

Managing My Grief

Learning to live at peace with loss

Disclaimer: The following are Dr. Jeff Stott's sermon notes and manuscript. It has not been carefully proofed for spelling or grammar. It is printed and given "as is." All Scripture quotes are from the New International Version unless noted.

Just because we are Christians and belong to an awesome and sovereign God does not mean we escape the troubles, pains, and sorrows that life can bring. Everyone of us will experience grief and sorrow many times in our lives and in many degrees. This message is for everyone. You are either in a time of grief right now or you are headed towards one. Today's message may be where you are right now and it's exactly what you need for today. On the other hand, it may be a time of preparation for what you are about to face.

With that said, I want us to see what God's Word says about dealing with grief. We are going to look at a description of grief, some causes of grief, and then examine some Biblical approaches to responding to grief.

Descriptions of Grief

The Bible uses several words to describe and explain grief.

A. Grief

The first word is *grief*. *Grief* is the painful emotion of sorrow caused by the loss or impending loss of anyone or anything that has deep meaning to you. An example of this is seen in **Genesis 38:12**, "After a long time Judah's wife, the daughter of Shua, died. When Judah had recovered from his grief, he went up to Timnah..." Judah had the painful emotion of sorrow caused by the loss of his wife.

Job experienced much grief after losing his children, his business, and his health. In **Job 17:7** he says, "My eyes have grown dim with grief; my whole frame is but a shadow." When it comes to grief you don't have to lose someone or something that is precious to you to feel the pain of grief.

If there is a looming or approaching sense of loss coming, grief can happen. This was the disciples emotional reaction in **Matthew 17:22** when He told them, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill Him....” When they heard this “the disciples were filled with grief” (22-23).

This feeling of grief can happen when a friend moves away or when you move away. It can happen when you lose a job or lose a pet. Grief is not just associated with death, it is associated with any kind of loss. A person can grieve over the loss of their youth, when they realize they cannot do what they use to do. Grief begins in your heart as a natural response to a significant, unwanted loss.

Before we move on I want to point out that grief can increase with knowledge about the sorrows of life. The wiser you are about the grief that people experience, the more you yourself will grieve. **Ecclesiastes 1:18** says, “For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.” When you understand what could have been and when you see people wasting the life God has given to them and you see the damage sin and Satan has inflicted upon people the greater your sorrow and grief will be. This is one reason why in **Isaiah 53:3** the coming Savior was described as “a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (NKJV).

B. Mourning

Another word you need to know in relation to grief is *mourning*. *Mourning* is the process of working through the pain of sorrow that follows a significant loss. Mourning is also called grieving. It is a normal, healthy process that lasts for a period of time.

Lamentations 5:15 expresses this by saying, “Joy is gone from our hearts; our dancing has turned to mourning.” That is what happened to Jacob when he heard about the death of his son Joseph. **Genesis 37:34** tells us, “Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days.” When you have lost someone or something you may mourn for many days or weeks. Mourning is healthy. God uses mourning in order to produce ultimate healing from deep distress and sorrow. This process of working through the pain of sorrow is expressed in **Psalms 30:11** when the Psalmist said to God, “You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.”

Causes of Grief

God knows you will experience many losses in your life and you will grieve, but what causes grief in our life?

Everyone has been created with three God-given needs: love, significance, and security. When one or more of these needs is no longer being met, we naturally feel a sense of loss, which, in turn, causes grief. Throughout our lives we will experience many losses. Although we need to feel the pain of our losses, we do not need to be controlled by them. Instead, we must rely on God's promise that He will meet our deepest inner needs.

What causes grief? Three things.

A. Loss of love

One cause of grief is the loss of love.

- This can be a loss of a significant family member (spouse, parent, unborn baby, child)
- Loss of a loved pet
- Loss of a boy friend or girl friend
- Loss of ability to have children (childlessness, infertility)
- Loss of a close friend

When you experience a loss of love in any way you will feel grief. A person experiencing this might say something like, "I'm still in agony over the death of my husband, and I feel like I'm only half a person."

B. Loss of Significance

Another cause of grief is the loss of significance. This can take many forms.

