

Grieving the loss of a loved one



It is often difficult to put into words how we feel when someone we love dies. Often there are a whole range of emotions that wash over us. These are not harmful, but quite natural.

In a modern world which sees death as a failure it is tempting to try and be strong and get over the death of a loved one in a rush. But Christians think it best not to hide or deny death because we have faith in a God who is involved in, but also over and above all our human existence, able to deal even with death. This is where Jesus is the key to all matters of life and death because he died and rose to life again.

When we grieve this does not mean we deliberately have to make ourselves miserable - it is not something false. Grieving is coming to terms with our loss, and letting that happen naturally so that we can live life again. Therefore grieving is a normal and healthy process which must not be hurried through.

I will share with you a few of the feelings which people often tell me about when I visit them. It is no definitive list, and it does not mean you have to have all these feelings. I share them because often people grieve totally alone, without love and support, and they need to be reassured that they are not 'going mad' whilst they experience these emotions.

FEELINGS ASSOCIATED WITH GRIEF:

Shock - Whether we are prepared for the death of a loved one or not, there is always an element of shock that it has happened. One day they are alive - the next they are dead, never to be seen by us again. There can be a sense of total 'unrealness' about the whole situation. It is quite common for this to lead on to a secondary factor called denial.

Denial - We can and do sometimes act as if the person we loved had not died, and try to cope with life as though nothing had changed - when we know deep down inside that things have changed drastically.

Emptiness - Inside we can feel empty, or torn apart, almost physically. Our stomachs can be restless and we may feel that a large part of us is missing. It might feel like something inside us has died too because of all that we shared with that person, and for the love and relationships that were very real.

Guilt - It is easy to feel guilty. We often feel that perhaps we should have done something to prevent the awful circumstances, or that we should have said something either to our loved one, or to a doctor or some such other professional. We search for reasons for death and suffering, and this is quite a natural thing to do, as we manage to explain most things in life - but death will always be partly a mystery - something that we have to trust God about for ourselves, our families and friends.

Anger - This is a very common emotion. Anger can be expressed in many ways:

- 1) Towards God (“Why did God let them die?” or “Why did God let them suffer?”)
- 2) Towards doctors and nurses (“Why did they not do more to save my loved one?”)
- 3) Towards family and friends (“Why did so and so say or do such a thing? Didn’t they know how I felt, that it hurt me or hurt the loved one who died?”).
- 4) And sometimes, less frequently, there can even be anger against the person who died (“Why did they leave me here all alone?” or “Why didn’t they provide or prepare me for what was to happen?”).

These feelings of anger are not all rational (!) but do wash over many people who are bereaved.

Fear - Sometimes we become fearful about where our loved one has gone, or fearful about our own future, or even about our own death. Many people share that the death of a loved one sharply reminds them about their own human frailty.

Depression - When feelings are not expressed, and when there are times of great loneliness, it is easy to feel depressed. Or maybe we feel depressed because of the sheer size of our loss - we simply don't know how to cope without our loved one being around.

Relief - There can be a huge relief when someone dies, especially if the person had been suffering ill health. If you have been a long term carer of the person who has died, you also may feel a huge relief. Do not feel guilty about being relieved, because it is quite natural.

Tiredness - The bereaved frequently feel tired. All the above emotions are very tiring. If you have the added responsibility of making the Funeral Arrangements you will also know how the many conversations and pieces of administration can add to your tiredness. The bereaved also frequently find their sleep patterns disturbed, and sometimes say they dream of their loved one in a very real or vivid way.

LETTING GO

Often the hardest thing is letting go of our loved one. It can seem too painful to do this as we cling onto how things were, and how things might have been. But letting go is an

important and healthy part of grieving: it helps us start to make sense of the different life we now live without our loved one. I believe we need God's help in all of this.

Even though there will always be precious memories, we may well feel totally separated from our loved one, but we can be sure of one thing - that nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8, verses 38 and 39). As we let go of our loved one into the hands of God, he is able to help us for the journey ahead.

Even when we try to be strong and cope with our grief, it is often the small, unexpected things which bring back memories of our loved one.

Do not resist these - let God feel the pain with you and ask him for strength to thank him for the life of your loved one. And ask God to give you strength for you to live a new life.

The way you grieve will be personal to you, and to you alone: no-one should judge that. But sometimes it is good to know you are not alone, that you are grieving normally, and that others are hurting too.

Our Pastoral Care Visitor, Mrs Jenny Thornton would be happy to meet with you if you would like to talk, receive prayer or if you need any help. Jenny can be contacted via our church office on 01202 897087 or via e-mail, office@stmarys-ferndown.org.uk May the peace of Jesus Christ be in your hearts and homes this day and always.

Footprints

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the LORD. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand; one belonging to him, and the other to the LORD. When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life. This really bothered him and he questioned the LORD about it. "LORD, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why, when I needed you most, you would leave me. The LORD replied, "My precious, precious child. I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."



SOME PRAYERS YOU MIGHT LIKE TO USE

Accepting the death of our loved one

O Lord, the giver of all life, I thank you for the love I have known, for the joys and sorrows shared. I accept Lord, that you have taken the life that you once gave. Please bring your healing to the hurt that comes with parting, and help me to let go of my loved one into your presence. Thank you, Jesus, that you care about me. Amen.

Jesus' promise to us

Thank you, Lord Jesus, that after your suffering and death you rose to life again, and that you live now forever in glory. I thank you Lord Jesus that you have broken the power of sin and death. Please help me to believe your promise that I may have eternal life and belong to you in this world and the next. Amen.

Psalm 23

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want; He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; For you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive those who trespass against us; And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.