

Practicing The Practice

What is Comfort Those Who Mourn about?

When we think about comforting those who mourn, we typically think about those who have lost someone in death. But in addition to death, **people mourn many things**: the loss of a job, the end of a relationship, a move to another city leaving behind friends, a loved one who is still living but no longer the person they once were, a pet's death, physical health deteriorating, and more. We also mourn as communities, especially following violent events such as war and mass shootings and the killing of innocent persons. Comforting others involves knowing and naming loss, being present to one another as we grieve, and hearing God's promises that speak words of abiding hope into our



experiences of loss. Comforting one another is not a destination but a journey; making peace with loss and gaining the strength to live through to the other side doesn't happen in a moment. It does not proceed in a straight line or on a fixed timetable. **It is a journey that requires patience for both the one who comforts and the one who mourns.**

* Just Be

When we think about offering the ministry of presence—just being with someone when they are grieving without worrying about what words to say—it can be hard to not fill the space with words. It takes some practice. As a household or within a group of friends, find some quiet space in your home. Silence your phones and put away all devices. Practice sitting in silence together. It can look like meditation. It can look like deep breaths. Maybe you practice yoga together or go on nature walks. Those are all meaningful ways to just be together. Wonder together about how this just being practice can impact your ability to comfort those who mourn.

* Sitting Shiva

Supplies: *Sitting Shiva* by Erin Silver or internet-connected device

Read together *Sitting Shiva* by Erin Silver or watch the YouTube video “Read Aloud Books for Kids—2022 ‘Sitting Shiva’ by Erin Silver” (bit.ly/FMSittingShiva). (Remember, bit.ly links are case-sensitive!) This story introduces the Jewish practice of sitting *shiva* when a death happens. It is a very different way of grieving than many of our Christian rituals. You might also (or instead) watch the video “Jewish Guide to Shiva Practices and Helping Your Friend in Mourning” (bit.ly/SittingShiva). Wonder together about what it would feel like to sit quietly with your family as a way to grieve the loss of someone important. What parts of this tradition feel familiar? What parts feel unfamiliar? Sitting *shiva* is a tangible way that other people in our communities are practicing the ministry of presence.

Sharing God's Promises

Supplies: sidewalk chalk

Go into your neighborhood and find a place of sidewalk or driveway to write and draw pictures of some messages that will remind anyone who sees them about God's promises to all of creation. Recall some of God's promises, such as: God is with you always; God loves you; Nothing can separate you from God's love; You are not alone; God is faithful; and so forth. Use pictures such as a rainbow, cross, heart, Bible, the world, or ideas of your own.

You are Not Alone

Supplies: Bible

Read Psalm 139:1-6 with others in your household or with a group of friends. Talk about what these verses mean. Wonder together about what it means that you are known by God. Think about times when you have been sad because of a great loss. Don't be afraid to be honest about times you experience sadness. Talk together about what it feels like that God knows your sorrow. Read verse 5 again. What images do you see when you hear that verse? Together, memorize the following adaptation of a portion of St. Patrick's prayer and say it as a blessing: "Jesus is with me. Jesus is within me. Jesus is behind me. Jesus is before me. Jesus is there to comfort and restore me."

Go On a Visit

Think about someone in your life who needs the ministry of your presence. Is there a local nursing home that needs visitors? Are there persons who cannot come to church because they are homebound? Take time to plan a visit to someone who needs to receive some comfort. On your way, talk about what you will do when you arrive. Do you have something you can share from church? A song you could sing together? Scripture that you can read? Notice what it feels like to visit someone who has experienced grief or loss. It can be uncomfortable to see other people's grief and sadness, but God calls us to be present for each other in this way.

Comfort Food

Supplies: cookie recipe and ingredients

There are many types of rituals around mourning and food. Taking a plate of cookies to a new neighbor is both hospitality and a response to mourning. They have moved to a new place and may be mourning some parts of leaving where they were and starting in a new place. Decide together who in your life needs comfort: a new neighbor, someone whose loved one or pet has died, or someone experiencing an unexpected loss. As a family, choose what cookies to make. Take them to that person or family. On the way home, reflect on how doing this small act of service is a way to bring comfort to someone.

Conversation Starters

- What does it mean in your family to comfort those who mourn?
- What kind of losses can you help with your acts of comfort?
- Who do you know who needs to be comforted?
- Share an experience where you showed up for someone mourning and what was difficult or meaningful about that time. Then tell about a time where someone showed up for you and what was helpful or difficult.
- How do you find God's comfort in times of mourning?
- Name ways your community might share God's promises in the following situations.
 - A couple in your community separates after a long relationship.
 - A frequent visitor in your church dies and has no family in town.
 - A chemical spill in a low-income community results in long-term dislocation and homeless situations for many people.

Prayer

Holy God, thank you for the gift of comfort that you offer us. Help us to be a comforting presence for all of creation. Amen.

For more ideas & resources about [Comfort Those Who Mourn](https://www.fpclexformation.org/comfort), visit [FPCLexFormation.org/comfort](https://www.fpclexformation.org/comfort)