

Grieving As An Act of Reconciliation

By Suzan Myhre, M.S.S.W.

My father Norbert died at the age of 82 of Alzheimer's disease, 8 years ago. As a result, I have experienced deep grief and loss and especially remember him at the holidays because of his meaning and impact on my life. I have noticed over these years that the reality of his physical absence is more complete in my mind my heart and my spirit. However, my grief and loss often surfaces, and I can hear his voice as he was accustomed to singing "The Old Rugged Cross" around the house. I can imagine his corny jokes just the way he told them, as I remember him fondly. Yes, my grief will always be with me, for I must live without his presence until we meet again.

I never liked the term "accepted" when referring to the loss of my father, because it seemed like such a final decision-a final act in which my grief would now be put to rest. I much prefer Dr Alan Wolfelt's term "reconciliation" when referring to my grief, because it seems a better way to describe the ongoing nature of grief through the various stages and transitions of life. Reconciliation, as Dr. Wolfelt states, refers to the ongoing integration of the "new reality" one has moving forward in life without their loved ones dear presence. In reconciliation there is a reverence for the necessity and the sacredness of grief as well as an ability to fully recognize the reality of the loss.

In reconciliation, there comes a renewed sense of energy and confidence and a desire to move forward to become re-involved in activities of living. Wolfelt reminds us that reconciliation doesn't just happen. You can encourage others in their purposeful mourning by inviting them to:

- talk it out
- write it out
- cry it out
- think it out
- play it out
- paint it out
- dance it out
- walk it out
- laugh it out

The good news of reconciliation is that one is not swallowed up by their feelings of grief. This is also the good news of the gospel!!! Death has lost its sting. Christ rose again, to give new starts, new and fresh beginnings. He will not leave us in our sorrow. He will not turn His back on us in our hour of need. He promises to hold us in His arms of love, and cradle our weary heads, and whisper "you belong to me" as we cry out to Him. Can you hear Him? He calls to the deep places even now.

This was the first year in a long time I carved pumpkins. It is an activity my dad loved to do and he even made a pumpkin carving tool especially for the occasion. Every year

growing up, my dad sat on the kitchen floor ready to carve pumpkins with me. He wore his flannel shirt and scrubby jeans, and we laughed and enjoyed our time with each other. Mom was always nearby admiring our handiwork. It felt good to do this again. It was time to remember and to celebrate all at the same time. I cried and I laughed. My daughter brought her sweet friends over and we enjoyed each other's company. And best of all, it was my turn to admire their handiwork. It feels good to remember, and to pass on his goodness. I thank God for being an even better dad than my own dad was.

Dr. Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D. serves as the director of the Center for Loss and Life Transitions. He is a noted author and lecturer. More information on reconciliation can be found in his book "Understanding your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart."

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