscience offers security to those who are grieving (Kelley 2009:93). In my pastoral ministry, I have

³⁰ See <https://whatsyourgrief.com/bowlby-four-stages-of-grief/> Accessed on 6 September 2018; Bowlby, J. (1961). Processes of mourning. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 42:317-339.

³¹ An example of the comfort offered by God during grief is found in Matthew 5:4 "Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted."

discovered how comforting those grieving involves reminding them that God is infinite, all-knowing, and all-seeing.

Kirkpatrick maintains that a personal relationship with God offers an attachment like that experienced in the infant-mother relationship (Kelley & Chan 2012:201). Individuals may relate to God as being a safe haven during times of distress and a secure base during times of non-distress (Jankowski & Sandage 2014:70). This reflects a secure attachment style, in which the bereaved return to God as their attachment for comfort and safety during their grief. God acts as their base of security during their time of grief. Research by Hart, Limke & Budd (2010:123), suggests that with respect to the amount of attachment anxiety, individuals with secure attachment have higher levels of spiritual maturity than individuals with insecure attachments. They also concluded that attachments to parents and romantic relationship partners resemble attachments to God.

Kelley & Chan (2012:199) found that “secure attachment to God, meaning and positive religious coping had a significant effect on grief and stress-related growth”. Secure attachment to God is associated with lower overall grief (Kelley & Chan 2012:211). People with a secure style of attachment to God have a faith or a worldview that includes belief in a benevolent God, who is both available and responsive. With God as their secure base they may weather a death with less depression and grief. In my personal encounters with grieving people who experience God as a loving presence in their lives, this secure attachment to God, undoubtedly offers comfort during their time of loss.

2.6 Religious coping

Religion serves as a powerful way of coping with existential questions as well as the pain and trauma and intense grief that follow the death of a loved one (Naidu 2012:76). In order to cope with grief, people may draw on religious resources such as beliefs about God, or religious activities such as prayer. Pray has been noted by researchers to become more frequent after a significant death (Kelley & Chan 2012:20).

Research has established that a person with a secure attachment to God is better able to cope with their grief (Kelley & Chan 2012:211). In my experience of working with

those who are mourning, many of them turn to the church when confronted with the death of a loved one. There is a spiritual struggle that sometimes ensues at or after the death of a loved one, and because of that, they turn to their faith to find comfort in it.

2.6.1 Positive religious coping and grief

One of the ways spirituality assists those who are bereaved, is by providing meaning to life's painful events (Burke & Neimeyer 2014:1090). People vary in their responses to loss. In my own ministry experience, faith in God helps those who are mourning to both cope with and adapt to their loss. Those who are grieving, turn to their faith as a source of comfort and as a way of helping them to make sense of life in the face of their loss and grief. Positive religious coping has been described as "an expression of a sense of spirituality, a secure relationship with God, a belief that there is meaning to be found in life, and a sense of spiritual connectedness with others" (Burke & Neimeyer 2014:1090). In counselling, grieving people, I have found the following Scripture to be a source of strength during their time of grief. Psalm 147:5 says, 'Great is our Lord and mighty in power: his understanding has no limit.' This verse is a reminder that God is sovereign and God understands the array of human emotions. Other factors, such as the comfort of God, or finding support in others who have lost a loved one, all provide avenues for finding meaning in the wake of loss.

Burke & Neimeyer (2014:1077) concur that many mourners turn to their spiritual beliefs and traditions when confronted by the death of a loved one. It is the faith of the bereaved person that brings hope. One of the aspects of this hope is the belief in a reunion with their loved one in the afterlife. Many people I have encountered believe in life after death (eternal life). These people are comforted by their belief that those who die no longer suffer or experience pain in the afterlife and that one day they will be reunited with their loved one. Furthermore, their religious beliefs bring comfort to them through the understanding that the deceased continues to live on by the gift of eternal life, and so they are able to stay connected to the person they have lost. There are, however some who do not believe in eternal life. For those who do not believe in eternal life, I firstly listen to what they do believe in, allowing them to express their opinions and beliefs. Thereafter, I explain the concept of eternal life to them, and encourage them to believe in it. If you believe that there is nothing after death, it may

be difficult to derive reassurance that the deceased are no longer suffering. Whatever you believe, it is clear that your grief in the face of loss by death will be tied to how you feel about the afterlife. It seems that whether we believe in heaven, God or reincarnation, or the white light, we are comforted where we sense that there is a life hereafter; that we are more than bodies; and might have more than one mortal life, with a beginning and an end (Kubler-Ross 2014:96).

To cope with grief, many people turn to religious resources because they offer something beyond the limits of this world. As grieving people confront the crisis of meaning in their lives after the loss of a loved one, they draw on their beliefs about God, religious activities and rituals such as prayer and funeral services, and connection to a faith community (Kelly & Chan 2012:202). According to Burke & Neimeyer (2014:1095) religious individuals who successfully interpret their losses spiritually (i.e., who use religious coping strategies to make meaning) experience less grief concomitantly. Conversely, survivors who struggle with making meaning of their loss appear to be more susceptible to spiritual crisis. Thus, both meaning, and spirituality have been individually associated with bereavement outcomes. Frantz, Farrell and Trolley eloquently argue that “spiritual beliefs, whether in the form of a structured religion or a generalised belief system, may be strengthened because there is no other source of reason or solace” (in Matthews & Marwit 2006:97).

2.6.2 Negative religious coping and grief

Grief can give way to a crisis of faith in some individuals. Burke and Neimeyer (2014:1091) argue that spirituality can be experienced as both a source of strength and a source of strain. Grief can usher in spiritual distress and is often projected by the griever as anger towards God. Spiritual distress can also result in the inability to accept that a good God would allow a loved one to die, especially when the death is as a result of violent means. In my own experience, those who struggle spiritually after the loss of a loved one usually communicate that their relationship with God is most affected by feeling some sort of distance. These people also often express concerns about the after-life, doubting its existence. Even though some people experience a negative shift in their faith because of loss, for most mourners something positive is derived from enduring a crisis of faith (Burke & Neimeyer 2014:1091). For others there

is the despair of feeling forgotten by God or even worse, that the suffering the loss of a loved one can be a “direct blow from His³² hand?” For some it is difficult to reconcile their loss with a good God whose love endures forever. In Ruth 1:19-21, we see Naomi “erupt with the same agonising despair that charges God with not just the oversight of her pain but also with responsibility for it,” where she voices “The Almighty has done this to me!” (Minter 2009:40).

Burke and Neimeyer (2014:1104), encountered what they termed an ‘*unexpected finding*.’ They found that a spiritual crisis does not necessarily indicate weak or immature faith. Rather, even people with a solid faith in God can struggle tremendously, especially when facing life without a treasured attachment figure. Individuals that felt that they could no longer participate in organised religion or maintain a relationship with God might return to both again at a later stage, perhaps once the pain of the loss has lessened (Burke and Neimeyer 2014:1104).

The author Rogers-Vaughn (2003:39) elaborates on how he suffered in his own grief and through this discovered in ‘the chaos’, in the beginning, “that Genesis 1 is not some commentary about a primeval era”, noting that Genesis 1:1-2a states, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep.” This is where anything that deserves the name life must begin. In the void, in the darkness of chaos. It is into this darkness that we descend whenever we grieve”. And if we keep our eyes open in this darkness, we find what the text of Genesis 1:2b asserts: “and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” “That the breath of life, the Spirit of the Creator is moving around in there.” God’s spirit moved or hovered over the waters, which covered the earth and thus kept the chaotic forces in check. We can confidently conclude that the Spirit of God is everywhere, even in the chaos of our lives, even there the Spirit of God is associated with life.

³² I have chosen to refer to God in the masculine images such as Father, Lord and King throughout my dissertation. The reason for this is that in my experience the traditional language for God has been male. However, the Bible also contains feminine imagery for God. God is much more than a set of male characteristics (Rakoczy 2004:346). Many words and many images are necessary for the Christian community, lest it becomes fixated on one image (male or female) and forget that the reality of God is always more than any image of concept (Rakoczy 2004:71).

In both instances of negative and positive religious coping, it can be concluded that the Spirit of God is everywhere. The Scriptures as contained in the Bible, remind the person grieving of this and offer means of comfort.

2.7 The Bible and grief

Probably the most identifiable examples of grief in the Scriptures are those known traditionally as 'laments', which occur predominately in the Psalms. The Psalms were songs or liturgies that expressed the emotions of the writer and which were designed to generate similar responses in those either listening to or reading them (Massey 2000:480). I have learnt over the years of pastoral ministry that we are never alone during our times of sorrow and grief, but the accompanying presence of the Holy Spirit is always with us. The Bible contains many stories and passages about how the people of God mourned at the time of death. I will refer to a few stories contained in the Bible that refer to God's people grieving and mourning at times of death. For example, Genesis 23:2 records the story of Abraham mourning for Sarah and weeping over her. When Moses, the leader of the Israelites died, the people grieved for him until their time of weeping and mourning was over (Deuteronomy 34:8). Another example of grief in the Bible is found when David grieves over the death of Jonathan and Saul (II Samuel 1). David does not just talk about his grief, he laments it through song, and so his emotions receive expression (Massey 2000:481). The Prophet Isaiah writes of the Messiah who is to come, "he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." God also surely has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows (Isaiah 53:3-4). To me these stories illustrate that the Bible offers comfort in the face of grief, even though it does not rescue us from the pain of loss and grief.

The Bible contains numerous illustrations of God communicating with those who are suffering. One such example is that of Job. The initial monologue of Job is among the more eloquent expressions of grief in the Bible. Job 3:7 speaks of the physical symptoms owing to grief and expresses a hopelessness about the future (Job 3:11-16) (Mead 2002:10). Significant communication occurs between God and Job, even though no explanation is given to Job for his numerous losses. Rather, in Job 38, 39 and 40, God speaks to Job in response to his questions of God. In God's response no explanation for his losses is given, and God does not defend himself, instead God speaks to Job about His control over creation and through this explains to Job that he

can take care of Jobs' pain and frustration. Buechner (1973:47) finds a constructive perspective on this situation where he writes: "Maybe the reason God does not explain to Job why terrible things happen is that he knows what Job needs is not an explanation. If God did explain to Job, Job would have his explanation, and then what? Even if Job understood why his children had to die, Job would still have to face their empty chairs at breakfast every morning... God does not reveal his grand design. He reveals himself... he shows his *face*." Through my pastoral experience I have come to believe that for someone grieving it is a relationship with God that is most needed, above an explanation of why their loved one had to die.

2.7.1 The Scriptures as a source of comfort

No-one is untouched by the profound and poignant experience of grief. The Bible is a tool that ministers can use as a means to bring comfort and support to those who are grieving. Suffering does not mean that God is angry or has separated Himself from those who are suffering. Through Scripture, God can relieve fears and calm distress. When ministering in a pastoral capacity to my congregants, I endeavour to comfort them with Scripture³³. An example of this is taken from Psalm 34:18, which reminds us that "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted." In my experience congregants find hope from Scriptures. Scriptures such as, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). As Jesus hung on the cross, He cried those words to His Father. Our heavenly Father suffered a profound separation of His own. In the midst of our worst sorrows, our sovereign and loving God can be trusted. Through the use of such Scriptures, congregants have come to believe that God understands their sorrows. The comfort that is needed can be found, because "the Lord is close to the brokenhearted" (Psalm 34:18). God has included Promises in His Word to help people through grief.

As I make use of Scripture, I have discovered that it may not heal the pain of loss. But that Scripture does remind the person grieving that God still cares and accepts them even as they suffer. Through Scripture, the nearness of God can be discovered. Dreyer (2003:721) observes of Henri Nouwen, that he quotes Psalm 31, "You have

³³ I do not mean to analyse academically the texts that are mentioned outside of *Ruth*. I am using them illustratively as they would be used in a pastoral situation.

turned my mourning into dancing”, to express the centrality of God when people grieve. Jesus, extends his hand to sufferers, helps them up and invites them to move, step by step, out of their suffering until their movement becomes a joyful dance. Without the presence of God, and the help of Jesus, pain and grief cause people to become anxious and desperate (Dreyer 2003:721). If maintaining hope is the foundation of all healing, as psychotherapist Jon G. Allen attests, then the gospel has something fundamental to offer those afflicted by trauma (Allen in Van Deusen Hunsinger 2011:21).

2.8 Summary of Chapter 2

Grief is a reaction to the loss of a loved one, and can be described as emotional pain experienced as a result of the loss, together with an experience of helplessness and powerlessness. Despite there being differences in gender and culture, grief has certain universal features. Loss can occur through numerous events throughout life, such as death, a broken relationship, a life change such as relocation, the diagnosis of a life changing medical condition, or other similar events. There are different models of coping that are specific to bereavement through the death of a loved one. Freud argued that working through grief until detachment from the loved one was achieved, was part of the process of grief work. The highly influential work of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross identifies five stages of grief. Worden also identifies the bereavement process as going through various stages. Stroebe and Schut suggest that grief operates in two main ways and people switch back and forth between them as they grieve. As one grieves, one switches or ‘oscillates’, between these two different modes of being, hence the name DPM. Attachment theory originated with the seminal work of John Bowlby. Janoff-Bulman’s theory of shattered assumptions says that people operate according to a conceptual system based on a set of assumptions about the world, the self, and others. Our assumptive world is changed in bereavement.

Whether it is through a series of stages, phases or tasks, bereaved people will process their loss as they attempt to come to terms with the loss of a loved one. After the loss of a loved one, a spiritual crisis of faith can follow or alternatively the person experiencing the loss can turn to their faith in a time of grief. A secure attachment to God, and positive religious coping assists someone who is grieving. Secure attachment to God is associated with lower overall grief. There are a variety of valuable

ways to use the Bible in caring for those who are grieving (e.g., the use of Scripture). Robert Neimeyer, argues that meaning reconstruction in response to loss is the central process in grieving. I will discuss his theory in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

NEIMEYER'S THEORY OF MEANING RECONSTRUCTION

If there is meaning in life at all, then there must be meaning in suffering.

Victor E. Frankl³⁴

Grief is in two parts. The first is loss. The second is the remaking of life.

Anne Roiphe³⁵

3.1 Introduction to Chapter 3

In this chapter, I thoroughly examine Neimeyer's theory of meaning reconstruction, which he views as the principal task of coping with loss (Neimeyer et al., 2009:1). While Neimeyer is not alone in propounding this theory (Neimeyer 2005:27) he is its main proponent. Others seem to incorporate his ideas into their own grief models. For example, the constructivist or narrative approach fits well with the restoration orientation component of Stroebe and Schut's dual process model.

According to Neimeyer, "a meaning reconstruction perspective on bereavement emphasises the inveterate human quest to find order and significance in life's events at personal, interpersonal, social and cultural levels" (to be discussed further in Chapter 4) (Neimeyer & Burke 2017:41. Stated simply, we seek to construct and enact a narrative that makes sense of life, and makes sense of ourselves (Neimeyer & Burke 2017:41). Many people engage in a quest for meaning in the wake of bereavement. The bereaved, struggling to make sense of their loss, could benefit from interventions that foster this process. This chapter presents the therapeutic strategies can help bereaved persons navigate their way through the grief process.³⁶

³⁴ Victor Frankl 1984:136.

³⁵ Anne Rophie Quotes, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/3972426-grief-is-in-two-parts-the-first-is-loss-the-second-is-the-remaking-of-life>. Accessed online 5 October 2018.

³⁶ In Chapter Two, sections 2.4, I refer to the role of culture in grief, stating that my point of departure is from a Western perspective, albeit in an African context.

3.2 'Meaning' and 'meaning-making'

The terms meaning and meaning-making have been defined differently by various authors. Stroebe and Schut use the term 'meaning-making', which they define as "how a person feels and reacts on becoming bereaved is dependent on the meaning that is assigned to the loss" (in Nadeau 2008:514). Stroebe and Schut noted that grief is a process of "meaning reconstruction" and that bereaved people develop narratives of their lives (i.e. their life stories), and that these social constructs can affect the outcome of grief (Nadeau 2008:515). Frankl puts forward the idea that the primary purpose in life is the quest for meaning. For Frankl (1984:133), meaning came from three possible sources in life namely, purposeful work or doing a deed, by experiencing something or encountering someone (love) and the attitude we take toward suffering.

However, Frankl's understanding of meaning limits meaning to only positive meaning. By contrast, when more substantive meanings are studied, such as those that families attach to a particular death, negative meanings are also found (Nadeau 2008:514). An example of a negative meaning can be when parents, after the death of their child, blame each other for what they believe could have been a preventable death. For example, one of the parents accuses the other of not calling the ambulance on time. That parent believes that if the ambulance was called on time then the death of their child could have been prevented. The marriage becomes strained and relationships in the family are affected. This example demonstrates how negative meanings can result in more difficult or troubled bereavement (Nadeau 2008:515).³⁷

Bonanno, Wortmann, and Nesse (2004) used the term 'searching for meaning', and rather than focusing on the meanings themselves, they measured the degree to which the bereaved search for meaning. Searching to make sense of or find meaning in a loss, is measured by asking respondents about the extent to which they are searching for have searched for sense of meaning (Colman and Neimeyer 2010:818) Neimeyer, a leading figure in postmodern, constructivist approaches to understanding bereavement, uses the expression meaning reconstruction and sense-making (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:32). We as human beings seek an order, a plan and a significance

³⁷ An explanation of Complicated Grief (CG) or Prolonged Grief Disorder PGD can be found in Chapter Two, section 2.2 Mourners with fragile world assumptions and insecure attachment style are prone to CG (Neimeyer 2016:3).

in our existence. When our expectations meet with unexpected occurrences, such as the death of a loved one or our own serious illness, our world is shaken and we face a crisis of meaning. Neimeyer argues, “To a far greater extent than other animals, we as human beings are distinguished by living not only in a present, physical world, but also in a world populated by long term memories, long range anticipations, reflections, goals, interpretations, hopes, regrets, beliefs and metaphors – in a word, *meanings*” (2011:332).

3.3 Bereavement from the constructivist perspective

A constructivist theory of bereavement posits that grieving entails an active effort to reaffirm or reconstruct a world of meaning that has been challenged by loss (Neimeyer 2016:2). From this perspective, people are viewed as meaning makers, drawing on personal and cultural resources to construct a system of beliefs that permit them to anticipate and respond to the essential events of their lives (Neimeyer & Currier 2009:356). In keeping with this constructivist approach, loss is viewed as an event that can profoundly perturb one’s taken-for-granted constructions about life, sometimes traumatically shaking the very foundations of one’s assumptive world (Janoff-Bulman 1989). A feature of the constructivist approach to loss is the conviction of grieving as an active process (Neimeyer 1999:68). Bereavement thrusts survivors into a period of accelerated decision-making. Grievers are left with many choices to confront, as they revise their life narratives, and help them to shift through the options and make difficult decisions. Meaning reconstruction from a constructivist perspective argues that grieving cannot be understood in an isolated way, as it takes place within the framework of a larger social world. However, private grief may be understood this way, since it is linked with the responses of others (Neimeyer 1999:69). Within an African context, bereavement is primarily a communal affair, and care for the bereaved is the concern of the entire community (Magazi & Keya 2013:4) ³⁸

Echoing Frankl’s (1992) assertion that “the quest for meaning is the key to mental health and human flourishing,” constructivism is a postmodern approach to psychology that emphasises people’s need to “impose meaning on their life experience” (Neimeyer et al., 2009:2).

³⁸ A more elaborate explanation of grief and culture can be found in Chapter Two, section 2.4.

3.4 Grieving and the reconstruction of meaning

Most recently, researchers in the field have addressed ways of looking at meaning making and loss. Among the most important of these are Neimeyer's (2001a) construct of meaning reconstruction, Janoff-Bulman's (1989) theory of rebuilding shattered assumptive worldviews, and Tedeschi and Calhoun's (1995) concept of post-traumatic growth. Research shows that people coping with loss or trauma often feel forced to attribute meaning to the event; that is, to make sense of the circumstances that have caused their grief (Matthews & Marwit 2006:89). Gilbert also describes the attribution of meaning as "essential" to grief resolution (Matthews & Marwit 2006:89). According to Manda, "reconstruction carries with it a notion that something has been broken, fractured or wounded and therefore it is not in the original shape or essence" (Manda in Magezi & Manda 2016:8). As far as healing trauma in individuals, bringing back "the original" design for life may not be possible (Manda in Magezi & Manda 2016:8).

When we lose a vital participant in that self-narrative to death, implicit meanings that sustain our sense of self and our world are eroded and assumptions can be "shattered", as Janoff-Bulman has theorised. Viewed in this light, grieving commonly entails an attempt to reconstruct a world of meaning that has been challenged by the loss (Neimeyer & Burke 2017:41). It is important to note that research does suggest that there are individuals who see no need to "make sense" of their loss event and are able to "continue to live fulfilling and existentially gratifying lives" (Hibberd 2013:680).

3.5 The Grief and Meaning Reconstruction Inventory (GMRI)

The concept of finding or making meaning following a death-related loss has received increased attention in bereavement research and practice (Gillies, Neimeyer & Milman 2015:61). Despite this recognition of the importance of meaning in grief literature, "empirical research has yet to explicate fully the process by which individuals make meaning in response to loss or the form that meaning takes when it is made" (Gillies et al., 2015:61). In response to this problem, Gillies et al. (2014) developed the grief and meaning reconstruction inventory (GMRI), which measures themes that emerge when one has made meaning. In order to determine these emerging themes when one has made meaning, a diverse sample of bereaved individuals provided "written reflections on the meaning they had constructed or reconstructed following death-

related loss” (Gillies et al., 2015:62). The researchers then conducted a content analysis on the reflections to identify common themes (Gillies, *et al*, 2015:62). The GMRI has five distinct factors: continuing bonds; personal growth; sense of peace; emptiness and meaninglessness; and valuing life. The GMRI shows that: experiencing a sense of peace with the loss; reaffirming the bond with the deceased; appreciating life, and/or, perceiving oneself as having grown through adversity; are all indications that one has made meaning in the context of bereavement. In contrast, a sense of emptiness or meaninglessness serves as an indication that meaning has not been made or found in the grief experience (Gillies et al., 2015:69).

The first factor is The Continuing Bonds factor, as consistent with Bowlby’s theory of attachment.³⁹ It conveys the theme of an ongoing attachment or connection with the deceased. The second factor named Personal Growth, fits the theme of personal growth by Calhoun and Tedeschi as PTG. Personal growth includes: volunteering to help other bereaved persons; enjoying new hobbies and activities; taking time to enjoy the little things in life; and talking about spiritual, existential and philosophical issues. Personal growth is an outcome of sense making and benefit finding. Having a chance to say goodbye, having spontaneous positive memories, and spirituality all account for personal growth (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:48). The third factor, Bringing a Sense of Peace to the Bereaved conveys the sentiments that the death ended the loved ones suffering and brought a sense of peace with the loss, that the bereaved and the deceased were prepared for death, and that the death made sense. The fourth factor that describes distress and a loss of meaning as a result of the loss, was named Emptiness and Meaninglessness. This was used to convey the distress, feelings of void, and loss of meaning. Hibberd (2013:680) argues that for those who have lost a loved one, life can be meaningless, when people feel “empty, devoid of interest or motivation”. The fifth factor, named Valuing Life, includes existential themes underscored by Frankl (Gillies et al., 2015:66). The results of the GMRI suggest that bereaved persons who report a “strong continuing bond with their loved one tend to report greater personal growth, sense of peace and valuing of life, as well as less struggle with emptiness and meaninglessness,” have made meaning in the context of

³⁹ In Chapter Two section 2.5.6, I refer to John Bowlby’s theory of attachment as a framework for understanding grief.

bereavement (Gillies et al., 2015:67). In contrast, a sense of emptiness or meaninglessness serves as an indication that meaning has not been made or found in the grief experience (Gillies et al., 2015:70).

