

Issue 40: October 2026

The Apostle

The Monthly Magazine of St Aidan's Orthodox Church,
Henderson Street, Levenshulme, Manchester M19 2JX

Losing and Finding



Have you lost anything recently? I don't mean things that can be replaced. I mean things or persons that can never be replaced. That could mean a particular job, childhood innocence, a friend who emigrates, the death of a loved one. Grief means that we always, in the first place, experience such a loss

as painful. The grieving process, which is different for everyone, has to lead somewhere: to a resolution, to something positive. I should perhaps mention this grieving process first to have a fuller understanding of the painful path towards resolution. I will then pass to the witness of Scripture to learn

how our journey might be facilitated by the providence of God and the faith we confess.

The most famous contribution to the grieving process in modern times has been from the author Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. A common misunderstanding of her work is that she talked about five stages of grief, but she didn't. She identified five elements in grieving which some people experience in their entirety, others only in part. With that caution in mind, let us look at these five elements and what we can learn from them.

denial - this is not happening, it can't be true, I will not accept it

anger - why me? it's not fair, why have you deserted me?

bargaining - is there something I can do to make it go away, stop hurting?

depression - nothing works, my life is over, what's the point?

acceptance - oh, I see now!

DENIAL: The desertion of the crucified Christ by all the disciples except St John and Christ's own Mother, the Theotokos is noteworthy here. Flight is an aspect of denial; the refusal to accept reality and stick with the pain, the urge to run, not just for survival in physical terms, but to put as much distance as possible between ourselves and the painful event,

in the vain hope that the pain will somehow go away. Most of the disciples ran away, St John and the Theotokos did not. They stood in their grief at the foot of the cross and accepted the truth of that.



ANGER: Anger comes hard on the heels of denial, especially when denial fails and the truth presses to be accepted. Psalm 136 (137) chronicles the grief and then rage of the exiled Jews in Babylon after the loss of the whole nation. Vengeance will be the death of Babylon's children (verse 9). By way of contrast, Martha's words to Jesus in John 11:21 are a good

example of a more moderate rebuke, but with anger still in the background. The trouble is we read this text as if Martha was calmly accepting of the death of Lazarus. However, I think it's a mistake to sanitise the emotion here. It was indeed a rebuke. She was angry. Jesus could have been there earlier and then this terrible thing would not have happened. However, he had not been present and so no amount of complaining about the unfairness of it all could turn back the clock (that's the denial bit of course). The astonishing thing though is how quickly Martha moved on from her anger to trust in what God was then about to do!

BARGAINING: In Luke 16:19-31 the rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers, hoping to avert their sharing his fate. His request seems compassionate, but Abraham's answer exposes its mistaken premise: "They have Moses and the prophets." The warning they need has already been given. What stands in the way is not a lack of evidence that could be remedied by an exception, but an unwillingness to listen. You can't bargain your way out of difficulty with reality or God if you have failed to attend to the truth that you are pushing away from you. You must accept

the suffering for what it is. This is not to say that suffering is always a result of personal sin. Equally you can't bargain your way out of innocent suffering either. Life has to be dealt with on its own terms. Job's repentance is the final word (Job 42:1-6)

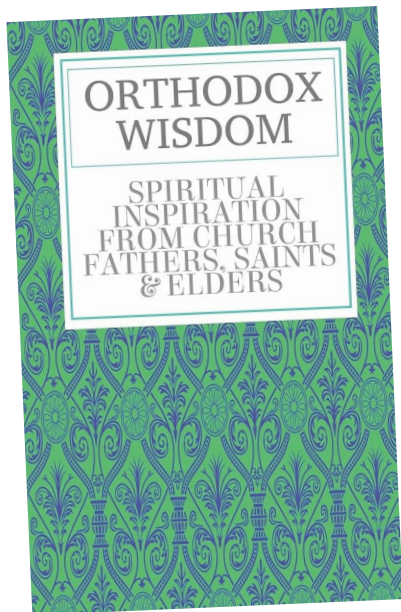
DEPRESSION: The first word of Job though in relation to his innocent suffering is despair, exhaustion and the wish to die (Job 3). All this is very understandable, but it is not a resolution for his grief over the loss of everything - his wife, his family, his property and his wealth. Is Job though going to get stuck in that original condition? No he is not! However, it will take a lot of struggling with God and his providential care for him personally to emerge victorious into new life.

