

Good Grieving

Session 1

❑ A definition of “grieving.”

- Grieving is the process by which we respond to and adjust to the experience of loss – physically, cognitively, emotionally, behaviorally, socially and spiritually.

❑ The inescapable reality of change and loss.

- “You cannot step into the same river twice” (Heraclitus, Greek philosopher, c. 500BC). The only unchanging thing is change.
- **Ecclesiastes 3:1-2**
There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:
a time to be born and a time to die ...
a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance ...
- Becoming a person involves change.
 - Cutting the umbilical cord.
 - The “terrible 2s.”
 - Going to school.
 - The “terrible teens.”
 - Cutting the apron strings: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother ...”
 - The “terrible middle ages.”
 - Retirement.
 - Death.
- Sometimes God takes something away in order to give us something better.
 - **John 16:7** – “But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”

❑ The disorientation and pain of change and loss.

- Human beings are creatures of habit; we crave stability. We naturally develop attachments to people, places and things, tangible and intangible.
- When our attachments are disrupted, we lose our equilibrium (balance). The experience of change or loss can be
 - unfamiliar
 - uncomfortable
 - disorienting
 - disturbing
 - painful
 - anxiety-provoking
 - traumatic
- We naturally attempt to make whatever adjustments are necessary in order to regain our balance. **This is the grieving process.**
- It is not possible to “not grieve” – we are always making adjustments to our losses. But we can choose, with God’s help and the help of our community, to grieve well.

- Grieving well – acknowledging and dealing with our losses, so that we can receive God’s gift of “new life.” More pain now, more joy later.
 - Grieving poorly – choosing to deny and not deal with the disorientation and pain of our losses, and saying “No” to God’s gift of “new life.” Less pain now, more pain later. [Why do people make this choice?]
- God’s promises related to grieving
 - **Matthew 5:4** – Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
 - **Psalm 30:4-5, 11-12** –

Sing to the Lord, you saints of his; praise his holy name.
 For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime;
 weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.

* * *

You turned my wailing into dancing;
 you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,
 that my heart may sing to you and not be silent.
 O Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever.

□ Healthy process

- Sympathetic – opening up to each other in a safe, emotionally honest and respectful environment.
 - God became a human being in order to “be with us” in our suffering (Immanuel = “God with us”).
 - **Hebrews 4:15** – For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.
 - Sympathize = “to suffer with.”
 - **I Peter 3:8** – “Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.”
 - Taking what’s inside and bringing it outside – into our community.
 - “Together we can do what we could never do alone.”
- Safe – confidential, nonjudgmental.

When a trout rising to a fly gets hooked on a line and finds himself unable to swim about freely, he begins with a fight which results in struggles and splashes and sometimes an escape. Often, of course, the situation is too tough for him. In the same way the human being struggles with his environment and with the hooks that catch him. Sometimes he masters his difficulties; sometimes they are too much for him. His struggles are all that the world sees and it naturally misunderstands them. It is hard for a free fish to understand what is happening to a hooked one. – Karl A. Menninger

- Emotionally honest – “When this happened, I felt ___(an emotion word)___.”
- Respectful – allowing others the time and space to “work out their own salvation” (Philippians 2:12).

Good Grieving

Session 2

☐ A definition of “grieving”

- **Grieving** is the process by which we respond to and adjust to the experience of loss – physically, cognitively, emotionally, behaviorally, socially and spiritually.

☐ The disorientation and pain of change and loss

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- When our attachments are disrupted, we lose our equilibrium (balance). The experience of change or loss can be
 - unfamiliar
 - uncomfortable
 - disorienting
 - disturbing
 - painful
 - anxiety-provoking
 - traumatic
- We naturally attempt to make whatever adjustments are necessary in order to regain our balance. **This is the grieving process.**
- It is not possible to “not grieve” – we are continually adjusting to change and loss. But with God’s help and the help of our community we can learn to grieve in a healthier manner.

