

GRIEF AND GRIEVING

Proverbs 14:13 ... “Even in laughter the heart may sorrow, and the end of mirth may be grief.”

You probably already know what grief is, but let me share this definition: Grief is a deep sorrow about something lost, such as the death of a close friend or loved one. You can also experience grief if your house burns down, a robber steals all of your money and belongings, or when your best friend moves away. Grief is very personal and we each feel and express it differently. Oftentimes, grief may be delayed. For instance, if a spouse or child dies, the stress and busyness of preparing for an internment can cause the profound grief of that loss to come later after the immediate tasks are completed.

I have heard people criticize a husband or wife for controlling their emotions after their spouse dies. But we must allow time and emotions to run their course. The surviving spouse will eventually grieve after the funeral preparations and burial are completed, and after friends and family have returned home, leaving the survivor alone. I have witnessed surviving spouses put on a happy face, demonstrate total composure, and speak only of the blessings their departed spouse can now enjoy in Heaven. But after weeks or months have passed, the absence of their spouse becomes very real and they face their grief then. For some, the grieving never ends.

I often see outpourings of grief on social media when celebrities or sports figures die, mostly by young people who may not yet have a mature outlook on life and death. Those who deeply grieve the loss of people they do not personally know, may not have experienced the loss of a parent, sibling, spouse or close friend. They may not yet have learned to handle grief. The death of a celebrity idol may overwhelm them. A person's first tragic loss is the most difficult and may not be demonstrated in ways that others understand. But we should empathize, not criticize.

We sometimes tell survivors “It's okay to grieve,” when they are not displaying grief. We also may be guilty of giving false hope by telling survivors that their loved one is in heaven when the person who died showed absolutely no interest in God while they were alive. When I speak at funerals, I rarely talk about the deceased. Instead, I speak to the living and their need for a Savior. We might also be tempted to criticize someone who is not expressing grief in the same way we would. Grief is beneficial and can lead to personal healing and reconciliation with God. But we should not condemn those who delay their grieving or express it differently than we would. The best encouragement you can give someone who is grieving, is to pray for them, help them materially, and – sometimes – remain silent.

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