

Terri Daniel Interview

Karen Wyatt: [00:00:00] Welcome to End of Life University on YouTube. Today I'm sharing with you a conversation I had with Dr. Terry Daniel. Terry is an end of life educator, interspiritual hospice chaplain, and grief counselor in Portland, Oregon and we are going to talk about spiritual bypassing, particularly as it relates

to complicated grief and disenfranchised grief, and I think you'll find this a really interesting conversation. Terry's hosting a symposium in July 2026 on this topic, so check out the show notes and you'll be able to find out more information about that symposium. make sure you subscribe to this channel down below.

Also, subscribe and leave a rating and review for the podcast wherever you happen to listen and go to eoluniversity.com/support to find three different ways you can make a small financial contribution that will help keep this channel and the podcast on the air. So we'll move on now [00:01:00] with my conversation with Terry Daniel.

Today I'm so happy to welcome back my good friend who's been on the podcast a number of times in the past, Dr. Terri Daniel. Terri is an end of life educator, interspiritual hospice chaplain, and grief counselor in Portland, Oregon. She is certified in death, dying, and bereavement by the Association of Death Education and Counseling, in family focused grief therapy by the Portland Institute, and in trauma informed critical care by the NYU School of Social Work.

Terri conducts workshops throughout the United States and offers end of life consulting through her private practice at endwelladvisors.com. In addition, she is an adjunct professor in death studies and chaplaincy at Marian University, the Graduate Theological Union, and United Theological Seminary.

Terri is also the founder of the Conference on Death, Grief and Belief, and the [00:02:00] Ask Dr. Death podcast, and you can find out more at the website deathgriefandbelief.com. So Terri, my friend, welcome back. It's good to see you again.

Terri Daniel: You, Karen, and you are the co-founder of the Ask Dr. Death podcast even though we hardly ever do a podcast anymore.

I know.

Karen Wyatt: I know. I was gonna say occasionally I'm there for an episode, but-

Terri Daniel: And occasionally I'm there for an episode. I only really do one when I have a symposium or something coming up, and then I'll interview the speakers and do a pod- I think I've done 42 podcasts in the last five years.

Karen Wyatt: Oh. I'm a, I'm on a little different track than that numerically, But, but we do.

It's ... We always have a good time when we get together- We do ... and record these episodes, and I have always really enjoyed working with you. we've done workshops together and presentations, and I've-

Terri Daniel: Yeah ...

Karen Wyatt: been to the old Afterlife conference in the past, so we have a long history. [00:03:00]

Terri Daniel: The old Afterlife conference.

Yeah, we've been in Portland and I think Florida and many places together. unlike a lot of people that we do these podcasts with, we've actually been in live in person rooms together.

Karen Wyatt: We have been, and, working together and participating in really powerful rituals together, which, I will never forget.

I'll never forget some of the rituals that we did in, in Portland- Yeah ... when we walked down to the river and we did ... Oh, my gosh. We did this release ceremony and released flower petals- Yes ... into the river, and that, that was incredible.

Terri Daniel: With Linda Fitch leading us. Yes. And we had so many people on that little dock that it was sinking into the water-

and the hotel got really upset with us for doing, for having too many people out there. Yeah, Linda Fitch led us in many of those rituals. We did one. We've

done them in, on the East Coast in Virginia and- Oh gosh, I can't even remember all the places. Those were the days, the afterlife ones

Karen Wyatt: [00:04:00] Yeah. Yeah.

And you actually, just these pers- little personal notes as we get started, but you actually gave me the courage to do rituals, to plan rituals for other people and do them, because I was always interested in the idea of rituals, and I always did my own little private rituals, but I never had the confidence to make it part of my own teaching or a workshop I was teaching until I worked with you.

And, Well- So I will always be grateful to you for that

Terri Daniel: thank you, and I'm gonna pass that along on to Linda Fitch and Austin Wells who taught that to me. So we pass the torch along to each other- and we thank our teachers. It's, that's how it works.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, exactly.

Terri Daniel: Anyway, that's nice.

Karen Wyatt: today we're coming together, to talk about your upcoming sympo- symposium on spiritual bypassing, which will be in, on July 25th, 2026.

We want to talk about it in, in advance so people will know to be able to sign up for it. [00:05:00] And, this is a, such an important topic, but I want you to tell our audience about the topic of spiritual bypassing and why you chose it for this symposium and why it's so important.

Terri Daniel: Yeah. in hospice as a grief counselor, and many of the people listening will know this, we often come across, e- especially as a chaplain especially, people who, go deeply into their spirituality to cope with their grief.

And there is in the literature on grief and loss and trauma, work by a guy by the name of Kenneth Pargament who identified two forms of religious coping that he calls positive and negative religious coping. And without getting too far into the weeds about that, negative religious coping would be something like, feeling like God is punishing You "Why did my child die? I must have done something wrong to make [00:06:00] God mad at me. I'm being punished," or maybe, "I had some sin that I'm not aware of, and God is punishing me," or feeling like Satan is doing it or your faith wasn't strong enough. You prayed and prayed for

your child to get better, and then he died, and it's because my faith wasn't strong enough.

