



“And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days: so the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.” Deuteronomy 34:8

Someone once said, “When words are inadequate, have a ritual” (Anonymous). Rituals help us to express our deepest thoughts and feelings about the great events of our life. The funeral ritual is a public tradition that enables us to express our faith, beliefs and feelings about a loved one who has encountered death.

Unfortunately, we live in a society that tries to avoid mourning at all cost. We make the casket linings pale blue and pastel pink and somehow think that the aroma of the flowers will soften the blow that the living feels when a

loved one dies. It is a tremendous opportunity to learn of the faithfulness of God and the power of the Holy Spirit to comfort the living. I believe that mourning is a central part of healing in grief. It is necessary to grieve if we are to find the avenue that the Lord has given us to continue on with a real meaning in life.

Grieving first of all acknowledges the reality of death. There often is a mental battle that ensues upon the death of a loved one. Are they really dead? Surely there is a mistake and it must be somebody other than my loved one that has died? The battle rages to deny the fact that death now has come to our home, our family or our friends. Grieving is a means to acknowledge that death has come and it cannot be avoided. Often times, those who avoid grieving also avoid the reality of death.

Mourning also helps us to move toward the pain of loss. The defense mechanism kicks in at death. Death is painful and we never like entering into a place that causes any mental or emotional distress. Dr. John Cippel once said, “If we don’t say goodbye, we can’t go on. If we do not bury the dead the dead will bury us.” Journeys in life often begin with painful goodbyes. The more intense the pain the deeper the bond. However, death does not sever that bond.

The next step is to remember the person who died. There is a shifting that must occur from a physical relationship with the person who died to one of memory. If we could remove the pain of grief then we would also be able to remove the memories. The more we are able to tell our story in dealing with the death the more likely we are to enhance a healing in the grief process.

Another step to help us deal with grief is developing a new self-identity. We are social beings and recognized by those we have relationships with. Hence, when they die we feel that part of our identity is lost. That is why we feel like a part of us dies with our loved one. That is why we realize that when friends and family call during our time of grief they are in reality saying that even though our loved one is gone they still care about us. They will still be there even though the mutual link is now gone. Much like the Biblical example of the brothers of Joseph. They felt like Joseph would punish them after their father had died. Even though Joseph had cared for them for 17 years in Egypt it didn’t seem to matter to his brothers. They felt all he was doing for them was for their father’s sake. Really, he was doing it out of love and the death of their father only strengthened that relationship. Death has a way of bringing out the true love others have for us.

Therefore, another important part of dealing with grief is to accept the support extended to us by others. They are not responding out of obligation, but out of compassion. Funerals make a social statement of the need for others to support us. They are not beneficial to the dead. They are strength for the living. It gives us the chance to mingle with those who have the compassion that we rely on to make it through the difficult pain of grief.

Most important of all in dealing with grief is to search for the true meaning to life. Often times we forget that even as Jesus died on the cross, His cry went forth, “Why hast thou forsaken Me?” He did not say that because He didn’t know. He was saying that the best place we can turn for answers in grief is to the Lord. We never question the ability of the Lord but we do have questions. Turning to God in this hour of our life gives life greater meaning. A family that endures death once can fully understand why Jesus came and died to give us hope beyond the grave. The death of a loved one is a brush with mystery and the only one that can properly comfort us is the Lord.

Some information in this article came from the following sources:

Eva Shaw, *What To Do When a Loved One Dies*, (Dickens Press, Irvine CA, 1994)

Mary Jane Moffat, *In the Midst of Winter*, (Vintage Books, New York, NY, 1992)

Carl Luebering, *Planning the Funeral*, (Abbey Press, St. Meinard, IN, 1988)