

NAME

Woven Fine MP3.mp3

DATE

October 13, 2020

DURATION

27m 41s

START OF TRANSCRIPT**[00:00:00]**

Good morning, everybody. It is so good to be with you this weekend. We're pretty much in the middle right now of our fall message series, The Cloud Over Everything, where we talk about how we cope with the various griefs and losses that this year has brought and sadly is still bringing us. Last week, I talked a little bit about those well-known five stages of grief, reframing them a little bit as tasks of grief, emotional work that we have to do, that we work through as we process a big change or a big loss. And next week, we're going to hear from Beverly Fox, one of our lay preachers, about a personal story of grief followed by our annual ritual, our Remembrance Sunday on October 25th, that Reverend Ken is going to lead us through in a new way this year. But today, I wanted to add something in a way to my message from last week. Because you see the five stage framework, those five tasks of grief, I talked about anger and sadness, denial, bargaining and acceptance. There was an addition made to the framework by one of the original authors a couple of years ago, you might have heard the names, David Kessler and Elizabeth Kubler Ross. I talked about David last week. The two of them worked together to create this framework. And while you may have heard those names, you may not realize that Elizabeth Kubler Ross was much older than David Kessler when they began to work together. She was his mentor.

[00:01:39]

She died in 2004.

[00:01:43]

And after her death, David Kessler started to think about. And the more he talked and researched and wrote about this topic, he started to hear these hungers and people for something more than acceptance. Again, the the tasks or the stages of grief are not meant to be proscriptive. They're not meant to describe how you should grieve. They are descriptive, right. They attempt to describe what people talk about and express as they move through a loss. And David Kessler started to hear people talking about something that came beyond or after acceptance, something deeper, that brought people a sense of peace and the ability to move forward. He started to draft some new chapters about what he called finding, meaning this sixth stage or sixth task about grief in an interview earlier this year, the researcher and author Bernie Brown talk to David Kessler specifically about this new step finding meaning. And he talked about the strange ups and downs that he had even been through in his own life with this work. A few years after David Kessler started drafting those chapters, his own son, also named David, died unexpectedly at the age of 21. David Kessler said, you know, in those first few weeks after this happened, all I felt was pain. He said I wanted to call up people I had interviewed and worked with over the years who had told me about their own grief and say, I'm sorry. I actually had no idea what kind of pain you were describing until now. He actually describes finding those draft chapters about how we find meaning after a loss and throwing them into a drawer and shoving the door closed and saying, no, not right now. Finding meaning may not be the task we need at first. And it's a tough needle to thread. He admits finding meaning is not about saying I'm glad this happened. It can never be about rushing people to make sense of something or say that their suffering was for a purpose.

[00:04:19]

But when it is the organic work that we crave.

[00:04:24]

When we hunger for a sense of meaning. When we realize that that will help us move forward, it's OK. It's OK to look for that and to find a way to make a deeper meaning out of what's happened to us. Over time, David Kessler realized that this idea of finding meaning was even starting to weave its way into his own life. He said it didn't take away the pain of his son's death. But as a sense of greater meaning around, it began to emerge.

[00:05:08]

He said it was like a cushion for the pain. One that wasn't there before.

[00:05:16]

You can imagine that, right, if you're sitting on a hard seat, let's say you have a deep bruise on your hip bone, that pain grates, but when you add a cushion, the core injury is still there.

[00:05:33]

But you have something to sink into.

[00:05:38]

The pain is eased, and when you're really in pain, you know that easing the pain, it makes a difference.

[00:05:48]

I think about that sometimes this year when in small ways we're struggling, we're on yet another resume call, maybe our fourth or fifth in the day, but then somebody holds their pet or their baby up to the screen.

[00:06:03]

And for a moment, that pet or baby is the star. It's a cushion.

[00:06:09]

Makes it a little easier every time we get creative and find a new safe way to get together with someone.

