

Transitions: Understanding the grief associated with times of change

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Resources for Healthy Life & Ministry

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Agenda

Identify

- Stages of transition

Discuss

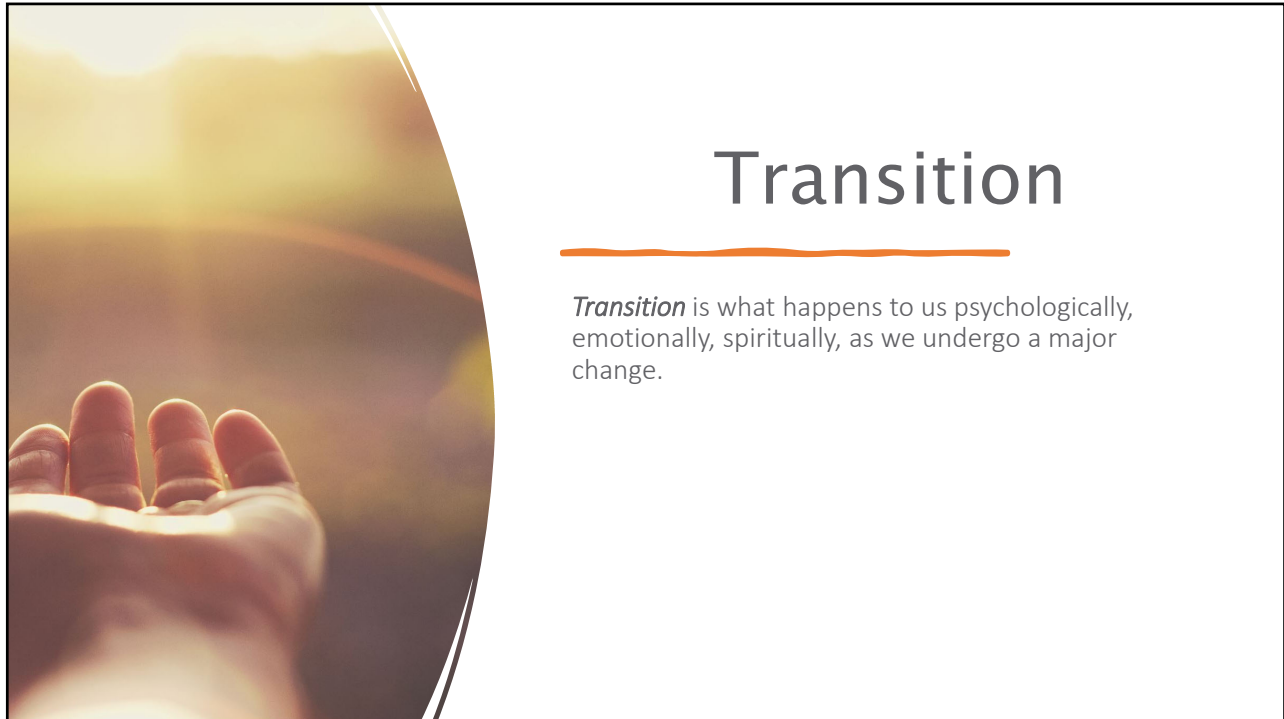
- Shared language around stages of grief

Explore

- Varying reactions to grief, avenues of support, and strategies for coping

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Transition

Transition is what happens to us psychologically, emotionally, spiritually, as we undergo a major change.

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Transition: Three Stages

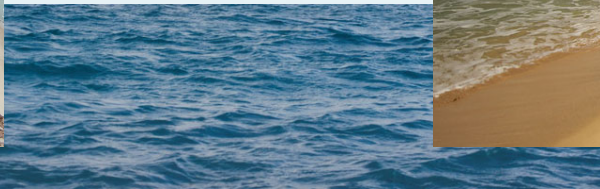
1. An **ending**—letting go of the old situation.
2. A period of confusion and distress—**neutral zone**—suffering confusion of in-betweenness.
3. A **beginning**—a launching forth again.

Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes
William Bridges, 1980 (2004)

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Transition in Religious Life Itself



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Endings



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“Considering that we have to deal with endings all of our lives, most of us handle them poorly.”

William Bridges, 2004.

