

Bereavement and the Process of Loss



All Saints' Church
Preston on Tees

Grieving and the Process of Loss

PASTORAL INTRODUCTION

"God's love and power extend over all creation. Every life, including our own, is precious to God. Christians have always believed that there is hope in death as in life, and that there is new life in Christ over death. Even those who share such faith find there is a real sense of loss at the death of a loved one." (Common Worship: Pastoral Services, Church House Publishing, 2000, p256)

WHEN A LOVED ONE DIES

One of the most devastating experiences that we encounter is the death of somebody we love; the most profound of all sorrows. How can we cope? How can we go on? Will this pain never end? These and many more questions spin around in our minds. Grief hits us with a vengeance.

Just as each of us is unique, each of us grieves in a unique way. There is no right way or wrong way to grieve for a loved one; the way and time is different for everyone. However, there is a recognised pattern or process which grief follows. As you read this booklet, may you come to realise that what you are experiencing is 'normal' after bereavement, even though 'normal' is far from what you are feeling.

SHOCK

Even if death was expected, shock is experienced for a while. If the death was sudden and unexpected, quite often the shock lasts longer, perhaps days, weeks or even months. People sometimes describe this as feeling like being "on automatic pilot" or "going through the motions". There can be a sense of numbness.

You may experience physical symptoms. This is not uncommon and can include loss of appetite, sleeping difficulties, difficulty in concentrating, anxiety and feelings of panic. Sometimes you need company around you constantly, and sometimes you may need to be on your own.

DISBELIEF

A common reaction to the death of someone close to you is "I can't believe it has happened". It does not seem possible to take in that the person you loved is not going to come through the door as usual. Perhaps you find yourself laying a place at the table as usual or turning to speak to the person who has died. You may be unable to cope with the reality of the death and it can take some time before you begin to understand the finality of your loss.

The funeral and sympathy cards, as well as family and friends, can help you to accept the fact that the person you loved has died.

FEELINGS

Many people are overwhelmed and frightened by the depth and range of feelings they encounter after the shock has worn off - feelings of helplessness, panic, intense sadness, desperation, and inadequacy. These can be so intense that the bereaved person sometimes thinks they are "going mad". You may find yourself swinging regularly from one intense feeling to another, perhaps sobbing uncontrollably or else unable to cry at all. Although very alarming, these feelings - and perhaps a complete lack of energy - are not abnormal during grieving.

Anger is another feeling that is quite often experienced after a death. Perhaps the anger is directed towards doctors or the hospital, to yourself, God, or even towards the person who has died.

Guilt may be around. Thoughts of “if only I had done this or that differently”. It can be helpful to talk through all these feelings with a friend, or member of the family or perhaps one of our church bereavement visitors.

DEPRESSION

When the finality of a loved one’s death finally sinks in, life can seem pointless; not only has the loved one died, but a part of you has died as well. What is there left? This usually happens some months after the death and is very debilitating. Feelings of despair and loneliness take over and it seems that nothing will help.

Getting through each day can be a real effort; the concept of taking one step at a time is important. Try not to worry about tomorrow. Setting small goals, such as dusting, ironing, gardening or doing a jigsaw sometimes helps. Achieving small goals really helps when in the depths of depression.

Again, it is very important to find someone who will listen and understand. However, if depression is causing serious problems, then a visit to your doctor is a good idea.

Gradually you will find that you begin to have some better days amongst the dark ones. As the good days increase, you will begin to take an interest in the outside world again. Things will no longer look quite as hopeless.

ADAPTING

The time required for grieving differs for everyone. It can take months and even years. However, usually there comes a time when you realise that you are feeling interested in life again. Perhaps you become aware that you are now doing certain tasks as part of your daily living that your loved one used to do. There is a realisation that life is never going to be the same but that it can go on in a different way. It is possible to cope and find strength and energy to reinvest in life.

HOW CAN WE HELP?

We have stressed the importance of attending to your feelings and finding someone to talk to when things look bleak. This someone may be another family member or a friend. But sometimes you need someone who isn’t involved emotionally. Perhaps your faith is being tested – ‘Where is God in all this?’ or, for the first time you are wondering if there is more to life than what we can see; for the first time you are considering the spiritual side of things. And that’s where we come in as a church. We have a trained team of bereavement visitors willing to call on you. Whether your needs are emotional or spiritual, we have someone willing to listen - to listen and not to force their own beliefs on you. All you need to do is ring the church office and we’ll do the rest.

For Christians there is hope through Jesus Christ. God always invites us to trust him and find that hope. We pray that the light of Christ will shine for you in the darkness of loss, bringing the comfort that you need.