

**Reproductive Loss**  
Seeking Peace in Faith Practices



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**Reproductive Loss**  
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Rev. Catherine Malotky

If you are reading this, you carry a pain you did not invite into your life. Reproductive loss can take many forms: infertility, miscarriage, infant loss, and more.

You may have been suddenly immersed in a miscarriage or the death of a child, or you have slowly come to realize that you will not have children, though you always thought you would.

Reproductive loss is a particular loss – and one our culture seems eager to gloss over, ever optimistic about “next time.” But for you, for this loss, “next time” is not a consolation.

This is a resource to help you face your loss and to help with the long and winding process of metabolizing your pain so that you can become what you will be because of your loss – to journey toward abundance.

“Come to me, all you who are weary  
and are carrying heavy burdens, and I  
will give you rest”

(Matthew 11:28).

There are four sessions in this resource to help you along the way. They are written for you to do personally but can easily include others. You can do them at any point in your grief, but there is an order if you wish to follow it.

The first two sessions are designed to respond to early in grief, within the first year of your loss. The third session fits anytime in the first three years, and the fourth can be done beyond. They are sequential, but please use and reuse them as fits your need. If you find a session isn't appropriate for you at this time, set it aside.

## **Each session includes four parts:**

- An introduction
- Suggestion: For your involvement
- If there are others who want to participate: Thoughts about including friends or family
- Why: The reason for this activity, your takeaway

At the end, there is a word for pastoral caregivers.

# Begin

Telling our stories, including for and to ourselves, is important for facing how we are and who we are. Take the time to answer these questions, even if you are years away from your loss.

Take a reading of now and also remember the moment you realized your loss. Sit with a box of tissues and a piece of paper (or electronic document) and write down what's true.

## Suggestion

Make this reflection time a moment. Heat up some tea. Find a quiet space. Light a candle. Put on some quiet music. Frame it somehow. Set it aside as holy because you will be doing holy work.

Once all is prepared, breathe before you start, deeply in and deeply out. Then offer this prayer or one like it:

Creator God, you promised to love me no matter what comes. Be my ground for these next minutes.



Hold me in your embrace as I remember. Receive my grief into your loving arms. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.



What is your story? What happened? Where do you feel the loss most acutely? What does it feel like?

Journal about the questions posed. When you have spent the time you need, finish with several deep breaths again, in and out.

**Close by reading Psalm 27:7-8:**

Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud,  
be gracious to me and answer me!  
"Come," my heart says, "seek [God's]  
face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek.

## **Close up your writing.**

If you are writing long-hand on paper, place it under the candle you lit. Release this time and your story to your prayers and then blow out the candle and/or turn off the music. Finish and transition to the next part of your day. Remember the last line of the psalm passage as you move into the days ahead.

## What is your story? What happened?

Tap in each box to insert your answers. Once a box is full , feel free to continue within the text boxes on the following pages.



Where do you feel the  
loss most acutely?  
What does it feel like?



**If there are others who want to participate:** Invite them to join you but still choose a time and space in which you will feel safe to really ponder what happened and how it affected you. They can reflect on the same questions from their perspectives.

## **Why?**

Knowing the story of your loss is critical for healing. If there are details that are lost to you, find someone who can fill in the blanks you yearn for. You may be at the beginning of a long journey toward what you are becoming because of your loss.

Be patient. Keep yourself open for God's face – in others, in the world around you and in your own heart. Notice.

# Grief's mysteries

You may still be quite close to your loss, or it may be months or years since. Grief is a persistent companion, changing by the minute sometimes. Grief takes us inward.

Few of us escape a persistent wondering: Why did this loss happen? And a companion question: Why me?

## Suggestion

Set the stage for your time of introspection. As you did last time, light a candle, turn on some music, get physically comfortable. Bring your story into the space. If you wrote it on paper, set it beneath a candle again or pull up the electronic document. Give yourself a moment to be in this space, in this present time. Paying attention to a few long, slow breaths is a good way to do this.

Begin by contemplating the long journey of the Old Testament people of Israel and Judah,

surrounded by powerful empires vying over their territory. The Northern Kingdom of Israel fell first, to the Assyrians, and many were deported into foreign lands with unfamiliar languages and cultural practices.

Such a powerful loss! Three generations later, the Southern Kingdom, Judah, fell as well, sacked by the Babylonians, and the people were driven out of their homelands to faraway places. Read Psalm 137 to get a sense for their grief.

The Old Testament is full of musings about why this happened. The prophets, especially, preached to help their people come to terms with their loss, sometimes blaming them for their calamities, and sometimes offering tender comfort and calls to faithfulness.

Jeremiah speaks of their powerful sense of loss, in this case for children dragged off to Babylon:

**Thus says the LORD:**

A voice is heard in Ramah  
lamentation and bitter weeping.  
Rachel is weeping for her children;  
she refuses to be comforted for her  
children, because they are no more.

**Jeremiah 31:15**

It is human to lament and weep. Jesus also cried to God when he felt abandoned on the cross. And it is human to ask why this unwelcome chapter is now in your life story. Journal about your responses to these questions:



- How has “why” shown up for you?
- What emotions seem to accompany “why” moments?
- How are you being challenged and how are you being comforted in your grief?
- How has God been present in the middle of your suffering?

When you have examined your “why” moments, put down your writing and be still for a time to give it space and let yourself come back to the present.

### **Read this aloud:**

Grace is mine, in the midst of all the wrestling and bargaining and railing.

God is with me. God is with me when I ask why. God is with me when I don't even feel God's presence. God is with me when I cry out.

Conclude by reading this verse from the Easter hymn, "Now the Green Blade Rises"  
*(Evangelical Lutheran Worship 379)*

When our hearts are wintry,  
grieving, or in pain,  
your touch can call us back to life again,  
fields of our hearts and that dead and bare  
have been; Love is come again like wheat  
arising green.

**How has “why” shown up for you?  
What emotions seem to  
accompany “why” moments?**



**How are you being challenged and how are you being comforted in your grief?**



**How has God been present in the middle of your suffering?**



**If there are others who want to participate:** No doubt there are others in your life who have plenty of “why” questions about your loss. Perhaps they have walked through grief before. Invite them to join you in the journaling exercise.

When you are finished, each person can read aloud the statement about grace, either in unison, or directly to another person in the group. Be sure someone reads it to you!

## **Why?**

It’s so important to allow yourself to work through all the emotions that come with grief, including “why me.” Your identity is being refashioned as you grieve. You are, in many ways, being raised from the dead.

God’s grace gives permission to feel all the feelings, even if the world around you wants you to tidy this all up pleasantly.

# Remember

Reproductive loss is now an unwelcome part of your story. No one would have wished for this, yet here you are. Some of us have had a cultural ritual to help us process our loss – a funeral, for example. Some of us have had to navigate grief without this kind of support.

Remembering is a critical part of coming to terms, and there are things you can do to help, especially once you are through the most acute grief. Eventually, tears will be less likely to spring unbidden, but then comes the sacred work of remembering, which can be just as important.

## Suggestion

Set aside some time to call up your memories. Light a candle. Ground them in your senses and then in your emotions. What were touchpoints for you? Any of these can help:

- A location
- A person
- An object
- A smell
- A time of day
- A poem
- A flower
- A bird or animal
- A stone
- A sympathy card

You may already have set aside a piece of clothing, for example, or a toy. Or you may have created a dream for a nursery and treasure a favorite paint chip, wallpaper or bedding print. Or you might have an object that represents the combined loss and gain of deciding to wait for a partner or some level of financial stability or professional achievement that delayed you to the point where childbearing or rearing was no longer possible.

Collect your artifact(s) and bless it for memory. Light a candle and, after a few deep breaths, out loud, tell yourself the story of this object and its connection to your loss.

Then honor it by offering a prayer, something like this:

Merciful God, you created me with a heart that can bear both loss and hope.

Bless this [object] with memory, so it might travel with me through life as a reminder of my loss, a gateway to feelings that get tucked away, and permission to invite your compassion to embrace me.

In Jesus' name. Amen.



Give yourself time to sit in silence for a bit. Conclude by speaking or singing the words to the simple song "Deep Peace" (*All Creation Sings 1018*), remembering that the rhythms of the earth can sustain you:

Deep peace of the running waves, deep peace of the flowing air, deep peace of the shining stars to you, deep peace of the quiet earth.

Extinguish the candle. Like Mary, Jesus' mother, ponder these things in your heart (Luke 2:19). Store your object(s) meaningfully for use on anniversaries and anytime you want or need to remember.

**If there are others who want to participate:** This is an especially opportune moment for others to join you, especially those who have been on the journey with you. They may choose to find their own artifact/object or contribute their heartfelt blessing on yours.

You could choose to do this in a publicly sacred space, such as a worship space or chapel, or to set aside a personal time and place using candles, low lighting, or music.

You might contact a pastor or other person who has experience leading people through ceremony.

## Why?

The goal of this exercise is to identify an artifact(s) of your experience that will help you open your heart to memory as time goes on. Some of us will have obvious things, and some of us will need to stretch. Some will even find that movement/dance is an "artifact" that can help us reach memory and its emotions again.

# Becoming

When the most acute stage of grief has run its course, there will come a time when you realize your life is going on.

You may laugh again or seek out the company of others for activities not focused on your loss. Yet you will be different because of your loss. How are you changing?

## Suggestion

Take some time to think about these changes. Some may be subtle and some more obvious. Again, set apart a place and time to think about these things intentionally. If weather allows, you might want to be outdoors, where changes happen all the time. If not, surround yourself with cues that this is an important time for important inner work.

Gather a candle, music or nature sounds; use subtle lighting; find a comfortable space to write, whether on paper or digitally; and give yourself time.

Once you have created the space you need, hold this holy space and time by starting with a prayer, something like this:

Loving Spirit, you have carried me for these weeks and months since [name your loss], and in my grief you walk with me still.

Hold me now while I reflect on your presence and the way I am changing. Bless me as I do. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Wonder about who you are becoming. In your writing, recall what values or perspectives have become newly or more important to you since your loss.



- What is your loss teaching you?
- Do you live differently?
- How do you appreciate differently?
- How has your relationship with God changed?
- How have you seen God at work?
- How has God seemed absent?
- What is true about you now that might not have been before?
- How are you the same?

- What relationships have changed and/or emerged since your loss?
- What do you imagine will be true about your grief in five years? Ten? Forty?

You may find it helpful to write in a stream of consciousness, not stopping to reflect or edit. You can reflect on all the questions or choose the ones that resonate with you or that you need to reflect on.

**Wonder about who  
you are becoming.**









Once you have taken the time you need, hear the witness of the psalmist in Psalm 139:1-14. You are beloved.

## **Psalm 139 1-14**

**The Inescapable God To the leader.  
Of David. A Psalm.**

O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand

shall hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and night wraps itself around me," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

## **Conclude your time with this thought:**

Though you have suffered great loss and grief is a constant companion, you live still.

Your life matters. Allow God's redemptive hand to shape you, nourish you, and empower you with compassion for yourself and everyone who grieves.

You are not alone. We are all companions on this journey.

Gently fold up your writing and the space and things that have helped you mark this time as holy.

Re-emerge into your life, continuing to notice how your loss is shaping your heart and your soul for life and community. You might consider using anniversaries as opportunities to review, tracking over time how your grief changes and matures.

**If there are others who want to participate:** There can be a powerful advantage to sharing your reflections with others as time goes on. Too soon, those around you will lose track of your loss.

You can help them remember by inviting them in, either in the actual process of reflecting along with you, or as witnesses to what you have learned. You may choose to offer the final blessing to each other.

## Why?

The coming chapters of your life's story will be infused with both the pain and wisdom that accrue over time from your loss. Sharing your pain and wisdom is a grace to yourself and those you love.

Be vulnerable. Avoid truisms about grief and loss. Our culture is not comfortable with grief and will hurry you past it if it can. Give yourself the gift of acknowledging and tending your loss and all it brings to you and those who love you.

Until we learn how to do this in community, you may need to initiate these times of reflection. In doing so, you will be helping all of us learn how to grieve and how to honor our losses with the love they deserve.



## Notes for pastoral care

This resource is focused on the grieving person who has experienced a reproductive loss. Like all experiences of death, each circumstance will be unique, and each grieving person will have their own timeline.

You can certainly use each of these four sessions in your work with the bereaved, with you serving as a facilitator to move them through the session. You can do this in the person's home or circumscribe a more intimate space at church (a chapel or conference room).

- If you do facilitate, please allow ample time for personal reflection. You might ask if you should leave the room or stay present. (You might do your own reflection.)
- Your role is to be a witness, not to help them feel better. Holding sacred time and space is rare in our culture. Trust that this will be a gift. Grief takes time.
- The grieving person may want to share their reflection with you or may not. Either path is blessed by your willingness to hold the time and space.

The first session is designed for use soon after the loss, though it does not have to be immediate. The second and third fit best within the first few years, and the fourth is designed for beyond. You may find that this approach can be a structure for ongoing bereavement care.

The sessions here are very personal and not designed for public ceremonies. That said, a funeral or memorial service is always appropriate for miscarriage, stillbirth, or infant loss. Your wisdom can also fashion a service based on the structure of a funeral for the loss of the dream of children if public acknowledgement would be beneficial for the bereaved.

You can be a powerful helper in the early stages of grief by encouraging things such as saving mementos, by asking caregivers to document the facts of the loss, or by supporting a public announcement of the loss within your faith community.

Too often, reproductive loss is unrecognized and unmarked, to the detriment of the bereaved. You can help build the community they need by being open, so long as the bereaved are willing.

## Acknowledgments

This resource is dedicated to our daughters, Erin, Cara, and Abbie. They made me a parent, and they invited me to explore myself so I might help them do the same for themselves. They changed my life for the good, all three of them.

Two of our daughters are married and now raising families of their own. Our firstborn (by 10 minutes) died suddenly and inexplicably at 8 weeks of age. The coroner named the cause as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Because of expert medical care, her twin survived a challenging birth and is thriving now, though she and her husband experienced the heart-breaking miscarriage of their second pregnancy. Our third daughter was born to parents who knew that death can come at any time. We feel grateful beyond words for all of them and privileged to be on the journey with them.

**Please see also:**

[Carrying Them With Us: Living Through Pregnancy or Infant Loss \(Augsburg Fortress, 2019\).](#)

–Rev. Catherine Malotky

To share feedback, including how this resource worked well for you, what more you need, and changes in this resource you would recommend, please email [genderjustice@elca.org](mailto:genderjustice@elca.org).