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Endings

- Every transition begins with an Ending.
- Endings often begin with something going wrong.
 - Feeling of “*wrongness*” may be a lasting feeling....
- Endings may also begin with something we have *chosen* or knew was *coming*
 - Feeling of “*wrongness*” may still be a lasting feeling....



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Endings

Skills for negotiating the descent:

- Recognize that letting go is ambiguous at best
- Identify the losses, including subjective losses
- Expect and accept signs of grieving.
- Understand your characteristic way of coping with ends.
- Recognize that some part of you will *unconsciously resist* letting go.

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Endings

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The Neutral Zone



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The Neutral Zone

Between one ending and the next beginning,
there is an important empty or fallow time.

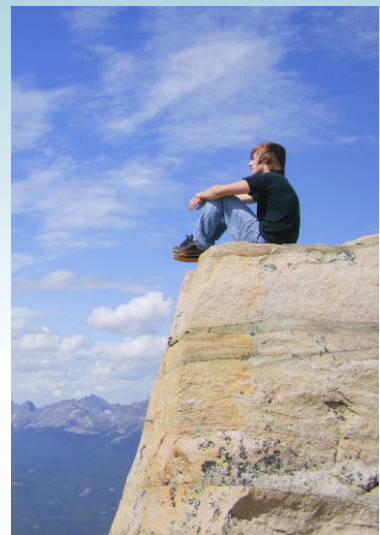


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The Neutral Zone

- Important time of Death and Rebirth
- Inner growth and renewal
- Emptiness provides perspective
- Opportunity for expanded sense of reality and a deepening sense of purpose



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Beginnings

"Genuine beginnings depend on an inner realignment rather than on external shifts, for it is when we are aligned with deeper longings that we become powerfully motivated."

W. Bridges



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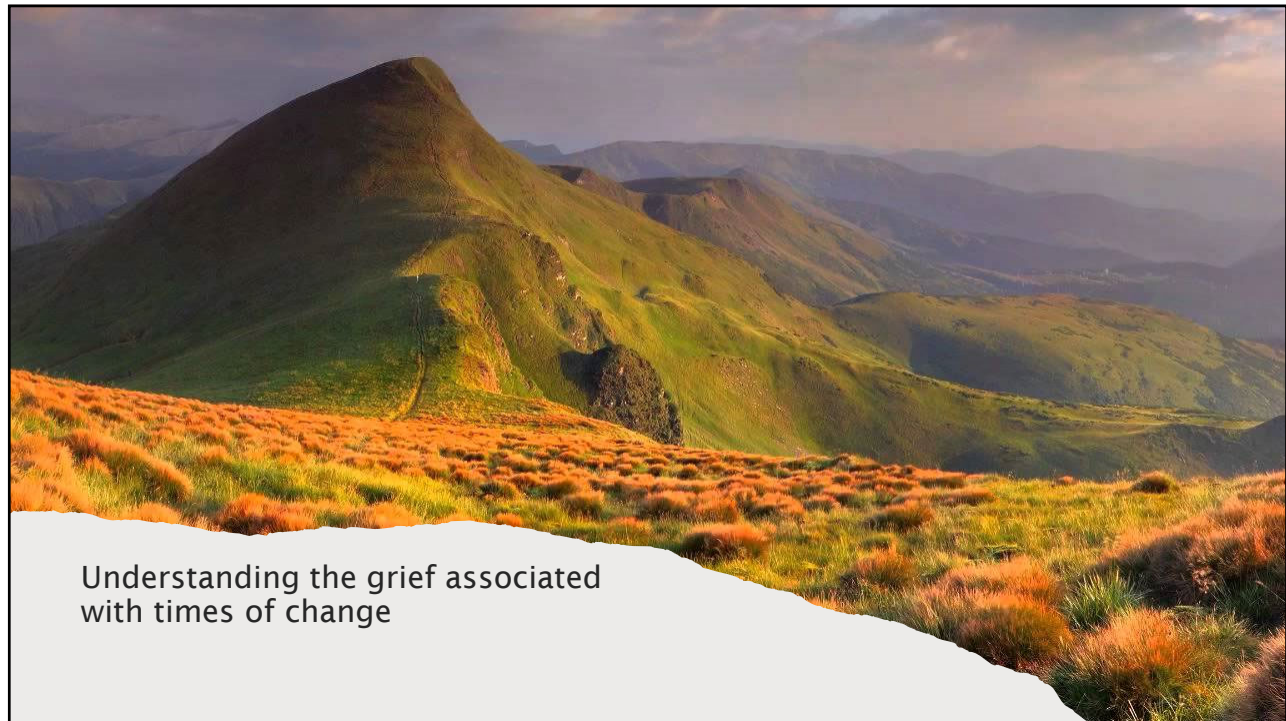
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A part of any *Ending* is Grief and Loss

- Before we can fully and truly enter into the **neutral zone**....and make use of that space
- Before the **new beginnings** can be fully revealed and realized
- We must acknowledge, honor and bear witness to the losses we have endured.

