

## The Pain of Loss and Hope for Recovery

by Beverly Littau

Grief is a natural response to losses of various kinds—divorce, death, loss of a job or a dream, loss of a limb, and on and on. We experience loss many times over the span of our lifetimes. Some losses are almost immeasurable, and other losses are more subtle, embedded in our lives and maybe even unnoticed.

It is important for us to allow ourselves to feel the emotions of grief—sadness, depression, anger, etc. in order to move through it and resolve it. When we don't allow ourselves to "feel the feelings," we will have a "build up" of grief and will begin to experience "*chronic grief*" that may span many years until we work to resolve it.

Grief goes through several stages: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. You will not move through these stages in a linear fashion, but rather in a more fluid, back and forth way. You may feel *denial* and then *anger* and be back to *denial* again and then feel *depression* and so on. What follows here is a brief description of the stages.

*Denial* is the initial stage of grief. It is characterized by a refusal to accept what has just happened (i.e. a death or serious accident). It normally lasts anywhere from two days to two weeks. You may feel numb, shock, fear, inability to function or sleep, confusion and idleness.

*Anger* is the second stage of grief. You may be angry in ways that are "illogical." You may be angry at the person who died, or you may be angry at the cat they left behind for you to care for. Illogical? Yes, but normal. You may even feel angry at God or at someone totally unrelated to the loss such as your boss or your neighbor.

The next stage of grief is *Bargaining*. This is the "if only" stage of grief. You may think that "if only" you had gotten to their house an hour earlier you could have saved them. You may "make a deal" with God to take away your pain. Bargaining is a way of seeing yourself in control. *You* could have saved them. *You* could have stopped it. *You* can pray enough and have the situation reversed.

After Bargaining comes *Depression*. This is the stage where you feel sad, tired, anguished, helpless, remorseful, guilty, and lonely. You may want to isolate. You may back off from activities that you once found enjoyable. Your appetite for food may change, which results in you eating more or less than normal.

The fifth and final stage of grief is *Acceptance*. This is the stage when you come to terms with the loss, and realize that it cannot be reversed. It is in the past and you cannot change the past. You also accept that your life is different since the loss, but that life can be stable, secure, and significant in your new circumstances. You also will come to accept that the future can hold some wonderful things for you, even though they are different than what you had planned.

It is important to realize that the loss may always be sad to you. That is a normal thing. The difference is that, while at the beginning the grief is raw and overwhelming (like sitting in an orchestra pit with the sound all around you), when you move through grief and then past it, those raw feelings will begin to subside and you will feel more like you are sitting first, up in the balcony and later, out in the theatre lobby, and finally in the parking lot. You will have more "emotional distance" from the grief and not feel it so deeply.

This doesn't happen simply with the passage of time. When people don't do the work of grieving (i.e. going through the five stages in an active way), they may still be feeling the raw, overwhelming grief even years later.

So what are some healthy ways to grieve? How can you do the work of grieving in a way that

will bring you to and through acceptance?

- Allow yourself to cry.
- Accept the help and listening ear of friends and family.
- Work hard at good nutrition and light to moderate exercise.
- Seek grief counseling.
- Search scriptures for comfort.
- Journal your prayers to God.
- Accept the emotions that come with each stage and don't deny them.
- Accept that it is not "un-Christian" to grieve.
- Allow yourself to talk about the person or thing lost with a friend.
- Seek out a Grief Group to share your experience with.

The scripture is full of promise and encouragement for those that grieve. It is important to realize that grief is a part of life and God understands our feelings of sadness and loss. He offers us hope and comfort through His word and His Spirit.

### **Bible Verses to Consider**

**Matthew 5:4** "Blessed are those who mourn, because they'll be comforted."

**Ecclesiastes 3:4** "There is a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance."

**Psalms 71:20-21** "Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up. You will increase my honor and comfort me once again."

**II Corinthians 12:9-10** "God said: 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Therefore I will gladly boast in my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me. So because of Christ, I am pleased in weakness...for when I am weak, then I am strong."

**I Peter 1:3-4** "According to His [God's] great mercy, He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that is imperishable, uncorrupted, and unfading, kept in heaven for you."

**Psalms 147:3** "He heals the despondent and binds their wounds."

**Psalms 62:5** "Rest in God alone, my soul, for my hope comes from Him."

**Romans 8:28** "And we know that God works in all things for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose."