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Special points of interest:

- ◆ Grief is the natural reaction to loss.
- ◆ Grief can be like a journey on a roller-coaster
- ◆ Denial is a defence mechanism
- ◆ Anger is part of the grieving process
- ◆ There are no “quick fixes”
- ◆ You can’t bargain with God
- ◆ Grief can lead to Depression/Anxiety
- ◆ Accepting a new reality and reflecting

The Stages of Grief



Grief is the natural reaction to loss. Grief is both a universal and a personal experience.

- The wounds of grief cannot heal fully until one has accepted the reality of the loss.
- Grief is dynamic because it changes from morning to night, from day to day, or week to week.

Jesus promised, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). God beckons us into His loving arms so He can heal our wounded hearts.

When we lose a loved one, a thousand and one questions come to mind, for

example:

- How can this be?
- Am I going crazy?
- What am I going to do? And, how am I going to cope?
- How long is the grieving process?
- Will things ever get back to normal?

All these are normal questions, but it is important to remember that grieving is a process to be continued and not a project to be completed.

It is also important to bear in mind that we will never recover the loss, but through the hard work of dealing with our grief, we will be able to integrate the loss into our new reality through the grief process.

“Grief is not a disorder, a disease or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical and spiritual necessity, the price you pay for love. The only cure for grief is to grieve.”

- EARL GROLLMAN

GRIEVING IS HEALING

The grieving process describes how a mourner copes with and progresses through the emotional and behavioural responses to the loss of a loved one. It is considered natural, healthy and expected as it helps you learn how to refocus on living your life without someone who you treasured and valued.

Whilst you're going through the journey of grief, you should be mindful of the following:

- Don't compare your grieving with that of another, as everyone grieves differently.
- There is no right or wrong way to grieve.
- The grieving process takes time.
- Healing happens gradually; it can't be forced or hurried—and there is no “normal” timetable for grieving.

There are different models of grief that can help bereaved people work through the grieving process. These models are tools to help frame and identify what we may be feeling. Psychologist, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross identified five stages of grief:

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining

- Depression
- Acceptance

Not everyone however, will go through these stages in a prescribed order and you might not experience all stages. There is also no set time period for grieving and some people will take longer to heal than others.

Cry whenever you need to.
Scream. Shout. Lay on the floor. Sob in the shower. Be still. Run. Walk. Create.
Live your truth. Share without fear.
Listen. Release your pain. Breathe.
Be courageous. Throw away the map.
Wander. Be real. Be compassionate.
Read. Seek friendship. Be vulnerable.
Don't fear being broken.

-Zoe Clark-Coates



DENIAL:

A Purpose in Denying - Time to Adjust

- This first stage of the grieving process is denial.
- Denial shields us from the true pain of loss – even though we know the person has died, we don't really believe it.
- Accompanying denial are feelings of numbness and shock. This stage helps us to carry on with life for the time being.
- Feelings of numbness can act as an emotional buffer as we try to rationalise the overwhelming emotions.
- There is a grace in denial in that, it is nature's way of letting in only as much as we can handle.

Denial is a defence mechanism that buffers the immediate shock of the loss. It helps us to control the pace of our grief and limits the flood of emotions pouring over us all at once.

Though grief is bitter, we must let sorrow run its natural course. Isaiah 53:3 describes Jesus as “a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” Denying or repressing pain can lead to emotional problems later on.

Tips for Dealing with the Denial Stage of Grief

- Understand that **denial is normal**, especially when a loss is recent.
- It serves an important, protective function and is your mind's way of protecting you from more pain.
- Understand that it is **normal to not “fully get” that a loved one is no longer with us**. Your mind is not yet able to comprehend a life without that person.
- Don't pretend that things are all right when they are not. **Be honest with yourself and others**. Cry freely and let others see your tears. Distractions may keep you occupied, but won't help you move toward resolution.
- The tears you shed when your loved one has died are the beginning of your healing process. They are an outward expression of grief.

Tears are a vehicle that God has equipped us with to express the deepest feelings words cannot express.

Seek **professional help** if you are unable to move past the denial stage of grief. You will need professional support if you are unable to function in your everyday life.

ANGER:

The Anger stage: A common response to hurt and pain.

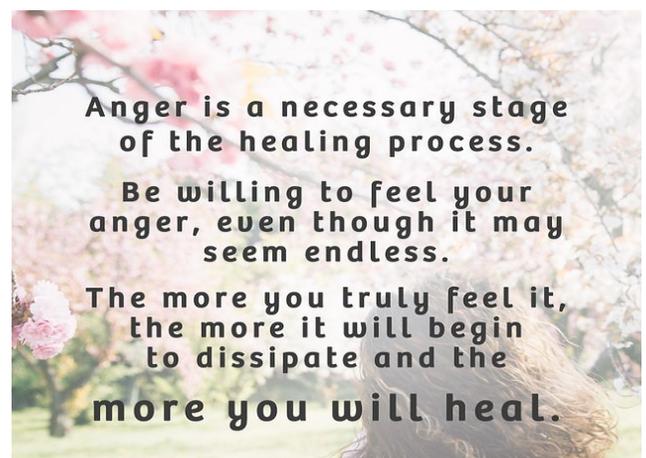
We get angry when we cannot control what is happening to us. It can be one of the most confusing feelings during bereavement, and is at the root of many problems in the grieving process.