There's a long list of, negative religious coping, and positive religious coping is seeing the divine as a sort of co-creative force where it, it can Turn the power into yourself. you co-create with the divine. Like, how can I find inner strength and inner resources to cope with this problem?

Which involves you making decisions and taking action to go forward with healing and restoration from the loss. So that's foundational. and many of you listening know what prolonged grief disorder and complicated grief is, and what that basically [00:07:00] means is that over a period of time, you actually don't really go forward toward restoration.

You get stuck into this sort of dark place of just cycling into deeper and deeper sense of hopelessness and non-restoration. And a lot of people get into that place because of an over-dependence on religious doctrine, and putting so much expectation on this religious doctrine to be the answer or the thing that solves the problem.

in the 1980s, there was a guy who was a Buddhist monk, and his name was John Welwood. He was a monk and also a therapist, and he came up with this term spiritual bypassing because he lived in, ashrams and meditation centers and places with a lot of Buddhists, and he noticed that they were just [00:08:00] hanging out in the higher realms and in the meditative world, and not dealing with their earthly concerns.

And they... And you see this a lot in spiritual communities across all religions of "I'm not concerned with the material world. I, my eyes are on God." and he coined this term spiritual bypassing because that's what he was seeing people doing. And it got, popular in psychology, and we now have research on that, and a lot of scholars are looking at it, and a couple of people have language- come up with language for it.

And for example, here are a couple def- definitions. hold on. I'm looking at from my paper here. let me quote Welwood. not Welwood, but Cashwell, who says it really well. da, da. Sorry, guys. A defensive [00:09:00] psychological posture cultivated by a tendency to privilege spiritual beliefs or experiences over and against psychological needs, creating a means of avoiding or bypassing difficult emotions.

That's one way to define it. and this is, that sounds very scientific, but, this is what happens. And in this symposium that we're having, we have a lot of experts and researchers who are gonna be talking about how they've witnessed this in their interactions with clients and in their research, and how to address it when you're working with someone who's showing this.

But the real question is this necessarily bad? So if you're working with somebody who, for example, is telling you, let's say their loved one died a year ago, and they're saying, I'm just doing fine. I don't feel sad at all because I know he's with Jesus now, and I go [00:10:00] to church t- three times a week, and my church community holds me up, and we pray, and I just imagine him, in, in the Kingdom of God, and I'm just fine," is that necessarily bad?

I don't have the answer. But what, that's what we're gonna look at. and the answer to how do we discern if that is healthy, positive religious coping or negative religious coping is, to get a little bit clinical here, is we look at bereavement assessment tools. And we can talk more about that as we go along.

But that's basically what we're gonna be doing in the symposium.

Karen Wyatt: That's really fascinating, and I love the idea that you're looking at it without knowing the answer in advance. willing to- Yeah ... to struggle with this and look at it. 'Cause I can imagine scenarios where someone's very survival may depend for a few years on being able to bypass the pain because they simply [00:11:00] can't bear it.

They can't hold it all at that time. Yeah. And maybe the bypassing serves them for a while, while they try to find other resources or support systems or strength, or get far enough away from the death that they could finally, take an honest look at it. I could imagine that. But

Terri Daniel: then- And then maybe it's not bypassing.

Yeah. Maybe it's a legitimate coping tool if it does serve them in that way. And so what we wanna look at is, let's say they're doing that for two years. What else is happening in their life during that two years? How are they functioning? That's the trick, right? So are they having healthy relationships?

They're getting along with their family, and their kids, and their spouse? Are they getting up and going to work every day and making a living? Are they eating healthy and taking care of their body, taking care of their house? And if

they're functioning, 'cause this is what you look at in bereavement [00:12:00] assessments.

You look at, no matter what they say about how they're feeling or what they're doing, how are they actually living, right? So if they're just completely off in spiritual land, but they're functioning well, they're physically and mentally well-functioning, then they're fine but what we often see is that they are almost in a cult-like space, and they're really, they're isolated from the world outside of their spiritual or religious community.

They might be, really They might be in having addictive behaviors. in that community there might be really strict, dietary laws or, I... There was a woman who spoke at one of my conferences once who was part of a New Age group that, like, was not allowed to eat red [00:13:00] food on Tuesdays.

just really ridiculous things. And so when you see things like that's no, that's spiritual bypassing. And I have some case h- examples that I can give as we go further in this conversation.

Karen Wyatt: That's so very interesting because now, one of the advantages of having lived a long time so far is just having to, having seen so many iterations of the grieving process and the varieties of ways in which people grieve and how it proceeds.

But I see it's really important that we're aware of spiritual bypassing as almost a trap that some people might fall into, that might not serve them well. And so I think it's a really important conversation that we have.

Terri Daniel: Yeah. when you have a trauma or a big loss, it challenges your whole personal system.

It challenges your whole [00:14:00] reality or your system about meaning making. And for many people, it challenges your spiritual system. So if you have a belief system that says, "I'm a good person, I'm faithful to my, religious structure. I go to church, I tithe, I believe in the virgin birth," whatever, and that you believe you're gonna be rewarded for that, and then you're not.

the Book of Job basically says that you're not rewarded for that, but maybe in the end you get everything back a little bit differently. Nobody really understands what the message of the Book of Job is, but, it shakes up your reality. it shatters your assumption, according to the title of the, one of the greatest books, called Shattered Assumptions by Ronnie Janoff-Bulman.

And so then you come into what is called a spiritual struggle, and there are characteristics of a spiritual struggle. There's, uh, some of the [00:15:00] researchers break it down this way. There's a divine struggle, where you have a problematic relationship with God; or a demonic struggle, where you think that Satan or evil spirits are influencing it.

There's a doubt struggle, where you question your faith or you have, questions of guilt and things like that; and an interpersonal struggle, where you have problematic relationships with religious individuals or community. So all of this stuff can come up when you have a traumatic loss or a grief that's making you question your religion now or your religious beliefs.

Two different things can happen. You can... This is my theory on it. You can veer in two different directions. So let's say you believe that prayer is go- and devotion is going to protect you from pain or from really feeling deep pain with a loss or protect you from loss. And then this loss, everything that you think [00:16:00] is true is now no longer true.

You can either double down on that belief and really try to make it fit and let your religious community hold you up and say, "Hey, the belief is still true. We just don't understand how God works. It's too big for us to understand." I'll give you an example of that in a minute. And just keep trying to put that square peg in the round hole.

You can go there and spend your whole life doing that. Or you can say, "You know what? Maybe this isn't true. Maybe this belief system doesn't work. Maybe I'm gonna go over here and start looking at some other theologies and open the d- to a little bit of a wider view and start questioning this belief and look at some other beliefs."

When you do that, you might be abandoned by your community and your family. This happens to people all the time. So there's a big risk

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. Wow, it's so interesting, Terri. [00:17:00] I just realized, what a synchronicity it is that this day, as we're recording this, is the anniversary of my father's death by suicide, which was the big devastating event in my life that created complicated grief for me. So it's really interesting we're, we happen to be talking about it on the very anniversary of his death.

Oh. But my entire path through hospice and everything I'd do- I've done came about as a result of his death long ago, long time ago. But, but it wa- it was definitely a complicated grieving process, and so I see what I've lived through,

the all of the, years of not being able to take all of the grief on at once a- and everything that had shattered, not being able to put all the pieces back together at once.

'cause I was a mom with little children and a doctor with a full practice. I had to function. I had to keep my life together. So the [00:18:00] shattering from his death, changed everything about me, and then all the rest of my life has been spent bringing all the pieces together gradually over time. So I just wanted to say I may, to an expert, I might be a textbook case in complicated grief and prolonged grief because of how many years it took to actually be able to work through that death.

But, but I see all the pitfalls and all the traps I could have fallen into that were there, like people who offered me a kind of religious or spiritual explanations, a here's an easier path if you just believe this or go this way, it might be easier to deal with this. But somehow within me, I knew that's not it.

That's not the way to go. I have to struggle through. I have to feel the pain of the grief and struggle through it

Terri Daniel: I would not call that prolonged grief or complicated grief. did you have symptoms of prolonged [00:19:00] grief? Like-

Karen Wyatt: only the, I guess that it took that... Yeah, maybe that's just normal grief.

I

Terri Daniel: just- see, that- ... that's, you're bringing up a really interesting thing. So prolonged grief disorder used to be called complicated grief. And, they changed it in the DSM and literally changed the name of it to prolonged grief disorder, and a lot of us absolutely hate that term for exactly the reason you just revealed, is the word prolonged.

Because that indicates a timeframe. That's true. And you look at that word and it sounds like, oh, I was grieving too long, which is not what it means. And a lot of us wish we would go back to using complicated grief. And what complicated grief means is that it doesn't heal properly. It's if you have gallbladder surgery or something and y- there are complications.

You can understand it in medical terms, like you get an infection or the surgeon leaves a sponge in there or something, right? It's complications in healing.

That's what it [00:20:00] means. And that's so much easier to understand. You s- you throw the word prolonged in there, it, that just means too long.

It's a really misleading term. And I personally hate it.

Karen Wyatt: you're, you're right about that. Exactly. It implies that there's a timeframe and that the path- there's pathology in the time- Exactly ... whatever time that it takes. And, that it's okay for such a devastating death to take a long time and a lot of work t- to heal over time.

It takes forever. It's a process. Yeah.

Terri Daniel: It takes forever. It's supposed to. There's no timeframe on it. Yeah. But for, to be diagnosed with, if you look at the DSM, there's diagnostic criteria, which is, obsessive, perseverating on negative imagery, not being able to function in certain ways, not being able to sleep, all these very s- specific markers, which you may have had for a period of time, [00:21:00] but I'm sure you didn't have them after five years.

Karen Wyatt: No. No.

Terri Daniel: Yeah. And that's the other thing that happens. i- if you look at the hospice, bereavement assessments that we do, and they're all different, but a lot of them, you're t- you call people within the first week or the first month after the death, and a lot of the assessments you ask them like, "Have you been having trouble sleeping?"

And you ask them this one week after their spouse of 50 years has died. And, of course they're having trouble sleeping. Yeah. What a stupid question. And you don't wanna say yes, because that gives them a score. that puts them, that leans them toward a higher risk-

griever.

Karen Wyatt: Wow.

Terri Daniel: And yeah, and then, you'll end up with th- they, there's a scoring thing where they're now shown as high or medium risk.

and it's also, risk of what? Suicide? Of complicated grief? It's all very weird. [00:22:00] I teach a whole class on this, on these grief assessments and how

they could be better. anyway, that's another topic. Let me give you an example of what spiritual bypassing looks like.

You asked me earlier, Karen, before we started recording, can people do spiritual bypassing to avoid facing death? And I was telling you about this one case of this man, he wasn't a client, he was actually a neighbor of mine. But his wife of 50 years had open heart surgery and she had complications.

and her surgery took eight hours, and she ended up with a, I think she was in ICU for, a week or a month or, I don't know, a very long time. And she was on a ventilator, and she was in critical condition. And I saw this man all the time. He was very religious, and he would always tell me, I would check in on him, see if he was [00:23:00] okay, and try to support him.

And he would say, "Oh, I am fine. I'm not worried about her. My whole church is praying for her. We have a prayer group going on around the whole country, a national prayer chain." And he wasn't even going to visit her. and he was just, going to church and praying. And he said she didn't have an advanced directive.

And he said his children would try to help him address the possibility that she might not survive, and he wouldn't talk about it because he just knew that, the prayers would heal her. And then she died, and he was very stoic, and he didn't express any emotion. And, when he was asked about, "How do you feel about now that she's died?"

And he said, "Oh, it's fine. God took her for a reason that only God knows, and it's not my place to question God's will." So that's an example of spiritual bypassing. Now- I didn't see him long term. I only saw [00:24:00] him, in the few weeks after she died. I don't know where he is today and how he ended up functioning.

He might be just fine. He probably, statistically, he's remarried and, still in that church and still being held up by that church community. Or h- he could have killed himself. Who knows? But that's just an example, and we see this a lot. He may not have ever addressed his grief. And what can happen, I'm not saying this always happens, is he might have mysteriously developed some kind of medical symptoms, somatic symptoms of unresolved emotion.

He might have mysteriously come up with a heart condition of his own. Or gastrointestinal symptoms. That's so common. All of a sudden it's oh, I have heartburn all the time, or oh, I've got colitis or something in the stomach because you're just pushing down [00:25:00] all that emotion.

so that's one example of using spiritual bypass to not look at death. Do you want me to give you some other ones?

Karen Wyatt: I want- I wanted to just say, so it's clear that it can, it's an individual who is experiencing spiritual bypassing, but there's a whole system around that person that supports it as well, that feeds into it and, keeps offering suggestions and- Yeah

and keep, keeps that alive in a way for that individual. Because a person alone who doesn't have that system around them may see through it in a way. may see through their own bypassing at some point and may find it's not working or helping them. But when other people reinforce it and are giving you the messages that you should continue bypassing, it's, I think it's would be very hard to get out of it then.

I guess that's when it becomes as you were saying.

Terri Daniel: the [00:26:00] support system is everything in grief. It's the number one most important thing. So when you were going through that with your father, you said that people were coming up to you and saying, here, try this. This will make it easier."

Were they saying religious here? Yes. Yeah.

Karen Wyatt: Religious ideas. Yeah.

Terri Daniel: And but you had other influences beside that. You had, oh, more than that, so you had other choices and you were able to resist that particular-

Karen Wyatt: yes ...

Terri Daniel: offering. Yeah. But if all you had was that- Yeah ... you wouldn't have critical thinking-

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, that's very true

Terri Daniel: available to you. And so that's one of the big questions that we ask too, is how do you sustain this? Is it sustainable for a lifetime? So let's look at this guy, Tom was his name. he could have kept that up for his whole life, as long as he stayed in that group. why would he ever leave that group? I don't know.

Maybe not. [00:27:00] I've been to his house. his house was... I've been sitting in his den in his office. I worked with him on a project, but had to... having nothing to do with this. And, the books on his bookshelf were all, MAGA books and things. I, and all extreme right-wing Christian stuff.

I'm not judging him, but then when he started talking to me about his wife, I could see where he was. And he will be fine as long as he's in that group. Then now if he starts developing the somatic systems, they're gonna pray his illness away, and so on, and so on, so he may never have a reason to leave that group.

And so that system is always gonna be there as an enabler. I'll give you another example about that. this was from, somebody, name is, n- we'll call him Carl. So he was a young student at a Christian college. I'm reading this from a [00:28:00] case study. His girlfriend got pregnant and had an abortion, but never told him.

