



*"The Lord has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair" (Isaiah 61:1-3).*

## **What is Grief?**

The act of grieving is a natural mourning, sorrowful emotional expression of pain at a severe personal loss. It is neither a passive nor passing emotion which may last for a short period of time after which happiness is ensued once again. Rather, grief is an individualistic process; and no one experiences grief and loss in the same manner. The grief process is as unique to the griever as their fingerprints. Therefore, one can never truthfully say to the bereaved person, "I know just how you feel." In reality what we know is how we have felt in the same situation, not how someone else has.

In order for someone in pain to cope with their bereavement, they must progress through certain stages of the grieving "process" as it is impossible to cause the pain to disappear instantaneously. This

grieving process can be organized into three broad phases:

1. The initial phase is marked by shock and disbelief which can last for hours, even days. The individual is constantly wondering how did this happen, how could it possibly happen to him, to his family, his beloved ones.
2. The second phase encompasses symptoms of depression such as sadness, anger, hopelessness, emptiness, and helplessness. Grief may also be manifested through insomnia, diminished appetite, and lack of interests or decreased social contacts that are the norm for the person. This stage can last several months and brings about the gradual realization of the loss.
3. The third phase is characterized by the grieving person fully accepting the reality of the loss and starting to return to normal, moving forward in their life (Powell, A., 2004).

At no time during these energy-draining phases is it necessary to forget the loss, hide how one is feeling, or avoid talking about the loss. Rather we are called to be honest with ourselves, express our grieving feelings, pain, and finally step forward turning our grief into something more honorable by embracing life; moving forward with the loss recognized as a living attribute for the person we loved.

Brownlow (1972) a well published philosopher said,

"Sadness must be for the good of humanity or we would not have been given the capacity for sadness. The same can be attributed to joy. Sorrow is so potent, however that we need it only in small doses for brief periods, but we require joy in large doses for longer periods of time. The Holy Bible says, '*...as the month which was turned from sorrow to joy for them, and from mourning to a holiday* (Esther 9:22)."

Surveys have shown, time and time again, that most grieving individuals can and do cope with and recover from the experience of having suffered a significant loss in their lives. God makes it possible for grief and sorrow to give us a new type of gratitude never experienced before in our lives, a gratitude to God that only someone who has lost a loved one can know and truly understand.

## **How Did the Lord Jesus Christ Deal with Grief?**

During His life upon this earth, our Lord Jesus Christ was full of love and compassion for people. He himself went through the painful experience of seeing his beloved ones undergo mortal death leaving behind their bereaved relatives and friends in enormous pain and sorrow. In the Holy Bible we

come across a lot of dramatic instances of the Lords unmerited grace towards mankind. Perhaps the Lord Jesus Christs expression of His limitless love toward penitent sinners is the very heart beat of the Holy Gospel for which we are eternally grateful. Our Lords utmost compassion is manifest in the raising of Lazarus from the tomb and the acceptance of the thief into paradise. When Lazarus, Mary and Marthas brother, and the one the Lord Jesus Christ loved, had died, the Lord Himself wept thus revealing His compassion and humanity, and confirming the spontaneity and indispensability of weeping as a natural response to painful experiences.

*"Then, when Mary came where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.' Therefore when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to Him, 'Lord come and see.' Jesus wept" (John 11:32-35).*

The other major incidence of love magnified and personified to someone on the verge of death is that of the thief on the right side of the Lords Holy Cross. It was not a saint nor a martyr that was the first person to step into Paradise; but a thief who, at the

last moment of his life had a face-to-face encounter with Compassion and Mercy that melted his heart and professed on his lips a declaration of Christ's deity and a repentance of his sins.

*"Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying 'If you are the Christ, save Yourself and us.' But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying 'Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said to Jesus, 'Lord, remember me in Your Kingdom.' And Jesus said to him, 'assuredly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise'" (Luke 23:39-42).*

### **How Do We Show Christian Compassion to the Grieving?**

Compassion is the heart and soul of Christianity and a true Christian...

*"Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; Love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous" (I Peter 3:8).*

What are the things that we should and should not do before a person who is going through a rough time either due to the loss of a dear one or because of a sickness or terminal disease?

- First we should not fall in the trap of stopping people from expressing their feeling by saying, for example, "Don't cry"; "it will be alright"; "Control your emotions" etc. etc. forgetting that it is NOT unhealthy nor wrong to cry or even shout David the psalmist has proven to us that the harvest of tears is joy and relief..

