

A Biblical Perspective On Grief and Mourning

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A Biblical Perspective on Grief and Mourning

Dr. Alan Wolfelt, from his extensive study and years of counseling, developed a wonderful collection of wisdom called “The Mourners Bill of Rights”. The purpose of this booklet is to add a Biblical perspective to them. Our goal is understanding that encourages healing.

Isaiah 58:11 (NASB) says, “And the LORD will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.”

Though you may not want it or seek it at first, God is the source of healing.

There are a few things to know right up front:

1. You are human and are therefore not perfect.
Can you permit this to be so?
2. This is not a time in your life to be hard on your self. Life and death have been hard enough on you already.
3. Let yourself grieve in whatever ways you need to. Eighteen years ago, a widowed woman told me, “I finally realized that it’s okay to feel lousy.” I never forgot those words, and now I offer them to you.

(Author unknown. “What if I Grieved Perfectly?”
Bereavement Magazine May/June 1995.)

1. You will experience your own unique grief.

We are created by God as unique individuals (Psalm 119:73; Isaiah 64:8). Your life experiences are unique to you (Psalm 139:1-6; Jeremiah 1:5). Your reaction to your loss will be unique to you. God knows that; it is how He made you (Ephesians 2:10).

“I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well” (Psalm 139:14).

2. Talk about your grief but realize not everyone will be a listener.

It is said that talking things out helps. “To everything there is a season, and a time for every matter or purpose under heaven ... a time to keep silence and a time to speak” (Eccl 3:1, 7b, KJV). Do you have a friend who listens? Truly listens? Such a friend is a rare treasure. Does your family tire of listening? Proverbs 17:17 says, “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.” One of the old commentaries describes this verse as “A friend that loves at all times is born (becomes) a brother in adversity and is so to be valued.”

But Job 16:6 tells us, “Yet if I speak, my pain is not relieved; and if I refrain, it does not go away.” Simply talking might feel good at the moment, but it isn’t what brings deep healing.

There is a Friend who is closer than a brother who listens when your dearest listening friend is not there. Psalm 77:1-2

says, “My voice rises to God, and I will cry aloud; My voice rises to God, and He will hear me. In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; in the night my hand was stretched out without weariness; my soul refused to be comforted.”

Sometimes we talk; sometimes we need to listen. When we hear others who are going through a similar loss, it helps us understand we are not alone. Perhaps our words can be an encouragement to others as well.

3. You will feel a multitude of emotions.

Jesus came to show us the heart of the Father, but even before then, God revealed himself as one who grieves (Genesis 6:6; 2 Samuel 24:16; Isaiah 63:10).



The word grief means “to be afflicted inwardly.” Mourning is the outward expression of grief. Since we are created in the image of God, we can look to Him for the emotions we can expect to experience. The Bible ascribes love, hatred, anger, repentance, grief, compassion, indignation, abhorrence, patience, long-suffering, joy and every other affection and emotion of a moral being, to God. Jesus, Peter, and Paul all wept

(John 11:35; Matthew 26:75; Philippians 3:18). David also wept over his stolen family in 1 Samuel. The Psalms are full

of emotions. Many and often conflicting emotions are to be expected.

4. Be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits.

1 Corinthians 6:19 says our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in us. We are not our own. We were bought with the precious blood of Jesus and therefore are responsible for taking proper care of our body.

When we are grieving, our emotions are in turmoil. “Therefore, my spirit is overwhelmed within me; My heart is appalled within me. But the Psalm continues, I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your doings; I muse on the work of Your hands. I stretch out my hands to You; my soul longs for You, as a parched land. Selah” (Psalm 143:4).

Matthew Henry, a Bible commentator from the 17th century, describes it this way: “He bemoans the oppressing of his mind occasioned by his outward troubles. He applies himself to the use of proper means for the relief of his troubled spirit. He looks back and remembers God’s former appearances for his afflicted people and for him in particular. The more we consider the power of God, the less we shall fear the face or force of man.”

Returning to Psalm 143, we see it ends with the word “selah.” Selah means to “pause and calmly think on that.” Take time out for yourself from others. Take time to reflect on the good times and to rest. Although it is good to be with others, sometimes it is okay to say, “No.”

5. There will be grief 'attacks'.

Little things set them off. It could be a sight, a smell, or a song. They surprise us anytime and anywhere and can be devastating. Proverbs 3:25 says, "Do not be afraid of sudden fear nor of the onslaught of the wicked when it comes." "When it comes." It will come, so try not to be surprised by it.

"God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; Though its waters roar and foam, Though the mountains quake at its swelling pride. Selah [*pause and think on that*]" (Psalm 46:1-3).

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, 'My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust'" (Psalm 91:1-2).

"Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me" (John 14:1).

"You will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy" (John 16:20b).

"Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5b).

6. Some have found it useful to create and make use of ritual.

The funeral is a ritual that gives you the support of

caring people. It is a way for you to mourn. But it isn't in saying good-bye that healing begins, but in remembering all the ways you expressed your love and care during the time you were with the loved one. Memories. Remember the good ones; let go of the unpleasant ones. "A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones" (Proverbs 17:22).

"Shadow grief" happens around anniversaries and holidays. You wonder why you feel sad and then remember the time.

