

Thomas Attig

Catching Your Breath in Grief: A Workshop for Theorists and Caregivers

Good thinking about loss and grief is grounded in phenomenological descriptive analyses and interpretations of the essential features, depth, and richness of experiences of bereavement, grief reaction, and grieving response. Compassionate and effective caring responses to grievers require exquisite attunement to their existential uniqueness and the particularities of their experiences. For both theory and counseling, then, the stories that grievers have to tell about their personal experiences comprise the foundational evidence base, “the heart of the matter,” in securing understanding.

My distinctive contribution to the study of loss and grief has been sustained existential-phenomenological reflection on a) grieving as a process of relearning how to live in a world profoundly changed by loss (*How We Grieve*) and b) making the transition from loving in presence to loving in separation (*The Heart of Grief*). My most recent work, *Catching Your Breath in Grief*, captures the substance of that earlier work and extends and embeds it in descriptions and interpretations of experiences of learning how to live from birth to death, learning to carry sorrow, engaging with life’s mysteries, and soulful and spiritual dimensions of loss and grief.

As the workshop leads participants through these reflections, it discusses phenomenological limitations of theories about loss of assumptive world, emotion, meaning-making, dual-processing, intuitive vs. instrumental grieving, disenfranchisement, attachment (vs. love), remembering, and needs for science vs. wisdom. It includes reflections on twelve good things about grieving, explores wisdom for caregiving, and reflects on advantages of thinking of grief counseling as analogous to midwifery.



Thomas Attig, PhD., Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at Bowling Green State University (Ohio) is the 2015 recipient of the Death Educator of the Year Award from the Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC) and the 2008 Lifetime Achievement Award of the International Network of Personal Meaning. He is the author of *How We Grieve: Relearning the World* (Oxford, Revised, 2011), *The Heart of Grief: Death and the Search for Lasting Love* (Oxford, 2000), *Catching Your Breath in Grief...and grace will lead you home* (Breath of Life Publishing, 2012), and numerous articles and reviews on grief and loss, care of the dying, suicide

intervention, death education, the ethics of interactions with the dying and bereaved, and seeking wisdom about mortality, dying, and bereavement. He is Co-Editor with Judith Stillion of *Death, Dying, and Bereavement: Contemporary Perspectives, Institutions, and Practices* (Springer, 2015). He spent the greater part of his career (1972-95) at Bowling Green, where he served as department chair for eleven years and with his colleagues established the world’s first Ph.D. in Applied Philosophy in 1987. A Past President of ADEC, he also served as Vice-Chair of the Board of the International Work Group on Death, Dying, and Bereavement (IWG). He holds degrees in philosophy from Northwestern University (BA) and Washington University in St. Louis (MA and PhD), where he studied existential phenomenology with Herbert Spiegelberg. He currently resides in Victoria, BC, Canada and devotes his time to writing and speaking. He invites you to visit his website at www.griefsheart.com.