

Grief and Changes

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On a trip to Philadelphia, I visited the town square in the heart of the city. A girl of about four years of age was trailing behind her father, who was dressed in Colonial period uniform. She caught my eye and I returned her glance with a smile. Grasping her father's hand, she walked toward me. A bit embarrassed by this boldness, her father nonetheless allowed her daughter to take the lead. I now had a choice to make. I could further engage them with eye contact and a brief word, or I could assume my tourist role and detach from them. The Holy Spirit nudged me forward. Slowly I affirmed the girl's dark curly pigtails and Cinderella dress, while respectfully and carefully acknowledging the authority and protection of her father. "My wife is expecting twins any day now" the father volunteered. "It's been a difficult pregnancy, and I think the days are getting long for all of us". The father's voice spoke further safety to the girl. Watching me lovingly yet cautiously, she wrapped her arms around me. The father, daughter, and I continued a short conversation regarding the upcoming changes in the family, and then said our goodbyes.

Grief and loss occurs in many areas of our lives. Babies' births are an exhilarating and life-changing event for a family. Yet this girl and her father were grieving. Mom had been physically and emotionally tired, and they both missed her. This four year old would also soon give up the privileged status of an only child. We grieve during life-cycle changes. We also intensely grieve when a loved one dies. Here are six ways that God can help us with grief and loss.

1. God cares deeply about specific losses within the grief process or within life-cycle changes. The missing of a loved one's voice or, in the above example, the loneliness of the father and daughter, are very much a part of God's heart.
2. Trust in God's timing and provision in the process of grieving. The individual personality that God formed in each one of us plays a part in how we grieve and how long we grieve.
3. It is God's will for you to be a survivor, or you wouldn't be here! Allow him to slowly and gently show you His ongoing purpose for your life: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11).
4. Balance self-nurturance with simple acts of service to others. Becoming too isolated will increase depression, and thus we miss out on some of God's blessings.
5. Take each thought captive before the mighty throne of God (2 Corinthians 10:5). Feelings of guilt and self-condemnation are normal, but if allowed to linger in our thoughts, they cause mental anguish. Ask Jesus Christ, the author of all truth, to be your ultimate "reality check" for each thought.
6. Losses, particularly death, combined with other life-cycle changes such as the birth of children or retirement, will take longer and will be more complicated to work through. Allow God to give you His divine patience with yourself and with Him.

God, the one who gave up His only Son, Jesus Christ for us, is well acquainted with change and loss. Ask Him to walk with you during those seasons in life. You will find Him faithful.

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