He found out about 15 years later, and he was so filled with guilt about his part in the dual sin of premarital sex and abortion that he had several counseling sessions with his church pastor. The pastor recommended that Carl attend a church sponsored post-abortion support group for men. And one of the first healing exercises facilitated by the group leader was a letter-writing process in which all the men wrote a letter to everyone involved in the abortion decision, the doctors, the mothers, to themselves, and even to God, everybody who took part in the abortion.

And they shared their letters with the group. But Carl didn't write a letter. He felt that because he'd already confessed to his pastor and prayed for forgiveness, his sin and guilt were erased, and he was absolved, so no other emotional [00:29:00] processing was needed. He'd already dealt with it with the pastor and by praying to absolve himself of these sins, sex and abortion.

And the group leader in this church group agreed with him and excused him from doing the letter-writing exercise. So that's a really good example of processing only at the spiritual level-

and not at the psychological level.

Karen Wyatt: And even beyond psychological, even the physical level, the pain that we carry in our own bodies around grief and guilts and the changes that happen to us physically and emotionally.

Terri Daniel: because letter-writing Talking about rituals is a way to get that out of your body onto a piece of paper. If I was conducting that exercise, I would then have them take the letter, we'd all go outside together and build a little fire and burn it, and that really does release it. That's how you avoid those [00:30:00] somatic- symptoms, is to release it. So it was a beautiful exercise. And the fact that the group la- leader just let him off the hook and said, "You don't have to do this. You've already done your work with God"- is just unethical and inexcusable

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, that's really interesting because for someone who is religious and spiritual, the work with God is fine.

That's a great component of it, but that's not all there is. And then to say, "That's enough. Once you've done that, you've done everything," a- and not even acknowledge all the pain that's still being carried inside that person, that now they have to suppress it. They cannot acknowledge that there's still pain present because they did, this other spiritual work that was supposed to alleviate it and remove it, so they can never look at

Terri Daniel: it.

You know what else? What else was skipped in that was the thing about, speaking your process in front of community-

[00:31:00] was also skipped for him, because all the men had to wr- read their letters out loud to each other in that group. And then, having a witness when you do a ceremony or you do a process like that, I'm going to read my letter to you, you're going to read your letter to me.

We're going to witness each other's process. He skipped that, too.

That's, such an important part of a community, ritual like that.

Karen Wyatt: Oh, so very, true to be vulnerable in that way, and then but then also to just receive the kind of the embrace of other people who are in a similar circumstance- Yeah

who are not judging you, who accept you as you are.

Terri Daniel: Yeah. So he just I guess didn't even stay. I guess he just went home. I don't know.

Karen Wyatt: Oh, wow.

Terri Daniel: Yeah.

Karen Wyatt: And- All right. There's...

Terri Daniel: Yeah, go ahead ... you

Karen Wyatt: can fully understand him s- saying that and believing that, I already did the work, but the profe- the people around him running the [00:32:00] group should have said, "There's more.

There's more to that. Please stay."

Terri Daniel: Yeah. There's so much more, and that's really that's a really g- a really good example of, what spiritual bypass is. All right, so here's another one. So this is a woman, I call her Sharon. Her teenage son went hiking in the wilderness but never came home, and his body was found two weeks later at the bottom of a 90-foot waterfall.

Suicide was suspected but not confirmed, and when a grief counselor asked her what kind of tools and social support helped her get through this loss, this was the conversation that, was had. So Sharon said, "Oh, Jesus helped me. He helps me every day. I couldn't have survived without him, and I know he's looking after my son."

And the counselor says, "Oh, that must be very comforting. You seem very much at peace. How does Jesus help you now that it's [00:33:00] been," I forget, two years later. And she said, "Oh, he's with me all the time, and he loves me. It really helps to know that I'm not alone and that my son is not alone." And the counselor says, "You mentioned earlier that you have a close group of friends and family that has also been helpful."

And, she says, "They were very helpful at first, but they eventually faded away. Unlike them, Jesus is always there. He doesn't fade away. It's different than having friends and family because He can carry the pain for me, and they can't. And He can reunite me with my son in heaven and protect me from harm.

When my son died, I wasn't a Christian yet, but that's my biggest regret because if I had Jesus back then, I don't think He would have let my son die."

so now it's been two years since this death, and, that, that's where she's at. Now, again, I d- I wasn't there. I don't know how she's [00:34:00] functioning.

So that's, in the symposium, that's what we're looking at. How do we assess this person? Is she able to support herself? Is she eating well? Is she physically healthy? How are her relationships? Is she sleeping? All the assessment check boxes. And can she function outside of her church community? And if she can't, then we start looking at the check boxes of, cult behavior and, And again, is that necessarily bad?

I don't know.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah.

Terri Daniel: I mean- Let's

Karen Wyatt: say.

Terri Daniel: Okay, let's say she is. let's say she's... I don't want to bash anybody. This is, I spent 10 years in theology school, and the thing I learned the most how to say is, "I don't know, [00:35:00] and it depends. This is what we're looking for. How does, how do people live?