So this is what we can conclude in relation to loss and its resolution: there is no successful and positive resolution of loss without facing our reality courageously and pushing through our emotions to wrestle with God and discover His plan for our lives. We lose our lives in order to find them. As Jesus taught: "for whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." (Matthew 16:25)

- Father Gregory

Book Review - Orthodox Wisdom: Spiritual Inspiration from Church Fathers, Saints and Elders

By Father Spyridon Bailey



This book has helpful insights about many topics from which I have selected only a few examples:

St John Chrysostom: "Happiness can only be achieved by looking inward and learning to enjoy whatever life has, and this requires transforming greed into gratitude" [p. 21].

St John of Shanghai: "Just as a basic concern is to be careful of anything that might be harmful to our physical health, so our spiritual concern should watch out for anything that might harm our spiritual life and the work of faith and salvation. Therefore, carefully and attentively assess your inner

impulses. Are they from God or from the spirit of evil?" [p. 25].

Archbishop Averky (Taushev):

"When someone begins to say, 'what does it matter if I say that word, eat that little morsel, feast my eyes on that?' They fall into insensibility. For both virtues and vices start from slight things and lead to greater ones, either good or bad." [p. 26].

St Tikhon of Zadonsk: "Prayer does not consist merely in standing and bowing your body or in reading written prayers... it is possible to pray at all times, in all places, with mind and spirit. You can lift up your mind and heart to God while walking, sitting, working, in a crowd and in solitude. His door is always open, unlike man's. We can always say to Him in our hearts 'Lord, Lord have mercy'" [p. 29].

St Seraphim of Sarov: "The fact that I am a monk and you are a lay person is of no importance. The Lord listens equally to the monk and to the person of the world provided both are true believers. He looks for a heart full of true faith into which to send His Spirit. For the heart of a person is capable of containing the Kingdom of God..." [p. 32].

St John of Kronstadt: "When you look at the candles and lamps burning in church, rise in

thought from the material fire to the immaterial fire of the Holy Spirit. When you see and smell the fragrant incense, rise in thought to the spiritual fragrance of the Holy Spirit for we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ.” [p. 34].

St Isaac the Syrian: “Before the war begins, seek after your ally; before you fall ill, seek out your physician; and before grievous things come upon you, pray, and in the time of your tribulations you will find Him, and He will listen to you” [pp. 34-35].

St Paisios of Mount Athos: “When we say, ‘Thy will be done,’ and when we surrender ourselves to God, it is then that the will of God is indeed done. But if, on one hand, we say, ‘Thy will be done,’ and on the other hand, we keep persisting in our own will, well, what is God supposed to do then?” [p 36].

St Basil the Great: “Those who pray for others pray for themselves” [p. 37].

St Ephraim of Arizona: “When guided by prayer, the moral powers within us become stronger than all our temptations and conquer them” [p. 40].

St John of Damascus: “Miserable are those among the dead for whom none of the living prays” [p. 43].

St Theophan the Recluse: “If you have sinned, acknowledge the sin and repent. God will forgive the sin and once again give you a new heart and a new spirit [Ezekiel 36:26]. There is no other way: either do not sin, or repent” [p.56].

Sayings of the Desert Fathers:
“A soldier asked Abba Mius if God accepted repentance. After Abba Mius had taught him many things he said, ‘Tell me, if your cloak is torn do you throw it away. The soldier replied, ‘No, I mend it and use it again.’ Abba Mius said to him, ‘If you are so careful about your cloak, will not God be equally careful about His creature?’ [p. 59].

The final section of the book contains prayers of the saints. Only one is included here:

A Prayer of the Optina Elders:
“Grant unto me, O Lord, that with peace of mind I may face all that this day is to bring. Grant unto me to dedicate myself completely to Thy Holy Will. For every hour of this day, instruct and support me in all things. Whatever tidings I may receive during the day, do Thou teach me to accept tranquilly, in the firm conviction that all eventualities fulfill Thy Holy Will. Govern Thou my thoughts and feelings in all I do and say. When things unforeseen occur, let me not forget that all cometh from Thee. Teach me to behave sincerely and rationally toward every member of my family, that I may bring confusion and sorrow to none. Bestow upon me, my Lord, strength to endure the fatigue of the day and to bear my part in all its passing events. Guide Thou my will and teach me to pray, to believe, to hope, to suffer, to forgive and to love. Amen” [p. 198].

