

## A Grief Mindfully Observed

Hypothetical, contemporary bereavement counsel for C. S. Lewis

By: Kelvin Chang

Quotes from the first chapter of *A Grief Observed* serve as the patient's dialogue for the simulated counseling session and [I] respond in kind using mindfulness principles.

*KELVIN sits in a chair in a room with his feet flat on the ground, and his hands on his lap. His eyes are closed and he is breathing deeply and steadily. His posture is relaxed and comfortable. He looks to the closed door and imagines someone standing on the other side with the handle on the door, waiting to come in. KELVIN walks to the door and opens it. Enter LEWIS.*

KELVIN: Please come in.

LEWIS: Thank you.

*(KELVIN and LEWIS shake hands.)*

KELVIN: Please have a seat on the couch. Would you like anything to drink? Some water perhaps?

LEWIS *(taking his seat on the couch)*: I'm quite all right, thank you.

KELVIN *(smiling as he sits down in his chair across from LEWIS)*: Good afternoon, Mr. Lewis, my name is Dr. Chang but there's no reason to keep up the formality here; you may call me Kelvin if you like.

LEWIS: Hello, Kelvin. Jack. I never did like the name 'Clive'.

KELVIN: Pleasure to meet you, Jack. I'm so very sorry for your loss. How are you doing today?

LEWIS: Not wonderfully.

KELVIN *(frowning sympathetically)*: Could you describe to me what that feels like?

LEWIS *(swallowing)*: No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me.

KELVIN *(nodding)*: What do you mean by that?

LEWIS: I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be about me. I dread the moments when the house is empty.

KELVIN: Do you feel like others are unavailable to talk to you about Joy? What about the children?

LEWIS: I cannot talk to the children about her. The moment I try, there appears on their faces the most fatal of all non-conductors, embarrassment. They look as if I were committing an indecency. They are longing for me to stop. I felt just the same after my own mother's death when my father mentioned her. I can't blame them. It's the way boys are. It isn't only the boys either, I'm aware of being an embarrassment to everyone I meet. At work, at the club, in the street, I see people, as they approach me, trying to make up their minds whether they'll 'say something about it' or not.

KELVIN *(putting a hand on LEWIS' shoulder)*: There's no need to be so hard on yourself, Jack. You're not an embarrassment. Grief is a normal reaction to loss. Everyone has a right to grieve. Perhaps the boys aren't embarrassed by you so much as they are embarrassed by themselves. Expressing your feelings requires that you render yourself vulnerable; it's immensely difficult to do. If you make the first step, I'm sure they will follow. Those boys

look up to you. The others are probably a similar way. Perhaps they're embarrassed at their lack of knowledge of what to do rather than embarrassed by you.

*(LEWIS gazes blankly.)*

KELVIN *(brightly)*: Tell me about Joy. What was she like?

LEWIS *(with a slight chuckle)*: Her mind was lithe and quick and muscular as a leopard. Passion, tenderness, and pain were all equally unable to disarm it. It scented the first whiff of cant or slush; then sprang, and knocked you over before you knew what was happening. How many bubbles of mine she pricked! I soon learned not to talk rot to her unless I did it for the sheer pleasure—and there's another red-hot jab—of being exposed and laughed at. I was never less silly than as Joy's lover.

KELVIN *(grinning)*: It sounds like she was an extraordinary woman.

LEWIS *(nodding)*: At first I was very afraid of going to places where Joy and I had been happy.—our favourite pub, our favourite wood. But I decided to do it at once. Unexpectedly, it makes no difference. Her absence is no more emphatic in those places than anywhere else.

*(LEWIS' face falls. His chest starts to heave as he begins to sob. KELVIN sits patiently and waits.)*

LEWIS *(sobbing)*: I have no photograph of her that's any good. I cannot even see her face distinctly in my imagination. But her voice is still vivid. The remembered voice—that can turn me at any moment to a whimpering child.

KELVIN *(putting a hand on LEWIS' back)*: Jack, can we try something?

*(LEWIS shrugs and nods.)*

KELVIN: I want you to close your eyes put your feet flat on the ground. Find a comfortable sitting position—take your time—and take a deep breath in.

*(LEWIS closes his eyes, adjusts his posture, and inhales sharply.)*

KELVIN: Good! Now exhale slowly and as you do so, imagine all of the weight on your shoulders, your pain and your suffering, leaking out from your bloodstream and into your lungs. You're breathing it out of your body. Let the tension lift from you as you breathe out. Do this a couple more times and when you feel like you're ready, open your ears and just listen to the sounds around you.

*(LEWIS exhales and repeats the breathing exercise.)*

KELVIN: And when you feel comfortable, just open your eyes and sit for a little bit. Just be.

*(After a few moments, LEWIS opens his eyes and pauses.)*

KELVIN *(after a beat)*: How did that feel?

LEWIS *(slowly)*: Better. I feel fresher than I have in a long time.

KELVIN *(smiling)*: I'm very glad. So here's what I would like for you to try until the next time we meet. If you feel like your ruminations are overwhelming you, try the breathing exercise. Let me know how well that works for you next time?

LEWIS: Yes, certainly.

KELVIN: Do you keep a journal?

LEWIS: Yes I do.

KELVIN: Good! That may serve as an outlet for some of those emotions broiling inside.

Sometimes it's good to feel like you're physically engaging with them and letting them out. Has it been helpful?

LEWIS: Somewhat. I feel like I am going in circles. I will write notes down and then wonder if the act of writing is perpetuating the problem. The progress is akin to building a house of cards, only to have it knocked down again.

KELVIN: For those moments, try the breathing exercises. Remember to ground yourself in the present and also importantly to be kind to yourself. You deserve it.

LEWIS: Yes, thank you.

KELVIN: Lastly, try and speak to the boys. You could benefit from each other's support. It can be comforting to know that you're not alone in the way you feel.

LEWIS: All right. Thank you very much, Kelvin.

KELVIN (*smiling*): It was my pleasure. It was very nice to meet you, Jack. Feel free to give me a ring if you're having trouble with something.

LEWIS: Likewise. Thank you, Kelvin.

(LEWIS and KELVIN *shake hands. Exit LEWIS. End scene.*)

### **Works Cited:**

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