I've published papers o- on toxic theology and, what the symptoms of that are, and social isolation and, all kinds of stuff.

I can go through a whole checklist of that. But maybe, there's a world in which that's not necessarily unhealthy

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. It, makes sense to me each person is on their own path, and like we said before, may have their own coping mechanisms that they resort to. But it, it seems we need to understand what spiritual bypassing is so that we can recognize when someone's being harmed, when they're not able to live in a healthy, functioning way.

And, I, know of someone who [00:36:00] was, after the death of his daughter, started drinking a lot of alcohol every day as a coping mechanism and decided that was his grief therapy. That's how-- The way he was dealing with his grief was with alcohol, and justified it in his own mind, and that wasn't a spiritual bypassing, but it is a, it's a bypassing nonetheless.

And when something like that happens, we can recognize that goes toward harm because he's harming his health and not functioning in his life. And, so someone in that state is someone who may need extra help.

Terri Daniel: harm is the thing, isn't it? That's really what we wanna look at. And, if he's...

And you can also, I should also say, there's intellectual bypassing as well. There's... And, people can bypass their emotions all kinds of different ways. You can bypass your emotions with physical exercise, [00:37:00] But then we start getting into different kinds of griever. So a lot of, something, a kind of new theory of grief now is, instrumental versus intuitive grievers.

This kind of veers off- down a rabbit hole, but, instrumental grievers are people who are very emotional, who will cry, who will read poetry and listen to sad songs and be very emotional, who will call up their friends and cry on their shoulder and talk. yesterday was Mother's Day.

Mother's Day can be really sad for people who've lost a child or a mother. and will emote that, or will, get together with their friends and do something for Mother's Day because it would be so sad to be alone. that's an instr- an intuitive griever. An instrumental griever doesn't really spend a lot of time in the emotional realm, but is more in the practical realm.

So the instrumental griever, instead of spending a lot of time crying and [00:38:00] writing in a journal, will go start a foundation to raise money for the disease, or will remodel the house, or will clean out the person's closet immediately, like a week after they die. That's me, by the way. And I've lost a child, and yesterday was Mother's Day, and Mother's Day doesn't bother me at all.

what, what I feel on Mother's Day is mostly I just get pissed off at my sister for not calling me on Mother's Day. Oh. So that's, the whole thing for Mother's Day. And my son's been gone 19 years, but that's... is that a form of bypassing because, you go and clean out the garage the week after your loved one dies, rather than cry and talk and open up to people when...

let's say you're a couple and your child has died, and I don't mean to genderize this, but I'm gonna just f- for the ease of conversation. So the wife is in the house, and the people are coming over with the casseroles, and the wife [00:39:00] is there, and she's talking, and she's crying, and the husband's out in the garage-

cleaning out the garage. And does that mean that he's bypassing his feelings, or that he's just an instrumental griever? I get this all the time with my hospice people, And the wife says, "What's wrong with him? He's not crying. He's out in the garage all the time." There's nothing wrong with him.

That's his grieving.

Karen Wyatt: That is such a, an important distinction to make.

Terri Daniel: Yeah.

Karen Wyatt: And that, that, that whole line of thinking that we have to see the full spectrum of how people grieve, and it's different for everyone.

Terri Daniel: Yeah. And back to the spiritual thing, I'm trying to be as balanced as I can because I don't wanna diss anybody for having a spiritual response.

when the police come to your door and tell you that your loved one was just killed in a car accident, and the first thing you do is [00:40:00] go straight to God, of course you're gonna do that. And you might stay there for a really long time. That's an unbearable thing, to bear.

I can't say how long you're supposed to stay there. again, I'm gonna just keep coming back to functionality and harm. And so back to the, symposium, that's what, our experts talk about. So we've got, some just brilliant people. Craig Cashwell. and for those listening, to find out about the symposium, just go to deathgriefandbelief.com and you'll see it popping right up there on the front page.

Craig Cashwell is probably the leading researcher on this topic right now, so we're really lucky to have him. We've got somebody named Carrie Doering, who I feel really lucky to have. She's, a, on the faculty at the Iliff School of, [00:41:00] Theology, and she focuses on interreligious social justice and research on trauma and moral stress and spiritual struggles.

who have we got? Oh, we have Mary Remington, who's a Buddhist teacher. so she's gonna give us a Buddhist perspective on spiritual bypassing. And Sonia Lott, who is a psychologist expert in complicated grief. And then we have two people who are former evangelicals who are gonna talk about Christian spiritual bypassing, Andrew Chasko and Janice Selby.

And so I also want to really emphasize, even though I do use Christianity and Jesus a lot as an example, that this does not only happen in Christianity.

It goes across the board.

Karen Wyatt: Yes. That, yes, that's such a good point.

Terri Daniel: Yeah. It's just, I emphasize that a lot because in America, that is the dominant theology here.

