

Prayer toolkit

mourning prayer

AIM

This material aims to encourage us to think about praying with people who are bereaved. It is based on personal experience and prayer in the aftermath of death and encourages participants to reflect on their experiences and consider ways of sharing in a supportive ministry of prayer to people who have lost loved ones and are grieving or mourning in some way.

Let me tell you...

A young mother from the estate was killed in an accident with a fire engine that was answering an emergency call. The call turned out to be a hoax but the accident left the woman dead and her youngest child, baptised at the local church, in a coma. How were we, the people of the local community, to pray in this devastating situation?

A photograph of the family taken at the baptism was found and placed by a candle on a small table at the heart of the community hall. Each morning someone from the community lit the candle and a short silence was kept together.

On the other side of the city others we knew were praying with the driver of the fire engine.

A few months later the family asked for the baptism of another new baby, a child of the dead woman's sister, and a memorial service for all those who had recently died in the family.

INTRODUCTION

This material is about praying alongside people who have asked for prayer because someone they know has died. It is because this happens quite often, at least to me, that I have written about these experiences. It is not meant to be heavy going or off-putting. Rather because I believe that Christians have something distinctive and hopeful to say in the face of death that I would like to encourage others to step into praying in circumstances others might rather avoid. That is not to say that I don't recognise this as a challenging time to pray. It certainly can be, but in the company of Jesus the Life Giver we can try to be pray-ers in the face of death. The material includes stories from many different situations where folks have experienced the death of someone they love and others have tried to come alongside them at this time. My thanks to those who have shared these times and these stories.

Talking about death and prayer

It may be difficult for folks to discuss this subject, perhaps because they do not often do so or because it evokes emotions that they find difficult to control. It is therefore important to have some ground rules for a discussion. Remind participants that they should

- not talk about the content of the discussion outside of the group (confidentiality);
- listen carefully and allow time for each person to speak without interruption (respect);
- speak for themselves and from their own experience rather than contradict or put down the experiences of others (integrity);

Prayer toolkit

mourning prayer

- wait respectfully if people are emotional and not try to hush people up or move them on too quickly (humanity).

If you are doing this on your own or with a prayer partner you might want to make some notes in your prayer journal.

Let me tell you...

A young soldier, who had come to some of the church organisations as a boy, had been killed whilst on duty in Afghanistan.

As the first Christmas after his death approached his mother wrote to the local paper in anguish, saying how she thought he'd been forgotten and his death in vain.

We made an Advent wreath at our workshop and took it to her, to place on his grave. We told her about our Advent Tree and how we'd put his name on it alongside all the other people remembered with love in the prayers of our community.

Let me tell you...

The day after my mother died suddenly, my father and I went up to the church together, 'to pray', we had agreed.

We sat down on the front pew and looked around us. I waited, ready to take my cue from him, but not wanting to rush him.

He started to pray out loud: 'God help me. Just help me God. Please give me strength to carry on'.

When I think of him now, in hospital, some 20 months later, to have shared that prayer with him then is really important.

Ask the participants

Consider the stories already mentioned. Either read them out loud or silently which ever seems most appropriate.

When people have died, in which situations have you found yourself challenged to pray?

Why was that?

What did you do?

Jesus said 'Blesses are those who mourn: they will be comforted'. Given just how difficult mourning can be, what do you think he meant?

Praying with others

Collect some recent newspapers featuring local, national and international news. Ask participants to select some stories from the papers that include experiences of death. There are bound to be quite a few. At the time this material was written the daily death toll of service personnel in Afganistan was rising, there were continual reports of deaths in other parts of the world due to famine, disease, etc, the obituary columns were never empty and local people died from a range of causes. Cut some of these out and read them together. Again you may want to do this aloud or quietly or make notes in your prayer journal.

Prayer toolkit

mourning prayer

Invite responses from the participants about the newspaper stories. What has particularly struck them in the story? Does the situation connect with them in some particular way? Perhaps they have a relative serving in the forces, or living or working in one of the contexts mentioned. Provide some small candles/tea lights and invite people to place these on the newspaper stories and light them as they pray. The prayer does not have to be in words out loud. Silent prayer is also prayer and some people may be more comfortable or more confident with that. When you have finished you might want to conclude by saying

'We light these candles to remind us that Jesus is the Life Giver. He has overcome death and darkness and shares life with us all. In his name we share these prayers.'

Prayers

Here are some of my own prayers that have been written from the experience of praying in bereavement.

A death in the family

Caught out again

between waves

we wait.

Not knowing what to ask

for ourselves

we rely on others.

The line is fragile,

so thin and taught

we marvel

that it holds at all.

In silence we turn,

from silence we return.

Cells are still dividing.....

....in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Still calling

In joy and sorrow,

in gain and loss,

Prayer toolkit

mourning prayer

in despair and hope,
in death and life,
the Constant One,
calls me still.

Moving on

Not everyone knows the story of the empty tomb
and of those that do, not all of them believe it.
Approaching our own tombs we falter.
Standing on the edge of the tombs of those we love
we collapse inwards on ourselves,
memories stark, turning like knives.
It takes a patient story-crafter to listen
to the deep silences that well up through our fears.

Silent One, be with us.

Tomb- quitter, be with us.

Story-weaver, be with us.

Holy and inexhaustible Three,
be with us in our fear and in our passion,
as we live the story of your new life
and move on to the place of flourishing.

EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

Prayer toolkit



mourning prayer

THE NEXT STEP

If you want more toolkit items please revisit the website.

Acknowledgements

This material is copyright to Janet Lees who has given permission for it to be used in the Vision4life process. Other enquires about using the material to admin@vision4life.org.uk please.

HOW TO FEEDBACK TO VISION4LIFE?

If you wish to offer any feedback – brickbats and bouquets are equally welcome! – you can do so in various ways.

You can email the Vision4Life steering group about general V4L issues via the website or at admin@vision4life.org.uk

If you have questions specifically about the website email web@vision4life.org.uk

If you have comments and particularly contributions to the prayer year, you can email the V4L prayer year coordinator via prayer@vision4life.org.uk

If you want to make contributions or ask questions about other V4L years you can email:

Year 2 – Transformed by the Bible: bible@vision4life.org.uk

Year 3 – Transformed for Evangelism: evangelism@vision4life.org.uk