



GRIEVING

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If you have recently lost a spouse, a child, a sibling, a parent or even a very close friend, you have entered one of the strangest times of your life. You are going to be on an emotional roller coaster, over which you will have little control. You may be laughing one minute and crying the next or having a good day one day and in the dumps the next. You may see something or smell something and just start crying. Pastor Bob Aligood tells of a time after the death of his son when he was in a store and saw a display of potato chips, which were his son's favorite. He burst into tears and stood there in the store and cried. As he says, "Grief has a mind of its own."

On a Friday afternoon in April of 1999 my wife of 42 years died. She had been a physical invalid for almost two years, we had seen over a dozen doctors and had every test run they could think of, yet her condition remained undiagnosed. Mentally she was sharp until the day she died. No one expected her to die, not the doctors and certainly not me. That afternoon she just died. I said all of that to say, although I don't know exactly how you feel, I do understand what you are going through. I hurt with you.

Please don't try to bypass the grieving process. 1 Thessalonians 4:13 states, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." That verse does not teach that

Christians are not supposed to grieve; it says Christians do not grieve like those who have no hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

I tried to bypass the grieving process and it didn't work. I thought I had to be strong and pretend everything was fine when it wasn't. I smiled and laughed and was just going to go on with my life like nothing happened. Four months later I unexpectedly went into depression, which was horrible. I am not talking about having a down day. I am talking about an elephant sitting on your chest; not being able to shut your mind off at night; not wanting to be alone but not wanting to be around anyone; not wanting to be at home but not wanting to go anyplace. I even had some panic attacks which is an experience in itself. I was reading my Bible and praying every day and I had no idea what in the world was going on. My friend Lynn Raburn was wise enough to listen to me, recognize the problem and recommend I go to my doctor. The doctor prescribed an anti-depressant and I was soon sleeping again. However, it took some time to recuperate. I have never been the same emotionally as I was before.

We must understand that grieving is not for the loved one we have lost, grieving is for ourselves. I have heard people say, "It's OK. I know they are with the Lord." No, it isn't OK. They may be with the Lord but we aren't. We are left here to face life without them. We grieve because something has been "stolen" from us and our life has suddenly been turned upside down and will never be the same again. It has been said that losing a loved one in death is not like a wound that will heal, it is like an amputation that we must learn to live with. The grieving process is a time in which we learn to go on with our lives without the loved one.

Although you may be running on adrenalin at the time, the funeral or memorial service is an important part of the process.

Even though you may not remember all about the funeral, it brings reality to death and is a chance for closure and a time to say a final good-bye. The people, the hugs, the message, the flowers and the cards are a source of strength and will mean more to you in the weeks to come.

How long should the grieving process last? The truth is, no one knows. Every situation is different and everyone goes through it differently. Our age and the closeness of the one who has died will have a lot to do with it. You will probably never get completely over it. So, don't pay any attention when someone says to you, "Snap out of it" or "Isn't it time you got on with your life?" People who haven't been through it just don't understand. Often people mean well but really don't know what to say.

As strange as it may seem, you may get mad at the person who died for leaving you or for leaving something unfinished or who knows what. It is OK to get mad at them. You may get mad at God because He didn't do as you asked. It is OK to tell God you are mad at Him. He can take it because He understands.

In his booklet "What Do You Say to A Friend Who is Hurting?" Dr. George Garner relates a conversation between himself and his pastor, Dr. Harris Crittenden, soon after the death of his daughter. "Preacher, I am hurting right now and I just don't understand why this all happened.' To which he [Dr. Crittenden] wisely replied, 'George, I don't know why either. But you know, one of the most beautiful examples of Christ's ministry was as He hung on the cross, as described in Matthew 27:46. Betrayed and wronged, He too cried out to His God, "Why?" George, I think that was Christ's way of telling us that it is OK to question God and ask, "Why?'" And then my pastor continued, 'George, do you remember the answer that He got?' I stopped and thought, and then I remembered that Christ received no answer. The Scripture simply declares that there was darkness on earth

and silence in heaven. Finally, Pastor Crittenden observed, 'I think God wanted us to know that sometimes in this life there will be no answers to our questions. And that is where faith comes in.'"

If you feel like crying, then cry. If you feel like screaming, then scream, although I would do that in private. If you feel like kicking the wall, then kick it. You need a release for your emotions. When you feel like being alone, tell everyone to leave.

One thing you really need to do is talk. You need to talk about your loved one and you need to tell someone exactly how you feel. You need to find someone who will keep their mouth shut and just listen and that is sometime hard to find. That person also needs to be someone you can trust because you may need to share some feelings that are no one's business but your own.

Please don't make any major decisions in your life for at least a year, or maybe more. Your emotions will not allow you to make informed decisions for some time to come. If there are some major decisions you absolutely must make, seek wise council before you do.

One last thing. Stay close to the Lord during this process. You need to stay close to Him in prayer, His Word and the fellowship of other Christians. He is the God of all comfort and will give you peace as you work your way through this emotional quagmire.

Remember, you will live through it

but you must go through it.