

The background of the cover features a soft-focus photograph of dried baby's breath flowers. The thin, light-colored stems are scattered across the frame, with small, delicate flower heads in various stages of bloom. The overall color palette is a mix of pale pinks, whites, and light greys, creating a gentle and calming visual effect.

FIVE PRACTICES FOR

Processing *Grief*

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PART I

ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR GRIEF

First of all, I want you to say this out loud —

"It is okay for me to grieve."

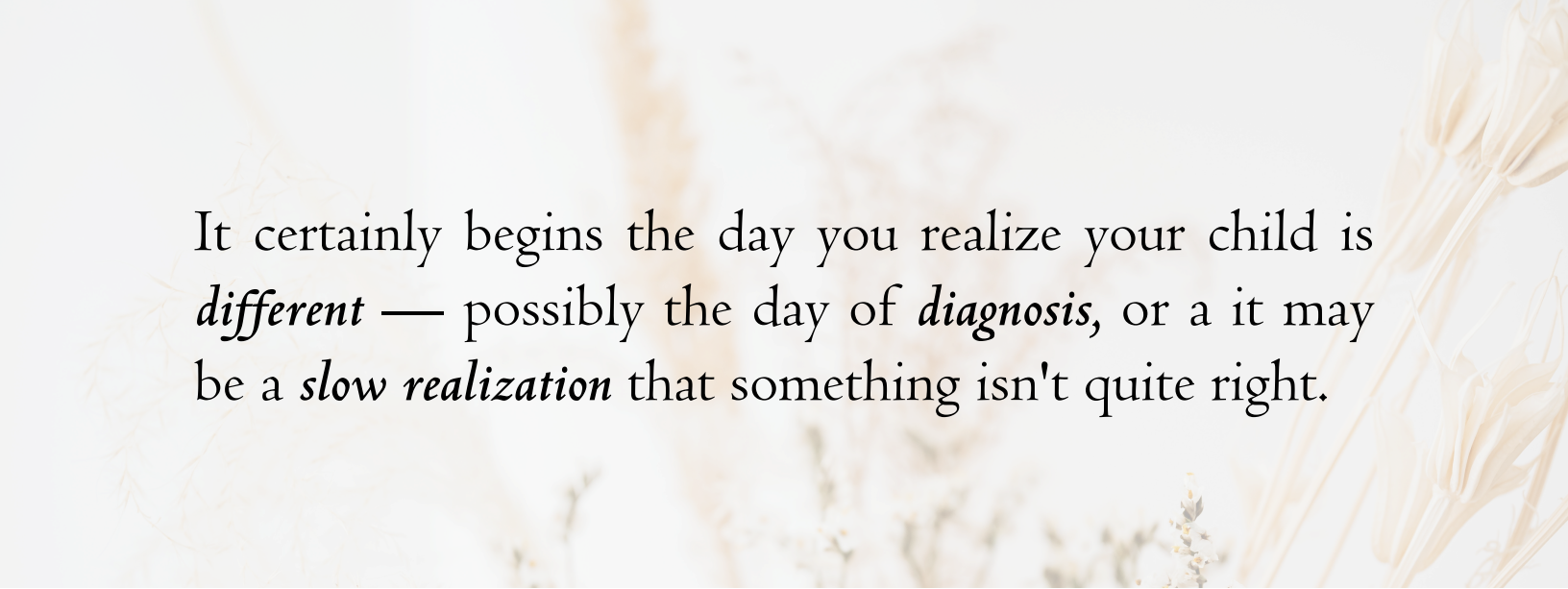
In our society, we tend to rank grief. We reason, "Well, I haven't lost my child to death, as other parents have; I should be grateful." You might feel guilty for acknowledging the sorrow you're feeling. You have experienced loss...the loss of a dream.

You have unmet expectations of what you thought your life, child, or family would be. In reality, it's quite different. It's essential to acknowledge your losses and grieve them as they bubble to the surface.

Adam Young, in his Podcast "*The Place We Find Ourselves*," relates how when we can name how we've been wounded, connect with that emotionally, talk about it, and mourn it, we have taken the first step to healing (1).

As a special needs mom, grief is a *part* of the journey, not just a *one time* event.

I. Young, Adam. "Your Wounds and the Path to Healing." The Place We Find Ourselves. Episode 13.



It certainly begins the day you realize your child is *different* — possibly the day of *diagnosis*, or it may be a *slow realization* that something isn't quite right.

More than likely grief will return again and again. It might be the day your child goes to school, after an unexpected hospital stay, or when they can't get a driver's license.

Sadness is just one way grief is displayed. Sometimes grief looks like anger, rage, weariness, and fear. It might be triggered by something completely unrelated to your child's diagnosis. But, there it is, and you don't know what to do with it.

