



Parish Nursing Notes

“I praise You because I am
Fearfully and Wonderfully
made....”(Psalms 139:14)

March ~A Look At Grief And Hope

As March begins, my mind turns to thoughts of Spring new life coming from a winter of death. I think of the hope that is Easter. I look forward to warm days digging in the flower garden and watching the back yard come alive with color. Spring is such a time of hope.

In thinking about the many losses of church family over the past several months, I feel a need to offer encouragement and hope. I think we can acknowledge the presents of grief in the lives of the families and friends of our members. We can attempt to understand this process.

There are many good resources to help us deal with our own losses and understand some ways we can help others on their journey. One of these is a book that I found at the LifeWay bookstore, *Helping People Through Grief* by Delores Kuenning. I want to share some of her thoughts on the nature of grief and some do's and don'ts in ministering to the hurting.

“No one can get through life without loss and grief.

Grief is a God-given natural, healthy, self-corrective process. It is an ongoing, continuous, highly fluid process whereby an individual can separate from someone or something that has been lost.”

“The grieving person may experience numbness, disbelief, denial, anger or rage, confusion, depression, guilt, fear—and vacillate from one moment to the next. Grief comes in waves.

Each person responds to grief differently. Responses vary with each individual according to temperament, background, emotional and physical health, age, the maturity of one's faith, and past losses, as well as a host of other reasons. A current loss can trigger unresolved losses from the past.

Intense grief can produce physical symptoms. The grieving person may experience the following : fatigue; shortness of breath; dizziness, palpitations; frequent, ongoing feelings of numbness, irritability and restlessness; headaches and diarrhea; appetite loss; insomnia; and inability to organize daily activities. The person may be filled with self-blame, preoccupation with the image of the deceased; guilt, with feelings of not having done enough for the deceased; and hostility toward the physicians and other medical professionals who attended the deceased.

It is healthier to express emotions than to repress them. Repression is the means by which intolerable memories are kept out of the consciousness. Unfortunately, crying is often seen as a sign of weakness, especially for men. It should be understood that tears are a way of cleansing inner wounds. Because grief is unique to every individual, observers should understand that some persons will cry profusely, while others may not cry at all.”

The grieving person must take one day at a time. The grief process may last from six months to several years. Some days will be better than others. The process must be gone through in order to experience the healing that comes with it.

Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, a noted expert on grief, identifies five commonly recognized stages of grief: shock and denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

1. Shock and Denial

In this stage, everything seems unreal. This is where the numbness comes that allows the person to react in automatic ways. Denial is the period when dealing with reality is more than the mind can withstand. It can last for days or weeks or years if the person traveled or was away a lot.

2. Anger

Anger is a common response to loss. Someone important has been taken away; life for the grieving person will not ever be the same again. Statements like “I don’t deserve this happening to me”,

“Why me?” are typical expressions of resentment, bitterness, frustration, and rage. These expressions of anger may be directed at one’s self, family members, doctors, nurses, God, or no one in particular. Some ways to express anger that will not harm yourself or others:

- Roll up the car windows and scream
- beat on a pillow
- exercise
- keep a journal
- write a letter(even to God)

3. Bargaining

This is the stage in which most people examine their spiritual beliefs. They may bargain with God by making all kinds of promises to Him, “if only” He will meet their needs in this situation. Many people renew their devotion to God by allowing Jesus to be Lord of their life. It is a time when a minister or counselor can be most helpful.

4. Depression

When it looks like things will not work out the way the persons wants, depression enters. There is a sense of hopelessness and helplessness. There may be a change in eating habits, personal grooming, or emotional and physical withdrawal. At this point...talk to a doctor, family counselor, and talk to yourself about your blessings. Choose to focus on the positive. Philippians 4:6-8. Exercise for at least 20 minutes a day.

5. Acceptance

When the work of grief is finished, there is a peace that comes that indicates acceptance. Some people move rapidly through into it while others never experience acceptance. For those who have lost a loved one, acceptance has been reached when:

- Realize that life must still be lived.

- Begin to live in the present while releasing the past.

- Allow God to use us to minister to others who are now walking through grief. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4...Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the **God of All Comfort**, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

Sorrow has a refining influence on the soul, and it can help an individual put priorities in their proper perspective and clarify values.

DON'TS:

- Avoid the grieving person because you don’t know what to say.
- Say, “Don’t cry” or “Be brave”. This may cause the grieving person to repress sad feelings.
- Use Cliché’s, trite statements, or euphemisms. Avoid statements such as “He’s at rest”, “Be glad it is over...” “Time heals all wounds” or “ The Lord knows best.”
- Don’t be afraid of tears. Grieving persons seldom forget those with whom they’ve shed tears.
- Don’t say, ‘I know how you feel.’ Each person’s grief is unique, and no one can totally understand another’s grief.
- Make statements or ask questions that induce guilt or affix blame. There is always some unfinished business and guilt associated with the death of a loved one.
- Don’t try to answer the question “why?”
- Don’t discount the loss of a baby or child by reminding grieving parents they can have other children. Parents experience the death of their dreams and hopes for the future embodied in their wished for baby. The age makes little difference; their pain is just as great.

GRIEF AND LOSS RESOURCE CENTRE
<http://www.rockies.net/~spirit/grief/griefA1.html>

This site is operated by a Methodist minister and his wife. Great information on both grief and loss.

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I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...God will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain...

Revelation 21:1,3

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Interested in forming a grief and loss support group? Or learning about groups already functioning?

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