



Grief Journeys

If there is no undeserved suffering, there can be no redemptive suffering, no sacrificial substitutionary suffering. And if there is no substitutionary suffering, there can be no grace. p. 138 (Job: The Wisdom of the Cross by Christopher Ash)

Is Grief Normal?

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.” — Romans 12:15 (NKJV)

“Be still, my soul, the Lord is on thy side...”

Be still, my soul, though dearest friends depart
And all is darkened in the vale of tears;
Then shalt thou better know His love, His heart,
Who comes to soothe thy sorrows and thy fears.
Be still, my soul; thy Jesus can repay
From His own fulness all He takes away.

by Catharina von Schlegel, 1697-?
Translated by Jane Borthwick, 1813-1897

Spiral Staircase

Written nearly one year after my disabling concussion. Simply naming that we’re grieving can free us to experience this challenging form of healing.

_____ has to deal with Grief.

Grief experiences are much harder than you ever expected.

Grief is how we _____.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross in her book “_____” defined five stages of grief, which apply to any loss: Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

Grief is never truly done.

Grieving is not _____, but it is _____.

Grieving, they say, is a process of...

Denial, anger, bargaining
depression, and acceptance.

It is not so clean as that.
The steps are all there,
if not so neatly lined up.

They are arranged in an inwardly
descending spiral staircase to the
soul.

The first four steps are only
for the purpose of accepting and
integrating the need to decent the
rest of the staircase.

It is a journey well worth taking,
when necessity requires it,
for with each step into the depths,
one is added into the heights,
where, without the anchor of the
depths, we do not last.

To take the journey, I must first
grieve that I am grieving. Amen.

—Patrick A. Jones

One woman said, while talking about the loss of a close friend, “I really couldn’t understand that while I was looking at my friend in the casket, others were standing behind me laughing and telling funny jokes.”

I responded, “Yes, and then afterwards they go back to the church and eat potato salad.”

Everyone handles grief differently.

The Journey of Grief

“You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word.”

—Psalm 119:114 (NKJV)

How long should the journey of Grief last?



Grief never ends, but it changes. It's a passage, not a place to stay. Grief is not a sign of weakness, nor a lack of faith. It is the price of love.

Setting Goals on the Journey.

“If it wasn't for the struggle, you wouldn't have the strength. God is always building you even when it seems like He's breaking you.”



*Those who think there is a **Time Limit** to Grieve have **never** lost a piece of their **Heart**...*

The Journey and Relationships



The death of a loved one affects your friendships:

1. You are completely surrounded by compassionate people even though you _____.
2. Within a very short time, you will feel _____, but you really aren't.
3. You will want to _____ about this a lot, and a _____ will listen.
4. You may feel like only your _____ friends are the ones who stay by you.
5. You will want to _____ yourself, but will still want people to be _____.
 - Everyone goes home
 - The cards and calls cease
 - The meals stop coming
6. You will not understand why your friends don't _____ your grief.

**"He heals the
brokenhearted
And binds up
their wounds. "**

—Psalm 147:3

Diary Of A Grieving Mom

My child is gone to Heaven above. Unbearable pain but surrounded by love. People visit from far and near. My home is filled with friends so dear. A year goes by and my heart still cries. My "true friends" are still by my side. It's now two years of hurt and pain. I try to smile, I only cry in the rain. See, others are tired and fear this feeling, so "true friends" try to begin my healing. It's now three years of this nightmare. I am angry and sad because this isn't fair!! Where are my "true friends"? Where can they be? I guess they can't handle the "broken" me. They seem to have all run away. I dread waking up every day. They think I should be "over it". I'm sick with grief, yet they all split. I try my best to look so strong, from fear of this...being alone!!!! This pain will never go away, so why do they all think I'm okay?



Coping with the Pain

The Great Physician sometimes allows us to experience excruciating pain, but only that which is necessary for our _____ and _____.

