



All Our Losses

"My eyes flow with rivers of tears." Lam 3:48

Besides losses related to the death of a person or animal companion, the following is a list of some of the other losses we may experience over the course of a life journey.

- Dreams & aspirations (to be president, millionaire, rock star, sports hero, higher education, or "to get out of this dirty, stinking town")
- Direction
- Innocence
- Objects lost, stolen, or broken (ring, wallet, phone, furnace, car, computer, or home)
- Fire and weather-related losses
- Environmental losses, extinction
- War, deportation, global instability
- Elections, local or national tragedies
- Sports team loses a game or a championship
- Loss of a limb, personal injury
- Illness, chronic or terminal diagnosis
- Virginity (by choice or by force)
- Safety or security
- Incarceration
- Military deployment
- Losses related to childbirth (miscarriage, stillbirth, abortion, child born with a disability, loss of exclusivity of a mother's love, freedom, all your friends get married & start having kids, custody, adoption)
- Beginning/end of the school the year
- Empty nest
- Someone moves away
- Relational breakup or conflict (estrangement, divorce, rejection, infidelity)
- Financial, stock market crash, income
- Job, retirement, career change
- Losses related to aging (mobility, memory, independence, potency)
- Other people's losses (Their loss can also impact us)

Fortunately, all of life is not sadness and suffering; sometimes those tears are tears of joy! Sorrows will be mixed with moments of ecstasy and mingled with the monotony of daily routine. Grief is just one of the currents of life. It flows side by side other currents that propel us forward like, love, desire, ambition, fear, anger, and hope. If we are open to all of the experiences of life, we can learn to negotiate these waves of emotion with the skill and agility of a seasoned kayaker. Mercifully, if we are willing to go with the flow, the circumstances of life will undoubtedly change. We will pass through this and a variety of other phases of life before we reach the sea.



About *Grief River*®

Looking at any loss as an isolated event contributes to feeling overwhelmed and powerless in the face of adversity. However, when we examine the current waves of grief in the context of the entire lifespan, we are able to recognize we have navigated turbulent and troubled waters before. Taking this longer view enables us to claim our resilience and possibly even offers direction as to how to negotiate the whitewater we are currently experiencing, and whatever may await us around the next river bend.

The phases of a river offer a helpful and nature-inspired map for understanding grief and loss over the course of the entire lifespan.

Headwaters

It can be challenging to identify a single source for a river, glaciers, lakes, small streams and tributaries, rain, and snow all add to a river's volume and its rate of flow. The same can be said of grief. When we look back, many things contribute to how we experience the current loss and how well we are able to cope with those waves of grief. Our personality and temperament, spirituality and worldview, previous experience with loss, and our relationship with who or what we lost will influence our ability to manage grief and bereavement.

Rapids

Loss is an inevitable part of life so it cannot be avoided; the only way out is through. With time and effort, we can learn to negotiate the waves of grief and learn to go with the flow. Grief has to pass through the contours of our current life situation, so whatever other life stressors we are dealing with may intensify the rapids. However, finding paddle partners, an experienced river guide, and sandbars (places to rest along the way) can make the journey more manageable.

Run

Eventually, we will pass through the rough spots, grateful to leave those troubled waters behind. At this point, we should be able to refocus on the scenery and the events of everyday life. The run offers the opportunity to reflect on the experience and learn from it. If our loss was the death of a loved one, the feeling of missing him or her might never go away, but we will learn to chart a new course and continue on our journey.

Delta

As we approach the end of our own personal journey, either because of age or illness, the pace of life will eventually slow down. We will have time to reflect on the choices we have made and review our life. We will revisit our accomplishments and disappointments, all of our joys and sorrows. We will revisit the losses we have experienced as we approach and develop a point of view about our own death. Some may get stuck in the backwaters of bitterness and stagnate in a swamp of resentment, but most of us will find a channel that will carry us on toward the sea.

Rejoining the Sea

Just as all rivers eventually lead to the sea, we will join those who have gone before us. No matter what your personal perspective on a continued existence may be, Heaven or Hell, reincarnation, conversion to cosmic energy or nothingness, death is either the end of the journey or the beginning of a whole new adventure.