

## **Coping With Grief**

Death an unavoidable part of life. When death and loss come, it can have a devastating affect upon those which are left behind. A better understanding of the grieving process may help us in ministering to people when tragedy strikes.

Those that have suffered from loss will be quick to tell you that time itself is one of the great healers. Because memory is selective, we lay aside the painful thoughts that surround death, and remember the joyful events of life. Time also allows for a period of adjustment, which is one of the most distressing symptoms of grief. Schedules have to change. Relationships and lifestyle take on an entirely new perspective. One woman, who had lost her husband to a heart attack, shared with me during a grief support group that she was forced to find employment for the first time in her life. Her income went down and she had to move from her home of many years. Now dependent upon government support, she was at the point of nervous exhaustion.

Some adjustments won't wait- but we should encourage those we are ministering to, to take their time on those that can. This eases the stress and makes it easier for them to deal with the loss.

The shock that surrounds the initial tragedy is a protective covering through the funeral. Often the most difficult times are the days and weeks that follow. We should continually assure the survivors that things do get better, although some of the emptiness will never completely go away. The person that has died, has taken away something that is difficult to replace. It is called relationship. This is the time that a minister and church can really be most effective.

After the service is over and the cemetery flowers fade, the church can step in to help fill the void. Thoughtful cards and letters, visits, and invitations to social activities are crucial. Not only the pastor, but also the families of the church should get involved. If the survivors are not church members, it is all the more reason to reach out and minister to them.

In ministering to those who grieve, don't try to answer all of the questions about death. Most can't be, and even if they were, it wouldn't really make any difference. philosophical or poetic observations about death have a hollow ring and may even add further confusion to the situation. This is not a time to make conjectures or sermonize. The harsh reality of life is that things can't always be explained. Your role as a minister or friend is simply to give support, lend an ear, and remind them that God knows and cares about them.

There is often a tendency among survivors to isolate from friends, which is the worst thing that they can do. The most valuable prescription for healthy recovery is to find a friend who knows how to listen and then talk, talk, talk. I have frequently heard people make statements such as, "Don't cry...now pull yourself together!" While these folks have good intentions, they simply don't understand!

Someone that has suffered great loss should grieve! Jesus wept at the death of His friend, and so will most everyone else, too! You may even suggest that they pull out the old photo albums and share stories that involve the one that has died. Assure them that it is not their fault. But don't be surprised if they do feel guilty, or even angry for that matter. It is not disrespect-just a quite normal emotion that almost everyone recovering from grief experiences at some point.

The church may help prepare the family for difficult times, such as holidays or annual events. It is beneficial to have friends and family around at these times. It is also healthy to talk freely about the good times of the past when loved one was still alive. Counsel the survivors to spend time with God and to not be afraid to come boldly before Him with questions such as Even though they might not get answers in an audible voice, God, in His own way, will help them. Don't allow them to blame God. They need Him too much. And, while they may be angry over the loss, it is wrong to be angry God. He did not the loved one. They died. An event that will also happen to you and to me.

Help the family to stay involved (or get involved) in church, community and family activities. Helping others is the best way to help one's self. By sharing and helping others all will benefit. Encourage them to ignore the do-gooders that try to stop the tears and hurry the recovery. They have a right to weep. They have a right to be angry. And they may take all the time that is needed to grieve. Though these people mean well, they don't really understand the grieving process.

Finally, help them to trust God. With time, with friends, with God, they will overcome this and, while always feeling the loss, they will not always feel the pain.

### **The Five Stages of Grief and Loss**

- **Shock/Denial**
- **Anger**
- **Bargaining**
- **Depression/Sorrow**
- **Acceptance**