☐ Healthy process

- **Sympathetic** – being curious about the feelings of others, and finding a place within ourselves that identifies with the feelings of others.
 - God became a human being in order to “be with us” in our suffering (Immanuel = “God with us”).
 - ☐ **Hebrews 4:15** – For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.
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 - Taking what’s inside and bringing it outside – into our community.
 - “Together we can do what we could never do alone.”
- **Emotionally honest** – “When this happened I felt _____ (an emotion word)_____.”

- **Respectful** – allowing others the time and space to “work out their own salvation” (Philippians 2:12).
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Karl A. Menninger, The Human Mind

Good Grieving

Session 3

Confronting our feelings and giving them appropriate expression always takes strength, not weakness. It takes strength to acknowledge our anger, and sometimes more strength yet to curb the aggressive urges anger may bring and to channel them into nonviolent outlets. It takes strength to face our sadness and to grieve and to let our grief and our anger flow in tears when they need to. It takes strength to talk about our feelings and to reach out for help and comfort when we need it.

Fred Rogers, The World According to Mr. Rogers

- ❑ A definition of “grieving”
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- ❑ Healthy process
 - **Sympathetic** – being curious about the feelings of others, and finding a place within ourselves that identifies with the feelings of others.
 - **Emotionally honest** – “When this happened I felt _____ (an emotion word)_____.”
 - **Respectful** – allowing others the time and space to “work out their own salvation” (Philippians 2:12).
 - **Safe** – confidential, nonjudgmental.
- ❑ The Five Stages of Good Grieving
 - In her 1969 book On Death and Dying, Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross identified five stages that terminally ill people typically pass through in the course of coming to terms with their mortality: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. This pattern is also useful in understanding our journey through other types of loss.

Stage 1: Denial

- **Denial** is the natural mechanism of mind/spirit/body that keeps us from being overwhelmed by change or loss. It works by heightening some functions and depressing or shutting down others.
 - “I don’t believe it,” “This can’t be true,” “This isn’t happening,” “This can’t be happening to me.”
 - What are some reasons we might deny the reality of a loss?
 - ❑ In order to retain our sanity when experiencing otherwise unbearable pain.
 - When a loss or trauma is too painful for our conscious mind to absorb, we sometimes transfer the pain to another “compartment” in our mind.
 - ❑ In order to attend to more urgent matters (e.g., funeral arrangements, child care).
 - ❑ In order to protect others (e.g., children) from experiencing the reality of the loss.

- In order to maintain a certain appearance – “mature,” “spiritual,” “OK,” “together.”
- In order to “protect the reputation” of God, the gospel, Christianity, etc.
- _____
- _____

- Denial might become harmful when ...
 - ... it creates conflict between deniers and non-deniers.
 - ... non-reality, fantasy, distorted thinking or “magical thinking” becomes habitual.
 - ... it contributes to poor problem-solving and decision-making, or when it prevents us from taking appropriate and timely actions.
 - Do you have a will?
 - ... it leads to avoidance, withdrawing or isolation.
 - ... our “flight from reality” becomes unattractive to those we’re trying to reach with the gospel.
 - _____
 - _____

- Suggestions for dealing with denial:
 - Be gentle with yourself.
 - Whom do you trust to help you interpret reality?
 - Using words to bring the pain from inside to outside:
 - Asking yourself, “What specifically is painful about this?”
 - Asking yourself, “What am I afraid of?”
 - _____
 - _____

[Some of the preceding material has been adapted from <http://www.coping.org/grief/denial.htm>]

Good Grieving

Session 4

- “Grieving” – the process by which we respond to and adjust to the experience of loss – physically, cognitively, emotionally, behaviorally, socially and spiritually.

- Healthy process – sympathetic; emotionally honest; respectful; safe; speaking in the “I.”
 - Avoid commenting on, critiquing, criticizing, correcting the “shares” of others.
 - Avoid advice-giving.
 - Focus on “active listening,” which involves the exercise of curiosity and sympathy.

- The Five Stages of Good Grieving
 - Stage 1: Denial – the natural mechanism of mind/spirit/body that keeps us from being overwhelmed by change or loss. It works by heightening some functions and depressing or shutting down others.

Stage 2: Anger – “I don’t want this to happen.”

- Anger is our experience of boundary-making energy, which we need in order to protect ourselves and our loved ones.
- We might feel angry at ...
 - Others who are not cooperating with us.
 - Others who are not suffering as we are.
 - Ourselves.
 - A loved one who is sick, in trouble, dying, or who has died.
 - God.

Job 23:1-7 (NIV)

Then Job replied:

[2] "Even today my complaint is bitter; his hand is heavy in spite of my groaning.

[3] If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling!

[4] I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments.

[5] I would find out what he would answer me, and consider what he would say.

[6] Would he oppose me with great power? No, he would not press charges against me.

[7] There an upright man could present his case before him, and I would be delivered forever from my judge.

Dirge without Music

Edna St. Vincent Millay

I am not resigned to the shutting away of loving hearts in the hard ground.
So it is, and so it will be, for so it has been, time out of mind:
Into the darkness they go, the wise and the lovely. Crowned
With lilies and laurels they go; but I am not resigned.

Lovers and thinkers, into the earth with you.
Be one with the dull, the indiscriminate dust.
A fragment of what you felt, of what you know,
A formula, a phrase remains, – but the best is lost.

The answers quick and keen, the honest look, the laughter, the love –
They are gone. They are gone to feed the roses. Elegant and curled
Is the blossom. Fragrant is the blossom. I know. But I do not approve.
More precious was the light in your eyes than all the roses in the world.

Down, down, down into the darkness of the grave
Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind;
Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the brave.
I know. But I do not approve. And I am not resigned.

Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night

Dylan Thomas

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Good Grieving

Session 5

- “Grieving” – the process by which we respond to and adjust to the experience of loss – physically, cognitively, emotionally, behaviorally, socially and spiritually.
- Healthy process – sympathetic; emotionally honest; respectful; safe; speaking in the “I.”
 - Avoid commenting on, critiquing, criticizing, correcting the “shares” of others.
 - Avoid advice-giving.
 - Allowing others to have their experience – resist the temptation to “take away” their grieving!
 - Focus on “active listening,” which involves the exercise of curiosity and sympathy.
- The Five Stages of Good Grieving
 - Stage 1: Denial – the natural mechanism of mind/spirit/body that keeps us from being overwhelmed by change or loss. It works by heightening some functions and depressing or shutting down others.

 - Stage 2: Anger – our experience of boundary-making energy, which we need in order to protect ourselves and our loved ones.

 - Stage 3: Bargaining – “I’m not going to let this happen,” or “I’ll do anything to prevent this.”
 - ☑ When we believe that a particular loss might actually end up happening, our next line of defense is *bargaining*. Bargaining is similar to anger, in that we are still attempting to create a boundary against the loss.

 - ☑ Bargaining *before* the loss has occurred, in order to prevent/postpone/delay the loss.
 - We bargain with God for our own sakes.
 - “Since the terror of death is so overwhelming we conspire to keep it unconscious. ‘The vital lie of character’ is the first line of defense that protects us from the painful awareness of our helplessness.” (Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death, xii).

 - “The terminally ill patient ... knows, from past experience, that there is a slim chance that he may be rewarded for good behavior and be granted a wish for special services” (Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, On Death and Dying, 82-83).

 - In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, “This is what the Lord says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover.” Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, “Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah: “Go and tell Hezekiah, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life.’” – Isaiah 38:1-5

- We bargain with God for the sake of others.
 - After Nathan had gone home, the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill. David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground. The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them. (2 Samuel 12:15-17)

- ☑ Bargaining *after* the loss has occurred.
 - The “if only’s” or the “what if’s” – “*If only* I had gone to the doctor sooner,” “*If only* I had been paying attention,” “*What if* I had called her earlier?”

 - “Woulda,” “shoul da,” “coulda.”

 - Bargaining over losses that have already happened allows us to have *in fantasy*, at least for a moment, what we can’t have in reality. Bargaining also allows us to hold on to an image of ourselves as we might have been, or as we “should have” been.

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Session 6

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 - Stage 2: Anger – our experience of boundary-making energy, which we need in order to protect ourselves and our loved ones.
 - Stage 3: Bargaining – our efforts to negotiate with God, in the hope of preventing or postponing a loss that seems inevitable. “Just tell me what I need to do in order to prevent this from happening.”
 - Stage 4: Depression – the “desert” or “wasteland” between our old “way of being” (which we now realize is gone) and a new “way of being” that we haven’t yet had the time, ability, outside resources or willingness to accept/discover.

Lonely	Lost hope	Loss of appetite
Numb	Giving up	Unsafe
Irritable	Broken	Misplaced
Empty	Isolated	Angry
Unmotivated	Unaware	Afraid
Confused	In the void	Tired
Lost	Catatonic	Heavy
Don’t care	Suicidal	Sleepy

Jonah 4:1-11

But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the Lord, "O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

But the Lord replied, "Have you any right to be angry?"

Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the Lord God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?"

"I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die."

Psalm 88:1-18

O Lord, the God who saves me,
day and night I cry out before you.
May my prayer come before you;
turn your ear to my cry.

For my soul is full of trouble
and my life draws near the grave.
I am counted among those who go down to the
pit;
I am like a man without strength.
I am set apart with the dead,
like the slain who lie in the grave,
whom you remember no more,
who are cut off from your care.

You have put me in the lowest pit,
in the darkest depths.
Your wrath lies heavily upon me;
you have overwhelmed me with all your waves.

Selah

You have taken from me my closest friends
and have made me repulsive to them.
I am confined and cannot escape;
my eyes are dim with grief.
I call to you, O Lord, every day;
I spread out my hands to you.
Do you show your wonders to the dead?
Do those who are dead rise up and praise you?

Selah

Is your love declared in the grave,
your faithfulness in Destruction?
Are your wonders known in the place of
darkness,
or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?

But I cry to you for help, O Lord;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.
Why, O Lord, do you reject me
and hide your face from me?
From my youth I have been afflicted and close to
death;
I have suffered your terrors and am in despair.
Your wrath has swept over me;
your terrors have destroyed me.
All day long they surround me like a flood;
they have completely engulfed me.
You have taken my companions and loved ones
from me;
the darkness is my closest friend.

Job 3:1, 20-26 (see also Jeremiah 20:14-18)

After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. He said:

* * * * *

"Why is light given to those in misery,
and life to the bitter of soul,
to those who long for death that does not come,
who search for it more than for hidden treasure,
who are filled with gladness
and rejoice when they reach the grave?
Why is life given to a man
whose way is hidden,
whom God has hedged in?
For sighing comes to me instead of food;
my groans pour out like water.
What I feared has come upon me;
what I dreaded has happened to me.
I have no peace, no quietness;
I have no rest, but only turmoil."

Matthew 26:38

Then [Jesus] said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Good Grieving

Session 7

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 - Stage 4: Depression – the “desert” or “wasteland” between our old “way of being” (which we now realize is gone) and a new “way of being” that we haven’t yet had the time, ability, outside resources or willingness to accept/discover.

 - Stage 5: Acceptance – the “time and space” in which we find ourselves more willing and able to adjust to our new reality. We find ourselves more willing to change, to do things differently, and to do different things (or resume doing things we used to do).