And if [00:42:00] you are a hospice worker or a grief counselor in America, that's what you're gonna mostly see.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, that's... Yeah, I'm glad you m- that you mentioned that. but the symposium sounds marvelous, and, it's... I just wanted to get the structure down. It's a one-day symposium online?

All right.

So anyone can participate from anywhere. And also, will the symposium be recorded so if someone can't attend live they'll-

Terri Daniel: You register for the symposium, you will get a recording of all the presentations, so you don't have to be present online. However, if you want CE credits, there are six CE credit hours.

So if you need those, you do have to be present on, in person for all the presentations on Zoom. You have to be there in person with your camera on to get the CE credits.

Karen Wyatt: It sounds like this would be a great symposium for chaplains, social workers, [00:43:00] hospice workers. but who else do you feel could benefit from attending?

Terri Daniel: anybody who works with grief and loss, not necessarily hospice. And not, this happens with non-death losses as well. So nurses, we have, our CE hours are for nurses, social workers, just really... And death doulas. We were talking about death doulas before. Anybody, or just yourself.

You don't have to be a professional, Also, I would love to see, clergy, you know- from, I have, a long list of churches and clergy that I'm sending out

announcements to. I would love to see traditional religious people from all religions. I would just, come and hear this.

This is really important. I'd like to hear all the points of view. all the speakers will, have time for a question and debate because like you said earlier, we're not coming at this "Here's the absolute truth about what this is," [00:44:00] We're coming at this from, this is a new subject in research and we don't know.

We don't know where to draw the line of how much spiritual bypassing is okay, and how to absolutely pinpoint when it is exactly, you hit the point when it's harmful. That's what we're trying to figure out.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. So I love this. It isn't that there are set answers, but it's an exploration. But- Yeah ... and also how to be aware and to talk about what do we do?

what do we do if we know someone or we witness someone, who might be in pain because of spiritual bypassing, and, what, can we do to help?

Terri Daniel: Yeah. And if one thing you can do... I'm have, in, in one of my Facebook groups, that I run called Chaplains Outside the Box, if anybody would like to come and check it out, we're having a conversation right [00:45:00] now about images of God.

Let me see if I can find this. a, researcher in another group that I'm in, posted, posted this question to other researchers. it's a group of psychologists and academics that, explore the intersection of psychology and religion. And some researcher posted this question about, how do you deal with people asking, where is God in the presence of suffering?

And of course, everybody asks this questions. It's the big question. and so my answer to him was, you can't really address that question when someone asks it to you unless you first understand what do they think God is. So people ask all the time, "Why did God let this happen? Why did God give me cancer and I'm only 25 years old?

Why did God let my child get hit by a car?" Always this is the question that we get. And I can't answer that question. [00:46:00] Nobody should ever attempt to answer it. In fact, if anybody does, if some pastor tells you, God let this happen because..." That's immediate spiritual bypassing right there. No one should ever give you an answer.

But before even beginning a conversation like that, you... And you need to ask the person to first tell you what do they understand God to be. Because my- idea of what I think God is not gonna be the same as yours. And in order for us to have that conversation, we have to find some sort of, equivalency.

So God can either be in you, your mind, who's asking me this question. Are we talking about, the Old Testament father figure warrior God who dispenses reward and punishment according to your obedience? There could be that God. Or the Christian idea of God who has [00:47:00] unlimited, unconditional love and forgiveness.

Or it could be, like, the God of, an internal archetype God that kind of represents parts of the self that come out and need attention for inner work. Or God as a universal force of creation that doesn't actually have an opinion, but is just a shit happens kind of God. And can any of these types of God be influenced by prayer?

So these are all the questions that you have to ask before you can actually have a conversation about God with somebody.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, so true. You have to find out, is there common ground in how we- Yeah ... view things and where- What God are you talking about? ... we stand. Exactly. Exactly. And then I think that clues you in as well, is if you're looking for spiritual bypassing, where might it reside?

Because , if this is a person who sees God as all powerful but outside of themselves, [00:48:00] all of the burden is placed on God in a sense. God created the death. God didn't stop the death. So God's the one who's in charge of all of this.

Terri Daniel: So then the question is, instead of where was God in this, the question is where were you-

in this? That's a really great point. one of the problems with that theology is that the idea that God is only always good. There is no such thing as bad God. Which is why the concept of Satan was created, to explain bad things. If God is always only good, there has to be some other thing that brings the bad.

And that's always a problem with this, if you can't allow God to also be bad. The, somebody said to me, a grieving mother, I love this so much, she said, "Life has to have equal parts of both, like positive and negative charges on a battery. A battery doesn't work with only one." [00:49:00]

Yeah, exactly ... I thought that was the most brilliant thing I ever heard

Karen Wyatt: So interesting. Wow, I can see this is gonna be a really rich day, the symposium of diving into these questions It's gonna be really fun And again, i- not that the symposium is gonna produce all the answers to all the questions.

