# Are You Ready to Launch a SHARE® GROUP?



10 Inspirational Stories of People Who Did

DAVID N. BASS

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# 10 Locations. 10 Stories of Transformation.

More than 12,000 churches worldwide have been equipped with the GriefShare program. Passionate lay people facilitate each local GriefShare group. We'd like to introduce you to ten of them.



- Murray & Marlene Dalrymple Roanoke, Virginia
- Hollis Palmer
  Hampton, Virginia
- JoAnn Goldston Austin, Texas
- Jodi Rule-Rouse
  Raleigh, North Carolina
- **Fiona Hutton**Bellingham, Washington
- 6 Kim Castine Irwin, Pennsylvania

- **Joanie Woodall**Libertyville, Illinois
- 8 Kathy Maestas Fort Worth, Texas
- Dave & Mary Greer Eagle, Idaho
- Barb Stuart
  Seattle, Washington
- DivorceCare Headquarters
  Wake Forest, North Carolina

## About GriefShare

GriefShare enables your church to offer ongoing weekly support groups for people who have lost a loved one. We help you equip a lay-led team for effective ministry to people in your church and throughout your community. Through GriefShare, you can provide biblical, Christ-centered hope that will help hurting people rebuild their lives.



## Introduction



The purpose of GriefShare is to transform lives impacted by the pain of loss. But GriefShare has another ancillary benefit—changing and improving the lives of those who facilitate the curriculum.

The stories of transformation of these leaders are many. In this short book, we present 10 compelling stories from leaders scattered across the country. It is our hope that these stories will inspire you as you consider launching a GriefShare group at your own church.

To begin a GriefShare group, flip to <u>Page 37</u> or visit <u>www.griefshare.org/start</u>. Begin this exciting journey there.

— Steve Grissom, *GriefShare* founder

## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to all GriefShare leaders—the thousands of men and women who have used the curriculum to bring God's healing touch to so many. In a small way, the ten stories contained in this book reflect the countless stories of renewal and healing that GriefShare leaders around the world share in common. Our thanks goes out to them.

## How Can You Use This Book?

#### If you're a pastor

Share the book with members of your congregation who might be interested in becoming GriefShare lay leaders.

#### If you're a current GriefShare leader

Use this book as part of your efforts to recruit new leaders to your team. Or send the book to someone who has lost a loved one and shows aptitude for becoming a GriefShare leader.

#### If you're thinking about launching a GriefShare group

Read this book and share it with your church leaders, potential ministry team members, and others to cast a vision for the potential of a GriefShare group.

## Murray & Marlene Dalrymple

#### **Use Their Personal Tragedy to Help Others**



Most GriefShare facilitators have heartache somewhere in the past. Murray and Marlene Dalrymple experienced their loss nearly 35 years ago when their son died in a car accident. Over the years, the Dalrymples have come to see a greater purpose behind their grief as they have ministered to others.

The year was 1981. Murray and Marlene Dalrymple were a happy couple living in Chicago, serving in their local church and raising their two sons: 18-year-old Todd and 16-year-old Derrick. Like so many others, the Dalrymples never thought that tragedy would touch their happy family.

That all changed one evening. While driving to pick up a friend, Derrick's car was struck by an Amtrak train, killing him. That was the beginning of the Dalrymple's long journey of grief.

At first, the family experienced shock and disbelief. Why had this happened to Derrick? The young man had a close walk with the Lord. Even while many of his teenage friends were headed in the wrong direction, Derrick stood against the tide as a powerful witness for Christ.

Quickly, another emotion surfaced—one of gratitude for Murray and Marlene's church family and dear friends. On the night of the accident, Murray had been on a business trip in Ames, Iowa. He drove home through the night, arriving around six a.m. to find a multitude of cars in his driveway—all belonging to individuals from their local church. The body of Christ was rallying around the family in their time of grief.

"Words can't adequately express the impact that made on me," Murray said. "That's why we now help other people—because we were comforted when we needed it."

Several months after Derrick's death, the Dalrymples relocated to Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas, due to employment, which meant leaving their strong support network of friends behind in Illinois. Drawing inspiration from the care of their church and extended family back in the Windy City, Murray and Marlene joined a grief-relief program for parents who have experienced the death of a child. After a year, they were asked to consider being co-leaders; they accepted and served in that role for 12 years.

"We feel that leading GriefShare is a way that we can honor our son's memory—to continue what he believed in."