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What is grief?

- Grief is the natural reaction to loss.
- Grief is both a universal and a personal experience.
- Individual experiences of grief vary and are influenced by the nature of the loss.
- *“An individual’s grief is as unique as their fingerprint.”*
- David Kessler

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Symptoms of Grief

- Intense sorrow, pain and rumination over a loss
- Focus on little else but the loss
- Extreme focus on reminders of the loss or excessive avoidance of reminders
- Intense and persistent longing or pining for what has been lost or ended
- Problems accepting the death or loss
- Numbness or detachment
- Bitterness about your loss
- Feeling that life holds no meaning or purpose
- Lack of trust in others
- Inability to enjoy life or think back on positive experiences

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Anticipatory Grief:

The normal mourning process that occurs *before* the the loss has occurred

- Sadness/tearfulness
- Anger/resentment
- Loneliness
- Anxiety and depression
- Guilt
- Desire to talk
- Fear
- Fatigue
- Emotional numbness
- Poor concentration
- Forgetfulness

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Prolonged Grief Disorder:

When symptoms persist and intensify

- Have trouble carrying out normal routines
- Isolate from others and withdraw from social activities; intense loneliness
- Experience depression, deep sadness, guilt or self-blame
- Believe that you did something wrong or could have prevented the death or loss
- Marked sense of disbelief
- Feel life isn't worth living or meaningless
- Sleep disturbances

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Risk Factors

- Females with older age
- Close or dependent relationship to the deceased person (caregivers)
- Social isolation or loss of a support system or friendships
- Past history of depression, separation anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Traumatic childhood experiences, such as abuse or neglect
- Other co-occurring, major life stressors

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Grief is tricky....

- It is there.....and then it is not
- It is a wave of sadness and then it passes
- We think we've through the worst of it and then we are flooded again
- Sometimes, our grief is masked by other feelings: anger, depression, agitation

