

Wednesday, October 2, 2013 – How Long Does the Hurt Last?

Death comes to all. “And as it appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). Ecclesiastes tells us there is “a time to be born and the time to die” (Ecc. 3:2). The emotional, social, and spiritual intensity of that loss affects how successfully the individual works through the experience of losing the support of someone close. The manner of death, the age of the individual, the warning before death, the image of personal suffering before death, and the importance of the deceased person in the lives of the survivors are important factors to consider in dealing with loss. There is a degree of difference between the death by “natural causes” of an elderly parent and the sudden death of someone in an automobile accident or other traumatic event. Sudden and violent death has always been with us, but the chance of it occurring is greater now than in the past.

The death of God’s own is not a senseless end to a pointless existence, but is the crowning glory of a life lived in faith and obedience. Death is only a termination of our earthly life, but not a termination of life. Paul shows us we have nothing to fear. He states in 2 Cor. 5:1, “For we know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens.” Christ used this very point in John 14 when he said, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.” We know Our father grieves with us. We have a savior that understands the pain and knows the hurt we feel. We lean on the Lord through prayer and study of His word. We lean on family, fellow Christians around us to try and ease the troubling times we experience. We are comforted by the memories we have and know that a reunion awaits. However the pain persists and we are left asking the question, “How long does the hurt last?”

Coping with the dying and loss of a loved one can be a very emotionally trying experience. Whether it's a parent, child, sibling, friend or other relative, the reality of losing someone who was close to you can feel overwhelming. While it's true that time heals painful wounds, there are more immediate ways that you can deal with the grief and adjust to your loss. By identifying and accepting your feelings, finding comfort in friends and family, and not being afraid to ask for help, you can ease the grieving process.

Depression and loneliness may set in following the funeral. Relatives and friends have gone back to their lives and may no longer be readily available to offer support. However, these feelings should subside as time passes, as you come to accept the reality of the situation and as you shift from mourning a loved one's death to celebrating their life and wonderful memories.

What can we do as Christian brothers and sisters to help those who are suffering the loss of someone loved and now missed? While we may be helpless to change the events we are certainly not helpless in the comfort and concern we can, in a real way, bring to the bereaved. The important thing to remember in helping bereaved individuals is that each person's grief is unique. Regardless of what you may have experienced in your life with death situations, other people will have a different way of dealing with their grief. Never say to a grieving person "I know how you feel," because in actuality, that is impossible!

It should not surprise us that God's Word addresses the subject of grief recovery. Certainly, "the God of all comfort" (2 Cor.1:3) provides help for us in time of death and bereavement. Notice the following passages as they apply to the idea of grief recovery:

1. Deut. 34:7, "Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor diminished"
2. Deut. 34:8, "And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. So the days of weeping and mourning for Moses ended."
3. Job 2:11, "Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, each one came from his own place - Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. For they had made an appointment together to come and mourn with him, and to comfort him."
4. Job 2:13, "So they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great."
5. Ezek. 3:15, "Then I came to the captives at Tel Abib, who dwelt by the River Chebar; and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days."
6. Jn. 11:35, "Jesus wept."
7. Rm. 12:15, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."

These scriptures suggest three important factors that are necessary for successful grief recovery. Time was given to the grief process (Deut. 34:8-9), friends were available for the grieving person (Job 2:11,13; Ezek. 3:15), and caregivers expressed being real with their own feelings (Jn. 11:35, Rm. 12:15).

I found some information that hopefully will help those who are suffering deal with their loss.

- Don't hold back your feelings. The emotions you'll experience upon first learning of the loved one's ill condition or passing will probably come upon you automatically. Experts say the sadness you feel and the tears you shed are absolutely necessary to promote the healing process. Don't deny these feelings - you need to let it out, whether privately or in the comfort of family and friends. Crying is a stress reliever and an endorphin releaser that will make you feel better. Don't be afraid to cry or to confide in loved ones. Talk through your difficult emotions with them.
- There are different ways to vent your emotions. As a cathartic release, some people like to write letters to the deceased expressing exactly how they feel. Others take solace in their faith and the counsel of a religious leader.
- Offer your shoulder to cry on. Be a comforter and a listening ear for friends and family who are also in mourning. It's natural to want to lean on others during this trying time. Be willing to let your grieving relatives and friends lean on you, too. This instinctual urge to be a caregiver can give you the strength and courage to better cope with your grief.
- Honor the deceased's memory. Besides perhaps displaying pictures of the deceased at the wake or giving a moving eulogy at the funeral, consider having a post-funeral get-together with family and friends in which home movies, photographs and keepsakes of the deceased are shown and discussed. Create a family tree scrapbook with your children and write a short biography of the deceased that could be included in it. Some survivors like to express their feelings creatively, by painting a portrait of the deceased, or writing a poem or song about the person. Plan an annual visit to the gravesite, followed by a family dinner. Dedicate part of your work-such as a book, film, or other project- to the memory of the deceased. Or consider launching a special fund or scholarship in the deceased's name.
- Get outside help. You may choose to talk to a therapist or counselor about your feelings, especially if the sadness lingers. Perhaps you have unresolved issues about the deceased or things you wish you would have told that person before he died. Confiding in an expert can help. Also, consider joining a support group for family survivors and mourners.
- Consider taking a hiatus. Aside from taking funeral leave at work, be prepared to give yourself ample time to heal and reflect. After the funeral, you may want to take a leave from your obligations and just get away for a short time-not necessarily to forget, but to recharge your batteries and ponder the impact of the deceased on your life. Take a relaxing vacation in a comfortable setting. Reunite with mourning relatives in another state. Or spend some time alone, perhaps on a mountain-climbing expedition, kayaking trek or excursion to a woodsy cabin.
- Get on with everyday life. Give yourself enough time to properly mourn and reminisce. But don't be afraid to return to normalcy. Just as the deceased would have wanted you to pay your respects and remember him appropriately, so, too, would he have wanted you to enjoy life and make the most of its opportunities.

- Go back to your family, your job and your everyday routines with the renewed commitment to do the best you can and savor every moment. While it's important to lament the loss of a loved one and let your feelings flow, don't forget to cherish his life. Death is on the surface a sad occasion. Dig deeper, however, and you'll realize that this occasion is more a celebration of a life, a revisiting of joyful memories shared with a special person that you'll treasure for the rest of your days.

We don't know when our time on earth will come to an end, but we know it will. We don't know the time when the Lord will return, but we know he will. For those who doeth the will of the Father, who is in heaven, Paul gives us a preview of the latter scene when, in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, he says, "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air...and so we shall always be with the Lord... Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

May God bless and comfort those who are in pain at their loss.