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# Grief in Community: The Establishment of Bereavement Ministry Teams From the Congregation at Sandy Run Baptist Church in Mooresboro, North Carolina

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GRIEF IN COMMUNITY: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF BEREAVEMENT MINISTRY  
TEAMS FROM THE CONGREGATION AT SANDY RUN BAPTIST CHURCH IN  
MOORESBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

A PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
OF THE M. CHRISTOPHER WHITE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY  
GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY  
BOILING SPRINGS, NORTH CAROLINA

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

ANDREW S. RAWLS

MAY 6, 2016

APPROVAL FORM

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TEAMS FROM THE CONGREGATION AT SANDY RUN BAPTIST CHURCH IN  
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To the beginning and the end, the hope and the love of humanity, the yesterday, today, and forever – to You be glory, praise, and power now and forevermore. Thank you for making all things new and for bringing the newness of tomorrow into today. Amen.

*SDG...*  
-ASR

## ABSTRACT

The Church is to be the expression of hope through the various contours of the human story. Too often congregations have difficulty expressing this hope during the time of death and extending that hope to ministry with the bereaved. In this project I studied the increase in self-efficacy in bereavement ministry with the congregation of Sandy Run Baptist Church in Mooresboro, North Carolina. The research focuses on the teaching of a curriculum that explores the biblical, theological, and clinical aspects of grief. The results of my research show this was an effective means of increasing self-efficacy.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The human story is one of great power, promise, and growth while simultaneously being vulnerable to suffering, death, and decay. With such extremes present within the human life, it is possible for an individual to experience a wide array of emotions, feelings, thoughts, and expressions in a short period of time. Therefore, one of the great callings on the human life is to live the days at hand with honesty.

One of the periods of extreme emotion, feeling, thought, and expression that arise in the life of every human being is a time of grief and loss. Bidding farewell to a loved one can be one of the most difficult moments in life and, therefore, has the potential to be a moment of great change. There are a number of changes that are possible in times of grief, and they can be both positive and negative.

A positive change that is possible through times of grief is the growth and maturation of the human soul, reaching a deeper level of unity with God and fellow humans. This may come as a result of seeing the fragility of life, and thus, embracing the beauty of life in ways not previously explored. On the other side, negative changes resulting from grief may include isolation, depression, and a withdrawal into the darkness of shadows. Such a direction may stem from the nature of the loss (e.g., tragedy, trauma, lack of opportunity to “say goodbye”) or from a lack of resources (e.g. extended family, church family, community and network of support).

This ministry project sought to address the issue of grief and the two types of changes from grief within the context of community at Sandy Run Baptist Church in Mooresboro, North Carolina. The goal of this project was to guide project participants, along with the congregation of Sandy Run Baptist Church at large, to a deeper understanding of grief through four elements of congregational life: *kerygma*, *leitourgia*, *diakonia*, and *koinonia*.<sup>1</sup>

### **Project Setting**

Founded in 1772, Sandy Run Baptist Church holds a rich and vibrant history that tells the story of the grace and faithfulness of God to all generations. As the story of God continues to be told and lives are incorporated into this grand narrative, the community is strengthened to announce the goodness and life of God to all creation.

Sandy Run Baptist Church is located in the community of Mooresboro. The community is four miles from the Town of Boiling Springs and straddles the line dividing Cleveland and Rutherford Counties in North Carolina. Mooresboro is ten miles from uptown Shelby and twelve miles from downtown Forest City. Upon entering the community of Mooresboro, one is overcome with a sense of the beauty of the creative work of God. The wooded areas of the community and the rural farmland present a picturesque scene in many ways. The rural feel of the community is warmly felt within the congregation of Sandy Run as well.

The people who constitute the body of Christ at Sandy Run Baptist Church are humble, gentle folk who have been serving the Lord with gladness for many generations.

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Fackre, *The Church: Signs of the Spirit and Signs of the Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 60-74. Fackre identifies *kerygma*, *leitourgia*, *diakonia*, and *koinonia* as “signs of the Spirit” (60) at work in the church. This four-fold structure makes for strong support of a ministry within the local church to those who are grieving.

Within the congregation are multiple generations of families who are hardworking, middle-class people. There is a healthy segment of the congregation that is retired or nearing retirement. The average attendance for Sunday School is 70, while Sunday morning worship attendance is 80. Sunday evening Bible Study and worship tends to draw an average of 30 people into the church, while Wednesday evening Prayer Meeting averages 20. Sunday School classes are currently offered for every age group from nursery care (birth through two years) through senior and late adulthood. There are currently six adult Sunday School classes, each providing a place of learning to an age-specific group.

The ministry groups within the church include Baptist Men's Ministry that meets once a month but is only remotely active in service projects. What would traditionally be referred to as the Women's Missionary Union is termed the Missions & More Group. This group of ladies meets once per month and is active in the church and community. The ladies of this group span two generations as there are mothers and daughters involved together. The group organizes and promotes missions projects and opportunities in and through the congregation throughout the year.

The children's ministry is a steadily growing ministry within the congregation. Meeting on Wednesday evenings, the ministry utilizes the TeamKID curriculum from LifeWay. The group of children involved in this ministry is split between children whose parents are active members in the congregation and are also actively involved in the lives of children in the congregation, and children who are participants in the community bus ministry that runs from the church. Each Wednesday evening, a pair of volunteers drives a 45-minute route to pick up children from the community in order to bring them to

church. The children eat supper during the church-wide fellowship meal, engage in children's ministry, then ride the bus home.

The youth ministry at Sandy Run is comprised mostly of teenagers whose parents are not members of the congregation. The weekly gathering for this group is also on Wednesday evening. The group gathers for a time of worship and Bible study led by the Minister of Youth and Children. This group of teenagers engages each summer in a one-week missions experience to places such as New York City, Canada, Cherokee, North Carolina, and Pensacola, Florida.

The 2016 budget for Sandy Run Baptist Church is \$154,308.44, and the financial contributions at the time of this writing have stayed on track with the budget needs. The church property consists of a sanctuary and worship space capable of seating 300 including the balcony. The educational space is a three-story building behind the sanctuary complete with a fellowship hall and fourteen classrooms. The sanctuary and educational space are entirely enclosed as one brick building built in 1950. The debt incurred to finance the building was paid in full in 1953. Because of poorly kept records, it is uncertain exactly how many buildings have housed the worship of Sandy Run Baptist Church since 1772. However, what is certain is that the current structure is at least the second in the last century. The church cemetery rests in a field on the east side of the building.

Directly across from the cemetery sits a house that, at one time, was the parsonage. A pastoral presence has not lived in the parsonage since the year 2000. In the year 2004, the parsonage was converted to house the office space for the pastor, Minister of Youth & Children, and secretary. The building is now referred to as The Renfro Office

Center and is named for the late Julia Renfro who left a significant sum of money to the church upon her death to be used at the discretion of the congregation. Also inside the Renfro Center is a conference room, a music room, and a file room. There is a basement that has been used through the years as a meeting place for the youth ministry.

The church staff at Sandy Run is comprised of one full-time member and five part-time members. The full-time member of the staff is the pastor, while the Minister of Youth & Children, Interim Minister of Music, Organist, Secretary, and Custodian are all part-time positions. The ministry opportunities provided by these staff members are helpful in guiding the church to a healthy sense of worship to the risen Lord and service to our fellow man.

While it is uncertain as to the exact number of pastors who have been shepherd to this flock, the church has seen three pastors in the last thirty-two years. The pastor immediately prior to the current one served eight years in that position, while his predecessor served for twenty-two years. The author of this project has served as pastor since June 2012. The Minister of Youth & Children has been serving in that capacity since 2007, whereas the Interim Minister of Music began in 2016. The organist for Sandy Run has been joyfully providing musical accompaniment since 1960. In 2011 the secretary was hired, followed by the custodian in 2014.

This description provides a detailed picture of the culture of the congregation at Sandy Run Baptist Church in Mooresboro, North Carolina. With the long history and rich story present in the ebb and flow of the congregation, this project had the potential to reach deep into the hearts of participants to explore the presence of God in new and profound ways.

## CHAPTER TWO

### STATEMENT OF MINISTRY PROBLEM

There are certain aspects of the human life and story that inescapably unite us in the most common of ways. Grief is one such aspect. Grief represents a heavy weight upon the life of individuals and upon congregations of Christian believers. During my first six months as the pastor of Sandy Run Baptist Church, I officiated at six funerals of church and community members. In addition, I attended six other funerals for persons who were related to members of Sandy Run Baptist Church.

As the weight of bereavement ministry was bearing down upon my shoulders during those days, it became clear that the grief ministry within the congregation was lacking in substance and stability both theologically and practically. I began internally to ask questions of the situation as to why this was the case and then observed how the culture of the congregational system operated. By watching the manner in which the congregation currently ministers to the bereaved, I was able to reflect upon the process. What I discovered in this ministry context is that once the funeral had concluded, the efforts of the church regarding grief ministry ceased to continue. The members of the congregation were bringing food to a meal following the funeral but leaving the largest bulk and weight of grief care to the pastor.

Upon further reflection, it became clear to me that the issue was multi-faceted with roots in several areas. On one side there appeared to be little room for persons to



grieve in an open and honest manner. This may stem from the church members' self-perceived incapability to know what to do or say during times of grief and loss. This may also stem from a congregational assumption that the pastor is to be the sole caregiver to the members of the congregation. This leads to the other branch of the issue: the congregation has been poorly educated and formed as Christian disciples to (1) face grief openly and honestly and (2) assist fellow members of the body in doing so.

All of this brings tremendous sadness to me both as a Christian believer and a Christian pastor. As Christians, we are believers in a Messiah who has defeated death through resurrection, yet we can be among the world's worst grievers. Regardless of how we may have arrived at this state, Lauren Winner provides a sharp and clear focus on how this reality is known in our lives and congregations: "We lack a ritual for the long and tiring process that is sorrow and loss."<sup>2</sup> The church lacks healthy, biblical rituals and practices that anchor the griever into the realities of the Christian faith and community for processing grief and loss. The absence of such practices and rituals coupled with the surrounding culture brings undercurrents that push and pull members of the congregation in directions that are unhealthy and may unknowingly prohibit powerful ministry to the bereaved.

This is a sad and stark truth in the life of the church. To borrow from James Bryan Smith, we have not allowed margins to be formed in our lives where grief has room to be processed.<sup>3</sup> This is exemplified in the perceived need to rush back to a sense of normalcy in life when, in all actuality, there is no pre-grief state of "normal" that can be regained

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<sup>2</sup> Lauren F. Winner, *Mudhouse Sabbath: An Invitation to A Life Of Spiritual Discipline* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2007), 27.

<sup>3</sup> James Bryan Smith, *The Good & Beautiful God: Falling in Love with The God Jesus Knows* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 128-31.

following the death of a loved one. One example of this in western civilization is when men and women feel pushed to return to work the day after the death of a loved one or are required to jump back into the ebb and flow of life without so much as a second thought toward the deceased. Any attempt to truncate grief robs the believer of a God-given desire to express, feel, and process all that is happening around and within the life of the believer. Furthermore, truncated grief robs the community of faith an opportunity to be the body of Christ and give voice to their belief both in word and deed. What is left is a context in which an issue of eternal magnitude is void of the theology it holds so dear and a lack of integration of that theology into the life of faith.

While this discovery was not groundbreaking in any regard, it should be eye-opening for the church and for those who shepherd her. James Bryan Smith calls this “hurry sickness” and goes so far as to refer to it as “the number one spiritual sickness of our day.”<sup>4</sup> In discussing the impact such sickness has on our lives, he continues,

We are constantly in a hurry because we have overloaded our schedule. When we lack margin in our lives we become tired and lonely and joyless, which seems to invite temptation. We need margin. Margin restores balance and restores our soul, thus increasing our capacity for joy. Joy is a bulwark against temptation. Margin and holiness are related to one another in very deep ways.<sup>5</sup>

This hurry sickness as it relates to grief is paramount to the spiritual and physical health of the congregation. Therefore, it is the proposal of this project to write a curriculum equipping members of the congregation at Sandy Run Baptist Church through spiritual formation to become lay providers of bereavement ministry. We live in such a hurry as individuals and as congregations that we have not given time or space to reflect on how ministry to the bereaved should and can be shaped by the theology of our faith.

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<sup>4</sup> Smith, *The Good & Beautiful God*, 130.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, *The Good & Beautiful God*, 130.

### **Personal Rationale for Project**

Grief has played a major role in my life and in my ministry during the last several years. In one fell swoop, I lost both parents in a motor vehicle accident when I was 26 years old. This plunged me off a cliff into a world I had never known. I was determined for my journey of grief to be open, honest, raw wrestling with God and loss. This seemed to be a different approach to grief, loss, and mourning than exhibited throughout modern American culture. Furthermore, I set it as a personal and pastoral goal to help believers grieve openly and honestly. My grief has been that of an open book. There have been no questions too deep and no statements too strong in my conversations regarding grief.

One contributing factor in to this process was the community in which I was living and ministering at the time. When my mother and father died, I was serving as a part of the pastoral staff at East Maiden Baptist Church in Maiden, North Carolina. The congregation lovingly carried my wife and me through those dark days. Out of this community there were a select few with whom I would bare my soul. I shared with them the hurts of the loss, and they cried with me. Thus, the role and presence of community played a major role in my story of grief.

My theory is that those within the church are often unaware of what to do with grief from a biblical perspective. When the congregation is ill equipped to share the load of caring for one another through this universally binding human experience, grievers can become stuck in grief without the ability or stamina to proceed. So I simply ask a question: What if Sandy Run Baptist Church became a community where grief is shared

and processed authentically? What if we became a community of believers who are grieving with hope and doing so *in* community? This process, I believe, would help break off the shackling chains of embedded theology and turn the community loose into what Howard Stone and James Duke call a “deliberative theology.”<sup>6</sup> The embedded theology functions to, for whatever reason, to suppress and shelve grief, and if it is to be explored, to allow the clergy to be the ones to lead in such exploration. When looking objectively at the nature of grief, loss, and mourning, it becomes clear that communities of grieving believers are in need of a faith that is reflective and responsive for deep and even painful questions.<sup>7</sup>

### **Project Goal**

Christian pastors have always been charged with shepherding a flock, a community of believers, who profess to serve a Messiah who is risen from the dead. However, in many places, there appears to be little room for the serious questions of grief and loss within the context of Christian community. Such realities may have an adverse effect on the life of Christian grievers, as they may be pushed further away from the community of faith in the risen Jesus instead of drawn closer into the community. With a grieving process like this, the bereaved are often left with a sense of isolation and loneliness, leaving Christians to “grieve as those who have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13).

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<sup>6</sup> Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How To Think Theologically*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 16. The embedded theologies surrounding ministry to the bereaved at Sandy Run include a dependency upon the pastor to handle all of the “ministry.” This embedded theology prohibits the members of the congregation from truly seeing, and even looking for, deliberate acts of ministry that the pastor cannot perform for those who are bereaved.

<sup>7</sup> Grief has the power to descend upon the human soul in a variety of ways resulting from a variety of events. Grief can result from the loss of a marriage, home, job, etc. This project will focus on the grief which results from death.

When grief is true, honest, and genuine, there is a depth to it that comes only from a hope in the resurrected Jesus. Therefore, as N. T. Wright comments about the aforementioned passage from the Pauline letter to the Thessalonians, the resurrection of Jesus and the final resurrection of the dead are central to a biblical understanding of grief.

How does resurrection in this passage function within Paul's larger picture? Initially, as an incentive to the right sort of grief: not the kind of grief that overtakes people without hope, people in the pagan world the Thessalonians knew so well. There is nothing unchristian about grief, and Paul can refer to grief, including his own, as a Christian phenomenon needing no apology.<sup>8</sup>

The need for community today could not be greater, especially when it comes to addressing the issue of grief. The present culture is one of ever-increasing individualism that seeks to protect the self from the influence and impact of community. We live in a society that does not wish to expend the energy required to be authentically vulnerable.

Os Guinness writes, "The plain fact is that for most modern people, community is either a rare experience or a distant, even mocking, ideal."<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the chief goal of this project was to teach a curriculum on grief to members of Sandy Run Baptist Church in order that the community and its members would be strengthened to grieve as a community of hope.

The secondary goal, equal to the first, is the formation of the community in terms of how to face and handle grief through the use of biblical and clinical understandings of grief and how to apply these understandings to ministry situations. This process was supported by four "table legs" that were identified through the work of Gabriel Fackre

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<sup>8</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Volume III of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 217.

<sup>9</sup> Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding & Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1998), 99.

cited in chapter one. The hope of this project was that when these goals were combined, a healthier congregation made up of healthier parishioners would emerge. “Mourners need to be able to communicate to the community that they are in need of special consideration. And the community needs to be able to receive those signals.”<sup>10</sup> The formation of the community in this area of ministry should help the community minister more effectively, and with genuine hope, by receiving and responding to those signals.

### **Resource and Literature Review**

This project was a major undertaking and, therefore, required rich and diverse resources to see it through to completion. The first resource was participation from the congregation at large. The entire congregation of Sandy Run Baptist Church was involved in the implementation of this project but participation took place in various forms.

The culminating goal of this project was the establishment of Grief Ministry Teams at Sandy Run Baptist Church. Therefore, persons were required to be members of the teams. I selected twenty participants from the congregation and invited them to participate in the curriculum aspect of this project. The hope was at the end of the curriculum that these twenty participants would be put into teams of four who would then come alongside the pastor to minister to the needs of the bereaved. This concept would provide support during the time of death, through the funerary rituals and beyond into the weeks and months of adjusting to what will be called “the new normal.”

Potential members of Grief Ministry Teams will have walked through an eight-week curriculum that explored grief through the lenses of *kerygma*, *leitourgia*, *diakonia*,

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<sup>10</sup> Rob Moll, *The Art of Dying: Living Fully Into the Life to Come* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 135.

and *koinonia*. As the group facilitator, I led the sessions which included a detailed biblical and theological component along with clinical suggestions for grief counseling and ministry. Together, they helped focus the participants on the benefits as a community of hope. To encourage the completion of this component, those who participated in this training aspect of the project committed to and signed a covenant of learning and confidentiality.

In addition, participants needed a space to meet each week. The curriculum was taught in the Fellowship Hall at Sandy Run. Multimedia equipment was moved into the Fellowship Hall in order to utilize resources such as PowerPoint, video and audio.

While these curriculum sessions were designed for those who would constitute the Grief Ministry Teams, the sessions were open to the balance of the congregation as well. Everyone who wished to join in the sessions was welcomed to do so, as it expanded everyone's understanding of grief and the ministry of grief.

In order to keep track of the means of evaluation listed below, I sought the help of our church secretary. She was present at the first meeting to assign participant numbers and answer any questions regarding the registration and confidentiality of numbered participants.<sup>11</sup> Her presence and contributions to this project helped ensure organization as well.

The rest of the congregation participated in the project through the use of congregational surveys. These surveys (Appendices 2, 3) called for responses in how effective Sandy Run Baptist Church currently ministered to persons and families in times of grief and loss prior to and after the project.

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<sup>11</sup> A detailed description of the process used to assign numbers is found in the Detailed Project Description in chapter 4.

Additional resources to be utilized in this project included a wide array of books and materials related to the subject of grief and loss. Countless books, articles, and resources were available to those who wished to wade through these murky waters. In recent work with the Minister of Youth & Children, Choral Director, and Organist, I discovered a helpful resource in the book *A Grace Disguised*.<sup>12</sup> Based on a survey conducted with members of the staff at Sandy Run Baptist Church, it was decided that *A Grace Disguised* would be a helpful companion along the journey of grief.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, each member of the Grief Ministry Teams was encouraged to obtain and read this resource.

The clinical approach to grief helped participants understand the physical, psychological, and cognitive approaches to grief and loss. Since these resources were vast in number, I compiled a reading list for the members of the team wished to explore grief and loss on a clinical level.

Professional resources were also made available to participants. This project enlisted the Funeral Director of Clay-Barnette Funeral Home in Shelby, North Carolina. Exposure to these professionals outside of a funeral setting allowed for participants to grow in their knowledge of how work with the deceased is carried out from start to finish. Furthermore, it assisted in introducing the ministry of the funeral through the congregational lens of *leitourgia*.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Jerry Sittser, *A Grace Disguised* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> This survey work was compiled during the fall semester of DSDM 581 – Ministry Supervision as a part of a learning goal for fulfillment of the course. The responses from these staff meetings are available upon request.

<sup>14</sup> Fackre's book *Signs of the Spirit* has been instrumental in drawing out this element of congregational life as one essential for the structure of this project.



Another piece of the resource puzzle was the utilization of participants from the congregation who would serve as an outlet for ministry. While in most cases, death cannot be predicted, and thus neither can the need for ministry to grieving persons and families, I sought the help of four participants from the congregation at large who will allowed their lives and stories to be outlets of learning put to practice.

The last area of resources included the faculty and staff at the School of Divinity at Gardner-Webb University. Working in conjunction with my faculty advisor, Dr. Steven R. Harmon, and field supervisor, Dr. Guy Sayles, this project was carried out with clarity and accuracy. Furthermore, the assistance of Dr. Danny West, Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program, and Dr. Robert Canoy, Dean of the School of Divinity, and Dr. Gerald Keown, Associate Dean of the School of Divinity were invaluable to completing this project. The resources provided by Mrs. Kheresa Harmon and Mrs. Lisa Hollifield ensured the financial aid and registration processes were in place to complete this project.

### **Means of Evaluation**

Data collection for this project centered upon a mixed method means of evaluation. The quantitative data was collected through the use of surveys from participants both from the congregation at large and those who had been selected to participate in the training to be members of Grief Ministry Teams. These surveys utilized the Likert scale for data collection along with closed-ended, yes/no questions.

The qualitative data collected during this project was in the form of written theological reflections. As is detailed in chapter four on the project description, a total of three reflections was collected from numbered participants. These reflections were

succinct in nature, but sought to engage the material covered during the sessions and called for participants to integrate his/her life experiences with grief and reflect upon them, as well as how the material covered could be applied within the context of the congregational needs at Sandy Run Baptist Church. Before beginning this project, I was aware that participants had varying degrees of capabilities when it came to writing, critical thinking, and theological integration. Therefore, when these reflections are quoted in chapter six on critical evaluation, they are quoted as-is with no corrections to spelling, grammar, or punctuation.

### **Detailed Project Description**

As is the case with many congregations, the time between Labor Day and Thanksgiving is one of regularity for Sandy Run. During this time of year, there are fewer events than any other time for the congregation; therefore, it is the ideal time on the calendar to execute this project. The project was placed into the regular weekly schedule of the congregation with six sessions being taught on Sunday evenings. Sessions one, three, and five cover the biblical and theological material of *kerygma*, *leitourgia*, *diakonia*, and *koinonia* while sessions two, four, and six followed the biblical and theological material with application and clinical perspectives on how to apply the material. This structure brought a foundation of both theory and practice to the table of the designed model of bereavement ministry.

Communication about the project implementation began with a letter sent to twenty people who were selected to be a part of the study group that met on Sunday evenings (Appendix 4). The pastor extended invitations to be part of the study group based on regular attendance of Sunday evening services and the pastor's sense that these

persons exhibit gifts of compassion and caring.<sup>15</sup> If recipients of the letter chose to be a part of the project, they were to call the church office and speak with the secretary to receive a participant number. The secretary and the participant were the only ones who knew which number corresponded with which survey and reflection. Out of the twenty invitation letters sent, sixteen participants called to receive a number and officially agreed to participate in the project.

A second letter was sent to a group of four widows from within the congregation (Appendix 5). These four widows, who had lost their spouse -- and in two cases an adult child -- in the last five years were to serve as a living case study for the larger study group. Two of these widows agreed to participate and meet with the study group during the final session and engaged in small groups in conversation about grief and loss.<sup>16</sup>

As evidenced in the appendices, this project utilized a mixed method approach to data collection. The first means of qualitative data collection for the project was a pre-project congregational survey. This was distributed and collected on Sunday, August 23, 2015 at the beginning of the 11:00 A.M. worship service (Appendix 2). This survey was designed to measure the pre-curriculum level of bereavement care from the pastor and congregation at Sandy Run. It was intended to involve the congregation at large, including those who had agreed to participate in the Sunday evening curriculum.

The official teaching of the curriculum began on Sunday, September 13, 2015. Participants of the project were asked to meet with me prior to the session for a brief orientation and to sign a ministry development covenant (Appendix 1). Subsequent

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<sup>15</sup> A full description of the selection of these persons is given in chapter six.

<sup>16</sup> A full description of the selection of these persons is given in chapter four.

sessions began with a pre-session survey that included two types of questions. The first set of questions would appear on every survey in the project. These questions centered on (1) the importance of ministry to the bereaved by members of the congregation and (2) the level of self-efficacy among participants in the project. These questions were to quantitatively measure the directional hypothesis stated in chapter two.

The remaining questions on each survey were specific to the material covered in the present session and the one to follow. These included questions about the meaning of terms to be covered in the session as well as biblical, theological, and clinical concepts covered in the teaching.

The first teaching session walked through the biblical and theological rationales of *kerygma* and *leitourgia* (Appendix 7). The material was dense and had to be heavily condensed from the proposal.<sup>17</sup> However, combining these two aspects of the curriculum helped to move the project from the theoretical aspect to the pragmatic aspect much quicker.

The curriculum was offered at a time during the week when Sandy Run would normally gather for worship, and some in attendance had not signed up to receive a participant number. This brought to light some of the messiness of working with human subjects. It would have been pastorally insensitive to limit attendance only to those who had agreed to participate in the project. Therefore, this first teaching session, and each subsequent session, brought in more surveys than assigned participant numbers. These surveys, while helpful in presenting an overall picture of project development, could not

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<sup>17</sup> What appears in the appendices as “lesson plans” for each session is the full text from the proposal of this project. The PowerPoint slides that accompany each lesson plan demonstrate how the material was condensed for presentation.

be tracked on an individual level to show growth and learning on the individual level. Therefore, these surveys were not used in evaluating the data presented in chapter six.

The second teaching session was led on Sunday, September 20, 2015. This session was designed to approach the biblical and theological material of *kerygma* and *leitourgia* through a clinical lens (Appendix 9). Each clinical session (sessions 2, 4, 6) did not include a pre-survey but rather a post-survey that covered the material from the previous session and the current session. During this second session, a representative from Clay-Barnette Funeral Home in Shelby, North Carolina was present to engage the participants in discussion on the role of the funeral home in the death and grieving process. He provided valuable insight into how he approaches death and grief and shared stories of the process that he uses in working with a family. The material covered his care for the deceased body and encouragement of the grieving family. He drew from a deep well of experience and knowledge to incorporate the material covered by the project.

The funeral director then turned to his perspective on the role of the community that surrounds the bereaved. He shared helpful information regarding appropriate protocol in a funeral home, including what should be said and what should not be said to a grieving family member. This proved to be helpful on many levels as it integrated the material covered by the facilitator of the project as well as speaking as a professional from the funeral home business. His voice helped give weight to what was taught by the facilitator.

At the conclusion of this session and all application/clinical sessions, a theological reflection prompt was distributed. Participants were instructed to write reflectively on the material covered during the two previous sessions and to return the written reflection at

the next session. A total of three theological reflections were distributed and collected from participants as a means of collecting qualitative data (Appendices 10, 17, 24).

The third session was taught on Sunday, September 27, 2015. The material covered during this session was the biblical and theological basis for *diakonia* (Appendix 12). This session began the true pragmatic element of the project as it began to frame the role of the bereavement ministry teams as envisioned by the pastor. It was during this session that the flow of the curriculum was settled and participants began to engage in more lively discussions around the biblical material.

The fourth session was taught on Sunday, October 4, 2015 and covered the application of the biblical material and a clinical approach to *diakonia* as covered in session three (Appendix 14). This session concluded with the distribution of a second theological reflection. During this session, the large group was broken up into three smaller groups. Each group was given a pre-written case study (Appendix 15) and imagined themselves as a bereavement ministry team who would step into the situation to bring comfort. The guiding questions for discussion among the teams included the biblical and clinical material covered in all of the previous sessions. This served as a means of integrating and practicing all of the learning that had been taking place thus far in the project. After a time of discussion, the smaller groups shared with the larger group the case study scenario they were given and how they would approach the ministry opportunity.

Self-efficacy theory seeks to understand how it is that a person will exert more energy toward behavior change if provided with opportunities for learning and practice.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For a fuller treatment of self-efficacy, please see Albert Bandura, "Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change," *Psychological Review*, no. 2 (Vol. 84, 1977): 191-215.

integrated into the life of the project as a third voice to the structure. The teaching sessions provided education, while the case studies started to introduce practice. A deeper piece of the directional hypothesis was providing opportunities for the education to be put into practice producing higher self-efficacy among members of the participant group.

The introduction of *koinonia* as the fourth and final leg of the table of bereavement ministry (Appendix 19) was presented on Sunday, October 11, 2015. During this session it became abundantly clear to the facilitator that the material covered had been very helpful to the participants in their understanding of grief and loss and may have provided deep and meaningful contributions to the larger congregation of the ministry of Sandy Run and possibly beyond.

The sixth and final session was taught on Sunday, October 18, 2015 and focused on the application of *koinonia* (Appendix 21). With the unpredictable nature of death, opportunities to utilize the tools learned are difficult to plan. Therefore, the facilitator and author of the project has seen fit to include the living case studies of the widows. The large group was divided into two smaller groups and time was given for conversation with a widow. This was a third aspect of social-cognitive theory and another step in the direction of practice and experience.

At the conclusion of the session, the widows were asked to take a short survey (Appendix 23) while the larger group took a post-session survey (Appendix 22). As participants were preparing to leave, they were given the third of three theological reflection prompts to return the next week. Participants were also encouraged to take a short suggested reading list (Appendix 24) with them. This reading list was to serve as a springboard for further reading on various subjects covered during the curriculum.

On Sunday, October 25, 2015, a post-project survey was distributed to the congregation at large at the beginning of the morning worship service (Appendix 2). The objective of this survey was to gauge the perception of change among the congregation's efficacy in ministering to those in grief.



CHAPTER THREE  
BIBLICAL ANALYSIS AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The human story is one of life and death that ebbs and flows in the context of relationships. Relationships make the human story one of great joy as well as deep sorrow. From the earliest pages of the biblical narrative we become aware of how the context of relationship is woven into the fabric of creation.

To be alive means existing in relationship with other people and things. Life is communication in communion. And, conversely, isolation and lack of relationship means death for all living things, and dissolution even for elementary particles. So if we want to understand what is real *as* real, and what is living *as* living, we have to know it in its own primal and individual community.<sup>19</sup>

The relationships present in and throughout creation serve as the canvas on which the human story is portrayed. The power of story has been used from the earliest chapters of human history as a means of communicating the reality of what is, as well as exploring the depth of what could be, while reflecting on what was.

In light of this project the power of story becomes a tool of high importance. The subject of grief is a result of the story of relationship. The objective of the bereavement ministry teams envisioned through this project is the hearing and responding to stories of grief and the relationships that have been transformed and redefined through death.

The importance of listening to and hearing the story of human beings is a central task of the role of the Christian pastor. It is in hearing and listening to the stories of

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<sup>19</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God In Creation.*, trans. by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 3.

human beings that one can observe in the story divine nuances of grace, mercy, and love.

Eugene Peterson describes the task of story listening in the following way:

In the process of telling the story of their [parishioners] lives (or better teaching them to tell it), their names and struggles, their sins and disappointments are rearranged into a plot that has a beginning in God, a providential middle, and a conclusion in salvation. No biblical story is *just* a story, any more than any person's story – each deals with actual events and traditions in which there is a Creator, Director, and Redeemer, with whom ordinary persons in history get involved.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the biblical narrative, there are countless stories of human living that have been and still are being used by faithful Christian believers around the world for encouragement to see God in the midst of the human story. One such story, and the one that is used as the biblical basis for biblical and theological reflection on this project, is the story recorded in the book of Ruth.

Clearly identified as belonging to the genre of short story, Ruth is “a narrative that has been carefully crafted to move through various scenes before reaching a climax and denouement.”<sup>21</sup> The plot of the book of Ruth presents the reader with the journey from plentiful lives and relationships to empty lives and relationships transformed and redefined by death. Then only through the active move of God does the story reach a conclusion where all that was lost is restored. The restoration does not bring back what was lost, for the dead are still dead, but instead, there is a newness of life and the capacity to move forward knowing that the dead will live on in the living.

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<sup>20</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 84. “Parishioners” is my insertion to clarify to whom Peterson is referring. It is worth noting that here Peterson pulls from G. Ernest Wright, *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* (Chicago: Alec R. Allenson, 1960), 84.

<sup>21</sup> Eunny Lee, “Ruth,” in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 4:866.

The four legs of the table of bereavement ministry presented in this project (*kerygma*, *leitourgia*, *diakonia*, and *koinonia*) are actively at work through the story of Ruth; each carefully woven into the fabric of the story of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz, and into the tapestry of our lives and deaths as well. The narrative presented in the book of Ruth is one of great loss, deep lamentation, faithful service, and strong community. While the book of Ruth addresses many issues and serves many functions within the canon, the lens through which we will examine it is the lens of grief and loss. The book of Ruth serves as an exemplar for how grief can be explored in the biblical world and provides a framework out of which we can operate as a community of Christian believers. Through it all, there is the constant theme of the redemption of God in the midst of the messiest situations in life.<sup>22</sup>

***Kerygma: A Theological Reflection on Story, Loss, and Redemption Through Inter-Human Relationships***

At its core, *kerygma* is story-telling. It is “a Greek word meaning ‘proclamation.’”<sup>23</sup> While it is a broad term that generally centers on New Testament preaching, it is used in the context of this project as a means of telling the story of the relationships of creation. Most uses of this term incorporate telling the story of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The present use of *kerygma* will include this traditional approach to *kerygmatic* living but also will focus on the use of story-telling as a means of putting into context the reality of human relationships.

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<sup>22</sup> Grief is an area of human living that is deeply theological and is expressed throughout the biblical narrative. While chapter three explores the four “table legs” through the lens of the book of Ruth, a further, much more detailed theological rationale and foundation is provided in appendices 7, 9, 13, 15, 20, and 22.

<sup>23</sup> Mark D. Given, “Kerygma” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary Of The Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 3:492.

Telling the story of human relationships involves seeing the story from beginning to end and everything in between. All human relationships have a beginning, and all human relationships are to reflect the relationship with the divine Creator God who is in relationship as the Godhead. Such is also the case when examining the book of Ruth. The human relationships throughout the story provide excellent examples of the interconnectedness of inter-creational and inter-human relationships.

The story opens with the introduction of several main characters, only one of whom will make it to the end of the story: Naomi. Along with this soon-to-be widow, Naomi's husband, Elimelech, and her sons, Mahlon and Chilion, are introduced to the reader (Ruth 1:1-2). Within these opening verses of the story, three main human relationships are brought to our attention: husband-wife, parent-child, and sibling.

One of the first elements of the curriculum presented to project participants was the need for the identification of relationship. Ministry with the bereaved centers around a relationship that has been transformed and redefined by death. Therefore, it is essential to identify the nature of the relationship being discussed. Such identification helps determine how and when ministry is offered. It also helps determine the type of support and service made available to the bereaved.

Readers of the book of Ruth will never know the dynamics of the relationships presented in these early verses. We are unaware as to the level of emotional intimacy between any of these introductory characters. However, these questions are worth exploring within the context of ministry with the bereaved. Relationships do not exist in a vacuum. Relationships, especially inter-human relationships, always have a context and are fueled by the spirit of interconnectedness.

While it is possible to explore such themes with the bereaved, the only clue given for this kind of context in Ruth is in the opening line. “In the days when the judges ruled” (Ruth 1:1)<sup>24</sup> presents the reader with a context of conflict. The story that is about to unfold is one that took place during a time of cultural and religious uncertainty and upheaval.

The book of Judges presents this era as one of repeated bloody battles between Israel and Canaanite, Philistine, and other enemies as well as of warfare among various Israelite tribes. It is also a time of repeated disobedience to God’s covenant stipulations, a time marked by struggle to learn how to be faithful to God in the new setting of the promised land.<sup>25</sup>

When introduced to the subject of grief and loss, it becomes paramount to look at the reality of the relationship being presented. For example, if the death of a loved one took place at a time of intense conflict within the family unit, the implications for ministry with the bereaved become very complicated. Levels of guilt, resentment, and anger can be higher than what would typically be present if the death occurred at a time of relative peace. For many, however, such times of peace are few and far between and the suddenness of death comes with great intensity and a lack of preparation.

Without warning and reason, Elimelech dies. There is no timing given surrounding the events of his death. There are no rituals described in terms of where or how he was buried. This primary familial relationship has now been transformed and redefined by death, thrusting Naomi into a whole new world complete with a whole new status: widow. She is forced into a world of grief over the loss of her husband, but so are her sons. The suddenness and unexpectedness of death is as strong as the cultural conflict

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<sup>24</sup>All direct quotations of scripture are from the New Revised Standard Version

<sup>25</sup>Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Ruth* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1999), 17.

in the days when the judges ruled. No mention is made of how Naomi, Mahlon, or Chilion handle their grief either culturally or religiously. As devastating as it is for Naomi to lose her husband, we are reminded that the sons lost their father. The family has suffered a tremendous loss. Coupled with the fact that the family has moved to the territory of Moab to escape a famine (Ruth 1:1) drives home the complexity of the human story.<sup>26</sup>

This is a family who is forced into a transformation and redefinition of relationship while living on foreign soil. There was no community around them to help them cope. There was no bereavement ministry team from their church to surround them and hear their story. They were living in and among a people who were not their own and with whom they had very little, if anything, in common.

