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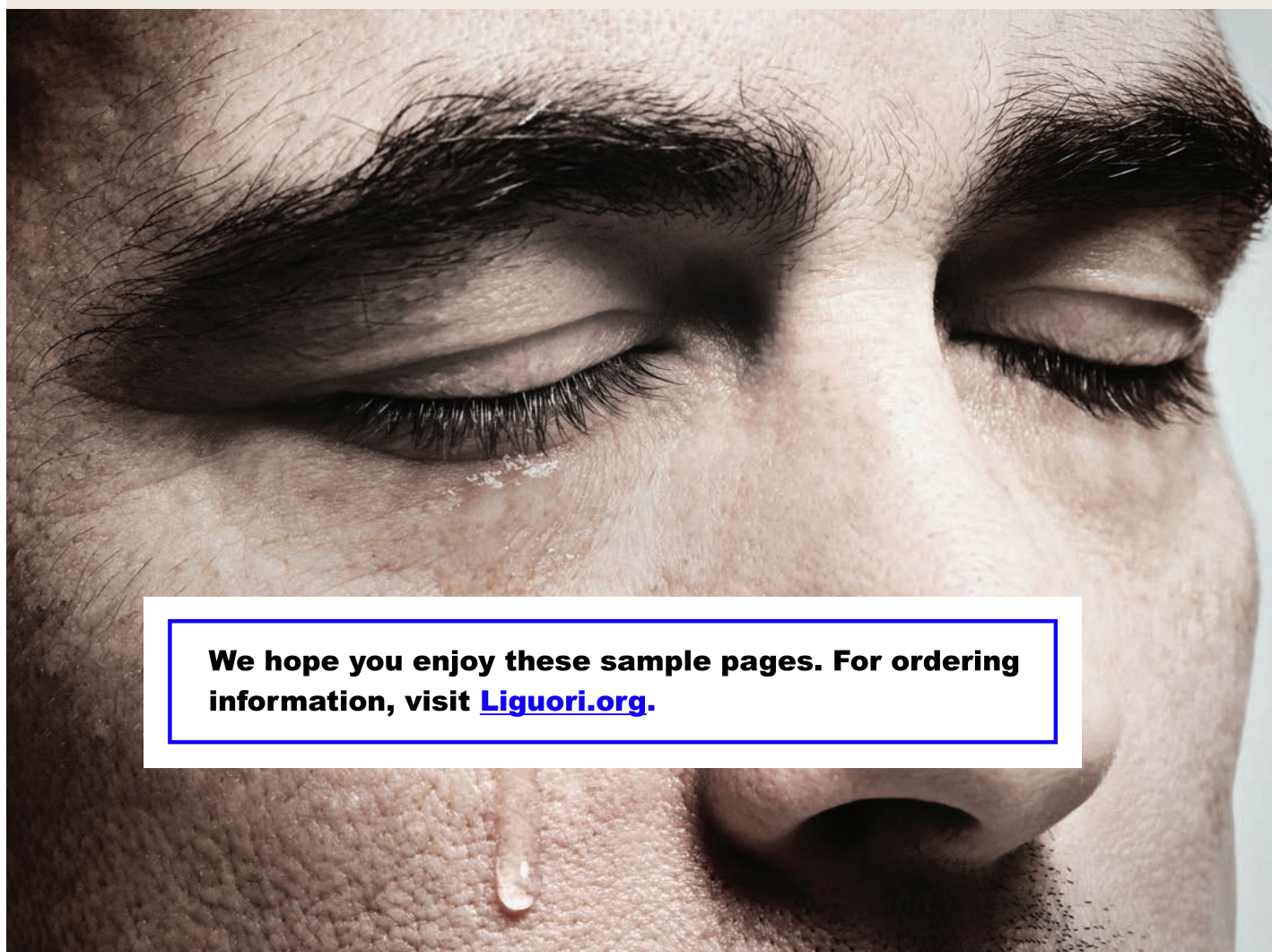
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JOURNEY THROUGH GRIEF

FINDING STRENGTH IN FAITH BY JUDY ESWAY

Our hope in Christ's resurrection and reuniting with loved ones can hedge against despair. That's the difference our faith makes when facing loss and grief.



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Can we expect to grieve differently because of our faith in the resurrection? My experience as a hospice chaplain and bereavement counselor tells me yes, but don't expect the pain to be less intense.

Even Jesus wept at Lazarus' death. I remind people of this, especially those who say, "I thought I'd be stronger. I know he's with the Lord" or "We went to Mass daily. I shouldn't be crying like this every night" or "It's been two months. Shouldn't I be over this? I've always had strong faith."

CONSEQUENCE OF LOVE

Grief includes intense emotions, sadness, and sometimes depression. But our hope in the resurrection and reuniting with loved ones can hedge against despair. That's the difference. The very definition of despair is "hopelessness."

Grieving isn't a sign of despair, nor is it inconsistent with being strong and having faith. Grief is the natural consequence of love: the greater our love, the greater our grief. Would we have it any other way? Would we build barriers to love so it won't hurt in the end? C. S. Lewis writes, "The pain now is part of the happiness then. That's the deal."

The other side of love is pain, and we can't do a thing about it. It hurts when loved ones die. Grief is the normal response to loss. So go ahead and cry. Tears are good, healing, precious to God, and never wasted. "Are my tears not stored in your flask, recorded in your book?" (Psalm 56:9).

THE GRIEF PROCESS

Grief affects us on every level: physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual. Experts in thanatology (death, dying, and bereavement) now steer away from old models of stages, as if we'll magically find closure when we get through the last stage. *Closure* is an inadequate word. There is no closure when those dearest to us die. We move beyond, integrate the loss into our lives, and somehow learn to live with it.

J. William Worden, author of *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, defines grief as four tasks in a circular process. The bereaved moves back and forth and all over the circle, sometimes working on more than one task at a time.

TASK #1: FACE THE TRUTH.

The first task is to accept the reality of the loss, to come to grips with the fact that our loved one has died and isn't coming back. Early on, we may be in shock and feel numb, stunned, as if in a bad dream. When the shock wears off, we face all sorts of confusing feelings.

Our minds can play tricks. One minute, we know our loved one has died; the next, we imagine he's on a fishing trip and will soon return. Some people may get alarmed and say we're in denial. But a little denial in the beginning isn't necessarily bad. It can help us accept the loss in smaller doses and gives us a little control when things have turned chaotic. When the full reality sets in, so does the pain.

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