

### Society’s Attitude to Grief

I feel that society does not treat people well who are in grief. We have this euphemism where we talk about “passing away” or “passing on”. We don’t talk about death. We don’t like to talk about death. We try to avoid it. I don’t know whether it’s out of fear or anxiety and people don’t know what to say to people who are newly bereaved. They say things like “keep busy”, “stay strong” or something like that, which isn’t helpful.

People need to grieve and they need to experience grief and they’re never going to get through grief if they don’t have a chance. So they feel there’s something wrong with them. They feel isolated if they can’t be real about it. I hope that we’re changing but that’s not what I’ve experienced over the last few years. Grief is seen as something to overcome rather than to go through.

Grief is not just about death. Any major loss causes grief. I’m sure we’ve all experienced grief in one form or another. A break down of an important relationship, especially a long term marriage or something like that causes grief. There are many, many losses. Loss of a job, health, even pets. People don’t like to come out and say how upset they are but you get very close to your animals and that can be a grieving process as well.

When we do our grief groups we spend a whole session on normal reactions to grief. We’re trying to help people to know that whatever they’re going through is normal. There’s no one way to grieve. You can be reacting even by illness sometimes. Some people have aches and pains and headaches, compromised immune system that’s brought on by grief. Or they can be very, very emotional and they are feeling a lot. People are crying all the time sometimes and some people don’t. They need to know that what they’re going through is okay and they also need to know that they’re going to come out the other side eventually. It’s a long process but they need to know they can again and it will be okay. And they don’t believe that at the beginning at all. They think they’ll never ever get through it.

### Personal Experience of Grief and How Her Faith is Stronger Because of It

We lost a daughter aged eleven in a car accident. She was on her bike. Years ago, she was only eleven. It took me a long time to work my way through that. I was a Quaker at that time and we meet in silence. I would be praying in the silence, “Why did this have to happen? Why was her life taken so young when she had everything ahead of her?” She was such a beautiful child and I never got any answers.

But eventually, and it was very weird, it’s hard to explain it, but in the silence, it was February, after the August of her death, I was in the silence in the worship and I felt this light and love surrounding me. And I knew that she was okay. She was with God and why did I keep fretting? I don’t need to fret anymore.

Jesus tells us that there is life after death. You don’t always believe that unless you can experience some of that and I’ve been very, very fortunate. And I’ve also experienced that after the death of close friends. I know that they’re okay.

The community where I live is a small town and when our daughter died, the love that we felt that came to us from the people in this town was totally amazing and that was something else that strengthened my faith. Because where does love come from? I've never doubted since. I've been very lucky that way because some people struggle a lot with their faith after a death. They're angry with God or they don't understand.

One of the things that we spend a whole evening on in our grief group is letting people tell their stories. It's really important. Often people don't want to listen to another person's story when it's full of grief and sadness. What we do in the grief group that week, we ask them to bring a photograph. It's the most moving, beautiful evening. We all are quiet. We listen to each person in turn and they show the photograph. They tell the story of their love, why that person was important to them and it's a very healing thing to do. If you can be there to listen to somebody's story, they can help themselves by telling that story and you can help them by listening.

When you have a death it makes you confront the major issues in your life. What's life all about? Is there life after death? Some of these profound questions that we don't take the time sometimes to ask ourselves. There can be a lot of growth through that process and I believe and I think our faith tells that the other side of suffering, when you've gone through it, is joy.

You have to go through the bad times to enjoy the good times in a better way. If you've had profound grief and suffering then you can really appreciate the small things in life that give you pleasure: the beauty around us in nature, the joy of having a good friend, a small grandchild smiling at you, even a pet you have that's affectionate. All these things you appreciate more when you've gone through the bad things.

Mostly in our lives we're just sort of running around and we're busy and we're doing all these things and we don't take the time. When you have a death or loss it makes you confront these important issues.

I have a metaphor that I use in groups that I felt was helpful to me. When you first have the death or the loss, it's like a gaping wound and it bleeds all the time and it's horrible and it's painful. After awhile you start to have a scab. The scab starts to form on the wound. This is a natural healing. Grief process is a natural healing. The scab starts to form. At times the scab will bleed again, something will prick it, you'll have a memory or be in the grocery store or somewhere and something will suddenly flood back to you. The scab will bleed again, but eventually you'll have a scar. The scab is gone. It takes time. But you have a scar, but you want to have a scar. You don't want to not have a scar. You always want to remember. It doesn't hurt so much but it's there. You want to remember because eventually you are able to be thankful for having had that person in your life.

If you are dealing with somebody who had a loss, usually through death but not necessarily, the best gift you can give that person is to be truly present to them, no judgement, no advice, just be there to listen, if you can sit with them in a spiritual way. Just ground yourself in the Spirit. But you're in sort of that loving place where you let them talk. They know, they feel it, they know that you're there for them. I think it's the most helpful thing that can be done.