

Comfort for Loss

Five Myths about Grief

INTRODUCTION:

- A. It hurts, doesn't it? . . . I am asking about loss and grief in our lives. Again I ask, it hurts, doesn't it? We all know that it does
1. We have all experienced it . . . We will experience it again.
 2. We have endeavored to help others with theirs as they have endeavored to help us with ours.
 - a. I am not going to tell you the grieving process is easy . . . It isn't.
 - b. I am not going to tell you the grieving process isn't difficult . . . It is.
 - c. I am not going to tell you the grieving process doesn't hurt . . . It does.
 - d. I am not going to tell you the grieving process passes quickly . . . It doesn't.
 - e. I am not going to encourage you to go at it alone . . . You shouldn't.
 - f. I am not going to tell you that you can't move on . . . In time you can.
- B. People grieve over a variety of things in life.
1. Loss of a loved one (spouse, child, sibling, parent, grandparent, etc.).
 2. Loss of a friend.
 3. Loss of a pet.
 4. Impending death when a terminal illness has been diagnosed.
 5. A tragedy occurs.
 6. Losing a job (Place of employment closed . . . Fired . . . Age)
 7. Etc.
- C. Twenty-eight times the word "grief" appears in the Bible. (24 OT . . . 4 NT)
1. **Psalm 6:7** – "My eye wastes away because of grief . . ." Also in Psalm 21:9
 2. **Job 16:6** – "Though I speak, my grief is not relieved; And if I remain silent, how am I eased?"
 3. **Job 6:2** – "Oh, that my grief were fully weighed, And my calamity laid with it on the scales!"
 3. **Job 2:13**: - "So they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great."
 4. **There are things that we don't want to happen but have to accept . . . Things we don't want to know but have to learn . . .and people we can't live without but have to let go.**
- D. A companion word "sorrow" appears seventy times in our Bible.
1. **Psalm 38:17** – "For I am ready to fall, and my sorrow is continually before me."

2. **Job 17:7** – “My eye has also grown dim because of sorrow . . .”
3. **Proverbs 15:13** – “. . . By the sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.”

E. Well known in the field of grief counseling is the **Kübler-Ross model**, commonly known as **The Five Stages of Grief**. Set forth in her 1969 book, ***On Death and Dying***, which was inspired by her work with terminally ill patients. When people know that death is coming, Elizabeth Kübler Ross identified what they face . . . the five stages of grief :

- (1) Denial . . . (2) Anger . . . (3) Bargaining . . . (4) Depression . . .
- (5) Acceptance. (Known by the acronym DABDA)

1. **DENIAL** — "I feel fine."; "This can't be happening, not to me."

Denial is usually only a temporary defense for the individual. This feeling is generally replaced with heightened awareness of possessions and individuals that will be left behind after death. Denial can be conscious or unconscious refusal to accept facts, information, or the reality of the situation. Denial is a defense mechanism and some people can become locked in this stage.

2. **ANGER** — "Why me? It's not fair!"; "How can this happen to me?"; "Who is to blame?"

Once in the second stage, the individual recognizes that denial cannot continue. Because of anger, the person is very difficult to care for due to misplaced feelings of rage and envy. Anger can manifest itself in different ways. People can be angry with themselves, or with others, and especially those who are close to them . It is important to remain detached and nonjudgmental when dealing with a person experiencing anger from grief.

3. **BARGAINING** — "I'll do anything for a few more years."; "I will give my life savings if..."

The third stage involves the hope that the individual can somehow postpone or delay death. Usually, the negotiation for an extended life is made with a higher power in exchange for a reformed lifestyle.

Psychologically, the individual is saying, "I understand I will die, but if I could just do something to buy more time..." People facing less serious trauma can bargain or seek to negotiate a compromise. For example "Can we still be friends?.." when facing a break-up. Bargaining rarely provides a sustainable solution, especially if it's a matter of life or death.

4. **DEPRESSION** — "I'm so sad, why bother with anything?"; "I'm going to die soon so what's the point?"; "I miss my loved one, why go on?"

During the fourth stage, the dying person begins to understand the certainty of death. Because of this, the individual may become silent, refuse visitors and spend much of the time crying and grieving. This process allows the dying person to disconnect from things of love and affection. It is not recommended to attempt to cheer up an individual who

is in this stage . It is an important time for grieving that must be processed. **Depression could be referred to as the dress rehearsal for the 'aftermath'**. It is a kind of acceptance with emotional attachment. It's natural to feel sadness, regret, fear, and uncertainty when going through this stage. Feeling those emotions shows that the person has begun to accept the situation.

5. **ACCEPTANCE** — "It's going to be okay."; "I can't fight it, I may as well prepare for it."

In this last stage, individuals begin to come to terms with their mortality, or that of a loved one, or other tragic event. This stage varies according to the person's situation. People dying can enter this stage a long time before the people they leave behind, who must pass through their own individual stages of dealing with the grief.

A GOD WHO KNEW PAIN

- A. GOD has not kept himself distant from human suffering. Jesus Christ came to show us God the Father (Luke 10:22). He took on human flesh and became Immanuel ("God with us" (**Matthew 1:23**)). He did not have to come down and suffer, but he did; he chose to share in our pain. He allowed himself to become vulnerable and experience loss and grief. He went to the cross for us, and in doing so, he revealed the immeasurable love of the Father.
- B. It was through the Son's suffering, that God's love for us was demonstrated **Romans 5:8** – "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
- C. Dean L. Harvey – The cross is a one time, visual representation of God's grief over sin."

JESUS – A SAVIOR WHO KNEW PAIN

- A. **Philippians 2:6-8** – [Jesus] "who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage. Instead He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave, taking on the likeness of men. And when He had come as a man in His external form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.
- B. When Jesus saw Mary and the others weeping for Lazarus who had died, Scripture tells us that Jesus was "deeply moved" and wept with them. (**John 11:32-35**).
- C. Jesus wept for Jerusalem, knowing the destruction that the people would soon face (Luke 19:41–44).
- D. Just before Jesus was betrayed by Judas, he went to the Garden of

Gethsemane and told his disciples, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death” (Mark 14:34). He prayed to the Father saying, “Abba, Father... everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36). “And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luke 22:44).

E. In intense suffering on the cross, “Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*’ (which means ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’)” Matthew 27:46

FIVE MYTHS ABOUT GRIEF

A. **MYTH:** “The Bible says that Christians should not grieve because our hope is in God.”

FACT: In 1 Thessalonians 4:13, Paul writes, “Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.” Paul does not say that believers will not grieve; rather that our grief does not need to be grief without hope. We can feel the pain of loss and also have hope in God at the same time.

B. **MYTH:** “If I avoid the pain long enough, it will go away. Time heals all wounds.”

FACT: We need to give ourselves time to heal, but just trying to wait it out will not bring recovery. Ignoring our feelings just prolongs the grief.

C. **MYTH:** “Grief is an orderly, predictable process. Everyone grieves the same way. I should be over it by a certain date.”

FACT: Though some feelings and stages may be anticipated, no two individuals’ journey through grief is experienced the same. Although we may not know what lies beyond the next bend in the road, we can trust in God that he will guide us every step along the path. Proverbs 3:5-6 - Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.”

D. **MYTH:** “I should try to get over my loss as soon as possible.”

FACT: Linda Feinberg authored a book entitled “I’m Grieving as Fast as I can.” Grieving is not a race against the clock. Often people never can (or should) “get over” significant losses, such as the death of a loved one. The pain may always be with you in some capacity. Although much of the sharp pain of sorrow goes away in time, you may always have a sense of the loss. The grief process is not about getting over it, but about learning how to live with the reality of the loss.

E. **MYTH:** “If I stop grieving, then it means I no longer care about the person I lost.”

FACT: Some people think that moving forward with their lives shows a lack of

love for the person they lost. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Coming out of the grief process does not mean that you forget your loved one. You still remember and love them, but your situation changes. You know fully well they would want you to get on with your life. You know that they would not want your feelings about their passing to hold you back. You know they would want the best for you.

IT IS IN THE THOROUGH ALLOWING OF THE GRIEVING PROCESS THAT TRUE HEALING OCCURS. Grieving is an act of love. It begins when someone or something you love is lost, and the stronger the love the greater the grief. The act of grieving honors you and the significance of your loss. We all know that the longer we live the more we will experience. In order to grieve in healthy ways, you need to understand the stages of the grief process itself.

A. SHOCK

1. This is the body/mind's way of saving you from the devastating pain of the loss . . . at least initially.
2. It is a blessing at best, but at worst can become a long-term numbness to feelings that resembles a sort of living death.
3. It will pass naturally as long as the other components of the grief process are honored.

B. DENIAL

1. This is your mind's attempt to protect you from the reality of the loss. You may lie to yourself and think about the person as if they were still alive.
2. A certain period of denial is normal but if prolonged, it can keep you stuck and prevent resolution.
3. There are many forms of denial, as varied as people are different from each other.

C. ANGER

1. When you lose someone you love, it is natural to be angry for a period of time.
 - a. You may be angry with the person for leaving you.
 - b. You may be angry with yourself for what you did not do to save them.
 - c. You may be angry with God for taking them away.
 - d. You may just be angry at the unfairness and injustice of life.
2. Healthy anger management techniques may be essential here. "Be angry, and do not sin . . ." **Ephesians 4:26**

D. GUILT

1. There seems to be a human tendency to blame yourself when something happens to a loved one. In loving someone, you automatically take some degree of responsibility for her or his welfare.

2. It is only natural to question yourself for a period of time after your loved ones die.
3. This is a normal part of the grief process, but it is extremely important that you move through it and don't get stuck in this stage.

E. PAIN AND SORROW

1. These feelings often exist throughout the entire grief process, and are the core feelings of grief. In the early stages, however, you are often distracted from your sorrow by denial, anger, guilt and the resulting confusion.
2. Fear can also be a tremendous barrier to the experience of sorrow, triggering all of the defense mechanisms.
5. To truly face and experience the pain and sorrow is necessary and healthy however, and it moves you forward in the grief process.
6. Working with love is the key for moving through this phase, because only love has the power to move us to the depths of our being where the greatest loss is registered.

F. RELEASE AND RESOLUTION

1. This stage of the grief process is accompanied by a sense of acceptance of the reality of the loss, a sense of "letting go."
2. There may also be a degree of forgiveness that occurs in this phase.
3. The denial, guilt and anger stages are over, and the pain and sorrow is not as intense as it was before.
4. Many people ask, "How long does it take?" The answer is different according to the severity of the loss and the health of the individual who is grieving.
5. Grieving moves in cycles, and it may seem as if we are through for a substantial period of time. A birthday, anniversary or another loss can bring back many of the same feelings that were there when our loved one died.
6. Any loss or low emotional period can bring back the feelings of loss, particularly if you have not reached resolution.
7. Many believe that giving through emotional release in the grieving that is as much a physical, non-verbal process as it is verbal and conscious.

G. RETURN TO THE WILLINGNESS TO LOVE

1. This is the final stage of the grieving process. Healing has occurred, and the grieving person is able to laugh again and to get involved in life.
2. Fear can slow you down or even stop you at this point, because new love means the risk of new loss.
3. By honoring and completing all aspects of the grief process, however, you will overcome your fear and move forward. This occurs through an appreciation for yourself and the life you are left to live.

4. Nurturing your relationship with God is the best thing to do to help you through the entire grief process, and particularly as you move back out “into the world” after a period of grieving.
 - a. Part of the return to love also includes remembering the love you felt for the one you lost. The love lives on and the anger, guilt, pain and sorrow fade away.
 - b. Revisit you love for God. This final stage of the grief process is ultimately a spiritual one
 1. Some grow distant from Him during grieving while others grow closer to Him. Know that God did not abandon you during your grieving process.
 2. It is a fact that all of us will die unless Jesus comes again while we are still alive. You need to live, laugh and love with this reality in mind.
 3. That’s where spirituality and faith come in. True security cannot be found in another person or in any external circumstances. You have to turn to God through Jesus Christ to ultimately find peace and security in a life that is only temporary.

CONCLUSION:

- A. In all of this, don’t forget the children.
- B. In our study this hour we have observed:
 1. We serve a God that has known pain.
 2. Our Jesus is a Savior that has known pain.
 3. Five myths about grief have been identified and dispelled.
 4. It is in the thorough allowing of the grieving process that true healing Occurs
 7. Seven stages in the grieving process.
- C. There is heavenly help for earthly sorrow from the One who said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” **Hebrews 13:5**
- D. **God’s Plan for Man’s Salvation**

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP A PERSON WHO IS GRIEVING?

A. **UNDERSTAND THE GRIEVING PROCESS.** A lot of materials are available to help you do that. The better your understanding of grief and how it is healed, the better equipped you'll be to help a bereaved friend or family member:

- **There is no right or wrong way to grieve.** Grief does not always unfold in orderly, predictable stages. It can be an emotional rollercoaster, with unpredictable highs, lows, and setbacks. Everyone grieves differently, so avoid telling the bereaved what they “should” be feeling or doing.
- **Grief may involve extreme emotions and behaviors.** Feelings of guilt, anger, despair, and fear are common. A grieving person may yell to the heavens, obsess about the death, lash out at loved ones, or cry for hours on end. The bereaved need reassurance that what they're feeling is normal. Don't judge them or take their grief reactions personally.
- **There is no set timetable for grieving.** For many people, recovery after bereavement takes 18 to 24 months, but for others, the grieving process may be longer or shorter. Don't pressure the bereaved to move on or make them feel like they've been grieving too long. This can actually slow their healing.

