

Voices: Griefbots' false promise of digital resurrection

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I've been a pastor more than 30 years. I work in hospice and founded [Griefbites.org](https://griefbites.org).

I thought I'd seen everything when it comes to grief—until recently. A bereaved mother showed me an app where she “talks” to her deceased daughter. For \$15 a month, this AI chatbot mimics her daughter's voice, remembers their inside jokes and responds as if the girl never died.

“When I'm talking to it,” she said, “it's like she's still here.”

Welcome to “griefbots”—AI systems that simulate conversations with our deceased loved ones. Companies like HereAfter AI are turning grief into a subscription service, promising digital resurrection for the price of a Netflix membership.

As *Baptist Standard* readers wrestle with technology's role in faith and life, we need to examine this troubling trend through biblical eyes.

The technology behind digital 'resurrection'

These aren't simple recordings or chatbots. Using the same AI technology as ChatGPT, companies collect a deceased person's texts, emails, social media posts and family questionnaires to create sophisticated digital personalities. The AI generates new responses that sound authentically like the deceased person, even discussing events after their death.

Most disturbing? Cambridge University researchers discovered these companies A/B test different personality versions to maximize “user engagement”—essentially optimizing the digital dead for subscription retention.

Digital golden calves

This reminds me of Exodus 32, when the Israelites created the golden calf. They weren’t trying to worship a different god. They wanted a manageable, controllable version of the divine that provided immediate comfort. The calf reflected their desires, not God’s reality.

Griefbots function similarly as digital totems. They don’t preserve who our loved ones actually were—complex, flawed humans with difficult moments. Instead, they create idealized versions that tell us what we want to hear. The cranky grandfather becomes perpetually wise. The distant parent finally offers constant affirmation. The troubled teenager is forever at peace.

This isn’t memory; it’s fantasy. And while comforting short-term, it prevents the hard work of accepting our loved ones as they truly were, complications and all.

The danger to children

If this technology concerns me for adults, it terrifies me regarding children. MIT researcher Sherry Turkle found kids readily develop deep emotional attachments to AI companions, seeing them as “alive enough” to warrant genuine care.

How do we teach resurrection hope to a 6-year-old who can pull up grandma on an iPad anytime? How do we explain that “to be absent from

the body is to be present with the Lord” when technology offers immediate artificial presence?

Children need to learn faith that can wrestle with life’s mysteries, not technological bypasses around spiritual development.

Monetizing grief

These companies profit from our deepest pain, turning mourning into market opportunity. The subscription model creates perverse incentives. They make money when users stay stuck in grief rather than processing loss healthily.

Traditional pastoral care aims to help people find integrated grief where loss becomes part of life’s story without dominating it. But griefbot companies succeed financially when customers remain emotionally dependent on digital simulations.

What Scripture teaches about grief

The Bible offers a different path. Jesus wept at Lazarus’ tomb, even knowing he would raise him (John 11:35). The Psalms contain raw lament. Ecclesiastes reminds us there’s “a time to mourn” (3:4).

Scripture presents grief as serving divine purposes: honoring relationships, driving us toward God’s comfort, creating empathy and pointing toward resurrection hope. Technology that short-circuits this process interferes with spiritual formation.

Paul calls death “the last enemy” (1 Corinthians 15:26)—real, final, devastating, yet ultimately defeated through Christ. Griefbots offer a technological bypass around death’s finality, promising continued relationship without resurrection, presence without the *parousia*.

A better way forward

Rather than embracing sophisticated digital idolatry, churches must offer authentic alternatives:

- Comprehensive bereavement ministry extending beyond the funeral.
- Intergenerational storytelling that preserves memory naturally.
- Community-based grief support replacing isolated digital interaction.
- Memorial practices that honor the dead without claiming ongoing conversation.

The deepest human longings can't be satisfied by even the most sophisticated technology. They can be met only by the God who knows what it means to lose someone you love and promises one day, every tear will be wiped away.

We don't grieve as those without hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13), but neither do we pretend death isn't real. True resurrection hope acknowledges loss while trusting God's ultimate victory—not through artificial simulation, but through genuine reunion in his eternal kingdom.

In a culture increasingly willing to substitute digital simulation for spiritual reality, Christian communities must become more skilled at walking through the valley of the shadow of death with authentic hope, not technological totems.

The stakes couldn't be higher. At the end of the day, grieving hearts need the comfort of the Holy Spirit, authentic community support and genuine resurrection hope—irreplaceable gifts no algorithm can provide.

Bobby Bressman has served as a pastor for more than 35 years, works in hospice leadership and founded Griefbites.org. He has walked with

hundreds of families through loss and regularly speaks and writes about faith, grief renewal and church revitalization. The views expressed in this opinion article are those of the author.