“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose” Romans 8:28

Many people cannot:

- _____ the same places (even church) after the death of a loved one
- _____ to the same music
- _____ in the same house
- _____ for the future
- _____ the same friendships (even marriages)

Sadly....oh, so sadly, I can now personally relate to the horrors of heroin. My oldest grandson, Tyler, has become another statistic....at 23 years old....just a number on a board in some meeting room of the officials. At first, of course, I was devastated, sad, mortified and at a loss. After hours of tears and a head full of memories crowding my brain, I'm ANGRY!! This demon from the pit of HELL itself HAS to be stopped! I don't even pretend to have the answers to eradicating this plague. The only thing I know to do is scream out in my pain and loss and plead with all you prayer warriors to pray against this evil that is running rampant. Thank you.

-- Grieving Woman

Sherri Crandell: I read once that God will pour tears of grief back on your life as a refreshing rain of joy, peace and love...praying you get drenched!

Biblical Examples of Loss

- ⇒ David's Son (II Samuel 12:21-23)
- ⇒ David's Son Absalom (II Samuel 18:33)
- ⇒ Elijah and the Widow's Son (I Kings 17:17-24)
- ⇒ Lazarus (John 11, 12)
- ⇒ Tabitha (Acts 9)
- ⇒ Jesus (John 19, et al)



The Fear of Death

For the Christian, there is assurance of Eternal Life. But even a Christian can fear the very thing that leads to it.

- Separation
- Emptiness/loneliness
- Anxiety
- Permanent Change
- Viewing Death as the Greatest Evil

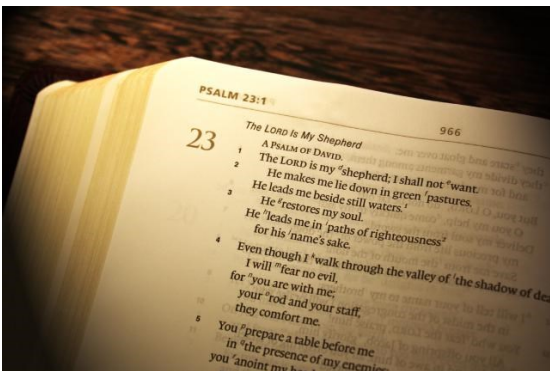
On Sunday it'll be three years since Gwen died and nearly 17 months since Mod was taken away, and it's still real difficult. I continue trying to follow and trust God because He has been faithful in the past, even though I do not understand why He has allowed these things to happen.

—Geoff

***Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.
"The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!"***

— Lamentations 3:22-24

Coping with the Loss of a Loved One



There is a more complete picture of who you are now that your loved one is gone.

- Compassion has a deeper meaning.
- You reminisce more.
- You reflect more and evaluate your own life.
- Prayer might be more emotional and meaningful.

Why no one grieves perfectly: Because everyone grieves differently and no one is perfect.

What does “Differently” mean?

How We Can Focus Through Grief

Journaling

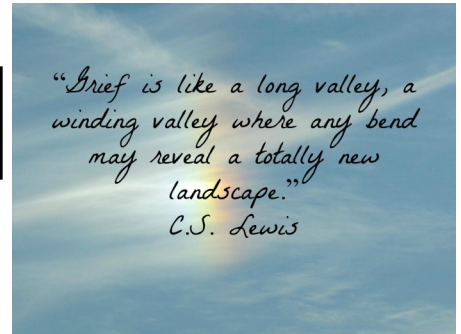
Praying the Scriptures

Involvement in the Church

Ministering to Others

In the months after my daughter's death in 2009, I found myself struggling with the notion that others around me didn't appear to be grieving the "right way." Initially, I was frustrated that for the most part, my husband and other children didn't openly cry or talk about her death the same way I did.

Preparing for Death

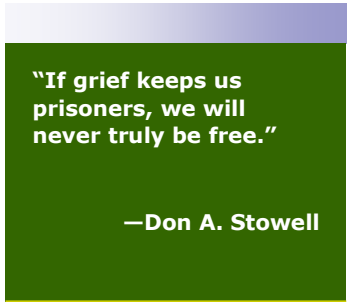


FOR YOU:

- The “ _____ ”
- _____
- _____
- Cultivating an _____ Perspective

FOR YOUR LOVED ONES:

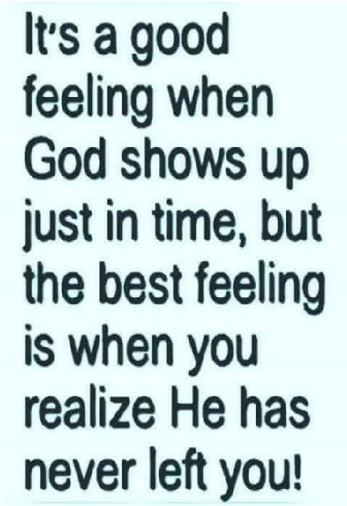
- Prayers
- Promises
- Provisions
- Reminisces
- Laughs



A Good Word

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."

Isaiah 43:2

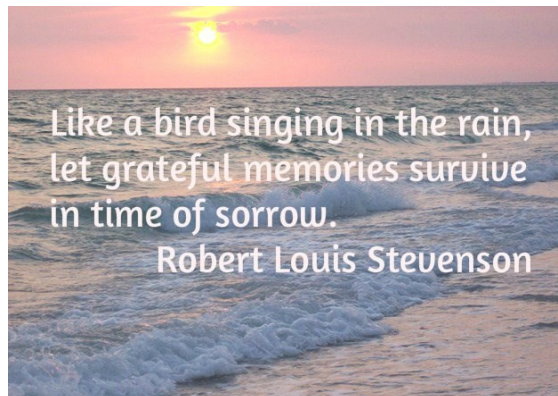


To Say or Not to Say



What are Some Good Things to Say to the Grieving?

1. May I pray with you?
2. What can I do for you?
3. I am so sorry for your loss.
4. I wish I had the right words, just know I care.
5. I don't know how you feel, but I am here to help in anyway I can.
6. My favorite memory of your loved one is...
7. Say nothing, just be with the person



Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.

II Corinthians 1:3-5

What are Some Wrong Things to Say to the Grieving?

1. "You have an angel in Heaven."
2. "God doesn't really give you more than you can handle."
3. "It was his/her time."
4. "You can always have more children"
5. "Tomorrow is a new day."
6. At least she lived a long life, many people die young.
7. He is in a better place.
8. She brought this on herself.
9. There is a reason for everything.
10. She was such a good person God wanted her to be with Him.
11. You'll get over it.

Grief Blogs...

JULY 16, 2013 ·

Grief: When I Don't Want to Hear Words

I've called them well-meaning people, but others have been repelled by their words. When death comes to a family, it can be the worst time ever experienced. The family and friends come together to memorialize the love one who has died. I've seen it nearly one-thousand times as I've performed funerals. Then the comments come. To the mother who has lost a child to cancer, "You can have another child" or "God wanted another angel." To the husband who has lost his wife in a car accident, "You can get married again" or "It was God's will." Well-meaning people say these things. But they are hurtful words bringing more grief and emptiness to an already hurting soul. Sometimes, it's better just to remain silent, because not everyone wants to hear words.

JULY 16, 2013 ·

The Emptiness from Grief

Recently, a friend of mine died. He was a typically joyful person who would do anything to help people. He expected you to be responsible, but he'd help you through tough situations. He was an honorable business man who I would visit often and work with him at other times. I saw him two weeks before he died. Then no more. Following his funeral, I went to his old place of business and it was clearly not the same. The rest of the employees were there, but not my friend. I visited for awhile, but the place seemed so empty because my friend was not there. Another chapter had closed and I had so enjoyed that chapter. That emptiness eventually is filled with memories of our loved ones. Thoughts of what was now bring us joy, even in the midst of our grief. The emptiness will never be filled by replacing our loved one with something or someone else. It will only be filled with our loved one... the pictures we see, the stories they told, and the love they shared.

JULY 17, 2013 ·

How Long Do I Grieve?

The separation of death brings out the emotions we thought we'd never have. The Bible says, "Mourn with those who mourn." (Romans 12:15) Mourning is necessary, I think, because it instills in us compassion. How long do we grieve? Forever. By that I mean, we recognize the loss of our loved ones each day. But we don't let death consume us because we'd live the rest of our days in despair. Others will say, "You'll get over this," as if the death of the loved one will become either a distant memory or completely eliminated from our minds. The first time we "get over it" is the first time we lose compassion. Grieving takes on many forms. Crying on birthdays or anniversaries or at Christmas. Laughing at the memories of practical jokes or mishaps. Pondering wisdom of words once spoken. Yes, grieving can be helpful in giving us strength to face the days, as long as we don't allow it to become crippling.

Grief Blogs...

NOVEMBER 7, 2014 ·

Memories

Although I know better, my mother was supposed to live forever. After all, she's mom. She didn't, of course. She died this past July after several years of heart problems. It was somewhat unexpected and so very difficult for my sister who took care of her. It hasn't hit me hard yet (it's November...4 months later), but I'm sure it will. Christmas is coming and our family came to visit every 2 years. Thanksgiving on the opposite years. We shared a birthday. I was her present on her 27th birthday, so of course, after I grew into adulthood, I'd call her. She never called me; that was my job. I'd send her flowers too. I made a choice a long time ago. No woman would ever get flowers from me except my grandmother, my mother, and my wife. Not even my church secretary on "Secretary's Day" would get flowers. After my mother's mother died, I called mom a little more often. For awhile, it was every week. Then I called every two weeks after that. For the next 15 years. Even now, when something happens on my end of the earth, I think about picking up the phone to tell mom. Sometimes, I even think of calling to ask how Larry is doing. Larry was my step-father who passed away two-and-a-half years before mom. It's only a split second, and then I come to my reality that I can't do that. So what I have for the rest of my days are the memories. Most who read this get it. You've gone through the same thing with a loved one, whether a family member or a friend. It's tough sometimes. But it's not impossible. God is my refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble. So there you go.

NOVEMBER 8, 2014 ·

Grief and Humor

No, it isn't funny when someone we love dies.

There is something, however, that keeps our memories going; and that is telling good stories. You see, our loved ones were/are real people. They experienced life for whatever number of years here and some of the time, they laughed. Or they made us laugh.

I tell the story about my grandmother who was told that Vaseline would condition her hair. It took her three days to get it OUT of her hair. More like conditioning the muscles in her hands.

My mother never spanked us when we were growing up. But she did give what I call "running swats."

An older gentleman in our church used to own a large piece of property. Being very wealthy, he would tell how he grew up the Depression and worked his way out of poverty. He would tell me the time he "bought the farm." I waited for a few years before telling him that "bought the farm" is slang for "died." He has since passed away.

Humor, tastefully spoken about our loved ones, helps us to heal. We see them as people who meant everything to us, rather than distant.

Laugh a little with the memories you have. There's no shame in that.

JANUARY 11, 2015 ·

Special Days

When I'm preaching a funeral, it is my intention/desire to bring good memories and peaceful thoughts to those who are listening. So, depending on who the deceased is, I can say to the *children*: "Mother's Day is still the second Sunday in May, and it's ok to celebrate it." Or, "The third Sunday in June is always Father's Day, a great time to remember your father." Other special days help us, whether we grieve or rejoice. In 4 1/2 months, I will have another birthday. It just so happens, it is the same day as my mother's. You see, I was born on her birthday when she was 27 years old. This past July, she passed from this life. She was 82. For 55 years, we shared that one thing as a bond. When this May returns, I will be one year older than last. I will also have some poignant moments as I reflect on mom. Thanksgiving and Christmas, 2014 were ok because there was so much activity. But they were also very different than they had ever been. No longer will I be traveling with my wife and granddaughter to Michigan as we have for the last 30+ years for one of those holidays. A new era has begun, and special days have changed. But I will still remember. That won't change.

Grief Blogs...

MAY 25, 2015 ·

What Can We Say?

Have you ever been put in the position to have to write a Eulogy for a funeral? Of course, ministers do it all the time. But what about those who are not clergy? Most often, one who writes the Eulogy is a family member of the deceased, which seems to make it that more emotionally difficult. I wrote one for my grandmother, my step-father, my mother, and my niece. But that's a bit unfair to what I'm asking...I'm a minister, so I've had practice. But still, these were my family members.

I'd recommend these things:

1. Let your compassion help you decide what to write/say.
2. Don't allow that emotion to make up things that really don't exist.
3. Tell a story based on the legacy the loved one has left behind.
4. Don't forget God.

Not everyone can do what you do. For those who want to bring the best out of a life well lived, you will be helping others to understand the value of life.