*"They that have sown in tears shall reap in joy"*  
(Psalm 126:5).

- Second, and of very significant importance is not giving way to discussing our own personal problems with someone who is in a state of grief regardless of their station in life (medical, psychological, clergy, relative, etc.).
- Third, in times of extended illness, we should not, more and longer than necessary, give in to inclinations to occupy a person's time in idle conversation, personal happenings, and in our own personal experiences with illness.

Adding our personal burden to that of those whom we are supposed to be caring for is sheer selfishness. Those who often find it needful to talk of their personal family work or church related problems are receivers and not givers, usually allowing themselves to occupy the space and time needed for caring for or comforting those who are suffering. Let us always

search ourselves; identify any selfish traits in our hearts and if we find ourselves short of love or compassion, let us rid ourselves of them...

Brownlow (1968) wrote, "He who receives but does not give is as stagnant and unattractive as the Dead Sea. All the fresh waters of the Jordan River cannot enliven and refresh its dead salt depths, for it self-devotedly receives and never gives. It hoards and never shares."

We are all called upon to "*love our neighbor as thyself?*" (Matthew 22:39). This in itself addresses the need to be unselfish. Unselfish individuals put others first, are humble, not controlled by selfish motives and needs, sincerely interested in the welfare of others, and have an outgoing, outpouring spirituality.

- A simple quiet and calm demeanor and an offering of "if there is anything I can do to help you during this time, please let me know" is very strong and effective. Often, if called upon to listen to someone in pain allowing them to express their grief without comment other than "I am here to listen..." is the greatest expression of kindness, non-judgment, and wisdom. We read in the Holy Book of Ecclesiastes 3:7, there is "*a time to keep silence and a time to speak.*"

- Sending "get-well" and sympathy cards with a comforting Holy Scripture is a good way to extend supportive thoughts. Bringing food and fresh fruits to those providing care for someone ill is another great way to help. Sending flowers to brighten the room of a sick person is often a moment of joy. Leaving groceries at the door of a person who is ill is also another way to say "I care." Offering to come and read the Holy Bible or pray the Agpeya with those who are ill is another spiritual way to say "I care."

### **Antidote to Grief**

The most sure effective remedy to grief could be summarized in the following points:

- Prayer gives a grieving individual strength in their time of loss. In prayer a tired soul can find rest and comfort...

*"And when He had sent the multitude away, He went up on a mountain by Himself to pray. And when evening had come, He was alone there"*  
(Matthew 14:23).

- Meditation is especially needed during times of grief. A grieving person should take the time to think, dwelling in thought on life's past journey, present location, and future destination. They must slowly begin to accept what has to be



accepted and reflect upon it. The Holy Book of Proverbs says, "*Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established*" (Proverbs 4:26). We must allow our thoughts to give us a clearer perspective of life. Day after day, through the course of meditation we will eventually realize more clearly, that we must accept ourselves, others, and present circumstances.

- The most important aspect of compassionate grief centers on our "hope". Hope is obtained through believing and examining the Holy Scriptures. Hope anchors our soul in times of despair and trouble. "*Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast*" (Hebrews 6:19).

## **Conclusion**

In summary, grief and sorrow are part of God's plan; otherwise it would not exist in the world. Death is a universal expectation and someone's earthly death touches the heart of us all. Grief instills pity in some, in others it begets sincerity, and still in others a conscious awareness of reality. With time and healing, the day eventually will come when sadness will no longer be the focus of the loss but rather the joy of remembering the person. Happiness will come in remembrance of the hymns they loved to sing, their contributions to the Church they so loved, their

family life, and the unique and special characteristics they possessed and which are adored by their family members. Missing their physical presence will still be there; but gratitude to God for allowing them to be a part of our life will replace the sense of grieving and sorrow. Happily we will recall their memories and their life and in a sense the loved one will be once again among us living through our cherished and heartfelt memories.

There are many things we should not say or do when comforting a grieving person. Allowing them to cry and express their grief is a MUST in comforting others. Let us not be found to be the person who serves his own needs rather than the needs of those who are grieving or suffering pain; stepping back and not complicating the grief of a grieving person; keeping in mind that no one person experiences grief in the same way or manner.

Let us pray that while in sorrow and grief we come to understand Gods mercy, accept His plans for our lives, and show gratitude to Him for having given us someone whom we love but who is now with Him forever. Let us also pray that He may draw us for ever spiritually closer to Him, the Lord our eternal God.

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