There are new human relationships introduced early in the opening scene that give the reader, and especially the family, a level of hope. Both Mahlon and Chilion take wives for themselves (Ruth 1:4). Though the wives are Moabites, the future of the family seems somewhat stabilized. There is hope of future generations to help sustain this family in the midst of difficult days without their patriarch. Hubbard's view, while not completely certain, is psychologically probable, in that "Naomi probably welcomed the weddings as sweet medicine for her bitter grief."<sup>27</sup> This is the introduction of two new characters, Ruth and Orpah, as new inter-human relationships.

Then, again without warning, the sons both die. The deaths of the sons are as sudden as the death of their father. Families such as the Elimelech family are common.

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<sup>26</sup> Here it is important to note that the story of Ruth addresses not only the loss of inter-human relationships through death, but the loss of land, societal standing, and cultural establishment through famine.

<sup>27</sup> Robert L. Hubbard, *Ruth* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 93.

Losses compound losses and in a given lifetime we never know just how many losses will be suffered and sustained. As an example from this project, one participant is a widow who has lost two husbands and her only son. While these losses did not happen at once, but over the course of forty years, she has suffered greatly. Such is also the case for the Elimelech family. The three losses in the Elimelech family span a decade of life for the family.

Now that her husband and both sons have died, Naomi faces a major crisis in life. She lives on foreign soil and without the three most important men in her life to provide for her. In the words of Kristin Nielsen, “The crisis is all-encompassing.”<sup>28</sup> This family is from Israel in particular: they are Ephrathites from Bethlehem (Ruth 1:2). One would expect the Creator God to care for his covenant people. Hubbard suggests that not only was this clan a part of the Bethlehem community, but they were also a well-to-do clan in the community, tracing ancestry back to Caleb. As Hubbard suggests,

“If the clan descended from Caleb, the author may have identified this family as Ephrathite to picture it as an aristocratic one – one of the ‘first families of Bethlehem.’ He thereby underscored the humiliating tragedy involved: the Vanderbilts have suddenly become sharecroppers.”<sup>29</sup>

Decisions are made in the stories of our lives. When we are faced with grief and loss, we are often forced to make decisions that we would not otherwise have to make. We are cornered into positions that call for decisive action. Often, they are actions that we never thought we would have to make. Suddenly, we are faced with the reality of what to do with the house. We cannot afford to make the payments on the mortgage because we bought the property with the income to debt ratio based on two annual

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<sup>28</sup> Kristin Nielsen, *Ruth* (The Old Testament Library; Louisville, KY, 1997), 44.

<sup>29</sup> Hubbard, *Ruth*, 91.

salaries. Now there is just one. We have moved away from family and friends because of a crippling agricultural crisis to start a new life but have found that new life to be marred and scarred by death. This is all part of the *kerygmatic* lens of grief. We must hear the toll death takes on those who are still alive. We must wrestle with the decisions of what to do with where we are. “Life for widows, orphans, and foreigners was regarded in the Old Testament as extremely insecure; this mirrored among other things in the repeated requests to look after these groups.”<sup>30</sup> Insecurity drives decision and decisions drive persons.

Naomi makes the choice to return to Bethlehem and her daughters-in-law will accompany her (Ruth 1:6). Her decision is based on the news she’s received that the Lord brought food to his “famined” people in Bethlehem. Does this mean that God actually cares about the happenings of the human story on earth? The answer both theologically and relationally is a resounding yes.

The level of importance in expressing the narrative of death, and the grief that follows, is paramount to living the overall narrative of humanity. When we discover that it is actually the Lord who brings relief to the people of Bethlehem who have suffered the famine, we realize that the presence of this God is essential to the story. Everything that took place prior to this, first intervention of God in the story of Ruth, still includes the presence of God.

The presence of God has been a fundamental aspect of identity for the family of Elimelech. They have shared the stories of the covenant-making God with their children, and likely the daughters-in-law. The God of the Covenant is also the Creator God.

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<sup>30</sup> Nielsen, *Ruth*, 44.



Therefore, the relationship between God and creation is one of tremendous intimacy and cooperation. We could even say there is a dependency on the part of creation which needs the Creator God of the Covenant to provide.

While Naomi is in Moab, having suffered the losses of her husband and both sons, she receives the news that God has provided for the needs of the people in Bethlehem.

Robert Hubbard explains how the verb choice פקד expresses a depth of care, concern and action. “With Yahweh as subject, the special covenant relationship which bound Yahweh the sovereign to his vassal Israel underlies it.”<sup>31</sup>

The story of loss is one of great sorrow as it strips from our hands the aspects of life which are most precious to us. The stripping of said relationships from us by the claws of death and suffering leaves us wondering about the presence of God in the story. What will God do? We are reminded through the flow of the narrative in Ruth that God has not abandoned God’s relationship with creation, and in particular with humanity. Hubbard writes, “Provision of food is, of course, typical of Israel’s covenant God.”<sup>32</sup> If God is concerned about the redemption of hunger to the point of intervening in an active manner, what will God, the Creator and Covenant-maker do to bring about some kind of relief for those who are grieving?

As we learn early in the book of Ruth how God provides food for the hungry mouths in Bethlehem, we are left to wonder how God will provide redemption to the hungry soul of Naomi. The empty and barren tables of Bethlehem were once again full and fertile because of the grace of God’s intervention. Will the same be true of Naomi?

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<sup>31</sup> Hubbard, *Ruth*, 100.

<sup>32</sup> Hubbard, *Ruth*, 100. Here Hubbard cites references to Ex. 16:8, 20; Deut. 10:18; Ps. 136:25; 147:7; eze. 16:19; Neh. 9:15; cf. Ps. 104:14-15; 1 K. 17:6; Matt. 6:25-26, 31-33; Phil. 4:19.

Will the same be true for all who grieve the loss of a loved one with whom the relationship has been transformed and redefined because of death?

To respond to this question of God's intervention, we turn our attention once again to the power and context of relationship. Relationships are, as we have already noted, the core of creation. Inter-human relationships are designed by the heart and purpose of God to reflect the relationship that God shares with God's self as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Karl Barth helps make this clear:

Man is the repetition of this divine form of life; its copy and reflection. He is this first in the fact that he is the counterpart of God, the encounter and discovery in God himself being copied and imitated in God's relation to man. But he is it also in the fact that he is himself the counterpart of his fellows and has in them a counterpart, the coexistence and cooperation in God himself being repeated in the relation of man to man.<sup>33</sup>

With this in mind, it is no wonder then that the narrative of Naomi's journey of grief and loss extends from God providing for the needs of the hungry in Bethlehem through God's own relationship of covenant with his people to the new human relationships in bringing about relief and redemption to the hungry soul and broken heart of Naomi. God moves through the power of inter-human relationships to bring about healing, redemption, and to be living, though human, expressions of God's own *אהבה* love of covenant.

The relationships that grab our attention and focus throughout the balance of the story of Ruth are the relationships shared among and between three main characters: Naomi herself, Ruth, her Moabite daughter-in-law, and Boaz, "the man of valor."<sup>34</sup> When

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<sup>33</sup> Karl Barth. *Church Dogmatics* 3.1. Translated by J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, H Knight (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 185.

<sup>34</sup> "Man of valor" is the preferred descriptive term for Boaz's character used by Carolyn Custis James. *The Gospel of Ruth: Loving God Enough to Break the Rules* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 95. "The NIV translates this phrase as 'man of standing,' but the Hebrew terms are actually much stronger, indicating both might and valor," (215, note 4).

approaching the need for ministry with the grieving and bereaved, the sharing of inter-human relationships becomes the crux in the narrative. In fact, this entire project is built upon the human relationships from within the church that constitute these types of doorways to redemption that we find exhibited in the book of Ruth.

In the book of Ruth, the first human relationship that brings to light and signals the presence of the Creator and Covenantal God is between Naomi and her daughter-in-law, Ruth. At one point in the journey from Moab to Bethlehem, Naomi urges her daughters-in-law to return to Moab so she may continue on alone (Ruth 1:8-13). The exchange between the three women is one of great interest to many scholars, for out of the two daughters-in-law, one (Orpah) returns to her home while the other (Ruth) commits to stay with Naomi. Much has been said about the difference between the two, drawing the conclusions that the author's purpose in the inclusion of this information has less to do with the character of the women and more to do with spotlighting the fact that the focus of the story will now be on Naomi and Ruth.<sup>35</sup>

The contrast between the two daughters-in-law is striking. While one leaves, the other clings. While one walks away, the other walks with. While one says goodbye, the other says hello. The life to which Ruth is now saying "hello" is one of commitment to grieve as community. She pleads with Naomi not to urge her to leave but makes a strong and vital commitment of life and death to stay by Naomi's side regardless of what should happen (Ruth 1:16-17).

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<sup>35</sup> While Ruth's character urges her to stay with Naomi, Orpah's character urges her to follow Naomi's instructions. Both seem to be admirable aspects of character both in the commitment of love and the respect for elders. There are however, references in other writings from the Ancient Near East that detail out the violent and dangerous journey Orpah endured on the road back to Moab. Reference to such material is made by Nielsen, *Ruth*, 48.

Ruth makes a statement of loyalty to relationship. In the words of Kathleen Farmer, Ruth is “changing primary allegiance.”<sup>36</sup> What makes this significant in terms of the storyline is that this same language is used in Genesis 2:24 to denote the level of intimate dedication and commitment between man and wife in the covenant of marriage. Ruth gives herself over to the God of Naomi and of Israel. Ruth is essentially telling Naomi that the *חסד* of Yahweh that Naomi has seen evidenced in the giving of food, the same *חסד* that Naomi heard was given to her ancestors, the same *חסד* that Naomi prayed Ruth and Orpah would each receive from Yahweh in the home of another husband (Ruth 1:8-9), is now the same *חסד* that Ruth gives to Naomi. She commits to live in relationship with Naomi through her days, whatever they may hold, bitter or better.

The next inter-human relationship enters the narrative in the second chapter of Ruth. Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest (Ruth 1:22). The scenario is one of great depravity and desperation. We are presented with two widows who are left to survive in a man’s world. As is noted above, the loss of a husband in the Ancient Near East is detrimental to a woman but survivable if sons are present. If a woman, such as Naomi, loses her husband and sons, she is left completely destitute. Ruth, too is a widow, and is a Moabite, a foreign refugee. She is not part of the covenantal people of God in Israel, yet she has committed herself to the word and works of Yahweh.<sup>37</sup>

The narrative becomes riveting when we are introduced to one from within the tribe of Judah who will serve as a kinsman redeemer for Naomi, and, by extension, for

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<sup>36</sup> Kathleen A. Robertson Farmer, *NIB*, 2:907.

<sup>37</sup> Farmer, *NIB*, 2:943, notes how the commitment of Ruth as an outsider to the word and works of Yahweh is much like that of Rahab who “was a non-Israelite woman who chose to align herself with Israel and Israel’s God” in Josh. 2:1-21; 6:22-23.

Ruth. Boaz is his name and it is his field that Ruth “happens into” to go to work (Ruth 2:3). While much could be said about the sovereignty of God in such situations, this is not the point of this project and its biblical/theological reflection component. The sovereignty of God in this instance does not appear to be working separate and apart from the agent of human will and action. Ruth sees the need to provide for Naomi and must do so however she is able. With the barley harvest beginning, there is work for her to complete. While God is active in directing what is taking place, the divine will of God is open to the move of human action. Ruth’s earlier commitment to Naomi opened the door of Ruth’s heart to bring about the “chance encounter” between Ruth and Boaz.

What is significant about Boaz is that he is a man of great means. In his translation of the text, Frederic Bush describes Boaz as “a man of substance and standing.”<sup>38</sup> He further exegetes the phrase as one that “always designates one who possessed social standing and a good reputation. In this context, it connotes not only wealth but also ability and honor.”<sup>39</sup> The action which takes place in the barley fields of Boaz outside of Bethlehem becomes the basis for a relationship of redemption. By the end of the story, Boaz agrees to marry Ruth and together they bear a son, Obed (Ruth 4:1-17).

In the end, the power of redemption is realized through the blessing of human relationships. When the child, Obed, is born, the boy is placed on Naomi’s lap and the women of the town exclaim “a son has been born to Naomi” (Ruth 4:17). The birth of Obed marks the finality of redemption in the life of Naomi. What she had lost has now

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<sup>38</sup> Frederic Bush, *Ruth/Esther* (WBC 9: Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1996), 98.

<sup>39</sup> Bush, *Ruth/Esther*, 100.

been restored to her. She lost her children, and thus her future, and now she is restored through a gift from God in the form of a human child. The importance of the human relationships and the impact they have on the story of grief could not be any more powerfully expressed than through the story of Ruth.

It should also be noted that the redemptive birth of a son takes place in Bethlehem at the intervention of the God who never leaves his people alone to suffer in silence. Centuries later another baby boy would be born in Bethlehem whose life, death, and resurrection would be the ultimate means of redemption for all humankind, and by extension, all of creation (Rom. 8:20-23). When asking the question of what God does to redeem humanity and to fix the problem created by death, the person of Jesus of Nazareth is what comes to the forefront.

In Jesus the full embodiment of God has been brought to earth as the means through which God fully relates to a created world marred and scarred by death. God's relationship to humanity is taken to a new level when Jesus is born in the town of Bethlehem. Such redemption is accomplished by God making his own dwelling among the lives of his image bearers, to walk among them and to embrace all of death as a means of swallowing it, in order to defeat it. "God creates the world, and at the same time enters into it. He calls it into existence, and at the same time manifests itself through its being. It lives from his creative power, and yet he lives in it."<sup>40</sup> Death and all of its effects including grief, are challenged and, one might dare to say defeated, in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

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<sup>40</sup> Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 15.

The continual power of story is utilized once again as it is the God of the Covenant who brings relief to the hungry homes of Bethlehem, brings a son to the empty and childless arms of Naomi, and calls Jesus out of the tomb of death. Paul writes to the Ephesian congregation how the power God exerted in raising Jesus from the dead is the same power that is at work in the lives of those who believe in Jesus as the Son of God (Eph. 1:20-21).

Thus Ephesians 1:20-21 is a central text for understanding the continuity of the narrative as being trimmed *and* filled with the powerful acts of the God of the Covenant. “The creedal-sounding formulation of 1:20 reflects the dominant conviction of early Christianity that Christ was alive, and here, as nearly everywhere else in the NT, his resurrection is seen as an act of God rather than his own act.”<sup>41</sup> God relates to the suffering of humanity by death through the most intimate means possible: becoming human in Jesus that he may absorb the sting of death on himself and thus raise Jesus from the dead.

This is the narrative into which we are woven as believers in Jesus. The possibilities for pathways to redemption are endless in this narrative of grace and love. While the power of the good news of Jesus being raised from the dead by God does not eliminate the temporal sting of death and the sorrow of grief, it allows for sufferers to express such pain in a unique and honest manner. To this expression of grief we now turn our focus for reflection.

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<sup>41</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC 42: Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), 61.

*Leiturgia: A Theological Reflection on the Presence of God*

Stories never exist in a vacuum but are lived in the context of daily living. The living of the human story does include the facing of death. Whether facing the death of a loved one or coming to grips with the reality of human death in general or even, more specifically, understanding that each human being will die, the human story involves suffering. One of the overall goals of this project has been, and hopefully will continue to be, to assist Christian believers in the open expression of the chapters of suffering in their own stories as it relates to the deaths of loved ones.

In less than two years, writer and musician Neil Peart watched his common law wife of twenty-two years die of terminal cancer, less than a year after their teenage daughter died suddenly following a motor vehicle accident. Peart boldly confesses:

I remember thinking, ‘How does anyone *survive* something like this? And if they do, what kind of person comes out the other end?’ I didn’t know, but throughout that dark time of grief, sorrow, desolation, and complete despair, something in me seemed determined to carry on. Something would come up.<sup>42</sup>

These words of bewildering despair and crippling grief exemplify the need for an openness of expression.

The gift of expression that the Creator God has written into the hearts of humanity is worship. Worship is a primary means through which the narrative of the Creator God and the narrative of broken-yet-still-good creation come together. It functions as such because it “comprises those actions by which people express and reaffirm their

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<sup>42</sup> Neil Peart. *Ghost Rider: Travels on the Healing Road* (Toronto, Ontario, Canada: ECW Press, 2002), 10. An interesting fact about Peart’s “kerygma” of grief is that his way of expression was to mount his motorcycle and embark on a journey of over 55,000 miles across North America. This deeply theological expression put him in the midst of the created order, as a part of the created order, and together with the created order, sought to work through relationships redefined by death.



devotional stance toward, and relationship to, a deity.”<sup>43</sup> Therefore, through worship, the relationships redefined by death in the created order can be redefined yet again; the primary relationship being between the Creator God and those who are created and thus called to bear the image of the divine into the rest of the created world – human beings.

Worship of the Creator God opens the doors of the human heart and story to the presence of the Creator God. However, chapters of the human story bring a depth of pain that might keep us shut off from the presence of God. We may feel as though we are too hurt for God to enter the situation or even too angry with the Creator himself because he has brought this upon us.

It is this critical juncture in the human story that brings to the forefront a means of worship much neglected, ignored, and misunderstood by the modern church: lamentation.

We may on occasion say that we ‘lament’ that something has happened, but in this case the word refers to regret. Biblical literary forms of lament, however, move well beyond regret to provide an avenue for expressing intense feelings of grief, such as sorrow and anger. Whether that grief arises from illness or tragedy or an act of injustice toward the worshipper, psalms of lament indicate that the Hebrew worshipper was free to express complaints, anxiety, rage, and deep sorrow before God and other members of the community. What was quite natural for the Hebrew worshipper, however, seems foreign to most of us now.<sup>44</sup>

One of the primary purposes for lamentation is to call into question the presence of God. Lamentation asks questions such as “Where are you, O God?” and “How long, O Lord, must I wait?” Expressions such as these are common among the psalms of lament, Job, and from the lips of the prophets.

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<sup>43</sup> Larry W. Hurtado, “Worship, NT Christian” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 5:910.

<sup>44</sup> Nancy J. Duff, “Recovering Lamentation As A Practice In The Church.” Pages 3-14 in *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square*, ed. Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 3.

These calls for the presence of God may be no clearer than from the heart, lips, and life of Naomi in the book of Ruth. In her work on Ruth, Carolyn Custis James rightly sees Naomi as the female version of Job.<sup>45</sup> While this is a surprising connection and correlation, James is not the first to notice such similarities between Naomi and Job. Andre LaCocque takes time to explore the connection, even citing the Midrash of Ruth 1:5 to describe the levels of loss in Naomi's life. LaCocque writes:

“The book of Ruth begins, like the story of Job, with the death of almost all Naomi's kin. She notes God's ineffectiveness or even hostility. There are hardly any other biblical examples where the victim dares to criticize God so directly for his or her affliction – even the communal complaints in the desert after the exodus address themselves to Moses (cf. Exod 15:24; 16:2; 17:3; Num 11:1; 14:2).<sup>46</sup>

At least twice in the narrative of Ruth Naomi expresses lament toward the presence and “hand” of the Creator in her life (Ruth 1:13; 1:20-21). One of these expressions is voiced aloud only to her daughters-in-law as she urges them to return to their people and to their gods while the other occurrence takes place before the women of Bethlehem when Naomi arrives with Ruth by her side.

The first lamentation from Naomi comes at a critical time in the life of the story. It is a semi-private shouting aloud of her views of God that ring loud and should cause any reader of Scripture to take notice. It is spoken in the context of her pleading with Orpah and Ruth to leave her be. Bush assists in interpreting the phrase “because the hand of the Lord has turned against me” as being the reason for her intense urgency to leave her.<sup>47</sup> It is as if she wishes to say, “You do not want any part of the God who has brought this upon me.”

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<sup>45</sup> James, *The Gospel of Ruth*, 37-38.

<sup>46</sup> Andre LaCocque, *Ruth: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004) 49.

A remarkable observation about the context of this lament is that it falls in a cycle of speeches. It is after Naomi has urged Orpah and Ruth to leave her and they refuse to do so that she opens this door to the world of voiced lamentation. Such is often the case when dealing with persons in the midst of grief and loss -- those who are reflecting emotionally, and thus theologically, upon the events of life. The voiced lamentations such as those of Naomi are likely not to be voiced at first but are often carried after there has been some pushback from those around the griever. Maybe unbeknownst to them, Orpah and Ruth give Naomi that kind of room for expression.

Lamentation of this kind opens the door to the presence of God in a unique way. It invites God into the suffering of humanity as a result of death but the invitation does not arrive in a pretty package but in the form of a busted heart. These words from Naomi “voice for the first time the bitter outcry of her wounded heart. Indeed, they subtly shift her focus from argumentation against the women to accusation against God.”<sup>48</sup>

Lamentation is this kind of raw emotion mixed with theology. It begs the question of the presence of God in the midst of suffering. Naomi has exchanged with her daughters-in-law the plea for them to return to their land, people and gods where they would receive grace, love and marriage in the home of another husband. It is when the daughters-in-law refuse to leave that her complaint turns to God.

Furthermore, we are reminded by Naomi’s second cry of lamentation that one cry is simply never enough. As the story unfolds, the reader learns that Orpah follows the instruction of Naomi to return to Moab while Ruth clings to Naomi. The group that

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<sup>47</sup> Bush, *Ruth/Esther*, 81.

<sup>48</sup> Hubbard, *Ruth*, 112.

returns to Bethlehem is now Naomi and Ruth, her Moabite daughter-in-law. This is the setting for the second outcry of lamentation.

While the first expression of lamentation was semi-private between Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth, the second expression is fully public. The eyes and ears of the women of Bethlehem are focused on Naomi. She and Ruth arrive into Bethlehem and are greeted by the women of the town who all seem to express genuine excitement to see Naomi again. And they ask, “Is this Naomi?” (Ruth 1:19).

We must remember that Naomi has now returned to Bethlehem after being away for ten years. Life has taken its cruel toll on her in more ways than one and the women of the town, while genuinely excited to see Naomi, do not know what she has suffered in the last ten years. While Bethlehem is recovering from famine and life is returning to a time of graciousness and plenty, Naomi walks into town completely opposite of that scenario. While the tables of Bethlehem are filled once again, the heart of Naomi is now empty. While God has brought bread to the house of bread, the babies of the house of Elimelech have been snatched away. To increase the tension of the situation, the author of Ruth chooses to play on the name of Naomi to add force to the message of restoration and redemption, and, by extension, to add value to the role of public lamentation.

Naomi’s name is a derivative of the verb meaning “be pleasant, lovely.”<sup>49</sup> It could be that the town of Bethlehem feels itself lovely again after the hand of God has brought them bread and relief from famine. However, Naomi, whose very name suggests a smile, does not feel the same way about her circumstances. She is rather bitter about her life now and has no trouble expressing her bitterness. Here we find another strong play on

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<sup>49</sup> Hubbard, *Ruth*, 88.

words positing lovely and bitter against one another. Such is the call for lamentation: the vocal, verbal, and sometimes vile outburst of the bitterness of life. Naomi has suffered much and just as the women of the town would likely have been ready to give praise to God for the deliverance from the famine, Naomi is ready to place blame on the divine shoulders for the bitter station in life in which she has found herself.

The construction of the sentence forcefully sets God as the one responsible for the bitterness. God is the subject of the verb, and as Hubbard notes, “bitter” is in the *Hiphil* root instead of *Qal*, thus strengthening the language to place the blame on God.<sup>50</sup> To add even more credit to her cause, Naomi does not use the covenant name of YHWH to describe God but, rather, *Shaddai*. Typically translated as “the Almighty” in English, *Shaddai* finds its way into biblical literature in a most obscure kind of ways. Scholars differ how the name came to be. “The name appears most often in the earlier literature in passages involving blessing and cursing, frequently in contexts expressing judgment and power. Hence, it is used most appropriately in the context of Naomi’s bitter complaint in Ruth.”<sup>51</sup> If God is “the Almighty” then God has all power and is, thus, omnipotent.<sup>52</sup>

This presents Naomi, Ruth, and the modern-day griever with a theological predicament. If God is all-powerful as the Almighty, then why does God not stop death from taking place? Why does God not show up to relieve Naomi like God has shown up to relive Bethlehem? Why does the rest of the community get back to life as normal after

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<sup>50</sup> Hubbard, *Ruth*, 124.

<sup>51</sup> Bush, *Ruth/Esther*, 92-93. Bush cites the following passages as instances of the following contexts for the use of *Shaddai* in the earlier literature: blessing and cursing (c.f., Gen 17:1; 28:3; 35:11), expressing judgment (Isa 13:6; Joel 1:15; Job 5:17), power (Ezek 1:24; 10:5; Pss 68:15; 91:1).

<sup>52</sup> Here Bush makes the connection to the Vulgate and the use of the term *omnipotens* as pulled from the LXX’s use of the term παντοκρατωρ.

the funeral is finished while the family of the deceased is left to pick up pieces and question the presence, and even existence, of God moving forward? After all, if *Shaddai* is the one who is appealed to when times of injustice strike,<sup>53</sup> then where is *Shaddai* now?

Naomi appears to confront the character and compassion of God in direct force. She attacks God head-on with her open and raw lamentation. I too, found myself in Naomi's shoes, my lips moving as if they were hers. It was a time of intense grief and difficult days. The morning after I learned of the accidental, sudden, and tragic death of my mother and was deeply concerned about the health of my father, I cried out to God in lamentation. Citing the promise of Jesus that he has come to give abundant life and give it fully (Jn. 10:10), I cried out in deep lament that the life I was living was empty, not full.

This is the same cry of Naomi. Her fullness has turned to emptiness. It is as if she and the psalmist of Psalm 30 do not see eye to eye. For Naomi she feels as though God has turned her dancing to mourning, unclothed of her joy and put on her sackcloth. Her soul not silent but the expressions are of pain, not praise (Ps. 30:11-12). While there are plenty of occurrences when the psalmist does lament,<sup>54</sup> Psalm 30 is not one of those times.

Such is the same spirit that was expressed by Martha, the sister of Lazarus when Jesus finally arrives in Bethany after the death of Lazarus.<sup>55</sup> Here she questions the presence of God in the most direct way. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would

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<sup>53</sup> Hubbard cites Job 8:3; 24:1; 27:2.

<sup>54</sup> Ps 13 was used in this project curriculum as the Old Testament example of lamentation.

<sup>55</sup> John 11 was used in this project as the New Testament example of lamentation.

not have died” (Jn. 11:21). What does God do about the divine presence in the midst of human suffering and grief? As has been established through the *kerygma*, we understand that God enters the world of human suffering to suffer with humans. God brings redemption for humanity through humanity by becoming human. It is in this act of incarnation that God fully identifies with the human plight and is able to redeem from within.

God never leaves humanity alone. By the end of the story of Ruth, we read where the same women who welcomed a bitter Naomi into their better days are the same ones who praise God that Naomi has not been left without a kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 4:14). God has not left humanity without a human presence either. Jesus knows the pain and suffering death brings to the living. Having suffered the loss of his friend, Lazarus, and eventually allowing death to do to him what it does to every other human, God is well aware of the sufferings of humanity. God is more familiar with our stations in life than we often give credit for.

Paradoxically, the starting point for any discussion of death in the Old Testament is life itself. It is not just that death is the end of life, its ultimate and concluding event. Nor that death is the absence of life, the negative defined by the corresponding positive. It is primarily that life is one of the fundamental characteristics of Israel’s God and of her faith.<sup>56</sup>

This is the God who is worthy of worship. This is the God who enters the human suffering of life to bring about redemption. Worship brings the presence of God into daily living. If the God who knows the sufferings of humanity and is moved by them is present, then lamentation is, therefore, an act of worship. It was not seen as an act of faithlessness but of great piety in the eye of the biblical world.

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<sup>56</sup> Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 2002), 39.

Commentators are reticent to identify Martha's words here as complaint, seeing them only as an expression of regret and faith in Jesus as a healer. To overlook their edge of complaint, however, is to overlook the thoroughgoing Jewishness of Martha's remarks. Complaint belonged to the language of faith in Judaism (e.g., Psalms 4; 6; 13; 22) and does not cast doubts on Martha's piety.<sup>57</sup>

Expressions of lament are worship for the worshipper has a keen sense that God will do something to bring relief.

During the time of teaching on the subject of lamentation, participants of this project were urged to listen to the complaints of people and to enter into the worlds of suffering and pain and grief by engaging in lamentation. It was necessary to discuss our need as caregivers to want to "fix" problems when mourners express, rather than simply sit and listen. It is in the act of listening, not correcting, that we are able to bring the presence of the peace of God into the situation.

In the host of expressions incorporated into lamentation as worship are frustration, regret, and even anger. It can often be the case that the days surrounding the funeral, and at times even the funeral itself, are filled with such expressions. Caregivers should not be surprised at such expressions. When hearing these expressions, what should be remembered is that the voicing of these feelings can be an act of worship and should not necessarily be seen as asking the caregiver for an answer that he/she is not qualified to give. VanDuivendyk writes, "Frequently these emotions are expressed by asking 'Why?' If we are with someone who is asking the 'why' questions, don't conclude too quickly that the person expressing lament really wants an answer from us. In fact, there are no answers when it comes to the why of suffering."<sup>58</sup> Too often it seems to be the case with

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<sup>57</sup> Gail R. O'Day, *NIB* 9:688.

<sup>58</sup> Tim P. VanDuivendyk, *The Unwanted Gift of Grief* (New York: Haworth Pastoral Press, 2006), 66-67.



grief ministry that platitudes of bad theology are thrown at questions as a means of helping the caregiver deal with the uncomfortable situations surrounding grief. There are questions posed for which there are no answers at all, let alone answers that will suffice the longing and heal the pain experienced by those in grief. Therefore, “We may belittle them if in our response we try to give them an answer to the mystery of their loss. They may be thinking, ‘Who has the audacity to think he or she has an answer? Who has the audacity to think he or she can explain the unexplainable?’”<sup>59</sup> Questions of this nature are the result of being in relationship with the Creator God who is, in God’s way, present in the pain of suffering and loss.

It should also be noted that in the course of ministering with the bereaved, comparisons of loss should be avoided. For it is in the depths of lamentation that the danger of human comparison becomes a present reality. Fred Craddock implores the church by writing:

There is neither encouragement or effective exhortation in telling those who are suffering that others have suffered more, in telling those who are grieving that others have lost more, in telling the hungry that others have actually starved. Such spoutings produce feelings of guilt, shame, and anger – all of which are not only unproductive but also destructive of the faith that was already barely clinging to the altar.<sup>60</sup>

This is not the case for Ruth. She sits in quiet support with Naomi. While she is a fellow sufferer, she never compares her situation to that of Naomi. Could it be that Ruth somehow sensed that the God who brought bread to the breadless houses of Bethlehem would also restore Naomi’s busted and broken heart? Could it be that Ruth was aware of the fact that while *Shaddai* is almighty, this same God is YHWH, the God of the

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<sup>59</sup> VanDuiwendyk, *Unwanted Gift*, 67.

<sup>60</sup> Fred Craddock, *NIB* 12:83.

covenant? If so, then her service to Naomi is deeper than we could ever imagine. It comes from a place of resurrection.

We have seen how God is present in humanity through humanity. To take this a step further, we must realize that as followers of Jesus, the resurrected Messiah, we have the opportunity and privilege to be the presence of God in Jesus in this world. We bring the presence of God into the situations of life by listening to and engaging in the lamentations of others, joining them in lament. We also bring the presence of God into these same situations through acts of service. Service brings the heart of the living God into the present moments of pain. Service is the third aspect of congregational life explored in this project. To a fuller reflection on service we now turn.

***Diakonia: A Theological Reflection on Service in the Name of Jesus***

The theme of service to other human beings is woven into the fabric of the human story. From the earliest acts of the story of creation, we find that living in relationship with other humans is paramount. It becomes necessary for the inter-human relationship to function in terms of service to one another as a collaborative expression of the *imago Dei*. This is seen through the divine command in Genesis 1:28 as the Creator issues the command to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” This is a command for inter-human connectivity as the command is issued to “them.”

The command is one of fruitfulness and living out the vocation as the image bearer of God to the ends of bringing about life-giving results on the created earth. “This command, like others in Scripture, carries with it an implicit promise that God will enable

man to fulfill it.”<sup>61</sup> Humanity’s enabling to fulfill the command first comes from a properly ordered divine-human relationship. The canvas God has humanity that this vocation may be lived out is through the inter-human relationship. Therefore, service to one another brings the human vocation as the image bearer of God to life on the earth. The attempt to live out the human calling outside of the context of service to one another not only denies the initial calling, but does a disservice to the rest of creation for all of creation has been designed to co-operate as a means of giving glory to God.

When it comes to the narrative of grief and loss within this project, we find this same sense of inter-human connectivity and service at work. In the story of Ruth there are prime examples of how this is brought to life in new and fresh ways in order to bring about redemption. It is on the road to Bethlehem where the conversation of service comes sharply into focus.

Ruth’s decision to stay with Naomi becomes the turning point in the story. It is the living example of service to another human being. Though the vow of service and commitment have been heard, read, and spoken countless times, “they still tower as a majestic monument of faithfulness above the biblical landscape.”<sup>62</sup> The commitment Ruth makes to Naomi is one of stern service. Ruth makes the commitment to live the life Naomi will live in the land where she will live it, alongside of the people with whom she will live it, and in the presence of the God whom Naomi calls “the Almighty.” Regardless of what happens to Naomi, Ruth will enter the same fate. They will walk the road of widowhood together. While reading the book of Ruth through the lens of grief and

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<sup>61</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (WBC:1; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 33.

<sup>62</sup> Hubbard, *Ruth*, 117.

mourning, we must acknowledge various other readings as well. For it is here, this turning point in the story, when Ruth speaks for the first time in the narrative and is cast “in terms of solidarity with other women.”<sup>63</sup> The journey of widowhood is now something these two women have in common, something they share, binding them to one another as strong, yet vulnerable, females in the ancient world. Ruth, becomes a kind of heroine. “Without Ruth, Naomi would be a widow without support, without property (at least for all practical purposes), without a goal in life (“call me Marah, Bitter,” she says on her way back to Bethlehem.”<sup>64</sup>

The commitment from Ruth to Naomi has two sides to it. On the one hand, there is a social element. The places where Naomi goes, Ruth goes too. The people Naomi lives with, Ruth will live with them, too. Ruth is making a serious social leap from her Moabite homeland to the town of Bethlehem in Judah. Her commitment on a social level is not an easy one for her to make for she knows, though the customs may have varied slightly, that life for a widow is not going to be an easy road. Therefore, by living the life of widowhood together, they may have a stronger chance of survival. The risk from Ruth is great. “She took on the uncertain future of a bitter widow in a land where she knew no one, enjoyed few legal rights, and - given the Moabite-Israelite rivalry - faced possible ethnic prejudice. Such was the character of this young Moabite widow, a character to be emulated.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Eunny P. Lee, “Ruth.” Pages 142-149 in *Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 145.

<sup>64</sup> Andre LaCocque, *The Feminine Unconventional: Four Subversive Figures in Israel’s Tradition* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 99.

<sup>65</sup> Hubbard, *Ruth*, 118.

Widowhood was a new station in life for both Ruth and Naomi. Naomi will now return, though very bitter, to the land where she is from, to the familiar sights and surroundings of Bethlehem, while Ruth must navigate the new station in life in a new town and culture. As the narrative of life and death takes its toll on the members of the human race, and in the local congregation of Sandy Run, these new stations are assumed by those who have never done so before. Everything begins to look and feel different about life even when living in familiar territory socially. One may have the same friends, the same community, and the same congregation, but the new identity as “griever” or “mourner” or “widow” or “widower” muddies the waters of life to the point that it can become difficult to navigate.

Such social changes call for service from those who have committed to walk alongside those who grieve and mourn. In this project, participants were encouraged to reflect upon such changes in the lives of others. Two categories of service were presented to the participants: provisional service and protective service.

Provisional services assist in the completion of tasks that the individual may not know how to do, or how to have done for them. The new station in life known as grief can be complicated and convoluted. All of a sudden an individual is forced to take care of issues in daily life that he/she depended on another human being to do. In the context of this project, the example was used of a widow who needs to have her car serviced. She was married to her husband for sixty years. The marriage relationship was redefined upon his death six months ago. This is the first time she has had to have her car serviced since he died and he was the one who made sure these things were completed. He knew when it was time for the oil to be changed, for the tires to be rotated, and for the inspection to be

completed. Upon his death, his widow is pushed into a new social situation where she needs assistance in finding her way around the new landscape.

While the widow may take the vehicle to the same mechanic her husband did, *she* has never had to do this before. The goal of the bereavement ministry teams at Sandy Run Baptist Church is to step in during the weeks and months following the funeral to assist in situations such as these. Take for instance a deacon in the church who is a part of one of these teams. He approaches the recently widowed woman and offers to check her vehicle to see when the inspection is due, when the oil needs to be changed, and the like. As a result a bond is formed because he provided an area of service to her that she was not able to provide for herself.

Protective services include protecting the physical wellbeing of the bereaved through acts of hospitality. They protect the bereaved and help conserve energy, time, and effort that should be given to the task of grieving openly and honestly. Such acts include providing food for the family or helping to arrange lodging for out of town guests. These acts of service, and others like them, are designed to protect the bereaved at a critical junction in life. These acts are acts of daily living that call for energy, time, and effort, all of which are resources that are in limited supply during times of grief and loss. It is no secret that in the days surrounding the death and the funerary rituals, that griever and mourners are highly vulnerable. There are a lot of tasks that need to be accomplished in a short amount of time.

