

From the Pastor's Desk

The Loss of a Loved One

They are difficult phone calls to receive. I received one about my father on May 8, 1990 and my mother on January 1, 1991. Both died unexpectedly about a year and a half apart and both calls were a shock to receive. I had presided at many funerals during the course of ministry but did not know death until my father and mother died. I am referring to the biblical notion of "knowing", i.e., "to experience" the heart-wrenching death of a person you love so much. When a loved one dies, a part of your heart also dies, especially if it is after many years of marriage or an untimely death.

All Saints Sunday is November 5th. During both services we will read the names of those from our congregation who died during the past year. It looks like we will be reading and ringing the bell for ten people. But, death does not have the final word. Our faith loudly proclaims they have entered into a new existence in the Spirit. Life is changed, not ended. In the funeral rite, we pray:

O God of grace and glory, we remember before you today our brother/sister, (name). We thank you for giving him/her to us to know and to love as a companion in our pilgrimage on earth. In your boundless compassion, console us who mourn. Give us your aid, so we may see in death the gate to eternal life, that we may continue our course on earth in confidence until, by your call, we are reunited with those who have gone before us; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We need not fear death - it is the gate to eternal life with God. On the other hand, the pain of loss should not be minimized or avoided. Allowing oneself to feel it and cry is part of the process. People often go through five stages of bereavement. In the case of a prolonged illness, these stages can occur during the course of the illness. Also, these stages can occur not only with death but with any loss such as divorce, loss of a job, etc.

1. **Denial** Not accepting the loss and refusing to acknowledge it. "This can't be happening to me".
2. **Anger** "Why me?", "Life's not fair!", "I hate you, God!". (It's OK to be angry at God.) Anger, even at the deceased is common.
3. **Bargaining** This stage often occurs before the loss. "God, if you just cure my baby, I'll do anything for you!" "Please, give me another chance."
4. **Depression** Feeling numb and without any sense of control. Overwhelming feelings of frustration, hopelessness, self-pity and bitterness. Mourning not only the loss of a person, but also the loss of dreams, hopes, and plans for the future.
5. **Acceptance** The sun begins to rise. You realize that life has to go on. You begin to accept your loss and regain energy and goals for the future. It takes time, sometimes a few years, to get here. One comes to realize that good can come out of *any* negative situation. Thoughts turn toward personal growth, and finding joy in fond memories.

Just as a healthy spirituality boldly proclaims victory in the midst of death; a healthy emotional life gives time and energy to the process of bereavement. As I was going through mine about fifteen years ago, a Pastor shared with me these wise words: "Remember Bob, although this is a painful time, it is also a very holy time for both you and your parents."

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? No! In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.. Nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:35-37

~ Pastor Bob