The Bible reminds us that it is allowable to be angry and vent your feelings but we should not sin or cause harm (Ephesians 4:26).

Anger is often expressed and directed:

- At yourself, for what you did or did not do during the life and death of the loved one. These feelings can be both real and imagined.
- At your loved one for dying and abandoning you.
- At the doctors, nurses or medical staff for failing to save your loved one.
- At God for not answering your prayers and allowing your loved one to die.

Anger is common to experience after the loss of a loved one. We are trying to adjust to a new reality and we are likely experiencing extreme emotional discomfort. There is so much to process that anger may feel like it allows us an emotional outlet.



Tips for Dealing with the Anger Stage of Grief

- Your job is to honour your anger by allowing yourself to be angry. Scream if you need to. Find a solitary place and let it out. You can even scream into a pillow

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if it helps you feel better.

- Crying is not a sign of weakness. It is a very healthy and normal expression of anger. You can't force yourself to cry of course, but don't feel like you have to hold your tears in either.
- Don't bottle your anger up inside; instead explore it in a way that is not harmful to you or others. Your anger is just another indication of the intensity of your loss.

Managing anger in times of high stress can be extremely difficult. Nothing is fixed overnight and you will need to work through these overwhelming emotions. Try to take time to read the Scriptures, knowing that God is there for you, He cares and understands your pain and your loss.

BARGAINING:

Guilt is often bargaining's companion

This stage is defined by your struggle to regain a sense of control as you grieve.

Bargaining is when you wish, pray, or hope that your loved one will be saved in exchange for something, usually you changing your behaviour. It can happen before a loss, if you know that your loved one is very ill, or after a loss, in an attempt to save them.

Dr Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, who came up with the five stages, said most bargains are made with God and are usually kept a secret.

Examples of bargaining could also be:

- God, if you bring them back, I promise I will do anything you ask; I will devote my life to your service.
- If only we had sought medical attention sooner...
- If only we got a second opinion from another doctor...
- Thinking/saying, I should have; could have or If only...

Kubler-Ross said that these "bargains" can be the mind's way of getting relief from the pain of loss. You're taking refuge by imagining a world in which the person you love is still with

you. It can also be a way of making sense of what has happened. As you explore these thoughts, you can slowly come to accept that there's nothing you could have done to make things end differently".

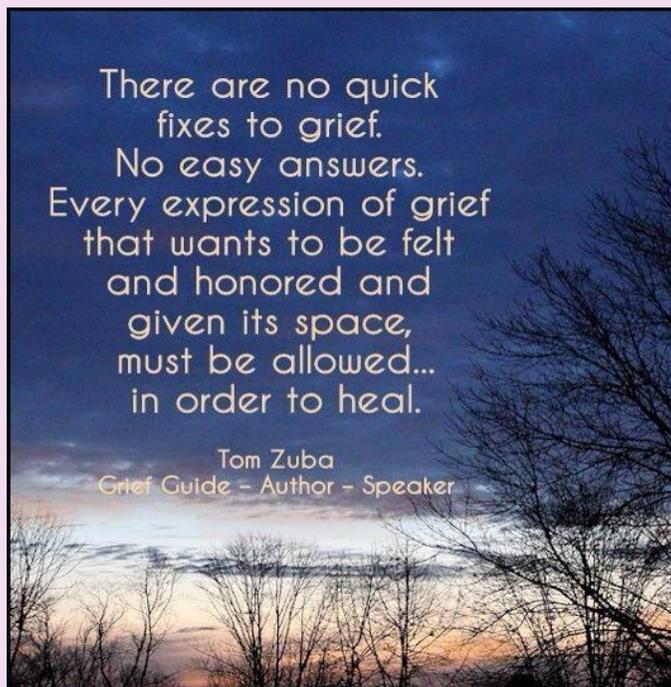
Tips for Dealing with the Bargaining Stage of Grief

- The hard truth is that God does not bargain.
- The Scriptures offer comfort and help when you feel total despair and asking for help. They will help you heal emotionally and spiritually and give you the strength you need to continue.
- The best thing you can do is express any bargaining thoughts you are having, either by writing them down or talking to someone you trust, like a counsellor or close friend. This may help you make sense of them and understand what you are feeling.
- Understand that bargaining is normal and serves an important purpose; that it provides temporary escape from one's pain and provides hope; it also gives a person time to adjust to the reality of the situation.

If you're struggling to manage this stage, join a bereavement support group or seek the help and support of a professional counsellor.

