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embrace

A Bereavement Newsletter | Issue 3



“We do best homage to our dead by living our lives fully, even in the shadow of our loss.”

Jewish Prayer

A Grief Story

“How to make *Brown Betty*?” I typed the question into Google, but it wasn’t the same as mom made.

How I wished I could call her one more time. Not to get a recipe, but just to hear her voice.

Dad had said that he wasn’t sure if he could remember the sound of her voice, but I thought he was just in shock. Now, I wasn’t sure if I could remember it either. I missed her so much!

The reality of it all was now sinking in. I couldn’t call her about a recipe. I couldn’t ask her advice about the guy I met at college. And one day, I wouldn’t be able to ask her which wedding dress fit the best. Mom was always hopeful about the future, but it didn’t look that way to me. In fact it felt downright depressing.

The one small comfort was the voicemail greeting dad was unwilling to delete. I dialed. “This is Meg, sorry I missed your call...”

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Courage

What is courage? Courage is soft and quiet. Look for simple ways to give voice to courage throughout the day. Maybe it is simply having the gumption to get out of bed. Maybe it’s the courage to share how you feel with a coworker or friend, or to walk through the doors of a grief support group. It could simply be making a phone call you have been putting off, writing a thank you to someone who helped after the funeral, going to church alone, or finding the backbone to be honest with yourself about something you fear. Healing after a death is hard. It takes courage in all shapes and sizes to mourn fully while living day to day.

Congratulate yourself on welcoming courage, regardless of its size or reach.

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Your Grief Journey

Grief may come in waves like an ocean. At times, they may be small and hardly noticeable. At other times, they are huge and seem to pull your feet right out from under you. When those waves come, it can be good that shock, denial, numbness or disbelief are part of the process. These can be nature's way of temporarily protecting you from the full impact of a loved one's death.

It is okay to take a temporary timeout. Sometimes, your emotions just need time to catch up to what your mind has been told.

Loss also can bring feelings of disorganization, confusion and anxiety.

You may also experience some of the following emotions commonly associated with grief:

Shock occurs most often in the case of a sudden death, but may also occur after an expected death.

Numbness is commonly experienced early in the grieving process and serves to protect us from being overwhelmed by a flood of feelings.

Sadness is the most familiar reaction to grief, and it helps us by evoking sympathy and protective responses in those around us.

Irritability and anger come from two sources. First, we feel frustrated that we couldn't prevent the death. Second, it is normal to feel anger at the person who "abandoned" us. These feelings must be acknowledged and eventually accepted as being directed toward the deceased.

It is common to displace anger onto another target, such as paramedics or other health care personnel. If anger is turned inward, it runs the risk of developing into suicidal behavior.

Guilt is a common symptom of bereavement. It does not always have to be rational to be real—this means even when we realize our guilt is not based on reality, we still may experience it.

Anxiety can range from a slight sense of insecurity to much stronger feelings of panic. Anxiety may come from the fear that we will not be able to take care of ourselves on our own.

Loneliness is particularly a problem for surviving spouses or when loss is experienced in other close, day-to-day relationships. It may be very intense if the relationship was extremely close or conflictual.

Fatigue can be surprising to an active person, but the reality is that grief is emotionally and physically exhausting.

Helplessness increases the stress of bereavement because there is nothing we can do to reverse death.

Yearning, or missing the deceased, is a normal response to loss. When it decreases, it may be a sign that mourning is coming to an end.

A sense of **feeling free** can be felt after a death, particularly in a difficult or highly conflicted relationship.

Relief is a common emotion after the death of a loved one, particularly if the loved one suffered a lengthy illness.

Understanding Your Feelings

Friends and family may try to tell you what, when and how to feel; they are well-intentioned, but misinformed. Only YOU know how you feel. Death often makes people feel uncomfortable. They fear it. They understand why you are grieving, but they have unrealistic expectations as to how you should grieve and for how long. Why? Underneath, they are uncomfortable with your grief and want it to go away as soon as possible. That is why they attempt to comfort you, give you advice and even encourage you to "get over it" and "get on with your life" as soon as possible.

Their discomfort can lead to insensitive remarks like:

"She would want you to go on." (You may think, "How do you know?")

"I understand how you feel." (You may think, "You don't have a clue how I feel.")

"God needed another angel." (You may think, "Not as much as I needed him/her.")

Try to understand they mean well, but are acting out of fear. They also may have little or no knowledge of how a healthy grief process works. Try to forgive them and, if necessary for your own well-being, only surround yourself with friends who will sit silently and not attempt to change your grief.

“Love, like the ocean,
is vast and forever,
And sorrow, but a shadow that
moves over the sea.”

John Grey

Spiritual Corner

“Jesus wept.” John 11:35

“Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.”

Matthew 21:12

“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me...” Luke 22:42

The verses above give a glimpse into some of the emotional states of Jesus throughout his ministry years. He wept because he was sad. He threw tables because he was angry. He asked God in the Garden of Gethsemane to take away the cross because he was afraid. Even though Jesus was fully God, he was also fully human, and he experienced the breadth and depth of what it means to be human. All the messy, complicated, beautiful emotions that we feel? Jesus felt them too.

This helps us when we grieve, because we trust we have a Savior who understands our pain, our sorrow, our fears, our anger; there is nothing we could feel that hasn't already been felt by Jesus. When we grieve, we feel emotions from despair to relief, denial to acceptance, and anger to peace. We can feel alone in our emotions and think that no one understands. However, if we remember we have a Savior who not only understands our emotions, but who struggled with them himself, then perhaps we can know we are not alone in our grief. We have a loving God who helps us get through our seasons of sorrow; a God who has mercy on us and compassion for what we are going through. And maybe that can give us comfort. The title of the well-loved children's song, "What a Friend We have in Jesus," is profoundly true. In our Savior, we have a friend, companion and compassionate guide.