

“Finding One Another”

by Carlo Griseta

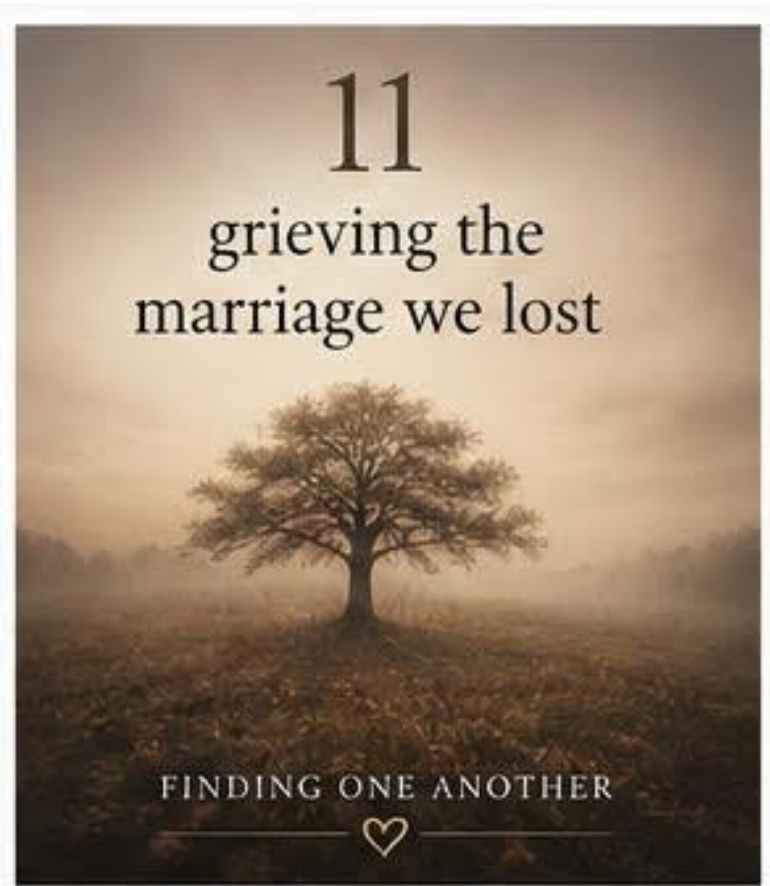
Chapter 11

Grieving the Marriage We Lost

Susan cried in the grocery store parking lot for reasons she could not fully explain. Nothing dramatic had happened that day. No argument. No betrayal. No major crisis. But while loading bags into the trunk she suddenly realized something painful: She missed a version of her life that no longer existed. Not only the early years of marriage. The feeling of those years. The anticipation. The closeness. The emotional ease. The sense of being chosen. The hopefulness. The way she and Mark once reached for each other naturally.

Now everything between them felt heavier. More cautious. More tired. Mark felt the grief too, though he rarely named it that way. He mostly experienced it as disappointment and emotional confusion. He missed laughing together. Missed affection. Missed feeling wanted. Missed feeling emotionally successful inside the relationship, but instead of grieving openly, he stayed busy, that had always been his way of coping: Keep moving. Keep functioning. Keep distracting yourself from what hurts.

One evening after dinner, Susan sat quietly flipping through an old photo album while Mark watched television nearby. Pictures of vacations. Birthdays. Young faces. Children small enough to carry. Arms wrapped around each other effortlessly. At one photograph Susan stopped and stared silently. Mark noticed tears running down her face. He muted the television immediately, “*What’s wrong?*” he asked softly. Susan looked at the photograph again before answering, “*I think I’ve been grieving us for a long time.*” That sentence hit Mark harder than he expected, because if he was honest, he had been grieving too. Grieving: the



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marriage they once had, the people they once were, the closeness they lost, the years that disappeared into survival, and the painful realization that time alone does not protect relationships. He sat beside her quietly, neither tried to immediately fix the sadness. For once, they simply allowed themselves to acknowledge it honestly. The marriage they once knew had changed. Some parts had been lost, some wounds had accumulated, some innocence had disappeared, but strangely, naming the grief out loud together made the distance between them feel slightly less lonely, because grief shared honestly often becomes softer than grief carried alone.