- Father Emmanuel

Grief Through the Eyes of a Catechumen:

Learning to Mourn in Christ After the Loss of My Auntie

In September 2025, I lost my auntie. Before her death, grief was something I understood and experienced a lot, from a very young age, I had attended funerals, heard people speak about bereavement, and listened to sermons about eternal life, yet none of those experiences prepared me for the loss of someone so very close to me. For five years, I had helped care for my auntie during her battle against cancer. Over that time, she became woven into the fabric of my everyday life. Caring for her was not simply an occasional responsibility but

part of my daily routine. I became accustomed to checking on her, helping her, and making sure she was cared for, changing her kidney bags and stoma bags. When she died, I felt as though a part of my life had disappeared. The grief I experienced was not simply sadness at her death. It was also the loss of routines, conversations, and a relationship that had shaped my life for years. There were moments when I felt shocked, moments when I felt angry, moments when I felt empty, and moments when I felt overwhelmed by memories. I found



myself in a very depressive state after losing my auntie and that is when I found the Orthodox Faith. Becoming a catechumen earlier this year, I found myself searching for answers within the life of the Church. I turned to Scripture, the writings of the Church Fathers, and the wisdom of the Desert Fathers. They did not remove my grief, but they taught me how to carry it.

The Orthodox Church does not view grief as a weakness or a failure of faith. Instead, teaches that grief is a natural response to love. We mourn because we love. We feel pain because relationships matter. Yet Orthodoxy also teaches that grief is not the end of the story. The Cross is always inseparable from the Resurrection. Through the loss of my auntie, I began to understand this truth more deeply than ever before. When my auntie died, I experienced a sense of shock that is difficult to describe, part of me struggled to accept it. There was a strange feeling of unreality. I knew she had died, yet my mind still expected her to be there. I would think about telling her something before remembering that she was gone. Family gatherings felt different. Familiar places seemed incomplete. The shock was intensified by the fact that I had cared for her for five years.

Much of my life had been organised around helping and supporting her. Caring for someone creates habits that become second nature. When those responsibilities suddenly disappear, there is an emptiness that is difficult to explain. The grief was not only emotional but practical. Daily routines changed. The ordinary moments of life carried reminders of her absence.

The Fathers of the Church help us understand why death feels so unnatural. St. Athanasius, in *On the Incarnation*, teaches that humanity was not created for death but for life in communion with God. Death entered the world through sin and became part of the fallen human condition. This means that our grief is not irrational. The pain we feel when confronted with death reflects something true about human nature. We know, often instinctively, that death is not how things are meant to be.

When we lose someone, we love, we grieve because a real bond has been wounded. The sorrow I felt after losing my auntie was painful, but it was also evidence of the genuine love that existed between us. Looking back, I realise that grief was not the opposite of love. It was the continuation of love in the face of absence. Love often looks ordinary. It appears in small acts of

service repeated day after day. It means choosing patience when you are tired. It means being present when it would be easier to focus on yourself. It means sacrificing time and energy for the sake of another person's wellbeing. Christ teaches that the greatest commandment is love. The Fathers consistently emphasise that love is revealed not merely in words but in action. St. John Chrysostom writes that nothing makes us so like God as being compassionate and merciful toward others. When I look back on those years caring for my auntie, I can see how they shaped me. At the time, the responsibilities often felt normal. Only after her death did I realise how much those years had formed my character. Her death caused me to grieve not only because I missed her but because I missed the relationship we had built through years of care and companionship. Yet those years remain one of the greatest blessings God has given me. Although grief has been painful, I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity to have cared for her.

One of the most important passages of Scripture for me during my grief was the account of Lazarus.

The Gospel tells us that Jesus arrived at the tomb of His friend

and wept.

"Jesus wept" (John 11:35).