[00:06:16]

Every time we get creative around Halloween and we build our air guns or our shoots for a candy to hand out, maybe even this year you've been able to watch a friendship or a connection blossom that you didn't have before all this started.

[00:06:35]

It doesn't take away the pain of what's happening, but it is a boost, it's a cushion.

[00:06:45]

The poet William Blake wrote what might be one of the most well-known verses about this strange place that we sometimes find ourselves in when we encounter joy in the midst of sorrow. And both are true, right?

[00:06:59]

Both are there at the same time, he said, joy and woe are woven fine.

[00:07:09]

A clothing for the soul divine under every grief and pain runs a joy with silken twine.

[00:07:21]

It is right. It should be so. We were made for joy and woe. And when this, we rightly know. Through the world, we safely go.

[00:07:37]

I love that ending, we were made for joy and well, and when this we rightly know through the world, we safely go, not everything is just fine, bro, right? Not that our bank accounts will grow. But yes, through the world, we safely go. In the interview, Brene Brown asked David Kessler something else I've been wrestling with this year, it's a question that I have had, but it's also one that many of you have brought to me. She asked him, how can we support each other when we're all going through in? How in a situation where everyone is struggling, can we make space for each others struggles right when we're all up in this together, is it even possible for us to help each other move through this grief that we're all experiencing? David responded to her not exactly with a straight answer, but in much the way that Jesus in the New Testament would respond to hard questions. He told her a story that's a story you might have heard before. It's often called the Parable of the Long Spoons, an ancient story attributed to a rabbi in Lithuania with versions of it from folk tales in Germany and Romania. Threads of it going all the way back to Aesop's Fables in ancient Greece.

[00:09:04]

An old wisdom story in this parable.

[00:09:10]

A man is led into a great banquet hall. And the hall is filled with the smell of a delicious meal and in the center right in the middle of this hall, there's a huge pot and it's filled with hot, hearty, delicious stew all around the pot. People are gathered to eat, but the man notices that the people all look hungry.

[00:09:37]

Worse than that, they're gaunt. They're starving.

[00:09:43]

The man notices that each of these people gathered around the pot is holding a spoon, but the spoons are long, very long. Let's just say they're six feet long just for fun.

[00:10:00]

And as each person scoops up the stew with these long spoons, there's no way to get the far end of the spoon back into their mouths.

[00:10:15]

Then the man is taken into another room in the same hall. With another huge part of delicious, hearty stew. But in this room, the people gathered are laughing, their cheeks are flushed and their bellies are full and each of them has that same six foot long spoon in their hands. But as the man watches them, he begins to realize the one difference, the only difference between those two rooms in the second room, the people are using their long spoons to scoop up the stew and then reach across the pot to feed each other. That question from Bernie Brown about how we help each other when we're all sitting here struggling. David Kessler says, look at that story. You know, those two rooms, same circumstances, same obstacles that everyone is dealing with.

[00:11:24]

The difference, he says, is something very simple.

[00:11:29]

Can we make that space and time for each other? Can we just say, OK, first you for me and then me for you, can we find the people who will work with us and be with us?

[00:11:50]

David Kessler said this year he's seen that parable come to life in a group text set up by one of his neighbors, just a group text for all of the people who live up and down his street, offering up what they could when they have it. People saying, hey, I have a ton of toilet paper. If anybody needs some people saying I love to cook, if anybody wants a meal, I'll bring you some food or hey, my kids are bored out of their minds. They would love to have a pen pal. Or if anybody goes out for a walk, please just knock on my window. I can't go out, but I'd love a visitor.

[00:12:31]

Like those hungry folks in that first big room, when we're starving, when we're caught up in our own pain and we think it's ours alone, it's so easy to forget that we are still in this together.

[00:12:50]

There's never any shame in asking for what we need.

[00:12:56]

And David Kessler says, especially in a year like this, if you are pretending that everything is fine, he says you're missing out on all of these opportunities to begin to find some meaning in what we're going through. He says the meaning is never in the trauma. It's not in the death or the loss.

