



Dealing with Grief

LifeCare Memos® Messages of Compassion

“Honey, I think Anjali is dead!”

These words woke me from a sound sleep. I checked and indeed, our baby daughter had died in her sleep.

My wife and I had worked for many months to adopt this little one from India. There was much paper work, praying, money, many phone calls and anxious moments. Finally she arrived and our hearts were filled with joy and gratitude to God for this marvelous gift. Then, only a few months later, she died in her sleep. Our loss was enormous; our grief almost overwhelmed us; but our God was so precious.

Through this experience, and other times of loss in my life, I have experienced a wide range of emotions. Some of these feelings came and went quickly; others persisted for some time; still others came, went, and then returned many times.

It may be helpful for you to understand some of the normal emotions you might feel as you deal with your grief.

Loss

We experience many losses when someone close to us dies. If we lose a child we also lose dreams and hopes that we had for that child. If we lose a spouse we may also lose our best friend, our financial support, our emotional support, or other losses. It was helpful to me to name the losses and feel the natural hurt that came with them. If we deny the pain or minimize the loss, it can have serious repercussions. Residents of skilled nursing facilities often experience the loss of their home and possessions. They need to name the losses and acknowledge the hurt. When this happens, the healing process can begin. Jesus said,

“Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).

Shock

Depending on the kind of loss you suffer you may also feel a sense of shock. If the death of a loved one was sudden or unexpected, you may go through a time that seems like paralysis—things move in slow motion or time stops altogether. This feeling usually passes as the loss begins to sink in. I have heard people say that they were in shock through the funeral and the swirl of activity that accompanied it. Later, when they were alone and had time to think and process things, the reality of the loss hit home.

Sadness

It goes without saying that you will feel sad, but I want to give you permission to feel this emotion. In the church we often think it is wrong if we are not happy. However, sadness and the emotional release of crying is a God-given response to something bad that has happened. Jesus came to the grave of His friend Lazarus, knowing that He was going to pray for his resurrection, yet,

“Jesus wept” (John 11:35).

People may ask, *“How are you doing?”* or *“How are you holding up?”* By this they may mean, *“How much are you crying?”* Don't be afraid to experience sadness and the release of tears. It is helpful to take time to feel sad. You might want to review mementos, play nostalgic music, or look at pictures. Sadness is one emotion that will come and go many times.

Guilt

When my baby daughter died I felt guilty. I was the one who put her to bed, not realizing that she was getting sick. Even now, over 20 years later, I still feel twangs of guilt. You might feel guilty as well. Often people think, *“If only I had done more, or done something differently, this would not have happened.”* These feelings are normal, but they are also futile. You are human, and your knowledge is not perfect. You cannot see the future; only God can. Forgive yourself, and accept all that you did for and gave to your loved one as your best human effort.

Anger

Anger is a natural response to something bad that has happened. Often the *“why”* question is asked after someone dies. Behind this might be anger, as we wonder *“Why did this have to happen to me?”* Death usually blocks or destroys a goal we had, which results in anger. Anger by itself is normal; sometimes it is how we deal with the anger that can be harmful.

“Be angry but sin not, and do not let the sun go down on your anger”
(Ephesians 4:26-27).

In other words, we need to talk about and express the fact that we are angry, figure out the source of the anger, and work it out. Anger can be harmful if kept inside. It can turn into bitterness and rage.

Hope

Even though you do not feel it right now, eventually you will feel hope again. When time and healing brings perspective, and when the Holy Spirit brings joy,

you will feel hope for the future. We have the promise of eternal life. This eternal perspective on life and death does help us heal.

“We do not grieve as those who have no hope” (I Thessalonians 4:13).

We can also be assured of God’s love and care for us even in difficult times.

“The Lord is near to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:1).

Besides these emotions let me offer a few simple suggestions to help you through the grieving process:

- Take care of yourself
- Do purposeful work without frantic activity
- Talk about your feelings and your loss
- Eat well
- Exercise regularly
- Join a grief group
- Postpone major decisions
- Record your thoughts in a journal
- Get professional help if needed

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When experiencing the stresses of life, people need support. The Psalmist needed that support and found it when he turned to God. He said, *“Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one **cares for my life**. I cry to you, O LORD; I say, ‘You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.’”* (Psalm 142:4-5)

LifeCare Memos are designed as messages of compassion that integrate biblical guidelines for emotional and spiritual well-being. Topics focus on various life-care issues and address them from the perspective of Scripture.