Journaling has been known to be helpful. In an article by Robert G. Murray (*Week-iversaries, Month-iversaries and Anniversaries*) he learned to anticipate that the harder grief moments came regularly (the anniversary of the day of the week that his wife died and then the day of the month, etc.) and would journal memories leading up to those days. Once he was aware of the pattern, he could deal with it up front. On the one-year anniversary, he planned a celebration of her life with his family. In ensuing years, other smaller plans were made. "Something was planted deep inside of me on the day and date that Elaine [his wife] died. Something that needed to be tended to as it grew and ultimately changed who I am. When my loss was fresh, I was reminded of it weekly, and so my grief was strongest on that day. As time passed, the grief lessened, and I was reminded strongly one day a month. Finally, it has lessened some more and is on that one day in October that I most deeply grieve her death."

Murray confides that perhaps anniversaries are there “to help us work through our grief. At first, they come rapidly, forcing us to work, and then gradually this begins to diminish.



friends on the anniversary of their birthday. It can be as elaborate as creating a college scholarship fundraiser in memory of the lost loved one or planting a special garden or tree in their memory and honor. Donating to a cause they loved is also meaningful.

“Therefore my spirit is overwhelmed within me; My heart is appalled within me. I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your doings; I muse on the work of Your hands. I stretch out my hands to You; my soul longs for You, as a parched land. Selah” (Psalm 143:4-6).

Matthew Henry explains it by saying, “He [the psalmist] bemoans the oppressing of his mind occasioned by his outward troubles. He applies himself to the use of proper means for the relief of his troubled spirit. He looks back and remem-

bered God’s former appearances for his afflicted people and for him in particular.”

Good memories will grow stronger. We begin to reap the rewards of having done our grief work, the work that transforms the pain of loss into good memories.”

A ritual can be as small as simply planning ahead. For instance, celebrating the person’s life with

bers God’s former appearances for his afflicted people and for him in particular.”

7. Though at first you may want to and actually choose to move away from God, you will finally find healing when you move toward Him. He will be there.

“Then his wife said to him, ‘Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!’” (Job 2:9). Job’s wife lost everything, too. But even with the pain of sickness and loss, Job chose to continue to trust God and through the process knew God better than ever before. It’s a choice we can make. C.S. Lewis wrote *A Grief Observed* about the loss of his wife. It shows the process he went through of turning away from God, then finally turning slowly but surely back. It made all the difference. Hebrews 13:5 says God will never leave or forsake us. He understands and waits until we are ready.

8. Do you wonder why? Do you want to search for meaning?

You may search for meaning in this loss. Why my loved one? Why now? Why this way? Realize that some things can be learned, but other things will remain unknown. Search and pray. It will draw you closer to God even if you learn nothing significant about the situation. Some things are simply not for us to know.

“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29).

“It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter” (Proverbs 25:2).

“And he said, ‘Go your way, Daniel. For these words are hidden and locked up until the end of time” (Daniel 12:9).

“It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him” (Daniel 2:22).

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:26).

“For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay” (Acts 13:36).

9. Treasure your memories. Write them down so you won't forget, and others can be blessed by them.

“We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old” (Psalm 44:1 KJV). It is a debt that every age owes to posterity to keep an account of God's works of wonder and to transmit the knowledge of them to the next generation.

“Then Solomon said, ‘You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great

lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day” (1 Kings 3:6).

Solomon acknowledges God's great goodness to his father, David. God's favors are doubly sweet when we observe them transmitted to us through the hands of those that have gone before us. It is hoped that those who praise their godly parents will imitate them (notes from Matthew Henry Commentary).

“O God, You have taught me from my youth, and I still declare Your wondrous deeds. And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to all who are to come. For Your righteousness, O God, reaches to the heavens, You who have done great things; O God, who is like You?” (Psalm 71:17-19).

“I will sing of the lovingkindness of the LORD forever; to all generations I will make known Your faithfulness with my mouth” (Psalm 89:1).

10. Grief hurts. Pushing it away doesn't get rid of it, but moving toward it helps to heal.

It may not seem reasonable, but it is important to move *through* the grieving process. It takes time. Be patient with yourself even if others are not patient with you. Your life has been forever changed. Give yourself time to go through it. God will show you the way.

“You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand

there are pleasures forever” (Psalm 16:11).

“Woe is me, for my wound! My stroke is hard to heal, and I had said, Yea, this is grief and I will bear it” (Jeremiah 10:19 Darby).

“My grief is beyond healing; my heart is broken” (Jeremiah 8:18 NLT).

“A Message from the high and towering God, who lives in Eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I live in the high and holy places, but also with the low-spirited, the spirit-crushed, and what I do is put new spirit in them, get them up and on their feet again (Isaiah 57:15 The Message).

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners” (Isaiah 61:1).

“Praise the LORD! ...
He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.”
Psalm 147:1,3

About Spiritual Care Support Ministries

Spiritual Care Support Ministries is a nonprofit, non-denominational 501(c)3 organization. All services are provided free of charge. SCSM relies on the generous gifts of people, companies, and organizations to continue the work God has given us to do.

If you or someone you know is in need of personal support, if you would like to participate in a project to help SCSM, or if you would like to aid us financially, please contact us.

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Spiritual Care Support Ministries

Reaching for a hand and touching a heart

MISSION STATEMENT

Spiritual Care Support Ministries provides support, education and a Biblical perspective to those who are ill, dying, grieving and experiencing personal loss, and to those who journey with them.

VISION

To establish a local, national and international resource center to provide ministry, training and a retreat for those who are ill, dying, grieving and experiencing personal loss, and to those who journey with them.

VALUES

God's Word

Prayer

Value Every Human Life

Integrity

Confidentiality

Excellence in Everything We Do



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