Reflection Reading

Naming the Loss Honestly

Many couples experience grief inside long-term relationships, but few recognize it clearly. People grieve: lost closeness, lost trust, lost innocence, lost time, lost affection, lost dreams, lost emotional safety, lost versions of themselves, and lost versions of the relationship.

Sometimes couples spend years trying to solve relational pain without first acknowledging that grief exists beneath it, but grief changes people, especially unspoken grief.

Many long-term relationships quietly accumulate sorrow over time: disappointments, betrayals, missed years, emotional neglect, unresolved wounds, caregiving exhaustion, illnesses, parenting stress, financial hardship, infertility, aging, emotional disconnection, and dreams that unfolded differently than expected.

Often both people adapt outwardly while grieving internally. Some become emotionally numb. Some become angry. Some withdraw. Some over function. Some stop hoping. Some quietly mourn the relationship while continuing to live inside it.

One of the hardest truths couples face is this: the relationship cannot fully heal by pretending nothing has changed. Sometimes couples must first grieve honestly: what was lost, what was damaged, what never happened, and what they both endured.

Grieving does not automatically mean the relationship is doomed. In fact, grief honestly acknowledged often creates the possibility for deeper authenticity moving

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forward. Because relationships cannot return to earlier versions of themselves unchanged. Life alters people. Pain alters people. Time alters people. The goal is not recreating the past perfectly, it is learning whether two people can meet each other truthfully in the present.

Many couples secretly long to “go back”, but healthy healing often requires something different: not returning backward, but rebuilding forward with greater honesty, maturity, compassion, and emotional awareness than before. This process requires mourning, because what is ungrieved often quietly controls relationships from beneath the surface, and grief denied often becomes resentment, numbness, or hopelessness, but grief spoken honestly can become the beginning of acceptance and renewal.

Individual Reflection Questions

Personal Reflection

1. What losses have I experienced within this relationship?
2. What version of our relationship do I miss most?
3. What dreams or expectations changed over the years?
4. Have I fully acknowledged my grief honestly?
5. How has disappointment affected me emotionally?
6. What unresolved sadness may still exist beneath my anger or withdrawal?
7. Have I been grieving privately without sharing it?
8. What parts of our relationship still feel meaningful to me?
9. What fears arise when I think about our future?
10. What would emotional healing look like moving forward?

Shared Conversation

Conversation Guidelines

This conversation is about honesty, not blame.

Allow sadness to exist without immediately fixing or minimizing it.

Grief often needs witnessing before healing can begin.

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Conversation Prompts

1. What parts of our relationship have we both been grieving?
2. What seasons of life changed us most deeply?
3. What losses or disappointments have affected our connection?
4. What do you miss emotionally about us?
5. What pain do you think we each carried alone?
6. What still feels valuable or worth protecting in this relationship?
7. What would rebuilding look like realistically—not ideally—for us now?

Weekly Practice

Honoring the Story Honestly

This week focuses on reflection rather than fixing.

Assignment

Together:

- look through old photographs, revisit meaningful places, or talk about important memories from your relationship story.
- Not to create guilt. Not to compare the past to the present harshly.

But to acknowledge:

- what was beautiful, what was difficult, what changed, and what still matters.

Additionally:

- Each partner write a private letter beginning with: “*Something I’ve been grieving is...*”
- You may choose whether to share the full letter or portions of it together.
- The goal is not emotional intensity; the goal is emotional honesty.

Closing Reflection

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Some relationships do not need immediate solutions first, they need space to grieve honestly, because people cannot heal what they refuse to acknowledge.

Long-term love often carries sorrow alongside beauty, disappointment alongside devotion, loss alongside loyalty.

Sometimes healing begins, not when couples pretend everything is fine, but when two people finally sit beside each other honestly and say:

“Yes... something precious was lost, and we both feel it.”