

Helping the Grieving

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When you love someone so much and you see the pain that they are in, and you are fighting with everything in you to help them preserve their dignity, to help them maintain their strength of mind and character, you hide your own feelings. You submerge yourself totally in the person who is sick, or you deny that you have needs. You deny that you have physical needs, although your body may be screaming for those needs to be taken care of, or you deny that you have emotional needs because all of your emotions are poured out on the person who is ill.

Between the diagnosis of a terminal illness and the actual death, many losses occur which affect both the ill person and family members. They may be physical, psychological, social, spiritual, or a combination of all of these. Reaction to these losses is called ANTICIPATORY GRIEF – a term commonly associated with the slow and expected deaths that have become more typical in our society.

A man dying of cancer, for example, may no longer have the ability to work and may grieve the loss of his identity as a productive person. A woman whose husband suffers from Alzheimer's disease may grieve the loss-in-process of his ability to provide support and companionship. She may also grieve losses yet to come, such as the further deterioration of his health and unfulfilled plans and dreams they have shared.

What can Christians do to help those who are grieving? Let me offer four simple suggestions:

1. LISTEN. You cannot say anything that will help as much as listening. When Job's three friends came to see him in his tragedy, they said nothing for seven days (Job 2:13). They were comforters until they started to talk.

A widow wrote after her husband's death: "Alone in my house, I longed for someone to call...anyone...I just wanted to talk."

2. FEEL WITH THEM. Don't try to push people away from their feelings. Do not tell people they do not need to grieve or cry. They need to cry. Let them express doubt, anger, disappointment, guilt, or whatever they feel. "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits" (Rom. 12: 15-16).

3. DON'T FORGET THEIR PHYSICAL NEEDS. They may need food, transportation, someone to help house guests, or even pay bills. If you see a need, do not wait until you have an official request. Take action and do it!

4. LEARN FROM THEM. People who are dealing with death are "coming to grips with their own mortality." And so must we. It is clear that life is brief and that death is an appointment we all must face. "...For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (Jam. 4:14). "...It is appointed unto man once to die..." (Heb. 9:27).

After Calvary, God has the right to be trusted, to be believed that he means what he says; and that His love is dependable.

A. J. Gossip

"In the Secret Place of the Most High", 1947

Nostalgia is like a grammar lesson...you find the present tense and the past perfect.

Reminisce Magazine

The supreme happiness of life is the conviction of being loved for yourself, or, more correctly, being loved in spite of yourself.

Victor Hugo

Horse-pulling Contest

Tom Moore

In a horse-pulling contest at a county fair the first-place horse moved a sled weighing 4,500 pounds. The runner-up pulled 4,000 pounds. The owner of the two horses wondered how much the animals could pull if they worked together. So they hitched them up and loaded the sled. To everyone's surprise, the horses were able to pull 12,000 pounds.

Sometimes in the Lord's work we try to pull the weight of a job all by ourselves. However, when we team up with others we work with greater efficiency and can accomplish so much more.

I am reminded of Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, and hath not another to lift him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have warmth; but how can one be warm alone? And if man prevail against him that is alone, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

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