There are no quick
fixes to grief.
No easy answers.
Every expression of grief
that wants to be felt
and honored and
given its space,
must be allowed...
in order to heal.

Tom Zuba
Grief Guide - Author - Speaker



DEPRESSION:

“Lord, though I’m walking through the valley of the shadows..., I will not be fearful., for I am confident that you will comfort me” (Psalm 23).

Depression is a commonly accepted form of grief. In fact, most people associate depression immediately with grief – as it is a “present” emotion. It represents the emptiness we feel when we are living in reality and realise that our loved one is gone forever.

Some reasons for depression in grief:

- Empty feelings present themselves, and our grief enters our lives on a deeper level, deeper than we can ever imagine.
- In this stage, you might withdraw from life, feel numb, live in a fog, and not want to get out of bed.
- The depression may feel as if it will last forever.
- The world might seem too much and too overwhelming for you to face.
- You don’t want to be around others, don’t feel like talking, and experience feelings of hopelessness. You might even experience suicidal thoughts – thinking “what’s the point of going on?”
- It is important to understand that this stage of depression is **not** a sign of mental illness.
- There is no "normal" time -frame for depression; the sense of loss ebbs and flows over time.

If your depression is impacting your ability to cope with everyday life over a sustained period of time—or if you are experiencing suicidal thoughts - please consult your family physician, a counsellor, or a mental health professional immediately.

Tips for managing in the Depression stage of grief

- Let others into your life; you need them. Let them help you with practical tasks. If you choose, you can ask them simply to be with you but that they shouldn’t talk a lot; just don’t cut yourself off from others.
- Keep a journal of your thoughts and feelings.
- Meditate on God’s promises.

- Give yourself permission to “feel your feelings”. Don’t let anyone tells you how you should feel or that you should “get over it” or “move on”.
- **Plan ahead for grief “triggers”.** Holidays, anniversaries, birthdays, and other special dates and events reawaken memories and feelings. It is completely normal for you to revisit your grief during these times.
- If a significant date or event is approaching, anticipate that you will struggle emotionally and seek support.

Don’t try and suppress your grief. In order to heal, you must acknowledge your pain. Avoiding your grief on a long-term basis can lead to complications such as clinical depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and other health problems.

Healing through grief
is not about
learning how
to STOP missing you.

It is about learning
to live my life
WHILE
missing you

ACCEPTANCE:

Acceptance does NOT mean that the person is “okay” with the loss.

“You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing. You have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy” (Psalm 30:11-Web).

Acceptance has to do with concluding and moving on. We come to grips with the reality that there is no “going back to normal”; rather, there is only a “new normal.” This does not mean the pain is over, if anything, it might mean the most profound pain begins. C.S. Lewis compares death to amputation – the loss of a loved one, he said, is like the loss of a limb.

- Acceptance does not mean forgetfulness; it does not mean that we slip back into denial – pretending that it has not happen. It does not mean that we can no longer think about our loved one; out of sight does not have to mean out of mind.
- Acceptance means embracing the present – both good and bad in order to shape the future.
- Acceptance is about reflecting on the good times you spent together, and, instead of crying and feeling sad, you can smile when you remember something they did or said- it is keeping ‘cherished memories’ alive!

Even when you accept the new reality, you have to learn how to walk again. Yet, when you’re able to see what God now has for you, you can begin to see the beauty in the world.

Tips for dealing with the Acceptance stage of grief

- Understand that acceptance is learning to live with your new norm where your loved one is no longer here. Understand that you will never be okay with the fact that your loved one died. Acceptance is a process that we experience, not a final stage with an end point.
- Be patient with yourself and don’t expect yourself to reach the acceptance stage of grief quickly. You could ebb in and out of the acceptance stage.
- Draw comfort from your faith
- Join a support group

- Find ways to commemorate the life, love and legacy of the person that you miss.

Despite each stage not entirely being applicable to everyone, or in the order established by the Kübler-Ross model of grief, the stages can still help you understand and process your emotions. Grief is more than just one emotion — it’s many emotions, thoughts, and feelings — a process we go through after a loss.

EXERCISE:

1. List how many of the stages of grief you can identify within this model and write them down in your journal;
2. how are you coping with each stage you’ve identified, and
3. what strategies are you using to manage your grief.

HELP!

Christian Counsellor:

If you need the support of a Christian counsellor, you can contact:

- Association of Christian Counsellors (ACC)

Visit the ACC website homepage www.acc-uk.org Click on ‘Find a Counsellor’, then scroll down the page and enter your postcode for a list of counsellors in your area.

You could Telephone **024 7644 9694** and someone will guide you through the process.

Bereavement Support

- ✦ **Samaritans Helpline:**
08457 909090, 24 hours a day
- ✦ **Cruse Bereavement Care:**
0808 808 1677
- ✦ **Bereavement Trust Helpline:**
0800 435 455, from 6-10pm
- ✦ www.wntcg.org/bereavement
- ✦ www.wntcg.org/care