



BEREAVEMENT

Coping with bereavement and loss

The loss of a loved one may well be the most difficult experience we have to face in life and can be devastating. This can be particularly true if the death is unexpected, traumatic or the loved one is young. The death of someone dear to us is not the only form of bereavement, any deep loss can cause us grief. This could be losing our role through redundancy or children leaving home; losing our health through illness or an accident; breakdown of relationship such as divorce. All these experiences of loss can cause pain and effect our sense of self.



Union Baptist Church
The HUB • High Wycombe



The grief pathway

Everybody experiences grief differently and will have an individual pathway through grief. The time needed for healing is also personal. Sometimes the bereaved person or their friends and family think that they should be over it by now. Whilst it is possible to become stuck in one's pain, it may well be that this person is moving at their own pace through their grief. There are, however, certain stages that are often seen in bereavement, although the journey is not necessarily a straight one moving through each stage in turn. The stages are as follows:

Shock or denial In the early days following a loss it can be hard to take in. The sufferer may feel disorientated or numb as though in a dream. This stage is something of a defence mechanism, protecting the person from the full reality of their loss.

Anger We naturally feel hostile to the awfulness of death and the loss it brings. It is hard to express anger at something as abstract as death and so it is not unusual to divert that anger, looking for someone to blame for the pain that we feel. We may even feel anger towards our loved one for leaving us even though they probably had no choice in the matter. It can also include anger towards medical staff or relatives for not doing enough or may be experienced as guilt as our anger turns inwards. We may feel huge regret over words that we said to the deceased or actions that we took. These are all normal feelings and it is often helpful to be able to talk them through with a friend or counsellor.

Tears and sadness It is natural and normal to cry when we feel a sense of loss. Other cultures are much better at permitting this release than our "stiff upper lip" Britishness can allow. Burying your pain is not helpful for our long-term healing, so allow yourself tears, they can bring us some relief.

Bargaining In this stage we may try to rewrite the story, thinking if only we had got a second opinion or made different decisions. You may have questions you would like to ask God.

Yearning A sense of sadness and loss may last for a long time after bereavement. You may feel disorientated, lonely, lost, listless, irritable and despairing. Your sleep may be disrupted. People sometimes describe feeling hollow inside or physical pain. You may even become physically unwell during this time.

Acceptance The grieving process may last months or years, but eventually after many ups and downs, the bereaved person comes to a place of acceptance and starts to build a life without their loved one.

Coping with bereavement

It is important to allow yourself to grieve at a pace that is right for you, you will have good days and bad days.

Do accept help from those around you. If you have a friend who you can call when you get low this can be particularly helpful. Talk about your loved one with friends and family remembering the good times.

Don't worry if you dream about the person or imagine that they are there with you. This is just your brain adjusting to their absence.

Try to avoid making major changes and decisions in the early days following bereavement. This is not the best time.

Be kind to yourself. Self-care is particularly important in recovery. Take time to do things that you enjoy and don't feel guilty about having fun. No-one can mourn all the time.

Use the help available. Find someone with whom you can talk honestly about your feelings. Joining a bereavement group or seeing a minister or counsellor may be helpful.

As you are ready start to build a new life, not to replace the person, but to learn how to be and grow in this new place that you find yourself.

When grief becomes all-consuming or too difficult to navigate alone.

For some people, often where the loss is complicated by a difficult relationship or perhaps a suicide, or they have less access to friends and family, the bereavement journey is too hard to cope with without extra support and counselling or a support group may be needed. Many illnesses have their own support groups and hospices will offer counselling for family members.

SOURCES OF HELP

Cruse Bereavement Care is a national charity for bereaved people, offering telephone, email and website support. The local branch, Cruse Buckinghamshire, offers monthly/bi-monthly "Understanding your Bereavement" sessions in High Wycombe, Amersham or Aylesbury to provide a greater understanding of Cruse and the support available. Cruse also offers local Bereavement Social/Support Groups. Further details can be found on the Cruse Buckinghamshire website:

<https://www.crusebucks.org.uk>

Amersham tel.01494 766455

Aylesbury tel.01296 425757

High Wycombe tel.01494 511 117

Child Bereavement UK helps children, parents and families to rebuild their lives when a child grieves or when a child dies. The national helpline is available to take calls and respond to emails and Live Chat via the website, 9am-5pm Monday-Friday. Helpline: 0800 02 88840

Email support@childbereavementuk.org

Website: <https://www.childbereavementuk.org>

Contact details for the local branch in Buckinghamshire are:

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/buckinghamshire>

Tel: 01494 569051

Email: bucksfamilysupport@childbereavementuk.org

Counselling Services

The Association of Christian Counsellors (ACC) is the only Christian UK-wide counselling organisation holding an Accredited Register with the Professional Standards Authority. For further details see their website:

<https://www.acc-uk.org>

The British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists is the professional association for members of the counselling professions in the UK. For further details see their website: <https://www.bacp.co.uk>

BEREAVEMENT AND FAITH

In recent years the traditional funeral has increasingly been replaced by the celebration of life. But in a time of shock and distress, the bereaved still need space to express their own grief and to mourn, as they confront the reality of their loss and the emptiness of life without a loved one. The numbness and shock of the early weeks can give way to a tidal wave of grief.

Grief can be a powerful, debilitating, and all-consuming emotion. We inevitably look for someone to blame. It's easy to blame God. Where was He? Where is He now? Why didn't He prevent this? Doesn't He care? You may feel angry with fellow believers who focus on God's eternal hope but fail to acknowledge your grief. The knowledge that a loved one is with Christ doesn't relieve the aching void of loss. Your church fellowship is likely to be a source of love and support, although you may find it difficult to face going to church and fellowship activities for a while. Some hymns and choruses can be particularly emotive. Don't feel ashamed of these feelings: they are natural reactions. The all-consuming dark shadow may block out the light for a while, and God may feel very distant. But always remember that God's love is not dependent on our feelings, and that He hears you as you call out to Him. You may find solace in the Psalms at this time.

Psalm 23:4 provides some comfort in the midst of loss: **"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me"** (Psalm 23:4). We are reminded that grief is a journey and not a destination. We walk, we stumble, we pick ourselves up, we fall to the ground, we feel we can't go on, and yet there is no going back. There are no short cuts through a valley, no going around, or over, or under. We must press on through to the other side to find healing. The valley is long, the shadow dark. But for shadow to exist, there must be light. The shadow can never overcome the light. Little by little, glimpses of light will break through, and as time passes, God will show His presence as we seek Him. As the shadow gradually lifts, we will see clearly that the light was always with us, however dark it seemed at times.

VERSES FROM THE BIBLE

Matthew 5:4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Grief is the way that God intended us to deal with loss. Jesus wept when he heard about Lazarus' death. Allow yourself to be honest in your emotions.

Psalm 31:9 "Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief." Grief is exhausting. Don't be afraid to be honest with God about how you feel.

Psalm 40:1-3 "I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand." Grieving takes time. Be patient. Wait on the Lord.

Job 16:16 "My face is red with weeping, dark shadows ring my eyes" Allow yourself to cry—it's normal and natural.

Isaiah 40:31 “But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” Grief is draining, and saps your energy. But put your hope in the Lord, and in time he will renew your strength.

Psalm 23:4,6 “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Our Heavenly Father walks with us through the valley of death and grief, and brings us through to the other side where we are able to find the light beyond the shadow.

Psalm 139:16 “Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” Death can seem horribly random. We ask God “why?” We may never know why, but we do know that nothing is random. God has foreknowledge of how our lives will work out. Trust Him.