[00:13:24]

The meaning is found in what we do after the meaning is in us and what we create.

[00:13:38]

For most of the year so far, I'll be honest, I have been so grateful that this is my job. It's reassuring for sure to find that in a stressful time when so much has changed. I really do love what I do. But also, I confess there are days when I have wished that finding meaning was not a part of my job description because you can't rush it. I mean, I try my hardest. I know Reverend can and our lay preachers do also. But we can't produce meaning on a weekly schedule.

[00:14:17]

It doesn't work that way. We live with it.

[00:14:22]

We live through these times. And if we keep a watchful eye, if we are looking and praying and hoping for that meaning to emerge, we wait.

[00:14:37]

We wait for it to show up.

[00:14:42]

I do sometimes feel like I'm in that banquet hall just saying I can't eat with these spoons for like I'm like I'm limited in a way that I have never quite been limited before. And it can feel so overwhelming to try to plan for anything or think too far into the future. Maybe you felt that way, too, like you can't eat with these spoons as you think about a whole school year ahead of us, or, gosh, as you think about your professional goals or your retirement goals or your personal goals and what this situation is doing to your progress or how all this change is going to impact your health or your quality of life in the years that you have left God, even just Thanksgiving plans for you. Don't even get me started yet. We've barely figured out how we've all got some long spoons in our hands. We're all coping with an ongoing challenge and trauma.

[00:15:47]

And we don't know what the meaning of all this will be in the end.

[00:15:53]

But we can help create it by what we do.

[00:15:59]

If we're hungry for meaning, if that is the task that we are craving right now, how do we get there?

[00:16:09]

How can we feed each other?

[00:16:14]

Well, I don't exactly have an answer either or a five step plan for you, but I do have a story, one that felt to me like a really beautiful example of the realistic process, the timeline, the complexity of what finding meaning really looks like in action.

[00:16:39]

There's an author and a podcast are named Nora McEnany.

[00:16:45]

A woman who has lived through before this year, a time of grief piled up upon grief. You see early in October of 2014, not long after the birth of her first child, Nora lost her second child to a miscarriage.

[00:17:06]

Just one week after that loss, her father died of cancer.

[00:17:15]

And then on November 25th of that year, Nora's husband, Aaron, died after three years fighting stage four glioblastoma brain cancer in two months.

[00:17:33]

Norah lost three of the people who were her heart.

[00:17:40]

Norah says that usually when she talks about that two month period in her life, the reaction she gets is, you know, I just can't I can't imagine, Norah says.

[00:17:53]

I think you can honestly.

[00:17:56]

She says, I think you should because someday, God, I hope not. With the same rapid force. Right. But someday it's going to happen to you. It is funny. And she says, listen, I have seen research that will stun you. Everyone you love has a 100 percent chance of dying. And yes, she says, I'm very fun at parties. Nora has shared her story in books and videos for campaigns around mental health and resilience and coping with grief. And in a TED talk a few years back and that talk, Nora says, I've remarried a very handsome man named Matthew and we have four children in our blended family. She says We live in the suburbs of Minneapolis, Minnesota. We have a rescue dog. I drive a minivan like the kind where the door is open and I don't even touch them by any measure, she says. Life is really, really good.

[00:18:59]

But I haven't moved on.

[00:19:03]

She says I haven't moved on. And honestly, I hate that phrase because she says moved on, says that Erin's life and death are just moments that I can or should leave behind, but I can't do that, Nora says.

[00:19:27]

When I talk about Aaron, I slip so easily into the present tense. And I thought maybe that was weird. But then I noticed that everybody does it.

[00:19:37]

It's not because we're in denial. It's because anyone or anything meaningful that we lose is still present for us.