#### - MARLENE

Participating in grief ministry taught them an important lesson. "We thought we had it bad, but so many people had it worse," Murray said.

After another move—this time to Roanoke, Virginia—Murray and Marlene encountered the GriefShare program at their new church. With their past experience in grief ministry, the Dalrymples were a logical choice to help facilitate the group. Later, they became GriefShare coordinators as well as facilitators.

"We feel that leading GriefShare is a way that we can honor our son's memory—to continue what he believed in," Marlene said. "He believed in helping others. We also like to share Derrick's testimony with others."

Facilitating GriefShare has been a way for the Dalrymples to continue to process their own grief over Derrick's death. "We've come to believe that one of the best ways to deal with your grief is to focus on helping other people and assisting them with healing," Murray said.

As the Dalrymples' GriefShare ministry continues to grow, they have come to see a greater reason for Derrick's death and how God is using it. "Anyone who would listen—or even wouldn't listen—Derrick would witness to," Marlene said. "He was pretty bold in his belief and his Christian walk. He had dear friends who went in the wrong direction, and he was a witness to them. That's his legacy."

"Due to Derrick, it has become our passion to help other people—and in the end, if we don't present Jesus Christ as the answer to our grief, then we haven't done our jobs," Murray added.

One of the most effective techniques the Dalrymples have discovered for GriefShare ministry is to consistently, effectively, and passionately promote their group to the Roanoke valley. The Dalrymples have placed Public Service Announcements on radio and television stations and included calendar events in newspapers.

"We use everything we can get our hands on," Murray said.

Beyond the importance of consistent promotion, the Dalrymples emphasize that maintaining a compassionate, understanding attitude and outlook is the most important attribute of a good GriefShare leader. They also strive to never put a timetable on their participants' grief.

"You deal with grief the best you can, when you can, as you can," Marlene said. "The main thing is that you deal with it, because if you don't, and you try to ignore it, it's going to come back later."

### Hollis Palmer

#### Finds Healing Through GriefShare and Gardening



After his son passed away, Hollis Palmer faced a dark journey of grief and depression. But God began to work in Hollis's life through GriefShare. Today, Hollis is sharing the same healing he received with others by directing a successful GriefShare ministry.

Hollis Palmer lost his son, Michael, in 2008. As a 30-year-old, Michael had been battling a drug and alcohol addiction for the past 15 years. On that sad day, he lay down to take a nap and never got up.

"When I got the call informing me of his death, I felt part of my soul leaving my body," Hollis said. "My first thought was to ask why God had allowed this to happen. Then I began to struggle with feelings of guilt, regret, anger, and disappointment."

An autopsy later revealed that Michael had not died from a drug or alcohol overdose, but from a heart condition known as hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. The news was welcome for Hollis, since he had been working with Michael to overcome these addictions for years, but it created even more questions. Why did God allow this heart condition in the first place?

One day, while searching for grief-recovery resources in a bookstore, Hollis happened upon 'Through a Season of Grief, GriefShare's 365-day devotional published by Thomas Nelson.

"As I read through the book, I began to feel hope. I felt God leading me through the valley of tears," Hollis said.

He soon located a GriefShare support group meeting five miles from his house. The weekly meetings helped Hollis get back on his feet and establish a "new normal."

Shortly after completing GriefShare, God placed a new burning desire in Hollis's heart—to facilitate a group. The step was a hard one since Hollis isn't geared toward speaking in a public setting.

"Occasionally folks attending GriefShare not only found their new normal, but they accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior during the journey from mourning to joy."

#### - HOLLIS

"I am a very shy person, and the thought of speaking to a group was unsettling to me," he said. "I prayed on this for a few weeks, but God continued to call me to minister with the promise that He would be my strength and He would lead me and help me."

God blessed Hollis's GriefShare group to such an extent that he soon became a ministry director. Over the years, he has maintained between eight and 12 small groups meeting throughout the year during each 13-week session cycle. He is currently the GriefShare ministry director for Wesley United Methodist Church in Hampton, Virginia.

During his six years of GriefShare ministry, Hollis has been privileged to see over 1,500 families experience healing. "Occasionally folks attending GriefShare not only found their new normal, but they accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior during the journey from mourning to joy," Hollis said. "I will always remember each of these dear folks."

In addition to ministering to others through GriefShare, Hollis has found healing through vegetable gardening. In the months immediately following Michael's death, Hollis denied himself such pleasures as gardening. But later he rediscovered this passion, and it has served as a source of healing since.

