BEYOND THE BROKEN HEART
A Journey Through Grief
LEADER GUIDE
Julie Yarbrough
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In 2004 my beloved husband, Leighton Farrell, a United Methodist minister, was diagnosed with a terminal disease. He died a very short ninety days later. When he died, my heart shattered into one million small pieces.

Three months after Leighton died I was desperate for an outlet to express my grief beyond the walled-in safety of my journal. For years a neighborhood church advertised a “Grief Recovery” program on a portable billboard when sessions were forming. I called, spoke to the person in charge, and told a little of my story. Because the leader seemed rather indifferent to my need, I quickly dismissed the idea of a group with almost panicked relief.

Later that year, a pastoral care minister at my church asked “how I was doing.” The dangling, painful, unspoken end of her inquiry was “without Leighton.” When she saw my pain-filled tears, she gently recommended a book by a local retired Methodist clergywoman, Rev. Patsy Brundige, who, because of her own experience of loss, had become a grief specialist.

After I read the book, I asked to meet with her, hoping for a personal lifeline of help. She graciously agreed and listened thoughtfully to my outpouring of pain and sorrow. Her professional and personal interest changed the course of my grief; I often tell her that she saved my life. For you see, she understood. Her husband died when she was exactly the same age I was when Leighton died. She knew what it felt like to be 55 years old and lose a spouse.

Patsy became my grief mentor and was there for me through the darkest days and months of my grief. And over time we became friends. Her support and spiritual encouragement guided my way on the journey through grief. She was my bridge builder on the road back to life.

An old man going a lone highway,
Came, at the evening cold and gray,
To a chasm vast and deep and wide.
Through which was flowing a sullen tide.
The old man crossed in the twilight dim,
The sullen stream had no fears for him;
But he turned when safe on the other side,
And built a bridge to span the tide.
“Old man,” said a fellow pilgrim near,
“You are wasting your strength with building here;
Your journey will end with the ending day;
You never again will pass this way;
You’ve crossed the chasm, deep and wide,
Why build this bridge at the evening tide?”

The builder lifted his old gray head;
“Good friend, in the path I have come,” he said,
“There followed after me to-day
A youth whose feet must pass this way.
This chasm that has been as naught to me
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be;
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim;
Good friend, I am building the bridge for him!”

“The Bridge Builder,” Will Allen Dromgoole (1860-1934)

In grateful appreciation for her wise counsel and friendship, I made a small presentation on financial management to a group at a day-long retreat on grief that Patsy was leading. As I left, Patsy followed me to the car. She urged me to consider starting a grief group at my church. I was certain that I could never lead a group because I did not attend groups or join groups. At times my father liked to invoke this aphorism with all the wisdom of its sly double negative, “Never say what you’re not going to do because that’s exactly what you will end up doing.” Time and again in life his little saying has proven true.

Almost two years later, I felt God gently asking me to start and lead a grief group at our church. Though it was not a loud clarion call, he gently urged me, despite my timid response, “Who, me? But God, you know that I am not a group person.” Without a real plan in mind, I contacted the Pastoral Care minister at our church about starting a regular group for widows and widowers; she and her staff colleagues offered their wholehearted support.

When we began, I knew only that the group would meet bi-weekly for one hour. I did not know how many weeks or months the group would go on. I had no idea who would show up, if anyone. What I did know was that the meetings must offer spiritual, emotional, and practical support for both men and women based on the foundations of faith and scripture. I knew, too, that my leadership must be offered with utmost care and compassion for the pain of those in the group.

When the group met for the first time, those who came defied any stereotypical notion of widow or widower. Of the twelve who were the core group for over two years, the participants were an equal number of men and women, evenly divided between young and old. The faithfulness and deep spiritual need of our
group inspired me in our shared quest to both understand and grow beyond our grief.

After the group concluded, I compiled the topics we considered into a book, *Inside the Broken Heart: Grief Understanding for Widows and Widowers*. I had no idea where its publication would lead, yet God opened a door, and then another. And now you are reading words by someone certain she could never lead a group.

If you have never led a group and you are perhaps wavering about your ability or in your self-confidence, perhaps my story will encourage you to respond if this ministry is God’s direction for your life. As a group leader, you offer the humanity and wisdom of a life tried and tested to those who grieve and affirm by your witness that there is life beyond the broken heart.

Julie Yarbrough
Dallas, Texas
INTRODUCTION

To survive and live forward, those who grieve must find answers. Beyond the Broken Heart is an eight-week support and ministry program for those who are grieving the loss of a loved one. Through your capable leadership, participants will find support and encouragement as they seek life in renewed hope and joy beyond the broken heart of grief.

Anyone who has a heart for those who grieve can lead a grief support group. You may be a pastor or church staff person. You may be a pastoral care volunteer or a Stephen minister. You may be a lay person who has been asked to lead a group or who has volunteered to lead one. Or you may be a professional counselor who plans to lead a group in the community or a church. To be an effective leader, it is not necessary that you have pastoral or counseling experience—only a desire to minister to those who grieve.

