

TRY IT ON

WHAT FITS MY GRIEF?

The Grieving of a Shunammite woman

Some features to help you determine if you want to **TRY ON** the grief because the circumstances are similar to your own:

- Difficulty having children
- Extra space
- Unexpected sickness of a child
- Unexpected death of a child
- Confusion about promises
- Inability to return home

Some feelings to help you determine if you want to **TRY ON** the grief because the emotions are similar to your own:

- Resignation
- Uselessness
- Shock
- Desperation
- Confusion
- Determination
- Displacement

A summary about what happened.

Getting older without children, a wealthy woman in Shunem had an empty room in her house that was designed for a baby. Rather than allow it to be useless, she decided to redesign it so that a prophet of God could stay there. Grateful for her generosity, the prophet, Elisha, invited the woman to relocate where his family could care for her in her old age, but she decided to stay because her community would care for her. Then the prophet learned that she was childless and promised that she would have a son within a year. The woman shared that she did not want to get her hopes up if this were not true. It did come true, but a few years later, her son complained of a headache, was taken to his mother, and died in her arms. She put the body on the prophet's bed and then arranged transportation to go to the prophet. When her husband asked why she was going, she did not explain but only told him it was for well-being. This made sense because there was a war happening that was most likely going to force them to relocate as refugees. When she found the prophet, she grabbed his feet and asked why she would have a child only for the child to die so suddenly and so young. Refusing to part with the prophet, the Shunammite woman brought the prophet to her house so that he could see her son's body.

Some of the actions of the Shunammite woman that you can *TRY ON* to see if any fit you well:

- **Prepare a place** - Re-envision an empty space to make it useful. Look for those who are displaced or traveling to invite into that space. Consider what needs someone may have and make arrangements to meet those needs.
- **Remain content** - Focus on what you have, not what you don't. Make a list of the people around you who support you. Offer thanks for what you have.
- **Hold the body** - Holding a child on your lap can be soothing when the child is in pain or dying. Even after death it can be soothing to touch the person's body or place the person's body on someplace soft. Moving away from the person's body and then back to the person's body can be helpful as the mind benefits from breaks and reconnections.
- **Don't explain** - If asked why you are acting a certain way, remember that you do not owe an explanation. Brief answers and no answers are fine. When in shock, it is fine for questions to go answered or for responses to be brief or confusing. Show grace to yourself and others by not pushing for responses. Give permission to behave however is needed, even if it is irrational.
- **Stay together** - Stay beside those who are helping or comforting you. Even when awkward, clinging to others is self care and communicates your desire to grieve together. When comforting someone, don't push the person away but instead linger so that the person is not rushed or left alone. These are important means of support when you are grieving.
- **Show bitter distress** - Whether through words or actions, communicate your distress to others. Allowing others into your distress can enable them to care for you as you need.
- **Plead your case** - Tell God or powerful leaders what you need. Even when you do not have the words to say, stand up for what you need. It never hurts to ask, but sometimes it does hurt to not ask. Being assertive can propel God and others to help you with what you need.

Some of the phrases of the Shunammite woman that you can *TRY ON* to see if any feel right for you:

- Let us use what we have.
- I seek well-being.
- I am thankful for my people.
- I am in bitter distress.
- Are you deceiving me?
- I will not leave you.
- Let me find help quickly.
- Restore what we lost.

Some ideas you can *TRY ON* with a child:

- **Decorate together** - Ask your child how to redesign a room or space that is not being used. Perhaps your child wants to rearrange the house or the child's living space. Changing things can help with processing how life will never go back to what it was or how we envisioned it previously. What would your child envision for that space? What colors or furniture would your child want to be there?
- **Interact with the body** - It might seem strange to talk to a dead body or touch the body, sometimes that connection is what your child may need. Some children will not want to see the body at all, and it is always beneficial to ask your child what your child would prefer since every child is different. Perhaps you could prepare the child for how the body will look different than when the person was alive. This can be daunting, but finding a wise counselor can help to give language that could help a child process the changes.
- **Don't force responses** - When asking your child questions, make it clear to your child that your child does not have to respond. You could say, "If you do not want to answer this question, that is fine, but I wanted to ask you ..." Notice if your child is giving brief responses, and ease off the questions until your child feels ready to share.
- **Permit the clinging** - Instead of pushing your child away or making your child give you space, invite your child to embrace you as long as is needed. Stay in the embrace until your child lets go. Notice what or who your child is clinging to? Some children need to cling to someone or something to feel safe and stabilized.

A summary of what happens next:

After she brought the prophet to her house, the prophet went to the body, layed down, got up, paced, and prayed multiple times. Miraculously the boy was raised back to life. The woman bowed to the ground in gratitude and embraced her son. Soon, however, they had to leave their home for seven years, and when they came back it had been taken by someone else. Rather than find a new home, the Shunammite woman went to the king to request it back. Despite it being a long shot that the king would grant her an audience let alone her request for reclaiming her house, it so happened that the king was talking with the prophet's servant about all that had happened to her family at the very moment that she requested an audience with the king. The king was eager to help her family, and her home was restored.

Where to find the *Grieving of the Shunammite Woman*:

2 Kings 4 and 8