Today, Hollis' backyard is filled with a 2,500-square foot garden. "As I am working in the garden, I am alone in my thoughts and feel close to God," Hollis said. "My wife Nancy and I made the garden four times larger than we needed in an effort to give vegetables to neighbors who stop by. We also share the vegetables with everyone in our GriefShare group."

Hollis erected a cross and a memorial plaque for Michael in front of the garden. Oftentimes, those who pass by will stop and speak with Hollis about the memorial.

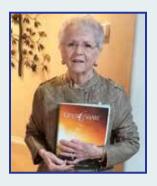
"They express to me that they, too, have lost someone close to them," Hollis said. "We spend some time sitting at a small table by the garden sharing our struggles of grief and how God has brought healing to me, and how He can do the same for them."

Hollis' desire for each man and woman who comes through GriefShare is that they would find their hope in Jesus, build a new relationship with God through their grief, live the remainder of their lives with eternity in mind, and pour into others what God has so freely poured into them.

"I have had countless folks come to me at the end of our cycles and express to me that they were going to commit suicide, but attending GriefShare got them back on track with a relationship with God, filling them with hope," Hollis said.

## JoAnn Goldston

## A GriefShare Veteran in Her 70s Relies on the Power of Teamwork



When you hear about JoAnn Goldston, you might be tempted to ask, "How does she do it?" Now in her late 70s, JoAnn is still going strong as a GriefShare facilitator. God has enabled JoAnn to maintain a strong GriefShare group during her golden years.

Over two decades ago, JoAnn Goldston made an important decision—to retire from her nursing career. But instead of devoting her golden years to leisure, she has chosen to use her free time for an eternal cause—bringing the healing of Christ to the hurting through GriefShare.

"Grief ministry has become my heart," she said.

JoAnn has facilitated GriefShare for 15 years now. A big reason for her success boils down to one word: team. Over the years, she has built a leadership infrastructure that has stood the test of time and will be around for many years after she leaves her facilitating role.

Offering three cycles at her church each year, JoAnn has a team of 17 in total: four team leaders, 10 facilitators, and three apprentice leaders.

JoAnn has certain requirements specific to her leadership team. Take, for example, that she doesn't bring on facilitators who haven't experienced the loss of a close loved one. In addition, each facilitator is required to attend GriefShare at least once as a participant. In

these ways, JoAnn hopes the facilitators will have a greater capacity to empathize with those participating in the program.

When referring to her team of facilitators—whom she calls "phenomenal"—JoAnn said, "They have to be called by God. They have to be people who have dealt with their grief."

## "There is such great joy in watching God work not just with the participants but with the facilitators."

#### - JOANN

She notes that if they let their own issues stack up, they can't help others as effectively. Throughout GriefShare's existence at the church, God has been using these facilitators to minister greatly in the lives of individuals.

"We get to see God literally at work," JoAnn said.

She mentioned that she and her team are able to watch people transform. "One of the greatest surprises is the angry person that comes charging through the door that dares GriefShare—that dares God—to help them. And then it happens."

But it's not just the participants in the program who are being changed for the better. "There is such great joy in watching God work not just with the participants but with the facilitators," JoAnn said.

At the end of each 13-week cycle, she reviews with her facilitators their strengths and weaknesses throughout the session. She also asks if there is anything they learned regarding their own grief.

"We keep a close eye on our facilitators because we know there are still some raw spots that they may not have identified," she said.

How did JoAnn first become involved with GriefShare?

"For at least six months, I was numb."

That's how she describes the painful season following her husband's sudden death in 1993. While she was able to find some solace in babysitting her two-year-old grandson, half-a-year had passed before she realized that she needed something more—a grief support group.

During that time, two friends came to her aid, helping her put her life back together. She tried a few support groups, but none seemed to be a good fit. In addition, she read books on the subject of grieving.

"They were very helpful," JoAnn said.

The combination of her friends' support and the books she read inspired her to start a grief ministry at her church. "It was needed—a Christian type setting for a grief support group," she said.

JoAnn led the ministry for about three years. And while the results were encouraging, she knew that burnout was a real possibility. "There was no way to find a co-leader to help with what I was doing," she said, "because I relied on so much of my own background."

Around 2000, her church's care minister recommended that she check out GriefShare. "It was such a godsend," she said. "It was a program that anybody could step into and anybody could lead."

Over the years, what started as mournful cries for her deceased husband has led her to a ministry that become a very different kind of cry—the cry of her heart to help other hurting people.