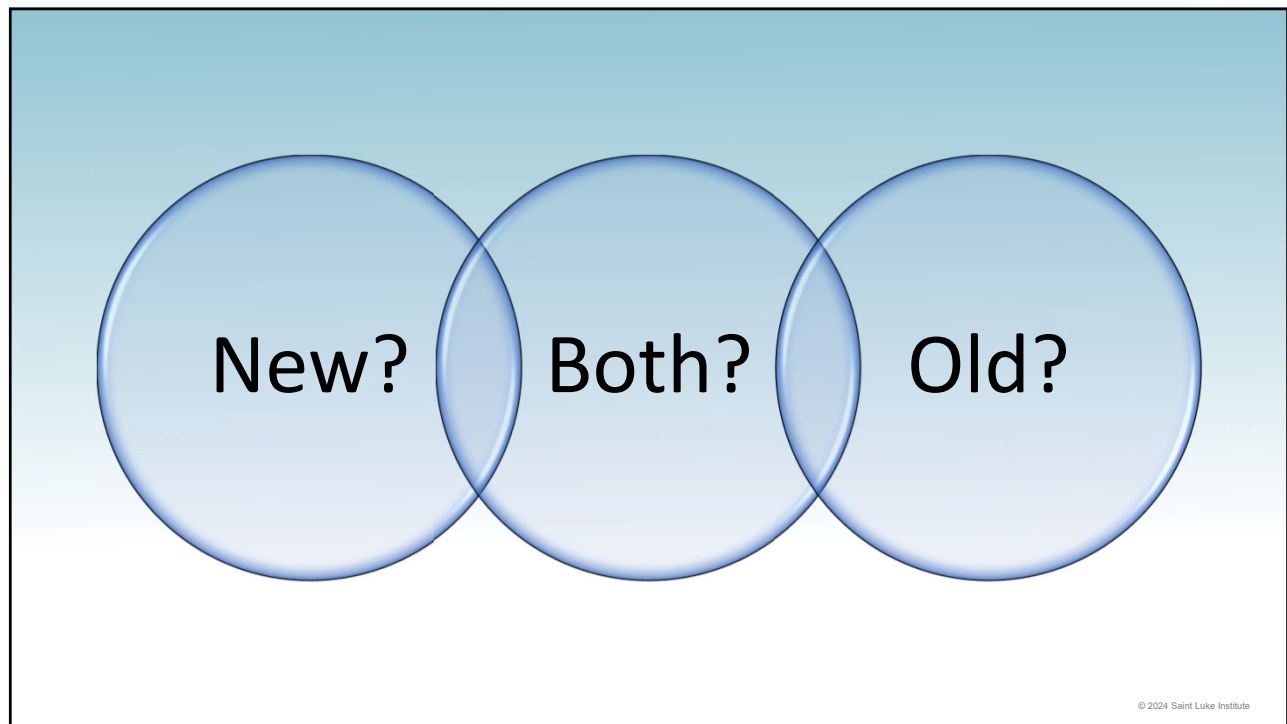


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The domino effect



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Stages of Grief

- Stages of grief are a part of the framework that makes up our leavening to live with what we have lost
- They are tools to help us frame and identify what we may be feeling
- They are not stops on a linear timeline of grief

"There is not a typical response to loss as there is no typical loss....our grief is as individual as our lives."

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, David Kessler

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Stages of Grief



Denial



Anger



Bargaining

These stages are intended to be a description, not a prescription.



Sadness



Acceptance



Meaning*

They describe a general process and are unlikely to be linear....

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, David Kessler

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Stages of Grief: Risk Factors

- Chronic denial is **avoidance**; it puts us and others at risk
- Chronic bargaining results in **avoidance** (of pain)
- Chronic anger results in **isolation** but it also allows for a sense of control
- Getting stuck in sadness can result in **depression**

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Acceptance

- Acceptance of loss is not resignation motivated by distress or anguish; it is a compassionate recognition that we have these feelings.¹
- Where we are able to put the loss or losses into perspective, we withdraw our energy from the loss and begin to invest it into life
- Acceptance is a recognition that we still have the power to be safe, to control, to problem-solve, to participate in life, and to partake in giving.¹
- Moving forward, not moving on

Mary Lamia, Ph.D.¹

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Worden's Tasks of Mourning

1. To accept the reality of the loss
2. To work through the pain of grief
3. To adjust to the new world or landscape
4. To find an enduring connection with what or who has been lost while embarking on a new life

*Aligns with Kubler-Ross and Kessler's stage of
"finding meaning."*

J. William Worden, Ph.D.

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Identify, Normalize and Predict

- Give ourselves permission to identify what we are experiencing
 - Get curious....be still and notice the complex feelings you are holding
 - Suspend the judgment...not helpful
 - We all navigate and respond to grief in unique ways
- "The answer to the pain of grief is not how to get yourself out of it, but how to support yourself inside it." - Unknown*

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Identify, Normalize and Predict

- The practical
 - Be still
 - Reflect and record (journaling, letter writing, grief/loss timeline)
 - Look for themes in your conversations and prayer
 - Look at the calendar....February, March, April....
- Notice and observe the feelings that surface

"...Grief is a delicate dance. It is the dance of duality. To miss and to remember. To feel vulnerable and brave. To feel overwhelmed and competent. To long for what was and to take steps forward."

Jennifer Stern, LISW

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Identify, Normalize and Predict

- Validate our collective experience of grief, fear and anxiety
 - Normal and understandable reaction to current situation
 - Pushing it out of our awareness only intensifies the feeling and forces us to work harder to ignore it
- Balance your thinking....not good or bad, just is
 - Pay attention to the extremes in your thoughts or the vulnerability to catastrophize

The pain of grief is "just as much a part of life as the joy of love; it is, perhaps, the price we pay for love, the cost of commitment"

Colin Murray Parkes, 2015.