3.6 The search for significance: Toward a model of meaning reconstruction in bereavement

According to the constructivist theory, people engage in three major activities by which they reconstruct meaning in response to loss. These three meaning-making processes are: sense-making, benefit finding, and identity change (Neimeyer, 2001b; Neimeyer & Anderson cited in Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:36). Implicit in this view of meaning reconstruction is the proposition that adapting to loss frequently involves constructing a new reality in which survivors' assumptive⁴⁰ world and their view of themselves are forever changed (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:36). In the "aftermath of life-altering loss", the bereaved are commonly precipitated into a search for meaning at levels that range from: the practical (How did my loved one die?); through the relational (Who am I, now that I am no longer a spouse?); to the spiritual (Why did God allow this to happen?). How and whether they engage these questions and resolve or simply stop asking them shapes how they accommodate the loss itself and who they become in light of it (Neimeyer 2011:423).

As indicated, *meaning* reconstruction includes the following constructs:

(i) Making sense of the loss

The need to make "sense of a loss" is the most well studied aspect of meaning reconstruction after loss (Hibberd 2013:677). Making sense of a loss is a common process by which people try to come to terms with what has occurred and why it has happened. Sense-making has most often been assessed by directly asking those grieving to indicate the extent to which they have been able to 'make sense' of a loss (Coleman & Neimeyer 2010:806). In the aftermath of loss, the bereaved are "precipitated into a search for meaning at levels that range from the practical (How did my loved one die?), through the relational (Who am I now that I am no longer a spouse) to the spiritual (Why did God allow this to happen)" (Neimeyer 2011:333). Janoff-

⁴⁰ I have defined the term assumptive world in Chapter Two, section 2.5.5 "Janoff-Bulman's Assumptive World Theory."

Bulmann's assumptive world theory and Stroebe and Schut's DPM, use "sense-making" to highlight mourners need for "a coherent set of schemas and assumptions to explain the world and the self" (Hibberd 2013:677). Mourners need to make sense of the loss and understand the loss and the world, now that the loss has occurred (Hibberd 2013:677). It is important to note that those who suffer from complicated grief or prolonged grief disorder, struggle with the prospect of meaninglessness, where they experience an inability to make sense of the loss (Neimeyer 2011:334).

The most difficult losses are those that fail to make sense, throwing everything that once had meaning into doubt and turmoil. An example of this would be when someone is suddenly and unexpectedly killed in an accident; or when a person suddenly dies of a heart attack or aneurism. In an instant, life is changed by this unexpected death. An indication of the person's search for meaning, is often expressed in the expression, 'there must be a reason for this.' Since many people believe that there must be a reason for everything that happens, they will endeavour to find meaning in their loss. Finding a reason for a death is an attempt to protect oneself from the pain and restore the order, security, and predictability felt in life before the loss. Questions that are asked range from, 'what caused the death,' to 'why did it happen'; may even question why the burden of grief has come; and ask 'what the experience means about the life thought to have been known' (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:37). Historically, one source of answers to these questions has been religious faith,⁴¹ that seeks to make sense of such loss (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:45). According to Neimeyer (2011:424) the most common sense-making themes involve religious beliefs (such as the belief in reunion in an afterlife). Research by Steffen and Coyle (2011:589) concurs with that of Gillies and Neimeyer, namely that spiritual and religious experiences assist the bereaved to make sense of the loss of a loved one. Belief in the after-life encourages the hope of a reunion with their loved one, such that they find meaning in this belief.

Constructivist theories propose that the process by which bereaved persons' question, find, and make sense of their bereavement is central to the experience of grief (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:37). When a bereaved person is able to make sense of the loss, and

⁴¹ In Chapter Two (2.6-2.7.1) I discussed numerous accounts of grief in the Bible and both positive and negative religious coping. Religion provides a way of coping with the existential questions as well as with the grief that follows the death of a loved one. A relationship with God, a spiritual connectedness with others and believing in the after-life, all help people to cope better with grief and loss. Turning to faith as a source of comfort helps to make sense of the loss.

in so doing find meaning, the severity of their grief decreases (Neimeyer 2000:551). On the other hand, those who are still engaged in a search for meaning show signs of increased grief distress and of deterioration in their functioning (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:45).

(ii) Finding benefits in tragedy

The ability to derive benefits or ‘silver linings’ from the loss is a key means of assigning “significance or positive value to the event for one’s own life”. Some of the benefits that can be gained from the loss include personal growth, a changed outlook on life, or better interpersonal relationships and support (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:46). Benefit finding asks the question, ‘what have I gained?’ (Hibbard, 2013:681). According to Neimeyer (2011:424), the most common benefit-finding themes involve an increase in the desire to help others as well as to have compassion for others’ suffering. From a constructivist perspective, “finding benefits is a means of building new meaning structures, incorporating-sometimes even founded on the raw material offered by loss” (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:37). Gillies and Neimeyer argue that “The mining of life lessons from the pain of grief is by no means a certain outcome, and when it occurs, it is likely dependent on a host of maturational, personal and social resources” (2006:37). Some may find benefit or grow as they come to terms with death in their lives. But, as Calhoun and Tedeschi warn, a person’s ability to sometimes facilitate posttraumatic growth in certain people, does not mean that we ought to use those people to create an expectation for everyone.⁴² For some people, even if they grow meaningfully through their experience of loss, the sorrow they experience remains and enduring core experience (Klaas 2012:11).

Research by Steffen and Coyle (2011:589) has concluded that there is benefit to be found in the continued relationship with the deceased. Bowlby also recognises that a continued attachment to the deceased was the norm, rather than the exception. Bonds do not need to be broken in order to ‘complete’ the grieving process (Mallon

⁴² I agree with this statement and argue that the CBS affords those who are grieving an opportunity to search for God and for meaning in their loss. It will be important to tell the participants that the CBS may be a conduit for healing for some of them, and for others possibly not. The CBS must not create the expectation that it is the method for them to grow meaningfully through their loss.

2008:10)⁴³. The theme captures the feeling that the deceased loved one somehow continues to exist, and that this is associated with gains for the bereaved. The sense of presence experienced between the deceased and their loved one is proof of their ongoing relationship, which is of great benefit to the bereaved. In research by Steffen and Coyle, the authors identified the continuity with loved ones both before and after death to be a benefit, where it enable them to feel that the deceases was not completely lost. Another benefit was that the deceased could be approached as a spiritual being with supernatural features (Steffen & Coyle 2011:589). This supports the African paradigm of the role of ancestors. The deceased ancestors are believed to be accessible. In order to access them, ritual practices are carried out, so that the deceased may be appeased and bring prosperity to the living.

However, it is not the content of the sense made (e.g., that death is part of the cycle of life; that it was the will of God), or the benefit found (e.g. bringing the family closer together or an enhanced perspective), but simply whether positive meaning was made of the loss that predicted adaption to bereavement (Neimeyer 2000:551).

(iii) Identity change

The loss of a relationship through death with intimate others can diminish a person's identity. Experiences of loss, never just involve one loss, but are a combination of the various types of losses. When an intimate other has died, possibilities and plans for the future are also lost. So too are the relational dynamics lost. The person who has died is no longer there to touch, and talk to, and confide in. The identity of the remaining person has changed, due to the combination of losses. Grieving is a process of relearning the world and the self and finding a new existential grounding for one's self-concept and life direction (Neimeyer 2000:552). Constructivist theory posits that by reconstructing meaning in our lives in response to a loss, we necessarily reconstruct ourselves. Positive changes can occur. The term "post-traumatic growth" (PTG) is used to describe such changes (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:37). This term is used to describe those who respond to the loss in adaptive ways. People who experience such personal growth report developing a changed sense of self, saying

⁴³ Accessed online 5 November 2018.

that they became more resilient,⁴⁴ independent, and confident; they also take on new roles and develop a greater awareness of life's fragility (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:37). They are able to make positive changes to their social relationships, increasing their capacity for empathy, and becoming emotionally closer to others. They also often experience a spiritual or existential growth (Tedeschi, Park & Calhoun in Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006:38), becoming "sadder but wiser" in the process (Janoff-Bulham in Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006:38). Life is punctuated by loss and these losses in our lives have an effect on our identity as individuals. Our identity is established through a series of stories that we tell about ourselves and relevant others, and the stories that others tell about us. This 'self-narrative' is profoundly shaken by some of the events that occur in our lives such as the death of a loved one, instigating the process of either the repair or replacement of the basic plot of one's life story (Neimeyer 2011:422).

According to these meaning-making process, new meaning structures are created by the bereaved who, in turn come to view the world in a new way. As a critique of the above mentioned constructs, Hibberd (2013:681) argues that a mourner may be able to explain the loss (sense-making) and may be able to acknowledge having gained something from the loss (benefit-finding), but still see nothing worthwhile in their life now that their loved one is gone (life-significance).

In addition to the above-mentioned constructs, there are a further three constructs as potentially important outcomes of bereavement. These are: purpose in life; life significance; and rebuilding shattered assumptive world views.

(i) Purpose in life

Although absent from Gillies and Neimeyer's model, purpose in life has also been an influential definition of meaning. This construct was first described by Victor Frankl, who observed that concentration camp survivors who were able to articulate a specific reason to survive, fared better psychologically than those who had no such purpose (Hibberd 2013:679). For example, bereaved adults who engage in a number of role involvements (i.e., activities) after loss report greater purpose in life (Hibberd

⁴⁴ I have defined resilience in Chapter Two section 2.3

2013:679). This lends support to Frankl's idea that the primary purpose in life is the quest for meaning.⁴⁵

(ii) Life significance

As an act of meaning, we seek a significance in our human existence (Neimeyer 2011:331). Life significance is the assignment of a value to a goal, relationship, or aspect of life experience that exists or is pursued in the present and future. In other words, what is inherently good to a person? Life significance asks, 'what now?' and 'what matters?' (Hibberd 2013:681). Bereaved individuals may find it challenging to reconstruct life significance after loss for a number of reasons. For example, family members and close friends provide life significance in the form of roles, where; in the absence of a spouse or child, mourners may lose the goals and values associated with being a parent or a husband or a wife (Hibberd 2013:683). To some extent, this may explain the enhanced meaning of some mourners who feel an ongoing bond with the deceased. Life significance continues to be reflected in the relationship even after death (Hibberd 2013:683). Alternatively, bereavement may lead to enhanced life significance. Janoff-Bulman proposed that individuals whose worldviews are shattered, "may embrace the value of everyday life as compensation for lost coherence and safety" (Hibberd 2013:683).

(iii) Examining one's assumptions and exploring alternative assumptions and meanings

In the aftermath of devastating loss, grievors strive to adjust or readjust their assumptive worlds. In the process of meaning reconstruction, the pain of bereavement prompts efforts to find meaning in the troubling transition with new meanings being retained and integrated to the extent that they reduce distress; otherwise attempts at reconstruction are likely to continue (Coleman & Neimeyer 2010:805). According to Hibberd (2013:681) and Wong (2008:77), the assumptive world theory by Janoff-Bulman is also to be considered a construct of meaning reconstruction. We make assumptions and have core beliefs that give us a sense of security in this world in which we live. Any disruption, such as a death, brings about a sense of loss of meaning. We need to then re-establish and reconstruct-meaning (Mallon 2008:11).

⁴⁵ Reference to Victor Frankl has already been made in section 3.1-3.3 of this chapter.

3.7 Therapeutic strategies that help those grieving navigate their way through the grief process

Wong writes, “Meaning reconstruction occurs whenever one cannot assimilate events that shatter the assumptive world and question a person’s cherished life goals” (2008:77). As I have mentioned before, the reconstruction process often involves intense meaning-seeking and meaning-making aimed to restore a sense of order and coherence. The biggest challenge is how to transform very negative events and integrate them with positive events and future planning. The transformative process can be both narrative and personal. Personal transformation entails reconstructing one’s worldviews and core values (Wong 2008:77).

Viewed from a constructivist perspective, grieving is a process of reconstructing a world of meaning that has been challenged by loss. Although most people successfully navigate bereavement and retain or return to pre-loss levels of functioning, a significant proportion struggle with protracted grief, and are unable to find meaning in the wake of an unsought transition (Neimeyer, Burke, Mackay & Van Dyke Stringer 2009:1). For these individuals, constructivist therapists have a variety of strategies at their disposal that can foster meaning making and help those who are grieving to reestablish a coherent self-narrative that integrates the loss, while “also permitting their life story to move forward along new lines” (Neimeyer et al., 2009:1). Narrative retelling, therapeutic writing, a focus on metaphorical language and the use of visualisation can all be viable strategies in helping individuals reconstruct meaning in the wake of bereavement (Neimeyer et al., 2009:1).

(i) Narrative retelling and meaning-making

The self-narrative is understood as an “overarching cognitive-affective-behavioral structure that organises the ‘micro narratives’ of everyday life into a ‘macro-narrative’ that consolidates our self-understanding, establishes our characteristic range of emotions and goals, and guides our performance on the stage of the social world”. Constructivist theories commonly frame human experience in terms of our life stories because “we live in stories, not statistics” (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006:38). Life is complicated, so we find ways to explain it. These explanations, the stories we tell ourselves, organise our experience and shape our behaviour (Nichols & Schwartz

2006:337). We continually author our own life stories as we reflect and interpret on what happens in our lives and as we tell and retell our stories (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:38).

A way of trying to make sense of a death is to tell your story. In narrative retelling, stories are unearthed, understood, and retold. Imbedded in these stories are both positive and negative meanings that are attached to the death of a loved one. Meaning-making, according to O’Conner, forms a bridge from negative emotions caused by negative life events, to positive emotions (2002-2003, cited in Nadeau 2008:522). Gilbert comments that, those who are grieving need to create stories so that order can be made out of the disorder, and so that meaning can be found in the meaningless. Meaning is both made as well as stories are created both in the context of real and imagined relationships (Gilbert in Nadeau 2008:521). Many bereaved individuals struggle to meaningfully integrate the loss into the story of their lives. For those with a strong sense of belief in the ‘afterlife’, narratives which incorporate afterlife beliefs can be of immense help to the bereaved (Naidu 2012:81).

Narrative retelling involves retelling the narrative of the death in a secure environment. Such retelling – specifically focusing on the hardest parts of the experience and “staying with” them until the associated images and meanings can be held with less anguish – plays a pivotal part in demonstrably efficacious treatments for complicated grief (Neimeyer et al., 2009:5). Re-narration of the loss helps master the difficult material, as well as counteracting avoidance coping (Neimeyer et al., 2009:5). When survivors of trauma draw upon biblical resources in telling and interpreting their own stories, it is of vital importance to ensure that the ritual space for this activity is safe (Frechette & Boase 2016:16). Trauma can leave a person who is grieving stuck. That is why the telling and writing of stories is important, since stories are about movement and progression. In this way, stories help to enter the next stage of grieving, healing, and regeneration (Mangezi & Manda 2016:4). According to West (2016:216), story-telling has the capacity to contribute to the healing of trauma.⁴⁶ The main requirement is the setting up of a safe space for the telling of the story. Once the safe space has been set up, two other key processes are at work. These are the elaboration of the painful experience and its validation through empathetic listening by developing a

⁴⁶ In Chapter Two section 2.3, I have discussed trauma and grief.

better understanding of their own story, where the wounded gain control over their lives (West 2016:217). At a pastoral level, “when ministers help people to tell their stories, they contribute to a coherent sense of self” (Peterson 1992:110). In doing so, these persons become aware that their lives make sense and are meaningful in their current circumstances in which they find themselves at that moment (Peterson 1992:110). According to Capps, one of the benefits of pastoral counselling is that it allows congregants to tell their stories within a constructive framework (LaMothe 2018:513). The role of the pastoral counsellor is to listen to the stories and seek to understand them and their contexts. The role of the minister is not only to listen, but to interpret the story being told. In order to do so, the minister listens to what is underneath or behind the story, and is then able to offer some helpful interpretation, insight or advice (LaMothe 2018:513). The hope is that by listening, the minister will be able to see things the congregant is unable to see (LaMothe 2018:513).

One of the therapies that can be used in narrative re-telling is photographs. Photographs are provided by the bereft person of their loved one, and are used by the therapist working with the bereaved person to help them make a more detailed family narrative (Neimeyer et al., 2009:5). As the narrative is retold, the memory of the deceased remains as if a living presence, and the bond between the deceased the person grieving is continued (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:38). Meaning then, is embedded in our life stories, and can be evoked by accessing people’s stories in their own words (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:38).

(ii) Therapeutic writing and meaning-making

A growing volume of research supports writing or journaling about bereavement, as it can have positive implications for one’s emotional and physical health, dramatically increasing one’s sense of well-being (Neimeyer 1999:72). One can never go back to the past. Therefore, recovery does not mean a return to what was regarded as a normal life before the bereavement. True recovery actually means that the bereaved person has found new meaning and purpose, which enables the person to reach a higher level of personal maturity. There is no medicine, no magic, and no logic to expel the affliction of bereavement. The only hope is to transform it into a poem, song, or a story that can make the bereaved feel a sense of having been humanised (Wong 2008:392).

One of the conventional writing assignments that therapists use when working with bereaved clients is a “goodbye” letter to the deceased (Neimeyer et al., 2009:6). Constructivists have a special affinity for “narrative medicine” in the context of grief therapy (Neimeyer et al., 2009:6). Therapeutic writing can take many forms, ranging from inviting the bereaved to write about themselves in light of their loss, or from the standpoint of a compassionate other, through biographical work chronicling their shared life with their loved one, to meaning reconstruction interviews in which they re-access vivid images of the loss and see fresh significance in them (Neimeyer et al., 2009:6). As the bereaved process their loss through this form of therapy, they are enabled to work their way toward a story that they can both hold in their heart and share with others (Neimeyer et al., 2009:6).

Poetry is another form of creative endeavour used to capture the essence of the bereaved person’s pain and struggles in grief. Literal language does not always capture the nuances of feeling and meaning that constitute our unique sense of loss. Writing personal poetry can sometimes help crystallise a moment, validate an emotion, or convey a felt sense in a way that straightforward writing cannot (Neimeyer 1999:81).

(iii) Metaphors, evocative visualization, and meaning-making

We choose our speech meaningfully, and when listening to a bereaved person, it is important to listen to the nuances of language that they use (Nadeau 2008:523). Metaphors are a rich source of meaning, a medium through which meaning is expressed and by which new meanings are made (Nadeau 2008:523). Grieving people use metaphors to describe their experience of loss. Therapists listening for metaphors and then make use of the metaphor to facilitate grieving (Nadeau 2006:201).⁴⁷ If the bereaved person uses a metaphor to describe their feelings of loss, then the therapist joins with the client in elaborating on this metaphor to help them make sense of their loss. Metaphors structure how we perceive, how we think and what we do. Metaphors used by a loved one in the wake of a death, structure how the death is seen and how it is thought about, as well as how they will grieve, and this facilitates the construction of meaning-making (Nadeau 2008:524).

⁴⁷ Nadeau, J.W. 2006. Article in *Illness Crisis and Loss* 14(3):201-221. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292390691_Metaphorically_Speaking_The_Use_of_Metaphors_in_Grief_Therapy. Accessed online 5 November 2018.

With evocative visualisation, the client is encouraged to close their eyes and enter the scene (i.e., the grief experience they are trying to explain) at a visual and tactile level, in order to stimulate meaning-making that might be less bound by highly conscious verbal constructs (Neimeyer et al., 2009:7). Rather than merely talking about the metaphor used to describe a particular component of their grief, the bereaved is encouraged to experience this metaphor that they have used to describe aspects of their grief. In so doing, they will better understand its meaning and function in their mourning; and this is a small but significant step forward in the process of meaning reconstruction (Neimeyer et al., 2009:8). Sometimes literal words fail to convey the deep sense of loss. Being able to draw on terms that are rich in imagery can help to move beyond just simply using words to speak of the loss. Speaking of loss metaphorically can help lead to surprising insights that are unavailable to us when we think of it only in conventional “symptomatic” terms (Neimeyer 1999:78).

(iv) Encountering the pro-symptom position and meaning-making

In psychotherapy, all strategies and techniques that are used to help the bereaved overcome emotional distress hold the premise of an anti-symptom position, namely that a problem is something to be resisted or replaced with more effective behaviour (Neimeyer et al., 2009:8). Constructivist therapy, however, adopts a different stance, one that begins with empathic validation of the real pain associated with the presenting problem, but then moves toward an exploration of the bereaved’s pro-symptom position (PSP), that non-conscious construction of meaning that makes the problem vitally necessary to have, despite the distress it may bring (Neimeyer et al., 2009:8).

3.8 Growth through grief

Grieving individuals usually struggle to reconstruct a personal world of meaning that has been challenged by loss. Bereavement prompts individuals to “relearn the self” and “relearn the world” in the wake of loss (Neimeyer, Prigerson & Davies 2002:239). Even though bereavement challenges a survivors’ world of meaning, growth through grief is possible. There are bodies of work that illustrate how meaning reconstruction in the wake of loss entails not only sorrow and despair, but also the potential for growth (Neimeyer et al., 2002:246). Research on parental bereavement indicates that the search for significance is central to the process of readjustment after a child’s death

and that parents are able to find meaning through becoming stronger or more compassionate people, or deepening their spirituality to cope better with the loss (Neimeyer et al., 2002:246). However, individuals and families are unique, and so the way grief is handled will differ (Neimeyer et al., 2002:248). Different personality patterns among family members will affect how each one individually expresses their grief as well as experience their grief. Gender is also a factor in that men and women are different in how they think, feel and mourn. Children and adults are also different, with their own unique needs for expression and support during times of grief (Tousley nd).⁴⁸ Cultural differences also impact the expression of grief. To the degree that individuals or families are able to redefine the situation, they are able to reconstruct a meaningful life, adjust, and psychologically grow from their experience of loss (Neimeyer et al., 2002:248).

When sense is made of the loss, and a sustainable bond with the deceased has been reconstructed, the loss is born less heavily, and a measure of post-traumatic growth is found (Neimeyer & Burke 2017:41). Calhoun and Tedeschi define growth by people's self-reports of an increased appreciation for life in general, and discovering more meaning in life, more meaningful interpersonal relationships, increased sense of personal strength, and changed priorities, which includes seeing new possibilities and a richer spiritual life (Klaas 2012:4). Our world is often shaken because it is not predictable, controllable and always meaningful. These different forms of post traumatic growth (PTG) proposed by Calhoun and Tedeschi, can assist a person grieving to live a meaningful life again. When applying an increased sense of personal strength to her life, Sandberg has noted, "If you don't see that growth is possible, you are not going to find it. When we face the slings and arrows of life, we are wounded and the scars stay with us. But we can walk about with greater internal resolve" (Sandberg & Grant 2017:79).

PTG also includes gaining appreciation for what you used to take for granted: family, friends and simply being alive. Don't wait for special occasions to show and express gratitude to others. Write letters, say thank you, tell people they are loved and

⁴⁸ Tousley, M. <https://www.griefhealing.com/> Accessed online 28 April 2018

appreciated. Be grateful for what you have, cherish special moments and take nothing for granted. Grief also motivates people to develop new and deeper relationships. When people endure tragedies together or endure the same tragedy, it can fortify the bonds between them. They learn to trust each other, be vulnerable with each other, and depend on each other (Sandberg et al., 2017:85).

The fourth form of PTG is finding greater meaning in life. Meaning in life is found when you believe that your existence has significance (Sandberg et al., 2017:86). In Victor Frankl's words, "In some way, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds meaning" (1984:136). Frankl said that life is not unbearable by circumstances, but by the lack of meaning and purpose. Family and religion are the greatest sources of meaning for many people. Suffering also tests our faith in God. In the midst of the tests of our faith, "even when you are in the darkest hours you can remain hopeful. That's the thing about faith, it helps you know that sooner or later this too shall pass." (Sandberg et al., 2017:87).

Calhoun and Tedeschi (2004:93) concluded that, after trauma, some people ended up choosing different directions for their lives that they may never have considered before. A brush with death can lead to a new life, and people are more likely to find meaning after surviving a potentially life threatening situation. It is not an easy pivot, where trauma often makes it harder to pursue new possibilities. While grieving, it can be hard to see through the pain to new possibilities or greater meaning (Sandberg et al., 2017:92).