My mother died immediately in the Friday morning car accident, while my father lived eleven days following the accident. By the first evening, there were countless people in the hospital waiting room, each one on pins and needles to hear the report of the

condition of my father. While we were at a hospital an hour away from home, evening was moving quickly to night, the darkness became darker both outside and inside my own heart. During those hours, there were people, servants of God whom I am convinced were moved by the Holy Spirit, who came to me and Ronna offering to pay for a hotel room for the night. Since we were not prepared to stay because of clothing and other necessities, we opted to make the trek home. Then someone said, “Let me drive your car home. You just ride.”

The next eleven days were filled with servants bringing meals to our home, running errands on our behalf, and collecting money, and gift cards to gas stations and restaurants. All of these were gifts of protected service, as we did not have the resources of energy, time, or effort to give to these tasks. They were all simple tasks that I remember to this day. I recall that each night during our eleven-day stay in the hospital at the bedside of my father, there was a different group from our church coming to take Ronna and me out to eat. This simple act pulled us out of the artificially-lit hallways of the intensive care unit and out to the sidewalks of the city. There, on those sidewalks, we were able to catch a breath of fresh air and to take a break from the painful monotony of waiting in a hospital room. These were all ways of protecting us to help preserve and replenish the energy we had spent. When the time came for the funerals, Ronna and I lived an hour away from the town where the funerals would take place. It was Ronna’s parents this time who called to reserve rooms for us at the hotel, making sure we had a place to stay overnight following the visitation and before the funeral.

In the narrative of Ruth we see both of these elements at work in Ruth’s commitment to serve Naomi. She provides a critical element to their survival in the form

of income. After their return to Bethlehem from the journey out of Moab, Ruth realizes that the two of them will not survive on their own without some kind of employment. Therefore she says to Naomi, “Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain behind someone in whose sight I might find favor” (Ruth 2:2).

This is a significant move for Ruth. She is providing for Naomi as well as protecting her. Naomi responds with “Go, my daughter” (Ruth 2:2). Naomi does not mince words and does not play games. “Naomi’s response is as brief as possible; she seems still caught up in her grief and bitterness unable to take any step or assist with any plan for her own survival.”<sup>66</sup> The overwhelming and overbearing pressures of life in the land of widowhood are stronger than Naomi’s psychological understanding and desire to push forward in life. She is simply not capable of providing for herself, and coupled with the patriarchal, and often cruel, cultural milieu of the time, it is no wonder Naomi would rather stay at home. Such is often the case in situations within the church. It is easy to become overwhelmed with the pressures of life coupled with the raging sea of grief. To have someone who will come alongside and commit to serve in these capacities becomes crucial to the overall survival of the griever, and gives strength to the community around.

The other piece of Ruth’s commitment to service in the life of Naomi is one of a religious nature. Ruth commits that not only will Naomi not be left alone in the new place, but that “your God” will be “my God. Where you die, I will die – there will I be buried” (Ruth 1:16). The religious component is what gives true meaning to the social component as it provides the fuel for the task that lies ahead. Ruth’s religious commitment to Naomi should not be taken lightly. She is vowing to leave behind the

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<sup>66</sup> Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 39.



gods of the Moabites to embrace the God of Israel. Hubbard notes the surprising nature of this commitment from Ruth because she just heard “Naomi’s bitter indictment of her god in v. 13!”<sup>67</sup> Ruth is willing to embrace the God whom Israel worships as her God despite the fact that Naomi has blamed God for all of the calamity that has descended upon her life. In essence, Ruth is able to see the goodness and the חסד of God, as evidenced in the relief of famine (Ruth 1:6), as the holy identity of the God of Israel. Once again, there is the hope within Ruth that maybe the God who brought grain back to the house of bread will bring hope back to the hearts of these two widows.

All of this takes place within Ruth’s commitment to stay with Naomi. She makes the commitment that whatever happens to Naomi will happen to Ruth as well. Faith is restored as a result of this level of commitment to service and togetherness. In the end of the book of Ruth, the same women who ask if it is really Naomi who has returned from Moab are the same women who praise God for the birth of Obed announcing “Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a next-of-kin” (Ruth 4:14).

As the story is read, the reader understands that Boaz is the next of kin, the kinsman redeemer. Earlier in this theological reflection, the correlation between Boaz as the kinsman redeemer and the person of Jesus of Nazareth was made. However, the connection reaches even deeper into the human story through the people who will follow Jesus as disciples.

A whole new way of living life as a human being was launched with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Those who follow in Jesus name, are able to serve in the power of the resurrection. Every act of service, every deed of commitment, every

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<sup>67</sup> Hubbard, *Ruth*, 118.

breath of compassion, is infused with the life-giving, life-changing, and life-restoring power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is no act of service too small to be filled with this power and used to bring about hope and life in the midst of troubling times.

In the days that followed the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the church began to experience growth on a major scale. Persons were coming into the Christian faith by leaps and bounds. The number became so great that the Book of Acts records there was a segment of the community who was being overlooked in the daily service of food distribution. Acts 6:1-6 provides the details of Hellenist widows who were missing out on the service. Robert Wall refers to this service as “resurrection practice.”<sup>68</sup>

This is an appropriate description of service because it is enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead. Any act of service done in the power of the resurrection of Jesus, is true service. As we read through the book of Ruth, the *חסד* love of God becomes overwhelmingly obvious. It is this covenantal love of God that brings about relief from famine and the birth of a son. When Jesus steps onto the pages of human history, he is *חסד* made flesh to live among us. When Ruth makes the commitment to serve Naomi, it is because of the *חסד* of God at work in her life.

When the apostles see the need of overlooked widows, it is the love of God put into action that prompts them to look for ways to serve. To drive the point home even clearer, the ones being overlooked in this service are widows: those who have experienced the redefinition of the primary human relationship of marriage because of death. Therefore, when Beyer describes the adjective, *διακονεω*, as “any ‘discharge of

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<sup>68</sup> Robert W. Wall, *NIB* 10:111.

service' in genuine love," he is exactly right.<sup>69</sup> Service is the act of putting the love of God evidenced in the resurrection of Jesus into practice.

Nothing discussed in the above pages is possible in the context of solitude. Ruth takes place in the backyard of human living. Jesus walks among the people of his hometown. The apostles are invested in the lives of those who identify themselves as followers of the resurrected Messiah. The ministry opportunities for the bereavement ministry teams take place within the context of community, of inter-human relationships. It is in the everyday, ordinary, unexpected rhythm of human living that the ministry of resurrection practice is brought to life. This often-unpredictable rhythm of human living always involves other human beings, fellow mourners, who are living their lives in partnership with one another to tell the story of God's redemptive story of resurrection and hope.

***Koinonia: Living Inter-Humanly as the People of Jesus***

The inter-human relationship of community is at the forefront of creational living. As the divine command was given to the first humans to live in partnership with one another by serving one another that together they may accomplish the divine call of humanity, so the inter-human pattern of living has been carried forth through all generations into the present.

Every time a gathering of humans is present, the inter-human relationship as designed by the Creator is active. Though it may not be noticed, given voice, and even at times suppressed through various intra-human pursuits, the reality of the design remains.

Brueggemann writes:

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<sup>69</sup> Beyer, "διακονέω, διακονία, διάκονος" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 2:87.

On the one hand, humankind is a single entity. All human persons stand in solidarity before God. But on the other hand, humankind is a community, male and female. And none is the full image of God alone. Only in community of humankind is God reflected. God is, according to this bold affirmation, not mirrored as an individual but as a community.<sup>70</sup>

The first leg of the biblical and theological table upon which this project stands is *kerygma*. It is within the *kerygmatic* framework we find the relationship metaphor reaches beyond inter-human into inter-creational. As this already broad scope continues to broaden, we are reminded that the primary relationship is with the Creator. Therefore, Brueggemann is correct in describing multiple levels of relationships going on within the context of created life and order. This becomes increasingly clear through examination of the biblical narrative. For it is there on the pages of Holy Scripture where we find inter-human and inter-creational relationships fleshed out in the living of history. The context is through the relationship with the Creator.

The term *κοινωνία* is derived from the term *κοινός*. The basic definition of *κοινός* is “common.”<sup>71</sup> To have things in common is to share them equally. When the word *κοινωνία* surfaces in the New Testament it “denotes ‘participation,’ ‘fellowship,’ esp. with a close bond.”<sup>72</sup> The use of the term in patristic Greek incorporates the use of this term in a Trinitarian sense as God is in relationship with God’s self, as the God of self-relationship is in relationship with humanity, and as humanity is in relationship with one another.

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<sup>70</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 34.

<sup>71</sup> Hauck, “κοινός, κοινωνός, κοινωνέω, κοινωνία, συγκοινωνός, συγκοινωνέω, κοινωνικός.” in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 3:789.

<sup>72</sup> Hauck, *TDNT*, 3:798.

To engage in a fellowship of participation with the grieving is the ultimate goal of this project. If the human life is to be shared, then the pains of the human life are shared together as well. The biblical and theological rationale and the application of each leg of this table point to *κοινωνία* as the final piece that holds it all together. The book of Ruth becomes a template for biblical and theological reflection in this project and this particular narrative becomes central once again as we examine community.

Ruth makes the commitment of service to stay with Naomi through the living and telling of the story of redemption and the expression of lamentation. This relationship between the two of them is extremely important because of the essence of community itself. Throughout the biblical narrative this sharing of commonalities and commodities is an important aspect of inter-human relationships that reflect the divine-human relationship set forth at creation.

Through the narrative of the Old Testament, Mark Finney details three distinct and identifiable eras of the understanding community. They are “the early tribal period, the period of the monarchy, and the exilic period.”<sup>73</sup> While the storyline of the book of Ruth takes place “in the days when the judges ruled” (Ruth 1:1), between the first and second periods as identified by Finney, the dating of the writing itself is seen by many scholars and commentators to be post-exilic.<sup>74</sup> This post-exilic reading of the book of Ruth, I feel, strengthens the aspect of community within the context of grief and loss. If, in fact, Ruth is dated as a post-exilic writing, this places the story among a nation of

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<sup>73</sup> Finney, “Community,” *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville:Abingdon, 2006), 1:711.

<sup>74</sup> The works of Frederic Bush, Robert Hubbard, and Katharine Doob Sakenfeld in their respective commentaries of Ruth each provide ample support for this claim.

people who are themselves well-acquainted with the losses of life. Inhabitants of the community know the pain of being in a place – geographically, ethnically, religiously, and emotionally – where they do not belong and are out of place.

Assuming this post-exilic date for authorship of Ruth, and connecting it to the understanding of community, we must be clear as to what the post-exilic idea of community looked like. “The period of the exile and beyond saw the community attempting to preserve certain laws and traditions by codifying and narrating them into what would later become the *TANAKH*. At the same time a vital oral tradition began that would later be codified as the *MISHNAH* and Talmudic writings.”<sup>75</sup> An aspect of post-exilic life as a community of faithful Israelites included multiple commands against intermarriage with other ethnicities (Ez. 9-10; Neh. 10; 13).<sup>76</sup> Such commands are addressed in the book of Ruth as we learn the story of a Moabites who becomes grafted into the family tree of Israel to become the ancestor of King David, and thus of Messiah Jesus. Sakenfeld writes:

The viewpoint expressed in Ruth was interpreted as a polemic against the policies of Ezra and Nehemiah that required Jewish men to divorce their non-Jewish wives. A post-exilic date was further supported by the author’s need to explain an old custom and by differences between Ruth and earlier legal texts in their approaches to marriage and redemption rights.<sup>77</sup>

Through this interpretation of Ruth, the inter-human relationship shared by Naomi and Ruth is one that more closely aligns with the New Testament understanding of

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<sup>75</sup> Finney, “Community,” *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 1:711.

<sup>76</sup> Andre LaCocque takes this perspective of the outsider welcomed into the fold within the context of the post-exilic world and describes Ruth as “a politically subversive pamphlet.” *The Feminine Unconventional* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 100.

<sup>77</sup> Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 2.

community, which was not so easily accepted. “The major disjuncture for Christianity was predicated upon the belief that in Jesus the first disciples had received a revelation and experience of God’s messiah, and the call to establish a new community around *him* superseded that of normative kinship or ethnic ties (Luke 12:49-53).”<sup>78</sup>

What kinds of community and relationships are seen in the book of Ruth that warrant such strong language used? Furthermore, how do the relationships exhibited within the book of Ruth carry forward into the present discussion and reflection on ministry with the bereaved? Exemplified in the book of Ruth is the commitment of inter-human relationships that are bound together in the *hesed* love of the Creator. The commonalities shared between the characters in the story of Ruth is what draws us to the understanding of Ruth as an exemplar of community functioning as a template for bereavement ministry teams at Sandy Run.

The commonalities between Naomi and Ruth surface early in the text as Ruth becomes the daughter-in-law of Naomi (Ruth 1:4). This takes place after Naomi’s husband, Elimelech, has died (Ruth 1:4). Naomi’s status in the story has changed twice already as she has moved from Bethlehem to Moab (Ruth 1:1), now making her a foreigner, and her husband has died making her a widow. With these changes in view it is clear that the inter-human relationships Naomi has known have changed. She is no longer in her hometown and she is left without her husband leaving her vulnerable and broken. To complicate the situation even further, the relationships she shared with her sons

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<sup>78</sup> Finney, “Community,” *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* 1:712. Emphasis added to underscore the building around the relationship with a common person.

changes as well. “The shift from ‘his sons’ (vv. 1, 2) to *her sons* signals the shift of parental claim and responsibility from the dead father to the living mother.”<sup>79</sup>

Naomi’s status changes again when the daughters-in-law come into the picture. There is now hope as the sons take wives, though they are Moabite wives. The hope is that the family line will, indeed continue. As the plot thickens with the deaths of the sons of Naomi, we notice more redefinitions of inter-human relationships. “With the mention of the marriages comes the expectation of the continuation of the family and assimilation into the Moabite community. But ten years of infertility pass, after which the two sons die.”<sup>80</sup>

The commonalities are greater now. Naomi and Ruth have both lost their husbands. Naomi has lost her sons and Ruth has lost the potential for sons. The commonalities of losses seem to be never-ending. The only difference in the two in this early scene is that Naomi is a foreigner and Ruth is not. However, that too is about to change. When they hear that YHWH has given them food, the decision is made to return to Bethlehem. It is in Bethlehem where Ruth will be the foreigner and Naomi the native.

Upon arrival in Bethlehem the two of them now have all things in common. They both have been aliens in a foreign land. They both are widows. They both are childless. They both are facing what Nielsen describes as a “crisis (that) appears “all encompassing.”<sup>81</sup> When considering the reality that *κοινωνία* refers to sharing

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<sup>79</sup> Hubbard, *Ruth*, 92.

<sup>80</sup> Nielsen, *Ruth*, 44.

<sup>81</sup> Nielsen, *Ruth*, 44.



commonalities, it is very clear to see that what Naomi and Ruth share is a set of commonalities that are in desperate need of redemption.

They become community for one another. They become support for one another. Their inter-human relationship is brought into an ever closer and tighter bond. They share in one another's sufferings as they are forced to face life together. As two childless widows their chances of survival become stronger if they remain close to one another since the ancient world was very unkind to widows, especially childless widows.<sup>82</sup> To make it even more complicated and risky, Ruth is an outsider, a foreigner. Her chances of survival are slim on her own because of this fact. Therefore, Ruth needs Naomi as much as Naomi needs Ruth. They share a common need along with their common hurts.

As I looked around the room during the teaching sessions of this project, I saw the same thing. I saw widows who had also lost children. I saw adults who had been forced to say goodbye to parents all too soon. There were in this room living stories of people who had encountered the sting of death. There were parents whose children died of cancer and others whose children died accidentally. There were widows whose husbands died of natural causes and by suicide. There were adults whose parents died of cancer and others who lost siblings to cancer. Though there were differences in our stories, the common traits remained the same: we all experienced the deathly redefinition of important inter-human relationships.

We were assembled in this room discussing tools for survival. How will we face life in this foreign land we call "grief?" What will we do? How will we move forward? *Will* we move forward? In the early days of grief these questions are screaming to be

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<sup>82</sup> Nielsen, *Ruth*, 43.

answered. This makes the need for a community of commonalities all the more important. Just as it was true the Ruth and Naomi had a greater chance of survival if they stayed together, so we today have a greater chance for survival if we stick together.

In the togetherness of community we are able to “bear with one another in love” (Eph. 4:2) and to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2). It is in the sharing of the commonalities of broken lives that we “fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). As one who has spent time in the valley of the shadow of death, had it not been for the community around me, I would have been lost. In fact, I am not sure survival would have been an option had people not committed to surround my wife and me during these dark and trying times. The community, having things in common with one another such as losses and deaths, creates a unique bond that is not easily severed.

What we see unfolding in the book of Ruth is what Finney describes community in the New Testament. It is a gathering of people around one person and the ties that bind the individuals into a community are much deeper and stronger than ethnicity and race. It becomes a common bond of brokenness and hurt that finds redemption and recreation in the presence of Jesus, the Messiah. Those who are outsiders are brought inside the community and are seen as being valuable not because of what can be contributed, but because of what is in common.

As an outsider, a foreigner from Moab, Ruth knows this pressure full well. She has nothing to bring to the table except herself. She brings to Bethlehem a life of hurt and pain and brokenness and a heart filled with grief. This is just where Naomi is as well. She left Bethlehem full and has returned empty. Not only is she empty, but Ruth is empty as

well. The community they experience together is strengthened when one man enters the scene.

Boaz is a relative of Elimelech from Bethlehem and is introduced into the story as soon as the women arrive in Bethlehem. It happens to be the fields of Boaz where Ruth goes to glean. When Naomi receives word of where Ruth went to work, she is ecstatic because “the man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin.”<sup>83</sup> At any point in this narrative, Naomi could have said that Boaz was one of *her* relatives. However, she chose to include Ruth in the statement because of the building of community. This is significant because it symbolizes the outsider coming inside the fellowship of community. Boaz will be as important to Ruth as Boaz is to Naomi.

Naomi refers to Boaz as a גֹּהֵל. The term is one rich in legal use and reaches far into the social construct of ancient Israelite life. In times of severe need, such as in the purchase of land in order to keep it within the clan, to redeem members of the family from situations of forced slavery and other duties, the גֹּהֵל stepped forward to see to that all was made right and that life could be settled once again. When the writer uses the term גֹּהֵל to describe the commonality between Boaz and Naomi, the reader is left to wonder how this particular person will bring about such relief.

The balance of the book of Ruth builds on this anticipation surrounding Boaz. He becomes the common connection and those who are empty and grieving are brought to fullness of life because of his generosity and the הוֹדֵד of God moving through him. In so many instances, those who are grieving the loss of a loved one feel very much like an outsider. Nothing around the person seems to fit where it once did. The daily tasks of

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<sup>83</sup> Ruth 2:20

living are complicated by the absence of this relationship. In many ways, grievors can feel like Ruth and are in need of community to be around them.

In the account of Ruth and Naomi, there is a community that surrounds the griever, cares for the griever, and commits to walk with the griever so that the griever is not alone. The activity of God as Creator can be most clearly seen here. God, as Creator, interacts with a fallen and suffering creation by himself embracing the forces of death as a means of bringing about life. God relates and connects with the broken creation as by becoming part of creation in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. God has made the eternal commitment to carry creation through times of loss, to be alongside of creation, and to mourn within creation.

It was the sharing of the common hurt that led to the redemption of Ruth and Naomi by the end of the story. The redemption was centered upon one man, Boaz. When we look at the life of the Christian Church in the post-Easter era, all of our community is built around one person, the resurrected Christ Jesus. In the life of the early church this was certainly the case. Acts 2:42-45 includes the term *κοινωνία* in the description of how the early Christian church functioned as a community. Such an enterprise is not entered into without the cohesive binding agent of the Holy Spirit. As the church is getting on her feet in this scene early in the book of Acts, it is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that true community can take place.

This *koinonia* cannot be some merely warm-hearted *animorum Concordia*, human-initiated brotherly and sisterly love. It is a fellowship that produces astounding “wonders and signs” (2:43), not the least of which was that “all who believed were together and had all things in common,” selling their possessions and distributing them to all (2:44-45).<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> William H. Willimon, *Acts* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1988), 40.

The binding agent is the presence of the Holy Spirit, the same spirit that raised Christ from the dead (Rom. 8:11). This Spirit was at work in and through the church to bring into living life the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It is only in the power of the resurrection that the church is able to be the community of hope she has always been intended to be.

In the book of Ruth the binding agent is the same spirit for it is the same God. The God who gives bread to the hungry is the God who raises Jesus from the dead. This is the same God who sends the power of the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who was the active agent in raising Jesus from the dead, to empower the church to engage in the resurrection practice of daily living in the context of inter-human relationships.

When Luke describes the church as having “all things in common” this could include the failed hopes of life and the deep wounds of the heart. There was, no doubt, the presence of grief as those who were seeking to follow Jesus as the resurrected Messiah were forced to bid farewell to loved ones. As was made clear in the section on *kerygma*, the Creator chooses to enter the human story by becoming human. In so doing, there is the establishment of a commonality, the building of a community of hope that God has come among us.

We share losses and griefs as we assemble together and commit to life together. The commonality is built around the central hope that God has come in Christ Jesus, that redemption of our losses is here and we are able to give hope to one another. As has been emphasized on multiple occasions and through multiple aspects, God is the Creator of all life. God is also the one who recreates the created world that has been marred and scarred by death. God has both begun and completed the work of recreation through the person

and work of Jesus of Nazareth by raising him from the dead. Therefore those who participate in the resurrection of Jesus are given a new hope, a hope that has existed from the foundations of the earth as it is rooted in the God who both creates and recreates, for living life in the midst of painful death. When those who enter into this covenantal bond of resurrection are bound to one another through *κοινωνία* God's work of recreation is launched once again.

Very early in his exploration of the vast, numerous, and intricate relationships within creation, Terence E. Fretheim introduces the reader to the concept of the creative work of God continuing into creation:

While creation may entail *preservation* in the broadest sense of the term, that word can be misleading, as if it had the sense of preserving creation just as it was “in the beginning” (a “finished product”). Continuing creation cannot be restricted to that understanding; it also refers to the development of the creation through time and space, to the emergence of genuinely new realities in an increasingly complex world. God's continuing creative work is both preserving and innovative.<sup>85</sup>

The new and innovative expression of the continued work of creation by God is through the blessedness of a *κοινωνία* established through the resurrection practice of the disciples of Jesus, the Creator bound in creation.

When we, the church, grasp the breadth and depth of such a reality as being birthed within us and through us by the continued work of the Creator, we will see a truly innovative *κοινωνία* emerge. While it is in no means possible for such a reality to be brought to completion through a six-week curriculum on grief, it is my hope that this contribution awakens participants to the possibilities that waits when we bind ourselves to one another to see the new life of *κοινωνία* truly renew our world.

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<sup>85</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *God World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2005), 7.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CRITICAL EVALUATION

A project of this magnitude is accompanied and measured by various instruments to gauge the learning and growth of participants. The six-week curriculum at the center of this project included participants from the congregation at Sandy Run Baptist Church on three different levels. The three groups featured in this project are: (1) the congregation of Sandy Run Baptist Church as a whole, (2) weekly participants who were invited to participate during the teaching sessions on Sunday evenings, and (3) the group of widows who afforded their presence and shared their experiences with the curriculum participants. The pages that follow present a detailed critical evaluation of the entire project. The evaluation will cover three major themes in the project: procedure, overall growth, and week-to-week analysis of the teaching curriculum.

#### **Evaluation of Project Procedure**

The weekly participants in the curriculum were individuals I selected from the congregation. Each of them received a letter (Appendix 4) informing them of the project, the methods of research, and the start date. Further instructions on how to commit to the project were included. The process for choosing individuals to participate in the project followed several criteria. Since the curriculum would be taught on Sunday evenings during the regularly scheduled worship hour, I selected individuals who were regular in attendance for Sunday evening worship. Second, I was very intentional in selecting

individuals whom I had observed as already active in the ongoing ministry of the church. Third, these individuals were selected from each adult Sunday School class as a means of ensuring a diverse range of ages and life experiences. Out of the twenty who received letters, sixteen responded to confirm participation and then received a participant number from the church secretary by which their responses to surveys and theological reflections could be tracked.

Evaluation of this piece of the research should include the learning that took place for me personally. The letter did not specify that only twenty letters were sent out. As I reflect on the process of this project, it might have been helpful to spell out such details in the letter. While there is no guarantee, it is possible that the lack of such information could have led to invitees to believe this was sent to the whole congregation and, thus, there would be plenty of other people to participate in the research. To some degree, this could employ the bystander effect on the research conducted during this project.

The selection of the third group, the widows, was also intentional. I selected four women from the congregation who each have been widowed, one of whom has been widowed twice. Two of these widows have also each lost an adult child. These women were selected according to similar criteria used to select the curriculum participants.

They are each active in the weekly gatherings on Sunday mornings and are committed to the life and flow of the congregation. Out of these four, I have conducted funerals for one husband and one son while another widow lost her husband since I have been pastor of Sandy Run (but I did not participate in leading his funeral). At the time of his death, the couple was not involved in church at Sandy Run, though they were many years prior. For this widow and for one other who was not active at the time of the death



of her husband, it was the response of the congregation in ministry to the situation of grief that brought these widows back into the flock of Sandy Run. Since the deaths of their husbands, they have been faithful and active in the ministry of the congregation.

Each of the four widows received a letter tailored to their situation and detailing their involvement in the project (Appendix 5). As with the letters to the participants of the curriculum, I did not specify that only four were asked to participate on this level. Therefore, the same bystander effect could be used to explain why only two of them agreed to commit to their role in the project.

During the six-week curriculum, pre- and post-session surveys were used to collect quantitative data (Appendices 6, 9, 11, 16, 18, 22). The structure of the curriculum was to use the odd numbered sessions (1, 3, 5) to explore the biblical and theological foundations for each of the supportive legs of congregational life (*kerygma*, *leitourgia*, *diakonia*, *koinonia*). The even numbered sessions (2, 4, 6) built upon the biblical and theological foundations and introduced clinical aspects of grief ministry as a means of applying what was learned in the previous session.

These pre- and post- session surveys had two sets of questions. The first set included questions that appeared at the beginning of every survey for every session. Such questions were intended to measure the continual growth of the idea that the church should be involved in grief ministry. The second set of questions was specific to the material covered in the sessions at hand.<sup>86</sup> Each survey used a Likert scale from 1-5 (1=low; 5=high) to collect responses.

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<sup>86</sup> “A” surveys were distributed at the beginning of odd numbered sessions and covered the material to be presented during the odd and even numbered session. “B” surveys were distributed at the end of the even numbered sessions and covered material presented in both sessions. “C” surveys were distributed at the end of odd numbered sessions and included evaluative questions on my teaching.

At the end of each even numbered session, a theological reflection was distributed to each participant (Appendices 10, 17, 24). Each participant was asked to integrate the material covered into his/her own story of grief and to explore how the information covered could or could not be helpful when ministering to those who are grieving. These reflections were collected at the next session. The collection of such reflections constitutes part of the qualitative data used for this project. I took time following each session to personally and pastorally reflect on the teaching. In my reflections I was able to recall some of the elements of the sessions that, while anecdotal, constitute further qualitative data. What follows is a critical evaluation of all of this collected data.

### **Overall Growth**

The congregation at large was surveyed on Sunday, August 23, 2015. This pre-project survey was designed to gauge the current efficacy of the ministry of Sandy Run to those who are bereaved. Questions on this survey asked specifically about membership, length of membership, if one had lost a loved one in the last five years, and other important questions. It was my hypothesis that if the congregation began to take part ownership in the pastoral care to the bereaved, there would be a remarkable increase in the overall efficacy of ministry to the bereaved. When the ministry to the bereaved is left solely to the clergy, the clergy can easily become overwhelmed and rendered ineffective. One of the most important questions asked on this survey centered upon the response of the pastor during these times of loss. On a scale of 1-5 (1=low, 5=high), the average response was 4.63 (standard deviation = 0.93). This question was asked to give weight to the necessity of members of the congregation ministering to one another. The post-project survey was distributed to the entire congregation on Sunday, October 25, 2015.

When the same question was asked about the response of the pastor, the average response was 4.77 (standard deviation 0.68). The change was statistically insignificant ( $p=0.31$ ) therefore it is difficult to know why this response increased. The variables may include but are not limited to those in attendance in worship to take each survey and the reality that participants in the curriculum were allowed to take these surveys as well.

A second important question on both of these surveys dealt with how important it is for members of Sandy Run to minister to one another during times of grief and loss. The pre-project survey brought in an average response of 4.86 (standard deviation = 0.47) while the post-project survey displayed an average result of 4.93 (standard deviation = 0.25). This, too, presents an increase that is not statistically significant ( $p=0.2$ ). The variables that may affect the question about the response of the pastor are the same variables that affect this question as well.

The third question of great importance on the pre- and post-project surveys was the perception of the congregation regarding the overall efficacy of the ministry of Sandy Run to the bereaved. Results from the pre-project survey averaged 4.6 (standard deviation = 0.6) while the post-project survey average decreased to 4.5 (standard deviation = 0.6). The change is statistically insignificant ( $p=0.2$ ) and is complicated by the same variables that constituted the insignificance in the aforementioned questions.

One final question worth considering appeared only on the post-project survey. This question was designed to gauge the perception of the congregation on any difference made in the efficacy of Sandy Run's ministry to the bereaved. The question resulted in an average response of 4.2 (standard deviation = 0.8). Upon reflection on this question, I should have been much more specific in terms of what kind of change I was looking for

an over what period of time. The congregational perspective of the project could appear to be statistically insignificant and show forth no genuine growth worth discussing. However, the congregation at large was only one of three groups to measure the efficacy of this project. It is important to examine the overall growth of the project participants who were present for and engaged in the week-to-week curriculum sessions.

The directional hypothesis of this project is that I expected to see significant growth and change from beginning to end of the curriculum in several areas of grief ministry through the congregation. I expected to see participants grow in terms of understanding the importance of the congregation's role in ministry to the bereaved. The second area where I expected to see significant growth was in the confidence of the participants to step into a situation involving grief to offer support and a ministry presence.

Each week participants were given pre- and post-session surveys with two tiers of questions. The first tier of questions appeared on every survey for every session and are hereafter referred to as tier one questions. A T-Test was used to compare the beginning and the end of the curriculum in these two areas of predicted growth. During the evaluation I compared surveys from week to week and there was no significant growth. In fact, the p-value was incredibly high and did not show any statistical significance to the changes that were made. The average response to the question on the importance of the role of the congregation in grief ministry on session one was 4.7 (standard deviation = 0.6) while the mean reported on the same question at the end of session six was 5 (standard deviation = 0). Even though the sample size is small, the increase is statistically significant ( $p = .05$ ).

The same comparison was made on the mean of the confidence of participants from week one to week six. When asked during in the pre-session survey on week one about the level of confidence in stepping into a situation where grief ministry was needed of each participant, the mean reported was 3 (standard deviation = 0.9). According to my directional hypothesis, I predicted confidence would increase among participants during the teaching sessions. This hypothesis was accurate as proven by the mean from the same question asked at the end of session six was 3.62 (standard deviation 0.7). Again, though the sample size was small, the increase is statistically significant ( $p = .03$ ).

These overall statistical observations confirm and support my directional hypothesis with a high level of confidence and validity to the results. The role of the church in ministering to those who are grieving, I feel is critical to the overall health of the individual, and to the forward movement and community building of the congregation. However, while the importance may be strong, and everyone agrees the presence of the congregation is important, it does not ensure that members of the congregation are confident in being present. Following this six-week curriculum on grief ministry, the acceptance of the important role the congregation plays in grief increased along with the confidence level of participants. This research suggests that the teaching helped increase the importance *and* increase the confidence. As the curriculum continued from week to week, participants became more aware of and more skilled in this all-important ministry.

The critical evaluation now must turn to the week-to-week observations and the increase in understanding and practice. This portion of evaluation will include quantitative data from surveys along with qualitative data from reflections.

### Critical Evaluation of Sessions One and Two

The first session of the curriculum included teaching on *kerygma* and *leitourgia* from a biblical and theological perspective. Together we explored biblical texts that speak to creation, death, resurrection, and worship and how each of these biblical and theological concepts relates to grief and grief ministry. Each of these terms and the concepts that rest behind them are familiar to most frequent churchgoers. However, there is a significant difference in the familiarity with and understanding of the terms and concepts and being able to articulate what the Scriptures have to say about them.

In comparing the pre- and post- session surveys dealing with these concepts, it became clear that growth and learning took place. In the pre-session survey, each participant was asked to identify his/her level of understanding in what the bible had to say about creation. Using a scale Likert scale of 1-5 (1=low; 5=high), the average response was 3.62 (standard deviation = 0.9). When the same question was asked on the post-session survey at the conclusion of session two (after the biblical/theological *and* clinical material had been covered) the average response was 3.94 (standard deviation = 0.8). These results indicate there was a level of growth and learning that took place between these two sessions but the growth was not statistically significant ( $p=0.2$ ).

This can be attributed to several variables. The first variable to consider when interpreting this quantitative data is the number of participants. There were thirteen responses on the pre-session survey and sixteen on the post-session survey. The number of participants was too low to provide a pool of data large enough to see any statistical significance. The other variable to consider in this interpretation is the use of the likert scale as the scale itself was too narrow. What became increasingly clear throughout the

course of project implementation I came to realize that participants did not have enough room to gauge their level of growth and learning and to indicate such on between the pre- and post-session surveys.<sup>87</sup>

While the quantitative data revealed growth and learning that was statistically insignificant, the qualitative data told a completely different story. At the end of the second session a theological reflection was distributed to participants (Appendix 10). Participants were asked to return this reflection the following week. A total of twelve reflections were collected the following week. Each of these twelve reflections give insight into the quality of growth and learning that took place. One participant wrote:

The past two sessions have been very informing about the larger story of God's redeeming purpose through creation to restore creation's proper place of full relationship with God. This larger story has its deep roots in life, death, and resurrection. Each of these have such large and inescapable foundations in our "existence" that when fully confronted with them we become overwhelmed in all three. I see that in only understanding the larger picture and diving into the pillars of creation can come to a stronger understanding of each individual.<sup>88</sup>

Another wrote:

It was also interesting to look at creation and to tie the beginning of all life and then to look at the end of life. Many times people don't look at the beginning of life when trying to discuss the end of life. But it is key to see that the God who created all is the God who is in control of all. He is also the God who comforts and brings peace to all.<sup>89</sup>

While these reflections were deep and meaningful in their own right, and they certainly conveyed the quality of growth and learning that took place, it should also be mentioned that individuals became more confident in their ability to translate these

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<sup>87</sup> This observation is across the board through the project. Therefore, this observation will be noted only here. There is no reason to restate this observation in further sections of this evaluation.

<sup>88</sup> Participant 19.

<sup>89</sup> Participant 37.

biblical and theological concepts to those who are grieving. For example, one participant responded with:

When we talk about grieving to someone we should be prepared to help them cope with and understand their emotions through the grieving process. In the early stages one of our first reactions may be that of shock and disbelief. Denying the reality is a normal response to the unwelcome news that your loved one has died. Grief is a part of (the) human story.<sup>90</sup>

Another participant who indicated on the pre-session survey the level of importance in ministering to one another in grief a 5 and his/her confidence level at 3, responded the very same way on the post-session survey. However, this same participant begins his/her theological reflection after the second session by writing, “The material covered the past two weeks has been helpful. I do not feel quite as ignorant as I did when the class began. I know each session will help to enlighten even more.”<sup>91</sup>

This qualitative data was further reinforced during the teaching sessions themselves. As was stated earlier in this report, I wrote my own reflection following each session, doing my best to capture the essence of the spirit in the classroom. Each reflection was written within an hour of the conclusion of the session. My own reflections of these two sessions revealed the same quality of learning and growth as is evidenced in the data interpreted above.

Reflection upon the first session was as follows:

The discussion was lively and participants very engaged. The highlight of the session for me was toward the middle of the session. I was teaching the theology of resurrection and connecting the dots between the first creation in Genesis 1 and the narrative of new creation in John 20. One of the participants (with a number) spoke up and said with great surprise and enlightenment, “Andrew, why have I never heard any of this before?” My response was, “I don’t know why you’ve

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<sup>90</sup> Participant 23.

<sup>91</sup> Participant 13.



never heard this before. I am deeply saddened to hear that this has not been taught. But I am thankful you are learning it now.”<sup>92</sup>

After the second session, which included a presentation from Eric Bester from Clay-Barnette Funeral Home in Shelby, North Carolina, I wrote:

A highlight from the session was when a woman approached me afterward – not a participant with a number – and said how helpful this study was for her personally. Her mother died nearly three years ago and she is still struggling with the loss. She shared how much this time studying together was bringing her great comfort as she continues to work through her own grief.

Another interesting piece to the life of the congregation and the impact this project had, even in the early weeks of implementation, was that the Monday following the second session, the brother of an active church member and participant in the project died. His brother at one time was a member of Sandy Run Baptist Church but as a young adult moved to South Carolina. The participant called me the morning of his brother’s death. I went to his home to spend time with him. He made the statement how odd it was to be learning about grief and then to have this happen. He further stated that what we had been covering had become very helpful very fast. To top it off, three other church members (all numbered participants) made significant contact with him. A husband and his wife went to his home to visit the day of the death. Another called and the two talked at length about the situation. Such contact would likely have taken place regardless of the project, but I hope the project has helped strengthen this ministry.

