

THE MANY FACES OF GRIEF Finding the Healthy Response

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Grief Defined

Grief is sorrow that comes in reaction to loss. The intensity of the sorrow depends upon the individuals felt or perceived loss. Loss of people, places, and things can produce intense sorrow. Grief is a normal response to loss.

Causes of Grief

Death of a loved one including death of a pet, loss due to illness or disability of self or a loved one, loss of significance, loss of security, relocation, new lifestyle, separation and divorce, Loss of a job, loss of a home, natural disaster, destruction of property, property theft, etc.

Faces of Grief

Grief has at least 5 stages as described by Elizabeth Kubler Ross.

They are as follows:

Shock & Denial: Often numbness ensues shortly after the initial understanding of the loss. Then there may be a refusal to acknowledge the reality of the loss. This serves as a protection from experiencing the intensity of the loss. **(2 days to 2 weeks)**

Characterized by: *confusion, numbness, idleness, sleeplessness, fearfulness, crying, trapped feeling, denial, disbelief*

Anger: Once acknowledging the loss and having an emotional/mental glimpse of the finality of the loss and the permanent life change that is evident, the hurt/pain turns into anger. The thought is "why me" or "this is not fair." **(1 or more years)**

Characterized by: *resentment, helplessness, anguish, acting out behaviors, etc.*

Bargaining: The reality of the loss is setting in; however, irrational thinking may begin to consume the grieving individual. Thoughts such as, "if I keep everything in place, I'll still have my loved one with me" **(1 or more years)**

Characterized by: *guilt, remorse, daydreaming, fantasy, unrealistic thinking, hoping, expecting, fear of and avoiding the reality of the loss, ruminating how things could have been "if," etc.*

Depression: As the individual realizes that the loss is certain, and bargaining is totally impossible, depression may appear. This is a temporary state of hopelessness due to the loss and the life changes that must incur. **(1 or more years)**

Characterized by: *loneliness, hopelessness, lack of energy and concentration, disturbed sleep pattern, appetite disturbance, isolation attempts, etc.*

Acceptance: When the individual begins to accept the reality of the loss, accepts that they can and must begin the process of change, i.e., going on with life without the lost person, people, places, things, etc., depression decreases, and hope energizes the person giving them the ability to move on with life as it is. **(The grief process completed)**

Characterized by: *new hope, leaving past behind, making future plans, new patterns, acceptance and appreciation of others, greater compassion and empathy, humility, greater dependence on the Lord*

The Process of Grief

Processing through grief does not occur as stair steps. The stages described do not happen in any particular order and may be revisited through out the process. Because grief is a process, many people find ways to avoid it because of the seemingly unending emotional pain and sense of instability. Normally, the grief process takes about 18 months to 2-3 years. When individuals do not understand the grieving process and/or do not allow themselves to grieve, unhealthy grief ensues. Process is unique to each person though similar in reactions.

Unhealthy Grief

Unresolved sorrow hinders the natural processing of grief. *Defense mechanisms* are often utilized to lessen or avoid the inner pain. Defense mechanisms are psychological maneuvers of coping. They keep the individual from facing the loss or dealing with their pain. Delayed grieving produces deeper pain and potentially increased negative behavior and/or reactions.

Unhealthy chronic grief is grief that has no closure or lack of acceptance of loss. June Hunt, president of Hope for the Heart describes unhealthy chronic grief.

Inhibited Grief is denial of grief

"This is not really happening to me"

Isolated Grief is selective remembering.

"I don't ever want to think about that car accident again"

Insulated Grief is reduced emotional involvement.

"I'm not going to open myself up to hurt again."

Intellectualized Grief is rationally explaining events.

"It could have been worse."

Inverted Grief is returning to immature ways of responding.

"I can't believe I had a temper tantrum like I had when I was two years old."

Immortalized Grief is inability to let go of loss.

"He will always be a part of everything in my life."

I will add one more to this list:

Spiritualized Grief is repressing the pain of the loss because of the belief that God knows all things.

"Even though it is sad, this is a good thing that has happened because God wants to use it to teach me or someone else something." Or "This is going to bring glory to God so I can handle it."

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REBUILDING THE SOUL

Healthy Grief Is

A process... not an event. It is a process which requires the grieving person to walk through in order to reach a place of emotional healing. Give yourself permission to walk through the grieving process with a determination to trust God to bring you through to a place of healing, new hope and a newer you, more mature in the Lord and empowered to comfort another grieving soul. Don't expect that you will never think of your loved one and/or losses. The day will come when you can more frequently *remember* without pain. However, remembering can, at times, produce an unexpected emotional response because we rarely ever forget the life we once had before the loss occurred.

Grief Work Activity

- 1) List your losses (Psalm 142 pour out your complaint/be specific)
- 2) Weep- it is a healing tool (Psalm 30:5)
- 3) Take the list and give it to God- Cast your cares upon Him (1 Peter 5:7). Indicate to Him that you intend to proceed forward trusting Him to walk you through.
- 4) Ask God to heal you. (Jeremiah 17:14, psalm 62:5, Psalm 147:3)
- 5) Give thanks to God who is faithful and will not leave you (I Thessalonians 5:18, Hebrews 13:5)
- 6) Choose to live one day at a time (Matthew 6:34)
- 7) Acknowledge God's good plans for your future regardless as to how you feel. (Jeremiah 29:11)
- 8) Throughout the grief process when a memory comes that elicits sadness or pain, give it to God.
"Don't dwell...Tell" (I Corinthians 1:3)

Scriptural Comfort

John 16:20 "You will grieve but your grief will turn to joy"

Isaiah 40:28-31

"Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

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Lamentations: 3:19-29

" I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. Let him sit alone in silence, for the LORD has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust – there may yet be hope."

Habakkuk:3:17-20

"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights. For the director of music. On my stringed instruments."

Matthew 5:4 *"Blessed are they who mourn for they will be comforted"*

2 Corinthians 12: 9, 10

"But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

Philippians 3:13, 4:11

Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

A Declaration

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me,
for in you my soul takes refuge.
I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings
until the disaster has passed. (Psalm 57:1)

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Grief Work Tips

"When you know better, you do better." Maya Angelou

- Experience and accept all feelings; it is an important part of the healing process
- Acknowledging grief promotes the healing process-then time & support facilitate the process
- Find a compassionate, and if necessary, confidential, listening ear and talk about the loss.
- Be mindful that grief is a process and do not allow shame or guilt; it is a natural normal response to loss.
- Choose to put your trust in God-meaning, deepen your relationship with Him
- Don't dwell on depressing thoughts...renew your mind
- Avoid isolation; find an accountability person who will nudge you if you begin to isolate
- Let your tears flow; they are a part of God's healing balm
- Knowledge and understanding the grieving process enables you toward healthy grief
- Down times happen but should not last; seek pastoral or professional assistance.
- Watch yourself: refrain from use of alcohol or drugs to self medicate
- Decrease over functioning in the church/ ministry, work, etc., to avoid feelings
- Use journal to document the healing process
- Identify unfinished business regarding your pain and try to come to a resolution
- Children need to see adults grieve in a healthy way, but be aware that children are often disturbed by their parent's or guardians emotional expressions. Be honest with them, give them attention, provide children structure, hope, and assurance of safety.
- Allow children and others to express their grief in their own words...use probing comments or questions to help them fully express themselves- "Tell me more...", "How did that feel?", "What did you do," etc.

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