However, Calhoun and Tedeschi say that not everyone finds growth as they strive to come to terms with a significant death. Debilitating depression and anxiety can result from loss and grief. They argue that continuing personal distress and growth often coexist (Klaas 2012:4). Klaas (2012:5) argues that we can grow and change, that we can still believe, and yet, that we can still not be resigned to the death. We can accept reality, but the reality can still remain ultimately unacceptable. The bereaved can experience posttraumatic growth and narrative reconstruction, but as in the case of parents who have lost children, they may still say something like, 'But you know for all the good that has come of this, I would give it all up if I could have her back.'

The “search for meaning” plays a compelling role in the grief of the great majority of persons experiencing potentially traumatising bereavement, although a significant minority apparently copes straightforwardly with their loss, without engaging in deep-going reflection about its significance (Attig in Neimeyer 2000:549). For those who seek meaning and find none, the loss can be excruciating, and the data suggests that they report intense suffering on a variety of outcome measures (Neimeyer 2000:549). Conversely, those who find meaning in their loss fare better at coping with their loss. It can therefore be concluded that a quest for meaning plays a prominent role in grieving, at least for those who are bereft by the sudden loss of a loved one (Neimeyer 2000:549).

3.9 Summary of Chapter 3

The ability to reconstruct life in a meaningful way after loss is available to those who are grieving albeit not without effort. While grieving, it is hard to see through the pain to new possibilities and meaning. However, according numerous theorists, meaning in life can be found in others, in relationships, in new challenges, in finding new possibilities and a richer spirituality. The difficult questions, such as ‘why me?’ and ‘why God?’ need to be actively explored, because their outcome will shape how the loss is accommodated and who the grieving person becomes. Neimeyer proposes that for those who are coping with loss, meaning reconstruction is central to the process of grieving, as they attempt to reconstruct meaning that was challenged by the loss. This is a constructivist of narrative approach. Neimeyer recommends that people engage in three major activities in order to reconstruct meaning in response to loss: sense-making, benefit finding, and identity change. Neimeyer recommends a variety of different therapeutic strategies that are available to help the bereaved navigate their way through their loss. These therapeutic strategies are: narrative retelling; therapeutic writing; metaphors; evocative visualisation; and the pro-symptom position. Narrative retelling encourages the use of telling stories, as this contributes to the healing of trauma. Narrative retelling is useful for my CBS, as the participants bring their story of loss and grief to the story of *Ruth*, and through a close and careful reading of *Ruth*, meaning may hopefully be found in the story. Through ‘the search for meaning’, growth through grief is possible.

In the following chapter, I explore a pastoral theology of hope, as well as the role of the minister as an agent of hope to those who are grieving.

Chapter 4

PASTORAL CARE: A THEOLOGY OF HOPE

Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.

Vaclav Havel⁴⁹

“Even if I thought there was still hope for me-even if....”

Ruth 1:12b

4.1 Introduction to Chapter 4

As a Christian Minister, this research is approached from the premise of faith. For Christians, hope is rooted in faith. According to the Christian paradigm, grief work is to be grounded in faith, in the belief that it can give rise to hope. The approach I take in pastoral care is framed by Neimeyer’s theory of meaning reconstruction which seeks ways to make sense of a given loss. A CBS is developed as a tool to assist those who are grieving rediscover hope and meaning in their lives. The tasks of grief work as described by Clinebell lead me into exploring the minister’s role of active listening, companionship, comfort, presence, hope, prayer and the gospel within the context of grief. The important work of Capps, who explores a theology of hope, is the thread that I draw through my pastoral care approach, always holding before me the fact that the pastoral ministry is grounded in eternal hopefulness. My purpose in exploring a pastoral theology of hope is not to explain the reality of suffering but to provide a framework for navigating the journey from loss to new hope.

4.2 Hope and despair

After the loss of her husband, Sandberg (2017:11) wrote that she does not pretend that hope will win out over the pain that she experiences daily, because it will not. She also said that there will be many losses and setbacks throughout life that will be experienced and that there is no right or proper way to grieve. After her loss, what she discovered to be important was that strength and hope was found in the face of the

⁴⁹ <https://www.vhlf.org/havel-quotes/distribng-the-peace/> Accessed online 5 October 2018.

hardship and grief she experienced. Victor Frankl (1984:86) contends that the will to live, and to hope, is a choice that we make even in the most dark and depressing times of life. Importantly, hope, Frankl says, is not contingent on circumstance (1984:86). In fact, if one looks hard enough, one can find signs of beauty, truth, love and God in every “Holocaust” moment of one’s life. Yet in the end, hope is about choosing to live and not to die (Jones 2012:202).

4.3 A Threat to hope: despair

Despair is the “chief” among the threats of hope (Capps 2001:99). According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the definition of despair is “utter loss of hope”. Frankl, calls despair, “suffering without meaning” (1984:136). One of the experiences in life that can threaten hope is grief. Even in the context of the Christian faith, grieving Christians are not immune from experiencing despair. In *Ruth*, for example, despair abounds. A famine in the land and the death of three male family members, tells the story of despair, grief, and the utter loss of hope. The story of *Ruth* moves from despair, disappointment and destitution to life and hope. The disciples of Jesus also experienced an utter loss of hope, after his death. As they were walking from Jerusalem on their way to Emmaus, in conversation with each other, they said “but we had hope that he was the one to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:21, NIV). They had lost all hope, and were in despair. As a minister, I believe that Jesus Christ is a literal embodiment of our hope; and I would argue that hope in Christ is the cure for despair. Paul reminded his readers that when their hope is in God it cannot disappoint, “...and hope does not disappoint us...” Romans 5:5. In all of the above mentioned Biblical examples, it can be seen that the Bible is a source of hope.

4.4 Allies of hope: trust and patience

Ministers, who seek to be agents of hope, endeavour to encourage those whose hope is being threatened due to their loss and grief to find “life-attitudes” or “dispositions” that align themselves with the hopeful self (Capps 2001:138).

For Capps, trust and patience are the allies of hope (Capps 2001:138). Religion encourages people to trust in God, and to entrust themselves and that which they value to God. From such trust, hope is born (Capps 2001:147). It is this trust in God that can

keep people from falling into the abyss of despair. Capps encourages the use of verses in Scripture that emphasise trust in God. An example could be that found in Deut 33:27, which reads “the eternal God is my refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.” This verse encourages a person who is struggling with loss to entrust themselves to God, who presents himself as their refuge. Psalm 46, is a reminder that God helps us in times of trouble. Its descriptive language emphasises that even if everything is in turmoil (46:2-3), God remains present (46:4). 1 Peter 5:7 meanwhile reads, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you”. This verse serves as a reminder that God cares about everything with which the grieving person is concerned. In my own experience of counselling the bereft, I have seen how portions of scripture can assure those who are grieving of presence of the God, and give them grounds for trust and reason for hope. Capps’ approach to make use of verses in scripture that emphasise trust in God concurs with that of Burke and Neimeyer (2014:1077), who discovered that by turning to spiritual beliefs and traditions during grief, this provided a framework and gave some meaning and hope to life’s painful events.

Patience is developed when engaging in difficult tasks without giving up and it is concerned with keeping hope alive (Capps 2001:149). If, according to Capps (2001:150), patience is “steadfastness, the ability to continue to hope even as we are sorely tempted to give up”, then Naomi and Ruth illustrate this through their words and actions. Ruth went to work in the fields (2:2), and could have resorted to giving up, but took the initiative and went to work. Even though Naomi had felt bitter (1:20,21), her faith in God was still alive, and she praised God for Boaz’s kindness to Ruth (2:20). By her expression of praise to God, Ruth is demonstrating that she has not given up, and still continues to hope in God.

Capps’ understanding of hope then is “future-orientated and hopeful people can see and believe deeply that desired things will happen and thus they can move forward with patience” (Kwan 2010:540). It may just be that Hebrews 11:1 “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see,” supports Capps’ understanding of hope. Faith is the confidence that what is hoped for will happen and so this faith gives those who have lost hope the assurance about things they cannot see. With patience, they can move forward into the future with hope.

4.5 Images of hope

The two images below are read as they relate to God, *Ruth* and hope. Both of these images will be used in the CBS developed at the end of this study.

(a) Hope (1886) by G.F. Watts



This is a painting of hope by George Frederic Watts 1886.⁵⁰ The artist sees hope as one string, the string of the human soul that can inspire and bring life back to meaningful existence like the art of music as in the case of David playing the lyre to the depressed and confused King Saul in the Old Testament (1 Samuel 16:14-23).

“Without hope, the human soul is killed; hope is the music of a heuristic soul” (Louw 2016:14). If a minister cannot open up new prospects of hope, then the question could be asked, ‘what then is the character of comfort and compassion and what kind of ‘future music’ are we going to play in making the soul whole?’ (Louw 2016:14). The painting by George Frederic Watts, shows a female allegorical figure of Hope. Within the context of the Christian faith, hope is traditionally identifiable through the sign of an anchor, but Watts took a more original approach. In his painting, the lady is depicted sitting on a globe, blindfolded, clutching a wooden lyre with only one string left intact. She sits in a hunched position, with her head leaning towards the instrument, perhaps so she can hear the faint music she can make with the sole remaining string. According

⁵⁰ See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hope\(painting\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hope(painting)). Accessed: 18 May 2018.

to Watts, “Hope need not mean expectancy. It suggests here rather the music which can come from the remaining chord” (Louw 2016:14). The desolate atmosphere is emphasised by Watt’s soft brushwork, creating a misty, delicate scene, in a soft palette. Watt’s melancholy depiction of hope was criticised, and G.K. Chesterton suggested that a better title would be *Despair* (Louw 2016:14). For me, this painting illustrates hope powerfully, in that the woman in her imperfect situation is able to find a glimmer of hope on her one stringed lyre. I read it as a reminder that all hope is never lost, and that the pursuit to find meaning after loss, can begin again with what remains. In *Ruth* 1:12b, Naomi says to her daughters-in-law, “*Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if...*” Naomi had no husband, nor sons, as far as she was concerned she had nothing remaining in her life that could cause her to hope. And yet, she had Ruth, who made the decision to remain with her. In Ruth was the hope that Naomi had thought no longer existed in her life. Like in the painting, Ruth provided a visceral reminder to her that all hope is never lost.

(b) Flower and the black sky, by Ken Kiff



Wendy Beckett’s (Beckett 1993:74-75) elegant description of the picture above, by Ken Kiff, helps us to see what we may not at first glance. Entitled *Flower and the Black Sky*, the flower stands helplessly alone in a landscape of darkness. To the left is a fragmentary tree, pale green, like an enlarged branch of seaweed, waving its dead

branches despairingly in all directions, and in vain. To the right, low in the black sky, the sun is visible, and yet it gives no light. Beckett describes it as follows:

...a sun of faith, a willed sun, overpowered by the darkness and still holding its place, waiting, keeping faith in powerlessness. The small flower is not dismayed. In an unmistakably anthropomorphic gesture, it raises its leaf-hands in prayer, it raises its flower-head in trust. The praying hands do not implore, but seem rather to jubilate. Incredibly, the flower almost orchestrates a hymn of jubilation. Like a conductor, the leaves rise to summon invisible players and singers. The flower in the sky represents an example of personal faithfulness in a dark world. Despite the surrounding darkness, which nearly extinguishes its little glimmer of light, the flower demonstrates its persistent resiliency. The darkness casts a fearful pall over the rock, the tree, even the sun. But the flower, either because it is exceptionally strong with roots sunk deep, or because of its resilience on a power not its own, is undeterred (Beckett 1993:74-75).

Beckett (1993:74-75) suggests it is jubilant, and in its jubilancy it offers a song of unlikely joy for all creation to hear. The little flower is symbolic, perhaps, of any person who continues to believe in God and to trust the light, despite the pervasive darkness. A little source of light, in a deep dark place is a glimmer of hope. The flower's light does not seem like much, but it signals a beginning, a turning point, a sign of hope. Perhaps the presence of the flower's light will cause the tree and the rock to remember what once was possible. Those who believe in Christ, the light of the world (John 8:12), those who are part of the community of the faithful believers, choose to stand resolutely, in the Light, in the midst of a great darkness. Perhaps it is also not too far-fetched a vision to see in the tree and the rock, the faithful person who, though battered by loss, nevertheless chooses to see light and claim hope (Jones 2012:63).

Hope enables those grieving to see and believe that there can be solutions (Kwan 2010:66). Sometimes these solutions are not easily seen and only discovered over time, because as the painting suggests, the surrounding darkness almost extinguishes any glimmer of light or hope. In the darkness, is hope (in the painting this hope can be seen through the figure of the flower that manages to bloom brightly and live despite of the darkness that surrounds it), for those who believe in Christ, their hope is found in their

faith, through Christ. Ruth was an instrument of hope, a glimmer of hope, like the flowers light in the painting, the one who signalled a new beginning for her and Naomi. Signs of hope pervade the story of *Ruth*. These signs of hope can be seen in the beginning of the barley harvest (1:22), as this was a sign of a new beginning. Being able to glean in the fields of Boaz (2:2), and then finding favour in the eyes of Boaz (2:10). When Naomi heard the news about Boaz, her hope for the future was renewed (2:20).

4.6 Spiritual Hope

Within the realm of Christian spirituality, hope seems to be a core category in faith (Louw 2016:13). A spiritual context is often necessary for individuals to maintain a sense of hope and coherence through the darkest hours of suffering and grieving. For many griever, religion and spirituality play an important role in adapting to loss. Faith appears to “buffer the effects of loss by reinforcing hope for reunion with loved ones in the afterlife, offering a sense of divine consolation and extending the support of a community of fellow believers” (Burke & Neimeyer 2014:1088).

I am of the opinion that the source of all hope is found in God. Kelley (2009:81) argues that a secure attachment to God assists someone who is grieving to adjust to their changed circumstances, and that, “In letting ourselves be loved by God, we form an attachment to the only One who cannot leave us.”

A secure style of attachment to God is an important factor in the creation of meaning following a significant death (Kelley & Chan 2012:199). Attachment theory is linked to *Ruth*, as she attaches herself to Naomi, but also to God, after the numerous losses experienced. It is the comforting presence of God and his loving relationship with us that is ultimately our greatest source of hope in grief. It is God who holds us in the midst of our sorrow and pain, and this is what helps us to move towards restoration with hope and trust into the future (Kelley 2014:120).

4.6.1 The Hope that Jesus offers

Jesus offers hope by reminding people of who he is and what he has done. Comfort is not found in bland assurances of hope. It comes from truly believing that Jesus is who he says he is. This is no mere platitude, rather, we are reminded that it is real

hope anchored in historical reality (Croft 2015:101). His power over death was demonstrated to those who watched him raise Lazarus from the grave, and by his own resurrection the third day after his death. The comfort Jesus offers begins with the truth of who he is and what he has done, but it does not end there. Jesus comforted those who grieving the loss of loved ones. From my experience as a minister, I have found particular texts to be consoling within the context of grief counselling. The most notable example is seen when Jesus went to comfort Mary and Martha as they grieved the loss of their brother Lazarus (John 11:17-27). But it does not end there. In John 11:28-29, 32-36, Jesus now acknowledges the pain caused by death. Jesus grieved for and with the hurting, and we are told he was 'deeply moved' and that we wept. Jesus grieved the death of Lazarus, reminding us that it is okay to weep, and grieve when we feel deep loss, even when we hold to the firm and sure hope of the resurrection (Croft 2015:102).

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Paul wants the Thessalonian believers to be informed as to what happens to believers who die. He believes that this knowledge will bring encouragement to them. He makes it clear that anyone who is in Christ will be raised with Christ when the Lord returns. Paul believes that this knowledge should lead to a different kind of grieving, a grief rooted in hope and not despair. These Christians in Thessalonica are to believe and speak these words to one another to encourage and comfort each other (1 Thessalonians 4:18). The claim presented here is that true comfort is not found in words of sentiment or in clichés or platitudes, but that true comfort comes from believing in the true words about Jesus, and what he has done (Croft 2015:103).

Psalm 23 contains some of the most comforting hopes recorded in Scripture. Hope is more often the gift of strength and patience that enables the person who is suffering to pass through what the Psalmist calls the "dark valley" (Psalm 23:4), and not some promise of an easy path around the deep experience of loss (Wolterstroff in Jones 2012:158).

4.7 A Pastoral theology of hope

Grief does more than rip away our present, it also tears apart our hope for the future (Sandberg 2017:91). Hope is future-orientated and life-changing. It facilitates people's

transcendence from their past to their present. It turns “impossibility” into “possibility” (Kwan 2010:51). A pastoral theology of hope should enable people to see and believe that there can be solutions, to envision a beautiful future, and also recognise the pain of the negative (Kwan 2010:66). Religion has a role to play where loss has been experienced. As an extension of this view, Capps suggests hope to be an element of religion that can play a crucial role (Shin 2018:493).

The death of a loved one has been the single most prominent topic of pastoral care, because this experience of personal deprivation is so profound, and “we do not know whether there could be anything we could ever hope for again after suffering such a loss” (Capps 2001:61). Hope is often radically lost when we desire something that we cannot have. This often happens when a loved one has died. However, hope believes that there is more to this life, and hope holds the promise that the future can be different from our present and our past. Hope believes that the future is open and not closed, and that it is not “frozen but brimming with possibility” (Capps 2001:63). For Capps, God, “who is the deep essence of all things”, is the God of the future, a future that is open to new possibilities (Capps 2001:68).

4.8 The minister as an agent of hope in pastoral counselling

In terms of grief work, ministers are responsible to care effectively and compassionately for those who are grieving due to the pain of loss. Loss is so often accompanied by the loss of hope. The use of religious resources, such as prayer, meditation and Scripture, can help strengthen people in crisis and lead them to growth. Spiritual healing is therefore the core task in all pastoral care (Clinebell 1984:103). Capps contends that that there is nothing that a minister can offer God’s people other than hope (Capps 2001:1). For Capps (1996:325) hope is the spirit, or fuel, of the ordained or lay minister’s mission in caring for souls. According to Capps, pastoral counselling is “an essential ministry” within the life of a congregation, because it is necessary for the flourishing of the community of faith (LaMothe 2018:512). According to Capps, the minister’s very act of making contact with a troubled person indicates to that person that there is grounds for hope (1995:8). Hope pervaded Capps’ approach to pastoral care, which enables his pastoral care to be “life-giving, life-bearing and life-sustaining” (Zylla 2018:547).

The position that I write from is that of being a minister to a congregation of 183 members, having served them for 15 years. As a Minister, one of the fundamental questions that I have been asking myself is, how do we, using the words of Capps (1993:74) “invite the grieving back to life.” I begin this journey, by listening to my congregants as they tell their stories, praying with them, and ministering to them. Assuming what Eugene Peterson calls “the pastoral work of pain sharing” (1992:113), I make sure not to minimise the harsh reality of what they face. Sometimes there is a chasm between the promises of the Christian faith and experience. Questions such as, “When living your life sacrificially and faithfully why do you still experience heartache?” are often asked. Often there are no easy answers to their challenging questions. Nevertheless, I encourage them to speak and I listen to their pain. However, in trying to be an agent of hope, I also have to confront the challenging questions as to why they suffer. In my pastoral capacity, I share Scripture as a way of teaching and reaffirming that God in Jesus has incredible life-giving power and is willing to share that power in our lives. Maybe the benefit of hope is not in finding the meaning within the experience of loss, but in realising the capacity, by whatever means possible, to keep going forward (Jones 2012:155).

Capps (2001:1) reminds us that “to be a pastor is to be a provider or an agent of hope”. The question that I ask myself then, is in the context of grief how can a minister be the most effective agent of hope? I present a few ways that I believe to be a path to healing and hope, explaining Clinebell’s tasks of Grief Work along with the help that is needed with each task. In doing so, I draw from *Ruth*, as well as my own experience as that of a Minister.

4.9 Clinebell’s tasks of grief work

According to Clinebell (1984:221), there are five tasks in this process of spiritual healing, and alongside each task is the type of help that is needed to facilitate the journey to healing the wounds caused by grief. The tasks listed below do not occur in lineal sequence (Clinebell 1984:221). Grief is not linear. It is a journey to healing (McNeish 2013:200).⁵¹ Kubler-Ross’s five stages of grief remind us that grief is not

⁵¹ Another way of describing grief is to call it a ‘circular staircase.’ The staircase is a means of transition between the room of loss, where the bonds are severed, and the room of restoration, where the bonds

linear, and that these stages are tools to help frame and identify what someone who is grieving may be feeling, and equip them to cope with life and loss.

The five Grief Work Tasks of Clinebell:

- (i) The first task in Grief Work: This task involves the experience of shock, numbness, denial, and gradually accepting the reality of the loss (Clinebell 1984:221).

The usual responses to the loss of a loved one are feelings of psychological numbness and shock, mixed with feelings of being in a nightmare from which one expects to awaken (Clinebell 1984:222). In Kubler-Ross's first stage of grief, denial and isolation, she maintains that denial can function as a buffer after receiving shocking news (Kubler-Ross 1989:35). Denial is temporary, and is eventually replaced by partial acceptance. Her fifth stage, acceptance, is only where healing begins, once the reality that the deceased is gone and will not return has been accepted. Worden also argues that acceptance of the reality of the loss is the first task of grieving. Accepting the full reality of the loss must eventually occur or the healing will be incomplete (Clinebell 1984:222). Nobody can 'fix' another person's grief. However, there are ways to provide comfort and support for those who are grieving.

The help that is needed for Task 1: In order to help the person who is grieving, the minister must offer a ministry of presence and caring, practical help and spiritual comfort (Clinebell 1984:221).

Ministers cannot bring any spiritual comfort without the help of the Holy Spirit. Incarnational theology involves companionship, which is about remembering to pay attention to the Spirit, to be led instead of needing to lead. This is termed the theology of pastoral care as presence (Massey 2000:477). Bennett (in Kelley 2009:92) suggests that when God functions as the ultimate secure base, a person is better able to negotiate separation and loss, as well as to discover an abiding sustaining presence even in the midst of things that are passing away. Pastoral caregiving is intrinsically related to the

are continued. Pastoral care can be considered to assist in the process of living in the whole house and not being trapped in one room/part.

notion of the presence of God, and the “biblical text as the primary source of comfort in a pastoral epistemology” (Louw 2016:463). The minister who accepts the quest for the Presence of God as the central focus of his or her counseling will have a “lasting centre, one that lives on past the threat of meaninglessness” (Capps 1993:144).

Incarnational theology should be understood as Christ-in-our-lives with each other. God is already at work within the life of the grieving parishioner, in advance of, and often in spite of, what pastoral carers or ministers have to offer (Massey 2000:478). The presence and closeness of another can be experienced as comforting in situations when suffering causes faith to become fragile. Often there is no hope of an improvement in the situation. Through the compassionate presence of another person, the comforting presence of God can be experienced (Dreyer 2003:723). How might meaning reconstruction then be facilitated? Bereavement professionals begin by fostering a sense of presence to the needs of the person who is grieving. Presence entails creating a safe and supportive relationship, one characterised by deep and empathetic listening (Neimeyer 2011:335).

An example of this is found in the story of Ruth, which will be dealt with in Chapter 5. Ruth meets Naomi’s loneliness with her presence (Fewell & Gunn 1990:100). Ruth refuses to leave Naomi after the numerous losses she experiences in her life and vows to remain by her side. Ruth and Naomi illustrate the importance of maintaining supportive relationships following grief (Neely 2008:48). Louw (2016:374) concurs, when he says “comfort in care is determined by sympathy and compassions; the Christian art of being-with and accompanying people through their difficult journey in life.”