### **Critical Evaluation of Sessions Three and Four**

During sessions three and four the subject matter was *diakonia*. The format was the same as the previous two sessions as session three covered the biblical and

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<sup>92</sup> Each citation from my personal reflection is pulled from a running Word document saved on my computer hard drive.

theological concept of *diakonia* as service while session four explored clinical avenues to bring *diakonia* to life within the ministry to the bereaved.

Critical evaluation of these sessions begins with the same caveats as mentioned in the critical evaluation for sessions one and two. Namely the number of participants was low and from session three to session four I expected no statistically significant growth and learning to take place. Session three brought in seventeen pre-session surveys from numbered participants while session four involved eighteen numbered participants.

Basing our understanding of *diakonia* out of the definition cited above, the correlation was to be made connecting *diakonia* and love. When asked to rate the correlation between *diakonia* and love before the funeral in the pre-session survey, the average response was 4.4 (standard deviation 0.8) on the five-point Likert scale. When the same question was asked at the conclusion of session four, the average response was 4.6 (standard deviation = 0.8). Therefore, while the average response increased, the change is not statistically significant ( $p=0.1$ ).

Another aspect of the curriculum involved the correlation between *diakonia* and the Holy Spirit. When asked this question on the pre-session survey the average response was 4.65 (standard deviation = 0.6) while the same question asked at the end of session four produced an average response of 4.72 (standard deviation = 0.7). The growth displayed here is so slight and minimal that it produced results that were statistically insignificant ( $p=0.4$ ). Upon first glance at these statistical results, it would appear that the level of growth and learning was minimal and ineffective.

However, as with sessions one and two, the qualitative evaluation of sessions three and four tell a different story. At the conclusion of session four, theological

reflection two was distributed (Appendix 17). These reflections were submitted the following week (at the beginning of session five). Though a total of ten reflections were submitted, the growth and learning that took place in and among these participants was highly significant.

One numbered participant begins his/her theological reflection by writing, “Service for the grieving is not just for the pastor to provide, it is the entire church’s responsibility.”<sup>93</sup> This same participant concludes his/her reflection by writing, “Pastoral care can’t be replaced but it can be greatly (enhanced). I believe this study has identified a great need for our church, especially identifying these needs after the funeral.” These words alone help to solidify the meeting of the directional hypothesis stated in this project: if the members of the congregation were to walk through a curriculum focused on ministry to the bereaved through both biblical/theological perspectives as well as clinical perspectives, the pastoral care offered to the congregation would be greatly enhanced as the members of the congregation would be involved in caring for one another.

Another aspect of my directional hypothesis was that many members of the church feel that ministry to the bereaved involves grand, big, and heavy acts of service, almost as though one must be clinically and highly-trained in order to provide any sense of support and ministry to the bereaved. This was addressed by one participant who responded on his/her second theological reflection by writing:

These sessions have made me realize it could be very small acts of service (that) could mean a lot to a person during a time of grief. Many times we tell the person, “Call me if you need me to do anything.” But it is not likely that they will call us.

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<sup>93</sup> Participant 31.

But, that gets us off the hook I guess; but we need to just go on and do some act of service. It might be that we don't need to do anything but just be there.<sup>94</sup>

In conclusion, this participant wrote, “These sessions have been good and made me stop and think. I hope it will make me a better friend in a time of loss and grief. Sometimes it is the small things that mean the most.”

By session four, I wanted to make clear to participants that the overall goal was to put the teaching into practice. This is not just a theoretical curriculum but should also be highly pragmatic. At the end of session four, I had the large group break off into three smaller groups. Each group was then given a case study (Appendix 15). The instructions were to discuss the case study using the material that was covered in the previous four sessions as a means of beginning to hang the flesh of pragmatism onto the skeleton of theory. Even though each case study was different, each group was presented with the same set of questions and discussion starters. The questions were as follows:

- Story of relationship – what kind of relationship?
- Story of death – the death surround – NASH – (Natural; Accidental; Suicidal; Homicidal)?
- Ways to help express worship?
- Think theologically about the WHY question in the context of the story.
- Ways to offer protective service?
- Ways to offer provisional service?

Following the session, my personal reflection centered primarily on this teaching and learning exercise. I wrote how “I was very impressed with the level of critical thinking coming from the groups. One group shared just how far a death reaches in impacting the lives around them. I can say that this project has been a major success – I can clearly see bereavement ministry teams forming from this group!”

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<sup>94</sup> Participant 13.

By the time the project was two-thirds finished, the qualitative response and data was overwhelmingly positive. Though the number of participants remained small and the quantitative data from week to week was statistically insignificant, the qualitative impact of the project was major.

### **Critical Evaluation of Sessions Five and Six**

The final two sessions of the curriculum were focused on the element of congregational life that holds the entire project together: *koinonia*. *Koinonia* is the living out of the relationships of creation and does the Creator God establish the pursuit of the rebuilding of relational order as. Moving into these final sessions, I was excited to see how the entire project would conclude and what quantitative and qualitative results would be shared.

Session five returned fifteen pre-session surveys from numbered participants while session six returned thirteen post-session surveys. One surprising piece of quantitative data from the pre-session survey is the average response on the definition of *koinonia*. While other terms seemed to be unknown on the pre-session survey, 73% of respondents indicated familiarity with the term *koinonia*.<sup>95</sup> This is in comparison to 0% for *kerygma* and *leitourgia*<sup>96</sup> and 14% for *diakonia*.<sup>97</sup> These results are surprising to me

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<sup>95</sup> 100% of respondents on the post-survey for *koinonia* responded that they were familiar with the term *koinonia*.

<sup>96</sup> 100% of respondents on the post-survey responded that they were familiar with the terms *kerygma* and *leitourgia*.

<sup>97</sup> 88% of respondents on the post-survey responded that they were familiar with the term *diakonia*. There were two participants who indicated on the post-survey that they were not familiar with the term *diakonia*. One of these two was present at for the first session (biblical/theological) on *diakonia* and was unfamiliar with the term after both sessions while the other participant was not present for the first session on *diakonia*.

in several ways and I do not have an answer for why the term *koinonia* was known to the respondents.

As was the case with *diakonia*, an approach to teaching the material was to connect it with love as an expression of love. When asked on the pre-session survey about the correlation between *koinonia* and love, the average response was 4.6 and when the same question was asked on the post-session survey, the average response was 4.38. While this shows a drop in response, it is a statistically insignificant drop ( $p=0.2$ ). This drop is a surprise to me, as further quantitative data shows that my definition of *koinonia* was clear and my lesson plan seemed to be clearly organized.<sup>98</sup>

As is detailed earlier in this report, the overall goal of the project was to provide practical tools to members of the congregation in dealing with the subject of grief and loss with other members of the congregation. Since we are one community, I felt it important to break the large group into two smaller groups to allow time to discuss the material with the widow. The objective of this exercise was three-fold: (1) to bring the concepts we have discussed into an actual conversation with someone who has experienced loss; (2) to enhance the level of *koinonia* among the participants of the project; (3) to gauge from the participants and from the widows to see if bereavement ministry teams of this nature would be a beneficial addition to the congregational life of Sandy Run Baptist Church.

When asked in session five if it would be helpful to meet with a widow, the average response from participants was 4.7 (standard deviation = 0.5). The same question

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<sup>98</sup> When asked at the end of session five about the clarity of my definition of *koinonia*, the average response was 4.9. The same question asked at the end of session six brought an average response of 5. When asked at the end of session five about the organization of my lesson plan, the average response was 5 and at the end of session six the same question averaged 5.

was asked in retrospect at the conclusion of session six was also 4.7 (standard deviation = 0.7). Since the results neither increased or decreased, it is necessary to ask examine the response of the widows on the same question. Two widows agreed to participate in this capacity in the project and when asked if this would have been a helpful approach to them in the early days of their journey of grief, the average response was 5. When the widows were asked if this ministry should be introduced into the congregational life of Sandy Run Baptist Church, the average response was 5. While two widows out of the entire congregation does not constitute a true cross-section of the congregation as a whole, it appears these widows benefited greatly from being able to talk to someone about the issues of grief they have experienced.

As has been the case with the previous evaluations of sessions, the qualitative data collected from sessions five and six tells a strong story of growth and learning. At the conclusion of session six a third and final theological reflection was distributed. With this being the final session of the curriculum, the reflection was to be turned in the next week, which was not a gathered time for the curriculum participants. Out of the thirteen numbered participants in session six who were given a theological reflection, only three returned them. This drop in participation should be seen as a learning opportunity for myself as I was not anticipating people simply not returning the reflection. With the return date being after the conclusion of the curriculum, it became clear to me that participants were out of the habit of attending the sessions and many likely forgot to return their reflections.

Out of the three who did return reflections, there were remarkable statements centering on the responsibility of the congregation to care for one another during these times of grief and loss. One numbered participant wrote:

When someone today takes time for you it means a great deal. When the Christian community comes together in fellowship our common bond is the hope we have through the resurrection of Christ. I hope this study will help our Sandy Run community to realize just how important it is for us to be there for those in grief. It's not just the pastor's job, it (is) the community's responsibility that extends beyond the funeral.<sup>99</sup>

Another participant reflects, "As you led the sessions on community service and the discussion that were had during the sessions made me wonder just how much the church community gets involved in the process of the grieving person or family."<sup>100</sup>

Upon further reading of this reflection, the participant wrote how the church often does not do as good a job of being community as is possible. "I am not being critical of the church and I include myself because I fail to do things I know I could do. We all need to reach out to people."

A third participant indicated how the congregation of Sandy Run Baptist Church did in fact provide a sense of community before and after the funeral for a loved one: "When I lost my loved one, I had an immediate response from my pastor and close friends. They came to my home, sat with me, talked with me, and prayed with me – especially church family."<sup>101</sup> This participant indicates how well the community offered presence following the funeral as well. "After the funeral, I had many respond with offers of companionship, restaurant visits, church involvements, trips to sporting events –

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<sup>99</sup> Participant 31.

<sup>100</sup> Participant 3.

<sup>101</sup> Participant 39.



involving both church family members and outside close friends.” With reflections such as these, it is encouraging to see how the congregation is growing toward becoming a community of hope as those who share the wounds of death.

Included in my own reflection on these sessions is the surprise of how well received the teachings were. In fact, session five is the one session where the narrative of the book of Ruth was used as a template for community. During the teaching on the book of Ruth, we discussed all of the losses accumulated in Ruth 1. One participant asked a question about the culture in which Naomi and Ruth lived in and what it must have been like for women to have to survive without a husband or sons. This was, I feel, critical thinking at its best. At the close of session five, one participant spoke aloud saying indicating it had been the best session yet.

Session six was the session when we met with the widows. It was the final and concluding session. At the close of the session, as participants were taking their surveys, one participant spoke up and said that her level of confidence in stepping into a situation involving grief would rise with practice. She said continued, “If I mark a 3 on this survey question, it is not because I have not learned something in the sessions. This has been HUGE for me!” This statement sums up the overall experience of the project and helps to confirm and support the quantitative data interpreted at the beginning of this chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION & FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Death and dying have become and remain a part of the human story. The results and effects of death and dying are felt across generations, cultures, time, and space. As has been successfully demonstrated through this project, the response of the church to the issues of death and dying are critical expressions of faith and worship through service and community. In this conclusion, I will explore the results of this project and the implications for how the church responds to the issues of death and dying in the human world. This final chapter will address: (1) what I have learned personally and pastorally; (2) the implications this project had on the life of the congregation at Sandy Run Baptist Church in Mooresboro, North Carolina; and (3) the implications this project may have on the church at large.

#### **Personal and Pastoral Learning**

As I reflect back on the project itself, I have discovered that my own personal story of grief is ongoing. Writing the clinical aspects of the project curriculum uncovered wounds that are deep, some of which have experienced great healing over the last eight years and some that will never be healed. While I shared during the teaching of the curriculum that grief is a lifelong story, and something one never “gets over,” I have had to learn this truth all over again.

Also reflecting on my own story of grief has caused me to cling even tighter to the theological and biblical concepts presented in this project. I have come to confess once again my belief in God as Creator, God's presence in the midst of death, and God's power over death through the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead. In the early days of my journey of grief, I found these theological truths and tenets of the Christian faith to be more alive than ever before. I clung to them, and more importantly, they clung to me. Over time, however, this edge was lost. The writing, reading, studying, teaching, and compiling that have gone into this project have awakened in me these truths in a new way. The theological realities have been reinforced as being so much more than theory, but as living practice.

Another area of personal growth for me has been in my view of the role of the church in the story of grief. It has been mentioned already in this project how the congregation of East Maiden Baptist Church was supportive of Ronna and me during the earliest days of our grief. However, I have come to learn that the role of the church in my story of grief is not limited to one congregation. The congregation of Sandy Run Baptist Church has been critical in supporting me through this process of learning. Their loving presence and understanding has brought to life the role of their presence in my story of grief. They have given me room to explore this topic in deep and meaningful ways that have had a major impact on me as a Christian believer. It seems as though they knew that I needed to complete this research as much for my own growth and healing as they needed it for the growth of the congregation. For that understanding, that love, that support, and that room, I am grateful beyond words. I have learned once again that the

people of Sandy Run Baptist Church, my brothers and sisters, constitute my community of hope in a hurting world.

I have also grown as a Christian pastor. In the pre- and post-project surveys a question was presented to the congregation at large concerning if the individual had experienced the loss of an immediate family member in the last five years. At the time of project implementation, I had been pastor of Sandy Run Baptist Church for nearly three and one-half years. Therefore, it is likely that if a person answered, “yes” to the question of losing a loved in the last five years could refer to a death that took place prior to my tenure as pastor. Yet, the possibility is greater that the “yes” answers referred to a death that took place after my tenure began.

One question that followed in the body of the survey asked about the level of response from the pastor of Sandy Run Baptist Church during this time of loss. The results of this question are discussed in the critical evaluation of the project in chapter six. As a pastor I learned the congregation truly feels the response of the pastor at a time of loss has been appropriate, significant, and even meaningful. As the project began, I was not sure how these questions would be answered. In fact, I was fearful that the responses would be so low that it would confirm my personal fears that I am a pastoral failure in the eyes of the congregation. The results of these surveys, and the overall project, have brought great encouragement to me as an individual, helping to squelch the fears of my heart and to strengthen my resolve as a pastor to serve with faithfulness and diligence.

I have also learned as a pastor that I do not have to bear the burden of grief ministry alone. As the results were counted and considered observing the overall growth of the participants in the project, I have come to see that the weight of ministry with those

who are bereaved can be shared with participants of the project. Participants feel better equipped and more confident when it comes to stepping into the role of caregiver in a situation of grief. Furthermore, the participants of the project were able to see how vitally important it is for the congregation to minister to one another during these times of grief. A part of my fear as a pastor has been the need to be needed. This fear works itself out in the sense that if I am not present for every need at every time on every day then I am a failure as a pastor and I am not loved as a pastor. This project has helped address these deep issues of my own heart as I have seen that the people are willing to help carry the load of ministry, not replacing my presence as the pastor, nor giving me room to shirk my responsibility as the pastor, but rather to enhance the effects of the ministry of the congregation as a community of hope.

### **Implications for Sandy Run Baptist Church**

This leads to the second area of growth that took place during this project: the implications of this ministry for the congregation of Sandy Run Baptist Church. As has been sufficiently and successfully shown, the congregation as a whole grew and learned significantly during this project. On the pre-project survey the whole congregation was asked about to indicate the level of importance of members of Sandy Run Baptist Church ministering to one another during times of grief and loss. The average response was 4.86 (standard deviation = 0.47). When the same question was asked on the post-project congregational survey, the average response was 4.93 (standard deviation = 0.25). These results show genuine growth of the congregation at large even though, again, the growth was statistically insignificant ( $p=0.2$ ). The results also show that the average response on the post-project survey was very tightly grouped around the highest response (5). Another

question asked of the congregation on this post-project survey was designed to gauge the change that took place in how Sandy Run Baptist Church responds to the issue of grief. The average response to this question was 4.24 (standard deviation = 0.83).

The implications of this project for the life of the congregation at Sandy Run Baptist Church have been overall very significant. As was stated in the critical evaluation in chapter six, this project has far reaching implications for the life of the congregation. Numerous members of the congregation in the weeks and months that followed the curriculum have referenced the project and curriculum and it has all been positive. In fact, as we have moved into 2016, the curriculum has been mentioned in the context of church growth. Leaders and other church members have reached back to the curriculum, especially the sections on *koinonia*, as a template for the care the congregation must offer to one another if the congregation is to grow in number of active members.

It is a part of my professional and pastoral plan for Sandy Run in 2016 actually to implement the bereavement ministry team structure into the life of the congregation. Having seen the significance of the curriculum and the learning and growth that took place, it has become very apparent to me that this is indeed a much-needed aspect of ministry in the congregation and we will implement it during the spring and summer months of 2016. I envisage this taking shape formally and officially by inviting members who were numbered participants in the project to meet once a quarter for a type of continuing education. These quarterly meetings and training sessions would involve reading and discussing a book together that addresses the subject of grief and loss. At the conclusion of the curriculum, I distributed a suggested reading list for those involved in the six-week study (Appendix 24). With a project and curriculum that brought in results

as significant as these, I feel it is necessary to take this to the next level of implementation and actually put it all into practice. Other than the brief description of quarterly meetings mentioned above, the exact details of how this will flesh itself out in the coming months remain to be seen. However, the future of this project for the congregation at Sandy Run Baptist Church could prove to be monumental in putting into daily and rhythmic practice the expressions of faith in the resurrected Christ.

### **Contributions to the World of Ministry**

The final area of implications of this project that I wish to explore is how this contributes to the life of not just the congregation of Sandy Run Baptist Church but also to the church at large. Since the beginning of this project I have had conversations with pastors and leaders of other churches surrounding the topic of grief and bereavement ministry. The congregations represented in these conversations have ranged geographically from those in our immediate area of Western Cleveland County to other parts of North Carolina and in states such as Florida and South Carolina. Upon description of the project from the three areas of theological, clinical, and congregational, these conversations have prompted very healthy responses. The average response in these conversations ends up heartily and joyfully describing ways this could improve and enhance the level of Christian ministry that takes place within the said congregations.

The American lifestyle is often cluttered with the busyness of activities religious and secular. It appears as though the art of conversation and presence is being replaced by digital “conversations” and virtual presences. Nothing, however, can replace the art of face-to-face human interaction. This project calls the American church to resurrect the practice of presence and the beautiful art of conversation as the details of this project

cannot be outsourced, digitally or otherwise, and expect there to be any increase in the overall health of congregations and their members.

This project calls the church to take seriously the theological tenets of our faith and to put them into practice in a way that addresses a fundamental and crucial element of human living: dying and death and the grief that results from such events. The doctrine of the incarnation, especially as detailed in the theology of creation presented in this project, takes seriously the sacredness of human living. According to this doctrine, the human body, the physical and earthly life, is of great importance to the Creator God. It could be said that in the incarnation of the Creator God in Jesus of Nazareth, all the theological ideas, theories, and conceptions, are truly brought to life. They are expressed through the language of the dust of the earth. Taking this to heart means living it in the flesh. This project has sought to do just that: to bring to life the theology of the Christian church that confesses the story of the Creator God addressing the plight of death within creation by absorbing it into and onto God's self in such a way that the entire created order is never the same again.

When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:54-58).



APPENDIX 1

MINISTRY AND LEARNING COVENANT FOR SESSION PARTICIPANTS

Your willingness to participate in this small group is much appreciated. During the course of six weeks, we will cover a multitude of topics surrounding grief, loss, death, dying, and bereavement. During these sessions, you will be asked to think theologically, critically, and to reflect personally. Pastor Andrew asks for your commitment to this six-week session. Please be consistent in your attendance and in submitting all necessary reflections and paperwork. Furthermore, please be aware that due to the nature and content of the teaching sessions, there may be times when you share information you wish to keep confidential. As a means of maintaining the integrity of the project and as an example of Christian witness, please keep all conversations confidential to the classroom. Portions of your written reflections submitted as a part of this project may be used in the final project Pastor Andrew will present to the faculty of the School of Divinity. According to your invitation letter, your participant number is the only means of identification you will use on all responses (surveys and reflections). Your participant number is known only to you and Beth (Sandy Run Baptist Church Secretary) and serves as a means of preserving anonymity while maintaining continuity. Again, your willingness to participate is paramount to this project. Pastor Andrew cannot express his gratitude enough for this commitment from you. Please sign, date, and return this form to Pastor Andrew during our first session (September 13).

Printed name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

APPENDIX 2

PRE-PROJECT CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY

Survey 1a

*This survey is the first of two congregational surveys that are a part of the research Pastor Andrew is conducting to complete the degree of Doctor of Ministry. Please complete this survey, pass it to the end of your row, and an usher will be by to pick it up.*

*Please note that you are asked to identify yourself **only by** the demographics listed below. All surveys are kept anonymous and confidential. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality, please do not write your name on the survey. Please answer each question as honestly and accurately as you are able.*

Please circle your age

18-25 y/o    25-40 y/o    40-55 y/o    55-65 y/o    65-80 y/o    80+

Please circle your gender

Male                  Female

Are you a member of Sandy Run Baptist Church?    Yes    No

If you answered “Yes” to the previous question, how long have you been a member of Sandy Run Baptist Church?

<5 years    5-10 years    10-20 years    20-30 years    30+ years

Have you suffered the loss of an immediate family member (i.e. spouse, child, parent, sibling) through death in the last five years?    Yes                  No

Please identify the relationship lost through death: \_\_\_\_\_

Was this family member a member of Sandy Run Baptist Church?    Yes    No

**Please use the following scale as a means of answering the following questions**

**1**                  **2**                  **3**                  **4**                  **5**  
Poor                                  Average                                  Excellent

\_\_\_\_\_ How well did Sandy Run Baptist Church respond to you during this time of loss?

\_\_\_\_\_ How well did the pastor of Sandy Run Baptist Church respond to you during this time of loss?

\_\_\_\_\_ How well do you perceive Sandy Run Baptist Church to minister to those who are grieving the loss of this relationship through death?

\_\_\_\_\_ How well has Sandy Run Baptist Church continued to minister to your grief in the months or years since the loss of this relationship?

\_\_\_\_\_ How important has it been to you to maintain a strong connection to the people of Sandy Run Baptist Church since the loss of this relationship?

\_\_\_\_\_ How important is it for members of Sandy Run Baptist Church to minister to one another during times of grief and loss?

APPENDIX 3

POST-PROJECT CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY

Survey 1b

*This survey is the second of two congregational surveys that are a part of the research Pastor Andrew is conducting to complete the degree of Doctor of Ministry. Please complete this survey, pass it to the end of your row, and an usher will be by to pick it up.*

*Please note that you are asked to identify yourself **only by** the demographics listed below. All surveys are kept anonymous and confidential. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality, please do not write your name on the survey. Please answer each question as honestly and accurately as you are able.*

Please circle your age

18-25 y/o    25-40 y/o    40-55 y/o    55-65 y/o    65-80 y/o    80+

Please circle your gender

Male                  Female

Are you a member of Sandy Run Baptist Church?    Yes    No

If you answered “Yes” to the previous question, how long have you been a member of Sandy Run Baptist Church?

<5 years    5-10 years    10-20 years    20-30 years    30+ years

Have you suffered the loss of an immediate family member (i.e. spouse, child, parent, sibling) through death in the last five years?    Yes                  No

Please identify the relationship lost through death: \_\_\_\_\_

Was this family member a member of Sandy Run Baptist Church?    Yes    No

**Please use the following scale as a means of answering the following questions**

**1**                  **2**                  **3**                  **4**                  **5**  
Poor                                  Average                                  Excellent

\_\_\_\_\_ How well did Sandy Run Baptist Church respond to you during this time of loss?

\_\_\_\_\_ How well did the pastor of Sandy Run Baptist Church respond to you during this time of loss?

\_\_\_\_\_ How well do you perceive Sandy Run Baptist Church to minister to those who are grieving the loss of this relationship through death?

\_\_\_\_\_ How well has Sandy Run Baptist Church continued to minister to your grief in the months or years since the loss of this relationship?

\_\_\_\_\_ How important has it been to you to maintain a strong connection to the people of Sandy Run Baptist Church since the loss of this relationship?

\_\_\_\_\_ What level of difference do you sense in the capacity and ability of Sandy Run Baptist Church to minister to the issue of grief?

\_\_\_\_\_ How important is it for members of Sandy Run Baptist Church to minister to one another during times of grief and loss?

## APPENDIX 4

### LETTER OF INVITATION TO NUMBERED PARTICIPANTS

August 10, 2015

Dear member of Sandy Run Baptist Church,

I pray you are doing well during these long and hot days of summer. As you are likely aware, I am pursuing the degree of Doctor of Ministry through the School of Divinity at Gardner-Webb University. This fall begins my third and final year of study in the program. The final portion of the curriculum is the implementation of a ministry research project within the context of Sandy Run Baptist Church. I am sending you this letter inviting you to participate in this ministry research project.

The project will run for six weeks on Sunday evenings at 6:00. The dates for the project are September 13, 20, 27 and October 4, 11, 18. The format of the project will be teaching and evaluation. The teaching sessions will be open to the entire congregation, but I am inviting you to be one who participates in the surveys each week. I can share with you on the front end that the subject matter for the project is grief and loss. Your participation in the project would be to share your story of grief with a small group of those who are learning more about grief and the ministry grief involves. Your story is one that I feel is valuable and important. The only session I ask you to attend is Sunday, October 18.

Your participation in this ministry research project is completely voluntary and you may cease participation at any time. If you are interested in participating in this ministry research project, please contact the church office and speak with Beth. She will assign your participant number, which will remain unknown to me. This will ensure that surveys will match participants each week but I will be unaware as to which survey goes with which participant.

I am grateful for your consideration in participating in this ministry research project. Please contact the church office no later than Wednesday, August 19. May the Lord bless and keep you.

*Soli Deo Gloria...*

Rev. Andrew S. Rawls  
Pastor, Sandy Run Baptist Church

## APPENDIX 5

### LETTER OF INVITATION TO WIDOWS

August 17, 2015

Dear member of Sandy Run Baptist Church,

I pray you are doing well during these long and hot days of summer. As you are likely aware, I am pursuing the degree of Doctor of Ministry through the School of Divinity at Gardner-Webb University. This fall begins my third and final year of study in the program. The final portion of the curriculum is the implementation of a ministry research project within the context of Sandy Run Baptist Church. I am sending you this letter inviting you to participate in this ministry research project.

The project will run for six weeks on Sunday evenings at 6:00. The dates for the project are September 13, 20, 27 and October 4, 11, 18. The format of the project will be teaching and evaluation. The teaching sessions will be open to the entire congregation, but I am inviting you to be one who participates in the surveys each week. I can share with you on the front end that the subject matter for the project is grief and loss. Your participation in the project would be to share your story of grief with a small group of those who are learning more about grief and the ministry grief involves. Your story is one that I feel is valuable and important. The only session I ask you to attend is Sunday, October 18.

Your participation in this ministry research project is completely voluntary and you may cease participation at any time. If you are interested in participating in this ministry research project, please contact the church office and speak with Beth. She will assign your participant number, which will remain unknown to me. This will ensure that surveys will match participants each week but I will be unaware as to which survey goes with which participant.

I am grateful for your consideration in participating in this ministry research project. Please contact the church office no later than Tuesday, August 25. May the Lord bless and keep you.

*Soli Deo Gloria...*

Rev. Andrew S. Rawls  
Pastor, Sandy Run Baptist Church

APPENDIX 6

PRE-SURVEY FOR *KERYGMA & LEITOURGIA*

Survey 2a

Please identify yourself *only* through the following criteria:

Participant #: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you familiar with the term *kerygma* and *leitourgia*?    Yes    No

**Please use the following scale as a means of answering the following questions**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Low		Average		High

\_\_\_\_\_ How important is it for the members of Sandy Run Baptist Church to minister to those in grief?

\_\_\_\_\_ What is your level of confidence in stepping in to minister in a situation of grief?

\_\_\_\_\_ How confident are you in your ability to articulate a theology of creation?

\_\_\_\_\_ How familiar are you with what the bible has to say about creation?

\_\_\_\_\_ How confident are you in your ability to articulate a theology of death?

\_\_\_\_\_ How familiar are you with what the bible has to say about death?

\_\_\_\_\_ How confident are you in your ability to articulate a theology of resurrection?

\_\_\_\_\_ How familiar are you with what the bible has to say about resurrection?

\_\_\_\_\_ How familiar are you with the biblical understanding of lamentation?

\_\_\_\_\_ How familiar are you with what the bible has to say about lamentation?

\_\_\_\_\_ What is the level of correlation between lamentation and grief?

\_\_\_\_\_ What is the level of correlation between grief and worship?

\_\_\_\_\_ How we respond to grief as a community is a reflection of our understanding of God?



## APPENDIX 7

### LESSON PLAN FOR SESSION 1

#### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR *KERYGMA* AND

#### *LEITOURGIA*<sup>102</sup>

##### *Introduction to Project*

- **Grief** is a part of the human story
- **Grief** is an area of deep ministry
- **This project** will focus on the grief ministry of Sandy Run Baptist Church.
- **The goal** is to provide critical teaching on the levels of biblical and clinical understanding of grief in order to lead Sandy Run to establish bereavement ministry teams from within the congregation.
- The six sessions we are together will cover this material. It is not my goal to make us all professional grief counsellors but to stock our ministry toolboxes with some essential know how when it comes to. Ministry with the bereaved.

##### **Objectives of Session 1**

- **Provide** definition of *kerygma*
- **Explore** how *kerygma* connects to the biblical story of creation, death, and resurrection
- **Explore** how *kerygma* and relationships fit together
- **Provide** definition of *Leitourgia*
- **Explore** how *Leitourgia* is expressed through lament

##### **The Leg of *Kerygma***

There are a number of ways to tell a story. There are many elements to telling a story. There are moving parts, fluid characters, twisting plots, high-marker resolutions, and endings. When addressing the issues of death and grief, story-living and story-telling are important. This is why the first theological leg presented in this project is that of *kerygma*.

At its core, *kerygma* is story-telling. It is “a Greek word meaning ‘proclamation.’”<sup>103</sup> While it is a broad term that generally centers upon New Testament preaching, it is used in the context of this project as a means of telling the story of creation. Most uses of the term incorporate telling the story of the life, ministry, death,

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<sup>102</sup> Text printed in **red** indicate text that is displayed on PowerPoint slides. This was for my benefit to know to advance the PowerPoint slide to the next statement.

<sup>103</sup> Given, “Kerygma,” 492.

and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The present use of the term will include this traditional application and broaden the term to involve the whole story of creation.

### Theology of Creation

From the earliest pages of the biblical story of creation, it is clear that God is a Creator God (Gen. 3:8). The Almighty has the power to speak creation into being and to pull light out of darkness, order out of chaos (Gen. 1:2-3; Ps. 24:1-2). The hands of God can move the mountains (Job 9:5-7). God is actively involved in the life and work of a creation that he has pronounced to be good as he walked in the midst of the created order (Gen. 3:8).

The opening scene of the biblical drama presents this in a most profound manner. The stage is set for a great story to unfold when God creates the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1). As the story is told by the author, there are multiple angles that unfold. At the center, however, is interaction between the two main characters. "It (Gen. 1:1-2:3) introduces the two main subjects of Holy Scripture, God the Creator and man his creature, and sets the scene for the long tale of their relationship."<sup>104</sup>

The concept of relationship is central to the present theology of creation. Creation should be seen through the lens of relationship as everything in the created order was established to work within the context of relationship. Relationship applies to God with human beings and human beings with God; humans and the rest of the created order and the rest of the created order with humans; God with the rest of the created order and the rest of the created order with God. Relationship is the foundation for what it means to be a human being.

To be alive means existing in relationship with other people and things. Life is communication in communion. And, conversely, isolation and lack of relationship means death for all living things, and dissolution even for elementary particles. So if we want to understand what is real *as* real, and what is living *as* living, we have to know it in its own primal and individual community.<sup>105</sup>

To be human means just this: to be in relationship. When the author of Genesis describes the process of creation, relationship is the undercurrent as each day of creation functions and flows in the context of relationship.

When God creates humankind in God's own image (Gen. 1:26-30), the context of relationship is the basis for *how* humans are to be humans. The use of plural language in Genesis 1:26 has stirred great discussion through the centuries. Suggestions have been made as to exactly what this means. In his commentary on the first fifteen chapters of Genesis, Wenham has compiled a list of possible interpretations. Citing the works of Philo, Justin Martyr, and modern commentators such as Gunkel, he leaves the question open to interpretation.

Regardless of how the text is interpreted, the plural indicates relationship. If the plural is the announcement of the creation of humans to the heavenly court, relationship

<sup>104</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (WBC 1; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 5.

<sup>105</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God In Creation: A New Theology of Creation and The Spirit of God*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985), 3.

with the heavenly court is present. If the plural is used in a Trinitarian sense, relationship is present with the Godhead. If the plural is used in a “royal “we,”” relationship is still present. Therefore, by the simple use of plural self-identification, God is communicating to the created order that relationship is going to be central to the story of creation.

God created human beings to be the specific bearers of God’s image into the world. No other creature mentioned in the accounts of creation is given the same task within the Creator-creation relationship. In fact, as Von Rad states, “The creation of man is introduced more impressively than any preceding work by the announcement of a divine resolution.”<sup>106</sup> Part of bearing the image of God is in caring for the created order. Therefore, “The image makes man God’s representative on earth.”<sup>107</sup>

One dimension of responsibility humankind carries is to be the representative of God on earth through the relationships humans share with one another. Karl Barth takes time to nuance out this theological concept as it relates to the purpose and calling of humankind.

Man is the repetition of this divine form of life; its copy and reflection. He is this first in the fact that he is the counterpart of God, the encounter and discovery in God himself being copied and imitated in God’s relation to man. But he is it also in the fact that he is himself the counterpart of his fellows and has in them a counterpart, the coexistence and cooperation in God himself being repeated in the relation of man to man.<sup>108</sup>

In order for these relationships to reach full potential vulnerability is necessary. With vulnerability from both parties in the relationship, there can be a free flow and exchange of love, creativity, and intimacy. Without vulnerability, there is a void left to be filled with contempt, control, and manipulation. Present within the story of God creating humankind in God’s own image and likeness is the divine expression of vulnerability.

Terrance Fretheim calls this to account when he writes, “It is not enough to say that one believes in God. What is important finally is the *kind* of God in whom one believes.”<sup>109</sup> From the earliest pages of this narrative, the God who is presented in the biblical account is one who is vulnerable. This vulnerability is clearly seen when God entrusts the beauty and care of creation into the hands and hearts of human beings (Gen. 1:28-30).

Vulnerability carries with it the opportunity for the relationship to go well, according to an ideal standard, as well as the opportunity for one (or both) parties in the relationship to fail. Therefore, with vulnerability in relationship comes the potential for suffering within the context of that relationship. This has always been the case in

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<sup>106</sup> Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis* (The Old Testament Library; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 57.

<sup>107</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 30.

<sup>108</sup> Karl Barth. *Church Dogmatics* 3.1. Translated by J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, H Knight (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 185.

<sup>109</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 1.

relationships and it is seen clearly in the biblical account of creation as well as the aftermath of the choices of vulnerability.

### Theology of Death

Having identified the primary motif in this doctrine of creation as relationship, and a key component of that relationship as being vulnerability, it is now necessary to explore the impact of vulnerability within the relationships of creation. Where does vulnerability in relationships lead? What happens when vulnerability is recognized, pursued, and even manipulated?

The narrative of creation does not leave these questions unanswered, for at a point early in the drama of creation, the plan went wrong (Gen. 3). The bond, intimacy, and vulnerability of the relationship between the image-bearer of God and God Himself is broken. Until this point in the narrative of creation, there is described a oneness of relationship between the Creator God and the created human. The picture painted by the writers of Genesis is that of partnership.

The partnership and relationship between the Creator God and the created human is manifest most clearly in the Creator God walking through creation. Genesis 3:8 provides insight into the intimacy of this relationship of partnership. The writer of the text has made a strategic verb choice to emphasize to the reader that the walking of the Creator God through creation was not a one time event, but something all of creation would have known. “The verb used to describe the divine movement – *mithallek* – is a type of Hithpael that suggests iterative and habitual aspects.”<sup>110</sup>

Though Hamilton’s description is accurate, the idea of “habitual” walks through garden hardly describes an intimate relationship between Creator and created. It is the picturesque language used by Terrence E. Fretheim that is most helpful for theological structure of this relationship in the present pursuit:

The creator of the universe and all creatures chooses not to relate to the world at a distance, but takes on human form, goes for a walk among the creatures, and personally engages them regarding recent events. The writer presents no naïve theology, but a deeply profound understanding of how God chooses to enter into the life of the world and relate to the creatures.<sup>111</sup>

These words from Fretheim serve to make the strong point for a relationship of partnership and intimacy between the Creator God and the created human. This relationship is exactly how the relationships of creation were established. This is the picture of how the whole package of creation fits together with God and with itself. To reflect the image of this God of relationship is exactly what humans were “knit together” (Ps. 139:14) to do. This kind of relationship is not possible without vulnerability.

It is when the Creator God makes this walk through creation in the cool of the day, a walk of habit, yet still of profound intimacy, that the Creator finds the divine-

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<sup>110</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 192.