## Jodi Rule-Rouse

#### **Learns to Care for Others Who Grieve**



Jodi Rule-Rouse experienced a shockwave of grief in 1997. Little did she know that God would use this painful season as a mechanism of healing for others who are mourning the loss of a loved one.

In 1997, Jodi Rule-Rouse endured a particularly painful season of grief—she had nine losses, including her beloved father, within seven months. The heartache that followed prompted Jodi to begin asking God questions: What was He teaching her through this experience, and what did He want her to do as a result?

At that point, Jodi had already been involved with ministering to others who were grieving. She worked in hospice and hospitals, participated in the Stephen Ministry, and became a chaplain. But her continual prayer was that God would show her a biblically based, Christ-centered program that she could use to more effectively minister to the grieving hearts around her.

That's when Jodi discovered GriefShare on the Internet. After getting permission from her pastor, she ordered the GriefShare kit in 1999 and began offering the curriculum at Canyon Ridge Christian Church in Las Vegas, Nevada. She began with one participant. Within seven years, God had given her 45 leaders and between 175 and 225 participants on any given Thursday night.

Jodi's GriefShare group became the largest in the world over the decade that she helmed it. But her involvement with GriefShare took on an even larger dimension in 2006. Joseph Northcut, director of church ministries for Church Initiative, contacted her to learn more

about the successful program at Canyon Ridge Christian Church. Joseph soon visited and got to learn about the ministry firsthand.

At the time, the Church Initiative team in Wake Forest, North Carolina, was hard at work on a second edition of GriefShare. That gave Joseph an idea. He invited Jodi to travel to North Carolina to tape a testimonial interview for the updated curriculum. Jodi agreed.

"To watch what God does in their lives, and the transformation that takes place, is awesome."

- JODI

Soon afterward, it became clear to Joseph that God was calling Jodi to join the GriefShare team as a consultant. She quickly accepted the opportunity, continuing to work out of Las Vegas in a part-time role.

By late 2007, Church Initiative needed a full-time GriefShare consultant in Wake Forest and approached Jodi about filling the role. The decision to move was a hard one for Jodi and her husband, Robert. It meant leaving family and ministries behind.

"I struggled with God over the decision, but the Lord eventually shifted my whole world and we decided to make the move to North Carolina," Jodi said.

The change came through Bill Hybels' teaching at a Willow Creek Community Church summit. While attending the summit, Jodi sensed the Holy Spirit confirm that she was supposed to take ownership of the senior consultant role and make the move to North Carolina.

She compared the shift to being a missionary. "Leaving my church, my family, grandchildren, and my ministry that I started and grew—it was challenging, but it was God's call on my life," she said.

Today, Jodi has faithfully served eight years in her role as GriefShare senior consultant. After moving to North Carolina, she also launched a GriefShare group at Crossroads Fellowship in Raleigh. The group has blossomed to 24 leaders and 30 to 60 participants on any given weeknight.

Over her 15 years of involvement with GriefShare, Jodi's best memories of the program include seeing people who arrived broken and left healed by the love of Jesus. Some even accepted Christ as their Savior.

"They never thought that there was ever going to be a light at the end of the tunnel," Jodi said. "They thought they wouldn't be able to move forward and that there wasn't going to be anything for them to live for. But to watch what God does in their lives, and the transformation that takes place, is awesome."

## Fiona Hutton

#### **Becomes a GriefShare Entrepreneur**



Fiona Hutton has had the privilege of planting GriefShare groups at two different churches—one in southern California, the other in Washington State—and contributing to the launch of GriefShare at many other churches. With a busy schedule just like the rest of us, how did she do it?

Fiona Hutton experienced two major loses within the span of 18 months—losing her husband to Lou Gehrig's disease and her oldest son to a motorcycle accident. From the ashes of that grief, God strengthened Fiona to recover and make a difference in the lives of other people by planting GriefShare groups at two different churches on the West Coast. She also planted the seed of GriefShare at many other churches.

Fiona started the first group at Grace Baptist Church in southern California in 2000. As with so many aspects of GriefShare, the key step that made a difference was Fiona's emphasis on assembling a team of dedicated leaders.

"I was able to build an awesome team of co-leaders that is still in place," she said.

In fact, the first woman who responded to the GriefShare bulletin announcement 15 years ago has since transitioned to replace Fiona as the key leader. Grace Baptist Church has a half dozen other leaders in addition to her.