Acts of ministry include the reading of Scripture and prayers, which can bring quiet spiritual comfort to the bereaved. Prayer is not a way to escape from reality, but rather a way to see reality more clearly. Nouwen finds “prayer of the heart” indispensable to a ministry of compassion: “Through prayer we can carry in our heart all human pain and sorrow, not because of some great psychological or emotional capacity, but because God’s heart has become one with ours” (Nouwen in Dreyer 728). Using Scripture as a means of communicating the words that God has for the bereaved in pastoral caregiving implies that an effective use of the Bible has a healing and

therefore, therapeutic dimension i.e., the gospel has a very specific therapeutic impact on human behaviour (Louw 2016:456). The Scriptures that are used need to speak into the context of the grieving person.

In my experience, I have found that the Bible is more than a tool in the minister's pastoral caregiving equipment, but it is a source of grace, hope and comfort. Louw (1994:101) contends that Scripture determines the hope dimension of pastoral counselling. It would be remiss of me to not make mention again of the work of the Holy Spirit. All the 'work' that takes place through the reading of scripture and prayers is the work of the Holy Spirit. According to Ephesians 3:16 comfort and strength originate in the Holy Spirit, so that 'out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.'

A pastoral theology of hope is not to explain the reality of suffering, but to provide a framework for navigating the journey from loss to new hope (Jones 2012:73). In my congregation we have various resources/pathways that can provide a framework for offering hope. In the rituals and through the liturgy of Sunday worship, God's presence is remembered. The Holy Spirit is evoked. And so worship becomes a space for reframing. Worship is a place where someone who is grieving is invited to look at the world afresh, "a place that recognizes [sic] not only the brokenness and sinfulness of the world, but also what God is doing in the world and in our lives" (Carlin 2018:534). When someone who is grieving takes worship seriously, this is an opportunity for them to see themselves as well as the world differently – to see themselves as God sees them, as someone who is loved unconditionally. Through the reading and meditating on Scripture, the truth of God's love for us is revealed. In the celebration of the sacrament of Holy Communion, God's mysterious presence becomes physical through the giving and receiving of the bread and wine. Through prayer, those who are worshipping can confidently express their inmost thoughts to God, in expectation that God is listening. Through the singing of hymns and worship songs, worshippers are able to voice a range of emotions that describes their journey of faith, as well as their experiences of grace, their fears, and their desire for courage, renewed faith and deep joy (Jones 2012:20).

In the congregational context, a ministry of caring is also expressed through the provision of meals which are nonverbal ways of communicating care. Writers in pastoral care increasingly emphasise the therapeutic value of connecting to a faith community (Jones 2009:643). In my ministry experience, persons who are grieving rest heavily on their faith communities for support and care. Everybody needs a Christ-shaped hope (Jones 2012:19). The church has at its disposal the pathways to hope. In seeking God during times of loss, within a faith community, the hope that Scriptures teaches and the promises that God offers can be discovered (Jones 2012:20). When survivors of trauma draw upon biblical resources, it is important to ensure that the ritual space for this activity is safe and that participants create a sense of solidarity (Frechette & Boase 2016:16).

The minister should encourage people to connect with their faith community. A community is a gift from God. In my experience, those who have lost a loved one almost always express their gratefulness for being part of a church community. Their ability to be able to share loss with a listening community and to be able to hear how others were struggling, gives strength and hope as they experience the presence of God within their faith community.

- (ii) The second task in grief work: During this task in grief work, painful feelings that are experienced and expressed are worked through, e.g. anger, guilt, remorse, despair, depression, loneliness, disorientation, loss of identity etc. (Clinebell 1984:221). Catharsis takes place when the emotions associated with a traumatic event are released.⁵²

According to Kubler-Ross's stage two of the grief cycle, feelings of anger are expressed. These feelings can be projected onto others and onto God. After the loss of her husband and sons, Naomi expressed her anger towards God, who she insists is responsible for her suffering (Ruth 1:20-21). Naomi's anger and her disappointment towards God are expressed through the use of her words: bitter (1:20), empty (1:21), afflicted (1:21) and misfortune (1:21). In stage four, depression becomes the response to loss. Some people experience loss as the result of the death of a love one as being

⁵²<https://study.com/academy/lesson/catharsis-in-psychology-theory-examples-definition.html>. Accessed online 3 December 2018.

left. Feelings of hurt, anger and blame are expressed towards the person who has left (Mitchell & Anderson 1983:50). Naomi experiences identity loss, as she has lost the role of wife and mother in her family. The loss of this role leads to loss and grief (Mitchell and Anderson 1983:42). Capps contends that despair is a threat to hope and Frankl defines despair as “suffering without meaning.”

The help that is needed for Task 2: A ministry of caring and responsive listening to encourage full catharsis. This task is facilitated by responsive listening, which enables the bereaved to express feelings the loss has triggered in that person (Clinebell 1984:221). In this task, as well as all the others, the minister must help those grieving find meaning in their suffering.

When a person grieving is in the stage of anger, one of the most frequently asked questions is ‘why did my loved one have to die?’, and ‘why am I the one left behind?’ Meaning as a pastoral problem, is really about “how those who are grieving understand God.” If someone is in need of assistance to find meaning in their suffering it is important for them to understand that their faith is deeply associated with their concepts of God (Louw 1992:77). Hope is strengthened when that person’s concept of God is constructive and positive (Louw 1992:78). One of the tasks of a minister is to help that person understand God’s involvement with their pain and suffering. As my point of departure I always remind them of the Sovereignty of God, namely that God is in control. And, through his covenant relationship with us, God is faithful. The sovereignty of God is also seen in *Ruth* 1:13.20-21. Naomi believed that God is the cause of everything that happens in life. Naomi was in the depths of despair and felt forsaken by God. It is important to remember that this was her viewpoint. As a minister I attempt to help people have a far deeper understanding of God in these types of circumstances. In Romans 8:28, Paul teaches that God can work in the tragedies of life; secondly, that God understands and is involved in our pain and suffering, by making use of Psalm 147:5 “Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.” And lastly, that God is good. I have found those three points to be a source of strength for those people that I am counselling during grief as well as a means of showing the grieving person that God is involved in their pain and suffering. Those who allow their faith to be ‘in’ their suffering, are able to ‘see’ meaning in their suffering as they find God in the midst of their pain.

Neimeyer suggests that in order to facilitate meaning reconstruction, the therapist needs to begin with fostering a sense of presence to the needs of the grieving client. Presence entails cultivating a safe and supportive relationship, one characterised by deep and empathetic listening (Neimeyer 2011:335). For Capps, an important component of pastoral counselling is listening. He understood that the medium of pastoral care and counselling is stories (La Mothe 2018:514). Ministers have to listen to the stories of their congregants, and as they listen they need to “possess constructive interpretative frameworks if they wish to provide good enough counsel” (LaMothe 2018:514). As ministers listen to these stories, Scripture can serve as an interpretive framework, in the sense that it can offer insight and aid people to understand themselves better or help people make better decisions to necessary changes (LaMothe 2018:514).

When helping people do the healing catharsis of their grief work, ministers must encourage those grieving to express their painful feelings. Ministers begin by listening. When we listen attentively to others, we also listen to God. When we listen, we listen to the words that are expressed and the story that emerges. This concurs with Neimeyer, who suggests that as the bereaved tell their story of loss and grief, this is a way of trying to make sense of a death. We are also to listen for the use of metaphors, which may be used to describe their experience of loss. As this is done, those metaphors can be used to facilitate the grieving and help the person make sense of their loss.

Often we think that we have to contribute to the conversation, but listening is far better than speaking. As ministers we are required to be attentive to the lives of others, paying particular attention to where God is in their story. We are to listen to references to God, which can be both positive and negative. When we do this, we are paying careful attention to where God is in their story. Peterson (1992:88) says that when a minister listens attentively, then they impart meaning to what a person says. When listening, we do so with the patience to ponder the story and the skill to discern the thread of meaning in it. The ministry of listening acknowledges that stories are sacred grist for theological reflection (Jones 2012:82). Kathleen Norris articulates this beautifully:

“Our daily tasks whether we perceive them as drudgery or essential life-supporting work... have considerable spiritual import, and their significance for Christian theology, the way they come together in the fabric of faith is not often appreciated... It is in the ordinary life that our stories unfold, tales of conceiving, bearing, giving birth, or trial and death and rising to new life out of the ashes of the old. Stories of annunciation, incarnation, resurrection, and the spirit, the giver of life, who has spoken through the prophets and enlivens our faith. As wondrous as these mysteries are, Christianity is inescapably down-to-earth Incarnational” (in Jones 2012:84).

Another way that feelings can be expressed is during the planning of a funeral. The minister encourages the family to talk about their loved one, share their memories that they most cherish about that person, and as they do this, the minister listens attentively. Through the singing of familiar hymns, reading well-loved Scripture, and the gentle offering of prayers, a funeral can facilitate the emotional release of grief feelings (Clinebell 1984:223). Funerals are also to be seen as services of thanksgiving for the life of the deceased. Funerals are an opportunity for the community that the deceased belonged to an opportunity to express their grief as well as show their support to those whom are grieving. The Dual Process Model describes the depth and breadth of experience that funeral services seem to capture (McNeish 2013:199). Themes of grief, sorrow, and pain can be considered loss-orientated, while themes of resurrection, hope and peace can be considered restoration-orientated (McNeish 2013:199).

- (iii) The Third task in grief work: This task involves, the gradual acceptance of the loss and putting one’s life back together; making decisions and coping with the new reality; unlearning old ways of satisfying one’s needs; and learning new ways to satisfy these needs. Saying “goodbye” and reinvesting one’s life energy in other relationships also forms an integral part of this task (Clinebell 1984:221). During stage five of Kubler-Ross’s proposed stages of grief, healing and adjustment begin to happen when accepting the reality that our loved one is gone and recognising that this new reality is the permanent reality (Kubler-Ross 2014:37).

The help that is needed for Task 3: A ministry of crisis care and counselling, facilitating reality testing, and support in the difficult tasks of rebuilding one's life is the help that is needed for task three (Clinebell 1984:221).

When Jesus encountered human brokenness, he responded with compassion. Jesus even wanted to huddle over Jerusalem like a mother hen protecting her chicks (Matt 23:37; Luke 13:34) (Jones 2009:646). Our pastoral care as ministers should mirror the way Jesus cared for people (Jones 2009:647). The difficult task of rebuilding one's life without the lost person involves unlearning countless habitual responses, learning new behaviour to meet needs formerly met by the deceased, and making countless decisions about how to cope with the new problems the loss brings. A sign that a bereaved person is moving forward in their lives, is when they begin to invest energy in other relationships. After a traumatic loss, disconnection from others is often experienced and so recovery from trauma is based upon new relationships that are developed (Magezi & Manda 2016:6).

Donald Capps' (1990:10) concept of reframing can be a useful tool in supporting grieving people to rebuild their lives. Capps (1990:10) says that the meaning any event has for us depends upon the frame in which we perceive it. When we change the frame, we change the meaning. Capps writes that a minister, when working in their pastoral capacity with those who are grieving, should try to get the person to see a new point of view, or think differently about things. These are attempts to reframe events (Capps 1990:11). In bringing hope to those who are grieving, ministers/pastoral counsellors are to help the suffering imagine new possibilities for the future. In so doing, we offer new hope. A reason for hopelessness is the result of the loss of future stories. Facilitating the reconstruction of future stories falls under the category of reframing. Jesus made frequent use of parables as a way to reframe reality (Capps 1990:56). Ruth reframes the situation in which both her and Naomi find themselves. Naomi insists that Ruth is not to accompany her and instead to return to her mother's house (1:11-12). But Ruth refuses, insisting on accompanying Naomi for the rest of her life (1:16-17). Naomi's plan to be alone is thus foiled (1:18). This was reframing of the problem that led to hope in Naomi's life being restored.

In the Old Testament, Job's desperate cries of complaint to God are reframed by God's thunderous reply in Job 38:4. "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" What Job is now able to do is see a glimpse of his life in the context of all of God's creation (Capps 1990:56). The new frame does not remove the harsh reality of her/his present losses, but her/his suffering and grief is seen against a much larger backdrop of God's maternal love/eternal time. Reframing thus becomes a tool to help someone suffering loss to recast a vision for the future (Jones 2012:93). To engage in the process of reframing is to affirm that one has the capacity to act upon the future.

Pastoral counselling is a way to help people on their journey through the challenges of life. One of the way to do this is to help them retell their own stories, grafting these stories onto the eschatological story of the Christian faith (Kwan 2010:50). Neimeyer's concept of narrative retelling dovetails with Capp's idea of reframing. In narrative retelling, stories are told and retold in order to find meaning in the meaninglessness. Here, I refer back to Neimeyer's "narrative retelling" as one of his tools in grief therapy. Trauma can often leave someone who is grieving stuck. This is why telling and writing stories is important, because stories are about movement, about what is going to happen next. Stories help those grieving move onto the next stage of grieving, and enter the cycle of loss, healing and regeneration (Haaroff in Magezi & Manda 2016:4). Two of the tools of reframing⁵³ that I propose to be useful for the purpose of this research are:

1. Writing make-believe stories of letters: The question to be asked is: "If you wrote me a letter in a few years and it was filled with good news about your life, what would your letter say?" To engage in reframing is to affirm that one has the capacity to act upon the future (Jones 2012:94). Writing this 'make-believe' letter is a way of acting upon the future in the process of rebuilding life.
2. Guided imagery: The person grieving is invited to perform a mental picture of their preferred future. The assumption is that as we think, so may we begin to live (Jones 2012:94). Once again, the process of rebuilding life and

⁵³ There are additional reframing techniques, and these can be found in Capps' book/article, Reframing, a new method in pastoral care, 27-51. I have only listed what I believe to be appropriate for hope in pastoral care within the perimeters of meaning reconstruction.

rediscovering meaning can begin with a mental picture of a dream and hopefulness for the future.

- (iv) Grief work: this involves putting one's loss in a wider context of meaning and faith as well as learning from the loss (Clinebell 1984:221).

When a person's spiritual beliefs and meaning-making systems have been shattered by trauma, how do they recover their faith or cope with the trauma? Spiritual resources help cope with trauma as well as a healthy attachment to God, as it assists a grieving person through their grief (Gill-Austern 2014:102). The reconnection with the trauma survivor's support system brings recovery from trauma. Trauma causes people to feel helpless and isolated, but recovery is experienced through empowerment and reconnection. Reconnection with a person's spiritual support system and God end alienation from God (Magezi & Manda 2016:8). Janoff-Bulman's research finds that benefits can be gained as well as lessons learnt from traumatic experiences (1989:123). When lessons are learnt and benefits gained, those who have suffered from trauma can continue to believe that the world is a benevolent and a just place and that they are worthy people (Janoff-Bulman 1989:123). According to Neimeyer, benefit finding is one of the activities of grieving people engage, by which they reconstruct meaning in response to loss. One of the questions benefit finding asks is, 'what have I gained?'

The help that is needed for Task 4: A ministry of facilitating spiritual growth (Clinebell 1984:221).

Following on from asking the question, 'what have I learnt from the loss?' It is important for a minister to be cognisant of the fact that there are no guarantees that any life lessons may be learnt through the experience of grief. However, if lessons are learnt, these are dependent on a host of resources.

As a minister, when caring for those who are grieving, my reference point is always God. My role as a minister is to help the person grieving put their loss in the context of their faith. Faith in God provides them with a system for dealing with their grief. God

is the One whom I personally lean on, and the One into whose presence I am to bring the person who is struggling with grief. Evidence suggests that spiritual resources are important for coping with trauma, where individuals who use religious and spiritual coping mechanisms, demonstrate greater physical and emotional well-being (Magezi & Manda 2016:8). People turn to spirituality because it helps them to find meaning, purpose and hope, which may nurture them in their suffering (Magezi & Manda 2016:9). For Clinebell, two ingredients are essential for a meaningful life. One is an “open, energising relationship with God” and the other is “a dynamic commitment to a cause that is larger than one’s circle of self-centered concerns” (Clinebell in Capps 1990:137). The discovery or recovery of a meaningful life may begin with one’s relationship with God (Capps 1990:137).

A minister’s skills in facilitating spiritual growth may help grieving people enlarge their faith and revitalize their relationship with God (Clinebell 1984:225). Religious and spiritual practices meet the needs of people for dependency, relationship and support, as well as reduce anxiety and depression. Religious and spiritual behaviours decrease the effects of traumatic stress through the establishment of support networks (Soleimani, Sharif, Yaghoobzadeh, Yeoh, Panerello 2018:698). Good social support is effective in the prevention of mental stress (Soleimani, et al., 2018:699). I have seen evidence of this in my ministry. Those who have lost a loved one cope better when they have a healthy, reliable social support system.

The original root of the word “religion” comes from the Latin word “Re-Ligare”. “Ligare” means “to bind” or to “connect”. Adding the “re” before “ligare” causes the word to mean “Re-Bind” or “Re-Connect”.⁵⁴ When loss shatters one’s life, religion may help bind it together, restoring some sense of meaning. As a minister involved in counselling, many bereaved persons, I contend based on my experience that spiritual beliefs are helpful during the grieving process and that those who are grieving turn to their spiritual beliefs following the death of a loved one. I would even suggest that the crisis of death often confronts people to renew their spiritual lives as a way of restoring some sense of meaning.

⁵⁴ See: <https://www.gregtimble.com.meaning-of-the-word-religion/> Accessed online 28 June 2018.

For some people, their experience of loss changes their outlook on life. But perhaps more significantly, in my pastoral experience, their experience of loss and grief challenges their confidence in their experience of God – of how God is in relationship to them and what might they expect of God in the future.

- (v) The fifth task in grief work: This task involves, reaching out to others experiencing similar losses for mutual help (Clinebell 1984:221). According to Neimeyer (2011:424), the most common benefit-finding themes entail an increase in the desire to help others and to have compassion for others' suffering.

The help that is needed for Task 5: A ministry of enabling outreach to others (Clinebell 1984:221) is of great benefit during this task.

In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, Paul talks about the comfort God has given us. The comfort God gives those who are grieving, is not only his loving ministry to them, but also His call for them to minister to others (Tripp 2005:12). In grief, it is possible to become angry, to express doubt and fear, as indeed it is to lose your way and want to give up. But God, who offers hope, help, strength and comfort, calls the person grieving to give this comfort to others. The discovery or recovery of a meaningful life may begin with a commitment to a cause, and this cause could be helping others who are also grieving (Capps 1990:137). In the story of *Ruth*, we can see a person, in Ruth, being able to reach out to Naomi in her time of loss of grief. Ruth's feelings of love and concern for Naomi are displayed in her willingness to be a companion to her during her grief.

A person who is grieving can be God's agent of help and hope to others (Tripp 2005:12). Sharing with others is therapeutic, providing that the space created is grounded in trust (Carlin 2018:534). When people who have had the same experience meet and share together, those who are coping better with their grief can inspire hope in those who wish they were doing better. The overall goal in a pastoral theology of hope, "is to instill meaning in life and to create a sense of hope and future orientation" (Louw 2016:374).

4.10 Summary of Chapter 4

A pastoral theology of hope is an essential ministry in any congregation. Ministers are agents of hope, and therefore they want to do everything they can to affirm persons in that hope (Capps 2001:89). A minister is an agent that can give hope to those who are grieving by attempting to understand and bring meaning to this painful experience in their lives. Christ's presence and work is always in place ahead of our efforts. As ministers who are called to be agents of hope, we participate in the work of Holy Spirit as we accompany those who are grieving on their journey to healing. Using Clinebell's tasks of grief work along with the help needed for each task, I have attempted to offer the minister or pastoral counsellor a framework that could assist someone who is grieving as they journey towards the healing of their grief. The most important part of supporting a grieving person lies in 'being with them,' listening to their story, acknowledging their feelings, and guiding them towards a new, different and meaningful life without the deceased. Hope and meaning are not necessarily found as easily for some as for others. For some people, a renewed faith only develops after they have finished their painful grief work, and are only then able to reflect and learn from the painful loss (Clinebell 1984:225). Scripture comforts and consoles, prayers allow for catharsis, and Holy Communion brings the presence of Jesus into the lives of those who are grieving. These tools of hope facilitate the task of pastoral work. As a minister, one is required to be attentive to the narratives being told, and whilst listening, you are able to help those grieving make sense of their situation, and so discover that their lives are meaningful in their environment in which they now find themselves.

I will conclude this chapter with a poem by Joan. M. Eriskon written weeks before her husband's death.

Hope:

The word "hope" the learned say
Is derived from the shorter one "Hop"
And leads one into "Leap."
Plato, in his turn, says that the leaping,
Of young creatures is the essence of play –
So be it!

To hope then means to make a playful leap
Into the future – to dare to spring from firm ground -
To play trustingly, to invest energy, and laughter;
And one good leap encourages another –
On then with the dance.

We cannot fall out of this world, so let hope spring eternal!

Joan. M. Eriskon (Zylla 2018:548).

Chapter 5

GRIEF, LOSS AND RECOVERY IN THE *BOOK OF RUTH*

In the depths of winter, I finally learned that within me
there lay an invincible summer⁵⁵

Albert Camus

Blessed be the Lord, who has not left
you this day without a Redeemer

Ruth 4:14 (ESV)

5.1 Introduction to Chapter 5

In this chapter I present a reading of *Ruth* from a narrative literary perspective, examining the themes of grief, loss, tragedy, trauma and recovery as they are presented. A literary critical analysis of *Ruth* means that the text is read as a narrative, with sensitivity to the shifts in plot, to the unfolding of character, and to the play of language that focuses our attempt to find meaning in the story (Fewell & Gunn 1990:13). We take the story world to be a realistic world, imitating our own world, peopled with characters who face the future with uncertainty, who do not know the end of the story (Fewell & Gunn 1990:13). No Biblical story is just a story. Numerous authors concur that the immediate reading of *Ruth* is that it is a story of a response to grief and to managing loss (Dresner 2007:133; McAvan 2013:2). The death of Naomi's husband and both her sons, results in the loss of significant attachments in her life, and her response to these losses is grief. As such, the *Book of Ruth* may legitimately and fruitfully be read through a grief perspective. Given that it contains themes, such as loss and grief, and other features related to trauma, one may also gainfully apply to *Ruth* a hermeneutics of trauma (Frechette & Boase 2016:14). The book of *Ruth* has no easy answers to the questions about loss and grief that may be brought to it (Fewell & Gunn 1990:17). By applying Neimeyer's theory of meaning reconstruction to the lives of the women in *Ruth*, I will argue that they were able to meaningfully reconstruct their lives and regain hope.

⁵⁵Albert Camus, 1954.

5.2 Background to the *Book of Ruth*: The work of God in the darkest of times

Ruth 1:1 tells us that the story took place during the time of the judges. The book of Judges comes before *Ruth*, and Judges 21:25 describes the times in this way: “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.” Violence against women, vengeance, idolatry, death, were widespread (Hamlin 1996:5). It was a precarious time in the history of Israel, marked by internal corruption and external aggression, when “everyone did as he saw fit” (Hamlin 1996:177). The book of *Ruth* gives us a glimpse into the hidden work of God during the most difficult times. God’s hidden hand was at work preparing a future for Naomi and *Ruth*.

The narrative is plotted in the time of the Judges, whilst the time of the narration dates to the postexilic period (de Villiers, le Roux 2016:1). By plotting the *Ruth* narrative ‘in the time of the judges’, the author was not simply looking for a peaceful rural setting for the story, but carefully chose a specific historical time: ‘the time of the judges’. The ‘time of the judges’ in the *Book of Ruth* therefore functions as a literary device (de Villiers, le Roux 2016:3). Scholars who argue for a post-exilic dating for *Ruth* propose that the book was written between the 5th and 4th centuries BCE. They rely on linguistic clues within the text, primarily on the presence of Aramaisms and late Hebrew forms, as well as the book’s reflection of Deuteronomic laws (Barton 1906:576).

5.3 A survival story with difficult beginnings

This story of survival is short, it consists of four chapters with elements of loss and recovery, famine and harvest, barrenness and fruitfulness, life and death, grief and the reconstruction of meaning. The opening five verses (1:1-5) introduces the theme of death from which the story will draw life, where famine in nature leads to journeying to a foreign land, displacement, death and barrenness; leading to Naomi’s being without any family, except for that of a foreign daughter-in-law (Green 1982:65).