The program uses topical references from the Bible, video, and group discussion to illuminate the unfamiliar emotions and questions of grief over the course of eight sessions, with the option of two supplemental sessions. In either a 60- or 90-minute format, sessions can be scheduled for weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly group meetings. The program offers significant flexibility for creating a time structure that will work for your group, whether you are meeting in a church, another community location, or a home. Recommended group size is 6-12 participants.

Each group member will need a copy of Beyond the Broken Heart: A Journey Through Grief (hereafter called the Participant Book) and will read one chapter prior to each session. Each chapter in the Participant Book includes:

- personal reflections from the author’s journey through grief
- spiritual and practical help for navigating the emotions, experiences, and questions of grief
- scriptures and biblical material appropriate to the themes and topics of each chapter
- questions for personal reflection with space for recording responses

As leader, your role will be to guide participants in their growth through grief within the sanctity of the group. Together you will explore many of the spiritual and practical issues of grief and consider specific coping strategies. Three resources will assist you in this process. The first is this Leader Guide, which is divided into two sections for your convenience:
1) Leader Support:
   • suggestions on forming and sustaining grief ministry
   • how-tos for promoting, planning, and facilitating a successful group experience
   • suggestions for creating a group to serve several churches or community programs
   • detailed information about starting a group
   • suggestions for effective leadership of the group
   • examples of challenges and solutions that sometimes arise within a group
   • guidelines for leading the group sessions
   • ground rules that will help you establish and maintain the integrity of the group

2) Group Sessions:
   • spiritual resources for your personal preparation before each session
   • easy-to-follow session plan outlines for eight sessions, plus two supplemental sessions on the holidays and personal finances

Each week’s session plan outline will lead you step by step through the following suggested format:

Greeting
Opening Prayer
Video
Content Review
Discussion and Sharing
Summary Statement and Scripture
Closing Prayer
(See page 32 for 60- and 90-minute format options.)

The second resource you will use is the DVD, which provides eight video segments featuring the author and a licensed professional counselor. Each video segment is approximately nine to twelve minutes in length and includes:
   • an introduction to the topic for the week
   • two short illustrations from the author’s own journey through grief to help participants relate to the session theme
   • key scripture passages
   • and practical points related to the session topic
The third resource you will need is the Participant Book. As leader, you will read the corresponding chapter prior to the group session. Using the Participant Book will help to prepare you for the session, particularly for the Content Review and Discussion and Sharing segments.

As leader of a grief ministry support group, you will find that those who grieve long to tell their stories so that others will understand the pivotal moments in life when their worlds forever changed. When participants open their hearts to share their stories within the sanctity of the group—certain they are heard by others who know the experience of death and grief—they will realize that they are not alone. As participants journey through “the valley of the shadow of death,” Beyond the Broken Heart will help to guide the way back to fullness of life. Grief will be transformed as the group moves in community toward new life in gratitude for the steadfast love and faithfulness of God.

When you step out in faith to lead, listen, care for, and nurture those who grieve, you give the gift of yourself to others for their life beyond the broken heart.
How does one understand grief when the heart is broken by the death of a loved one? To survive and live forward, those who grieve must find answers. Beyond the Broken Heart is an eight-week grief support and ministry program for anyone who is grieving the loss of a loved one. Author Julie Yarbrough chronicles her personal experience combined with a deep love of Scripture and years of leading grief support groups to create an authentic and deeply personal study.

This leader guide includes session plan outlines for eight group sessions, plus material for supplemental group sessions on the holidays and personal finances, to assist leaders in forming and sustaining grief ministry groups. (Video is provided for the eight core sessions.) In addition, leaders will find step-by-step instructions to guide them through the group session process; tips for launching, planning, and facilitating a successful group experience, including suggestions for creating a group to serve several churches or community programs; and self-care suggestions for their own spiritual preparation before each group session.

“A refreshingly excellent resource for grief support.”
Stephan Bauman, Senior Minister, Christ Church, New York City

“Provides everything you need to promote, establish, and conduct grief groups throughout the year.”
Judith Bone, Director of Adult Discipleship,
Brentwood United Methodist Church, Nashville, Tennessee

“I commend this remarkable grief ministry program to you highly.”
James W. Moore, Pastor in Residence,
Highland Park United Methodist Church, Dallas, Texas

Julie Yarbrough is a native of Dallas, Texas, and the author of Inside the Broken Heart. Inspired by her personal experience after the death of her husband, Dr. Leighton Farrell, the senior minister at Highland Park United Methodist Church for many years, Julie established a grief support group and began writing articles and books for persons who are grieving. She also is the author of Peace of Mind: Financial Management for Life, an estate-planning guide. With over thirty years’ experience in business management, Julie currently serves as president of Yarbrough Investments.