- Loss of your job
- Loss of hopes and dreams
- Loss of freedom

- Loss of achievement
- Loss of respect/reputation
- Loss of purpose

A person experiencing this may think, “I don’t feel important anymore. My meaning in life isn’t so meaningful anymore.”

C. Loss of Security

Another cause of grief is the loss of security. This can take on many shapes as well.

- Loss of companionship
- Loss of health (physical abilities)
- Loss of finances
- Loss of home
- Loss of justice
- Loss of family environment

This person may think, “How am I going to be able to face the future now.”

Responding to Grief

How do you respond to grief? How do you pick up the pieces of the loss and move on? How does God help you during your time of grief? What does God want you to do during a season of grief?

A. Talk to God about your loss (Ps. 88:9)

One thing you need to do is talk to God about your loss. The person in **Psalm 88** is grieving over many things and he says in **verse 9**, “My eyes are dim with grief. I call to You, O Lord, every day; I spread out my hands to You.” In your grief there may be times you don’t feel like praying and you may even think “what’s the use.” But the best place to be during your grief is talking to God about it. When you are talking to God, you are in the presence of God. Talk to God about how you feel? Ask Him whatever it is you want to ask

Him. Tell Him whatever it is you want to tell Him. He is a big God and He can handle whatever you tell Him. He knows you better than you know yourself and He is fully aware of what is happening in your life.

B. Realize your grief helps you to grow spiritually (1 Peter 1:6)

Another thing you can do is to realize your grief helps you to grow spiritually. In **1 Peter 1:6** we read, “Though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. (7) These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” God never waste a pain. He never squanders a hurt. He never misuses a loss in your life. He will use this time of grief in your life to refine you and to make you stronger. When you come out of this pain your walk with God will be stronger, your trust in God will be greater.

When you go through a loss it is also an opportunity to “prove” that your faith in Christ is “genuine.” By turning to God during this hard time and allowing Him to do His work in your life, your life will “result in praise, glory and honor” for Jesus Christ.

C. Let others mourn with you (Rom. 12:15)

A third thing you can do to help yourself through grief is to let others mourn with you. There are people in your life who love you very much. When you hurt they hurt. **Romans 12:15** says, “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.” To be Christlike is to be sensitive to the disappointments, hardships, and sorrows of others. Compassion carries the idea of suffering with someone. God is going to show His compassion toward you through others. When someone wants to give you a hug because they care, let them do it. When they want to pray for you, let them do it. If they want to cry with you, let them do it. When they are mourning with you they are ministering to you.

D. Receive from God's Word (Ps. 119:28)

A fourth response to your grief is to receive from God's Word. Psalm 119:28 says, "My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to Your word." When you are grieving on the inside you feel tired, weak, helpless or empty. As you study God's Word and think about what God is saying to you through it you find hope, direction, light, and strength for the day. It is medicine to your soul. I don't know how God does it, but His Spirit is able to take His Word and bring life and energy back into a life that had been weighed down by grief. Stay faithful to being in God's Word.

E. Your best days are ahead of you (Rev. 21:4)

One more thought about responding to your grief. **Remember, your best days are still ahead of you.** Revelation 21:4 says, "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." If you are a child of God the best days of your life are waiting for you in heaven.

Conclusion

I want to end our time together with an interesting thought from God's Word. It's found in **Ecclesiastes 7:2** which says, "It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart." A "house of mourning" refers to a place that has been impacted by death. From this I want to point some things out.

First, your mourning should remind you that you will die. "Death is the destiny of every man." No one escapes. When someone we care dies it is a reminder by God that some day we will die as well. It is our destiny. You cannot escape it.

Secondly, your mourning should remind you that you are to live. "The living should take this to heart." You are alive right now, so live it correctly. Know that you are going to die should cause you to think about your relationship with Christ. You need Jesus in your life. He is the only one who can save you and bring you to heaven when you die. If you are already a Believer then you need to approach life knowing that one day you will die so until then love people, encourage them, be their friend, be the kind of person people like to be around. Be kind, compassionate, patient, and gentle with people.