The reading presented here will be to examine the themes of loss and grief.

5.4 Famine as a season in life

One of the gifts that *Ruth* offers to its readers is that it speaks to the various stages and seasons of life (Fentress Williams 2012:13). Ecclesiastes 3:4 confirms some of these stages: “a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance, a

time to be born and a time to die”, as constituent part of the seasons of life. Life in God’s presence is not always one of joy. The Bible recounts many stories that attest to the fact that life can be difficult. The book of Job is a story illustrating how difficult life can be. The Psalms contain numerous laments over the difficulties faced in life.⁵⁶

In the first verses of *Ruth*, the literary element of tragedy is introduced through the famine (Grant 1991:425). As a result of the famine in Israel, Elimelech takes his wife Naomi and their two sons Mahlon and Chilion to live in Moab (1:1-2). There, they settled, and the two sons married Moabite woman, one named Ruth and the other Orpah (1:4). From the inception of the story certain themes emerge. The famine is the first in the ‘series of unfortunate events’ that result in Naomi having no more land because she had to leave Bethlehem and move to Moab. Thereafter, in *Ruth* 1:3-5, we read that Elimelech had died, as had Mahlon and Chilion after living in Moab for about ten years. The deaths are sudden and without apparent cause. Naomi could not have been more helpless, because she had no one to provide for her now that her husband and sons have died (Karlin Newman 1994:126). Naomi lived in a patriarchal society, where the loss of a husband was a social and economic tragedy. Patriarchy refers to the “rule of the father over the family and therefore men over women and children” (Rakoczy 2004:99). Weeping (Psalm 78:64), mourning (2 Sam 14:2), and desolation (Lam 1:1) can describe the personal experience of a widow after the loss of her spouse. Poverty (Ruth 1:21) described her financial situation, due to the fact that the main source of her economic support, her husband, had died. Widows were frequently placed on par with the disenfranchised; the orphan and the landless immigrant (Deut 24:17; 24:19) (Elwell 1996:np).⁵⁷ Naomi knows the death of the land, the death of her husband and the death of her children. She is in “exile, with her roots and branches cut” (Karlin Newman 1994:126). Death and emptiness have afflicted the life of Naomi. In summary, Tribble says, “The security of husband and children, which a male-dominated culture affords its women, is hers no longer. The definition of worth, by which it values the female, applies to her no more, the blessings of old age, which it gives through progeny, are there no longer” (Tribble 1996: 167-168 in Bush).

⁵⁶ Psalm 64, 77, 80 are some examples of the Psalmist lamenting before God.

⁵⁷ See: <https://www.biblestudytools.co/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/widow.html>. Paragraph 2. Accessed 15 October 2018.

During those years in Moab, Naomi would have felt a deep sense of loss, due to the fact that she was an alien in a foreign land with no family, and she had two Moabites as her daughters-in-laws. According to the categories of loss as defined by Mitchell and Anderson,⁵⁸ the fact that Naomi is widowed means that she has experienced 'relationship loss'. Both women experience, material loss, due to the fact that they had to leave their home. She also experienced, 'role loss', as her place in society would now forever be changed due to the death of her husband. Famine had stripped Naomi of her culture and home. Famine has a symbolic meaning that simply means something is wrong (Fentress-Williams 2012:42). A theological reading of these opening verses understands the famine to be both a physical event and something more. Famine evokes a spiritual time of separation from God as well as that of exile. Thus, in the first chapter, the reader is reminded of the pain of separation effectively conveyed in the language of famine.

The first chapter of *Ruth* begins and ends with a journey, from Bethlehem to Moab (1:a) and then from Moab to Bethlehem (1:22). All of us are on a journey, and our journeys take us through the numerous seasons of life. There are seasons of joy and celebration, and seasons of struggle and grief. Particularly when facing a season of loss, it is possible to be plunged into darkness and struggle maintain faith in God. In research by Burke and Neimeyer (2014:2), they concluded that severe life stressors like bereavement can challenge a person's faith resulting in a negative shift in their faith.

All the seasons of our lives are part of our spiritual journey. The story of Ruth is placed in the time that the judges ruled, "a notoriously disordered age" (Peterson 1992:76). Grief causes lives to become 'disordered' and throws the lives of loved ones into disarray. And so, on our journeys through life, sometimes the seasons are ones of disorder. Brueggemann writes, "Life is also savagely marked by disequilibrium, incoherence, and unrelieved asymmetry" (Brueggemann⁵⁹ in Jones 2012:6). The journey leading to restoration takes time. It is incumbent upon ministers to teach that the journey from despair to hope does not follow along neat lines, and that we must

⁵⁸ In Chapter 2 I have referred to this in detail.

⁵⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1984), 51, 74-77.

continue to encourage those grieving to faithfully ask God to intervene and restore hope because the pain of grief is intolerable.

The first chapter of the book represents mainly the personal process of managing death and loss from Naomi's point of view. Naomi can be seen to be, like all of us, moving forwards, regressing, succeeding to be ruled by her feelings of love and concern, getting overwhelmed by hate, bitterness and envy. In that sense, the book is a powerful, multi-faceted tale of the human journey (Dresner 2007:133). It stands as evidence of the fact that at times, grief can be both complex and challenging.

5.5 Naomi's isolation from others

In 1:8-9, Naomi encourages her daughters-in-law to return to their mothers' homes in Moab. In this context, it is particularly unusual, since widows normally return to their 'father's house.' Naomi's discourse reveals an emphasis, rare in biblical narrative, on relationships between women, specifically mothers and daughters, rather than the customary emphasis on fathers and sons (Rashkow nd:29). The mother's home is mentioned, because mothers were most affectionate to their daughters, and women in those times had apartments to themselves, and used to take their daughters to them when they became widows. There was more tenderness in the mother's house and a woman would find refuge in the "bosom of their mothers" (Pulpit Commentary 2010: :np)⁶⁰. In Ruth 1:8-9, we are given insight into what Naomi is thinking and feeling. She hopes YHWH will be faithful to them, in one day providing husbands for them. Naomi has no hope for either another husband or more sons (Fewell & Gunn 1990:73). Her daughters-in-law may have hope, in that they may possibly marry again, but she has none (Fewell & Gunn 1990:70-71). This is powerfully expressed by Naomi in 1:12 "...Even if I thought there was still hope for me-even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons..."

Ambivalence towards love, and hate towards oneself and others, and distorted perception of reality is often part of a reaction to a traumatic loss (see for e.g. 1:8-9). At this stage, Naomi is not able to be in touch with her own sadness and extreme pain

⁶⁰ See: <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/pulpit/ruth/1.htm>. Paragraph 8 and 9. Accessed 15 October 2018.

and with the pain of her daughters-in-law (Dresner 2007:135). In that moment, Naomi is regressing in her grief. When a person makes use of regression they display what might look like immature and insecure behaviour. A person engaging in regression in their grief might withdraw (Williams & Hayley 2017:np).⁶¹ Naomi chooses to withdraw from Ruth and Orpah. We see this starting in Ruth 1:8-11, where Naomi expresses a powerful range of emotions when she dissuades her daughters-in-law from joining her. In 1:8-9, it is as if Naomi is being kind and angry towards Orpah and Ruth. In her kindness, she hopes that God will grant her daughters-in-law husbands again. Thereafter, in 1:11, Naomi tells them to return home in an angry and sarcastic manner. In that moment, Naomi experiences herself as someone who is totally useless, because she is unable to have more children (Dresner 2007:135).

Her deep sense of loss is highlighted by her wish was to be alone in her grief. This can only be accomplished if she rids herself of her two daughters-in-law (Magonet nd:2). Kubler-Ross argues that isolation is a “very important stop on the path of grief, but usually, it should only be a step along the way” (2005:82). In her grief journey, here we see Naomi regressing. In 1:8-13, Naomi strongly commands that Orpah and Ruth do not go with her. Her reasoning for this is cited in v9-11, 12-13, in that they must find husbands. However, with fierce determination Ruth refuses, 1:16-1. Faced with such determination, Naomi, “stopped urging her” v18b, and withdrew into silence for the rest of the trip (Rashkow nd 32). Bush notes that “Surely such a lack of reaction to Ruth’s warm and impassioned devotion speaks volumes about the bitterness and pain that consumes Naomi in her return” (1996:87). Naomi is showing a common response to grief, as well as a desire to be left alone and bear her grief in isolation and solitude. In research by Magezi & Manda (2016:6), they discovered that support systems are very significant in the recovery from trauma, and yet Naomi chose to shut herself away from Orpah and Ruth. For some people, retreating into isolation is a way of coping with their grief. In these circumstances, the role of the minister is to continuously remind sufferers that their current circumstances are not the end of their life story, even if they cannot be sure how their story will unfold (Jones 2012:8).

⁶¹ See: <https://whatsyourgrief.com/defense-mechanisms-in-grief/> Paragraph 3 Accessed 22 November 2018.

Because Naomi is a woman, in an ancient, patriarchal world, her loss is more poignant than that of a man in a similar situation. It is not her, but her husband who, until his death, controls her life and family. Her husband brought her to Moab. When her children die, the narrator says that she is “left over”, left alone, left without (1:5). When loss has occurred the experience of being left, is accompanied by feelings of hurt, anger and blame. By her own admission, she has no hope for another husband or more sons (Fewell & Gunn 1990:73). In *Ruth* 1:2, the narrator identifies Naomi as a wife, “Elimelech, his wife’s name was Naomi.” Naomi’s identity shifts in the story through the way the narrator names her. Never again throughout the rest of the story is she identified as “Naomi wife of Elimelech”, she is simply referred to as Naomi (Bush 1996:69). Mitchell & Anderson would term this ‘role loss’, as her accustomed place in the social network has been lost. Naomi now stands alone, without a husband and her two sons in a patriarchal world.

Naomi, “begins her mourning as an individual and her path back to the community – to hope and to life – charts the emotional terrain that may accompany an overwhelming experience of loss” (Karlín-Neumann 1994:125). In 1:3, the words “and she was left,” reinforce her sense of aloneness. The phrase “was left” (1:3) presents Naomi as the last remaining remnant of Elimelech’s family (Hamlin 1996:11). A parallel can be seen between Naomi and Job: both experience loss of property, then family. Job has friends who try to console him, but reinforces the distance between their understanding and his plight. Naomi has foreign daughters-in-law who accentuate her distance from her land and her people. Like Job, Naomi attributes her losses to God (*Ruth* 1:13, 20-21) (Karlín-Neumann 1994:126).

Five times Naomi insists that it is God who is responsible for her suffering (1:13, 20-21)⁶². Her refusal to be identified with pleasantness, the root of the name Naomi, and her renaming herself *Mara*, or bitterness, communicate how completely Naomi is suffused with the tragedy of her experience (Karlín-Neumann 1994:126). The journey through grief can cause a grieving person to be overwhelmed by bitterness. Bitterness

⁶² The five occurrences of Naomi insisting that God is responsible for her grief in 1:13b “It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has gone out against me.” 1:20-21: “Don’t call me Naomi, she told them. Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.”

can lead to anxiety and/or depression, interfere with cultivating healthy relationships, create an attitude of cynicism, and erode your general sense of well being (Seltzer 2015:np). In her home there are two other mourners, yet Naomi wants to turn them away. Instead of seeing Ruth and Orpah as being a comforting presence, for Naomi they are bitter reminders of her loss. She cannot provide for them or protect them, and she has lost those who could have done so. Naomi's mourning is made more painful by her exile. In 1:22, Naomi returns to Bethlehem, without her husband and sons. She returns a bitter woman who is angry at God. The women that greet Naomi find it hard to believe that she is in fact the woman arriving home (1:20). Even though Naomi has a community to which she belongs, she does not want to connect with them at this point in her life. We don't hear of them again until 4:14-15.

5.6 The depths of Naomi's grief

In 1:1-6, with brief yet masterful strokes, the narrator paints a picture of one of the dourest tragedies possible for a family (Benitez 2016:22). This is not only a family with no land, but a family who suffered the losses of loved ones. Naomi suffered the loss of her husband and two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. Part of Naomi's tragedy was the devastating experience of having out lived her two sons. A woman who loses her husband is called a widow. A person who loses parents is called an orphan. In English, we have no word for a mother or father whose children die (Karlin-Neumann 1994:132). Her sons were married for ten years before their death, and they had no children born to them. Ruth not only suffered the loss of her husband, but also the loss of having no children, as well as the loss of her home, and her country of origin. They were both grieving women. Naomi, felt the bitterness and hopelessness that accompanies grief. Naomi's husband, her provider, had been taken away from her. Her life was turned upside down by her loss. After the loss of his wife, the author C.S. Lewis could not explain the depth of his grief: "No one ever told me that grief felt so much like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the yawning. I keep on swallowing" (Lewis 2013:5). I would suggest that these words echo something of the depth of the grief that Naomi experienced. Naomi's grief is intense, and her inner core has been shaken, her identity shattered, she is overwhelmed by her tragic circumstances, she has lost all hope for the future, and she is bitter and disgusted at her situation. The shattering of Naomi's sense of identity means that she has lost the role of wife and mother in her family. The

loss of this role leads to intrapsychic loss and grief (Mitchell and Anderson 1983:42). However, because of the decision of Ruth to remain with Naomi, she never loses the role of being a mother-in-law. "Grieving is not just a function of loss, but a function of the attachment of the bereaved to that which is lost" (Louw 1994:179). The more emotionally attached the griever was, the greater is his/her vulnerability, and the more intense the pain of longing and hurt (Louw 1994:179). Naomi's attachment to her husband and sons would have resulted in the intense feelings of bitterness and sadness she expressed in 1:13b, 20-21.

The depth of Naomi's grief is expressed in her lament in 1:13b, 20-21: "It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has gone out against me!" (1:13b) "Don't call me Naomi, she told them. Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me, the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me" (1:20-21).

At the heart of her speech is her grief and helplessness and her bitter sense of deprivation (Fewell & Gunn 1990:75). In the depths of her despair, Naomi feels forsaken by God. Naomi lays responsibility for her empty life directly at the feet of God: "the Lord has brought me back empty... the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me." Such a view of God can square with what is called a "theology of complaint." Campbell observes that "not only is complaint tolerated by God, but it can even be the proper stance of a person who takes God seriously! Anyone who ascribes full sovereignty to a just and merciful God may expect to encounter the problem of theodicy, and to wrestle with that problem is not sin even when it leads to an attempt to put God on trial." Naomi takes God so seriously, she resolutely and openly voices her complaint. With this example of the "theology of complaint", Naomi expresses her desolation, despair and emptiness of the life of a woman "left alone without her two boys and without her husband (v5) in a world where life depends upon men (Bush 1996:66).

Language has a way of doing more than it says. No less is true of Naomi's speech in 1:13b, 20-21 (Fewell & Gunn 1990:71). Naomi's use of language in her lament such as, bitter, empty, afflicted and misfortune, expresses her traumatic experience.

Lament is the language of suffering; in it suffering is given the dignity of language: it will not stay silent! (Frechette & Boase 2016:12).

5.7 Ruth the companion to Naomi

In the wake of death the narrator forecasts life. Naomi is not alone, Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law is with her (1:22). Not only that, but they arrive at the beginning of the barley harvest (1:22), a sign of life, suggesting that Naomi and Ruth would not remain “empty” forever (Efthimiadis 1991:71). Ruth chooses to stay with Naomi and abide with her (Ruth 1:16-18). Not only does Ruth decide; she decides contrary to Naomi’s orders. Her choice makes no sense. It relinquishes the familiar, and from a cultural perspective Ruth has chosen death over life. She has abandoned national identity and she has renounced religious affiliation. Ruth possesses nothing. No God has called her, no deity has promised her blessing. A young woman has committed herself to the life of an old woman rather than to the search for a husband, and she has made this commitment “where you die I will die”. “One female has chosen another female in a world where life depends upon men. There is no more radical decision in all the memories of Israel” (Trible 1978:173). Naomi is silenced by it (v18) (Trible 1978:173).

In Ruth we see a person succeeding to be ruled by feelings of love and concern for others who are grieving. Ruth has the ideal qualities for someone caring for a loved one coping with grief and loss. She provides companionship to Naomi through her grief. Hunsinger (2011:17) speaks of the “lively presence of a caring other” as a companion when having to confront a traumatic event. This person offers a compassionate, caring presence, “free of judgement, praise or blame.” Ruth fulfilled the role of the “caring other” as she accompanied Naomi during her loss and subsequent grief. Her presence is more important than any solution. Ruth allows Naomi to let her grief take its course without forcing anything upon her. Far too often people are told ‘to snap out of it’, Ruth faithfully remains with her. Ruth was the perfect comforter to help Naomi through her grief experiences. And so, Naomi owes her restoration to a woman, to Ruth the Moabite (Fewell & Gunn 1990:82).

Even though Ruth was a supportive companion to Naomi during her time of grief, it is important to note that attachment theory rejects the notion that supportive friends can compensate for the loss of an attachment figure. Bowlby proposed that the attachment

figure, unlike other people in the social environment, was uniquely able to foster general feelings of security and that other people could not simply take over this function (Stroebe, Stroebe & Abakoumkin 1996:1242).

5.7.1 Casting the blame on God for loss

Naomi speaks about her feelings for the first time in *Ruth* 1:13. The discourse about her husband, sons, and her womb, leads to one thing, God. In her bitterness, she interprets the way her life has gone of late as God's doing. It is not a matter of having bad luck, or having food or not, or a husband or not; what is at stake for her is God and how she feels about God. This is because Naomi, protests from a place of faith, as a believer, where she feels that the hand of God has turned against her (Benitez 2016:25). *Ruth* 1:13b; 20-21 (quoted above) articulated Naomi's anger towards God for allowing such a tragedy to happen. She cannot bear to hear her name, Naomi, which means "pleasant" and "sweet". Now her name mocks and reproaches. And she feels singled out by God for misfortune (1:13, 21) (Dubin 1994:136). Naomi changes her name to Mara, which means "bitter one", as a dramatic way of showing how her entire life has been transformed through loss. In changing her name, Naomi wants to completely identify with her loss (Fentress-Williams 2012:59). By using the word 'bitter', Naomi expresses how much she resents her lot in life and has resigned herself to live out the rest of her empty days in bitterness (Grant 1991:430). According to Grant (1991:431), the most significant word that is used is, 'bitter', because it captures the mood of a woman who has lost everything, including her hope.

Naomi's anger, her disappointment towards God, and her feelings of abandonment by God, are expressed through the use of her words, bitter (1:20), empty (1:21), afflicted (1:21), and misfortune (1:21). These are all typical responses to grief and loss, with initial emptiness and despair, giving way to bitterness and anger against others and against God, who is often seen as the ultimate cause. When she arrived back in Bethlehem she arrived in a hopeless state of mind, feeling abandoned by God. She saw nothing but a bleak and empty future. Despair is one of the debilitating consequences of grief. Naomi stressed the bitterness of her soul by using the Hebrew word for "bitter" three times. "It has been far more bitter (*mar*) for me than for you" (v 13); and "Call me Mara (bitter) for the Almighty has dealt bitterly (*mar*) with me" (v20).

Bitterness is a form of anger, a complaint that life is not fair (Hamlin 1996:21). Naomi complained that the Lord had dealt harshly with her, “The Lord has afflicted me.” (v21) (Hamlin 1996:22). Naomi blamed God for bringing calamity on her, where she says “the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me” (v21) (Hamlin 1996:23). These words emphasise the depth of Naomi’s journey, her world of pain and bitter affliction.

The hope for Naomi is that in the midst of her bitterness, and anger Naomi still feels that she lives within the framework of God’s providence whatever form it may take. In Naomi’s poem in *Ruth* 1:20-21, she makes a profound statement of both her anger at her bitter experience and her acceptance that ultimately everything must lie in the hands of God (Magonet nd:4).

5.8 Where is God in the time of crisis and great pain?

Naomi left Bethlehem ‘full’, but returned ‘empty’ (1:21). In my own pastoral ministry, I have often heard those who are grieving describe their spiritual life as ‘empty’, after experiencing loss and struggling through grief. I would therefore be led to suggest that Naomi was struggling with a spiritual ‘famine’ in her life after experiencing numerous losses.

What Naomi does, is interpret God in the light of her circumstances. Bitterness is her reality, and by it she will redefine her concept of God (Grant 1991:432). Louw defines a “God image” as a “psychological working internal model of the sort of person that the individual imagines God to be” (Magezi & Manda 2016:2). God images reflect God’s actions as experienced by believers according to real life events (Magezi & Manda 2016:3). Naomi’s God images are shattered by the loss of her husband, and both sons. The shattering of Naomi’s image of God is voiced through her narrative in 1:20-21, as she expressed her great pain and disappointment in God.

When Naomi returns to Israel the women in the town hardly recognised her. Her misery is evident in her demeanour and possibly in her appearance. The question “is this Naomi?” acknowledges the substantive changes that have taken place in Naomi, where her depressed state is visible for all to see. The answer Naomi gives offers clarity to the question: “Call me no longer Naomi, call me Mara for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me” (Fentress-Williams 2012:59). By Naomi (sweet one) changing

her name to Mara (bitter one), we see the opposites of life and death present within one person, Naomi. Naomi insists she is not the same woman she was she left when Bethlehem. “Why call me Naomi?” She asks and then she answers her own question in four statements that alternate the names of God:

A EI Shaddai has made her life very bitter.

B She went away full, but *Yahweh* brought her back empty.

B’ *Yahweh* has afflicted her.

A’ EI Shaddai has brought misfortune upon her.

In the dialogue between Naomi and the women of Bethlehem (Ruth 1:19b-21), Naomi’s reply is chiasmic in content as follows: 1:21a “I” vs. “Yahweh,” “full” vs. “empty” and “went-away” vs. “brought-me-back”. This sharply contrasts Naomi’s initial state with what Yahweh has subsequently done to her. The chiasmic language, is used to explain the power of death in her life as a divine curse (Trible 1978:174).

These are words of pain and protest against God. This is how people talk when they are honest and drop the pretense of sanctity (Benitez 2016:28). In Naomi’s lament there is no glib talk that God is faithful and that he will make all things right. All there is, is bitterness and anger at her present experience. Naomi was bitter at God and at life. The *Book of Ruth* raises important theological issues for us as Christians.

Two of these are:

1. Where is God at the moment of tragedy?
2. Is any response other than bitterness appropriate in the tragic hour of need?

Complaints against God are found in Scripture. The Psalms contain many honest complains and grievances against God: Psalm 6:3 ‘my soul is in anguish. How long, O Lord, how long?’ Psalm 10:1 “Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” The question, “where is God in the time of crisis and great pain?” is asked throughout Scripture. When people are wracked by the tragedies of life, it is often these types of questions that they ask of God, as they seek answers to the difficult questions. When mourners experience grief, confusion about their role in life, or an inability to accept the loss, the griever’s faith can be called into question,

challenging one's sense of secure connection to both God and the religious community (Burke & Neimeyer 2014:1088).

The minister can help a grieving person by encouraging them to make a list of their grievances. This is done in order to clarify where they believe God has failed to do his part. The minister does not take up defending God. There are times when the biblical position is on the side of the person who is angry and disappointed with God. There are times when ministers ought to encourage such protest, because protest is tolerated by God. It could even be taken a step further, saying that this could even be the proper stance of a person who has the appropriate expectations of God. Anyone who ascribes full sovereignty to a just and merciful God may expect to encounter the problem of justifying God, "and to wrestle with that problem is no sin, even when it leads to an attempt to put God on trial" (Peterson 1992:99). Naomi's protests towards God, her bravery in wrestling with the problems she had pertaining to God, whom she would have expected to be merciful, places her in good company.

5.8.1 God's promise to never leave us nor forsake us

My personal experience involves being a minister to those who have lost loved ones. No one is untouched by the profound and poignant experience of grief. Each person has his or her own story to tell, their own journey to endure, with a particular understanding of how grief may relate to the journey of faith. Frechette and Boase (2016:20) argue that a relationship with God can foster recovery and resilience in the face of traumatising experiences. This can take place when God functions as an attachment figure by representing a safe haven and a secure base (Burke & Neimeyer 2014:2).