In 2012, the opportunity arose for Fiona to relocate to Bellingham, Washington. Eventually, she settled into a new church—Christ the King Community Church—and quickly received approvals to launch a GriefShare group there.

With the help of two co-facilitators (and two more in training), Fiona recently completed her third cycle at the new church.

She underscores the importance of creating a team in order to make a group work. This has been essential for her both in southern California and in Washington.

#### "God created a new heart for me and I am eternally grateful for that."

#### - FIONA

"Finding the right people to come alongside you is a very important part," she said. "It is such an honor and a privilege that God would entrust these people to us—to lead them."

One of her goals in the new area and church is to think creatively and expand GriefShare's impact even more. Four different churches in her area offer GriefShare—all on different days, which increases effectiveness. Fiona's goal is to jumpstart collaboration between churches.

"I want to work together with them to do a better job of getting the word out to our county," she said. "There are over 200,000 people in our region. Of those, only about 10 to 15 percent attend church regularly. So we have a great opportunity to draw people to the Lord through GriefShare."

She wants to break down the false barriers of competition between churches. Her network of churches is working together to put out fliers in local funeral homes and make placements in the local newspapers.

Fiona experienced tragedy at a young age. She and her husband had three children—a son, daughter, and adopted youngest son. Her husband was healthy until he was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease at the age of 42. Within two years, he passed away.

Eighteen months later, her oldest son, David, was killed in a motorcycle accident. He was 20 years old.

"As you can imagine, my whole world was turned upside down," Fiona said. "I was torn apart by grief and by trying to care for my remaining two children."

She had a hard time because she had never experienced anything like this before. "I wrestled with God. I asked Him why this had to happen," she said.

"God made clear that He wanted to use my tragedies to help others," Fiona added.
"Suddenly, I found this unbelievable compassion towards anyone who lost a loved one, whether it was someone in our community or even someone on the news on TV. I had a nagging desire to reach out to them."

Due to God's providence, Fiona's story has a happy ending. She remarried nine years after her husband passed away. She has also discovered an outlet of healing by leading GriefShare.

"God has blessed me by watching Him bring hope to the hopeless," she said. "I have had the honor to watch Him transform lives. Would I have been willing to serve in this capacity had I not lost my husband and son? Absolutely not. But God created a new heart for me and I am eternally grateful for that."

## Kim Castine

## Survives a Season of Grief and Moves Forward to Help Others



Torn by the unexpected death of her father in 1999, Kim Castine found comfort in an equally unexpected way—by facilitating GriefShare. Today, Kim serves as a GriefShare consultant and supports facilitators across the globe.

As a teenager, Kim Castine faced the death of several close friends and relatives, including her grandmother. But the death that impacted her the most happened later in life, when her father died from sepsis.

In 1999, Kim's father experienced an aortic aneurysm that landed him in the hospital for 11 days. During that time, Kim fully expected him to return home—trusting that God had told her as much. She made arrangements to begin remodeling her house to make room for him. But that end wasn't meant to be.

"The day came when I realized that the Lord didn't mean my dad was coming home with *me*, but with *Him*," Kim said. "That was a huge realization."

After her father passed away, Kim struggled with guilt. Since 1997, she had led a bereavement ministry at her church—Word of Life Ministry. That fact, however, didn't change her inner turmoil.

Unexpectedly, God provided the solution in 2000 when Kim's church began to offer the GriefShare program. As a facilitator, Kim sat in her living room alone and reviewed all the videos. The process allowed her to fully grieve the loss of her father.

"I carried the burden of the weight of responsibility, because I made the decision to take my father off life support," Kim said. "GriefShare helped me to realize that my feelings were normal."

Even as Kim experienced healing in her own life through GriefShare, the frustrations and disappointments weren't over. Initially in her GriefShare group, nobody came.

"If He has called you to facilitate [GriefShare], then everything that happens in the ministry is for a reason."

— KIM

"I spent more sessions alone than I did with people," she said.

In fact, it took years of persistence and commitment before Kim saw numerical fruit in her group. Beginning with the second edition of GriefShare in 2006, Kim had established a leadership team and a regular cycle of sessions—three per year at her church and two per year at a home health center.

Kim was blessed to witness the transformation in men and women who participated in multiple sessions of GriefShare and completed all their homework.

"The Word of God just permeates them and gives them peace while they continue to heal," Kim said.

Little did Kim know that God had far more in mind for her than solely facilitating a GriefShare group. In 2010, the opportunity arose for Kim to make a major career transition, one that she warmly welcomed.