- “Act as if,” “Fake it till you make it.”
 - Rituals – set or stereotyped patterns of behavior that help us ...
 - Relate – shape, express, and maintain relationships.
 - Change – make and mark transitions for ourselves and others.
 - Heal – recover from relationship betrayal, trauma and loss.
 - Believe – voice beliefs and make meaning.
 - Celebrate – affirm deep joy and honor life with festivity.
[adapted from Imber-Black and Roberts, Rituals for our Times]
- Perspective

For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning. **(Psalm 30:5)**

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. **(Matthew 5:4)**

[Jesus said:] I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. **(John 16:33)**

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:
a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,
a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,
a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a
time to refrain,
a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw
away,
a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,
a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.
(Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting,
for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart.
Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart.
The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in
the house of pleasure.
(Ecclesiastes 7:2-4)

- o Experiencing community with God.

Hebrews 4:14-16 (NIV)

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Hebrews 4:14-16 (The Message Bible)

Now that we know what we have—Jesus, this great High Priest with ready access to God—let's not let it slip through our fingers. We don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He's been through weakness and testing, experienced it all—all but the sin. So let's walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help.

- o Experiencing community with people (“smart feet”).

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. **(Romans 12:15)**

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it ... **(I Corinthians 12:26)**

It's better to have a partner than go it alone. Share the work, share the wealth. And if one falls down, the other helps, but if there's no one to help, tough! Two in a bed warm each other. Alone, you shiver all night. By yourself you're unprotected. With a friend you can face the worst. Can you round up a third? A three-stranded rope isn't easily snapped. **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (The Message Bible)**

Good Grieving

Session 8

Grieving and the Holiday Season

- All significant milestones dates/seasons tend to stir up our emotions, and we might be especially sensitive to issues of grieving at such times as:
 - Holidays (religious, ethnic/national, secular/“American”)
 - Birthdays (our own or others)
 - Anniversaries (our own or others)
 - Memorial dates
- We often associate milestone dates/seasons with memories from childhood (good, bad, or mixed), including sensory memories (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch).
- Happy memories may provide us with comfort. But other memories may contribute to feelings of
 - Sadness
 - Loss
 - Loneliness
 - Regret
 - Remorse
 - Anger
 - Resentment (“Why did they ...?,” “Why didn’t they ...?”)
 - _____
 - _____
- Some of our “wounds” that are normally healed over will sometimes “open up” during certain seasons. “I thought I was over that” This is the “spiral” nature of loss and grief.
- For those prone to depression, the Fall and Winter seasons are time of special susceptibility to Seasonal Affective Disorder.
- How to help ourselves to grieve well during sensitive times:
 - Keep up with your “regular” grief work. Keep on giving yourself permission to do “healthy grieving.”
 - Note the sensitive times and plan ahead.
 - Special times devoted to remembering/grieving
 - Use of physical objects, mementos.
 - Making special visits (e.g., old neighborhood, cemetery).
 - “Mental health days” and other “emotional vacations.”
 - Seek support specifically related to these times.
 - Have realistic expectations for yourself.
 - Personal limits.
 - Be gentle with yourself.
 - “Know thyself.”
 - “Easy does it.”
 - “Keep it simple.”
 - “First things first.”
 - “One day at a time.”
 - “Just for today.”
 - “How important is it?”

- Relationship expectations – “Thanks for asking, but I just can’t do this or that right now.”
- Cultural expectations.
- Religious expectations. Listen to Jesus!
 - “... for He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust” (Psalm 103:14).
 - “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly” (Matthew 11:28-30, *The Message Bible*).
 - “Martha, Martha ... Mary has chosen what is better” (Luke 10:41-42).
 - “The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27).

A 4-year-old was asked to return thanks before Thanksgiving dinner. The family members bowed their heads in expectation. He began his prayer, thanking God for all his friends, Mommy, Daddy, brother, sister, Grandma, Grandpa, and all his aunts and uncles. Then he began to thank God for the food.

He gave thanks for the turkey, the dressing, the fruit salad, the cranberry sauce, the pies, the cakes, and then he paused. Everyone waited, and after a long silence, the young fellow looked up at his mother and asked, “If I thank God for the broccoli, won't he know that I'm lying?”