When listening to those who are grieving, when attempting to remind them that God is with them, even though it feels to them that in the darkness He cannot be seen or heard, it is the role of the minister, accompanied by the work of the gentle Holy Spirit, to get them to realise that God is with them, albeit, not in the ways they preferred or immediately understood. C.S. Lewis writes of the same experience following the death of his wife, as he explains a fundamental issue of faith and hope in loss. "Not that I am in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe

such dreadful things about him. The conclusion I dread is not, ‘So there is no God after all’, but ‘so this is what God is really like. Deceive yourself no longer’” (Lewis 2103:8). In the process of grief recovery, Lewis eventually comes to the realisation that the problem of this theological anguish in grief is not God’s inadequacy, but his view of God that is flawed.

5.9 God Almighty: *El Shaddai*

El Shaddai is one of the names of the God of Israel. El Shaddai is translated as God Almighty, the God who suffices, God of overpowering strength (Dubin 1996:135). When Naomi instructs the women to call her “Mara”, her primary identity is that of loss and emptiness at the hand of “Shaddai”, whom she blames for her bitterness, misfortune and emptiness. The priestly name El-Shaddai used of God by Naomi in Ruth 1:20-21 recalls these ancient promises (Larkin 1996:50). The first occurrence of the name is in Genesis 17:1, “And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram and said unto him, I am El Shaddai, walk before me and be thou perfect.”

In Hebrew the word *shad* means “breast.” Thus, Shaddai could mean “The Breasted One.” Although etymology is certainly important in determining the meaning of a word, how the word is used in context fundamentally shapes what it means. If we look at El Shaddai in its various contexts, it has a semantic range of meaning. In other words, it can mean different things in different contexts, for example “The God of Breasts” to “Powerful God” (ref. foot note).⁶³ The meaning of El Shaddai, ‘The God of the Breasts’ is profound in the context of a patriarchal culture. The God of the Breasts gives us insight into a God who encapsulates both masculine and feminine characteristics. In *Ruth* 1:20, 21 Naomi speaks of how Shaddai has dealt bitterly with her, and that God is no longer nurturing her. Shaddai speaks to God’s omnipotence and God’s ability to nurture and sustain. Even in the midst of her loss, the mention of Shaddai contains hope. (Fentress-Williams 2102: 63). As we study Naomi, we can gain information about El Shaddai, the God who cares for us in our grief.

⁶³See: El Shaddai and the Gender of God. <https://scibalishess.wordpress.com/2014/05/23/el-shaddai-and-the-gender-of-god/> Accessed 17 October 2018.

5.10 God's grace in a surprising vessel

In the story, God is not portrayed as intervening directly. Rather, the grace of God comes in surprising ways. The author must mean to imply that divine action occurs through human agents (Dubin 1996:51). In 1:16, we can see that Naomi had in Ruth someone who refused to leave her in her tragic loss. As Bush argues, "This commitment of a young woman to the life of an old woman in the darkest hour that, a woman in a man's world, can face is already a signal step toward a dawn for Naomi's dark night of despair" (1996:96). The faithfulness of El Shaddai is represented by the presence of Ruth, who resisted being parted from Naomi (Fentress-Williams 2012:63). Ruth resisted being parted from Naomi. The "emptiness" of Naomi's return to Judah provided the transition to God's grace by means of Ruth (1:19-22). Ruth's words of commitment to Naomi, 1:16-18, constitute one of the most striking examples in all of Old Testament literature of that loving and sacrificial loyalty that the Hebrew language designated *hesed* (cf. 1:8; 3:10), for Ruth's devotion to Naomi caused her to cast aside all concern for her future and security and to break the bonds even of community and religion (Bush 1996:87). The theme of grace, *hesed*,⁶⁴ is central to the *Book of Ruth*. *Hesed*, is one of the key words controlling the text. The word *hesed* is found at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the story (Ruth 1:8, 2:20, 3:10) (Bronner 1995:147). What is remarkable in this narrative is that a female character, Ruth, takes the lead as the epitome of *hesed* (Bronner 1995:157).

In the ordinary actions of Ruth (2:1-23), God began to prepare the way of blessing. Ruth's initiative to go and glean provided food for their dire present circumstances. Ruth going to glean began the building of a future foundation for their welfare as a family (2:1-7). The encounter between Ruth and Boaz opened the way for God to bless in an unexpected manner (2:14-23). God used all these ways and people and made it ways of grace, and hope began to be restored. Through one of the "kinsman redeemers", Boaz, God filled the emptiness of Naomi and showed His presence in both her life and that of Ruth. God filled the emptiness of Naomi through a son born to Ruth and Boaz, who was the grandfather of the great King David (4:13-22).

⁶⁴ The concept of *hesed* includes two notions, one of them consisting in the exercise of beneficence toward one who deserves it, but in a greater measure than they deserve it. In most cases the prophetic books use the word *hesed* in the sense of practising beneficence toward one who has no right at all to claim this from you. "Ruth's mode is the second, to practice benevolence toward people who have no claim on her for it" (Bronner 1995:148).

Despite the tragedies Naomi had undergone, the birth of a grandchild “transforms death into life, emptiness into fullness” (Ruth 4:15a) (Trible 1978:194). Naomi, the one who called herself bitter and called her life empty, has now received a beautiful blessing through Ruth, whose son, would bring fullness to her life. The women say to Naomi in 4:15a, that ‘he will renew your life and sustain you in your old age...’ (NIV). It is interesting to note the wording in Ruth 4:15a⁶⁵ ‘And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age...’, where Obed would be the “restorer of life”. Yahweh’s covenant teaching (Torah), as lived and taught by this grandson, would mean “reviving the soul” of Naomi, restoring her courage, and strength for her life (Hamlin 1996:69). The implication here is that God would use human agents to bring hope and life where it has been lost. We see at the end of the story in *Ruth* 4:16, ‘Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him.’ Obed is nursed by his grandmother, and laying him on her breast, is a token of her tender affection to take care of him (Henry 1992:294). When trying to help people reconstruct their lives and make meaning out of their loss, it is important to assist those who are grieving to understand that God has not abandoned them. God’s presence is manifested in a variety of ways, and His grace at times comes through surprising means. Sometimes it is an answer to prayer, sometimes it is through another person, but so often it is just that God grants sufficient grace to endure.

5.11 The Faithfulness of God

Louw argues that it is the task of hermeneutics to assist human beings in their restless search for meaning, to decipher texts within context, in order to detect signs of hope (2016:273). Through the display of God’s faithfulness in the text, it is possible to detect these signs of hope in our search for meaning:

- a) **God’s faithfulness through the provision of food:** Ruth and Naomi return to Bethlehem at the beginning of harvest time. Bethlehem means house of bread. The words, “as the barley harvest was beginning” conclude the first chapter (1:22). Harvest is the natural counterpoint to famine, signaling a change is imminent. Harvest connotes abundance and plentitude, an antidote to

⁶⁵ Translation: King James Bible. The Holy Scriptures. Hebrew and English

Naomi's identity based in lack and loss (Fentress-Williams 2012:62). Bethlehem is the place where a new beginning is made for Naomi and Ruth. Bethlehem will also be a new beginning with the birth of Jesus (Matt 2:1,5). The companionship or presence of Ruth and the barley harvest are two signs of life opposing the death statements that had been made earlier by Naomi in 1:19-21 (Trible 1978:175). There was no welfare system in those days, but there was a way for the poor to get help. Farmers could only reap their fields once. The widows and the poor were then to glean what was left over (references to this practice can be found in Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:22, and *Ruth* 2:2-23). Ruth seeks provision for herself and Naomi. In Chapter 2:2, part of Ruth's plan for their survival involves her taking the initiative to go and glean in the fields of Boaz. Ruth plans for their survival in someone's field in whom she may find favor (Fentress-Williams 2012:67). In this field, Ruth meets Boaz, from the clan of Elimelech (2:2-3). The law in Israel at the time stated that when a man died childless, his brother or closest relative was to marry the widow and have a child by her and that child would belong to the deceased man and inherit his property (Deuteronomy 25:5). In 2:20, when Boaz stepped into the life of Ruth, Naomi's faith was uplifted in her journey through grief, here we see Naomi moving forward. Naomi praises the kindness of God as she recognises God's goodness. These words stand in stark contrast to the darker sentiments voiced in 1:13, 20-21. This was evidence that God had not abandoned them. And so, widowed Naomi's redemption comes through her widowed daughter-in-law rather than her own sons. God had arranged things such that Ruth ended up in Boaz's fields. Boaz in turn treated her with kindness and generosity. Reading this through a theological lens this is seen as the work of God. This meeting of Ruth and Boaz is a theology of surprise (Fentress-Williams 2012:68). "So, she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech" (2:3). Behind these words, 'as it turned out', is the hand of Almighty God keeping His promise to defend "the cause of the fatherless and the widow... giving [them] food and clothing" (Deut 10:18). In the Hebrew, the words, 'she found herself working,' translate as, "happened to happen" upon the fields of Boaz. In these words, we recognise that what was on the surface

a chance occurrence was in actuality being specifically guided by divine providence (Luter & Rigsby 1993:54).

- b) **God's faithfulness through His protection:** In *Ruth* 2:12b we read 'the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge'. These words, "wings" and "refuge" connote an image of God's protective covering (Fentress-Williams 2102:72). The words in *Ruth* 3:9b 'spread the corner of your garment over me since you are a kinsman-redeemer,' recall the words in 2:12b 'the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.' The metaphor of spreading the garment or wings can be taken to represent protection (Green 1982:62). Deuteronomy 32 describes the scene where the Lord finds Israel in a desert place and hovers over them and under them, spreading his wings to bear his fledging young along (Green 1982:62).
- c) **God's faithfulness displayed through His abundance:** In 2:14, Boaz invites Ruth to a meal, at which she was able to eat all she wanted and had some left over. Abundance replaces lack when Ruth returned to Naomi after gleaning in the fields of Boaz, and Naomi sees how much Ruth had gathered (2:18). This image of abundance stands in contrast to Ruth's past experiences of famine and death. Through food, protection and the image of abundance, 2:15 signals an end to the years of famine and loss (Fentress-Williams 2012:75). Boaz demonstrates God's faithfulness in providing abundantly for those who are in need. Both Ruth and Boaz demonstrate God's *hesed* to God's people (Fentress-Williams 2012:79). A theological lens recognises the faithfulness of God as something that is not limited by famine or geography or death (Fentress-Williams 2012:84).
- d) **God's faithfulness is a blessing:** In 2:20a⁶⁶ Naomi responds to Ruth's good report with a blessing: "The Lord bless him! He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead!" This blessing of Boaz's faithfulness is

⁶⁶ 2:20 has elicited much debate. Efthimiadis (1991), eloquently argues the reasons for this debate. Whether the relative pronoun refers to Yahweh or Boaz is questionable. If the blessing is from Yahweh then all that follows is an anti-climax. Support for the relative pronoun referring to Boaz seems to be preferred.

rooted in the faithfulness of the Lord. In contrast to Naomi's words upon their return to Bethlehem, she now acknowledges God's faithfulness to the living and the dead. It is not the case that Naomi's earlier words that describe God as the cause of her bitterness were untrue; they were simply the words expressing her experience at that time. (Fentress-Williams 2012:83).

The end of Chapter Two echoes the end of Chapter One. Ruth brings grain from Boaz's field to a hungry Naomi, who is empty and by doing this she demonstrates God's faithfulness through her faithfulness to Naomi. In Chapter One, wails of lament were raised, whereas now, Ruth rises up full of hope that comes with abundant food (Benitez 2016:34). Just as Ruth did not abandon Naomi, so God did not abandon Naomi, but shows his mercy towards her. In this way, God manifested his grace and protection through other people. In a lovely chain reaction, we see that Ruth did not abandon Naomi; Boaz aligned himself in solidarity with Ruth, and Ruth provided for Naomi, God was with and in all three (Benitez 2016:34).

That God is associated with Naomi's emptiness in Chapter 1 and her fullness in Chapter 4 speaks to the ever-present faithfulness of God. God is present in the famine, death, and barrenness. God is present in the harvest and new life. In spite of the circumstances or the timing or the season, God is faithful (Fentress-Williams 2012:127). By the end of the narrative of *Ruth*, the reader is convinced of God's faithfulness to his covenant promises (Grant 1991:426).

5.12 The journey to life

Naomi's progression through despair, anger, bitterness, depression, and finally being able to find new purpose, renewed hope and life again, exemplifies what has been referred to as the grief cycle. The experience of moving from death and mourning back to life and vitality, is one that most of us will repeat several times in our lives. *Ruth* is a phenomenology of that journey (Karlin-Newmann 1994:125).

5.13 Your God and my God

In contrast to Naomi, who had resigned herself to living the rest of her empty days in bitterness, Ruth moves out in faith 1:16, never complaining or looking back (Grant 1991:431). Ruth takes the initiative in moving from death-back to life, and she intends

to bring Naomi with her on that journey (Karlin-Newmann 1994:128). In moments when death seems intractable and the only reality, it is sometimes another human soul, perhaps suffering, perhaps journeying, who can move a mourner slowly toward life, toward hope, toward redemption (Karlin-Newmann 1994:130). Finding solidarity with other people who have suffered loss and are grieving can foster recovery and resilience in the face of traumatising experiences (Frechette & Boase 2016:20). Ruth refuses to be pushed away from Naomi. She insists on being with her. Although she frames her declaration as a following of Naomi “where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God”, 1:16b, it is actually Ruth who leads Naomi out of darkness (Karlin-Newmann 1994:126).

Two aspects of Ruth’s words are astounding. She states that ‘*your God shall be my God.*’ The God Naomi repeatedly names as the source of her desolation and bitterness is the God Ruth is prepared to embrace. Although she too is a mourner, Ruth is willing to turn to Naomi’s God. Ruth’s declaration, “Your God my God,” makes God, once again, Naomi’s God (Karlin-Newmann 1994:127).

Ruth and Naomi are bound together by the deaths of men in the family. The men are presumably buried together, and Ruth vows that the women in the family will also be buried together. *Ruth* 1:17 ‘Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried.’ In this line we see another way in which Ruth helps to move Naomi out of her despair. They have been surrounded by death. For the mourner to leave death requires an act of extraordinary energy and courage. Naomi, pummeled by so many losses, filled with so much bitterness, epitomizes death, and yet she is able to live. Ruth is reminding Naomi to see that she is not dead yet. ‘Where you die, I will die’. I will be there, Ruth promises, but it is not here, not yet. Ruth has taken the initiative in moving from death-back to life, and she intends to bring Naomi with her on that journey.

For Naomi, the way back to life, vitality and restoration cannot be directly through faith, because her estrangement from God is critical to her understanding of herself as Mara. Instead it is through human acts that she is ultimately restored. (Karlin-Newmann 1994:128). Ruth participates in Naomi’s pain and as she does so communion emerges. In this consoling relationship, Ruth’s presence and availability towards the

grieving Naomi, illustrates what it means to walk alongside or accompany those who grieve (Klaas 2012:13).

5.14 Going to glean

In *Ruth 2*, Ruth's plan to go out and glean also evoke the journey motif that we have already seen in this narrative, as well as the journey through grief. Reading *Ruth 2:2* through a theological lens affords an understanding of these activities, where it is possible to interpret them as the work of God. Ruth's plan will take her to an unknown place she will have an encounter with someone. The narrative timing and the characters combined in this location make for a meeting of tremendous significance-it constitutes a theology of surprise (Fentress-Williams 2012:68). We need to look out for God in those unexpected places, when and where we did not expect to encounter Him. An example of this is found in *Genesis 28:16*. This is why Jacob expresses surprise when he encountered God at Bethel, "Surely the Lord is in this place-and I did not know it!" It never occurred to him that he would encounter God when on the run from his brother (Fentress-Williams 2012:80).

In *Ruth 2*, Naomi re-encounters God and we also see Naomi's attitude changing. She is no longer wallowing in her bitterness but showing a sense of hope for the future and a caring attitude towards Ruth and she is making plans to solve her problems. In my own interpretation, Ruth epitomises what Scott Peck contends, namely that "life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. Once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Life is a series of problems. Do we want to moan about them or solve them? It is in the process of meeting and solving problems that life has its meaning" (2002:13). Ruth and Naomi set out to solve their problems in daring ways which end up being life-giving for them.

5.15 A new garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness

Naomi seems to come back to life when, in Chapter 3, she instructs Ruth to visit the threshing floor. It is Naomi who initiates the plan. She does not wait for matters to take their course or for God to intervene with a miracle (Trible 182). In *Ruth 3:1*, this is the first time Naomi becomes active as a caregiver and willingly takes responsibility for Ruth's welfare, and in doing so she moves from being the receiver of calamity to becoming the agent of change (Trible 1978:182). In recovering her concern for her

daughter-in-law, she creates a strategy that will ultimately provide her with a home as well. Initially, through Ruth, and then through Ruth and Boaz, Naomi's bitterness and ultimately even her barrenness fades (Ruth 4:13) (Karlin-Newmann 1994:129). In *Ruth* 3:3, Naomi suggests to Ruth that she put on her 'best clothes.' The instructions given to Ruth regarding her personal appearance and preparation, her washing, anointing, and putting on her cloak, have far deeper significance. When Naomi, instructs Ruth to put on her 'best clothes', she is asking Ruth to appear before Boaz in her 'bridal gown.'" 2 Samuel 12:20 is directly parallel to *Ruth* 3:3. David learned of the death of his child born to Bathsheba. It is also clear from other passages that mourning practices involved refraining from washing oneself or anointing oneself with oil (2 Sam 14:2), together with the wearing of "garments of widowhood"(Gen 38:14,19) or else the usual garment unwashed for the person of the mourning. Hence, the most likely explanation of Naomi's instructions to Ruth is that they mean that she should end her period of mourning and so signal her return to the normal activities and desire of life, which of course, would include marriage. In Zulu culture, women are required to wear black mourning garments for a year to signal to people that they are grieving. Once the grieving period is over, they can return to so called 'normal dress'. The change in Ruth's appearance, with its symbolic meaning, would indicate to Boaz both her availability and the seriousness of her intentions (Bush 1996:152). The significance of these words implies that the period of mourning in the story is over (Green 1982:61). Benitez (2016:36) concurs that the change of attire might suggest the period of mourning is over, availability for a new marriage and desire to move on in life. David performs the same sequence of events after the death of his young son in 2 Samuel 12:20 (Green 1982:61). I want to suggest that Naomi was encouraging Ruth to rid her garments of sorrow, as that time of sorrow was now over, and put on her 'best clothes'; signaling her re-entrance into society, and that she was ready to hope and live again. Through Naomi's actions we see evidence of a faithful God bringing new life into what was once dead.

5.16 A new birth

The placement of Obed (Ruth 4:16) in the lap of Naomi, serves the narrative function of undoing the emptiness in Chapter 1. God withholds nourishment in Chapter 1 but in Chapter 4, Naomi's restoration and blessing are demonstrated in her "nursing" of baby Obed. Naomi is restored and the famine, emptiness, and barrenness from the

first chapter have not only been resolved, but reversed (Fentress-Williams 2102:124). Through the birth of Obed, and Naomi's taking of the child and laying him in her lap and caring for him (Ruth 4:16), she looks upon the newborn child as her own. The women say, Naomi has a son, and they named him Obed (Ruth 4:17). In this way Naomi is not restoring Ruth, but using her to maintain the delusion that she herself is still young, and uses Ruth to deny the reality of the end of her own life cycle, up to a point where she denies Ruth's separate existence and merges with her by becoming the mother of Ruth's child (Dresner 2006:5). The cycle of our life is a constant process of managing losses. As we read about Naomi's different feelings, these feelings can become emotionally meaningful to us as readers.

Obed means "servant". It is through Ruth's waiting, her service both to Naomi and to God, that the movement from death to life take place. In those moments when the distance from God is so great that it cannot be traversed by the mourner, it is an Obed, one in service to God, who can take the mourner by the hand. In moments when death seems intractable and the only reality, it is sometimes another human soul, perhaps suffering, perhaps journeying, that can move a mourner slowly toward life, toward hope, toward redemption (Karlín-Newmann 1994:130).

Ruth 4:15 The women affirm the goodness of God by acknowledging what God has done as the one who 'will renew your life'. The Lord is indeed the giver and sustainer of life. The Lord is able to renew lives that have been shattered by loss. God can be trusted in the darkest hours of our lives. We are never able to escape from the tragedies of life, so what we need rather is to see God's presence and wait for him to reveal His grace and faithfulness. Naomi was in a desperate state of despair, but God continued to work in her life.

5.17 Summary of Chapter 5

The story contained in the book of Ruth is a case study in grief and true to life. Naomi's grief represents everyone's grief, and it is possible for those who have gone through a time of trauma and loss can empathise with her feelings of bitterness, anger and depression. Fewell & Gunn argue that for the reader who has ears to hear and eyes to see, God can be found somewhere in the complicated relationships, somewhere in the struggle for survival (1990:105). The evidence of El Shaddai who graciously never

leaves her, gives hope to the person who is grieving. God gives new life to Naomi, new purpose and new hope. God is at work through a variety of circumstances in the story. At the beginning of the story, we find famine and death. At the end food and life. *Ruth* reflects several themes together: hope and hopelessness, death and life, pain and joy, loneliness and companionship, begging and gratitude, famine and provision, abandonment and redemption, a tragic name and renown (Benitez 2016:19). *Ruth* is a story about survival in the midst of loss and grief. In the following chapter, through the use of two CBS's I will highlight the themes of loss, grief and hope as found in *Ruth*.

Chapter 6

AN INTERVENTION STRATEGY

6.1 Introduction to Chapter 6

In this chapter the work done in the previous chapters will be used to design an intervention strategy for grieving UPCA congregants that will enable them to meaningfully reconstruct their lives with God.

6.2 Contextual Bible Study (CBS)

A CBS is designed in such a way that it would help participants understand what the Bible is saying to them in their particular contexts (West 1993:7). The Bible shows that God speaks to specific people in particular life situations (West 1993:13). For the purposes of this intervention strategy, I am proposing two CBS frameworks. The first CBS will be on the book of *Ruth*. I have chosen to let participants work on *Ruth* first, so that they can hear God speaking into their context of loss and grief. The second CBS will be on hope. After having read *Ruth* closely and carefully, there is no doubt in my mind that participants would have unearthed their personal feelings of loss and grief. A second study that draws on the theme of hope in *Ruth* would then enable the participants to begin to have their hope restored and allow for the process of meaning reconstruction to develop in their shattered lives. A CBS can make a contribution to healing in the context of trauma as it may be considered a therapeutic practice, or more precisely, a therapeutic praxis (West 2016:210). This is because our churches “regularly refuse opportunities to engage the lamenting portions of the biblical tradition, insisting rather on superficial forms of celebration” (West 2016:214). Within my context of faith, it is imperative that people in mourning explore Biblical texts. Believers should be empowered to relate their exploration of the text to their own lives. In this sense, the exploration is motivated throughout by the need to constitute meaning after the death of a loved one (Zuidgeest 2001:3). Bereavement invites people to explore texts in a hermeneutic-narrative manner to discover what they mean in this new situation (Zuidgeest 2001:40).

We must situate the biblical text in its context. This could be either historical and sociological context, a literary and narrative context, or a thematic and symbolic context. And we must continually situate ourselves in our context as readers. This will allow for a dialogue to take place between us and our context and the text and its context (West 1993:77).

CBS asks two types of questions: a) those about the context; and b) those about the Biblical text. The CBS questions presented here identify those questions which are context and those which are text.

The five steps in the construction of a CBS:

Step 1: Identifying a theme (See)

CBS is guided by a theme that a particular community is dealing with (West 2015:9). The community that I have identified are those who are grieving.

Step 2: Discerning a Biblical text (Judge)

Once the theme has been identified, a biblical text is chosen, that might address the theme (West 2015:9). *Ruth* serves as the biblical text, to address the theme of grief and loss.