JUNE 9, 2015 ·

Everyone Does It Differently

I've conducted nearly 1000 funerals since late 1999. In all of them, I watch people who attend. Some do exactly what everyone expects...they cry. But not everyone does. Some come in and are in great moods. They laugh and carry on conversations that have nothing to do with why they are there. They play with the little children in the lounge. Some look as if they are obligated to be at the service. Others seem lost.

Tears can be misinterpreted. One young woman told me she had a very difficult relationship with her deceased mother. Yet, she cried during the entire service. Did she miss her? Yes, possibly. But she cried because she mourned that she never had the relationship a mother and daughter should have had. Another time, a man mourned the loss of his father as his only child. Now dad was gone and there was no one left in his family. It's not always directly about the death of the loved one. But that death was a catalyst for other feelings.

Others never shed a tear for days, weeks, months, or even years. Then an event will overtake the heart and the mourning is strong.

Is it wrong to not cry? Is it wrong to laugh? I say no to both questions. Everyone mourns differently. But for sure, we can mourn. It shows our compassion.

JUNE 17, 2015 ·

How Long?

"You'll get over it." Those words stung partly because they came from a friend and mostly because it sounded so uncaring. It's like saying, "Just think...in time, you'll forget this person ever had a part of your life and you can move on with yours."

I'm fairly sure that the friend meant no harm and the words were supposed to ease the pain of loss. But it doesn't work like that. We aren't supposed to *get over it*. You not only lose a family member or a friend, you lose a part of yourself. Your soul cries out to God. Yet, at a given time, you're supposed to just stop it. Grief happens for a long time. To some, it is a huge burden. To others, it's a matter of remembering and treasuring. I've said many times that the first time we "get over it" is the first time we lose our compassion. Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for **His compassions** never fail. (Lamentations 3:22). That's where we find comfort in grief.

Grief Blogs...

JULY 3, 2015 ·

What Will They Say?

Everyone has a story to tell. For the elderly, the pages are filled with history that the young can marvel at. The chapters equal the number of years they lived. There are still people alive who can remember the Great Depression, WWII, or some other event. Many also married, had children, built homes, worked tirelessly inside and outside the home. Moms baked pies and planted gardens. Dads worked on the car in the driveway and built bookcases in the workshop. They got involved with their community, made friends with their neighbors, and went to baseball games. Perhaps they laid a foundation of faith in God.

The best legacy one can leave behind in this story is character. What kind of person are you? Are you kind? Compassionate? Giving? Spiritual? Genuine? What you are is what people will talk about at your casket. Through the tears, they will remember. Sometimes there will be laughter for the good times. And many times, there will be respect for the person you were. How will your book end?

May I encourage you to live a life worthy of God's calling? An old song says, "May all who come behind us find us faithful. May the fire of our devotion light their way. May the footprints that we leave lead them to believe; And the lives we live inspire them to obey."

What will they say about you?

EBRUARY 22, 2016 ·

How Long Has It Been?

From December 30, 2015 until January 9, 2016, I conducted 9 funeral services. The age range was 6 months to 86 years. The grief for all those families was deep. The joy of remembering lives was also deep. That is the emotional battle that continues to rage on. I've mentioned in other writings that there is no time to ever get over the loss of those we love. Nor should there be.

It has been over 30 years ago that a young lady in our community lost her daughter when a school bus hit and killed her. Today, she still grieves and talks about that daughter who never grew to be a teenager. She never had a boyfriend. She only had 9 Christmases with her family. But this was over 30 years ago. Isn't it time to move on?

The truth is, we do move on. But we move on and take the memories and even the grief with us. The grief isn't supposed to cripple us, but make us keenly aware of our love and compassion. It tells us to value the life God has given us; to know that people come into our lives for a reason, and also for just a brief moment.

How long has it been since you lost someone? It may have only been a matter of days or weeks, or it may have been years. The time doesn't really matter. We will continue to work or play, read or sing, socialize or worship God. But the memories (treasures) of our loved ones will go with us. We will remember the day of their deaths and we will shed tears again. Perhaps for years and years and years.

But know this: God is our comfort in times like these.

"With my voice I cry out to the LORD; with my voice I plead for mercy to the LORD. I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before him" (Psalm 142:1-2).

Grief Blogs...

SEPTEMBER 6, 2016 ·

Thanks for the Memories

It wasn't too many years ago when I opened up a box and found some biographical sketches my great aunt had written. There were probably 15 or so stories of my relatives, yet none of them were exhaustive. I wanted more. Then, my great aunt's very, very brief autobiography appeared. It was interesting and quite unusual. These prompted me to write a reflection of my own grandmother and give it to her only daughter, my mother, on what would have been her 100th birthday. So I had gone back into the recesses of my mind and wrote about "things" and funny "stuff" and personality.

There was my grandmother's generosity, her wonderful fudge, and chocolate chip cookies. There was the time she left the lid on a "Fry Daddy" and melted it with the potatoes; and when she was told that Petroleum Jelly was a good conditioner for her hair (it wasn't, as she said 3 days later). Then, there was her faith in God which was genuine.

My grandmother has been gone for nearly 17 years, so these memories stay with me. They are not poor substitutes for the real grandmother, but this is what I have along with many, many pictures.

Really, we never forget, nor should we. But the pictures, recipes, music, trips taken, hand-made clothes, smiles, words of wisdom, faith, kindness to the unfortunate, and generosity to the needy are the very things that keep our loved ones "alive."

NOVEMBER 19, 2016 ·

Our Grief and the Holidays

Thanksgiving and Christmas this year will be "firsts" for many people. Eleven families from our church will be among them. You may be, too. It will be the first holiday season without your mother or your father, your first-born child, or your very best friend. Maybe you will cry or find a room just be by yourself for a time. But you will remember.

Hopefully, you will take the time to be thankful for who you had in your life and the time you spent together. The grief of their deaths will never leave, nor should it. However, the kind of grief you can live with falls in the categories of compassion and love. Grief is deep and it is clear when we meet these "firsts." It reveals to us our uncompromising love for those who have gone before us.

I think of Thanksgiving and am thankful for my grandmother, step-father, mother, and niece who have all passed away in the last 17 years. I think of Christmas and how my Savior brought Eternal life — what a GIFT!

When the holidays come and we grieve the way we do (or will), remember that we can have peace because of our God. Without God, there would be no peace when we come to our "firsts" this year.

Grief Blogs...

DECEMBER 7, 2016 ·

Opening Gifts

It was only a few years ago that I discovered the cassette tape that had my grandmother's Memorial Service on it. The preacher of her church spoke a few words and my brother and I told personal stories. That cassette tape was transferred to cd's which I gave away at Christmas to several family members. I remember the expression on my mother's face when she opened her gift. She gasped a little gasp, looked up, and just smiled.

It was HER mother's service on that cd.

Christmas gifts have special meaning most of the time, especially for the giver. Some are fun, while others are practical. Many times they are sentimental.

Then there are the gifts we never open. We just *remember*. They include gifts of joy, wisdom, faith, compassion, excitement, and humor. We don't wrap them up in pretty paper or bind them with an entire roll of Scotch Tape. We don't display them on a shelf or play with them on the living room floor. And we don't hold them in our hands.

But we DO hold them in our hearts. They become our most treasured possessions.

So, do a little remembering this year. Remember that Jesus is the reason... well, you know. Thank God for those who came into your life for the *season*. And I'm sure... very sure... you *won't* regift these presents!

MARCH 19, 2017 ·

Isolation

Sometimes, you just want to curl up in a corner or climb under the covers, thinking that every heart-ache will go away soon. You want to be left alone because talking is trivial and quite annoying at times like this. Every musical note is welcomed and yet shunned. Every ring of the telephone is an encouragement, but a reminder that others' lives are going on. You don't want to go to work or even to the mailbox. You want your groceries just to be there instead of you having to go out in public to buy them.

And then, your heart cries out that you want someone — anyone — to be there for you. Most have already gone home and back to work or school. The leftover potato salad at the funeral dinner has been packed up for you and you find there is no one left to share it with. While you don't want company, you still want someone there. You want to cry on a shoulder and then be left alone.

Isolation is one way to cope. It doesn't solve the problem of loss, but it gives us opportunity to pray in private, to grieve in private, to find peace with our Eternal God in private.

Believe it or not, there are many, many people who empathize with that. To be alone forever, though, doesn't give us the total strength of heart we need to live again. We must find solace with our friends and family who may also be grieving. Together, after a time of going off by yourself, you grow strong and courageous again.

Other Resources



Grief Journeys
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