[00:19:49]

She says, when I say, oh, Aaron, is it because Aaron still is and not in the way he was before, which was much better for the record, it's just that he's indelible, he's unforgettable, and so he is present for me. He's here, Norah

says, in the work I do in the child that we had together in these three other children I'm raising who never met him, who share none of his DNA, but who are only in my life because I had Aaron and lost Aaron. He's present in my marriage to Matthew because Aaron's life and death made me the person that Matthew wanted to marry.

[00:20:40]

So I have not moved on from Aaron. I've moved forward with him.

[00:20:52]

Nora McEnany says now more than ever, she's aware that all day, every day, terrible things are happening all around the world. People are experiencing formative and traumatic losses every day. As part of her job now hosting a podcast about loss, she says, I talk to people about the worst moment of their lives. Sometimes I talk to people about their grief, and none of them have closed themselves off around this loss and made it the center or the entirety of their lives.

[00:21:27]

Their worlds keep spinning, but they do talk about their losses as being with them still because these are the experiences that mark us and make us. Just as much as the joyful ones do. Nora says, we don't look at people in the midst of joy and tell them to move on, right.

[00:21:54]

We don't send a card like congratulations on your beautiful baby and then five years later think, oh, my God, another birthday party, like, OK, we got it is five, right?

[00:22:05]

The great joys and the great losses, these are the experiences that mark us and make us. What's happening now for all of us? It is marking us and making us. And there will come a time when we know just how maybe we see some threads already, maybe you see some clues already as to how this year is changing us, changing you, even though we never would have wished for any of this to happen. Maybe something is changing or growing inside of you because of what we're going through this year.

[00:23:02]

Nora says we can't prevent grief, but we can try to remind each other that some things cannot be fixed.

[00:23:16]

That you can be sad and happy that grieving people do laugh and smile again and that we don't need to move on to move forward.

[00:23:33]

Nora met Matthew, her current husband, who she admits doesn't love that title. She met Matthew and she says, you know, there was this audible sigh of relief from my friends and my family. Like, who? It's over.

[00:23:49]

She did it. She got a happy ending.

[00:23:54]

Nora says that narrative is so appealing, even to me, but it's not true, I didn't get a happy ending. I got another chapter. I opened my heart, she said to Matthew. And suddenly my brain was like, Would you like to think about Aaron now? Like just past, present, future, get in there all at once in a big jumble. And all of a sudden she said, I realized both plots were unfurling at once.

[00:24:29]

Falling for Matthew helped me realize the enormity of what I lost when Aaron died and helped me realize that my love for Aaron and my grief for Aaron and my love for Matthew are not opposing forces.

[00:24:44]

They are strands to the same thread. They are the same stuff. Not an ending and a beginning. Just the same love. The same love winding through it all.

[00:25:06]

Joy and woe are woven fine, a clothing for the soul divine under every grief and pain runs a joy with silken twine.

[00:25:19]

It is right it should be so we were made for joy and well. And when this we rightly know through the world, we safely go. May you go safely, friends?

[00:25:41]

Amen, and may you live in blessing.

[00:25:48]

I invite you to take a moment to join me in the spirit of prayer. God of our hearts.

[00:26:03]

Who knows what we carry?

[00:26:09]

Greater force that holds us all literally holds us all on this earth like gravity. Who knows what is unspoken inside of us? What is lost and hurting? And also what is new and just beginning to emerge.

[00:26:31]

May we find that space just as you hold us to hold ourselves with so much tenderness in this time, to allow ourselves to feel the jumble of feelings, the mix of joy and woe, the mix of despair and hope not to judge ourselves or each other for how we are feeling.

[00:27:00]

But only to ourselves and each other with love. And to let that be our guide. For the choices we make. For the actions we take.

[00:27:15]

Now and in the days to come, as we create something. Something we can't yet see in full, but that we can trust in part.

[00:27:32]

For the prayers that I've spoken and for the prayers that everyone gathered with us this morning holds on their hearts. We say Amen.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



Automated transcription by Sonix
www.sonix.ai