These two words became a source of immense comfort to me. What makes Christ's tears so remarkable is that He knew He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead. He knew the grief of Mary and Martha would soon be transformed into joy. Yet He still chose to weep. St. John Chrysostom explained that Christ's tears reveal His true humanity. Christ did not merely appear human. He genuinely entered the full reality of human life, including sorrow and mourning.

Christ Himself grieved.

His tears taught me something important: mourning is not a failure of faith. Tears are not signs that God has abandoned us. Instead, grief can become a sacred expression of love.

When I cry now after losing my auntie, I begin to remember that Christ himself once stood and did the same thing

Christ does not stand far away from our sorrow. He enters into it.

As I explored the Orthodox faith more, I found comfort in the teachings of the Desert Fathers.

The Desert Fathers were not strangers to pain. Living lives of asceticism and prayer, they encountered loneliness, struggle,

temptation, and sorrow. Yet again and again they taught that suffering becomes a path toward God.

One saying from Saint Poemen stayed with me:

“Whatever hardship may come upon you, conquer it through thanksgiving.”

At first this teaching seemed impossible.

How could I be thankful after losing my auntie?

Yet the more I reflected on it, the more I understood. Saint Poemen was not suggesting that death itself is good. Rather, he was teaching us to recognise God’s blessings even amid pain. I could not be thankful for death. But I could be thankful for the years I had with her. I could thank God for the memories we shared, the lessons she taught me, and the opportunity to care for her. The Desert Fathers also teach us not to flee from sorrow immediately. Modern society often encourages distraction. We are told to keep busy, move on, and avoid difficult emotions. The Fathers instead encourage honesty before God. Grief became a form of prayer. Some of my most sincere prayers arose from pain. There were times when I did not know what words to say but simply bringing my broken heart before God became a prayer in itself.

One of the most beautiful things I discovered in the writings of the Fathers was their understanding of tears. Modern culture often treats tears as weakness. Many people feel embarrassed by them. The Fathers, however, frequently describe tears as a gift.

St. Isaac the Syrian writes:

“Before the eyes begin to shed tears, let the heart love God; then tears become a source of joy.”

These words transformed my understanding of grief.

After losing my auntie, I often wished the tears would stop. I wanted the sadness to disappear. Yet St. Isaac taught me that tears can soften the heart and draw us closer to God. My grief gave me a greater awareness of the suffering of others. Before experiencing loss myself, I sympathised with grieving people. Afterwards, I understood them in a completely different way.

Pain changed me.

I became more compassionate and more aware of the fragility of life.

St. Ephraim beautifully writes:

“Blessed is he who has learned to weep, for his tears will become pearls before God.”

This teaching helped me see that tears are not wasted. When offered to God, they can become part of the soul’s healing. People

often speak about grief as a series of stages. While there is some truth in this idea, my own experience felt less orderly. There were days when I felt relatively normal and then sudden moments when grief returned unexpectedly. Sometimes a song would remind me of my auntie. Sometimes a family conversation would bring memories flooded back. Sometimes I would remember an ordinary moment from the years I cared for her and find myself overcome with emotion. The hardest part is I now look after her 9-year-old daughter.

Grief rarely moves in a straight line.

The Fathers understood this reality. Spiritual growth itself rarely follows a predictable path. There are periods of comfort and periods of struggle. The important thing is perseverance. At first, I thought only about my longing for my auntie. Gradually, however, grief awakened a deeper longing. It reminded me that this world cannot completely satisfy the human heart. Every earthly relationship, no matter how precious, points beyond itself toward the Kingdom of God.

One of the greatest gifts Orthodoxy gave me during my grief was the practice of praying for the departed. In a modern society that often treats death as a complete

ending, Orthodox Christianity offers something profoundly hopeful.

The Church continues to pray for those who have fallen asleep in Christ. When my auntie died, prayer became a way of continuing to express my love for her. During her life, I had cared for her physical needs. After her death, I could no longer do that. Yet I could still pray.

I could ask Christ to grant her rest.

I could ask Him to forgive her sins.

I could remember her before God.

This gave me a sense of connection that was deeply comforting.

Orthodoxy teaches that the Church is made up of both the living and the departed. Death does not destroy our unity in Christ. St. John Chrysostom encouraged Christians to pray for those who had died, understanding that love continues beyond the grave. This transformed my grief. Instead of feeling completely powerless, I found hope in the knowledge that prayer remains an act of love. One of the most difficult aspects of grief is learning to trust God when we do not understand His providence. After losing my auntie, there were questions I could not answer.

Why do some people die sooner than we expect?

Why does suffering exist?

Why must separation be part of the human experience?

The Fathers do not provide easy answers to these questions. Instead, they repeatedly call us to trust God even when His purposes remain hidden. St. Isaac the Syrian writes that God's mercy is deeper than human understanding. This perspective became very important to me. I realised that faith does not mean having every answer. Sometimes faith means continuing to trust even in uncertainty. The loss of my auntie forced me to confront the limits of my understanding. Yet it also taught me to rely more deeply on God.

In my weakness, I discovered the importance of prayer.

In my sorrow, I discovered the comfort of the Church.

In my grief, I discovered the presence of Christ.

Without the Resurrection, grief would ultimately end in despair. With the Resurrection, grief is transformed by hope. Christ has conquered death from within.

The greatest expression of this hope is found in the famous Paschal Homily of St. John Chrysostom:

"Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the tomb."

These words meant far more to me after losing my auntie than they ever had before.

They are not simply theological ideas.

They are promises.

Because Christ is risen, death has been defeated.

Orthodox Christians often speak of departed believers as having "fallen asleep in the Lord." Death remains painful, but it has been transformed into a passage toward eternal life.

My auntie's death was real.

My grief was real.

But death is no longer ultimate.

Christ is.

The loss of my auntie was one of the most painful experiences of my life. Caring for her for five years created a bond that shaped me deeply. When she died, I felt not only the pain of losing a beloved family member but also the loss of someone who had been part of my daily life for years. Yet through that grief, God taught me many things. St. Basil taught me that grief reveals the reality of love.

St. John Chrysostom taught me that Christ Himself wept and that death has been conquered.

The Desert Fathers taught me to bring suffering into prayer. St. Isaac the Syrian taught me not to be ashamed of tears. St. John Climacus taught me that mourning can awaken our longing for the Kingdom of God.

Most importantly, Christ taught me that grief and hope can exist together.

I still miss my auntie. There are still days when memories bring tears to my eyes. There are still moments when her absence feels painfully real. Yet I am grateful for the five years I spent caring for her. Those years taught me patience, sacrifice, compassion, and love. They became a school of Christian discipleship that continues to shape my life. As a catechumen, I have come to understand that grief is not evidence of God's absence. Often it becomes the place where we encounter Him most deeply. In sorrow, we learn to pray. In loss, we learn to hope. In tears, we learn to trust.

Through prayer for my auntie, through the wisdom of the Fathers, and through faith in Christ's Resurrection, I continue to entrust her to the mercy of God. As St. Athanasius teaches, Christ has destroyed death through death itself. Therefore, although I grieve, I do not grieve as one without hope. I look forward to the day when every tear will be wiped away, when death shall be no more, and when all those who belong to Christ will be gathered together in the joy of His everlasting Kingdom.

May her memory be eternal.
Memory eternal.

- Katie



30 Great Years!

Although the community of St Aidan's dates back to 1994-1995, we have only been in this temple since June 1996. On 20 October of that same year, our then bishop, Sayedna Gabriel visited the parish, and he consecrated the altar table and the church. St Aidan's was the first church in what was then the Vicariate, (a pre-Archdiocesan constitution) to be consecrated.



We shall celebrate the consecration of this church on Sunday 11 October and Father Gregory, who was one of the founders of course of this church, will make a special address in the context of a sermon for the Gospel



of the day, marking the history of this parish from 1995 to 2026. At the end of the Liturgy on that day, there will be a memorial

for all the reposed founders by name, together, of course, with our beloved Bishop Gabriel, Memory Eternal!



The sermon with the address will be a little longer, but this will be

a wonderful opportunity for all of you who have come into the church during this 30-year period to hear this wonderful story: the almost improbable story of how we were received into the Church after a long struggle. It is the story of how everyone worked so lovingly, prayerfully and faithfully to adorn the temple that we have today - and the community also, which glorifies God.

- Fr Gregory



The Height of Humility, icon by Efrem Carasco