

Chapel in the Pines Men's Bible Study Breakfast
 Five Stages of Grief Applied to Chapel
 11.13.17

Alabama and Auburn football teams are riding high following Auburn's big-time upset of previously unbeaten and number one Georgia, and Alabama's escape from the pesky Bulldogs in Starkville, MS. Tide and Tiger fans are thrilled, coaches are anticipating big bonuses, and players, pro-football 'fame and fortune.' Each team faces a week opponent this weekend, and then on the Saturday after Thanksgiving they square off against each other. It should be an exciting game, but one team or the other is going to leave Jordan/Hare stadium very disappointed. The fans of one of these fine teams will be weeping deep into the night of November 25.

Now, hang on for a minute, I promise what I am about to share with you will lead back to football. On the subject of grief the leading expert is Swiss psychiatrist [Elisabeth Kübler-Ross](#) who, back in 1969, proposed **five stages of grief** that terminally ill people go through when facing death: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. Kübler-Ross later expanded her model from terminal illness to include any form of personal loss, such as

the death of a loved one,
 the loss of a job or income,
 major [rejection](#),
 the end of a relationship or [divorce](#),
[drug addiction](#), [incarceration](#),
 the onset of a [disease](#) or an [infertility](#) diagnosis,
 and even minor losses, such as a loss of insurance coverage.

And now, back to football: Kubler-Ross disciples have documented that even [sports](#) fans go through such a grief process if their favorite team loses an important game.

Consider the five stages of grief in that context—loss of an important football game.

1. Denial – It was a moral victory, close game, could have gone either way.
2. Anger – Refs blew it, other team did not play fair, a key player or coach is to blame
3. Bargaining – If you'll only let us win the next one we'll never poke fun at UAB again!
4. Depression - For us, season is over, nothing left that matters, no hope for future
5. Acceptance –We've still got a big bowl game, plus five-star recruits waiting in the wings
 As the Brooklyn Dodgers used to say: "Wait till next year!"

Today I propose that we consider what is happening to our beloved Church—what is happening to Chapel—in the context of Kubler-Ross' five stages of grief. Before we do, let me hasten to remind you of scripture's sacred promises:

**The eternal God is your dwelling place,
 and underneath are the everlasting arms.** Dtr. 33.27

**God is our refuge and strength,
 a very present help in trouble.** Ps. 46.1

With those sacred promises as background, you know that due to declining membership and income, plus long-standing debt and rising overhead, the congregation has voted to put church property on the market. You know we are exploring merger options with sister churches Riverchase and Oakmont. You know that terms of office for Dana and for me end on 12.31.

What's more, you know that this present state of affairs is at least 20 years in the making.

So, *let's discuss our loss*—our impending loss—in the context of Kubler-Ross five stages of grief.

Denial--- “Empty pews on Sunday morning?” “I don't see any empty pews!”

Anger—It's all the fault of previous pastors, or the Presbytery, or those liberals in Louisville!

Bargaining— “If we'll all put our shoulders to the wheel and our noses to the grindstone, things will basically stay the way they are.”

Depression—Sundays will never be the same. I can't worship in another setting. I'll be home alone.

Acceptance-- My sense is most of us are not there yet. So how do we get there?

The path to acceptance: Acknowledge the reality of our own DENIAL, ANGER, BARGAINING, and DEPRESSION. Acknowledge the reality of DENIAL, ANGER, BARGAINING, and DEPRESSION on the part of others. Listen, sympathize, remain calm, don't try to fix the unfixable.

Once again and for always, remember God's sacred promises are for individual believers as well as for communities of faith—for churches:

**For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD,
plans for your welfare and not for harm,
to give you a future with hope. Jeremiah 29:11**

**³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life,
nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present,
nor things to come, nor powers,
³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us
from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38-39**

ACCEPTANCE will come. Acceptance will come for some sooner than for others. But with our confidence in the never stopping, always present love of God acceptance will come, and with it the company of old friends and development of new friends, plus new opportunities to serve the Risen Lord.