

## The Grief of Death

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die."  
(John 11:25-26)

Death is an aspect of this world that touches all of us and, no matter the situation, it is hard to work through. You may have the opportunity to help those who are going through the grieving process or maybe you, yourself, need to work through the grieving process. Understanding this process helps in working through grief.

What are some of the different feelings or responses that a person who is grieving goes through?

Block it out	Abandonment	Hopelessness
Disbelief	Sorrow	Doubt
Numbness	Helplessness	Anxiety
Anger	Guilt	

These feelings are normal and the person is not wrong for feeling this way. There has been a drastic change in their life which has a permanent effect. These feelings which often can be simultaneous make grief one of our most painful experiences we will face. John 11 provides an understanding of the grieving process and some principles to help those grieving.

### **Principle #1: Have a connection.** Vs. 1-6

There is some history here behind the story that John briefly provides. Lazarus, not just any man, but a certain man, was sick. This guy was the brother of Mary and Martha. There is a connection here because John writes that Jesus loved this family. They were special to him. It is important to know the person that is grieving. There may be times where there is no connection and that is a hurdle that must be overcome, but when people are grieving they need to have those that know them around. If there is no connection, it may be a help to make a connection. It could be as simple as introducing yourself. An introduction builds a connection.

### **Principle #2: Go be with them.** Vs. 7-10

Notice that Jesus took the initiative to go to Bethany. He knew Lazarus had died and his reasons for staying were to become clear later, but for our understanding, we need to go to the person who is grieving. His disciples tried to talk him out of it. They and Jesus knew that there was a threat on his life and people wanted to stone him, but Jesus would not be moved. He knew that he needed to go. There are times when we know we should go to someone, but in our minds we come up with excuses why we should not go. Most of them stem out of fear of not knowing what to do or how to help them. Our fears should not keep us from helping those that are grieving. It may simply be your presence that is reassuring to them. You may not have to say anything. You are there to support them.

### **Principle #3: Realize the reality of death.** Vs. 11-16

The issue of death is not something that we naturally desire to think about. It is hard for us to think of death, yet death is a reality and for those of us that have not experienced the death of a loved one, we may not see the reality of it. Notice Jesus' response. He at first said that Lazarus was asleep and disciples who did not want to go to Bethany tried to say that Lazarus would get better. They did not want to think that Jesus was talking about death. Jesus then spoke more plainly. "Lazarus is dead." This principle is something that we must realize within ourselves, and not something that we say to those grieving. Jesus was explaining to the disciples why he needed to go to Bethany, therefore the reality of death set the priority.

### **Principle #4: Gauge the situation** Vs. 17-36

Some of you may fear that they want to be alone. That is a valid thought, but you will never know until you go be with them. Did Mary and Martha come running to Jesus? No, it was just Martha. She needed to see Jesus while Mary stayed behind until Jesus asked for her. It is appropriate to ask someone who is grieving whether they need to

be alone or not. They will tell you. It is also appropriate to ask if they need help with anything. They may want to have you there, but they may want to do everything themselves. Do not try to preach to them, but try to weep with them. Jesus set this example in verse 35.

**Principle #5: Ask about the loss.** Vs. 17-36

After you have made the connection and shown your support through your presence, when it is appropriate, begin to ask questions about the situation. Notice Jesus did this in verse seventeen and thirty-four. At an appropriate time you can ask questions. What are some things that you could ask?

What happened?  
Were you close to them?  
When was the last time you saw them?  
How old were they?  
Have any details for the funeral been decided on?  
What do you need to do next?  
Is there anything I can do for you? (Be prepared for this one)  
How is your family doing?

Not all these questions need to be asked, but taking the time to ask the appropriate ones will help the person work through their grief.

**Principle #6: Pray with them.**

In John we see Jesus praying aloud so that others hear. Simply suggest praying with them. "I would like to pray for you, would that be alright?" In your prayer you can thank God for the person who has died, ask God to reveal Himself as the Comforter and Shepherd to the family, and that the funeral will cause people to turn their eyes to Jesus. I have found that even someone who does not know Christ is willing to have someone pray for them.

*Understanding the Loss*

As we are helping those that have lost a loved one, it is important for us to understand what is going to be taking place. There are arrangements that will need to take place and the grieving person may be already thinking through these, but we will want to be familiar with them. These arrangements may be taken care of by another but the responsibility could fall on the person you are with.

1. Funeral arrangements – clothes for loved one, time and place, who presides, the service, pallbearers
2. Family arrangements – calling family and friends, meeting family and friends
3. Institution arrangements – insurance, banks, lawyers, government

Understanding all that takes place in a situation like this helps us in understanding their loss, but we also want to consider the grief process that everyone needs to work through.

*The process of grief:*

1. Denial – the individual cannot believe it has happened and may not believe it till they see the lost loved one or experience the funeral.
2. Anger turned outward – The individual feels like they have been robbed so they blame someone – it could be the lost loved one or other family or God.
3. Anger turned inward – The individual feels guilty because they had some part in the loss.
4. Genuine grief – Reality of the loss and nothing can be done so there is hurting and mourning.
5. Resolution – The individual comes to the point where they realize their life is now different and that they will move on.
  - a. This is a painful decision.
  - b. This is a personal decision. – no one can make the decision for the individual.
  - c. This is a patient decision. – no one can know when the decision should be made.
6. Epilogue – There are still memories of the loss, but they are precious even though they still may hurt.

The loss of a loved one, whether expected or not, is difficult to work through. This includes the person who has the loss and the person who is helping the grieving. We could be called upon at any moment to be there in that time of need. May God be with you as you are with others.