



# The Grief Journey

LifeCare Memos® Messages of Compassion

## The Journey

The journey of grief is one we all walk sooner or later. Though the packages of grief come in a variety of sizes, grief visits every person in the universe. Some losses are individual: death of a loved one, a terminal illness, divorce, loss of employment, or even the death of a dream. Other losses are more global: aftermath of school shootings, missing and exploited children, fear of pandemics, terrorism and traumatic brain injuries of returning veterans. In addition, we hear daily of scenarios of co-workers and friends who are experiencing loss and grief. When we pause to think about it, grief is an ever-present reality.

Although grief is prevalent in our society, it is often misunderstood and often avoided. In this “Hurry up and get over it world” we are tempted to circumvent the pain. We want Grief-Lite, as though it were an alcoholic beverage that could cure all ails. Unfortunately, the grief path is not a brief path. Dr. Timothy Clinton, President of AACC, says grief can take two to three years to get through, and even then the healing is still ongoing. Henri Nouwen suggests that we eliminate the words, “Are you still grieving?” and “closure” from our vocabulary. He says, *“You close on a house, you don’t close on a death!”*

## Don’t Take Away My Grief

Doug Manning, author of numerous books on the topic, insightfully offers this encouragement: *“Don’t let anyone take your grief away from you. You deserve it, you must have it. If you had a broken leg, no one would criticize you for using crutches until it was healed. If you had major surgery, no one would pressure you to run a marathon next week. Grief is a major wound. It doesn’t heal overnight. You must have time and crutches until you can heal.”*

Researchers agree that *active* rather than *passive* grieving is preferable. Harold Ivan Smith suggests several practical steps in navigating the grief journey. First, don’t do it alone. Let others join you in this difficult transition. The Hawaiian word “humuhum” means fitting the pieces together. Allow **GOD** and others to assist in placing pieces in the puzzle of your life. Start with the corners and edges—those pieces that already make sense and add pieces as they “fit into place.” Don’t attempt to force pieces to fit; be patient with yourself. Create a “mekom hanekama” – a safe place – by letting others you trust know of your need for personal space. Allow others to provide practical assistance during your time of grief.

## **GOD's Help**

Maranatha music has produced a compact disc entitled "A Healing Journey Through Grief." Dr. Clinton narrates this beautifully produced CD which offers hope and healing for those dealing with grief. Drawing from both personal and clinical experience he walks us through the very painful experience with great empathy and understanding. One of the verses he shares is,

**"GOD is our refuge and underneath are His everlasting arms"** (Deuteronomy 33:27).

The word "underneath" literally means bottomless. No matter how deep your loss or grief, **GOD's** love goes deeper still.

Smith also shares great insight into the healing process based upon a not-so-well known character in the book of Jeremiah named Ebed-Melech. When he heard that Jeremiah had been thrown into a cistern, he first became an advocate by going to the king to request his rescue. But he didn't stop there. Grief healers look for opportunities to go the extra mile. Anticipating the very real possibility that removing him from the cistern would add additional pain (physical as well as emotional) he took some old rags and worn out clothes and let them down with the ropes to prevent further injury. Ebed-Melech was sensitive and proactive. He took the time to anticipate Jeremiah's need and then used seemingly insignificant items to minister to him. Allow others to pad the ropes for you by being specific about your needs. Don't assume they will automatically know what you need or that it is selfish to articulate what you *do* and *don't* need at any given time.

### ***Grief Journey Items***

Grieving can be a very complicated, multifaceted process, so it is helpful to simplify. One practical way to do this is to imagine grief as a journey. When you anticipate a trip, you plan ahead, pack and hopefully pray along the way. Sometimes grief is unexpected and sudden, in which case preparation is not always possible. However, there are some essential items that will make the journey a little easier.

- A good map – **Remember** there is more than one way to arrive at any destination and no two people grieve in exactly the same way.
- A photo album – **Celebrate** traditions, rituals, vacations, and milestones that you had together; give yourself permission to laugh again. It is not disrespectful to your loved one.
- Personal care items – **Recharge** your batteries by good self care; let your personal hygiene items remind you to add some deposits to your emotional bank account as you have had many withdrawals recently.
- Comforter – **Realize** God, through the Holy Spirit, is right there with you as your Advocate—the One sent to be alongside to help us in our time of need (John 14:25-27).

- The Bible – **Rest** in the truth of **GOD's** Word. It offers hope and realism simultaneously. The scripture says,

*“We do sorrow, but not as those who have no hope”* (I Thessalonians 4:13).

Also, the Psalms are filled with authentic emotions and much encouragement.

If you have never thought of yourself as a religious person, or never thought **GOD** was involved in the daily affairs of mortal men, consider that your grief may be just the opportunity you need to reach out to Him. Tell **GOD** exactly how you feel: angry, alone, indifferent, doubting, etc. He knows your heart. He wants a relationship with you and has already made the first move. Don't walk the journey of grief alone. Ask **GOD** to help you *create a new normal*. Life will never be the same, but you don't have to face it alone.

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### ***LifeCare Memos***<sup>®</sup>

When experiencing the stresses of life, people need support. The Psalmist needed that support and found it when he turned to God. He said, *“Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one **cares for my life**. I cry to you, O LORD; I say, ‘You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living’”* (Psalm 142:4-5).

***LifeCare Memos*** are designed as messages of compassion that integrate biblical guidelines for emotional and spiritual well-being. Topics focus on various life-care issues and address them from the perspective of Scripture.