At the time, Kim's job was turning from a blessing into a curse, as its demands continued to increase, destroying her physical health. Her son even told her that she didn't laugh anymore because the stress from her job was so significant.

"I knew that I needed to find another job, but I had to wait until God directed me. I was stuck in my own Egypt," she said.

Kim was overjoyed to learn of an opening for a GriefShare consultant at Church Initiative. The only snag was the requirement that she relocate from her small Pennsylvania town to Wake Forest, North Carolina.

Kim began to pray that God would open the door for her to work in the position at home—and, eventually, He did. Kim accepted the job. She was one of Church Initiative's first "remote" consultants, made possible by advances in telephone, network, and computer technology that allows her full access to the same resources available to staff physically located in North Carolina.

"I couldn't believe the blessing at first," she said.

Kim recently celebrated her fifth year as a GriefShare consultant. Her greatest goal is to help GriefShare facilitators understand the privilege of participating in such a powerful ministry.

"By helping, supporting, and encouraging leaders, I believe the end result is excellent ministry to those participants that the Lord puts in our care," she said.

Kim has a particularly powerful testimony since she weathered so many years of lowattendance groups. She encourages leaders to avoid minimizing the power of their call, especially when attendance numbers are small.

"God is never taken by surprise," she said. "If He has called you to facilitate, then everything that happens in the ministry is for a reason. If no one comes, go and pray. Don't cancel. I believe the Lord tests our commitment to His call during those times. And if we stay committed, He will honor and bless the ministry."

## Joanie Woodall

#### Takes GriefShare's Healing "to the Nations"



Joanie Woodall has a unique passion—
recycling previously used GriefShare kits by
bringing them to Kenya. She has combined her
calling to missionary work in Africa with her care
and concern for the grieving.

Joanie's beloved husband, Joe, went home to be with the Lord in October 2009. As a young widow, Joanie thought that she was OK and didn't need a grief recovery program. But after a friend invited her to GriefShare in February 2010, Joanie realized how much she did need healing.

"I realized that I wasn't OK and that I needed God's help and comfort," she said.

"That's what GriefShare does—it brings people from mourning to joy."

Later that same year, Joanie took the next step by becoming a GriefShare facilitator. During the next three years, she faithfully led the program at her home church in Libertyville, Illinois.

In 2013, God placed a new and exciting call on Joanie's life when He led her to pursue missionary work in Kenya. For the past three years, she has served as a full-time missionary to Kibera, the largest slum in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi.

While there, she ministered to a local widows' group, and God laid on her heart that GriefShare would be a perfect ministry outlet.

Arriving back in the U.S., Joanie had a brilliant idea—why not take old, donated GriefShare kits that churches are no longer using and bring them back to Kenya? The release of the new version of GriefShare in 2014 was the perfect opportunity for this; many churches adopted the updated curriculum and could recycle their old kits.

When Joanie put out the call for donated materials, she couldn't have imagined that her closet would be crammed with GriefShare materials less than a month later.

## "The outpouring of love from facilitators all over the country was unbelievable."

#### - JOANIE

When Joanie put out the call for donated materials, she couldn't have imagined that her closet would be crammed with GriefShare materials less than a month later.

The result of the outpouring of support: six churches in Kenya are being blessed with GriefShare thanks to God's prompting and the generosity of pastors and facilitators in the United States.

"The outpouring of love from facilitators all over the country was unbelievable. I got phone calls from all over the U.S. from people who wanted to bless God's people in Kenya," Joanie says.

So far, 21 churches in the United States have donated materials to the cause.

Joanie recently completed her first 13-week session of GriefShare in Kenya. "It was extremely well received," she said. "I can't even tell you the God stories of healing and forgiveness that these women experienced."

"Grieving and death is an everyday occurrence over there," she added. "Pastors have shared with me that funerals are a big deal in Kenya, but after the funerals, these people have nothing to support them as they grieve. But now they do."

## Kathy Maestas

## Joins Forces with Her Mom to bring GriefShare to Dallas-Fort Worth



For Kathy Maestas and her mother, GriefShare has been a godsend. After experiencing their own healing, this mother-daughter duo teamed up to bring GriefShare's healing to others.

Imagine the privilege of leading GriefShare side-by-side with your mother. That's the exact opportunity that Kathy Maestas had. The Lord orchestrated events in such a way that Kathy and her mother, Lola, discovered GriefShare around the same time at two separate churches in Texas.