B. LISTEN WITH COMPASSION.

1. Almost everyone worries about what to say to people who are grieving. But knowing how to listen is much more important. Oftentimes, well-meaning people avoid talking about the death or mentioning the deceased person. However, the bereaved need to feel that their loss is acknowledged, it's not too terrible to talk about, and their loved one won't be forgotten.
2. While you should never try to force someone to open up, it's important to let the bereaved know they have permission to talk about the loss. Try simply asking, “Do you feel like talking?”
3. **Accept and acknowledge all feelings.** Let the grieving person know that it's okay to cry in front of you, to get angry, or to break down. Don't try to reason with them over how they should or shouldn't feel. The bereaved should feel free to express their feelings, without fear of judgment, argument, or criticism.
8. **Be willing to sit in silence.** Don't press if the grieving person doesn't feel like talking. You can offer comfort and support with your silent presence. If you can't think of something to say, just offer eye contact, a squeeze of the hand, or a reassuring hug **Job 2:13**: - “So they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great.”
4. **Let the bereaved talk about how their loved one died.** People who are grieving may need to tell the story over and over again, sometimes in

minute detail. Be patient. Repeating the story is a way of processing and accepting the death. With each retelling, the pain lessens.

5. **Offer comfort and reassurance without minimizing the loss.** Tell the bereaved that what they're feeling is okay. If you've gone through a similar loss, share your own experience if you think it would help. However, don't give unsolicited advice, claim to "know" what the person is feeling, or compare your grief to theirs.
6. **What to say to someone who has lost a loved one.** It is common to feel awkward when trying to comfort someone who is grieving. Many people do not know what to say or do. The following are suggestions to use as a guide.
 - Acknowledge the situation. Example: "**I heard that your _____ died.**" Use the word "died." That will show that you are more open to talk about how the person really feels.
 - Express your concern. Example: "**I'm sorry to hear that this happened to you.**"
 - Be genuine in your communication and don't hide your feelings. Example: "**I'm not sure what to say, but I want you to know I care.**"
 - Offer your support. Example: "**Tell me what I can do for you.**"
 - Ask how he or she feels, and don't assume you know how the bereaved person feels on any given day.
7. The American Hospice Foundation suggests these **COMMENTS TO AVOID** when comforting the bereaved
 - "**I know how you feel.**" One can never know how another may feel. You could, instead, ask your friend to tell you how he or she feels.
 - "**It's part of God's plan.**" This phrase can make people angry and they often respond with, "What plan? Nobody told me about any plan."
 - "**Look at what you have to be thankful for.**" They know they have things to be thankful for, but right now they are not important.
 - "**He's in a better place now.**" The bereaved may or may not believe this. Keep your beliefs to yourself unless asked.
 - "**This is behind you now; it's time to get on with your life.**" Sometimes the bereaved are resistant to getting on with because they feel this means "forgetting" their loved one. In addition, moving on is easier said than done. Grief has a mind of its own and works at its own pace.
 - **Statements that begin with "You should" or "You will."** These statements are too directive. Instead you could begin your comments with: "Have you thought about. . ." or "You might . . ."

C. **PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.**

1. It is difficult for many grieving people to ask for help. They might feel guilty about receiving so much attention, fear being a burden, or be too

depressed to reach out. You can make it easier for them by making specific suggestions – such as, “I’m going to the market this afternoon. What can I bring you from there?” or “I’ve made beef stew for dinner. When can I come by and bring you some?”

2. Some very practical & helpful suggestions. Be the one to take the initiative.
 - Shop for groceries or run errands. They will eventually need thank you cards and stamps, etc.
 - Drop off a casserole or other type of food
 - Help with funeral arrangements
 - Stay in their home to take phone calls and receive guests
 - Help with insurance forms or bills
 - Take care of housework, such as cleaning or laundry
 - Watch their children or pick them up from school
 - Drive them wherever they need to go
 - Look after their pets
 - Sit with them at church.
 - Accompany them on a walk
 - Take them to lunch or a movie
 - Share an enjoyable activity (game, puzzle, art project)
 - House sitting during the memorial service
 - Try to have a morning memorial service so as to have more daylight time afterwards to return home.