

Life After Loss: Growth out of Grief

Lessons on Loss.

Loss is a part of life—the hardest part—and it starts early. Grief has many faces and strikes every age. It is impossible to make sense of many terrible losses. Whether it's death, a disabling injury, the loss of property, pets, health, friends, or a job—loss can make you feel like there's a bull's-eye on your back with no place to hide. One author wrote: "God marks across some of our days, 'Will explain later.'"¹

How do you face loss? To the person who believes that God will never let bad things happen to people who live right, feelings of betrayal and bitterness can fester and finally destroy faith and trust in God's power. In this world we are not always shielded from suffering—it is a part of our human experience.

Sometimes we are grieved with the thought that we have brought suffering on ourselves or into the lives of others through unwise choices. But God promises His cleansing forgiveness, the comfort of His presence, and continual strength and guidance. "He restores my soul...Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me—Your rod and staff comfort me."² God will not abandon you in your hour of need.

Emerging from the valley. Healing from grief is not quick and easy, but it is possible. Trust that you can and will heal. Believe that the day will come when you will be able to remember your loss without overwhelming pain. It takes time, because grief over loss usually involves a progression of emotions that ebb and flow. The course of grief is traced by numbness and shock, feelings of utter despair, anger, loss, and helplessness. Every griever walks through that valley. But beyond that there is hope, purpose, and a plan for your life.

Staying strong through suffering. Physical as well as spiritual nurture is vital during times of stress. Accept help from others, or ask for it if you need it, whether it is help cleaning, shopping, caring for the needs of the family, or your own need for company.

Take time to get into the fresh air and exercise each day. Stock up on fresh fruits and vegetables, healthful whole grains, and nuts. Avoid caffeine, alcohol, soda pop and tobacco; instead, stay hydrated and calm with water and soothing herb teas.

Practice CPR! Grief counselor Larry Yeagley in his book, *Grief Recovery*, outlines a plan for readjustment after loss that he calls “CPR.” It is:

Communication. The environment of our society can make it difficult to talk about sad feelings. Someone in grief may need to talk but feel as if they are imposing on others by discussing their loss. It is important to actively seek out people who care enough to listen—and that may mean connecting with people in helping professions such as a pastor, counselor, physician, or with a support group.

Participation. Participating in the regular activities of life is an important step toward healing. Gradually expanding your activities and social circle does not mean you have forgotten your old life—it is a way of moving forward with a new life, a new “normal” that still has meaning.

Relationship. Major crises like death, divorce, or illness can impair a person’s ability to form or sustain relationships. Spending some time alone is healing, but prolonged isolation can hinder recovery. Actively reaching out to others to give and receive support is an important factor in recovery. It helps those who grieve establish meaning and purpose for their lives in a new context.

Strength to Endure. John Claypool lost his 10-year-old daughter in a 2-year battle with a terminal illness. In the promise of Isaiah 40:30-31, he found that strength came to him in a most unexpected form. “Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” He summarized his experience:

1. You “shall mount up with wings as eagles.” Here is exuberance and freedom. This type of strength does not fit the long nights of anxious care when tending to a sick child.
2. You “shall run and not be weary.” Here is strength for action to solve problems and perform tasks. But in some situations, there is nothing you can do.
3. You “shall walk and not faint.” “This may sound insignificant. Who wants to be slowed to a walk, creeping along inch by inch, just barely able to endure? But this is the only form of the promise that fits this situation. In the dark stretches of life, when you cannot soar and there is no place to run, to know of a Help that will provide the strength that enables you ‘to walk and not faint’ is good news indeed.”³

There is an end to sorrow. There are seasons of life that may feel like one, long winter. But the promise of summer is coming, when “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” Rev. 21:4.

Lessons on Loss. In this life the experience of grief can deepen our ability to participate in life. It can make us more grateful for what we have, more sensitive and trusting. It is often through the valley of suffering that the ministry of consolation to others is born in our hearts. Christ Himself is afflicted in all our sorrows, and He promises to guide us through the dark valleys in life.⁴ His love opens a channel into the wounded heart that becomes a healing medicine to those who sorrow—a medicine that those who have grieved can share with others.

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¹ Morgan R. The Red Sea Rules, p. 90.

² Psalm 23:3-4.

³ Claypool J. Tracks of a Fellow Struggler, 36-38, paraphrased.

⁴ Isaiah 63.9.