For Kathy's part, she encountered the VHS tapes of GriefShare's first edition in her church library in 2002. The location: Fort Worth, Texas. Meanwhile, in nearby Arlington, Lola had been leading a widow's grief recovery group when she became aware of GriefShare.

"My mom and I have been in the valley a few times after the death of my grandfather to suicide, my sister's suicide, and my stepdad to cancer," Kathy said. "Our lives had been a mess, but we found great support from the body of Christ in church, and we knew we wanted to continue to minister to those in grief from a Christ-centered perspective. We were so thankful to learn about GriefShare at our respective churches."

After they both discovered the program, Kathy and Lola decided to join forces to train local leaders. They held a joint recruitment and training event to discuss the idea of

starting GriefShare at their respective churches. It was a huge success—both Kathy and Lola launched their ministries with a solid team of leaders.

Though the Lord brought them to the curriculum separately, He was eventually to use them as a team to bring healing to the Fort Worth area. Lola made the move to the city, and both she and Kathy began to serve in the same GriefShare ministry together.

#### "We are going to see a new day. There is hope."

#### - KATHY

As a mother-daughter team, Kathy has served as the GriefShare leader in the evenings and Lola serves during the day. Recently, Lola decided to retire from GriefShare service.

"At 76, she will continue to serve as a substitute facilitator," Kathy said, "and she is a wonderful prayer warrior for our ministry."

Kathy encountered the saving love of Jesus as an 11-year-old. Even at that young age, she needed the power of Christ's rest, having come from an abusive household.

"Becoming a Christian doesn't mean all your problems go away. It just means that you have a Savior to walk with you," Kathy said.

Kathy has dealt with the pain of her sister's suicide. "I had to deal with a lot of rage and anger just getting through the abuse portion of it, prior to my sister's suicide. But when she committed suicide, I buried my pain," Kathy said. "I found out what it was like to be isolated in your pain."

While attending college, Kathy received helpful counseling and recovered. She ended up becoming an elementary teacher and also teaching first grade as a missionary in Honduras.

Toward the ending of her teaching career, Kathy received a blessing—the opportunity to join the Church Initiative staff as a full-time GriefShare consultant, with the job duties of helping churches and leaders offer the program and heal lives.

"In 2013, the call from Church Initiative came, and my education career of 28 years came to a close," Kathy said. "I joined Church Initiative full time in September of 2013."

Taking on the new role was a leap of faith for Kathy, because for her whole adult life she had been a teacher. But she has found new inspiration in devoting herself full-time to this important calling.

"Reaching people with the hope of Christ is what inspires me," she said. "I am so honored to know so many pastors and facilitators across the United States who have this passion to share their testimony and journey with others."

Kathy has also continued to follow God's leading in side pursuits as a published author. Her first book, *The Last Grain of Salt* (published under the pen name Dell Maestra), encourages others to open up about their history of pain and abuse.

In November 2014, Kathy published her second book, a bilingual children's book, *Sun's Not Up But His Hair Is Sticking Out*, about a small boy and his mother who work through the big questions surrounding grief and death after the loss of a loved one.

"The theme of the book is that morning is coming for each of us," Kathy said. "We are going to see a new day. There is hope."

## Dave & Mary Greer

#### Fall in Love While Serving in GriefShare



Dave and Mary suffered the pain of losing their spouses. They found healing and solace in GriefShare. Little did they know that GriefShare would also be the avenue for discovering love again.

Until the year 2000, Dave Greer hadn't experienced the death of a loved one. Then three deaths occurred in close sequence—his mother, father, and finally his beloved wife, Elizabeth, who passed away from cancer. They had been married for 38 years.

The first Sunday after Dave went back to his home church in San Diego, California, he leafed through the bulletin and found an announcement for GriefShare.

"Immediately, I knew it was something I needed," he said. "I devoured everything. I never missed a meeting. It meant so much to me," he said.

Shortly after completing GriefShare as a participant, Dave wanted to give back and began training to be a facilitator.

Meanwhile, God was working in Mary's life to arrange a meeting between the two. Mary had her own story of loss and grief: Her husband of almost 30 years, Dan, suffered a heart attack in 1994. He underwent multiple bypass surgeries but never fully recovered and remained disabled for eight years. He died suddenly in 2002.

"That hit me like a semi truck," Mary shared.

A friend suggested that Mary attend GriefShare. At first, the sessions didn't connect with her. But by the fourth session, everything started to click. Her healing journey began. She finished the first cycle and began another right away.

