

Health & Wellness In Focus Episode #19
Coping With Grief & Loss: “Light in Your Valley”
Host: Dr. Bryan Hudson | Guest: Dr. Stephen E. Gardner
Health & Wellness Hub of New Covenant Church, www.NewCovenant.org
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Affiliated with Wellness Connection, www.wellnessconnectionindy.org

Program Summary

Dr. Gardner’s links:

LinkedIN, www.linkedin.com/in/stephen-e-gardner-edd-ma-ct-6823b4b

Everyday Consulting, www.everydayconsulting.org

Crown of Hope International. www.crownofhope.org

In this insightful episode of *Health & Wellness In Focus*, Dr. Bryan Hudson interviews Dr. Stephen E. Gardner—a pastor, theologian, veteran advocate, transformational coach, and independent scholar—on the theme “*Coping With Grief & Loss: Light in Your Valley.*”

Key Highlights:

1. The Multifaceted Nature of Dr. Gardner’s Work:

- Dr. Gardner views his roles beyond the pulpit, engaging with the community on issues like death, loss, and personal transformation.
- His work with veterans especially involves shifting from post-traumatic stress to post-traumatic growth.

2. Understanding Grief Beyond Death:

- Loss includes not only death but also life transitions like job loss, shifting beliefs, or health setbacks.
- Grief is both emotional and neurological—highlighted by Dr. Gardner’s recommended book *The Grieving Brain* by Mary-Frances O’Connor.

3. The Four Tasks of Mourning (based on Dr. William Worden):

1. **Accept the Reality of the Loss** – Acknowledge what has happened, even if heart and mind aren’t in sync.
2. **Process the Pain of Grief** – Embrace emotions like guilt and sadness without rushing to “move on.”
3. **Adjust to a World Without the Deceased** – Including identity changes, especially for spouses or long-term caregivers.
4. **Find a Way to Maintain Connection While Moving Forward** – Through legacy, memory, or service.

4. Harmful Coping Practices:

- Telling people to “snap out of it” is unhelpful and often stems from discomfort or fear.
- Over-spiritualizing grief or using shallow platitudes can invalidate real feelings.

5. Integrating Faith with Mental Health:

- Faith is essential but must be paired with informed mental health practices.
- Spiritual responses should not replace therapy or professional help.
- Ministry of presence—being there without words—is often more healing than scripture alone.

6. Cultural Competence in Counseling:

- One-size-fits-all approaches fail across cultural lines.
- Dr. Gardner advocates for respectful, “user-centered” care that adapts to clients’ cultural and spiritual contexts.
- Professionals should ask: “*How can I help you in a way that respects your culture?*”

7. Encouraging Mental Health Careers:

- There's a great need for more culturally competent professionals, particularly from underrepresented communities.
- Churches and pastors should present these fields as mission and kingdom work.

8. Breaking the Stigma Around Mental Health:

- Many avoid counseling due to fear of judgment or appearing “broken.”
- Seeking help should be normalized like seeing a doctor for a broken arm.

9. The Power of Meaning-Making:

- Healing accelerates when people can find purpose or meaning in their loss.
- Dr. Gardner shared his personal story of losing his mother at 18 and how he found strength through understanding her legacy and completing his life mission.

Final Thoughts:

Dr. Gardner stresses the importance of *community, competent care, and courageous vulnerability* when facing grief. Pastor Hudson reinforces that churches should be wellness hubs that connect people to the full range of care they need.

- Viewers and listeners are encouraged to share the episode to help others who may be experiencing grief or loss.