<sup>111</sup> Terrence E. Fretheim. *NIB* 1:362.

human relationship to be hurting, offending, earth-shattering, and life-altering. There has been set loose into the beauty of creation, the power of disobedience and death. Amid the instructions from the lips of the Creator God as a means of establishing the confines of the divine-human relationship and with creation itself, there is a prohibition.

When humans are placed in the garden of creation, they behold all there is to see. Their eyes draw in the beauty, wonder, and majesty of the created world. Then the voice of God speaks to the newly formed humans and gives the prohibition: “You may eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (Gen. 2:16-17). While this has the potential to come across as harsh, demanding, and even demeaning, this does not seem to be the intent of the text. “God’s first speech to humans does not center on God’s place in the world, but focuses instead on the creatures, on their place and role, and the gifts they are given.”<sup>112</sup> This assists the current objective of a theological framework in that the role and function of humans as the image-bearers of God is at the center of the relationships of creation.

During the evening walk, the Creator God finds this is exactly what the humans have done: they have taken to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:1-13). The role and function of humans established by the creator God has been marred, and therefore, is left with the consequence of the prohibition: death.

But what did the Creator mean by “you shall die?” How is death perceived in the narrative of creation? Does this text serve the point of explaining death or is there a shift in the function, role, and therefore, understanding of death within the narrative? These questions help frame out the need to structure a theology of death as understood by the narrative of scripture.

Peter Cotterell briefly explores the possibilities at work in this scene from the Genesis drama. He makes the suggestion that this type of death (a post-Eden death) is not what was known in the beginning of creation. When asking the question about death, “Would Adam have died if he had not sinned?,” Cotterell writes:

Death as we know it, with its fears and hurts and mysteries – that kind of death would not have existed.

I think that I would be quite ready to think of life on this earth coming to an end for Adam, for his successors, even if Adam had not sinned. I suppose that in *that* sense Adam might have ‘died’, might have been transferred from this world to heaven.<sup>113</sup>

However, it must be asked if this is truly what the text teaches about the death that is described by the words of the Creator God as the consequence for violating the stated prohibition.

Walter Brueggemann identifies three components to the identity of humans as God’s image-bearers to creation.

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<sup>112</sup> Fretheim, *NIB*, 1:351.

<sup>113</sup> Peter Cotterell, *What The Bible Teaches About Death* (Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale House Publishers, 1979), 9.

Human beings before God are characterized by *vocation*, *permission*, and *prohibition*. The primary human task is to find a way to hold all three facets of divine purpose together. Any two of them without the third is surely to pervert life.<sup>114</sup>

Could the most functional understanding of the divine prohibition be that when humans engage in actions that violate the relationship and identity established by the Creator God through disobedience, and thus, taking advantage of the vulnerability within the relationship, that the order in which the Creator God has established human life to transition will be perverted?

The text never implies that the humans die the day the prohibition has been violated. What is apparent as the narrative plays out is that the result of eating of the tree is that the relationship between the Creator God and the created human, and by extension, the relationship between the created human and the balance of the created order, has been broken. The relationship is now a broken mess.

But that God was true, and the serpent a liar, was proved by the result, death having passed upon them who had eaten. For along with the fruit they did also fall under the power of death, because they did eat in disobedience; and disobedience to God entails death. Wherefore, as they became forfeit to death, from that [moment] they were handed over to it.<sup>115</sup>

From this moment on in the narrative of creation, death has been given new access to life in the form of a broken relationship with the Creator God.

Terence Fretheim suggests that death was already a part of the created order, but not in the sense of what is known as post-Eden death. “This larger view of death comes to a climax when humans are excluded from the tree of life and lose the opportunity to overcome their natural mortality. So death does become pervasive within their lives even in the garden.”<sup>116</sup>

Death, as it is known in a post-Eden world, is a breakdown of the relationships the Creator God established and desires. If originally the Creator God was in intimate relationship with humanity and with the larger created order, what will happen now that death has marred that relationship? In other words, the question now is how this Creator God who spoke “and it was good” will relate to the fallen and marred creation. Is there still an image of God? Is there anything worth preserving? Is creation still good? The context of broken relationship helps the present project set into focus a theology of death. But what comes next?

### Theology of Resurrection

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<sup>114</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 46.

<sup>115</sup> Irenaeus. *Against Heresies* 3.23 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995)1:551 (307-567).

<sup>116</sup> Fretheim, *NIB*, 1:352.

When the question is asked of how the Creator God will relate to the created order in general, and human beings in particular, a theme from the biblical narrative emerges as front and center: resurrection. It is the theological opinion of the present writer that there is no greater theological theme in the biblical narrative than that of the Creator God resurrecting to new life what was dead in the created order and restoring that order to a proper, and even recreated, relationship through the power of resurrection. In order for the church to minister effectively and with proper theological footing, it is necessary to establish a theology of resurrection.

How does the Creator God bring the divine life of resurrection into the created order? What are the details of how this will play out? What is necessary from the heart and hands of the Creator God and the hearts and hands of humans in order for the relationship to be restored and even recreated? The answers to these questions are rooted in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. It is in Jesus that the full embodiment of God has been brought to earth and through whom the redemption of all creation may be known, proclaimed, and shared to all generations and all nations. Jesus of Nazareth, in other words, is how the Creator God relates to his creation fallen and marred by death. “The death of Jesus on the cross is the *centre* of all Christian theology. It is not the only theme of theology, but it is in effect the entry to its problems and answers on earth. All Christian statements about God, about creation, about sin and death have their focal point in the crucified Christ.”<sup>117</sup>

In the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Creator God enters the confines of creation once again to walk among his image bearers. This time, however, the objective is not to maintain the relationship, but to restore the relationship. Since death is what has broken the relationship and released possibilities of perversion into the created order, the power of resurrected life will be the only means to reverse the dilemma and bring life back to life.

The Scriptures emphasize the utilization of community to celebrate resurrection and to grieve openly. This is seen clearly in the reaction of the community of the Hebrews following the death of Moses, giving themselves thirty days as a period of mourning (Deut. 34:8). It is seen again when the infant son of David and Bathsheba dies just after birth (2 Sam. 12). Mary and Martha grieve openly, allowing their anger to bubble to the surface and spill out at the feet of Jesus (Jn. 11). Time and again we read in the letters of Paul of his admonition to churches to stay rooted and joyful in the resurrection and to let the power of the resurrection guide their times of grief (Rom. 6; 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess. 4; Phil. 4; Col. 2).

When considering the biblical narrative of creation, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is truly the high water mark because of how it takes place. As James Wm. McClendon writes, “In the resurrection (of Jesus Christ from the dead), God owns his presence in all the history that reached its crest in Jesus of Nazareth; in the resurrection, our share in that history is affirmed as well; in it, the vector of creation toward its holy destiny is imprinted.”<sup>118</sup> To explore this further, attention must be given to the account of

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<sup>117</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 204.

the resurrection as recorded in the gospel of John (Jn. 20:1-18). After careful consideration of this resurrection narrative, attention must be turned to the writings of Paul to the Romans, Corinthians, and Thessalonians.

While all four of the canonized gospel writers provide an account of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, it is the gospel of John that most clearly nuances out the details in connection with the initial story and intent of creation. John's narrative opens with Mary Magdalene going to the tomb of Jesus on the "first day of the week" (Jn. 20:1). This should be the first sign that something is happening, or has happened, that will be life-changing.

The "first day of the week" rings familiar in the heart and mind of John's readers as being a connective point to the narrative of creation in Genesis 1:1-31. This account of creation is divided into seven days, resulting in a week. Therefore, when John begins his telling of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead with "on the first day of the week," this is a signal that creation is beginning again. Something has taken place from within the heart of creation that can only be verbalized as "new creation." N.T. Wright explains this with clear purpose and intent:

John declares from the start, with the obvious allusion to Genesis 1:1, that his book is about the new creation in Jesus. In chapter 20 he makes the same point by stressing that Easter was 'the first day of the week. On the sixth day of the creation narrative, humankind was created in the divine image; on the sixth day of the last week of Jesus' life, John has Pilate declare 'Behold the man!' The seventh day is the day of rest for the creator; in John, it is the day when Jesus rests in the tomb. Easter is the start of the new creation.<sup>119</sup>

As has been established through the theology of creation, the objective of creation is relationships. Therefore, when John powerfully begins this telling of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, the reader is aware that relationships are being addressed. This is just what John has meant all through his gospel that "the word was made flesh and made its dwelling among us" (Jn. 1:14).

The narrative that identifies Jesus is radically incomplete apart from the resurrection that opens that story to us: Christ is raised; therefore we too can know him; therefore the gospel is good news to us. And that resurrection, as we have seen, is nothing less than God's (*re*) *identification of the entire earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth, from conception to its last breath, with God's own immortal life.*<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> James Wm. McClendon, *Doctrine*, Vol. II in *Systematic Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 186.

<sup>119</sup> N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Vol. III in *Christian Origins and The Question of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 667.

<sup>120</sup> McClendon, *Doctrine*, 270.



Such a description helps the reader of John see the power that is being unleashed in the new creation through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It is not the objective of the present theology of resurrection to defend, explain, or detail out all of the particulars of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The objective here is to capture the big picture that, in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead on the first day of the week, there is a recreation of humanity for relationships of hope.

There are many interesting, intriguing, and even disturbing elements to John's resurrection narrative. However, it is the "garden" motif that calls for attention from the present reader. With creation beginning in a "garden" and being "recreated" in a "garden," there is no wonder that Mary Magdalene, upon her visit to the tomb on the first day of the new creation mistakes Jesus for the "gardener" (Jn. 20:15). This resurrected Jesus has established a new way of being human: resurrection. Jesus has brought the world of the first creation sharply into focus, and through him, the Creator God is able to walk through the garden once again. The relationship between the Creator God and the created human has been re-established. Tom (N. T.) Wright unpacks this concept in the following manner:

This is the new creation. Jesus is the beginning of it. Remember Pilate: 'Here's the man!' Here he is: the new Adam, the gardener, charged with bringing the chaos of God's creation into new order, into flower, into fruitfulness. He has come to uproot the thorns and thistles and replace them with blossoms and harvests.<sup>121</sup>

This makes Jesus' resurrection from the dead the new standard for how life is to be lived, in relationship to the Creator God, in relationship to one another, and in relationship to other humans.

As John brings his narrative of Jesus' resurrection to a close, this theological construct is clearly stated.

Jesus said to her (Mary Magdalene), "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and *your Father*, to my God and *your God*.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord": and she told them that he had said these things to her (Jn. 20:17-18, emphasis added).

The significance here is in what Gail R. O'Day calls "double identification." She writes that "This double-identification formula confirms that what was true of Jesus' relationship with God is now true of the disciples' relationship with God."<sup>122</sup>

For the theological implications as to how this works out, the focus must now be shifted to the writings of the Apostle Paul to the Romans, the First Letter to the Corinthians, and the First Letter to the Thessalonians. The Apostle is very clear through his letters included in the New Testament that the sufferings of Jesus of Nazareth which

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<sup>121</sup> Tom Wright, *John for Everyone, Part Two* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 146.

<sup>122</sup> Gail R. O'Day, *NIB* 9:843.

led to his death and in the Creator God raising him from the dead is the central hope and message of the Christian church. In his letter to the Romans, Paul goes to great lengths to emphasize what we have already seen in the John's narrative of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Namely, that in Jesus of Nazareth, resurrected from the dead, there is a new humanity. In essence, Paul calls Jesus the new Adam.

This is a critical bit to establish and understand as this project moves forward and as a proper theology of resurrection develops and takes hold of the church in order for the church to take hold of it, especially in times of grief ministry. For in Jesus, there is the reidentification of God with humans and the rebuilding of the creational relationship upon which the above theology of creation has been built. Wayne Oates writes:

The central fact about the revelation of God is not that you and I have sufferings in which God reveals himself to us. Rather, the core of truth in the revelation of God is that he, in Jesus Christ as Lord, has himself entered the arena of human suffering, taking upon himself the form of a servant, fashioning himself in the likeness of suffering humanity, and humbling himself to the death that is our to bear.<sup>123</sup>

With this being the means through which the creator God will reidentify and reestablish the relationship with human beings, attention is now turned to the biblical text in exploration of how this is described and detailed.

Romans 5:12-21 is a classic text for unpacking this deep theological reality that God has entered into the realm of human suffering so as to resurrect it from within itself and redefine how the relationship functions and flows. James D. G. Dunn asserts that the passage at hand "is evidently intended as a conclusion to the whole opening section (1:18-5:21)."<sup>124</sup> Douglas Moo writes, "Paul's focus is not at this point on the corporate significance of Adam's act but on his role as the instrument through whom sin and death were unleashed in the world."<sup>125</sup> Therefore, as Paul makes abundantly clear, "just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). The thrust of these words comes at the end of the sentence in that all people experience death and have since the time of estrangement from the Creator God. In other words, death has become a way of life in the created order because of this estrangement, the breakdown in relationship.

Paul uses his knowledge of the Hebraic narrative of creation in his discussion that this stretches clear back to Moses and even further back to Adam (Rom. 5:14). What then follows is a marking off of one man versus another man: Adam and Jesus. His assertion will be, as has been stated already, that Jesus will become the new Adam. "The similarity between the two consists in the fact that an act of each is considered to have determinative significance for those who 'belong' to each."<sup>126</sup> Both the original Adam

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<sup>123</sup> Wayne E. Oates, *The Revelation of God in Human Suffering* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), 26.

<sup>124</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (WBC: 31a; Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), 271.

<sup>125</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 321.

(first human) and the second Adam (new human) offer a type of “gift” to their respective descendants. The gift offered by the original Adam is death whereas the gift offered by the second Adam is life (Rom. 5:18).

The gift of life comes through the act of righteousness through Jesus on the cross. His suffering, his death, his burial all lead to the gift of grace that is justification as opposed to condemnation and then to life as opposed to death. The event of the cross (death of Jesus) is not separated from the event of the resurrection (life of Jesus) as the former leads to the latter. It is the resurrection of Jesus that brings about the birth of the new humanity. This resurrection of Jesus is the new way of normal living. Though death still works in the present order, as it has since the days of Adam, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, by the hand of the Creator God, becomes the final word. Another way of stating it, as a means of establishing a proper theology of resurrection, is that because of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, death did not have the last word in his life and it will not have the last word in the lives of those who follow him. This is the message, the good news, the gospel of the Church. To help nuance this more clearly, attention now must be given to Paul’s summarizing statement of the good news in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.

These two verses, while summarizing the Christian Gospel, also open the grandest and most expressive chapter on resurrection in the body of the New Testament writings. In the verses at hand, and those that follow through the balance of the chapter, the emphasis is not on proving the validity of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, nor bringing evidence to the table to make the case that it actually happened – the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is assumed a believed reality for the Corinthian church. The issue at stake is whether or not the members of the church accept and believe that the reality of the resurrection of Christ is an eschatological event that will also take place in their own lives.<sup>127</sup> “Although the enumeration of appearances might suggest otherwise, Paul is not here setting out to *prove* the resurrection of Jesus. Rather, he is reasserting the commonly held ground *from which* he will argue against their assertion that there is no resurrection of the dead.”<sup>128</sup>

In order to clearly make his argument heard, Paul pulls from the clearly established tradition of the Christian faith. This is evidenced by the phrase, “For what I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received” (1 Cor. 15:3). In such phrasing, Paul reminds the Corinthian congregation of the already established belief that what is to follow is the foundational truth for the Church. The doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, coupled with his suffering death, and burial, is the new reality of the church living in a world that continues to be marred and scarred by death. The meat of 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 is in a type of creedal format, thus providing a firm foundation for what it is the church believes. “Most writers agree that the commonality of the pre-

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<sup>126</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 334.

<sup>127</sup> Robert Scott Nash, *1 Corinthians* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary: Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2009), 395.

<sup>128</sup> Gordon D. Fee. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NCINT: Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 718.

Pauline tradition which Paul cites and endorses does indeed constitute what Eriksson calls a shared presupposition or an agreed basis for further argument.”<sup>129</sup>

Paul works through in the verses that follow through the balance of 1 Corinthians 15 a powerful treatise on how the resurrection of Christ from the dead has become what this project calls “the new normal.” The normal as evidenced in Romans 5 is that death came to all through the broken relationship with the Creator God. The new normal is that since Christ is raised from the dead, the power of his resurrection is brought into the present moment as a means of restoring hope and rebuilding proper relationships with God, our fellow humans, and the rest of the created order.

This creedal statement from the church is one the believers use as a confession, announcing to creation that the reality of the resurrection has laid hold of their lives and changed them from within. Changing from within is exactly what the Creator God has done in the person, work, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. This is the narrative the church believes and proclaims. “There is a very close relationship between the dimension of *proclamation* or *kerygma* which declares a gospel truth claim and the dimension of *confession* or *self-involvement* which declares a personal stake in what is asserted.”<sup>130</sup>

However, a comment must be made regarding how the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the eschatological event brought into the present moment. This comes later in 1 Corinthians 15 when Paul writes:

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be *misrepresenting* God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ – whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those who also have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:12-19, emphasis added).

If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then the new normal the Creator God has sought to establish through a new Adam has not come to pass and death still has the last word. There is even the phrase in 15:18 concerning those who have already died having believed in the resurrection of Christ, they have “perished” and death has had its way with them once and for all.

The basis for a theology of resurrection comes in these words: “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ” (1 Cor. 15:20-22). To be

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<sup>129</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (The New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 1188.

<sup>130</sup> Thiselton, *Corinthians*, 1188.

made alive in Christ is to be born into the resurrection, which births hope into the present world.

The mention of ‘first fruits’ refers to the scripturally based practice of sanctifying the whole crop by offering the ‘first fruits’ to God (Ex. 23:19). In this way Paul affirms that Christ’s resurrection promises or secures the future resurrection of those who belong to Christ. So without using the terms, the ‘first fruits’ claims are language of promise, guarantee, and confidence.<sup>131</sup>

This “promise, guarantee, and confidence” is that death will not have the final word in the end as the dead will be resurrected, and, since death will not have the final word in the end, death will not have the final word in the present moment either.

All of this brings this section on establishing a theology of resurrection to one final biblical passage: 1 Thessalonians 4:13. Early in the writing ministry of Paul, he seeks to bring comforting instruction to the members of the Church who are grieving the losses of loved ones. “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others who do not have hope” (1 Thess. 4:13). A theology of resurrection brings a theology of hope into the world of grief.

What Paul *does not* say in the verse at hand, nor within the larger context of this discussion on the *parousia*, is that grieving is wrong. In fact, it would be safe to say that grief is more than appropriate in this life because it reminds us that this is not the full way the Creator God intended life to be lived. Paul’s “concern is not that they should not sorrow at all, as has sometimes been suggested, as though Christian hope has eliminated all expressions of sorrow as such. Rather, his point is that believers who have hope in the resurrection do not sorrow *in the same way* as others, people who lack hope.”<sup>132</sup> The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is brought sharply into focus as the story of creation is told and retold. “The Good News of Jesus Christ rises out of the full news of Scripture’s narrative from Genesis to Revelation.”<sup>133</sup> This is the framing of the narrative of the new normal established through Jesus: the Creator God has created the world for relationship, the vulnerability that makes that relationship possible has been abused by humans – the image bearers of the Creator God – and death has entered the lives of humanity in a way it was never intended to, and that this same Creator God chose to relate to a dying and decaying world from within that world through the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth in his own death and resurrection, thus bringing hope to a world and declaring that death will not have the last word.

### **The Leg of *Leitourgia***

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<sup>131</sup> J. Paul Sampley, *NIB* 10:981.

<sup>132</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 168-169.

<sup>133</sup> Fackre, *Signs of the Spirit*, 84.

Facing the task of grieving a redefined relationship with another human being can be difficult. It involves a host of emotions, feelings, thoughts, and questions. In order to step into this chapter of human life with any kind of clarity calls for the ability to express. Each human being is given the ability to express from the Creator God. Yet, when pressed up against the reality of death, those expressions can be hindered. These hindrances arrive from a variety of sources. The hindrances from family may sound like “I need to be strong for momma.” The hindrances from culture may sound like “I have to get back to work, they are counting on me.”

In less than two years writer and musician Neil Peart watched his common law wife of twenty-two years die of terminal cancer less than a year after their teenage daughter was killed in a motor vehicle accident. He boldly confesses, “I remember thinking, ‘How does anyone *survive* something like this? And if they do, what kind of person comes out the other end?’ I didn’t know, but throughout that dark time of grief, sorrow, desolation, and complete despair, something in me seemed determined to carry on. Something would come up.”<sup>134</sup> Peart’s words of bewildering despair and crippling grief exemplify the need for expression. His situation presents us with the deep human search for expression that will help the heart and soul move forward.

Theologically, the gift of expression woven into the fabric of human living is that of *leitourgia* (worship). “Worship comprises those actions by which people express and reaffirm their devotional stance toward, and relationship to, a deity.”<sup>135</sup> Worship is a primary means through which the narrative of the Creator God and the narrative of broken creation come together. Worship can, and often does, include various elements and movements to it, as described by Gabriel Fackre when citing the work of Thomas Torrance: “the corporate activity of the Church in worshipping God with its mind as well as its body through humble repentance, adoration and praise, and thankful enjoyment of God in his transcendence, holiness and beauty.”<sup>136</sup> One aspect of worship not listed in this definition is that of lamentation which is of utmost importance to the present project.

Laments as expressions of pain and suffering are critical pieces to the grief picture. Such expressions allow room for the griever to connect with the Creator God in a very deep and profound way. Worship through lamentation presents the worshipful mourner the opportunity to unite with the Creator God who understands the pain and suffering of human death.

This practice is one that the present project wishes to recapture for the modern local church as a means of understanding how worship factors into ministry to the bereaved.

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<sup>134</sup> Neil Peart. *Ghost Rider: Travels On The Healing Road* (Toronto, Ontario, Canada: ECW Press, 2002), 10. An interesting fact about Peart’s “kerygma” of grief is that his way of expressing grief was to mount his motorcycle and embark on a journey of over 55,000 miles across North America. This is a deeply theological expression as he found himself in the midst of a created world, as a part of that created world, and together with the created world sought to work through broken relationships.

<sup>135</sup> Larry W. Hurtado, “Worship, NT Christian,” *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: Vol. 5* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 910.

<sup>136</sup> Fackre, *Signs of the Spirit*, 99.

Mourning includes both private expression of grief and formal, public enactment of lamentation. Contemporary custom in the West calls for decorum and for controlling grief in public at funerals, largely to protect the feelings of the other guests. Ancient Near Eastern custom valued precisely the converse: grief was to be displayed very publicly and loudly. Not to do so was considered insulting to the dead and to the grieving relations, as it implied a lack of affection and respect for the dead, the family, the clan, and the nation.<sup>137</sup>

While there can be admiration for those in the West who mourn with a sense of decorum so as to not disturb the guests of a funeral, the tendency can be to excuse lamentation as a viable, and even necessary, expression of pain in the midst of suffering. Allowing for too much decorum can, in fact, inhibit true, meaningful, and even healthy mourning from taking place.

We may on occasion say that we ‘lament’ that something has happened, but in this case the word refers to regret. Biblical literary forms of lament, however, move well beyond regret to provide an avenue for expressing intense feelings of grief, such as sorrow and anger. Whether that grief arises from illness or tragedy or an act of injustice toward the worshipper, psalms of lament indicate that the Hebrew worshipper was free to express complaints, anxiety, rage, and deep sorrow before God and other members of the community. What was quite natural for the Hebrew worshipper, however, seems foreign to most of us now.<sup>138</sup>

According to Robak’s article, “Grief Therapy,” one of the four tasks of mourning “is to acknowledge and work through the pain of grief. This is a particularly difficult task because no one wishes to feel such pain.”<sup>139</sup> On a theological level, a lack of lamentation has the potential of distancing the griever from the Creator God who knows the pain of suffering and death and wishes to unite in the bond of relationship with those who are living such pain. Therefore, as a means of guiding the participants of the present project to a fuller and deeper understanding of lamentation within the context of worship, it is necessary to examine passages of lament within the biblical narrative. What follows is exposition on one Old Testament example of lamentation followed by an example from the New Testament.

### *Old Testament Examples of Lamentation*

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<sup>137</sup> Alan F. Segal, “Mourning,” Pages 160-161 in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 4. Edited by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 160.

<sup>138</sup> Nancy J. Duff, “Recovering Lamentation As A Practice In The Church.” Pages 3-14 in *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square*, ed. Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 3.

<sup>139</sup> Rostyslaw W. Robak, “Grief Therapy.” Pages 885-889 in *Encyclopedia of Psychotherapy Vol. I*, ed. Michel Hersen and William Sledge (Boston: Academic Press, 2002), 885.

Lamentation can be evidenced throughout the Old Testament in a variety of places. Expressions of lamentation are also as numerous throughout the canon of scripture. Clothes are torn, ashes are worn, tears are shed, wailings are heard all as outbursts and expressions of lamentation resulting from the death of a loved one.

Within the Psalms, there are verbal expressions of pain, suffering, death, and the lamentation that ensues, unlike any other place in the Bible. Various scholars will group them differently, but the group known as the psalms of lament can be a useful resource to the modern-day griever. These expressions of pain assure worshippers today of the credibility and invitation to ask difficult questions of God that arise as a result of grief. In fact, “the lament of an individual, which some scholars prefer to call the complaint or prayer for help, is the most frequent type in the psalter.”<sup>140</sup> This general statement from McCann regarding the frequency of these psalms should provide participants in the present project, as well as grievers and mourners within the community of faith, with a sense of hope. Nancy J. Duff powerfully introduces the lament psalms as such: “In contrast to our contemporary experience of avoiding open expression of lament, psalms of lament invite us to bring our sorrow and the rage that may accompany it before God and one another.”<sup>141</sup>

The psalms of lament give clear expression to the reality of suffering, clearly identify the reason for the suffering by sharing the narrative of that suffering, and ground the future of life in the hope that comes only from the Creator God. What is found through the psalms of lament for the biblical characters is that when hopeless situations arise, there is a hope that comes only from the presence of the Creator God. For if the biblical characters give expression to such difficulties, what is to keep present company from doing so as well?

Among the cries for help numbered among the psalms of lament is Psalm 13. “This is a simple lament of a sick man. Its formal structure is lucid, the thoughts developed in the psalm are well arranged and the psalm itself is very impressive on account of the deep emotions which, welling up from the innermost recesses of the psalmist’s soul, are exhibited in the feelings and moods expressed.”<sup>142</sup> This psalm makes for solid grounding to establish the credibility of lamentation for these reasons.

When looking at the structure of the psalm, the power of lament as an expression of worshipful release of pain unto God is made abundantly clear. The opening stanza (vv. 1-2), brings to life the pain of the sufferer and calls to account for the absence of the Creator God, who will in time shift from being the eternal ear listening to woeful cries of lament to the eternal presence who is worthy of worship because of faithful and covenantal love. Thus, we see the cathartic role of lament in the life of the griever to bring about a life-changing impact on life through suffering.

However, suffering is not seen in this positive light in the opening stanza for Psalm 13 is a journey of lament. The opening questions are ones of abandonment, absence, and how long the suffering will last. It appears that the Creator God has

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<sup>140</sup> J. Clinton McCann, Jr., *NIB* 4:644.

<sup>141</sup> Duff, *Recovering Lamentation*, 8.

<sup>142</sup> Artur Weiser, *The Psalms* (The Old Testament Library; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1998), 162.



forgotten the worshiper and left him/her to deal with his/her sufferings alone. Often in the course of grief ministry, words such as these will be uttered. Cries from a broken heart suffering as a result of the loss of a loved one ring out loud and true. These cries are uncomfortable because there is an emptiness to them. The emptiness is not a result of lack of faith, but a perceived lack of divine presence in the midst of the suffering. This makes lament an honest, true, and raw expression of the depth of pain experienced through suffering loss.

Has God turned a deaf ear to the cries of human suffering and the pain of human loss and grief? As has already been established through theologies of creation, death, and resurrection, the Christian faith has answered this question with a resounding, “no.” Yet, in the midst of pain and suffering, the pain and expressions thereof, must be released. Established in the theology of creation and death is relationship. The pain that ensues as a result of death and the entrance of grief is because of a meaningful relationship that has now been severed by an enemy, death. These cries from the psalmist, along with others like it, give expression to the feeling inside the heart of the griever that “not only has a loved one died and left me alone but God has left me alone too!” Such harsh realities of suffering can help participants of the present project to come to grips with the fact that grief is relational in terms of the person who has died as well as the God who, at times, feels absent from the sufferings of those grieving. Therefore, the brokenness of relationship is felt on two planes: horizontal (with the recently deceased human) and vertical (with the seemingly aloof and uncaring Creator God).

In times of grief and mourning it appears that an “enemy” has won. The enemy, of course, is death. This prompts the question from the psalmist, “How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?” (Ps. 13:2). While the nature of the enemy cited by the psalmist is unclear, there is a likelihood that the enemy is, in fact, death.<sup>143</sup> Craigie exegetes the problem of death within Psalm 13 by stating, “The approach of death made more acute the sense of God’s distance. Death would come to all mankind, but the desire to live springs eternal, and the psalmist is not willing to capitulate to the enemy who is already in a state of exaltation.”<sup>144</sup>

This cry of desperation to be freed from the grip and threat of death is expressed clearly by the psalmist when he/she pleads to the Creator God to be given “light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death, and my enemy will say, ‘I have prevailed.’” (Ps. 13:1). In times of grief and mourning, the pain of death and suffering is intensified. It is through lamentation that the mourner and griever is desperate for life to return. “The petitions (of Psalm 13) seek the revival of life, appealing to God who alone is the giver and protector of life. Without the salvation of the Lord there will be death.”<sup>145</sup>

These cries for help in the midst of a desperate and suffering situation of grief make the case very clearly that lamentation is not an example of a lack of faith, but rather, an example of great faith. God, the Creator of life, is thus appealed to in times of death. Lamentation does not wash away the river of life that is faith, but rather, helps the

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<sup>143</sup> McCann, *NIB* 4:726.

<sup>144</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (WBC 19; Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2004), 142.

<sup>145</sup> James L. Mays, *Psalms* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY; John Knox Press, 1994), 79.

believing griever to know the source of the river, even when the river seems to be raging out of control and flooding the banks of the plains.

This idea is not original to the author of the present project, but rather comes from the psalmist himself/herself. The final stanza of the psalm (vv. 5-6) comes back around to the question of absence and emptiness to bring a word of praise to the Creator God. McCann identifies this shift to be a surprise from the previous four verses, claiming “that the transition here seems unusually abrupt.”<sup>146</sup> The surprise comes not only from a literary standpoint but also a theological one, surprising the worshiper of the Creator God that such expressions of lamentation clear the heart and mind to then call upon God and to praise God for his enduring faithfulness *in spite* of the presence of death.

Through this realization, the psalmist is able to state clearly that what was void of presence in the opening stanza (Where are you, God?) becomes a bountiful presence of promise in the last stanza. This is made possible through the steadfast lovingkindness of God that has been at the heart of the covenant between the Creator God and his chosen people from the earliest stages of the drama of creation. The Creator God is a trusted presence because of his faithful and enduring covenantal love. Craigie helps readers understand the power of this lovingkindness by stating: “The reality was of such a nature as to undermine that past experience of trust, but it is in the nature of confidence to transform the present on the basis of past experience and thus to create hope for the future.”<sup>147</sup> What the Creator God has done in the past in terms of being faithful to creation through the power of his own vulnerability within creation, God will do again each time one of his own is suffering for themselves.

#### *New Testament Example of Lamentation*

The entrance of God into human suffering is evidenced in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. His presence and work as portrayed in the pages of the New Testament brings participants in the present project into the full Christian faith. While there are examples of lamentation cited in the New Testament, one in particular is brought to light for the purposes of establishing a theology of *leitourgia*: John 11.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead in John 11 is the greatest miraculous sign of Jesus recorded in all of the gospels. Yet it is the lamentation from the sisters of Lazarus that serve for the present purposes to be the example of New Testament lamentation. Jesus of Nazareth was friends with the family of Lazarus and loved them dearly (Jn. 11:5). Such a powerful relationship makes the scene very odd to readers when Jesus learns of the illness Lazarus has contracted for Jesus does not go to the village of Bethany where Lazarus and his sisters live. This poses a question to participants of the present project, will God delay in coming to the aid of those who are ill and suffering? Jesus stayed where he was for two more days after hearing the word of Lazarus’ illness (Jn. 11:6) and by the time Jesus *does* arrive at Bethany to be with the sisters and family of Lazarus, Lazarus has been dead and in the tomb four days (Jn. 11:17).

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<sup>146</sup> McCann, *NIB* 4:727.

<sup>147</sup> Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 143.

The sisters of Lazarus hear of Jesus arrival in Bethany, Martha goes to meet Jesus while Mary stays at home (Jn. 11:20). The community of Bethany had come to being comfort and consolation to the family of Lazarus. “Lazarus’ death was not a private period of mourning for his family. Life in New Testament Palestine was lived publicly and community ties were strong.”<sup>148</sup> It is the actions and words of Martha, however, that cause readers of John’s Gospel to gasp in wonder that someone would have the audacity to speak to God the way she does.

When Martha meets with Jesus she says in a lamenting tone, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (Jn.11:21). When the scene opens, a request is made of Jesus, though the request is implied. By the time Martha speaks to Jesus, the implied request is made known: there was an expectation for Jesus to make a move of some kind and to bring about healing to the situation.

Such is often the case with mourners and grievers. Questions of the presence of God are painful and real. We carry an expectation for God to do something and when God doesn’t act or perform in the way we expect God to, there is then ground for complaint. Complaint is in the heart of Martha and comes flowing from her grieving lips. Citing the word of Schnackenburg, Gail O’Day writes:

Commentators are reticent to identify Martha’s words here as a complaint, seeing them only as an expression of regret and faith in Jesus as a healer. To overlook their edge of complaint, however, is to overlook the thoroughgoing Jewishness of Martha’s remarks. Complaint belonged to the language of faith in Judaism (e.g., Psalms 4; 6; 13; 22) and does not cast doubts on Martha’s piety.<sup>149</sup>

Practices of mourning were much longer in the days of first-century Palestine than in twenty-first century America. “Formal mourning lasted for seven days, called in Hebrew the *shibah* (cf. Sir. 22:12), and it commenced immediately on the day of burial, which took place on the same day as death.”<sup>150</sup> Thus, by the time Jesus arrives in Bethany and Lazarus has been dead and in the tomb for four days, the reader expects outbursts of grief and mourning, such as that of Martha, to still be a present reality for the family and community.

This word of lamenting grief, as with the psalmist in Psalm 13, does not stay for Martha in the “sleep of death” (Ps. 13:3). Rather, the words of Martha continue to express a deep trust in who Jesus is as the revelation of God, the face of the Creator, wrapped in flesh. This has been John’s driving point since the opening words of his gospel (Jn. 1:1-18). When mourners are face to face with the Creator God in the midst of suffering grief, there is room and freedom to express, to feel, and to lament openly. For it is in and through Jesus of Nazareth that God fully understands and is vulnerable in the sufferings of humanity.

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<sup>148</sup> Gary M. Burge, “John” in *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 315.

<sup>149</sup> O’Day, *NIB* 9:688.

<sup>150</sup> Burge, *John*, 315.

Martha's words continue as an expression of faith in God through Jesus: "but even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him" (Jn. 11:22). Again, the point must be stressed, that lamentation is not a lack of faith in God, but an expression of trust that God is the God who has the ability, the care, and the vulnerability to handle such pain and suffering for, in Jesus, God identifies with the suffering. Martha, as is the psalmist, is confident in the powerful presence of God to breathe life into what was dead. Such expressions of grief and mourning are necessary in order to reconnect and rebuild the relationship with the Creator God that has been broken by death.

### The Leg Of *Kerygma*

At its core, *kerygma* is story-telling. It is "a Greek word meaning 'proclamation.'"<sup>151</sup> We will use it as a means of telling the story of relationships and grief. We will also incorporate telling the story of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The present use of the term will include this traditional application and broaden the term to involve the *whole* story of creation. **This whole story will include a brief overview of creation, death, and resurrection as presented by the story of scripture.**

### Theology of Creation

God is creator

- **Gen. 1:2-3**
- **God's role as creator is an active role** where God is in relationship to creation – **Gen. 3:8**
- Creation is **pronounced good by Creator God**

Relationships

- **Humans created in relationship for relationship**
- ***To be alive means existing in relationship with other people and things. -Jurgen Moltmann, God in Creation, 3.***
- Relationship with God, relationship with other humans, relationship with rest of creation
- This is uniquely expressed through the image of God language – **Gen. 1:26. This is the relationship basis for how humans are to be humans.**
- When God introduces humans to the rest of creation it is grander and more powerful than any other introduction.
- Image of God makes human beings the representatives of God on earth. **Partnership – Gen. 3:8** – God's walking is a habitual walk
- One dimension of this responsibility is the relationships we share with other humans. Our human relationships were created to reflect the self-unified relationship that exists in Father, Son, Holy Spirit.
- This relationship calls for **vulnerability**. God makes God's self vulnerable when all of creation is entrusted into the care of His image bearers – **Gen. 1:28-30**

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<sup>151</sup> Given, "Kerygma," 492.