"GriefShare was the best gift that I received out of my husband's loss," Mary said. "My husband and I weren't walking closely with the Lord. God used GriefShare to reel me back to Him. My focus on Him became greater than my focus on my grief."

## "GriefShare was the best gift that I received out of my husband's loss."

#### - MARY

GriefShare was how Mary and Dave met. When they both expressed interest in facilitating, they were put on the same team. They discovered shared goals and a similar passion for the program.

Eventually, they began dating and got married in 2005. During their 10-year marriage, they've never taken a break from GriefShare ministry (except for their first year of marriage.) After moving to Idaho in 2013, Dave and Mary quickly became part of the GriefShare ministry at their new church—Eagle Christian Church in Eagle.

Due to their background, the Greers are often asked about dating in GriefShare groups. Dave and Mary always caution group members that GriefShare is about processing and healing from grief, not looking for another spouse. Healing should remain the number one priority.

"We did meet through GriefShare, but we had already done our grief work, and God brought us together as facilitators, not as newly grieving people," Mary explained.

"We encourage each group member with the possibilities of where they can be, one day, after healing," Dave said. "We encourage them to stay the course and come out on the other side closer to God."

Leading a group as a married couple is a marvelous experience for the Greers. They'll sit together during the videos and then break apart to lead separate small groups during the discussions.

Even as a married couple, Dave and Mary still focus on building a strong facilitator team. They also strive to remain teachable ("As GriefShare facilitators, we're always learning something new," Mary shared) and to always promote GriefShare, even when attendance is low.

"It's such a powerful evangelistic tool," Dave added.

## Barb Stuart

#### Reaches Seattle with the Healing Power of GriefShare



God is using an army of GriefShare leaders, both young and old, to accomplish His healing work. At the age of 81, Barb Stuart is far from living a life of retirement. She remains committed to the GriefShare ministry.

Barb Stuart's husband passed away in February of 2009, shattering her world.

After calling Focus on the Family about an unrelated issue, she was referred to a local GriefShare leader. The group was meeting 30 miles from her home, and she couldn't drive, but amazingly the facilitator was only six blocks away and offered to drive her.

"Going through GriefShare, I realized that all of our days are numbered," Barb said. "This was God's plan. He is sovereign. He is in control, and if this is where He wants me, He will gift me to do it. And each session that I did, I just became more sure that this was a wonderful ministry for grieving people."

That prompted Barb to ask another question shortly after she completed her GriefShare cycle and her griefwork—why wasn't there a group meeting in west Seattle, closer to her home?

Her facilitator replied that it was because no one had started it up yet. Barb saw that as a calling to facilitate. She approached her church and received approval for the start-up fee. Her old facilitator agreed to help her co-lead the first cycle.

Since then, she has led 11 sessions. The big news is that she is 81 years old and still going strong. She doesn't plan to retire from GriefShare leadership for at least another five years.

"I'll be here as long as God directs and my mind stays nimble," she said.

## "I'll be here as long as God directs and my mind stays nimble."

- BARB

She typically averages 15 to 16 attendees per GriefShare cycle. She recruits others to help her with various tasks.

For promotion, Barb targets 22 area churches, nursing homes, and funeral homes. "I make a little packet of brochures and flyers," she said. "My church prints them for me. And I get a group together of former GriefShare members, pull them in, and we get these all packaged and mailed out. We do it twice a year before each session starts."

GriefShare has been a fantastic outreach tool to the Seattle area. "We've had two Jewish people come," Barb said. "To my knowledge, neither of them have made a commitment to Christ, but again, I say to myself and to my team, we are here to share the gospel and to encourage them."

Barb makes a point to invite members of her group to church every Christmas and Easter, but she doesn't put undue pressure on the unbelieving group members to attend. "I don't make a big deal of out it," she said.

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## About the Authors



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A widely published writer, David has authored hundreds of articles and columns that have appeared in dozens of local, state, and national publications. His past roles include managing a communications department for a local nonprofit philanthropic foundation and serving as an associate editor and investigative reporter at a statewide newspaper. He is also a published author.

David has a B.A. in journalism. He lives in Raleigh, North Carolina, with his wife.



Paul Joe Watson contributed reporting to this e-book. He holds a master's in communications and is a published novelist. He has written for both print and web publications, and he currently serves as an editor in North Carolina. His other accomplishments include beating stage IV cancer, paying off his car, and earning the "most improved" award in first grade.