



## Grief Work

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There is an intensely moving story in scripture that reveals the very depth of death and grief. It is a story that resonates with raw feelings and open emotions in believers today.

The special friend of Jesus, Lazarus died. His death truly impacted the hearts and minds of Mary, Martha and those with them.

Yet Jesus knew of his promise to all believers and shared that with Martha. He said, **“Your brother will rise again.”** Martha acknowledged this promise. The Lord continued on saying **“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, <sup>26</sup>and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”**

The emotions Jesus encountered with Mary and Martha affected him greatly. As the story relates, “He was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved” and <sup>35</sup> **Jesus began to weep.** (John 11:23-35) and grieved with them.

Many grief counselors, pastors, therapists as well as those in mental health areas know that loss causes grief. *Helpguide.org – Guide to Mental, Emotional and Social Health* states the obvious: “Grief is a natural response to loss. It’s the emotional suffering you feel when something or someone you love is taken away. The more significant the loss, the more intense your grief will be. You may associate grieving with the death of a loved one—which is often the cause of the most intense type of grief—but any loss can cause grief, including:

1. Divorce or relationship breakup
2. Loss of health
3. Losing a job
4. Loss of financial stability
5. A miscarriage
6. Retirement
7. Death of a pet
8. Loss of a cherished dream
9. A loved one's serious illness
10. Loss of a friendship
11. Loss of safety after a trauma
12. Selling the family home”

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief-loss/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm>

Friends, There is no doubt in any of our minds that loss and grief are hard work. Just like the celebration of the birth of an infant there is also the depth and pain of grief with a loss. Yes, we can try to avoid the emotions of grief or bury it deep within one's mind. However, there is no way to get around it because there is going to be a degree of grief that one experiences at some point in our life.

Grief is understood as a normal and highly personal response to loss. It is also extremely powerful and many times catches us unprepared. "Many describe it as being knocked off balance and the very core of the self is rocked. There is deep pain that affects the physical, emotional, social and spiritual of a person." (Martha M. Tousley, APRN, BC, FT)

In essence, life is turned upside down and a person becomes numb from the loss. Life becomes different. We discover how vulnerable we really are and how fragile life truly is. There are feelings that may cause futility or challenges hope.

Nineteen year old, Aubrey McClure wrote on her blog about the essence of loss and grief.

### **Grief**

**Grief is feeling like you'll never let go.  
It sounds like the sobbing of a broken heart.  
It tastes like a desert, dry and flavorless.  
It smells like freshly turned dirt on a grave.  
Grief feels like you just can't go on.**

Since grief work is hard on us, what can we do to work through these difficult times? We all deal with loss and grief in different ways.

The Old Testament lesson from Deuteronomy tells how a nation of people dealt with the death of Moses. They wept for him for 30 days and then the period of mourning was ended and they moved on.

For us today, grieving or mourning the loss of a loved one has no time limit. Some say thirty days, others say six months and some say one year. Yes, we can say that it is "Time to move on". However, it is not helpful to tell someone in the midst of loss and grief that it's time to pick yourself up and get back to living. This is the time to be supportive and be empathetic.

People who work with individuals going through grief say that it is a lifelong process and recovery is a choice. It is what one does with the grief that determines the amount of healing. Sometimes anger is expressed and can be misdirected.

Of course, the intensity of grief that one feels diminishes over time. One bereavement counselor said, "It's more like a deep wound that eventually heals and closes but whose terrible scar remains and still can hurt at times." A constant reminder.

The value of Ecclesiastes chapter 3 comes through for us especially as we view life as changing seasons. **"<sup>1</sup>For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: <sup>2</sup>a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; <sup>3</sup>a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; <sup>4</sup>a time to weep, and a**

**time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance..”** Time is important in all aspects of loss, life, death and grief. Every one of us has been in a season of change.

Journaling is very helpful as well as meeting with others to share stories of loved ones and one’s life. Listening to music and moving toward relaxation techniques also helps.

A friend suggested that I keep my humor up and seek out things that will keep me laughing especially after the death of my Dad. So, here are a couple of stories that I ran across:

A visitor at a zoo noticed an attendant crying quietly over in the corner.

The visitor asked another attendant what the man was crying about, and he was told that one of the elephants had died. Touched by this, the visitor then asked, “I assume he must have been particularly fond of that elephant?” And the reply came back, “No, it’s not that. What he’s crying for is that he’s the one who has to dig the grave.”

A Philadelphia legal firm sent flowers to an associate in Baltimore upon the opening of its new offices. Through some mix-up the ribbon which bedecked the floral piece read “Deepest Sympathy.” When the florist was duly informed of his mistake, he let out a cry of alarm. “Good heavens,” he exclaimed, “Then the flowers that went to the funeral said, “Congratulations on your new location!”

Within this congregation are areas where member care reaches out to those dealing with health issues as well as to assist folks through loss and grief. There’s a Ministry of Presence, there are Stephen Ministers, there are Pastors and even Elders. We’re all part of a member care team.

In the Gospel lesson for today, Jesus revealed to the disciples what was to become of him and they were troubled. Nevertheless, Jesus gave them hope and encouragement. He said, **1“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. 2In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. 4And you know the way to the place where I am going.”**

Jesus spoke to their hearts and our hearts so that we would be courageous in the promise of God’s Mansion. Yet, even with this promise some still doubted. **5Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” 6Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”** Because Jesus is the way. The one who make us go through those times and will be there for each of us.

We all know there are some diseases that are gradual and difficult to watch. Alzheimer’s steals a person’s personality and loved ones struggle with loosing the person to the sunset. Cancer sends a shock wave through a person and loved ones when first discovered. The loss of health strikes at the heart of those who

have been very active and must now find other ways to get over the anger. Loss of sight and hearing causes many folks to retreat into isolation. Retirement scares some folks while for others it is something they are embracing.

So my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, grief is hard work and loss is hard work too. Every one of us is going to experience this inevitability in life. It is what we do with it that determines how we pass through it to healing and wholeness. We each have a choice. We each make a determination on how we're going to make it through.

May we also remember that in our grief work that we belong to God and we have a traveling companion through the many valleys of life. God is surrounded us with His ever loving arms. God is there. Go is here. God will always be there for us.

Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. For he is our Savior. He is the Risen Lord for us all.

May it be so for us today and into the future. Amen.

Scriptural Support:

**Deuteronomy 34:1-12 (NRSV)**

<sup>1</sup>Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho, and the LORD showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan, <sup>2</sup>all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, <sup>3</sup>the Negeb, and the Plain—that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees—as far as Zoar. <sup>4</sup>The LORD said to him, “This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants’; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.”

<sup>5</sup>Then Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in the land of Moab, at the LORD’S command. <sup>6</sup>He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day. <sup>7</sup>Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigor had not abated. <sup>8</sup>The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended.

<sup>9</sup>Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him; and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the LORD had commanded Moses.

<sup>10</sup>Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. <sup>11</sup>He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, <sup>12</sup>and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

**John 14:1-14 (NRSV)**

<sup>1</sup>“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and

will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. <sup>4</sup>And you know the way to the place where I am going.”

<sup>5</sup>Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” <sup>6</sup>Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup>If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

<sup>8</sup>Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” <sup>9</sup>Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? <sup>10</sup>Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. <sup>11</sup>Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. <sup>12</sup>Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. <sup>13</sup>I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup>If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.