- What is the **impact of vulnerability** on creation?
- Questions

### Theology of Death

#### Things went wrong

- **Gen. 3.**
- Creator God has chosen not to be in a distant relationship, but an **intimate one**.
- The intimacy is that of **father and children**. This comes with a **prohibition**: do not eat of this tree

#### Entrance of Death

- When they eat of it, death as we know it enters the world. **Was death present at creation?**
- *Death as we know it, with its fears and hurts and mysteries – that kind of death would not have existed. –Peter Cotterell, **What The Bible Teaches About Death, 9.***
- **What this violation of vulnerability brings is the perversion of life to its core.**

#### Relational Impact

- From this moment on in the story of creation, death has been given a new access to life. The **primary relationship of creation** – God & human – has been broken.
- **Access to the tree of life is revoked as well. Gen. 3:24**
- **Human relationships** are broken by death now too.
- **At its core**, death is an issue of relationship
- **Is creation still good?** How will this Creation and Relationship God now relate to this creation? This is the question of the hour and of life!
- Questions

### Theology of Resurrection

#### What Will God Do?

- **Answer:** Jesus of Nazareth – birth, life, death, resurrection. We will work forward from this presupposition
- **John 1:14**
- *“All Xn statements about God, about creation, about sin and about death have their focal point in th crucified Christ.” –Jurgen Moltmann, **The Crucified God, 204***
- God enters humanity in a unique way. Image bearer becomes image of the invisible God.
- **Goal:** not to maintain relationship but to restore relationship by absorbing the death into God’s self

#### God Enters The Story

- **John 20:1-18 – creation retold**
- **First day of the week**

- *“On the sixth day of the creation narrative, humankind was created in the divine image; on the sixth day of the last week of Jesus’ life, John had Pilate declare ‘Behold the man!’ The seventh day is the day of rest for the creator; in John, it is the day when Jesus rests in the tomb. Easter is the start of the new creation.” –NT Wright, Resurrection of the Son of God, 667*
- Relationships from creation are recreated through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Resurrection does not do away with death in this order but brings God’s great future into the present as hope.
- **Relationships become relationships of hope** for death is now no longer the mysterious threat it once was

#### New Relationships from Old Narrative

- **John 20:15** – Mary thought Jesus was the gardener. Garden refers to Eden
- **Jesus becomes the caretaker of new creation.** He is the embodiment of hope.
- **Resurrection is the new standard** for how life is to be lived – all relationships should be defined by this standard. Relationship with God and relationships with other humans.
- **Rom. 5:12-21**
- The death of Jesus cannot be separated from the resurrection of Jesus. The two are intimately inseparable.
- Because of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, death does not have the last word.
- **1 Cor. 15:3-4**
- Balance of *1 Cor. 15* explodes with the new normal. The new normal is that since Christ is raised from the dead, the power of resurrection is brought into the present moment as a means of restoring hope and rebuilding proper relationships with God, our fellow humans, and the rest of the created order.
- **This is our personal involvement in the resurrection. 1 Cor. 15:20-22**

#### Living the New Story

- **1 Thess. 4:13** – written to grieving persons who believe in Jesus. Relationships have been lost through death.
- **Death still happens.** A theology of resurrection births a theology of hope into this world of grief.
- We have room to grieve. But to do so with hope. **Framing out grief with hope** is essential to this project.
- The Creator God related to the death filled world from within it. This is hope. In the end death will not have the final word.
- We are not at the end yet. **Death still hurts.** How do we grieve with hope? Our next subject is critical to this understanding.
- Questions

### The Leg of *Leitourgia*

- *“Worship comprises those actions by which people express and reaffirm their devotional stance toward, and relationship to, a deity.”*<sup>152</sup>

#### Welcome to the new normal

- **Relationships have changed with death**
- **Pressure to get back to “normal” but how?**
- *“I remember thinking, ‘How does anyone survive something like this? And if they do, what kind of person comes out the other end?’ I didn’t know, but throughout that dark time of grief, sorrow, desolation, and complete despair, something in me seemed determined to carry on. Something would come up.”*<sup>153</sup>

#### Navigating the new normal

- *Leitourgia* is key to moving forward.
- **Grieving with hope requires honesty and vulnerability.**
- **Lamentation is a chief outlet.** It unites us with the Creator God who understands our pain, suffering, and the loss of relationship.

#### Expressing the new normal

- Public and private
- Public expressions are cultural – but the **funeral is a worship service.**
- There are times when public lamentation should be allowed.
- Private expressions should always include lamentation.
- **Lamentation allows for full expression** of pain and loss. It has no proper shape or form.
- Lamentation in raw and full expression does not distance one from God but can be a tool to draw closer to God. Lamentation is worship.
- **One of the four tasks of mourning “is to acknowledge and work through the pain of grief. This is a particularly difficult task because no one wishes to feel such pain.”**<sup>154</sup>
- **Lamentation as worship opens the door to the mov of God’s hope**
- Questions

#### Biblical examples

- Scriptures are full of examples. We will use one from each testament.
- **Psalms of lament: “In contrast to our contemporary experience of avoiding open expression of lament, psalms of lament invite us to bring our sorrow and the rage that may accompany it before God and one another.”**<sup>155</sup>
- **Psalms 13** – opens with abandonment and a question of how long.

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<sup>152</sup> Hurtado, “Worship, NT Christian,” 910.

<sup>153</sup> Peart. *Ghost Rider*, 10.

<sup>154</sup> Robak, “Grief Therapy,” 885.

<sup>155</sup> Duff, *Recovering Lamentation*, 8.

- Where is God is a normal question in grief. **Grief is a two fold relational journey:** where is my loved one and where is God.
- **Lamentation is not an expression of a lack of faith** but, when in worship, is an expression of great faith for it calls for God to come.
- **Psalm 13:5-6.** God is present! God has been present! Psalmist draws near to God through lamentation.
- What the Creator God has done in the past in terms of being faithful to creation through the power of his own vulnerability within creation, God will do again each time one of his own is suffering for themselves.
- **John 11** – sisters of Lazarus
- **Does God delay** in arriving to bring help to those in grief?
- The community had been supportive. This was the way they grieved.
- **John 11:21** is the prime example of lamentation.
- Martha's complaint in lamentation is not an example of a lack of faith, but rather, in accordance with Jewish customs, is an act of great piety.
- This was still within the walls of the seven day period of initial mourning.
- **Notice how Martha and the psalmist** do not stay in the "sleep of death." For both of them, come to draw closer to the creator God through such expression.
- Relationship with the creator God is strengthened when we express openly, worship freely, and feel deeply. It is in and **through Jesus of Nazareth** that God fully understand the vulnerability of sufferings in human living.

This is where the whole project begins. This is where grief ministry begins. We must first understand the elements of the biblical narrative in these things to move forward. There is no stronger theme in the narrative of scripture than the Creator God resurrecting and recreating a world marred by death.

Questions





## APPENDIX 9

### LESSON PLAN FOR SESSION TWO:

#### CLINICAL APPLICATION OF *KERYGMA* AND *LEITOURGIA*

##### Session Objectives

- To **explore** how the concept of *kerygma* relates to the relationship lost through death
- To **explore** means through which the biblical theologies of creation, death, and resurrection are applied in ministering in a bereavement situation
- To **explore** how the concept of *leitourgia* through lamentation is brought to life through the rituals associated with funeral and burial
- To **explore** means through which the theology of lamentation is applied in ministering in a bereavement situation
- To **explore** “funeral home protocol” and understand how the role of the funeral director contributes to a sense of *leitourgia*

##### Application of *Kerygma*

The question now must be asked how all of the aforementioned theological foundation for the *kerygma* is brought to light through application. What follows in this section is such a description of how the present project will implement through teaching these theologies of creation, death, and resurrection.

*Kerygma* means proclamation of a narrative. Therefore, to apply the strength of the theologies of creation, death, and resurrection to the grief ministry of the church, members of the church must be willing and able to hear the narrative begging to be proclaimed. When ministering to those in the throes of grief, what might come first is the tendency or temptation to throw around clichés and phrases that come out of a type of what the present writer calls a “bumper-sticker theology.” The reason a “bumper sticker theology” is the tempted place to rest is because of the uneasiness of the present culture in dealing with death.

Our culture simply doesn't know what to think about death. Through medicine and science we know more about death and how to forestall it than ever before. Yet we know very little about caring for a dying person. We don't know what to expect or how to prepare for our own death. And we're often awkward at best when trying to comfort a friend in grief.<sup>156</sup>

The first means of application of the *kerygmatic* leg of the table is in that of listening to the story proclaimed. Members of the grief ministry teams to be established at Sandy Run Baptist Church need to be ready and able to sit and listen to the story being

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<sup>156</sup> Moll, *The Art of Dying*, 13.

told. Since the theologies established in conjunction with the *kerygma* have to do with relationship, it is imperative to listen to the story of the relationship.

The reason grief is present and must be worked through is because there is a relationship at hand that has now been marred, first hand, by the sting of death. Mitchell and Anderson define grief in the following way: “Grief is the normal but bewildering cluster of ordinary human emotions arising in response to a significant loss, intensified and complicated by *the relationship to the person or the object lost*” (emphasis added).<sup>157</sup> The point is clear that the basis for grief is a lost relationship. This can throw the griever into a tailspin of emotion and may result in one feeling as if he/she is alone and there is no one to hear the story of the broken relationship.

Within the context of the Christian Church, it is the goal of the present project to help participants understand that the lost and broken relationship at the center of the griever’s life should be given voice. In order to listen to the story of the relationship the first question that must be asked is “How did the relationship begin?” Is the relationship one of marriage, one of offspring, one of friendship, or any number of other possible human relationships.

The type of relationship at hand, resulting from how the relationship begins, provides not only the context for how grief is lived out but also provides the context for how the minister offers support to the griever. For example, the context of grief following the death of a husband is different from the grief experienced following the death of a child. In his book, *Grief & Loss: Understanding the Journey*, Stephen J. Freeman identifies five contexts for what the project at hand would refer to as “hearing the story of grief.”<sup>158</sup>

Citing the works of Lindemann, Parkes and Weiss, and Worden, Freeman writes, “The first task of mourning is to experience and express outside one’s self the reality of death. This involves confronting the reality that the person has died and will not be coming back. To do this requires talking about the death.”<sup>159</sup> In discussing the death itself, giving voice to that which is causing pain, aids the griever in confronting the reality of the pain itself. When the reality of the pain is confronted with honesty and clarity, healing and redemption through the pain is possible.

Death is, therefore, itself a story. There are elements to the death that need to be confronted. Asking questions about the nature of death (natural, accidental, suicidal, homicidal) helps put into words the reality of the death for the griever. There can be a cathartic quality to describing the nature, cause, and surroundings of death. Such expressions of the story help the griever to hear the words from his/her own mouth and, therefore, to face the reality. In listening to this narrative and with the theologies of creation, death, and resurrection in mind, it is important to consider three questions Freeman suggests that aid in grief ministry:

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<sup>157</sup> Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, *All Our Losses; All Our Grievs* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 54.

<sup>158</sup> Stephen J. Freeman, *Grief & Loss: Understanding the Journey* (Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole, 2005), 70-72.

<sup>159</sup> Freeman, *Grief & Loss*, 70.

Where is the person in terms of confronting the reality that his or her loved one has died?

How might I help the person talk about his or her loss?

Do I need to respect the person's need to avoid the full reality of the loss for a period of time while attempting to help the person cautiously confront this new reality?<sup>160</sup>

With questions such as these hanging in the conversation with the griever, it is important to listen to the story of the relationship and the story of death in order to provide room for infusing the narrative of grief with a theology of resurrection. In other words, the gospel stories must go through the painful telling of the death of Jesus before getting to the hope of the reality of the resurrection.

Freeman's second context in hearing the narrative is "to tolerate the emotional suffering that is inherent in the grief while nurturing oneself both physically and emotionally."<sup>161</sup> In such a context, the caregiver/minister is giving the griever room to feel and to give credence to the full range of emotional awareness. In the words of Freeman, "Interpreting feelings and related behaviors as normal is often of great relief to the bereaved who might feel as if they are going crazy."<sup>162</sup> In times of grief, the full range of emotions and feelings can leave the griever with a sense of loss of control. This full range of emotions and feelings can lead to, among other emotions, anger, resentment, bitterness, and guilt. All of these emotions are a natural aspect of the story of grief that results from death that has taken place within the context of created relationships.

Suggested questions from Freeman in assisting in hearing this aspect of the narrative are:

Has the person allowed his/her self to experience the pain of grief? If so, with whom has the person shared this grief?

Was the bereaved person provided with a sense of feeling understood in the expression of grief?

How might I help this person find a balance between negative and positive feelings felt toward the deceased? Facilitative questions might be "What do you miss about the deceased? What do you not miss?"<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Freeman, *Grief & Loss*, 71.

<sup>161</sup> Freeman, *Grief & Loss*, 71.

<sup>162</sup> Freeman, *Grief & Loss*, 71.

<sup>163</sup> Freeman, *Grief & Loss*, 71.

The third context for hearing the narrative of death and grief identified by Freeman “is to convert the relationship with the deceased from one of the presence to a relationship of memory.”<sup>164</sup> Moving the language of life to past tense is can be a major step in the grieving process. Such a move helps the mourner redefine the relationship that has been lost to the present tense that is, ironically, one of past tense. The relationship has shifted to being a closed chapter in the narrative of life. While this is a necessary aspect of grief, time is needed for this to occur. Depending on the relationship at hand, there may be some ties to the relationship that continue to be a living aspect of the present (i.e. children from a deceased spouse). Therefore, not all ties to the deceased will need to be phrased in the past tense. However, helping the griever to identify, that which is necessary to move to past tense and that, which needs to stay present tense is of utmost importance.

The fourth context identified by Freeman “is to develop a new sense of self-identity based on a life without the deceased.”<sup>165</sup> This is another aspect of the redefinition of the relationship. Life without the deceased is “the new normal” in a world marred and scarred by death. Facing the reality of death involves facing what life is now going to be like in this new chapter of life. Thus, the need for a support system to help the griever adjust to this new way of living is paramount to healthy grieving, and can be a very meaningful ministry for a local congregation of Christians.

After all, the Christian message and good news centers upon the theologies of creation, death, and resurrection. Each are now intertwined because of the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. However, the church, nor this project, should be so naïve as to believe that all people will quickly move to a theology of resurrection. It is the assumption of the present writer that most people in the church become stuck on a theology of death and find difficulty in moving to accepting and embracing a theology of resurrection.

This leads the application of *kerygma* to the final context as identified by Freeman. “Finally,” he writes, “to complete the work of grief one must related the experience of loss in a context of meaning.”<sup>166</sup> A fundamental human question is that of “WHY?” This question rings out true and long in the hearts, minds, and lives of those who grieve. Why did the relationship have to end with death? Why did the death have to take place at such a time as this in our relationship? Why? It is not the objective of the present project to probe the depths of that question. However, it is imperative to acknowledge the existence and relevancy of the question. It is a question asked by all people. It is often a question of hopelessness.

To grieve with hope does not mean to deny the question of “why” in the midst of suffering. To grieve with hope means to face the “why” of suffering with the full on confidence that meaning and life and purpose can be pulled from the suffering through the power of resurrection. Life comes out of death time and again when griever and mourners face the grip of death with a solid foundation of resurrection. It is imperative to

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<sup>164</sup> Freeman, *Grief & Loss*, 71.

<sup>165</sup> Freeman, *Grief & Loss*, 72.

<sup>166</sup> Freeman, *Grief & Loss*, 72.

understand that the question of “why” left on its own will lead to hopelessness. Yet, as has been clearly underscored, the Creator God is involved intricately and intimately in the life of creation and, therefore, understands the question of “why” without being the one to cause the question of “why.” “While God does not die, God experiences in a profound way what death is like in and through the servant. By so participating in the depths of the death-dealing forces of this world, God transforms the world from within; and a new creation thereby begins to be born.”<sup>167</sup> This presents the griever, and caregivers to grievers, with great tension. To give voice to the tension that arises in the question of “why,” attention must now be turned to the second leg of the table: *leitourgia*.

### The Application of *Leitourgia*

Attention now must be given to how lamentation as *leitourgia* is put into practice. Worship is the connecting of the human story with the story of the Creator God and must be a regular part of the life of faith. Within the world of worship, there is room for lamentation. For the purposes of the present project, the rituals of the funeral and burial are in focus as opportunities for healthy expression of *leitourgia* through lamentation.

What must be understood from the outset is that the Christian funeral is, in fact, a time of worship given to the Creator God. “One of the basic functions of religious practice is to give meaning to life so important that persons are inspired to achieve the fullest possibilities of life.”<sup>168</sup> The worship at a Christian funeral assists those who are grieving and those who are in attendance for the sake of supporting the loved ones of the deceased in giving expression of lament and faith to the Creator God and to draw from the experience of worship the power of resurrection for the living of life in the days ahead through hope in Christ.

In his book, *The Minister and Grief*, Robert W. Bailey introduces the topic of the Christian funeral in the following manner: “A minister can do a great service for bereaved church members when he can show them that their minister feels that honest grief is good. We can help members even more when we affirm that honest grief may open the way to God, to ourselves, and to the whole process of healing.”<sup>169</sup> Such an introduction to the funeral puts pressure on the minister, and others leading worship, to treat funerary rituals with seriousness and importance.

The primary means through which the funeral is treated with seriousness and importance is by seeing the funeral as a time of worship. As established above, lamentation is an aspect of and outlet for worship. In order to minister effectively to those who are recently bereaved, the funeral must be approached in this manner for in the moments of that ritual, the God of all Creation is appealed to as the God of all life and the God who understands the sufferings of this life.

The subsequent movements of the service of worship (i.e., scripture readings, songs, spoken words of comfort and reflection, prayers) should support and undergird the

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<sup>167</sup> Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 165.

<sup>168</sup> Edgar N. Jackson, *The Christian Funeral: Its Meaning, Its Purpose, and Its Modern Practice* (New York: Channel Press, 1966), 22.

<sup>169</sup> Robert W. Bailey, *The Minister and Grief* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1976), 83-84.

purpose of worship. The reason is that the funeral is a significant marker in the life of the individual who has died, and in the lives of his/her family and members of his/her community. The funeral allows for participants (leaders and assembly) to give expressions to the Creator God.

These expressions include giving thanks for life itself. Acknowledging that the corporate belief of the assembly, and in particular that of the deceased, is that the Creator God is the one responsible for the breathing of the breath of life (Gen. 2:7) into the lungs of the one who is being laid to final rest. It is in this moment that the God of the living becomes the God of the dead. Furthermore, it is a proper theology of resurrection (as detailed above) that allows for these expressions to be truly thanksgiving. In this confession we are saying that God is a God of life and is the God of life. Such expressions connect the moment of the funeral with the overarching purpose of worship, as already cited in Hurtado's article.

The first means through which worship is brought to light through the funeral in our present culture is through the work of the funeral director. Leah Frith is a funeral director in New Zealand who said in a recent interview recorded in the *Manawatu Standard* that "Death is a natural process and rather than it being a scary, frightening experience, you can approach it gracefully, making it respectful and dignified."<sup>170</sup> Upon death, the body begins to rot. "Within minutes of death, carbon dioxide starts to accumulate in the blood, making it more acidic. This causes cells to burst open and spill enzymes which start to digest tissues from within."<sup>171</sup> Therefore, if the body is created by the hand of God and has fallen victim to the sting of death, caring for the physical body created by God after the time of death is an act of worship. The sheer fact that death does not wait long before destroying the physical body should cause caregivers to examine the importance of the work of the funeral director. In the days that lead to the committal of the physical body to the ground, there are rituals that help maintain dignity, preserve respect, and ensure sensitivity to those who are grieving the loss of this relationship broken by death.

In the host of expressions incorporated into lamentation as worship are frustration, regret, and even anger. It can often be the case that the days surrounding the funeral, and at times even the funeral itself, are filled with such expressions. Caregivers, then, should not be surprised at such expressions. And when hearing these expressions, what should be remembered is that the voicing of these feelings can be an act of worship and should not necessarily be seen as asking the caregiver for an answer that he/she is not qualified to give. VanDuiwendyk writes, "Frequently these emotions are expressed by asking 'Why?' If we are with someone who is asking the 'why' questions, don't conclude too quickly that the person expressing lament really wants an answer from us. In fact, there are no answers when it comes to the why of suffering."<sup>172</sup> Too often it seems to be the

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<sup>170</sup> "Natural Touch To Dignified Funeral Services." *Manawatu Standard*, 11/26/2014, p. 18. Accessed on April 10, 2015. Database: Points of View Reference Center on Bulldog OneSearch.

<sup>171</sup> L. G., "Earthly Remains." *New Scientist* October 20, 2012, Vol 216, Issue 2887, p 40-42. Accessed April 10, 2015 via Bulldog OneSearch.

<sup>172</sup> Tim P. VanDuiwendyk, *The Unwanted Gift of Grief* (New York: Haworth Pastoral Press, 2006), 66-67.

case with grief ministry that platitudes of bad theology are thrown at questions as a means of helping the caregiver deal with the uncomfortable situations surrounding grief. There are questions posed for which there are no answers at all, let alone answers that will suffice the longing and heal the pain experienced by those in grief. Therefore, “We may belittle them if in our response we try to give them an answer to the mystery of their loss. They may be thinking, ‘Who has the audacity to think he or she has an answer? Who has the audacity to think he or she can explain the unexplainable?’”<sup>173</sup> Questions of this nature are the result of being in relationship with the Creator God who is, in God’s way, present in the pain of suffering and loss. The questions expressed are questions rooted in the theology of creation as detailed above.

With the present structure of the created order, where death has its way in every human life, and with no answer good enough to meet the needs the questions pose, caregivers should do their part in ministry to make room for the questions, and not to squelch them. One of the questions we must address is how do we foster an environment where we welcome questions regarding grief and death and loss? John Westerhoff describes creating a “culture of floating” where the floater is one with, in cooperation with, the water.<sup>174</sup> The Bereavement Ministry Teams are to become a safe place where questions can be addressed through the murky waters of corporate lamentation. The great task of grief ministry is to come alongside the griever in his/her pain and move in cooperation with the questions, seeking the heart of the suffering God together, instead of attempting to give an answer to every question without a thought as to how the asking of questions is in itself healing. This is a place where the common ground of the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ works its way into our lives that creates a space with room enough for questions. Together this puts into practice the instruction of the Apostle Paul to “weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15).

In the wrestling with questions with those who ask them, and weeping with those who weep, we are in fact bringing the life of the resurrected Christ into the present moment. The same passage of scripture that was used as the New Testament example of lamentation, we find the expressed mourning of Jesus himself. When guided to the tomb of his friend, Lazarus, Jesus weeps (Jn. 11:35). Gail R. O’Day rightly describes this event as “Jesus’ public acknowledgement of the pain that death causes in human life.”<sup>175</sup> When a caregiver joins in the weeping, in the asking of hard questions, with the griever, there is an expressed presence of the resurrected Christ in the midst of the conversation. Caregivers are, in this light, mourners as well for it is alongside of someone that we express the deep pain of the loss of relationship. We stand hurt and even confused by the questions of “why” that looms around the situation as a result of watching the power of death at work yet again in the life and flow of creation.

However, in the moment of deepest need and pain, the caregiver must be aware of the need for the theology of resurrection without diminishing the sting of a relationship broken by death. Bailey’s instruction is crucial at this juncture:

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<sup>173</sup> VanDuiwendyk, *Unwanted Gift*, 67.

<sup>174</sup> John Westerhoff, *Spiritual Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 43.

<sup>175</sup> O’Day, *NIB* 9:691.



A minister will not provide help to a grieving family when he does not acknowledge the finality death places on physical life. There are too many platitudes uttered by insensitive ministers who have not tapped the roots of their own feelings. What good is it to a young widow with several children to hear when a minister says glibly about her dead husband: “Well, we know he’ll be better off where he is”? How can a young couple be comforted at the death of their child when a minister says: “The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away – blessed be the name of the Lord”?<sup>176</sup>

A certain level of protocol should be exhibited at and around the time of the funeral that provides support and respect, without offering trite quasi-biblical statements of “bumper sticker theology.” In place of saying, “Everything happens for a reason” a more supportive statement would be “I don’t know why this happened but I do know that I love you and am here for you.” Instead of making a statement such as “God will not give you any more than you can handle” a much more pastoral and biblical response would be “I am here to help you bear the burden as your brother/sister in Christ.” Those who are mourning the loss of a relationship broken by death are not out to hear words that help the caregiver feel better, but to hear honest confessions of faith that direct one to the Creator God who understands the sufferings of his children because that same Creator God has suffered through Jesus.

The debate has raged for centuries over the impassibility and immutability of God in relation to human suffering. Voices on both sides of the theological fence cite chapter and verse to support their stance. While Christian theology should maintain a high view of God in terms of majesty and sovereignty, this same God has become one with the suffering world in and through Jesus of Nazareth. The sufferings of Jesus – physical, social, emotional, spiritual – are a consistent theme throughout the gospel narrative. Therefore to claim that God is unmoved by human suffering is to deny the witness of scripture.

However, the balance that must be struck is that the person of Jesus as the Son of God suffers out of his own freewill. There is no coercion in his sufferings as there are in so many human sufferings that take place on a daily basis. Jesus suffered because he chose to suffer. Jesus suffered out of his choice to identify with the sufferings of human beings. This distinction places the suffering of God (suffering out of God’s covenantal loving choice to redeem humankind) into a different category. God is moved by suffering because God is a relational God who chooses to allow himself to be vulnerable to the condition of human suffering. God is willing to suffer for humanity<sup>177</sup> and because of humanity.<sup>178</sup> As a result this God who is also Creator is able to suffer with humanity.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Bailey, *The Minister and Grief*, 84.

<sup>177</sup> Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 148.

<sup>178</sup> Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 123.

<sup>179</sup> Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 137.

The suffering God who chooses to suffer *with* and *because of* humans is the God who is ever present throughout ministry to those who are suffering because of death.<sup>180</sup>

This Creator God has watched with human eyes at what the sting of death does to human beings and wept with pain (Jn. 11:35). Then, as has been evidenced through the theology of resurrection, “death has been swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54). While death is certainly not the last word on human life, the arrival at a theology of resurrection does not come without the theology of death. Therefore, when ministering to one who is grieving and, thus worshipping through lamentation, as the psalmist was not quick to belittle his/her own pain, the pain of those present should not be belittled by rushing through it either. This kind of movement takes time and effort and energy. For a fuller treatment of how this energy carries forward into the time following the funeral, attention is now shifted to the third leg of the ministry table: the leg of *diakonia*.

### The Application Of *Kerygma*

#### The Culture and Death

- ***Kerygma means proclamation of a narrative***
- First temptation is to **use bumper sticker theology**. This does not jive with the *kerygma* of the gospel.
- Uneasiness with death even within the church.
- ***Our culture simply doesn't know what to think about death. Through medicine and science we know more about death and how to forestall it than ever before. Yet we know very little about caring for a dying person. We don't know what to expect or how to prepare for our own death. And we're often awkward at best when trying to comfort a friend in grief.***<sup>181</sup>

#### Becoming Open to Death's Narrative

- Members of the church must be willing and able to hear the narrative begging to be proclaimed.
- **Grief is the working through of a lost relationship.**
- **“Grief is the normal but bewildering cluster of ordinary human emotions arising in response to a significant loss, intensified and complicated by the relationship to the person or the object lost” (emphasis added).**<sup>182</sup>
- Give voice to lost relationship

#### Exploring the Relationship

- Not going to cover the stages of grief. Can be helpful but can weigh us down.
- **First question: “How did the relationship begin?”** Is the relationship one of marriage, one of offspring, one of friendship, or any number of other possible human relationships.

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<sup>180</sup> Paul Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. This resource offers a thorough and dense exploration of the suffering of God. One aspect of this work that I have found especially insightful and thought provoking is how God can remain God even while suffering.

<sup>181</sup> Moll, *The Art of Dying*, 13.

<sup>182</sup> Mitchell and Anderson, *All Our Losses*, 54.

- This is important because it determines *how* ministry is approached.
- **Second question: “How did death occur?”**
- **The death surround**
- **Four types of death: Natural, Accidental, Suicidal, Homicidal**
- Gives specific voice to the pain of the altered relationship.
- Helps the reality of death to set in
- Cathartic to talk about it
- **Theologies of creation, death, and resurrection frame out the hope we give**
- **Questions to consider in conversation:**
  - **Where is the person in terms of confronting the reality that his or her loved on has died?**
  - **How might I help the person talk about his or her loss?**
  - **Do I need to respect the person’s need to avoid the full reality of the loss for a period of time while attempting to help the person cautiously confront this new reality?**<sup>183</sup>
- Such questions infuse the conversation with resurrection. Brings hope.

#### Awareness of Depth of Story

- There are a lot of things going on in a grieving context. Lost relationship.
- **Everything is normal in grief!**
- **“Interpreting feelings and related behaviors as normal is often of great relief to the bereaved who might feel as if they are going crazy.”**<sup>184</sup>
- Think about what has happened here. Relationship lost. Sometimes a good relationship and sometimes not. Be ready for what is coming.
- **Lamentation – we don’t have to have answers.** We just need to sit with the grieving. This is an aspect of worship.
- **Questions to consider**
  - **Has the person allowed his/her self to experience the pain of grief? If so, with whom has the person shared this grief?**
  - **Was the bereaved person provided with a sense of feeling understood in the expression of grief?**
  - **How might I help this person find a balance between negative and positive feelings felt toward the deceased? Facilitative questions might be “What do you miss about the deceased? What do you not miss?”**<sup>185</sup>

#### The All-Important Question

- Asking **WHY** is important and normal
- **Two levels of importance:**
  - **Puts meaning to the relationship – theology of creation**

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<sup>183</sup> Freeman, *Grief & Loss*, 71.

<sup>184</sup> Freeman, *Grief & Loss*, 71

<sup>185</sup> Freeman, *Grief & Loss*, 71.

- **Aspect of lamentation as it invites God into the equation. God knows death through Jesus.**
- *“Frequently these emotions are expressed by asking ‘Why?’ If we are with someone who is asking the ‘why’ questions, don’t conclude too quickly that the person expressing lament really wants an answer from us. In fact, there are no answers when it comes to the why of suffering.”<sup>186</sup> – Tim VanDuiwendyk, *The Unwanted Gift of Grief*, 66-67.*
- Do not rush lamentation and WHY. Think about **Holy Saturday**. A day of waiting and grief.
- Resurrection does not happen without death. Hope does not enter without hopelessness.
- Do not be afraid of the question of why.
- **Inappropriate responses to the WHY question –**
  - **It was his/her time to go** – is it ever anyone’s time to go?
  - **God needed another angel** – seriously?
  - **Everything happens for a reason** – God pulls reason out of messes, light out of darkness, life out of death. Sometimes death happens and there is no reason for it but God can pull a reason from it. This is redemption.
  - Think about context – sometimes death is merciful, but often it is not.
- **Other options to consider:**
  - **I don’t know why, but I am here for you.**
  - **I love you**

#### *Kerygmatic* Focus of Bereavement Ministry Teams

- Bereavement Ministry Teams are to become a **safe place** where questions can be addressed through the murky waters of corporate lamentation.
- **Romans 12:15** – our weeping with those who weep brings Jesus into the midst of the hurting
- **John 11:35** – God is moved by our suffering. God’s vulnerability

### The Application of *Leitourgia*

#### Reason for Public Worship

- *“One of the basic functions of religious practice is to give meaning to life so important that persons are inspired to achieve the fullest possibilities of life.”<sup>187</sup> – Edgar N. Jackson, *The Christian Funeral*, 22.*
- Christian funeral:
  - Assists those who are grieving and those who are in attendance for the sake of supporting the loved ones of the deceased in giving expression of lament and faith to the Creator God and to draw from the experience of

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<sup>186</sup> VanDuiwendyk, *Unwanted Gift*, 66-67.

<sup>187</sup> Jackson, *The Christian Funeral*, 22.

worship the power of resurrection for the living of life in the days ahead through hope in Christ.

- **Grief is a good thing – an unwanted gift. Worship helps express it.**
- **Expression is given through:**
  - **Spoken word – ours and God's**
  - **Prayer**
  - **Song**
- **Purpose – not to glorify the dead, but to thank the Creator for the created, and to ask the Creator to bring hope to the situation.**

#### Burial

- Death does not waste time destroying the body
- **The God of the living becomes the God of the dead. Final rest given to one who carried the image of God.**
- **Dignity and respect for the created, marred by death, and capable of being resurrected physical body**

#### Funeral Home Protocol

- **Eric Bester of Clay-Barnette**

#### Final Thoughts

- ***1 Corinthians 15:54***
- **Theology of resurrection does not come without a theology of death.**
- **Worshipping through lamentation, as the psalmist was not quick to belittle his/her own pain, the pain of those present should not be belittled by rushing through it.**

APPENDIX 10

POST SURVEY FOR *KERYGMA* AND *LEITOURGIA*

Survey 2b

Please identify yourself *only* through the following criteria:

Participant #: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you familiar with the term *kerygma*?

**Please use the following scale as a means of answering the following questions**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Low		Average		High

\_\_\_\_\_ How important is it for the members of Sandy Run Baptist Church to minister to those in grief?

\_\_\_\_\_ What is your level of confidence in stepping in to minister in a situation of grief?

\_\_\_\_\_ How confident are you in your ability to articulate a theology of creation?

\_\_\_\_\_ How familiar are you with what the bible has to say about creation?

\_\_\_\_\_ How confident are you in your ability to articulate a theology of death?

\_\_\_\_\_ How familiar are you with what the bible has to say about death?

\_\_\_\_\_ How confident are you in your ability to articulate a theology of resurrection?

\_\_\_\_\_ How familiar are you with what the bible has to say about resurrection?

\_\_\_\_\_ Given what you have learned in the previous two sessions, what is your level of willingness to engage in incorporating a theology of creation, a theology of death, and a theology of resurrection into the "*kerygma*" of grief?

\_\_\_\_\_ How familiar are you with the biblical understanding of lamentation?

\_\_\_\_\_ How familiar are you with what the bible has to say about lamentation?

\_\_\_\_\_ What is the level of correlation between lamentation and grief?

\_\_\_\_\_ What is the level of correlation between grief and worship?

\_\_\_\_\_ How we respond to grief as a community is a reflection of our understanding of God?

\_\_\_\_\_ Given what you have learned in the previous two sessions, what is your level of willingness to engage in incorporating a theology of *leitourgia* into your ministry with those who are grieving?

The following questions address the teaching abilities of Pastor Andrew. Please answer honestly following the same scale used in the previous questions.

\_\_\_\_\_ How easy to understand was Pastor Andrew?

\_\_\_\_\_ How clear was Pastor Andrew's definition of *kerygma*?

\_\_\_\_\_ How clear was Pastor Andrew's definition of *leitourgia*?

\_\_\_\_\_ How organized was Pastor Andrew?

\_\_\_\_\_ Did Pastor Andrew begin this session on time?

\_\_\_\_\_ Did Pastor Andrew end this session on time?

\_\_\_\_\_ Your comfort level in being able to ask questions?





APPENDIX 12

PRE SURVEY FOR *DIAKONIA*

Survey 3a

Please identify yourself *only* through the following criteria:

Participant #: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you familiar with the term *diakonia*?    Yes    No

**Please use the following scale as a means of answering the following questions**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Low		Average		High

\_\_\_\_\_ How important is it for the members of Sandy Run Baptist Church to minister to those in grief?

\_\_\_\_\_ What is your level of confidence in stepping in to minister in a situation of grief?

\_\_\_\_\_ How important is ministry to the bereaved *before* the funeral?

\_\_\_\_\_ How important is ministry to the bereaved *after* the funeral?

\_\_\_\_\_ What is the level of correlation between ministry and love *before* the funeral?

\_\_\_\_\_ What is the level of correlation between ministry and love *after* the funeral?

\_\_\_\_\_ What is the level of correlation between ministry to the bereaved and the move of the Holy Spirit?

\_\_\_\_\_ How important is it for the members of the congregation to minister to the congregation?

\_\_\_\_\_ The power of the resurrection of Christ is evidenced through ministry to those who are hurting.

## APPENDIX 13

### LESSON PLAN FOR SESSION THREE:

#### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR *DIAKONIA*

##### Session Objectives:

- To **provide** a thorough definition of the term *diakonia*
- To **explore** the meaning of the term *diakonia* as expressed through the scriptures
- To **begin** establishing a theology of *diakonia* pulled from the biblical use of the term
- To **help** participants start putting into practice the theoretical learning from the two previous sessions

##### **The Leg of *Diakonia***

Funeral services of worship are not the only means of ministering to the grieving. Post-funeral grief work is one area where the church has been largely silent. During the ministry to the bereaved at and around the time of the funeral, the overall goal is to bring the presence of God into the pain of human living and dying. To see that carried out in the days, weeks, and even months that come after the funeral, effort must be given that is equally intentional to that given during the funeral. This is what the present project refers to as *diakonia* or service.

Beyer rightly describes the adjective, *diakoneo*, as “any ‘discharge of service’ in genuine love.”<sup>188</sup> It has been established in our theology of creation that creation was birthed in love through relationship. In the section on lamentation as *leitourgia*, the covenantal love of the Creator God is what sustains through lamentation to see it as an aspect of genuine and honest worship. Therefore, it is a natural fit for the third leg of the ministry table to be rooted in love as well: the leg of service.

The days following the funeral are when the holy presence of God is brought to life, and the leg of service is the means through which it is accomplished. It should be noted that the holy love through which the church serves and ministers is not birthed in and through the church herself, but rather through the Creator God who is love (1 Jn. 4:8). Gabriel Fackre describes this holiness of the church by stating, “the church is holy, not because of our holiness but because the holy God is present.”<sup>189</sup> What follows in this section is a detailed theology of *diakonia* as brought to light through the holy love of the Creator God who is holy by an example from the New Testament book of Acts.