Step 3: Formulating Questions (analysing and linking text and context)

CBS has two types of questions that are based on the text and the context. Contextual questions are community consciousness questions because they draw on the resources of the community. They draw on the lived experiences and the theologies of the participants. Textual questions force the group to engage with the biblical text. These are critical consciousness questions, because they draw on the resources of biblical scholarship (West 2015:10).

Step 4: Articulating and owning (Making the Bible Study our own)

The CBS process allows participants to articulate and own their own interpretation of the text in relation to their context (West 2015:12).

Step 5: Developing a plan of action (Act)

CBS always ends with action. CBS is not only about interpreting the Bible, but about equipping participants to change the world (West 2015:13). In my CBS, the plan of action will be that participants begin to meaningfully reconstruct their lives after loss with God.

I have designed two Contextual Bible Studies. The first is on *Ruth*, dealing with the themes of grief and loss as found in *Ruth*. The second is on hope, drawing on the theme of hope as discovered in *Ruth*. The facilitator of these studies would need to run them over two consecutive days. Present at each CBS will be a psychologist. The psychologist will be able to offer follow-up care if needed by any of the participants.

6.3 CBS 1: Ruth, Grief, and Loss

1. Begin in prayer: El Shaddai, God Almighty, today we bring our broken lives and hurting hearts to you, and ask that you would begin to heal us and fill us with hope through your Holy Spirit. Amen.

2. The study questions:

The series of pictures⁶⁷ found on the next page, are placed in the correct order. However, when using them in the CBS, they will not be in any order and the corresponding Scriptures beneath each picture will be removed. The purpose of giving the participants the pictures, is to encourage engagement within the group. The participants are people who are grieving as a result of the loss of a loved one, and it may be that they are strangers to one another. The questions in the study are designed to invite the participants to engage with the Biblical text and their context, which is their grief. The questions are designed to take the participants deeper into the engagement between the biblical text and their context.

3. Using the pictures below, place them in the order of the story of Ruth.

⁶⁷ These pictures were used for a Bible Study written by a group of biblical scholars in 2016. These studies on *Ruth* were specifically written for the Anglican Communion to encourage them to read the Bible together across the different contexts in which they are called to witness and minister. The woodcuts were created by Margaret Parker (2003).



1. A man and his family went on a sojourn. 1:1.



2. The woman was left. 1:5



3. They lifted up their voice and went. 1:14



4. Don't press me to leave you. 1:16



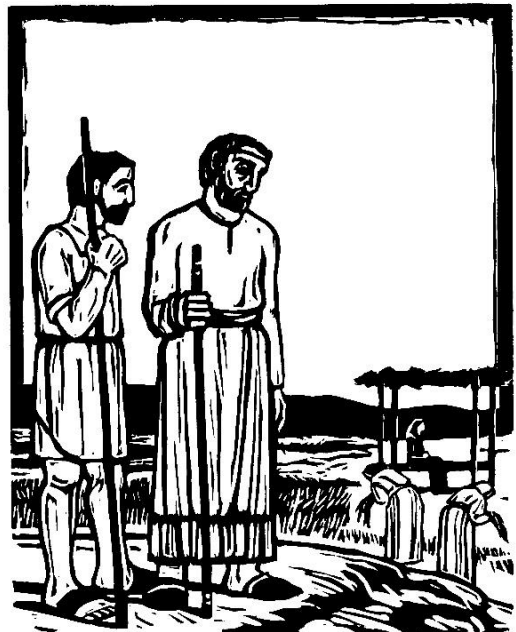
5. Is this Naomi? 1:19



6. His name is Boaz. 2:1



7. I am going to glean. 2:2



8. To whom does this worker girl belong?



9. You have comforted me. 2:13



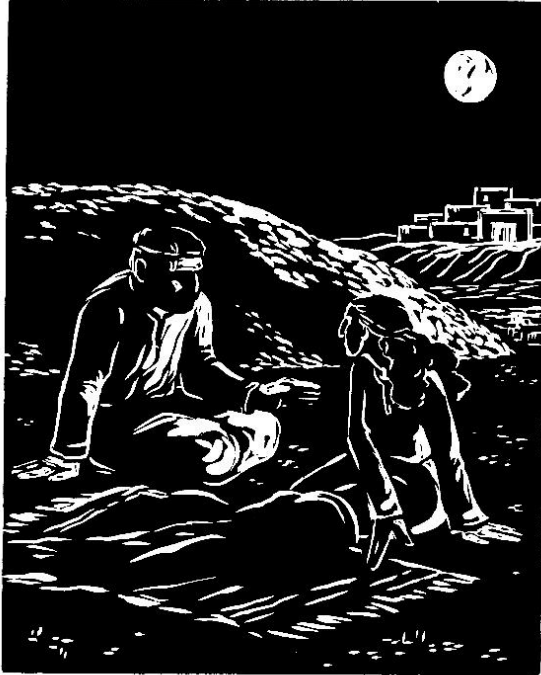
10. Come here and eat. 2:14



11. Her mother-in-law saw.
2:18.



12. Wash up and anoint yourself.
3:3.



13. Who are you? 3:9.



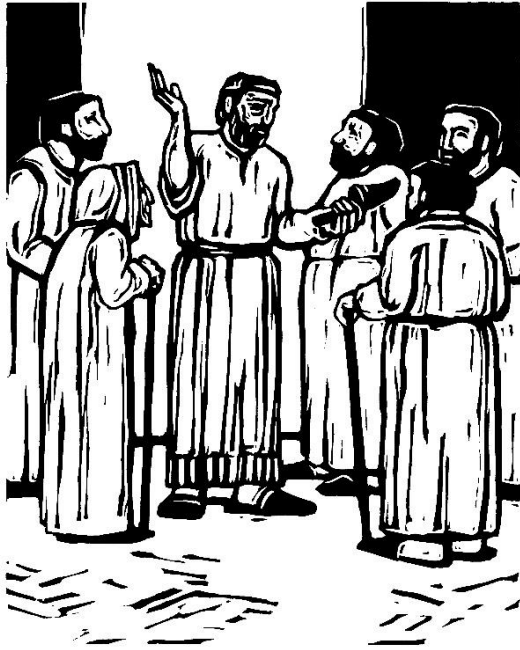
14. He measured six barleys.
3:15.



15. Who are you my daughter?
3:16.



16. He removed his sandal. 4:8.



17. You are my witnesses. 4:9.



18. She became his wife. 4:13.



19. Naomi took the child. 4:16.



20. Jesse Sired David. 4:22.

4. Read *Ruth* 1:1-22. What does this text from scripture say about loss and grief?
[Context]

This question is an in-front-of-the-text question, because the participants are asked to draw on their own understanding of what the text is about. It is also a community consciousness question, because the participant's draw on their lived experiences of loss and grief.

5. What images and metaphors does Naomi use to express her sense of loss?
How does Naomi speak to and about God? [Text]

This is an on the text question. This question allows the text to have a voice (West 2015:11). This is also a critical consciousness question, because it draws on the systematic and structured resources of biblical scholarship (West 2015:10).

6. Re-read *Ruth* 1:19-22. What images or metaphors does Naomi use in her lament? How do these images and metaphor express her feelings? [Text]

This is an on-the-text question as it allows the participants to read the text closely, carefully and slowly, so as to identify images and metaphors.

7. Which of Naomi's images and metaphors resonate with your own experiences of loss? [Context]

This is an in front of the text question. This question examines what the text says to the participant's experience of loss.

8. In what ways does Naomi's engagement with God resonate with your own experiences of God during times of grief and loss? [Context]

This is an in-front-of-the-text question. This question requires of the participants to ask what the text says to them.

9. Write your own version of a lament in the context of grief and loss, using Naomi's lament as a resource. [Context]

This question is an in-front-of-the-text question. This question is also part of Step 4 of the CBS in that it allows the participants to articulate and own their own interpretation of the text in relation to their context (West 2015:12).

10. Within the story of *Ruth* as a whole, what other aspects of the story can you identify that offer theological resources for times of grief and loss? [Context]

This question is an in-front-of-the-text question and also part of the action plan that the CBS Step 5 encourages (West 2015:13). Participants are encouraged to develop an action plan.

11. How will you share these resources with others in your church and community who are experiencing grief and loss? [Context]

Step 5 of a CBS is to bring about action (West 2015:13). This question requires that the participants act on what they have learned from each other during the CBS. This question asks, what is the text saying to the participants and how will they respond?

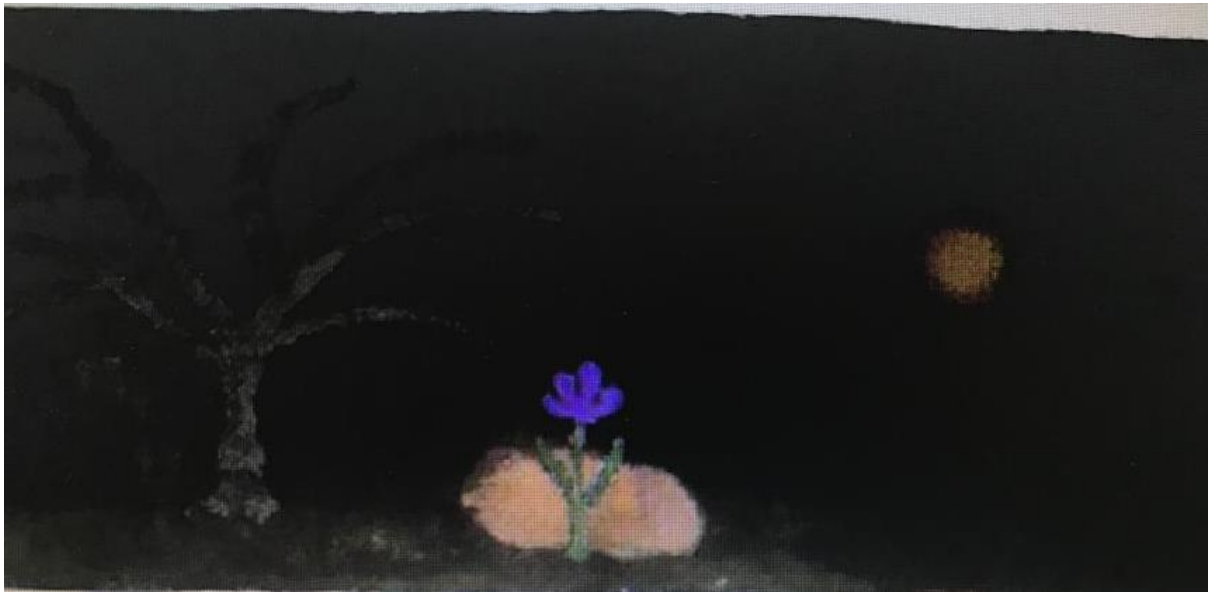
6.4 CBS 2: Hope

“...Even if I thought there was still hope for me - even if...” Ruth 1:12b.

Begin the CBS in prayer, asking God for hope. Heavenly Father, we come before you in need of hope. There are times when we feel weak, there are times when we feel helpless, there are times when things get tough and we feel like quitting. We pray for hope. Hope is possible when we place our faith and trust in You, our Saving God. We confess our fears to You. Help us overcome them by trusting in Your presence. May our doubts and fears decrease and our hopes in You increase. Amen.

1. The study questions:
 - i) Using the two images of hope, share how they speak to you about hope. [Context]

This question is an in-front-of-the-text question, because the participants are asked to draw on their own understanding of how the 2 images speak to them about hope.



- ii) What did you see from looking at hope in this way that you have not seen before? [Context].

This question allows participants to interpret the images in relation to their contexts.

- iii) How do these 2 images resonate with the book of Ruth's representations of hope? [Text]

This is an on-the-text question as it allows the participants to read the text closely, carefully and slowly, so as to identify representations of hope within *Ruth* (In CBS 1 participants would have read *Ruth*).

- iv) What are the relationships of hope in the book of Ruth? [Text]. Draw a picture that captures hope in the book of Ruth. [Context].

The first part of this question would have required a careful reading of *Ruth*, which the participants would have done in CBS 1. From that reading participants would be able to define the relationship of hope in *Ruth*. The second part of the question requires that participants demonstrate hope in the book of *Ruth* in a creative way.

- v) How will you share the hope of the *Book of Ruth* with others?

Step 5 of a CBS is to bring about action (West 2015:13). This question requires that the participants act on what they have learned during the CBS. This question asks, what is the text saying to the participants and how will they respond?

- vi) Liturgical conclusion:
Listen to the hymn, Lord of all hopefulness. Which words in the hymn speak to you about hope?

Lord of all hopefulness
Lord of all joy
Whose trust ever child-like
No cares could destroy
Be there at our waking
And give us we pray
Your bliss in our hearts Lord
At the break of the day.

Lord of all eagerness
Lord of all faith
Whose strong hands were skilled
At the plane and the lathe
Be there at our labours
And give us we pray
Your strength in our hearts Lord

At the noon of the day.

Lord of all kindness
Lord of all grace
Your hands swift to welcome
Your arms to embrace
Be there at our homing
And give us we pray
Your love in our hearts Lord
At the eve of the day.

Lord of all gentleness
Lord of all calm
Whose voice is contentment
Whose presence is balm
Be there at our sleeping
And give us we pray
Your peace in our hearts Lord
At the end of the day.⁶⁸

- vii) End with a prayer: “Give us Hope”: When despair numbs our soul, Lord would you give us hope. When we stumble and fall, Lord would you lift us up. When doubts assail us, gracious God give us faith to endure. When nothing seems sure, give us an ability to trust. When ideals fade, give us new dreams. When we lose our way, may Your Word be our guide. In all this we hope to be able to find serenity in Your presence.⁶⁹ In the name of the One who gives us hope we pray. Amen.

6.5 Summary of Chapter 6

In this chapter, I have used *Ruth* to highlight the themes of loss and grief in the life of people who have suffered loss. The two CBS's were designed to allow participants to read *Ruth* in such way that they are able to hear God speak to them in their struggles and through their suffering. Within the encounter with the text, and with one another, there is the possibility of meaning-making to occur that conceivably could lead the individual to reconstruct and reframe traumatic events.

⁶⁸ Jan Struther (1931).

⁶⁹ See: <https://www.gracecathedral.org/prayers-difficult-times/> Accessed online 1 August 2018.

In the following chapter, I write the conclusions of my dissertation and the recommendations that I propose.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

'Surely there is a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off'.

Proverbs 23:18

7.1 Introduction to Chapter 7

This chapter provides concluding remarks regarding the findings of the study. I will also make relevant recommendations regarding how the study's findings may be used to assist those grieving to meaningfully reconstruct their lives.

7.2 Conclusions drawn from the study

Grief is a nearly universal response to the death of a loved one (Burke & Neimeyer 2014:1088). No-one remains untouched by the profound and poignant experience of grief. In the journey of life, there will be times of deep sadness, and immense joy, so maybe it is not about living for a favorable outcome, but just maybe it is about the story that is created along the way, and being able to embrace all that it offers.

7.2.1 The need to understand loss

Different theories that underpin bereavement have been explored. Freud argued that working through grief until detachment from the loved one was achieved, was part of the process of grief work. The highly influential work of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and Worden, identified stages that the bereavement process goes through. Stroebe and Schut suggest that grievers oscillate as they go in and out of grief. Janoff-Bulman said that the assumptive world changes in bereavement. And Bowlby's attachment theory is a major factor for understanding grief. Grief takes as many forms as there are grieving people (Alexander 2000, Benoliel 1999 in Malon 2008:4). And grief is handled differently by everyone. As I have read through literature, and over the years of pastoral ministry counselled many grieving people, I can honestly say that whether breaking bonds with the deceased or continuing bonds with the deceased, working through the stages of grieving or oscillating between the two types of coping

processes, the person grieving is not the person they were before and will never be the same again, life is forever changed.

7.2.2 Meaningfully reconstructing life

Robert Neimeyer proposed that meaning reconstruction is central to the process of grieving. Over the years of pastoral ministry with those coping with loss, I have repeatedly seen how they attempt to reconstruct meaning that was previously challenged by their loss. Out of frustration, and a sense of an inability to assist them constructively, I embarked on this study. My grieving congregants have posed many questions, as to how make sense of the loss, how to find ways to live a meaningful life once again, and hopefully experience some forms of growth in the process. In my pastoral experience, those who are grieving often ask why did their loved one have to die or why has God allowed this to happen? It is important to explore these questions within the context of faith, through the lens of a theology of hope and using *Ruth* as a story to recover lost hope.

Evidence indicates that where meaning can be found in the experience of loss, then there is more likely to be positive adaptation (Hansen, 2004; Walter 1996; Wortman et al. 1993 in Mallon 2008:12). Neimeyer proposes that people engage in three major activities in order to reconstruct meaning in response to loss, viz.: sense-making, benefit-finding, and identity change (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:36). I would hope to apply these three activities when helping grieving congregants reconstruct meaning in their lives after loss.

7.2.3 Helping those who grieve to find meaning in their suffering

- a) **Through sense-making:** If you want to assist someone find meaning in their suffering it is important for them to understand that their faith is deeply associated with their concepts of God (Louw 1992:77). Meaning as a pastoral problem really concerns the way in which those who are grieving understand God (Louw 1992:77). When congregants ask, 'why did my loved one have to die?', and 'why am I the one left behind?', one of my tasks as a minister is to help those grieving understand God's involvement with their pain and

suffering. As my point of departure, I always remind them of the Sovereignty of God, namely that God is in control. And, through his covenant relationship with us, God is faithful. The sovereignty of God is evidenced in Ruth 1:13.20-21. Naomi believed God is the cause of everything that happens in life.

Naomi was in the depths of despair and felt forsaken by God. It is important to remember that this was her viewpoint. We need to have a far deeper understanding of God in these circumstances. Those who allow their faith to be 'in' their suffering, are able to 'see' meaning in their suffering as they find God in the midst of their pain.

- b) **Through benefit finding:** As a Minister, being an agent of hope means assisting a grieving person discover what they may have gained from their traumatic experience. Some of the benefits that could be gained from a loss include personal growth, a changed outlook on life, better interpersonal relationships and support. The ability to derive benefits or 'silver linings' from the loss is a key means of assigning "significance or positive value to the event for one's own life". According to Neimeyer (2011:424), the most common benefit-finding themes entail an increase in the desire to help others and to have compassion for others' suffering. Within the context of the church, a small group could be formed that supports those who have lost loved ones.

- c) **Through identity change:** The term "post-traumatic growth" (PTG) is used to describe such identity changes (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006:37). This term is used to describe those who respond to the loss in adaptive ways. People who experience such personal growth report developing a changed sense of self, saying that they became more resilient, independent, and confident; they also take on new roles and develop a greater awareness of life's fragility. I feel that to assist people grieving to be able to respond in adaptive ways, is a challenge for ministers. I am also of the opinion that meaningfulness lies in changing the way we get those who are grieving to look at their situations.

7.2.4 A ministry of hope

As previously noted, as a Minister of Religion, my approach to care for those wrestling with grief is a pastoral one. Capps suggests that “what makes the pastor unique amongst other professionals is that the pastor is fundamentally an agent or bearer of hope” (Capps 1996:325). Those who are grieving, often struggle to believe that beyond their ‘difficulty’ is the hope of being able to reconstruct their lives meaningfully. For some people, grief results in their faith being called into question, whilst for others they draw heavily on their faith during times of loss. I am of the opinion that the journey through grief begins with God. I would strongly recommend that all work done to restore broken lives through loss, begins within a context of faith, because it is within this context of faith that hope is found. Evidence collected by Kelley and Chan (2012:199) concur that a secure style of attachment to God is an important factor in the creation of meaning following a significant death. As ministers, called to be agents of hope, we are in a privileged position to be able to facilitate a process of meaning reconstruction in the lives of our grieving congregants.

Clinebell (1984:103) asserts that spiritual healing and growth is the core task in all pastoral care. If the process of meaningfully reconstructing lives begins with God, then the use of Scriptures can inform the counselling process, facilitate healing, and the reconstruction of life. There is much benefit to be found in Scripture as they remind us of the omnipresent God journeying with us in grief.

7.2.5 Surely there is a future

I chose *Ruth*, because it is a narrative response to grief and to managing various losses such as the loss of land and family (Dresner 2006:133). Even so, Fentress-Williams correctly summarises *Ruth* as “a story about survival” (2012:134). The narrative analysis, allowed me to explore the grief of the women in the story of *Ruth*. The text expresses, through Naomi, a number of themes and emotions related to loss, such as bitterness, anger, resentment, despair, grief, resignation, frustration, withdrawal, and blaming God (Sakenfeld 2003:137). However, it also expresses a different response that can be seen throughout *Ruth*. Ruth chooses to follow Naomi and her God (Branch 2012:4) and acts proactively to secure her future and that of Naomi. As Karlin-Newmann (1994:128) indicates, Ruth takes the initiative of moving from death to life and brings Naomi with her (Branch 2012:4). Arguably, it is Ruth’s journeying with Naomi that moves Naomi slowly back to life, hope, and redemption

(Karlin-Newmann 1994:130) Most significantly, in the context of this study, *the book of Ruth* shows the hand of God in the process of restoration (Branch 2012:10). When *Ruth* is read through the lens of personal crises, such as bereavement, an example of how to once again live meaningfully after experiencing major losses is provided through the story (Branch 2012:1).

Ruth is written to give encouragement and hope that all the perplexing turns in life are not dead-end streets. The story of Ruth is a series of setbacks. God is seen at work in the setbacks. We see people working through their setbacks. We see how God works with people and bring hope out of despair.

It is the comforting presence of God and his loving relationship with us that is ultimately our greatest source of hope in grief. It is God who holds us in the midst of our sorrow and pain, and this is what helps us to move towards restoration with hope and trust into the future (Kelley 2014:120). *Ruth* teaches that what can be found in Proverbs 23:18, namely the assertion that 'Surely there is a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off', ought to be taken into deep consideration.

7.3 Recommendations

Ruth has the potential to restore hope and offer those who have suffered loss a way to meaningfully reconstruct their lives. As a minister of religion, I am aware of the role that ministers should undertake, to be agents to hope to those who are grieving. The church can be a safe place for grieving persons in which to seek healing and hope. I therefore recommend that that the UPCSA conducts Contextual Bible Studies with people who are grieving as a conduit for hope and the reconstruction of meaningful lives. These CBS's offer space for meaning-making. Thus within the encounter with the text, and with one another, there is the possibility of meaning-making to occur that conceivably could lead the individual to reconstruct and reframe traumatic events. As *Ruth* has shown through this study, life is a journey, often with difficulties, but there is always a future and hope. I further recommend that both the Contextual Bible Studies be run with a test group and then the questions be redefined; that Ministers receive some form of professional grief training; and that the book of *Ruth* be preached as a series of sermons, through the lens of grief and with an underlying theology of hope.

This study is by no means exhaustive, and in closing, I would propose further work in developing a pastoral intervention programme for those dealing with grieving.

References

Ackerman, C. 2018. "Attachment Theory in Children and Adults: Bowlby and Ainsworth's 4 Types". Available online at <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/attachment-theory/#grief-attachment-theory>. [Accessed 6 September 2018].

Archer, J. 1999. "Theories of Grief: Past, Present, and Future Perspective", in Stroebe, M.S., Hannsson, R.O., Schut, H. and Stroebe, W (eds). *Handbook of Bereavement Research and Practice. Advances in Theory and Intervention*, 45-65. Washington: American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.

Barton, G.A. 1906. *Book of Ruth*. Jewish Encyclopedia, 10:576-577. Available online at www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12947-ruth-book-of. [Accessed online 30 April 2019].

Benitez, M.A. 2016. "Commentary on Ruth". *Latin American Theology*, 11(1):17-43.

Berlin, A. 1983. *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*. Sheffield: The Almond Press. Available online at <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/ruth/1-8.htm>. [Accessed 15 October 2018].

Bowlby, J. 1961. "Processes of mourning". *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 42:317-339.