It's not easy to lament or mourn. In days of old, people would be in mourning for an extended period of time — traditionally wearing dark clothing to further show they were in mourning. In our fast paced western culture, it's difficult to take the time to grieve, but it's an important part of your journey.

Sometimes half the battle is knowing *what* to expect. When you can accept that grief will be part of your journey, it makes it easier to recognize it the next time those emotions come.

PART II

NAME THE LOSS

It can be challenging to identify what has brought on the grief that you are now experiencing. It is essential to pause, reflect, and name the loss. What is the gap between what you expected to happen and what occurred? This is the loss you need to name. (i.e. after a hospital stay with my son it was missing out on my other kids' sporting events.

Name all the losses with journaling. Maybe you are not the type to journal with words — but could you keep an audio or video journal instead?

Being aware of your emotions and the events that have occurred in your life can help you be aware of grief.

JOURNALING IDEAS

Try these writing prompts as a starting place for your reflections:

- What did you expect to happen and what actually occurred?
Name this gap or loss.
- How did that situation make you feel?
 - Tip: try looking up a feeling wheel online.
- What are your doubts or fears?
- What would you change about your situation?
- What milestone is your child missing out on that you see other children achieving?

PART III

LAMENT IT

Psalm 62:7 says, “*Pour out your heart to him.*” Don't be afraid to grieve and pour out your heart before the Lord. To lament means to mourn, express sorrow, regret, and grief.

Do you ever feel like you have to filter your thoughts and emotions before you pray? God knows what you're thinking and feeling anyway and He wants you to pour out your heart to Him.

Head to scripture and read how real people lamented about their situations to the Lord. Read the book of Job; he was raw and honest with God. At the end of the book, God tells Job's friend Eliphaz, “*for you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has.*” Job spoke to God in a raw and real way, and yet God says Job was the one who spoke rightly about Himself.

It sometimes feels like can't tell God we are angry, sad, or disappointed with our situation, but scripture shows us we can. In human terms, imagine what type of relationship you would have if you only told a friend what was going well, never opened up vulnerably about your true emotions. It's the same way with our Father. Relationships are built on honesty, and God wants us to come to Him.

Be honest with God about your pain. He can handle it. When you take it to the Lord, you show a step of faith that you are trusting God with your pain. He will be near you in your grief.

REMINDER

I want to point out that in the scriptures of lament, you might see David affirming his trust in the Lord right after he has cried out in anguish about God being silent. Think about a song-writer or a poet. Most of the time they do not write everything at one time. Likely these were written over a long period of time, giving David time to *grieve* and *process*.

Don't feel guilty if you don't feel the trust and nearness of God in your grief. These were written over a period of time, not all at once.

SCRIPTURES OF LAMENT

If you're not sure what to say, then use scripture to pray your prayers of lament. Job, Psalms, Jeremiah, and Isaiah have great examples of lament to the Lord.

Here are a few places to get you started:

Job 8 and 10; Lamentations 1 and 3. Psalm 13, 22, 28, 42, and 102;
Mark 14

PART IV

SPEAK TRUTH OVER IT

Whenever life doesn't go as we expect, it is easy to doubt God. It is easy to make assumptions, or to feel as if the pain will never end.

Hopelessness can invade our hearts and minds in grief.

When we are grieving or experiencing loss we tend to lose sight of the horizon in the middle of a storm. The horizon is the truth about the character and heart of God.

He is *good*. He *loves* you and will *never leave you* or forsake you. In your grief, learn to speak the truth of scripture over it.

- **Copy them down on a note-card** — put them in your mirror, in your vehicle, on your fridge.
- **Journal about them** — how do they apply to your situation right now?
- **Pray them back to God** — There's something powerful about praying God's words back to him.



SCRIPTURES OF PROMISE AND COMFORT

Psalm 40:1-3, Psalm 9:9-10; Phil 4:6-7; Psalm 139: 1-18;
Hebrews 13:5, 4:15; Psalm 119:92; Psalm 34:18 or all of Psalm 34; I
Peter 5:7; Psalm 62:1-3, 5-8

PART V

CHOOSE GRATEFULNESS WITHIN IT

It may not feel like gratefulness and grief can go together, but you can choose gratefulness in the middle of your grief.

Thessalonians tells us: “*In everything give thanks...*”

This can also be in the middle of grief.

Pausing to reflect on how God has provided in those hard situations lifts our gaze from ourselves, and out our pain, to who God is and what He has done for us.

It both strengthens your *faith* and changes your *perspective*.

Journal Prompt: What are you grateful for today in the middle of this current circumstance?