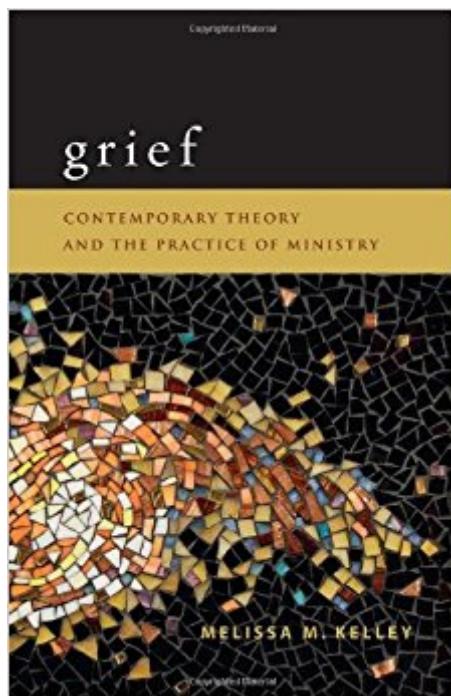


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# Grief: Contemporary Theory And The Practice Of Ministry



## **Synopsis**

The experience of grief has been a source of intrigue and curiosity throughout history, and it continues to stimulate thought and theory in various fields of study. Unfortunately, these fields tend to function in isolation from each other. The result is a substantial disconnect between grief research, theory, and care which has evolved greatly over the last two decades; and ministerial practice. Using a metaphor of grief as a mosaic, Melissa Kelley presents contemporary grief theory and research, integrated with important theological, religious, and ministerial perspectives. Written in an accessible way for ministers, ministers-in-training, and all pastoral and spiritual caregivers, this book provides the most up-to-date theory and research in grief to help inform their care of others. Through exploration of critical topics including attachment to God, meaning making, and religious coping in grief, readers are brought right to the heart of a contemporary understanding of grief.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"This book represents the cutting edge of grief theory and pastoral practice concerning bereavement. The author has integrated the finest research on grief and ministry to the grieving with a constructivist perspective showing the uniqueness of each person's grief. Paradoxically this book on sadness is a joy to read with its superb case studies explicating various facets of grief work and pastoral care." --Merle Jordan, Professor of Pastoral Psychology Emeritus, Boston University

"Well researched and thoughtfully written, Melissa Kelley not only amends outdated

ideas about grief with the latest social science on attachment, meaning-making, and coping. She adds what most secular theory overlooks - a wise grasp of religion, theology, and pastoral ministry. This book is a critical resource for professional caregivers and for all those who have lost loved ones and desire healing. --Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Professor of Pastoral Theology, Vanderbilt University Divinity School and Graduate Department of Religion

Melissa M. Kelley is Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling, Boston College School of Theology and Ministry. She is among an elite number of professionals certified by the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC) and the Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC).

Kelley's last statement captures the heart of the book: "God, the Master Artist, is constantly at work in all our lives, bringing hope out of brokenness, in love. All will be well" (141). The artist reference tied together each chapter's summary using her ongoing image of mosaic being a metaphor for grief, i.e. each person suffers uniquely (each mosaic is different). Mosaics are works of art, and by definition "mosaics emerge from brokenness" (139). With God's loving care and tender mercy during man's most painful moments, the divine artist creates the ultimate mosaic of holy beauty from the broken pieces of pain after loss. Kelley compares a complete and beautiful mosaic, comprised of many broken parts, "As we are broken by grief, we may break through to new insights and deeper clarity about faith, life, love, and loss" (130). With a steady stream of quotes such as the above, packed between thorough analysis, scriptural parallels, and memorable case vignettes, the book was beautiful, helpful, inspiring, meaningful, and surely trailblazing in the world of contemporary grief counseling. Above all, Kelley includes but transcends all secular history, theories, and positions, encasing points with practical tips for ministers, scriptural wisdom, and awareness that ultimately only God has all the answers. Consider this example referring to a healthy attachment to God as one's basic means of coping: "When we are oriented to this reality, we feel tethered in an ultimate sense to a loving, cherished God who holds us in our brokenness, and our coping efforts will help us to feel that life has meaning, even in brokenness, because God's love holds it all" (114-115). Kelley's choice to use a mosaic was the perfect metaphor for both the brokenness of loss and God's ability to gather our pieces and make people whole again--albeit forever altered. She also tapped into the universal truth that all of human experience is an ongoing narrative, and throughout history, "Stories create meaning and reflect meaning" (78). Instead of grief

being an isolated event that one must endure alone, Kelley weaves together common human elements such as stories and relationships epitomize. She writes, "Perhaps our greatest discomfort is when stories just do not make sense" (79). Upon this foundation, she successfully built her thesis that modern grief must address the meaningless shock and pain of most losses, and help those who mourn to realize they must create new meanings and write new narratives. All of this is done with others, as losses affect relationships and not just individuals. Most importantly, all of this is done with God, who never abandons his children, especially when they are hurting. Because of this book, God's ministers will be well prepared to comfort those who mourn. The paradigm of seeking meaning instead of focusing on the stages of grief seems the perfect next step in the evolution of grief counseling--especially since the author makes the natural link to God as both core attachment and secure base. This new paradigm provides for me a rich new handle on the subject of grief as I now plans to begin to minister within this framework. In my case as a jail chaplain, the book provides not only a new paradigm but also a new metaphor that will impact my doctoral project in a creative and positive way. Addressing the matter of emotional scars with inmates becomes particularly vivid when a death occurs. Surely there is no greater example of an emotional scar than the death of a loved one. At the same time, surely no event in life makes it easier to illustrate the concept. With the endearing, beautiful, and meaningful metaphor of a mosaic, I will be enriched both in my general ministry to inmates and as I conduct research among inmates for my project. As well, I will be able to bring principles from the book to bear as I minister to inmates who have lost loved ones. What could be clearer to anyone than the concept of broken pieces (such as a loss creates), now made into a new whole that would not have existed before (such as new meaning creates), and which is etched throughout with the scars that join the broken pieces? In truth, the mosaic metaphor now will become a principle element of my project, referred to often and which will supply a great deal of new cohesion, clarity, insight, and understanding. Those who seek to find meaning in their scars (of all types) will be helped to find it through Kelly's ingenious metaphor of a mosaic. In response to an email query with the question, "What has been the response from the professional world to your book?" Kelly responded with the following: "The response among pastoral colleagues has been very positive. So many people seem, at least intuitively, to understand the challenge of grief in some of the ways that I try to articulate, and so they find themselves resonating with various parts of the cases or the theory. That is very gratifying."

Great purchase

This is a major milestone in grief ministry. Awesome and more. I'm applying many of the tenets to my ministry of those bereaved and searching for the next step in their lives. This is a must for anyone who will ever be called to walk with another through our all too shared life experience. Thanks Melissa Kelley.

Great book for people looking to study grief and bereavement more. Very easy to read and understand and is an excellent resource for people who are looking to gain a broad perspective on numerous views and theories on death and bereavement.

Beautifully written, very insightful, and clearly well researched. Easy read, and enjoyable.

Thoughtful reflection integrating spiritual and psychological principles. I would recommend the book to ministers, lay leaders, and spiritually oriented therapists

Use this book in a Master's program in spiritual counseling. Great book with lots of insight on dealing with different situations. The book was mandatory for my class; however, I am glad it is now a part of my collection of books.

This is a well-written summary of the field. It was a pleasure to read it. Moreover it presented the material in such a way that the reader is able to see the practical and pastoral implications of what the author is presenting.

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