Brueggemann, W. 1984. *The Message of the Psalms*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Press.

Bonanno, G. 2010. "Rethinking Trauma: George Bonanno on Resilience". Available online at <http://evidencebasedliving.human.cornell.edu/2010/03/28/rethinking-trauma-george-bonanno-on-resilience/> [Accessed 8 October 2018].

Bonanno, G.A. Boerner, K. and Wortman, C.B. 2001. "Trajectories of Grieving", in Stroebe, M.S., Hannsson, R.O., Schut, H. and Stroebe, W (eds). *Handbook of*

Bereavement Research and Practice: Advances in Theory and Intervention, 287-307. Washington: American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.

Bonanno, G. A., Wortman, C. B., and Nesse, R. M. (2004). "Prospective patterns of resilience and maladjustment during widowhood". *Psychology and Aging*, 19:260–271.

Bosnick, C.B, Small, B.J., Burton, A.M. 2010. "The Effect of Spousal Bereavement on Cognitive Functioning in a Sample of Older Adults, Aging, Neuropsychology and Cognition": *A Journal on Normal and Dysfunctional Development*, 17:3, 257-269.

Bowlby, J. 1961. "Processes of mourning". *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 42: 317-339.

Branch, R.G. 2012. "Handling a Crisis via a Combination of Human Initiative and Godly Direction: Insights from the Book of Ruth". *In die Skriflig*, 46:1-11.

Bronner, L.L. 1995. "A feminist companion to Ruth". In A. Brenner, (ed). *A Thematic approach To Ruth In Rabbinic Literature*, 146-169. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Brown, E. 1999. *Loss, Change and Grief: An educational perspective*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Burke, L.A. and Neimeyer, R. A. 2014. "Spiritual Distress in Bereavement: Evolution of a Research Program". *Religions*, 5(4):1087-1115.

Burke, L.A. and Neimeyer, R.A. 2014. "Complicated Spiritual Grief 1: Related to Complicated Grief Symptomatology Following Violent Death Bereavement". *Death Studies*,38:259-267

Bush, F. 1996. *Word Biblical Commentary: Ruth/Esther*. Dallas, Texas: Word Books.

Butler, J. 2006. *Precarious Life. The powers of mourning and violence*. UK: Verso.

Calhoun, L.G. & Tedeschi, R.G. 2004. "The Foundations of Posttraumatic Growth: New Considerations". *Psychological Inquiry*, 15(1):93-102.

"Cambridge English Dictionary". Available online at <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/catharsis>. [Accessed 3 December 2018].

Camus, A. 1954. Available online at https://en.m.wikiquote.org/wiki/Albert_Camus. Accessed online 5 October 2018.

Capps, D. 1990. *Reframing: A New Method in Pastoral Care*. Fortress Press: Minneapolis.

Capps, D. 1996. The Pastor as an Agent of Hope. *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 23(5):325-335.

Capps, D. 2001. *Agents of hope: A Pastoral Psychology*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Carlin, N. 2016. "The Meaning of Life". *Pastoral Psychology*, 65:611-630.

Carlin, N. 2018. "Reflections for Clinical Pastoral Education Students in Psychiatric settings". *Journal of Religion and Health*, 57:523-537.

Clinebell, H. 1984. *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling: Resources for the Ministry of Healing and Growth*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Coleman, R.A. and Neimeyer, R.A. 2010. "Measuring Meaning: Searching For and Making Sense of Spousal Loss in Late-Life". *Death Studies*, 34:804-834.

Croft, B. 2015. *The Pastor's Ministry. Biblical Priorities for faithful shepherds*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

- Dames, G.E. and Dames, G.A. 2009. "Encountering God's Faithfulness in the Process of Loss". *Practical Theology in South Africa*, 24(2):38-60.
- De Villiers, G. and le Roux, J. 2016. "The Book of Ruth in the time of the Judges and Ruth, the Moabitess". *Verbum et Ecclesia* (online), 37(1).
- Doka, K.J. 2008. "Disenfranchised Grief in Historical and Cultural Perspective", in Stroebe, M.S., Hannsson, R.O., Schut, H. and Stroebe, W (eds). *Handbook of Bereavement Research and Practice: Advances in Theory and Intervention*, 241-262. Washington: American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.
- Dresner, O. 2006. "Mourning and Loss and the Life Cycle in the Book of Ruth". Bible Week 2006. *European Judaism*, 40(2):132-139.
- Dreyer, Y. 2003. "Beyond Psychology: Spirituality in Henri Nouwen's pastoral care". *Theological Studies*, 59(3):715-733
- Dubin, L.C. 1994. "Fullness and Emptiness, Fertility and Loss. Mediations on Naomi's Tale in the Book of Ruth", in Kate, J.A. and Reimer, G.T.(eds). *Contemporary Women Reclaim A Sacred Story*, 131-144. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Efthimiadis, H. 1991. "Mediating opposites. Deconstruction and the book of Ruth". (Unpublished Master of Arts thesis, University of Port Elizabeth).
- Elwell, W.A. (Editor) 1996. *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, Michigan USA.
- Fentress-Williams, J. 2012. *Ruth*. Abington Old Testament Commentaries. Nashville: Abington Press.
- Ferguson, S.G and Wright, D.F. 1988. *New Dictionary Of Theology*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press

Fewell, D.N. and Gunn, D.M. 1990. *Compromising Redemption. Relating Characters in the Book of Ruth*. Louisville: John Knox Press.

Frankl, V.E. 1985. *Man's Search for Meaning*. New York: Washington Square Press.

Frechette, C.G. and Boase, E. 2016. "Defining 'Trauma' as a Useful Lens for Biblical Interpretation in, E. Boase and C.G. Frechette (eds.)", *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, 1-23. Atlanta: SBL Press.

Gill-Austern, B. L. 2014. "Pastoral Theological Reflection of grief: Contemporary theory and the practice of ministry by Mellisa Kelley". *Pastoral Psychology*, 63:101-104.

Gillies, J. and Neimeyer, R.A. 2006. "Loss, Grief, and the Search for Significance: Toward A Model Of Meaning Reconstruction In Bereavement". *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 19:31-65.

Gillies, J.M, Neimeyer, R.A. and Milman, E. 2015. "The Grief And Meaning Reconstruction Inventory (GMRI): Initial Validation of a New Measure". *Death Studies*, 39(2): 61-74.

Grant, R. 1991. "Literary structure in the book of Ruth". *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 148: 421-441.

Green, B. 1982. "The Plot of the Biblical Story of Ruth". *Journal for The Study of The Old Testament*. 23:55-68.

Hall, C. 2014. "Bereavement Theory: Recent developments in our understanding of grief and bereavement". *Bereavement Care*, 33(1):7-12.

Hamilton, E.J. 1996. *Ruth: Surely There Is A Future*. W.M.B. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Hart, J.T., Limke, A. Budd, P.R. 2010. "Attachment and Faith Development". *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 38(2): 122-128

Hayslip, B. and White, D.L. 2008. "The Grief of Grandparents", in Stroebe, M.S., Hannsson, R.O., Schut, H. and Stroebe, W (eds). *Handbook of Bereavement Research and Practice: Advances in Theory and Intervention*, 440-460. Washington: American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.

Henry, M. 1992. *NIV Matthew Henry Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd.

Hibberd, R. 2013. "Meaning Reconstruction in Bereavement: Sense and Significance". *Death Studies*, 37:670-692.

Janoff-Bulman, R. 1989. "Assumptive Worlds And The Stress of Traumatic Events: The Schema Construct". *Social Cognition*, 7(2):113-136

Jones. D.L. 2009. "A Pastoral model for caring with persons with diminished hope". *Pastoral Psychology*, 58:641-654.

Jones, D.C. 2012. "A Theology of Hope for Pastoral Care: Reframing Life's losses in the context of God's future". Unpublished Doctor of Ministry thesis. Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Kates, A. and Twersky Reimer G. Eds. 1994. *Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Karlin-Newmann, P. 1994. "The Journey Toward Life", in J.A. Kates, and G.T. Reimer, (eds.) *Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story*, 125-130. New York: Ballantine Books.

Kelley, M.M. 2009. "Loss through the Lens of Attachment to God". *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, 11:88-106.

Kelley, M.M and Chan, K.T, 2012. "Assessing the role of attachment to God, meaning and religious coping as mediators in the grief experience". *Death Studies*, 36:199-227.

Kelley, M.M. 2014. "Author Response to Reviews of Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry". *Pastoral Psychology*, 63:117-122.

"Kiff, K. Flower and the Black Sky. 1987-1988", in Wendy Beckett, *Art and the Sacred: the Mystical Now*. New York City, NY: Universe, 1993.

Klass, D. 2012. *Neglected Areas in Bereavement Research: Sorrow and Solace*. *Death Studies* 37(7):1-18.

Kubler-Ross, E. 1989. *On Death and Dying*. London and New York: Tavistock/Routledge.

Kubler-Ross, E. 2005. *On Death and Dying*. New York: Tavistock/Routledge.

Kubler-Ross, E. and Kessler, D. 2014. *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through The Five Stages of Loss*. London: Simon and Schuster.

Kwan, S.S.M. 2010. "Interrogating 'Hope' – The Pastoral Theology of Hope and Positive Psychology". *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 14:47-67.

LaMohe, R. 2018. "Giving Counsel: Donald Capps' Contributions to Pastoral Counselling". *Journal of Religion and Health*.57:509-522.

Larkin, K.J.A. 1966. *Ruth and Esther*. OT Guides. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Lewis, C.S. 2013. *A Grief Observed*. London: Faber and Faber.

Longmann, T. 1987. *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan.

Louw, D.J. 1994. *Illness as Crisis and Challenge. Guidelines for Pastoral Care*. Halfway House: Orion Publishers.

Louw, D.J. 2016. "Wholeness in Hope Care: On Nurturing the Beauty of the Human Soul in Spiritual Healing". *Pastoral Care and Spiritual Healing* (3). Zurich: LIT Verlag.

Luter, A.B. and Rigsby, R.O. 1993. "The Chiastic Structure of Ruth 2". Faculty Publications and Presentations. Paper 253. Available online at http://digitalcommon.liberty.edu/lts_fac_pbs/253. Accessed online 30 September 2018

Magezi, V. and Keya, B. 2013. "The Concept Of Shalom As A Constructive Bereavement Healing Framework Within A Pluralist Health Seeking Context Of Africa". *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 69(2)1-8.

Magezi, V. and Manda, C. 2016. "The Use Of Spiritual Resources To Cope With Trauma In Daily Existence". *In Die Skriflig/In Lux Verbi*, 50(1)1-10.

Magonet, J. "Naomi's Bitter Poem". Available online at <https://thetorah.com/naomi's-bitter-poem>. [Accessed 3 July 2017].

Mallon, B. 2008. *Attachment and Loss, Death and Dying: Theoretical Foundations for Bereavement Counselling* (4-16). 1 <https://uk.sagepub.com/upm-binaries>. Accessed online 5 November 2018.

Massey, D.L. 2000. "Theological and Biblical Interpretations of Current Movements and Emerging Paradigms within Bereavement Studies". *Pastoral Psychology*, 48(6): 469-486.

Matthews, L.T. and Marwit, S.J. 2006. "Meaning Reconstruction in the Context of Religious Coping: Rebuilding the Shattered Assumptive World". *Omega*, 53(1-2):97-104.

McAvan, E. 2013. "Queer Mourning and Melancholia in the Book of Ruth". *Luvah : Journal of the Creative Imagination*, 4. Available online at <http://www.berfrois.com>. [Accessed 21 June 2017].

McNeish, D.G. 2013. "Grief As A Circular Staircase: The Uses And Limits Of Models Of Grief In The Pastoral Care Of The Bereaved". *Practical Theology*, 6(2), 190-203

Mead, J.K. 2002. "All our griefs to bear": A Biblical and Theological Reflection". *The American Theological Library Association*. 56(1). Available online at <https://repository.westernsem.edu/pkp/index.php/rr/article/review/1480>. [Accessed 15 February 2017].

Mikulincer, M. and Shaver, P.R. 2008. "An Attachment Perspective on Bereavement", in Stroebe, M.S., Hannsson, R.O., Schut, H. and Stroebe, W (eds). *Bereavement Research and Practice: Advances in Theory and Intervention*, 87-112. Washington: American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.

Minter, K. 2009. *Ruth. Loss, Love And Legacy*. Nashville, Tennessee: Lifeway Press.

Mitchell, K. R. and Anderson, H. 1983. *All our Losses, All our Griefs: Resources for Pastoral Care*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

Moyo, H. 2014. "Gendered grieving and mourning rituals amongst the Jahunda people of Zimbabwe as a challenge to the pastoral care ministry to the church", *Black Theology* 12(3): 213-229.

Nadeau, J.W. 2008. "Meaning-Making in Bereaved Families: Assessment, Intervention, And Future Research", in Stroebe, M.S., Hannsson, R.O., Schut, H. and Stroebe, W (eds). *Handbook of Bereavement Research And Practice*.

Advances in Theory and Intervention, 511-530. Washington: American Psychological Association: Washington, DC.

Nadeau, J.W. 2006. "Metaphorically Speaking: The Use of Metaphors in Grief Therapy". *Illness, Crisis and Loss*, 14(3):201-221.

Naidu, M. 2012. "Belief and Bereavement: The Notion of "Attachment" and the Grief Work Hypothesis". *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 25(2):71-88.

Neely, K.H. 2008. *When Grief Comes. Finding Strength for Today and Hope for Tomorrow*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books.

Neimeyer, R.A., 1999. "Narrative Strategies in Grief Therapy". *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 12:65-85.

Neimeyer, R.A. 2000. "Searching for the Meaning of Meaning: Grief Therapy and The Process of Reconstruction". *Death Studies*, 24:541-558.

Neimeyer, R.A. 2001. Available online at <https://griefjourney.com/startjourney/for-professionals-and-caregivers/articles-for-professionals-and-caregivers/theories-of-grief/Theories of Grief>. [Accessed 27 April 2018].

Neimeyer, R.A. 2005. "Grief, Loss, and The Quest For Meaning". *Bereavement Care*, 24(2):27-30

Neimeyer, R.A. 2011. "Reconstruction Meaning in Bereavement". *Rivista di Psichiatria*, 46:332-336.

Neimeyer, R.A. 2011. "Reconstructing Meaning In Bereavement: Summary Of A Research Program". *Estudos de Psicologia (Caminas)*, 422-425.

Neimeyer, R.A. 2016. "Meaning Reconstruction in The Wake Of Loss: Evolution Of A Research Program". *Behaviour Change*, 1-15.

Neimeyer, R.A. and Burke, L. 2017. "Spiritual Distress and Depression in Bereavement: A Meaning-Orientated Contribution". *Journal of Rational-Emotive and Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy*, 35(1): 38-59.

Neimeyer, R.A., Prigerson, H.G., and Davies, B. 2002. "Mourning and Meaning". *American Behavioral Scientist*, 46(2): 235-251.

Neimeyer, R.A., Burke, L.A., Mackay, M.M. and van Dyke Stringer, J.G. 2009. "Grief Therapy and the Reconstruction of Meaning: From Principles to Practice". *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 40(2):73-83

Neimeyer, R.A. and Currier, J.M. 2009. "Grief Therapy: Evidence of Efficacy and Emerging Directions". *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 18(6):352-356

Nichols, M.P. and Schwartz, R.C. 2006. *Family Therapy: Concepts and Methods* 7th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Oosthuizen, M.J. 1994. "The Narratological Approach as a Means of Understanding the Old Testament". *Old Testament Essays*, 7(4):84-91.

Orbach, I. 2008. "Existentialism and Suicide", in A. Tomer, G.T., Eliason, P.T.P. Wong (eds). *Existential and Spiritual Issues in Death Attitudes*, 281-316. Taylor and Francis Group: New York.

Parker, M. (2003). *Ruth* [Twenty Woodcuts]. Created to accompany Ellen F. Davis' new translation of the Book of Ruth. Published in *Who Are, My Daughter? Reading Ruth through Image and Text*. Westminster John Knox Press. UK.

Peterson, E. 1992. *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Pulpit Commentary, Electronic Database. Available online at <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/ruth/1-8.htm>. [Accessed 15 October 2018].

Raphael, B. and Dobson, M. 2000. "Bereavement". In J.H. Harvey, and E.D. Miller.(eds). *Loss and Trauma: General and Close Relationship Perspectives*, 45-61. Philadelphia: Brunner-Routledge.

Rakoczy, S. 2004. *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

Rashkow, I. 2001. "Ruth: The Discourse of Power and The Power of Discourse", in A. Brenner (ed). *A feminist Companion to Ruth*, 26-41. Sheffield Academic Press: England.

Rogers-Vaughn, B. 2009. "Recovering Grief in the Age of Grief Recovery: Then and Now". Address to the Tennessee Association of Pastoral Therapists (1-9).

Roiphe, A. 2105. "Quotes". Available online at <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/3972426-grief-is-in-two-parts-the-first-is-loss-the-remaking-of-life>. [Accessed 5 October 2018].

Rosenblatt, P.C. 2008. "Grief Across Cultures: A Review and Research Agenda", in Stroebe, M.S., Hannsson, R.O., Schut, H. and Stroebe, W (eds). *Handbook of Bereavement Research and Practice. Advances in Theory and Intervention*, 207-222. Washington: American Psychological Association: Washington, DC.

Rosenblatt, P.C. and Nkosi, B.C. 2007. "South African Zulu Widows In A Time Of Poverty And Social Change". *Death Studies*, 31:67-85.

Russell, G. 2017. "Good Grief". *The University of Memphis Magazine*. Available online at <http://www.mwmpphis.edu/magazinenearchive/v20i3/feat5.html>. [Accessed 3 July 2017].

Sakenfeld, K.D. 2003. "Naomi's Cry: Reflections on Ruth 1:20-21", in B.A. Strawn and N.R. Bouwen (eds.) *A God so near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honour of Patrick D. Miller*, 129-143. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbraums.

Sandberg, S and Grant, A. 2017. *Option B: Finding adversity, building resilience, and finding joy*. New York: Alfred. A. Knopf

Scott Peck, M. 2002. *The Road Less Traveled, A New Psychology Of Love, Traditional Values And Spiritual Growth*. Simon and Schuster: New York.

Seltzer, L.F. 2015. "Don't let Your Anger "Mature" Into Bitterness. Bitterness: What's its cause, cost, and cure?" Available online at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/evolution-the-self/201501/don-t-let-your-anger-mature-bitterness> [Accessed 21 November 2018].

Shear, M.K. 2010. "Exploring the Role of Experiential Avoidance From The Perspective Of Attachment Theory And The Dual Process Model". *OMEGA*, 61(4) 357-369.

Shin, H-U. 2018. "Melancholy, Acculturation, and Relief: A Brief Essay on the Religion of Ordinariness". *Journal of Religion and Health*, 57:483-496

Soelimani, M.A., Sahrif, S.P., Yaghoobzadeh, A., Yeoh, K.K., and Panerolla, B. 2018. "Exploring The Relationship Between Spiritual Well-Being And Death Anxiety In Survivors Of Acute Myocardial Infarction: Moderating Role Of Sex, Marital Status And Social Support". *Journal of Religion and Health*, 57:683-703.

Steffen, E. and Coyle. A. 2011. "Sense of Presence Experiences and Meaning Making in Bereavement: A Qualitative Analysis". *Death Studies*, 35: 579-609.

Strachely, J (Ed.) 1914-1916. In Collaboration with Freud, A. and Strachey, A and Tyson, A. *The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XIV (1914-1916). On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement. Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho Analysis.

Smikelsky, M.A. and Neimeyer, R.A. 2018. "Bereavement". In M.H. Bornstein (ed) *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Lifespan Human Development*,135-237. SAGE Publications, Inc: Thousand Oaks

Stern, J. "Death, Grief, and Shattered Assumptions" Available online from [www.https://whatsyourgrief.com/shattered-assumptions/](https://whatsyourgrief.com/shattered-assumptions/) Death, Grief, and Shattered Assumptions. [Accessed 9 July 2017] Regrettably there was no date on this article.

Stroebe, M.S., Hansson, R.O., Schut, H. and Stroebe, W. 2008. *Handbook of Bereavement Research and Practice: Advances in Theory and Intervention*. Washington: American Psychological Association (207-222).

Stroebe, M. and Schut, H 1999. The Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement: Rationale and description, *Death Studies*, 23:3, 197-224. DOI: 10.1080/074811899201046

Stroebe, M.S. and Archer, J. 2013. "Origins of Modern Ideas on Love and Loss: Contrasting Forerunners of Attachment Theory. Review of General Psychology". *American Psychological Association*, 17(1): 28-39.

Stroebe, W., Stroebe M, Abakoukin, G. 1996. "The Role of Loneliness and Adjustment to Loss In Social Support: A Test Of Attachment Versus Stress Theory". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 20(6):1241-1249.

Taylor, M.A. 2014. "The Gospel of Ruth: An Evangelical Feminist Reading". *Canadian Theological Review*, 3(2):1-12.

Trible, P. 1978. *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press .

Tripp, P.D. 2005. "When Grief Enters Your Door". *Journal of Biblical Counselling*, 23(1):1-13.

Tousley, M. 2012. "Grief and the Burden of Guilt". Available online at <https://www.griefhealing.com/> [Accessed 28 April 2018].

Updegraff, J.A. and Taylor, S.E. 2000. "From Vulnerability to Growth: Positive and Negative Effects of Stressful Life Events". In J.H. Harvey, and E.D. Miller (Eds.) *Loss and Trauma. General and Close Relationship Perspectives*, 3-28. Philadelphia: Brunner-Routledge.

Van Deusen Hunsinger, D. 2011. "Bearing the Unbearable: Trauma, Gospel and Pastoral Care". *Theology Today* 68(1):8-25.

Walter, T. 2010. "Grief and Culture: A Checklist". *Bereavement Care*, 29 (2):5-9.

Watts, G.F. (1886). *Hope* [Oil on Canvas]. Tate Gallery, London.

Weiss, R.S. 2008. "The Nature and Causes of Grief". In Stroebe, M.S., Hansson, R.O., Schut, H. and Stroebe, W. (eds). *Handbook of Bereavement Research and Practice. Advances in Theory and Intervention*, 29-44. Washington: American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.

West, G.O. 1993. *Contextual Bible Study*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

West, G.O. 2015. *Doing Contextual Bible Study: A Resource Manual*, UjammaCentre. Available online at http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za/Libraries/manuals/Ujamaa_CBS_bible_study_Manual_part_1_2.sflb.ashx. [Accessed 11 October 2018].

West, G.O. 2016. "Between Text And Trauma: Reading Job With People Living With HIV". In E.C. Boase, C.G. Frechette (eds.). *Bible Through The Lens Of Trauma*, 209-230. Atlanta: SBL Press.

Williams, L. and Hayley, E. 2018. "Using Defense Mechanisms in Grief". Available online at <https://whatsyourgrief.com/defense-mechanisms-in-grief>. [Accessed 22 November 2018].

Williams, L. and Hayley, E. 2017. "Continuing Bonds: Shifting the Grief Paradigm". Available online at <https://whatsyourgrief.com/continuing-bonds-shifting-the-grief-paradigm/> [Accessed 8 November 2018].

Wong, P.T.P. 2008. "Meaning Management Theory and Death Acceptance". In Tomer, A., Eliason, G.T. and Wong, P.T.P. (eds). *Existential and Spiritual Issues in Death Attitudes*, 65-87. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Wong, P.T.P. 2008. "Transformation of Grief Through Meaning: Meaning-Centred Counseling for Bereavement", in A., Tomer, G.T. Eliason, and P.T.P Wong (eds.) *Existential and Spiritual Issues in Death Attitudes*, 375-396. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Worden, W. 1991. *Grief Counseling And Grief Therapy: A Handbook For The Mental Health Practitioner* (2nd ed). New York: Springer.

Zylla, P.C. 2018. "Explorations in the Aesthetic Pastoral Theology of Donald E. Capps". *Journal of Religion and Health*, 57:538-550.