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Normalize: The Practical

Diminishing Statements

- I shouldn't still be feeling sad
- I'm supposed to be over this already
- No one understands how hard this is for me

Interjections of Health

- It is okay to still feel sad about this loss
- There isn't a timeline on grieving
- I'm not alone in feeling this loss

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Bearing Witness

- Name our experience
- Identify an individual with whom we can share that experience
- Ask for the time to be able to share *and* offer that gift of listening back
- We are all experiencing a level of grief at the present time *and* we need each other to bear witness to our pain

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Identify, Normalize and Predict

- Predict our reactions to these feelings/stages based on our personal past
- *Past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior*

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Identify, Normalize and Predict

The practical

- Reflect on previous losses
- What did your grieving look like at that time?
 - What helped? What didn't?
 - What obstacles got in my way?
 - What feelings do I find the most challenging to manage?
- What tools or strategies have I relied upon in the past?
 - What worked? What didn't?
- Capitalize on the insights and understanding you already have about yourself
- What supports can I put into place *now* in order to manage my experiences in a healthier way?

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Identify, Normalize and Predict

Create a Grief and Loss Timeline

- Document on paper how many losses one has encountered over her lifetime or in the last year
- This can assist in recognizing patterns of clusters of significant losses, which can provide a visual connection to how individuals respond to experiences of grief and loss
- Once you have completed your timeline, spend some time reflecting on what you've written

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Identify, Normalize and Predict

Create a Grief and Loss Timeline

- Be still and observe what you notice about yourself when you reflect on these powerful experiences:
 - What stands out to you?
 - What feelings come up for you now?
 - What lingers still when you reflect on these losses?
 - Are there certain phrases or thoughts you notice?
 - Grief is complicated emotionally...in addition to sadness, what other feelings do you notice? Anger, frustration, powerlessness?

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Share your Grief and Loss Timeline

- Share your timeline with a trusted friend, spiritual director, therapist; this helps facilitate a deeper acceptance of the impact of the losses
- Sharing our losses helps us to better integrate the feelings around all that has transpired while gaining a greater sense of control and understanding, rather than simply feeling overwhelmed.
- This sharing can be done in a one-on-one setting or small groups
- Larger groups can be used to identify themes within the small group sharings

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J. William Worden, Ph.D.

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Reflection Questions

- As we explore the definition and stages of grief, what stands out to me? What word or phrase resonates with my experience?
- Looking into my past experiences of loss, what stage or experience has been the most challenging for me?
- When I look at the common symptoms of grief, what symptoms do I experience when I am grieving?

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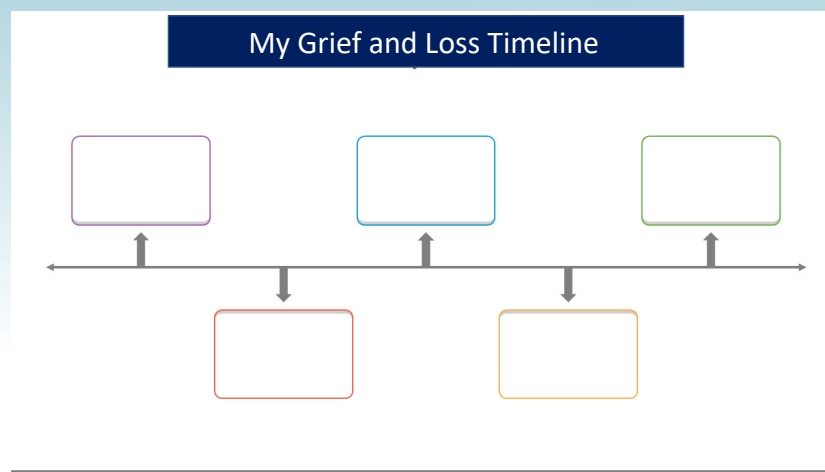
Reflection Questions

- Watching the changes in my community & world, what losses am I aware of?
- How am I experiencing or impacted by these losses?
- How am I and my community members carrying these losses?

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Homework



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Resources

- *On Grief and Grieving, Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss.* David Kessler and Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, 2005
- *Finding Meaning, The Sixth Stage of Grief.* David Kessler, 2019.
- *Boundless Compassion, Creating a Way of Life.* Joyce Rupp, 2018.
- *Constant Hope: Reflections and Meditations to Strengthen the Spirit.* Joyce Rupp, 2019.
- *Grief isn't something to get over.* Mary Lamia, Ph.D., 2022.
- *Positive Aging.* Robert D. Hill, 2005

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