

Analyze THIS

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Responding To Grief

Grieving is an emotion that we will all face in our lifetime. It is a natural process that we go through in the face of loss. Yet, despite the universality of this process, it seems a rather common response is to try and avoid the painful process of grieving. It is likely that we avoid it for that reason alone—it is painful. Normally, we don't make choices to put ourselves in painful situations, but as Solomon commends, there is a time for everything, and grief is a season of facing that which is painful, and yet healing can be found in that journey.

The losses we face in life are manifold. The depth of loss we experience is related to the significance of that which was lost. Whether one is facing the loss of a possession, job, career goal, dream, pet, relationship or a loved one, it is necessary to learn how to navigate through the waters of grief.

Grief can take on many faces. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross in her book *On Death And Dying* (1969) observed that grief cycles through periods of shock, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, testing, and finally acceptance. Grieving can occur in both a healthy or destructive manner. This is evidenced by the task of engaging in the work of grieving or by avoiding it altogether. Avoidance may take on many forms, such as a tendency toward over-commitments, workaholic patterns, and chemical dependency to name a few. Knowing this, how should we respond when someone close to us has suffered a loss and is grieving?

Here are some factors to consider when dealing with grief:

- **Know that grieving, though messy at times, is not sinful.** I Thessalonians 4:13 states, “Grieve not as those who have no hope.” Grieving will happen and it is okay; however, we are not to despair in our grief, for as Christians we have the promise of the resurrection. Yet, it is important that this wonderful truth not be used as a bully club to try to make the pain go away. Jesus was sad when his friend died. He wept and mourned. When encountering difficulties, be sure to let people have and experience their feelings.
- **Don't give advice unless someone asks for it.** Your main job is to listen and validate. It can be difficult when someone is hurting to simply walk beside them without trying to fix their pain and make it go away. We need to reframe our ideas on pain and grief so that we are able to tolerate this process even when it looks messy.
- **Everyone experiences grief and loss in their own way.** While it may look different, the need for care and support is universal. It is important for people to avoid isolation and stay connected to their support system. Be patient and know that grief will run its course. Things will eventually begin to stabilize, but in the meantime, consistent support is needed.
- **Do kind, loving acts to show support.** Think of what you would want if you were in pain. Consider sending a note, sitting with them in silence, making a meal, or doing household chores. It is also important to do such things weeks after the initial crisis occurred. Continue the kindness.
- **Talk openly about loss.** Usually people are eager to talk about their loss if someone is willing to listen. Talking about their loss helps keep the memory of loved ones alive. Part of a friend's job is to help them remember their loved one in positive ways.

In the face of loss there are no quick fixes, but by supportive, consistent listening, kindness and love, comfort and healing are experienced in humble obedience to Galatians 6:2, “Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.”