There may be more questions that arise at the end of the symposium than-

Terri Daniel: That's the whole point. That's the whole point. Yeah. We just want this conversation to happen. one of the things, in chaplaincy, and when I say chaplaincy, I don't mean ministry. I don't mean pastoring, And this is one of the things that we fight for, is to make that difference very clear.

Chaplains are not missionaries. We do not go out into the world preaching or teaching any particular religion. And one of the things that really all we wanna do is to make ... is to have, to allow [00:50:00] conversations and questioning to happen. We don't walk in with answers. We just want you to talk to us you know- and to sit with you for y- during your exploration, whatever that is. And are we ever gonna correct you and tell you're wrong? We're not supposed to do that. However, sometimes we do see harm. I have a friend who is one of the best chaplains that I know, and he told me once that when he's sitting with a dying person who has extreme anxiety about dying because he's afraid of going to hell because of some doctrine, that he will actually tell them he's, that they're wrong.

There is no hell. That's completely made up. It doesn't exist. We're not supposed to do that, but he does that, and I would do that too. I've never had to do that, but if I saw somebody that was just panicking, s- s- squeezing the bedsheets, if they were verbal and cognizant enough to say, "I'm freaking [00:51:00] out 'cause I'm gonna go to hell.

I can just see the flames are coming at me, and Satan is grabbing," if they were saying things like that, I would try to talk them out of that. Absolutely. Even though according to the rules of chaplaincy, we're supposed to meet them where they are. So what are we supposed to do? Go, "Oh, yeah, you're right.

I see those flames too." Of course not.

Karen Wyatt: No. No. Because you wanna help them have a more peaceful death if possible- Of

Terri Daniel: course ...

Karen Wyatt: and find a way out of the flames to see that there's something else.

Terri Daniel: Yeah. And that is probably terminal agitation, so that would require some drugs

Karen Wyatt: yeah ...

Terri Daniel: as well, and it's probably not rational talking.

But still, as a chaplain, you are going to talk to them, and you're gonna try to calm them down and get them out of that space.

Karen Wyatt: So it sounds like the symposium will be a great place, to do some contemplation but also gain some tools perhaps to help people [00:52:00] discern when someone might be in trouble, might be being harmed by beliefs that they have, and, find some ideas for how to talk about this at least, h- how to bring the topic up and, get clear about people's beliefs and how they're influencing their, process.

Terri Daniel: Yeah. One of the things, in, the paper that I'm publishing is going, back a little bit in our conversation about how, these communities can support this. There's also a whole, practice area- called, of Christian counseling that I've looked into, that's also really damaging because we were talking earlier, Karen, before we started recording about death doulas and, people getting credentials on, by taking a four-hour workshop online.

There are people who can [00:53:00] get credentialed as Christian counselors that way as well, a- without any education, high school diploma maybe. and they can show that they've had so many hours of church work, and boom, they get a certificate and can do grief counseling, as a ... And will, people will go to a counselor like that to get grief support, and that's one way that kind of bypassing is also shored up.

I should've said that earlier. So yeah, there's a l- there's a lot of stuff.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. Terry, I'm looking forward to this symposium. It's gonna be a, really robust day with lots of questions and ideas coming up. I think it's gonna be a great discussion.

Terri Daniel: Yeah, I'd love it, love it if you could attend.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, so-

Terri Daniel: Every, all your listeners.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. Everyone can go to, who's interested, can go to deathgriefandbelief.com and they'll learn more about it and, find out how to [00:54:00] register there.

Terri Daniel: Yeah, right on the home page is, you'll see it right there on the top of the page.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, and this is fantastic, and Terry, I really appreciate what you've been doing with these online symposiums.

You've been addressing difficult issues that sometimes are h- are hard to talk about, but bringing together just the right experts to help us learn how to think about things and how to see it differently, and it's just so valuable, and I, really appreciate all the time and effort that you put into bringing these events together.

Terri Daniel: thank you. You do the same thing with yours. How long have you been doing this podcast, like six, eight years now?

Karen Wyatt: It's, 13 years this year.

Terri Daniel: 13 years now. Are you

Karen Wyatt: serious? That's when I first started doing interviews- Wow ... except Terry Daniel, you were one of the first people

Terri Daniel: I- I was ... ever interviewed. I have no sense of time now that I'm old.

It's ti- everything is a time warp. 13 years. It's been since the Afterlife Conference. It started in 2010, so that's 16 years. It's hard to believe. [00:55:00]

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. I know. we're pioneers now.

Terri Daniel: Time gets so weird as you get older, doesn't

Karen Wyatt: it? It really does. Well,

Terri Daniel: thank you, Karen. Thank you for all you do. Oh. You are a real inspiration and leader in this field.

Karen Wyatt: Oh, you're welcome, Terri. I love it that, we've both been on our various paths over time, but we've always stayed connected, and we, always, find ways to come together. I'm looking forward. I'll keep spreading the word about the symposium and, Thank you ... sharing with people how to join in, I appreciate that.

Yeah.

Terri Daniel: Thank you so much.

Karen Wyatt: Thank you, Terri