Through the book of Acts, the movement of the Holy Spirit is evidenced in many ways. The group of people who become known as the Christian church is growing. In these early days of the church, “day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). Eventually, the group of believers is so large that some

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<sup>188</sup> Beyer, “διακονέω, διακονία, διάκονος” Pages 81-93 in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol. II. Edited by Gerhard Kittel. Trans. By Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 87.

<sup>189</sup> Fackre, *Signs of the Spirit*, 147.

are overlooked during “the daily distribution of food” (Acts 6:1). It is this passage, Acts 6:1-6, that becomes the focal passage for a theological rationale on service within the church, in particular to those who are suffering from the loss of a relationship broken by death.

The text begins by saying “the disciples were increasing in number” (Acts 6:1). The growth of the movement was increasing to the point that the Apostles were not able to keep up with the daily demands of having “all things in common” (Acts 2:44). Robert W. Wall identifies this practice as “the resurrection practice of sharing goods with the needy.”<sup>190</sup> Wall’s language of a “resurrection practice” serves to reinforce the theme of this project that the resurrection of Jesus is the new standard of living for those who are in Christ. Therefore, the acts of service in the church should be seen as bringing the resurrected life of Christ into a world that has been marred and scarred by death.

As the church grows, the task of caring for those who are in need becomes more than the Apostles can bear on their own. It is the Hellenist widows who are the ones being overlooked in the distribution of food (Acts 6:2). This draws in the subject of grief in a very profound manner. A widow is, of course, a female who has suffered the redefinition of the marriage relationship because of the death of her husband. However, during the days of the early church, the widow was more than simply a woman whose husband has died. Craig S. Keener describes the state of widowhood as being a state of suffering that comes about not just because of the loss of the husband to death, “but in terms of the destitution that typically resulted from it.”<sup>191</sup>

This suffering the loss of a way of life that is a secondary loss to the loss of the relationship to death. “One major study argues that widowhood was more common in this period than often assumed and that most widows were terribly impoverished.”<sup>192</sup> The task of caring for these who have suffered not just a loss of relationship, but a loss of means to move forward in life, falls to those who believe in a resurrected Messiah, those for whom serving in the name of Jesus is a means through which the resurrection of said Messiah is brought into the context of everyday life. What will this group of Jesus-followers do? There are suggestions that because of the large number of widows during this period, it would have been very easy for the apostles to become terribly overwhelmed with the demand of caring for them.<sup>193</sup>

The apostolic leadership of the church goes to great lengths to ensure that the resurrected life of Christ is brought into daily living. However, acknowledging that the task is simply more than they themselves are able to do, a group of servants needs to be appointed to handle this area of need. What is important to note is that the apostles are not assigning less important tasks to those below them in order to remain in places of

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<sup>190</sup> Robert W. Wall, *NIB* 10:111.

<sup>191</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 1265.

<sup>192</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 1265.

<sup>193</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 1265. Note 147 cites the source that provides statistical information that “nearly a third of women in the Roman world” were widows. Furthermore, “nearly 40 percent of those were between the ages of forty and fifty years of age.”

power and control. Rather, it is quite the opposite. The apostles see their primary calling in terms of the preaching of the word of God. Their ministry is one of service to the word of God. “It was not their primary business to supervise the financial arrangements of the community or to take an active part in the ‘daylic handreachinge’ (as Coverdale’s English version of 1535 calls it).”<sup>194</sup>

As a means of meeting the need at hand, the apostles decide to select a group who will serve in this capacity. This institutes one of the great needs of the Christian church: the need for assigned service. What is present in this passage of scripture is the glorifying of God in word and in deed. The apostles glorify God through the proclamation of the word of God. The servants glorify God through meeting the needs of the community around them. Both are done through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus, and to the glory of God the Father. Since both are areas of service, it is not possible to say to the community of believers that one area is more important than the other. In the proclamation of the word of God, the narrative (*kerygma*) of Jesus comes to resurrected life once again. In the service to the community, especially to those for whom the loss of a relationship to death has made survival in daily living very difficult, the same narrative comes to resurrected life once again. The church would do well to remember the caring for others through the language Wall has brought to the forefront: “resurrection practice.”

One of the requirements for serving in this capacity is to be full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3). The Holy Spirit has led the growth of the church. The Holy Spirit has moved through the apostles. Therefore, the Holy Spirit has been integral to the life of the church thus far. Now, as the church moves into the lives of the people who are joining her ranks, the Holy Spirit is the active agent of service. “Being ‘full of the Spirit’ probably indicates a continuous state more than it does a mere occasion of being ‘filled with the Spirit,’ although, because the latter assertion signified special empowerments, both assertions could be simultaneously true of the same person.”<sup>195</sup> The filling of the Holy Spirit, is thus a way of life. It is a signal that the life that lives inside the servant is the same Spirit that brings life in the name of Jesus. In other words, the choosing of servants should be based upon those whose lives have been filled with the resurrection power of the living Christ. It is out of that power that the individual is able to serve at all, and through that power that the service continues. All of this is to the glory of God.

When this recommendation comes from the apostles to the community it is well received. The community is in full support of this kind of move. The names of those chosen to be these new servants are listed and identified as Greek names which gives the hint that “the seven come from the ranks of the Hellenists.”<sup>196</sup> Keener suggests that with these men being from among those who were left out of the distribution of food, “they have special sensitivity to both the minority’s needs and the perceptions, and they are less vulnerable to criticism than Hebrews would have been.”<sup>197</sup> What this suggests in

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<sup>194</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, rev. ed. in NICONT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 120.

<sup>195</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 1276.

<sup>196</sup> J. Bradley Chance, “Acts” in *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2007), 105.

<sup>197</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 1279.

terms of practical service to those in need should come from those who understand the pains of being overlooked and left out. The server is able to serve in the power of the Holy Spirit because the server himself/herself understands the loneliness of deep need. It is only in our identification with our own story of grief and loss that we are able to serve in the power of the Holy Spirit, those who have suffered, and are suffering grief. How is this fleshed out in terms of the present project? What kinds of service should be remembered as the curriculum at hand moves to applying this learning to the field of grief?

### The Leg of *Diakonia*

#### Need for Service Today

- **Diakonia** means service
- *Diakoneo* – verb – “**any ‘discharge of service’ in genuine love.**”<sup>198</sup> Love is central
- We do a great job serving around the time of death – casseroles and cards. **What about afterward?**
- It has been established in our theology of creation that creation was birthed in love through relationship.
- In the section on lamentation as *leitourgia*, the covenantal love of the Creator God is what sustains through lamentation to see it as an aspect of genuine and honest worship.
- Therefore, it is a natural fit for the third leg of the ministry table to be rooted in love as well: the leg of service.
- **Service in love brings the holy presence of God to life.**
- Holy love is not birthed with us but through the Creator who is love (1 Jn. 4:8).
- **“The church is holy, not because of our holiness but because the holy God is present.”**<sup>199</sup> –Fackre
- **God is present in Jesus.** God is present in people who follow Jesus. To expound we turn to Acts
- Questions before we move on?

#### Diakonia in the Biblical Perspective

- **Why Acts?** Generation who came after Jesus. Witnesses to resurrection. Growth of believing community transformed by the resurrection of Jesus.
- **Holy Spirit** is central
- **Acts 6:1-6** – growth so vast there is an overlooked group
- “The disciples were increasing in number” (Acts 6:1).
- **Not able to keep up with the daily demands of having “all things in common” (Acts 2:44).**

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<sup>198</sup> Beyer, “διακονέω, διακονία, διάκονος” Pages 81-93 in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol. II. Edited by Gerhard Kittel. Trans. By Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 87.

<sup>199</sup> Fackre, *Signs of the Spirit*, 147.

- Robert W. Wall identifies this practice as **“the resurrection practice of sharing goods with the needy.”**<sup>200</sup>
- Acts of service in the church should be seen as bringing the resurrected life of Christ into a world that has been marred and scarred by death.
- Questions before we move on?

### Increasing Needs

- **More than the Apostles can bear on their own.**
- Hellenist widows (Acts 6:2) – widows and grief –
- Overwhelmed with the demand of caring for them.<sup>201</sup> **1/3 of women in Roman Empire were widows and 40% b/w ages 40-50**
- During the days of the early church, the widow was more than simply a woman whose husband has died. Craig S. Keener describes the state of widowhood as being a state of suffering that comes about not just because of the loss of the husband to death, **“but in terms of the destitution that typically resulted from it.”**<sup>202</sup>
- **Secondary losses**
- “One major study argues that widowhood was more common in this period than often assumed and that most widows were terribly impoverished.”<sup>203</sup>
- **Caring for the grieving comes to the community of believers in the resurrected Messiah**
- The resurrection of said Messiah is brought into the context of everyday life. What will this group of Jesus-followers do?
- A group of **servants** needs to be appointed to handle this area of need.
- Not assigning less important tasks to those below them in order to remain in places of power and control.
- Questions

### Servants Needed

- The need for assigned service.
- **Glorifying God in word and in deed.** The apostles glorify God through the proclamation of the word of God. The servants glorify God through meeting the needs of the community around them.
- Both are done **through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus, and to the glory of God the Father.**
- **Serving is “resurrection practice.”**
- Serving is to the glory of God – brings holy God into present
- Questions

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<sup>200</sup> Wall, *NIB* 10:111.

<sup>201</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 1265.

<sup>202</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 1265.

<sup>203</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 1265.

### The Role of The Holy Spirit

- **Acts 6:3**
- The spirit has been active all along
- **The Holy Spirit is the active agent of service.**
- The filling of the Holy Spirit, is thus **a way of life.**
- Whose lives have been filled with the resurrection power of the living Christ.
- **Romans 8:11**
- Questions?

### Follow Through Plan

- The **community is in full support** of this kind of move.
- **Acts 6:5 - Greek names** which gives the hint that “the seven come from the ranks of the Hellenists.”<sup>204</sup>
- **“They have special sensitivity to both the minority’s needs and the perceptions, and they are less vulnerable to criticism than Hebrews would have been.”**<sup>205</sup>
- Practical service to those in need should come from those who **understand the pains** of being overlooked and left out.
- It is only in **our identification with our own story of grief and loss** that we are able to serve in the power of the Holy Spirit, those who have suffered, and are suffering grief.
- Questions?

### What is Our Plan?

- **Ministry** teams
- **Identify** with our own story to help others in theirs
- **Carry** the load of care together
- **Resurrection** practice
- Next week we will discuss how to serve
- Questions?

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<sup>204</sup> Chance, “Acts,” 105.

<sup>205</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 1279.

APPENDIX 14

Survey 3c

Participant #: \_\_\_\_\_

The following questions address the teaching abilities of Pastor Andrew. Please answer honestly using the following scale.

**Please use the following scale as a means of answering the following questions**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Low				High

\_\_\_\_\_ How easy to understand was Pastor Andrew?

\_\_\_\_\_ How clear was Pastor Andrew's definition of *diakonia*?

\_\_\_\_\_ How organized was Pastor Andrew?

\_\_\_\_\_ Did Pastor Andrew begin this session on time?

\_\_\_\_\_ Did Pastor Andrew end this session on time?

\_\_\_\_\_ Your comfort level in being able to ask questions?



## APPENDIX 15

### LESSON PLAN FOR SESSION FOUR

#### CLINICAL APPLICATION OF *DIAKONIA*

##### **Session Objectives:**

- **Begin** to put into practice the material from the previous three sessions
- **Explore** two types of service
- **Explore** how these two types of service “rehumanize”
- **Case** studies

##### *The Application of Diakonia*

The initial survey in the present project (Appendix 1) serves as a means of qualitatively measuring the response to the needs of grief within the congregation at Sandy Run Baptist Church. The expectation is that the returned surveys will present results that reveal how shallow our response has been in times of grief and loss. Therefore, it is critical to identify practical ways through which acts of service may be brought to the table of grief ministry.

There are two areas of service to the bereaved that will be explored in this section of the project curriculum: protection and provision. In times of grief and loss, the bereaved are left in a critical state of vulnerability. There is whirlwind of loss and emotion that can make difficult even the simplest of tasks. The vulnerability present comes from the loss of a relationship through death. Therefore, the vulnerability is a tie back to the *kerygma*. In the section on *kerygma*, vulnerability was a fundamental piece of understanding relationships in creation. Now with the redefinition of relationship through death, the vulnerability comes back into focus as the one left to grieve the loss is left to navigate a world he/she may never thought of existing before the death took place.

A service of protection is, therefore, a fundamental area of service to the bereaved. These acts of service include protecting the physical wellbeing of the bereaved through acts of hospitality. Such acts include providing food for the family or helping to arrange lodging for out of town guests. These acts of service, and others like them, are designed to protect the bereaved at a critical junction in life. These acts are acts of daily living that call for energy, time, and effort, all of which are resources that are in limited supply during times of grief and loss. They protect the bereaved and helping to conserve energy, time, and effort that should be given to the task of grieving openly and honestly.

My mother died immediately in the Friday morning accident while my father lived eleven days following the accident. By the evening of the day my mother died, there were countless people in the hospital waiting room, each one on pins and needles to hear the report of the condition of my father. We were at a hospital an hour away from where we lived, so travel home would become an issue. The evening was moving quickly to night as the darkness became darker both outside and inside my own heart.

During those hours, there were people, servants of God whom I am convinced were moved by the Holy Spirit, who came to me and Ronna offering to pay for a hotel room for the night. Since we were not prepared to stay because of clothing and other

necessities, we opted to make the trek home. Then someone said, “Let me drive your car home. You just ride.”

The next eleven days were filled with servants bringing meals to our home, running errands on our behalf, and collecting money, and gift cards to gas stations and restaurants. All of these were gifts of protected service as we did not have the resources of energy, time, or effort to give to these tasks. They were all simple tasks that I remember to this day. I recall that each night during our eleven-day stay in the hospital at the bedside of my father, there was a different group from our church coming to take Ronna and me out to eat. This simple act pulled us out of the artificially-lit hallways of the intensive care unit and out to the sidewalks of the city. There, on those sidewalks, we were able to catch a breath of fresh air and to take a break from the painful monotony of waiting in a hospital room. These were all ways of protecting us to help preserve and replenish the energy we had spent out.

When the time came for the funerals, Ronna and I lived an hour away from the town where the funerals would take place. It was Ronna’s parents this time who called to reserve rooms for us at the hotel, making sure we had a place to stay overnight following the visitation and before the funeral.

These are acts of protective service to those who are bereaved. However, acts of service should continue beyond the time of death and the days following through to the funeral. The days that come after the funeral, the days that revolve into weeks and flip over to years, are the days when a different type of service is needed. The services that are needed at this point are provisional services. These services are the providing the completion of tasks that the individual may not know how to do, or how to have done for them.

Take, for instance, the woman whose husband of sixty years has died. Her late husband took care of all of the maintenance in and around their home. Now, he is not there to take care of these needs. Her loss stretches into the darkness of the future as she lays down at night to find his side of the bed empty and looks out a kitchen window in the morning. This window is in grave disrepair. It needs to be scraped, caulked, and painted. Or better yet, all of the windows around the house need to be replaced. An area of service for the Bereavement Ministry Team would be to go to the home of the widow a month following the death of her husband and ask what needs to be done around the house. The widow is not able to do these things for herself and she does not know who to call to have these repairs completed. Furthermore, if she found a for-hire service to come in and complete the work, would this service take advantage of her station in life as a new widow?

Another example would be the couple whose son died from cancer. He was only sixteen years old and was beaming with an electric type of life. His room has sat filled with belongings yet empty of presence for months now. It has become a kind of shrine almost, though the parents can hardly stand to walk down the hallway. The parents know that six months following his death is now the time to start cleaning out his room. It is time to donate his clothes to the Clothes Closet at church. The time has come to box up his sports trophies and move them to their storage building and then on to another “home.” An act of provisional service would be to provide the companionship to sort through the belongings of the son. “I’ll sit with you as you cry and go through his clothes,” someone says to his mother. “My truck is available to haul all of his clothes to

the Clothes Closet,” someone else says. These are acts of provisional service given to those who have not the means to do it on their own.

Fackre uses the language of “rehumanization” in his work on *diakonia*.<sup>206</sup> Such acts of service are in the power of the Holy Spirit through the church as a means of “rehumanizing” those who have been “dehumanized” by the world around them. These “rehumanizing” acts of service should be seen as the Creator God continuing to engage with and shape and form his creation through creation itself. It is the move of God’s Holy Spirit, the Spirit that brings life to the church that makes recognizable the need for service, and the means through which to serve.

The power of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead enables the world to crackle back to life, “rehumanizing” a creation that has been dehumanized by death. With the resurrection of Jesus from the dead as the new standard of normal in and through the church, these acts of service in the power of that resurrection are, in fact, the cracklings back to life of the world that has been marred by death. As was established in the section on theology of resurrection, Jesus is the new Adam, the new way to be human. Therefore, any act of service in the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of the resurrected Jesus “rehumanizes” what has been “dehumanized by death.” What may be the most powerful move of all of this is the fact that it is accomplished through the context of community. To this, the last leg of the theological table, our attention now turns.

### *The Application of Diakonia*

#### Reminders

- **Diakonia** means service
- **Diakonia** is through the power of the Holy Spirit
- **Diakonia** is a resurrection practice

#### Resurrection Practice

- After a death, those who grieve are **highly vulnerable** – remember *kerygma* and relationships?
- **New world** of living now that relationship is redefined
- Even **simple tasks** can be difficult – never thought we would have to do certain things
- Two types of serving: **protection and provision**

#### Protection

- Usually takes place right **around the time of the funeral**
- **Protecting the well-being of the bereaved**
- Resources of **energy, time, and effort** need to be directed in areas of being together. This pulls energy, time and effort away from simple tasks.
- **Examples of protection:**
  - **Offer food for family**
  - **Offer to arrange lodging for out of town guests**

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<sup>206</sup> Fackre, *Signs Of The Spirit and Signs Of The Times*, 136.

- **Offer to help clean the home where family will be received**
- My own story
  - The offer was made for a hotel room for Ronna and I. Someone drove our car home.
  - Someone took me to run errands and pay bills
  - Hotel arrangements were made for us when we had to travel to Boone for funerals

### Provision

- **After** funeral
- **Provide a service the bereaved does not know how to do or have done for them**
- New normal – life without the deceased – means **learning to find a through the fog** – help is needed
- **Examples of provision:**
  - **Home/Car Repair** – providing knowledge on how to do it
  - **Sort through belongings** – providing companionship going through

### Rehumanization

- **Death has dehumanized life**
- Gabriel Fackre uses the language of “rehumanization” in his work on *diakonia*.<sup>207</sup>
- These “rehumanizing” acts of service should be seen as **the Creator God continuing to engage with and shape and form his creation through creation itself.**
- The move of God’s Holy Spirit, the Spirit that brings life to the church that makes recognizable the need for service, and the means through which to serve.
- **We are resurrection people who live resurrected lives bringing resurrected hope into moments of life filled with death.**
- Protective and Provisional services are both examples of how the resurrected Jesus is present in creation, bringing life once again.

### Case Studies

- I want you to split up into groups.
- I will give your group a case study. A short paragraph describing a situation where a bereavement ministry team would be needed.
- **Identify the following:**
  - **Story of relationship – what kind of relationship?**
  - **Story of death – the death surround – NASH**
  - **Ways to help express worship?**
  - **Think theologically about the WHY question in the context of the story.**
  - **Ways to offer protective service?**
  - **Ways to offer provisional service?**

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<sup>207</sup> Fackre, *Signs Of The Spirit and Signs Of The Times*, 136.

## APPENDIX 16

### CASE STUDIES FOR SESSION FOUR

#### **Case Study #1**

Johnny and Susan have been married for 50 years. They have three adult children and eight grandchildren who are all scattered throughout the country. They have enjoyed a long and joyous life together and both of them still have both of their parents. They have been faithful members of their local church for more than 50 years. They have been very active in their community, often organizing clothing drives for children at Christmas. Three months ago, Susan was diagnosed with advanced stage pancreatic cancer. She was expected to live a year but died in three months. Johnny's response is anger and is asking WHY God would cause this to happen to his wife.

- Identify the following:
  - Story of relationship – what kind of relationship?
  - Story of death – the death surround – NASH
  - Ways to help express worship?
  - Think theologically about the WHY question in the context of the story.
  - Ways to offer protective service?
  - Ways to offer provisional service?

#### **Case Study #2**

Jacqueline is 95 years old. Her husband, Robert died forty years ago from a stroke. Together they had one son who lives next door. After a very brief upper respiratory infection, she died in her sleep. She has never been to church but her son speaks of her deep faith in a “God of love.” Their son was 15 when his father died. This is the first time he has been through a family death since then.

- Identify the following:
  - Story of relationship – what kind of relationship?
  - Story of death – the death surround – NASH
  - Ways to help express worship?
  - Think theologically about the WHY question in the context of the story.
  - Ways to offer protective service?
  - Ways to offer provisional service?

#### **Case Study #3**

Katherine is a student at the university. She is twenty-two years old and entering her final year of study as a business student. She is also the pitcher for the girl's softball team at the university. She has been very active in the college ministry at the church and teaches the G.A.'s class on Wednesday evenings. When she walks into a room, the room is automatically brighter. Although she is originally from Massachusetts (all of her family still lives there), she has made her home in our community. Everyone knows Katherine,

which is what makes her death so hard to accept. At softball practice the other night, the batter hit a line drive, striking Katherine in the face. She died at the hospital just twelve hours after she was hit.

- Identify the following:
  - Story of relationship – what kind of relationship?
  - Story of death – the death surround – NASH
  - Ways to help express worship?
  - Think theologically about the WHY question in the context of the story.
  - Ways to offer protective service?
  - Ways to offer provisional service?

APPENDIX 17

POST SURVEY FOR *DIAKONIA*

Survey 3b

Please identify yourself *only* through the following criteria:

Participant #: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you familiar with the term *diakonia*?    Yes    No

**Please use the following scale as a means of answering the following questions**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Low		Average		High

\_\_\_\_\_ How important is it for the members of Sandy Run Baptist Church to minister to those in grief?

\_\_\_\_\_ What is your level of confidence in stepping in to minister in a situation of grief?

\_\_\_\_\_ How important is ministry to the bereaved *before* the funeral?

\_\_\_\_\_ How important is ministry to the bereaved *after* the funeral?

\_\_\_\_\_ What is the level of correlation between ministry and love *before* the funeral?

\_\_\_\_\_ What is the level of correlation between ministry and love *after* the funeral?

\_\_\_\_\_ What is the level of correlation between ministry to the bereaved and the move of the Holy Spirit?

\_\_\_\_\_ How important is it for the members of the congregation to minister to the congregation?

\_\_\_\_\_ The power of the resurrection of Christ is evidenced through ministry to those who are hurting.

The following questions address the teaching abilities of Pastor Andrew. Please answer honestly following the same scale used in the previous questions.

\_\_\_\_\_ How easy to understand was Pastor Andrew?

\_\_\_\_\_ How clear was Pastor Andrew's definition of *diakonia*?

\_\_\_\_\_ How organized was Pastor Andrew?

\_\_\_\_\_ Did Pastor Andrew begin this session on time?

\_\_\_\_\_ Did Pastor Andrew end this session on time?

\_\_\_\_\_ Your comfort level in being able to ask questions?





APPENDIX 19

PRE SURVEY FOR *KOINONIA*

Survey 4a

Please identify yourself *only* through the following criteria:

Participant #: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you familiar with the term *koinonia*?    Yes    No

**Please use the following scale as a means of answering the following questions**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Low		Average		High

\_\_\_\_\_ How important is it for the members of Sandy Run Baptist Church to minister to those in grief?

\_\_\_\_\_ What is your level of confidence in stepping in to minister in a situation of grief?

\_\_\_\_\_ How important is community to the bereaved *before* the funeral?

\_\_\_\_\_ How important is community to the bereaved *after* the funeral?

\_\_\_\_\_ What is the level of correlation between community and love *before* the funeral?

\_\_\_\_\_ What is the level of correlation between community and love *after* the funeral?

\_\_\_\_\_ How important is it for the members of the congregation to be community to the congregation?

\_\_\_\_\_ How helpful would it be to meet with a widow, to hear her story, and to put some of these tools into practice?

## APPENDIX 20

### LESSON PLAN FOR SESSION FIVE

#### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR *KOINONIA*

##### Session Objectives

- **Provide** definition of *koinonia*
- **Explore** the relationship *koinonia* shares with *kerygma*, *leitourgia*, and *diakonia*
- **Explore** biblical perspective of *koinonia*
- **Begin** connecting *koinonia* to grief and the role of the bereavement ministry teams

#### The Leg of *Koinonia*

Community has been a part of the fabric of human living since the dawn of time. To attempt to separate the individual from the community is to rob both the individual and the community of the God-given desire to *be* the family of God. Community is central to the biblical narrative as it is woven into the story from beginning to end. In the opening scene of creation after God has knit Adam together he speaks of the pinnacle of creation by saying, “It is not good for man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). Presented there in the earliest telling of the story of humanity, it is clear that the creator God established community as a means of being present in the world. Community fuels the human project to survive and thrive. In other words, we are more fully human, as God created, when we live in community with one another. This has already been unpacked through the theology of creation.

The biblical concept used to describe community in this project is *koinonia*. To understand where this theme is headed, we must first devote attention to the word itself. With roots in the word κοινός, κοινονία is a crucial word in the body of the New Testament. Κοινός was used in secular Greek to refer to “common.”<sup>208</sup> To have things in common is to share them equally. When the word κοινονία surfaces in the New Testament it “denotes ‘participation,’ ‘fellowship,’ esp. with a close bond.”<sup>209</sup> The use of the term in patristic Greek incorporates the use of this term in a Trinitarian sense as God is in relationship with God’s self, as the God of self-relationship is in relationship with humanity, and as humanity is in relationship with one another.

To engage in a fellowship of participation with the grieving is the ultimate goal of this project. If the human life is to be shared, then the pains of the human life are shared together as well. What has been presented thus far in the biblical and theological rationale, and the application of each leg of this table, has built to this theme. Each leg of

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<sup>208</sup> Hauck, “κοίνοϛ, κοινωνός, κοινωνέω, κοινονία, συγκοινωνός, συγκοινωνέω, κοινωνικός.” Pages 789-809 in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. III. Edited by Gerhard Kittel. Trans. By Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 789.

<sup>209</sup> Hauck, *TDNT*, 798.

the table of this project points to *κοινωνία* as the final piece that holds it all together. Therefore, what does Scripture say about times of grief and loss and connecting this to the theme of participating in the fellowship with the sufferings of one another? The example used to illustrate this biblical concept will come from the Old Testament book of Ruth.

The book of Ruth exemplifies how grief can be expressed and experienced through a strong community network of support. Furthermore, the example given in the Book of Ruth shows how powerful grief in community can be as a mode of spiritual formation. This spiritual formation serves to develop and propel the individual and the community into a time of healing and the blessing of future thanks to the Kinsman Redeemer.

Biblical scholarship traditionally rooted the writing of the story of Ruth in the post-exilic period.<sup>210</sup> There are internal textual reasons for this belief, among which is the open discussion of inter-marriage between Israelites and Moabites and the welcoming of an outsider into the Israelite community. It is often the case that those who are grieving feel as if they themselves are outsiders within their own community. Something happened to them that they could not prevent or control, which left them feeling different from the rest of the community.

In many ways, this is just what happens in the narrative presented in the book of Ruth. The opening six verses of the book present a kind of microcosm for what is to come in the rest of the story. There is the loss of land, the loss of identity, the loss of prominence in the community from whence the family came, loss of a spouse, loss of children, and with all of these, the loss of the future as there have been no children born to the family at the center of the story. This is compounded with the loss of a belief in God. It seems as though the Creator God has somehow forgotten his own people and the losses begin to serve as proof to this thought.

In Ruth 1:6, Naomi, the mother of the family uprooted from Bethlehem and moved to Moab, reflects back on all the losses that have taken place in her life. She hears God has somehow provided food for his people and desires to return to this place. Her two daughters-in-law, who have themselves suffered the losses of their respective husbands to death, these husbands are the dead sons of Naomi, are presented with the choice of whether to remain in Moab and attempt to restart their lives, though now as widows, or to accompany Naomi to Bethlehem.

There is an exchange of conversation, with Naomi insisting that the young women stay in Moab and allow her to return to Bethlehem alone. At first both daughters-in-law commit to stay with her (Ruth 1:10). Whether to repay Naomi's love, to remain loyal to their husbands, or to avoid the pain of parting, they declared their intention to sacrifice their futures on the altar of service to her."<sup>211</sup> Ruth and Orpah, the daughters-in-law, know full well that Naomi is returning to the place and people from whence she came. However, Sakenfeld astutely notes that the women are aware that it is not simply a

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<sup>210</sup> Hubbard, *Ruth*, 24.

<sup>211</sup> Hubbard, *Ruth*, 106.

change in physical location they are committing to but also “a change of social orientation.”<sup>212</sup>

The women know they will be going to a place that is unfamiliar to them, to a people who are unfamiliar to them, and doing so in a station in life (widowhood) that is unfamiliar to them. Whether or not Naomi has thought of all of these things, or if she simply desires to be home after being in a foreign place for more than ten years (Ruth 1:4), she insists to return alone (Ruth 1:11-13).

At this second insisting from Naomi, Orpah kisses her mother-in-law and the two part ways weeping. Nothing is said in the text to cast Orpah in a negative light. She is obedient to the pleas of her mother-in-law, therefore she should be commended for that action. The trajectory of the text seems not to be casting one daughter-in-law in a bad light while the other remains in a good light, nor is it an attempt to serve as a message of faithfulness to marriage, family, or other social commitments. “Orpah seems to have been a model of obedient womanhood, and the Lord may have eventually dealt kindly with her, as she had dealt with Naomi and her family (1:8); but no one elected to tell her story.”<sup>213</sup> Rather, the departure of Orpah from Naomi serves as a literary move on the part of the author to focus the spotlight on Ruth and Naomi.

The shift that takes places in the story comes in the form of a commitment to what we will call “a community of care in grief.” Ruth clings to her mother-in-law and makes a solemn vow not to leave her (Ruth 1:14b-17). Ruth uses strong language when speaking to her mother-in-law using verbiage that pleads with Naomi not to ask Ruth to change her “primary allegiance.”<sup>214</sup> Up to this point, the allegiance of Ruth has been to Naomi and her family. She has been a daughter-in-law and together they have lived life. They have participated in the events of life alongside one another. Though the family situation has changed socially, and even legally, there is no breaking of the commitment of the heart.

Naomi and Ruth have both suffered the loss of a husband and, though they are of different generations, there is a sense of commitment to the cause of continuing to be community together. For Ruth, the commitment to cling to Naomi is social and religious. The social aspect is reflected in the terminology “your people will be my people.” Ruth is a Moabitess and Naomi from Bethlehem in Judea, therefore Ruth’s commitment to make Naomi’s people her own people is significant. On the religious side of the coin, for a Moabitess to make her God the God of an Israelite was to stake a claim on her heart. Her God was now the Creator God who has been the one to provide food for his people in Bethlehem. This decision from Ruth, the decision not to leave, but to participate in the life of Naomi, wherever that life may lead, is a declaration of *koinonia*. The truth is these women were widows. “Life for widows, orphans, and foreigners was regarded in the Old Testament as extremely insecure; this mirrored among other things the repeated requests to look after these groups.”<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 26.

<sup>213</sup> Farmer, *NIB* 2:906.

<sup>214</sup> Farmer, *NIB* 2:907.

<sup>215</sup> Nielsen, *Ruth*, 43.

Time has passed since the days when Naomi and her family last lived in Bethlehem. Now, as Naomi returns to Bethlehem from Moab, she is not the same person she once was. She is different because of the losses in her life; she has been changed by the effects of grief. One of the differences is in who is with her. She is accompanied by her daughter-in-law who has herself suffered greatly.

So often this is the case when people suffer great and terrible losses. From the valley of the shadow emerges a version of the person who entered. When Naomi returns to the people and the land she once knew so well, she returns as a different person. She is not the same woman she once was for there was once fullness in her arms and heart and now there is emptiness and barrenness. Of this reality neither Naomi nor Ruth will shy away (Ruth 1:20-21). Loss has a tremendous impact on who we are and shape the kind of future we will have. The faithfulness of God is a major theme here as it is the unspoken voice, and often the unfelt presence, that accompanies the griever and mourner through these seasons.

In the account of Ruth and Naomi, there is the impact of community that surrounds the griever, cares for the griever, and commits to walk with the griever so that the griever is not alone. The activity of God as Creator can be most clearly seen here. God, as Creator, interacts with a fallen and suffering creation by himself embracing the forces of death as a means of bringing about life. God relates and connects with the broken creation as by himself becoming part of creation in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. God has made the eternal commitment to carry creation through the times of loss, to be alongside of creation, and to mourn within creation, at the death of his prized possession.

Ruth's decision to stay with Naomi through the events of the future is a turning point in the story. Because Ruth goes to Bethlehem with Naomi, she meets Boaz. Through Boaz, the Kinsman Redeemer, the Creator God redeems the situation bringing life out of a situation of death. The woman who left Bethlehem with a full family has returned having lost everyone but her daughter-in-law. The Kinsman Redeemer who enters the story will provide a future for the family. Upon deeper theological reflection, it should be noted that the term Kinsman Redeemer is not used by accident. Since Boaz is labeled a "kinsman," it is highly possible that he was of the same clan as Naomi's family.<sup>216</sup> This critical piece of the story will be used by God to redeem the losses that have taken place. The realization is intense that not only is this man, Boaz from Bethlehem, but he is a part of the same clan as those who have suffered loss. In modern terms it could be phrased that "Boaz lives in our same subdivision in town." As has been identified thoroughly throughout this proposal, the entrance of God into the human life through Jesus of Nazareth is the means through which God redeems humanity. Jesus is God in the flesh, and thus, is from our neighborhood. When it comes to *κοινωνία* as a means of ministering to those in grief, there is no clearer picture than that of Ruth. In her commitment to stay with Naomi, she is led to the one whom God will use to redeem.

### *The Leg of Koinonia*

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<sup>216</sup> Bush, *Ruth*, 65.

### What is *Koinonia* and Why Does It Matter

- **Review** where we have been: *Kerygma* means? *Leitourgia* means? *Diakonia* means? Think of them as **legs on a table**.
- Κοινωνία comes from the word *koinos* which means “**common**.”
- When κοινωνία is used in the NT, it “**denotes ‘participation,’ ‘fellowship,’ esp. with a close bond.**”<sup>217</sup>
- Think back to the story of creation: in relationship for relationship. Not good for man to be alone (**Gen. 2:18**)
- **Relationships in creation reflect the relationship God shares within the Godhead** as Father, Son, Holy Spirit. (Patristic use of κοινωνία) All things in common!
- *Koinonia* is also described as “**community**.” Community fuels God’s human project and we are more fully human as God intended when we live in community – in common – with one another.
- **To engage in a fellowship of participation with those who grieve is the ultimate goal of this project.** This is the 4<sup>th</sup> leg of the table – holds everything together
- **Acts 2:44 – all things in common**
- If life is to be shared in common and in participation, this means the hurts and pains of life as well as the joys and successes of life. When Jesus, the Son, died, the Holy Spirit and the Father were both grieving and hurting.
- Questions?

### *Koinonia* in the Biblical Perspective

- **Book of Ruth** – exemplifies how grief can be expressed and experienced through a strong community, participation, and network of support.
- Many approaches to the book of Ruth. Intermarriage between Israelites and Moabites (outsiders) and the power of welcoming the outsider into the community.
- **Grievers often feel like outsiders.** Something happened they could not prevent nor control. Leaves them feeling different from the rest of the community.
- **Ruth 1:1-6**
- Microcosm for the rest of the book
- **Lots of losses:**
  - **Loss of home**
  - **Loss of identity**
  - **Loss of prominence in community**
  - **Loss of spouse**
  - **Loss of children**
  - **Loss of future – no grandchildren**
  - **Loss of a belief in God**
  - **God comes to the aid – 1:6 – too late?**
- Naomi wishes to return to Bethlehem....**ALONE (1:10)**. Ruth & Orpah will not have it.

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<sup>217</sup> Hauck, *TDNT*, 798.

- **“Whether to repay Naomi’s love, to remain loyal to their husbands, or to avoid the pain of parting, they declared their intention to sacrifice their futures on the altar of service to her.”<sup>218</sup> – Robert Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, 106.**
- They commit to **“a change of social orientation.”<sup>219</sup> –Katherine D. Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 26.**
- Ruth and Orpah are willing to embrace their new station in life (widowhood) in a new location (Bethlehem). Naomi will not have it. She **INSISTS on doing this alone (1:11-13).**
- Orpah bids farewell – no judgment cast on her. Narrative tactic to focus on Naomi & Ruth
- ***Ruth 1:14b-17 – community of care in grief***
- Ruth’s language is of **“primary allegiance.”<sup>220</sup> – Kathleen A. R. Farmer, *NIB 2:906*.** We have done so much life together already. Please don’t ask me to shift my commitment anywhere else.
- They have MUCH in common – losses of all kinds
- **Social and religious commitment – your people, my people; your God, my God.** This is *koinonia* – participate in the COMMON
- **Arrival in Bethlehem presents a different Naomi than who she was when she left.** Grief and loss have a way of doing this – leaving us with a different version of ourselves. One difference: who is with her – Ruth who has suffered greatly as well.
- **They will share the journey together** – whatever it holds. They will participate in the commonalities together.
- In Ruth we see the impact of community around the griever – **commitment to see to it that the griever does not walk alone.**
- **Ruth’s decision to stay with Naomi and to walk together is the key turning point in the story.** Because of that decision, she meets Boaz, they marry, they have a child.
- The Naomi who suffered so much and returned to Bethlehem empty is the one who... ***Ruth 4:16-17*.**
- No surprise, then, that Boaz is the kinsman **REDEEMER** – God redeems through sharing in common.
- Kinsman – Boaz is from the same neighborhood – so is Jesus!
- **The Creator God relates by walking with us by embracing and absorbing death in Jesus of Nazareth.**
- On a side note – Ruth is the great-grandmother of King David of Israel. Whose house and line does Jesus come from? David!
- This is the power of community. Committing to share the story of grief together. To lift one another up. To care for one another.

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<sup>218</sup> Hubbard, *Ruth*, 106.

<sup>219</sup> Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 26.

<sup>220</sup> Farmer, *NIB 2:907*.



- **In grief there is enough feeling like outsiders** – bring them in and surround as community. Share the journey in common.
- **Bereavement ministry teams are envisioned to serve as an aspect of community.** Commitment to care. *Koinonia* is what the whole project is. *Kerygma*, *Leitourgia*, and *Diakonia* all revolve around *koinonia*. Without *koinonia* this is not going to happen.
- In the context of *koinonia* we are able to hear stories, worship, and serve.
- Next week we will explore how the bereavement ministry teams serve as community.
- Questions?

APPENDIX 21

Survey 4c

Participant #: \_\_\_\_\_

The following questions address the teaching abilities of Pastor Andrew. Please answer honestly using the following scale.

**Please use the following scale as a means of answering the following questions**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Low				High

\_\_\_\_\_ How easy to understand was Pastor Andrew?

\_\_\_\_\_ How clear was Pastor Andrew's definition of *koinonia*?

\_\_\_\_\_ How organized was Pastor Andrew?

\_\_\_\_\_ Did Pastor Andrew begin this session on time?

\_\_\_\_\_ Did Pastor Andrew end this session on time?

\_\_\_\_\_ Your comfort level in being able to ask questions?

## APPENDIX 22

### LESSON PLAN FOR SESSION SIX

#### CLINICAL APPLICATION OF *KOINONIA*

##### Session 6 Objectives

- **Summarize** material covered: *kerygma*, *leitourgia*, *diakonia*, *koinonia*
- **Explore** application of *koinonia*
- **Meet** in groups with widows

##### *The Application of Koinonia*

Throughout this proposal, the spirit of *koinonia* has been the glue to hold everything together. *Koinonia* is seen in the relationships of *kerygma*, the honesty of *leitourgia*, and the willingness of *diakonia*. The reason is deeply theological because as the word *κοινωνία* deals with what participants have in common, we are able to truly share in common.

The common element in all of the work thus far is that every person suffers losses, therefore, everyone grieves. Loss of relationship through death is not particular to any race, gender, or language. Loss bears its ugly teeth at every human being. Since every human being is created in the image of God for relationship, and every human being has suffered loss of human relationships through death, every human being has the opportunity to be rehumanized by the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, every human being is then presented with the powerful gift of being in “common.” We then become common partners in the new humanity, defined by the new normal. We then become partners in a community of hope, telling the story of what God has done and how God has redeemed, lamenting before God and worshipping God and knowing God in the midst of our suffering, and serving together as a people who have been forever changed by God.

##### Summary of Material

- *Kerygma*: what is it?
- **Theologies** of creation, death, resurrection
- **Hear** the story – ask questions about the story of death
- *Leitourgia*: what is it?
- **Lamentation** as worship
- **Allow** God to be present in suffering through worship
- *Diakonia*: what is it?
- **Resurrection** practice
- **Two** types of service: protection and provision
- *Koinonia*: what is it?
- **Root** is *koinos* – common
- **What** do we have in common? We are all grievers. In the church we are believers of a resurrected Messiah who has in common with us the pain of death.

### Application of *Koinonia*

- ***Koinonia*** is the glue that holds the bereavement ministry teams together.
- The relationships of *kerygma*, the honesty of *leitourgia*, and the willingness of *diakonia*.
- **Loss** of relationship is no respecter of persons.
- We are all created in God's image – in relationship for relationship
- We have all suffered loss of relationship because of death
- We all have the opportunity to be rehumanized by the power of the resurrection of Jesus
- **We have all of these things in common** – we are in common in Jesus. As believers we have died with X and have been raised with X. We have all come into the new humanity to navigate the new normal through X. The new normal of grief is navigated by the new normal of the resurrection.
- This is a **community of hope** – we are not doing this alone. X is with us and is with us in one another.
- **We then become partners in a community of hope, telling the story of what God has done and how God has redeemed, lamenting before God and worshipping God and knowing God in the midst of our suffering, and serving together as a people who have been forever changed by God.**

### Group Meetings

- **Two** widows have agreed to participate
- **You** are going to put into practice the material covered during the previous six weeks
- **Act** as if you are a bereavement ministry team in conversation with a widow
- **Let** this be a free-flowing conversation
- **Cover** the four legs of the table: *kerygma*, *leitourgia*, *diakonia*, *koinonia*
- **Explore** what was and what could have been had this model been in place at the time of death

APPENDIX 23

POST SURVEY FOR *KOINONIA*

Survey 4b

Please identify yourself *only* through the following criteria:

Participant #: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you familiar with the term *koinonia*?    Yes    No

**Please use the following scale as a means of answering the following questions**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Low		Average		High

\_\_\_\_\_ How important is it for the members of Sandy Run Baptist Church to minister to those in grief?

\_\_\_\_\_ What is your level of confidence in stepping in to minister in a situation of grief?

\_\_\_\_\_ How important is community to the bereaved *before* the funeral?

\_\_\_\_\_ How important is community to the bereaved *after* the funeral?

\_\_\_\_\_ What is the level of correlation between community and love *before* the funeral?

\_\_\_\_\_ What is the level of correlation between community and love *after* the funeral?

\_\_\_\_\_ How important is it for the members of the congregation to be community to the congregation?

\_\_\_\_\_ Given what you have learned in the previous two sessions, what is your level of willingness to engage in incorporating a theology of *koinonia* into your ministry to those who are grieving?

\_\_\_\_\_ How helpful was it to meet with a widow, to hear her story, and to put some of these tools into practice?

The following questions address the teaching abilities of Pastor Andrew. Please answer honestly following the same scale used in the previous questions.

\_\_\_\_\_ How easy to understand was Pastor Andrew?

\_\_\_\_\_ How clear was Pastor Andrew's definition of *koinonia*?

- \_\_\_\_\_ How organized was Pastor Andrew?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Did Pastor Andrew begin this session on time?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Did Pastor Andrew end this session on time?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your comfort level in being able to ask questions?







## APPENDIX 26

### SUGGESTED READING ON DEATH & GRIEF

These resources are pulled from the bibliography Pastor Andrew used to write the six-week curriculum we have walked through together titled *Grief In Community: The Establishment of Bereavement Ministry Teams from the Laity at Sandy Run Baptist Church in Mooresboro, North Carolina*. Should you choose to delve deeper into the subject of death, grief, loss, and the ministry these three call for from the local church, this list is a great place to begin. You will find four categories with a brief description of each category then two to three books that would fall into this category.

#### Biblical / Theological

This category centers in on the biblical and theological approach to death and grief. Each of these books takes seriously the task of approaching the subjects of death and grief through dense biblical and theological reflections. They present various sides of the subjects, each side supported by biblical and theological grounding.

Duff, Nancy J. "Recovering Lamentation as a Practice in the Church." Pages 3-14 in *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square*. Edited by Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

Fertheim, Terence E. *The Suffering of God*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.

Oates, Wayne E. *The Revelation of God in Human Suffering*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959.

#### Clinical

This category looks at the subjects of death, grief, and loss from the clinical perspective. Each book explores psychological, social, and emotional aspects of grief.

Freeman, Stephen J. *Grief & Loss: Understanding the Journey*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole, 2005.

Moll, Rob. *The Art Of Dying: Living Fully Into The Life To Come*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010.

VanDuiwendyk, Tim P. *The Unwanted Gift of Grief*. New York: Haworth Pastoral Press, 2006.

#### Pastoral

The pastoral category approaches the subjects of death, grief, and loss from the perspective of ministry. This category combines biblical and theological with clinical aspects.

Jackson, Edgar N. *The Christian Funeral: Its Meaning, Its Purpose, and Its Modern*

*Practice*. New York: Channel Press, 1966.

Mitchell, Kenneth R. & Herbert Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983.

Nouwen, Henri. *Turn My Mourning Into Dancing: Finding Hope In Hard Times*. Nashville: Nelson, 2001.

#### Personal / Reflective

These personal and reflective books weave together personal stories of grief and loss while exploring the impact these losses have on the rest of life. At times these books are like reading a journal of grief while at other times seeking to console others who are entering the journey. They are filled with hard questions, not-so-easy answers and honest reflection.

Lewis, C. S. *A Grief Observed*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009.

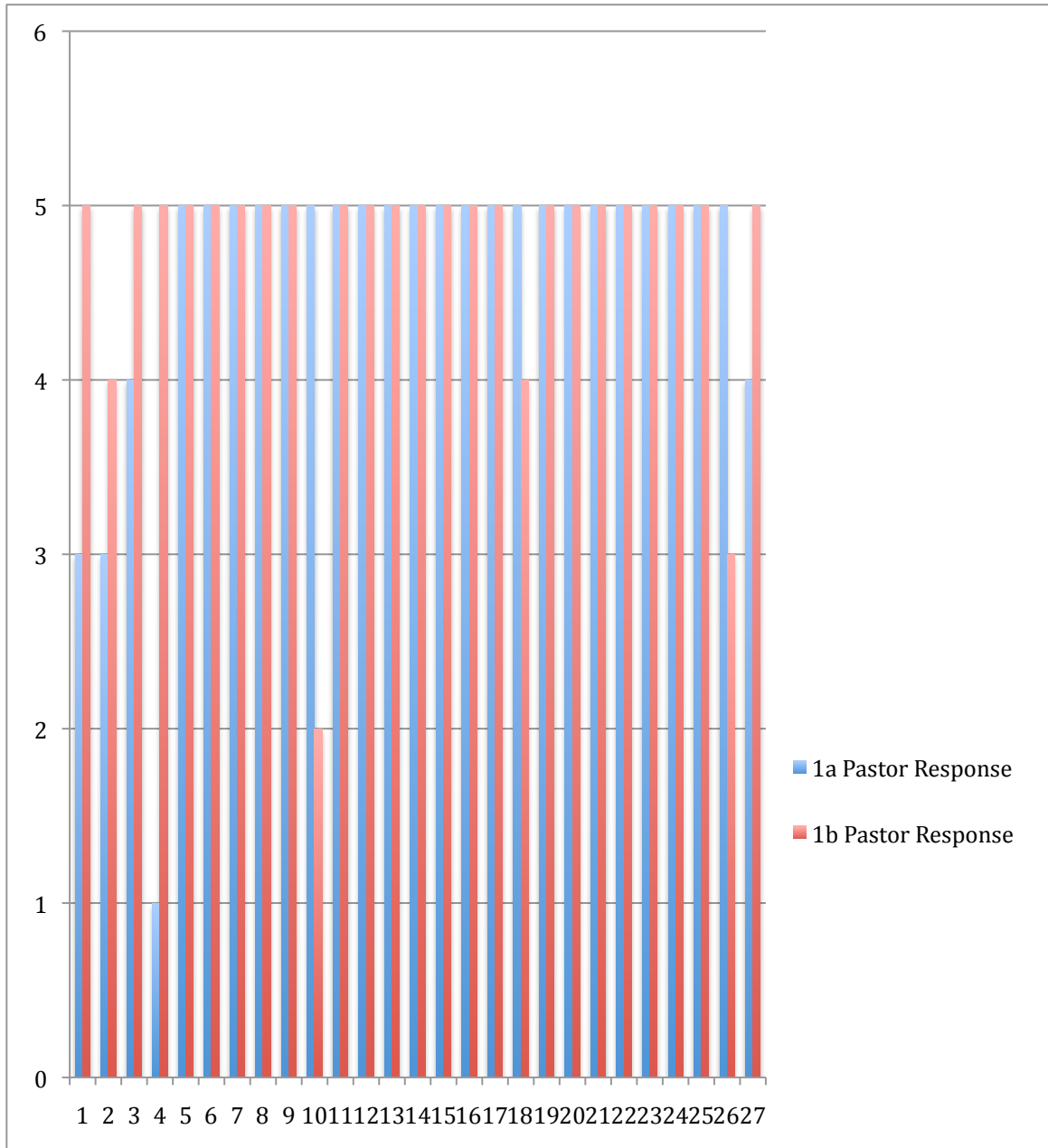
Sittser, Jerry. *A Grace Disguised*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004.

Winner, Lauren F. *Mudhouse Sabbath: An Invitation To A Life Of Spiritual Discipline*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2007. See especially chapter three, "Mourning," and chapter eight, "Aging."

APPENDIX 27

GRAPHS OF RESULTS FROM SURVEY 1A CITED IN CHAPTER SIX

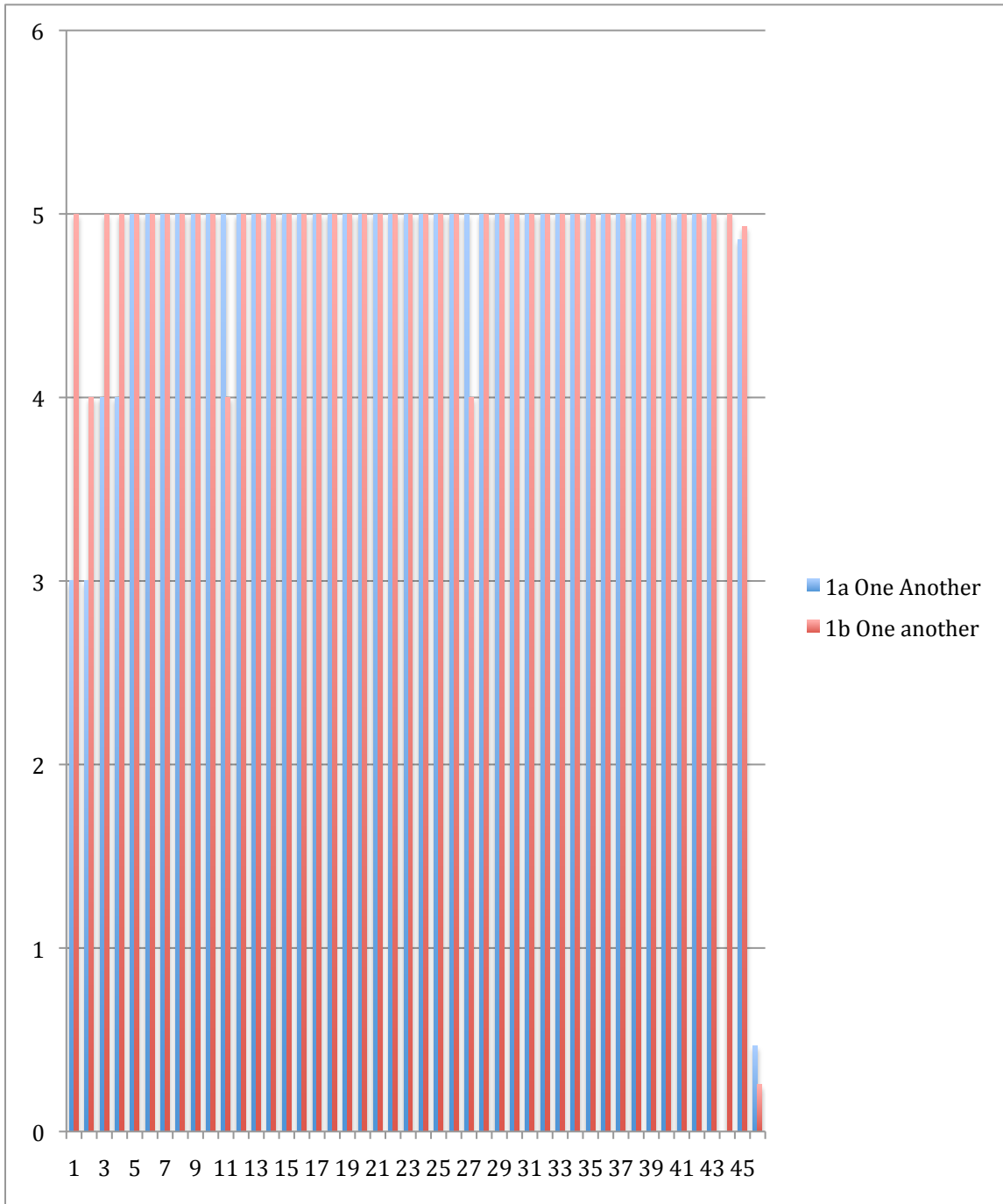
Question: How well did the pastor of Sandy Run Baptist Church respond to you during this time of loss?



Survey 1a Average: 4.63 (standard deviation = 0.93)

Survey 1b Average: 4.77 (standard deviation = 0.68)

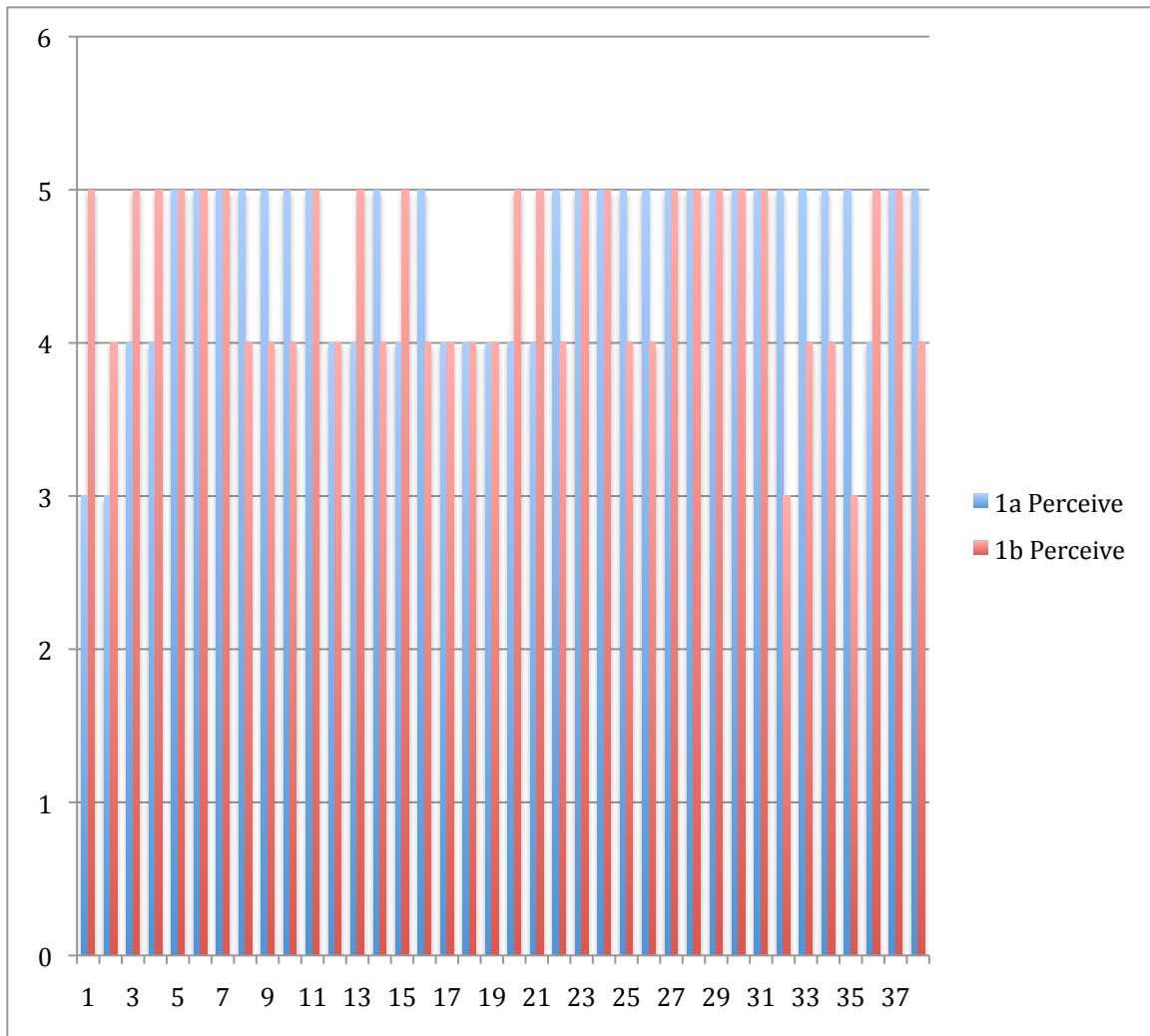
Question: How important is it for members of Sandy Run Baptist Church to minister to one another during times of grief and loss?



Survey 1a Average: 4.86 (standard deviation = 0.47)

Survey 1b Average: 4.93 (standard deviation = 0.25)

Question: How well do you perceive Sandy Run Baptist Church to minister to those who are grieving the loss of this relationship through death?



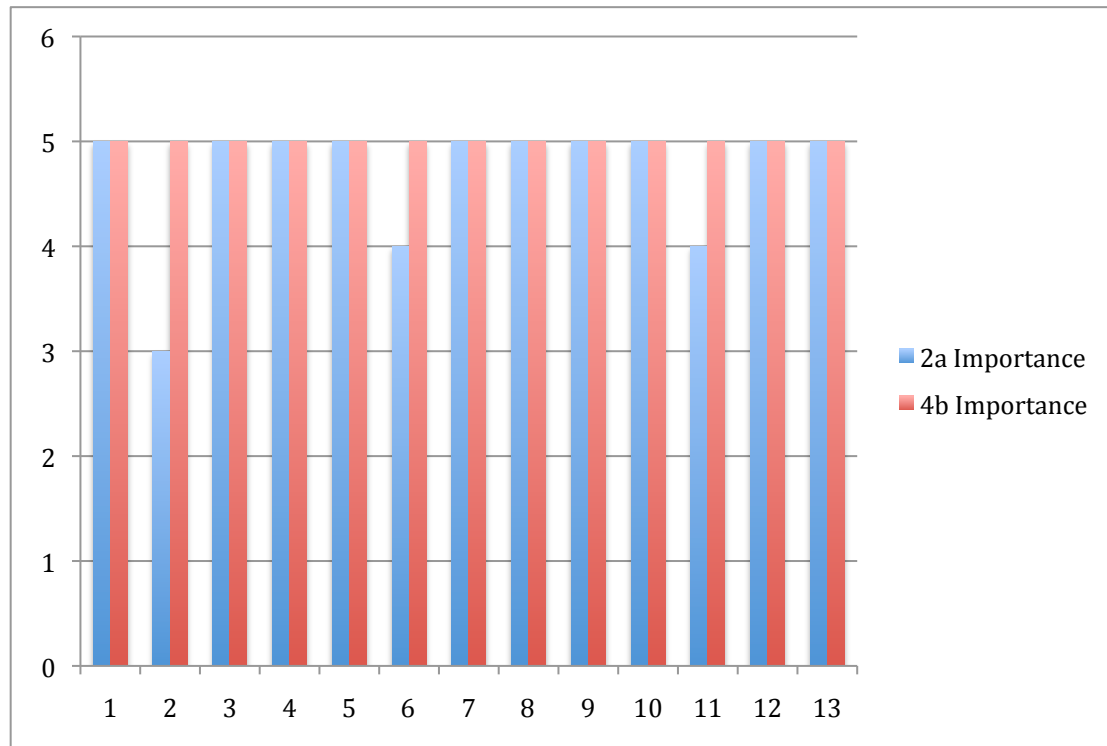
Survey 1a Average: 4.6 (standard deviation = 0.6)

Survey 1b Average 4.5 (standard deviation = 0.6)

## APPENDIX 28

### GRAPHS OF TEIR ONE QUESTIONS FROM CURRICULUM SESSIONS

Question: How important is it for members of Sandy Run Baptist Church to minister to those in grief?

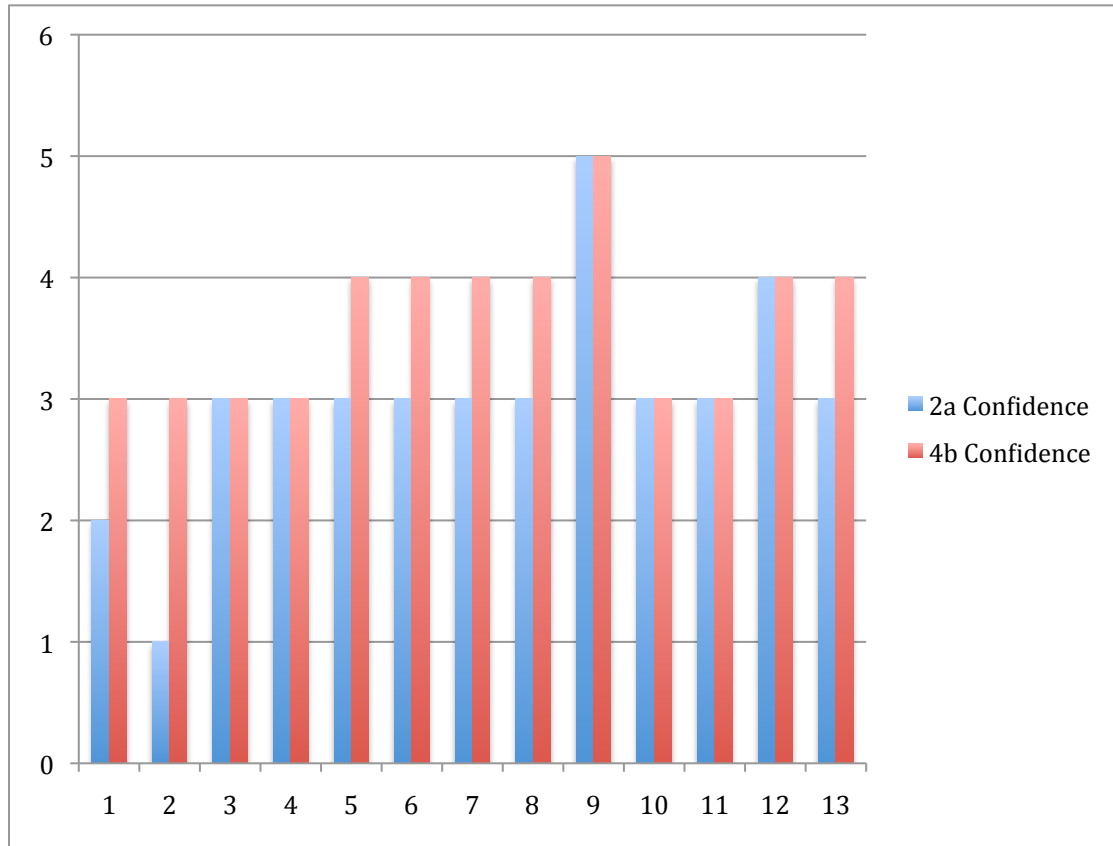


Survey 2a Average: 4.7 (standard deviation = 0.6)

Survey 4b Average: 5 (standard deviation = 0)

P = 0.05

Question: What is your level of confidence in stepping in to minister in a situation of grief?



Survey 2a Average: 3 (standard deviation = 0.9)

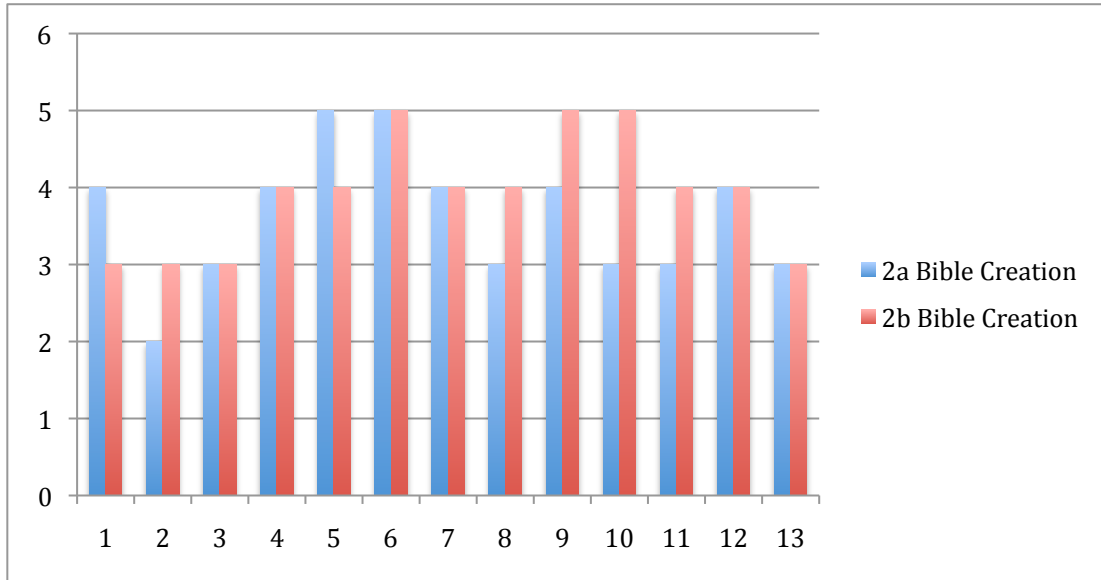
Survey 4b Average: 3.62 (standard deviation = 0.7)

P-Value = 0.03

APPENDIX 29

GRAPHS OF QUESTION CITED COMPARING SESSIONS ONE AND TWO

Question: How familiar are you with what the bible has to say about creation?



Survey 2a Average: 3.62 (standard deviation = 0.9)

Survey 2b Average: 3.94 (standard deviation = 0.8)

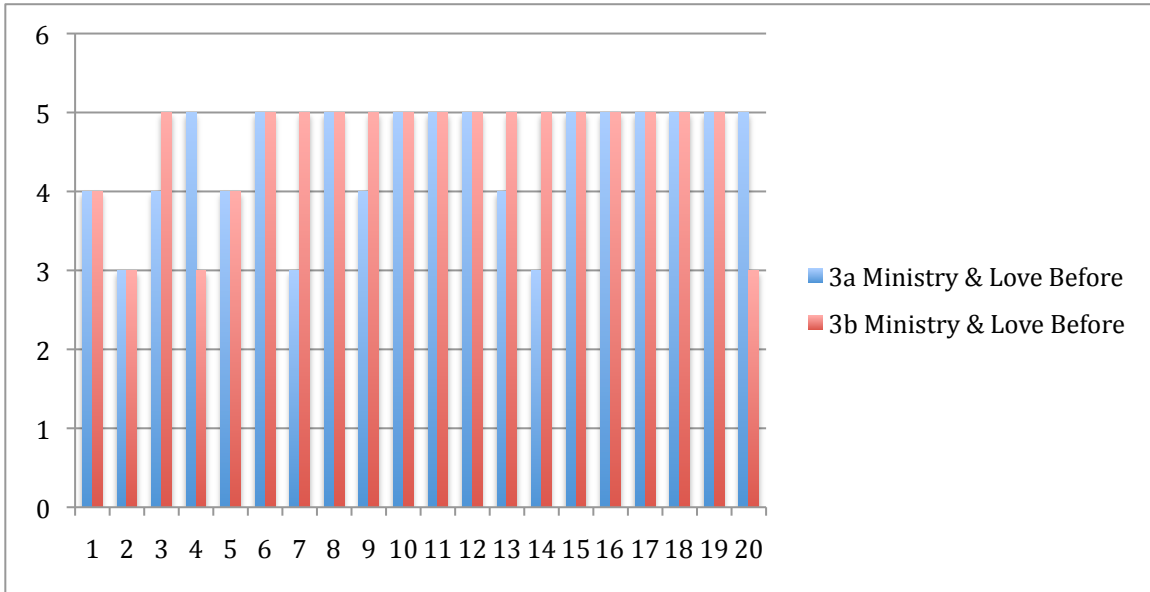
P=0.2



APPENDIX 30

GRAPHS OF QUESTIONS CITED COMPARING SESSIONS THREE AND FOUR

Question: What is the correlation between ministry and love *before* the funeral?

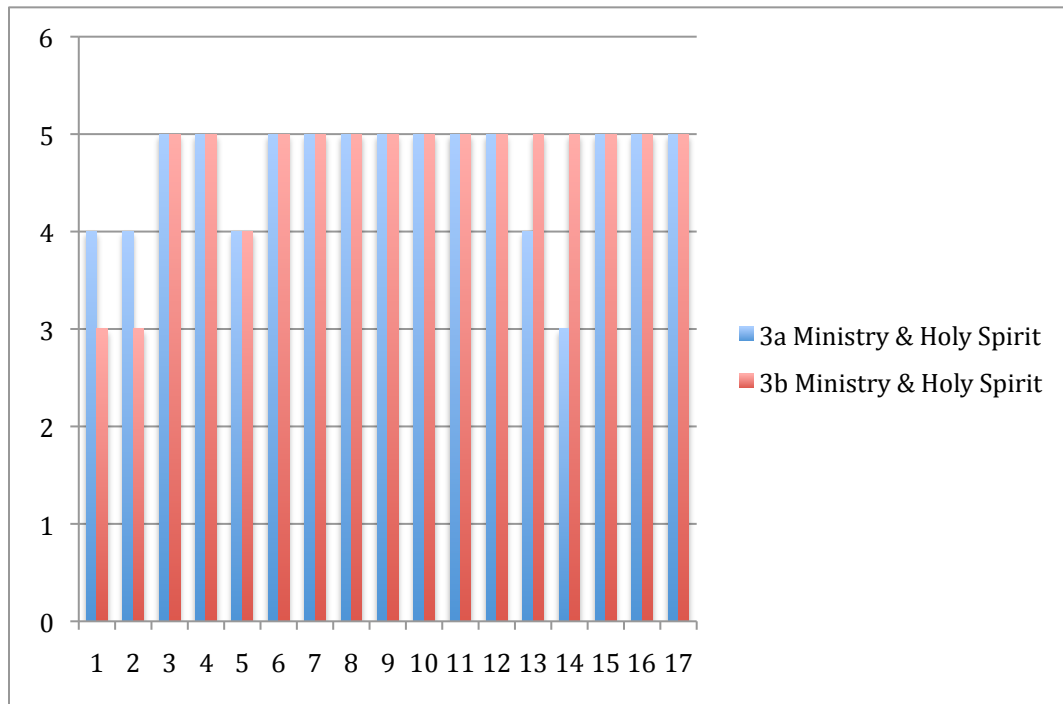


Survey 3a Average: 4.45 (standard deviation = 0.8)

Survey 3b Average: 4.6 (standard deviation = 0.8)

P=0.1

Question: What is the level of correlation between ministry to the bereaved and the move of the Holy Spirit?



Survey 3a Average: 4.65 (standard deviation = 0.6)

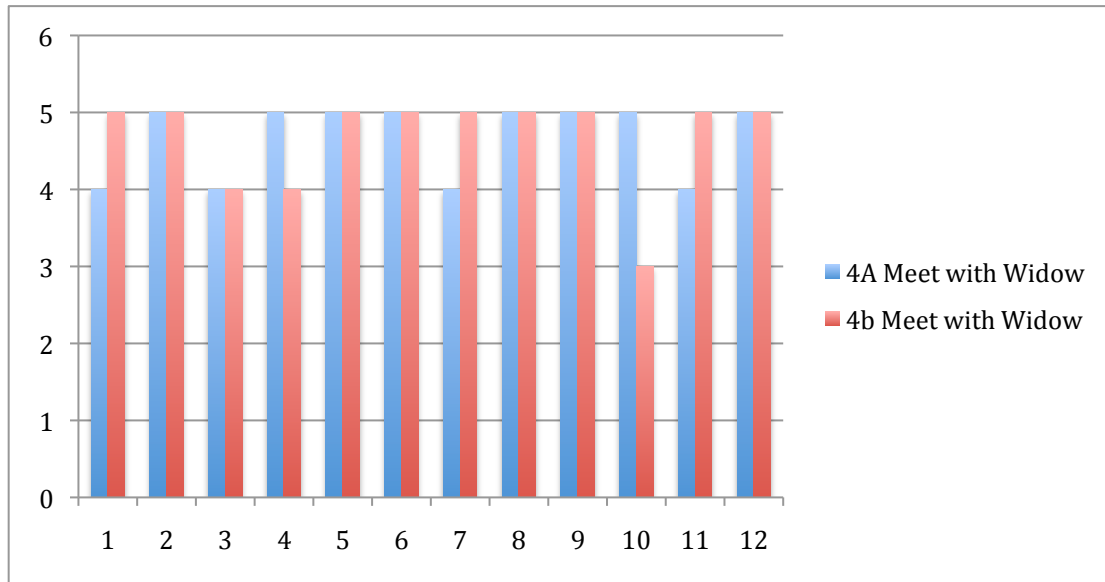
Survey 3b Average: 4.72 (standard deviation = 0.7)

P = 0.4

APPENDIX 31

GRAPH OF QUESTION CITED COMPARING SESSIONS FIVE AND SIX

Question: How helpful would it be to meet with a widow, to hear her story, and to put some of these tools into practice?



Survey 4a Average: 4.7 (standard deviation = 0.5)

Survey 4b Average: 4.7 (standard deviation = 0.7)

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