

GRIEF IS NOT DEPRESSION

When a family member or close friend dies, people may say that we're depressed, but in reality what we're experiencing is grief. Grief is different from depression, which is an emotion or feeling, like anger or glee.

It's only partially correct to tell a mother whose four year-old daughter has died of leukemia that she's depressed, or tell a husband whose wife has been killed in an automobile accident that he's suffering from depression. What also has happened to each person is the onset of grief.

What is grief?

Grief is a condition of moral and spiritual crisis. All of the beliefs which we have are challenged when a family member or friend dies. We find ourselves asking many painful questions:

- What does it mean to be mortal?
- What does it mean that everyone I love is finite and mortal?
- Who do bad things happen to good people?
- What is there suffering?
- Does suffering have meaning?
- Is life inherently tragic?
- Does life have meaning?
- What role does fate (being in the wrong place at the wrong time) play in our lives?



A spiritual crisis

This spiritual crisis – which is not necessarily a religious one - involves both an intellectual and emotional struggle with a variety of emotions, only one of which is depression. Sometimes, a clinical depression will be provoked by a tragic disaster.

But along with feelings of depression, there are likely to be feelings of despair, longing, shame, blame, anger, shock, sorrow, denial, loneliness, fear, and rage. All of this surrounds us as we grieve. We find ourselves asking: If babies die of agonizing diseases and if people can become

widowed in a matter of seconds, can we trust life at all, much less a loving, divine God who is good and all powerful? If such tragedies can happen, how can we feel safe or know the earth won't spin off its axis or that gravity will hold? There appears to be no order, no meaning to life as we have known it, when we grieve.



A crisis of the entire human condition

This is why grief transcends emotions, becoming a crisis of the entire human condition. In addition to the wrenching emotional pain that occurs when we grieve, our intellectual understandings are cracked wide open, forcing us to our knees. We are overwhelmed with doubt, even if we thought we had faith.

An entire reworking of our fundamental beliefs will have to take place, from the ground up, as we work through our grief. Most of us go through life believing that bad things should not happen to good, law-abiding, God-loving individuals. It becomes important in a time of loss to find a philosophy of life that can incorporate unfair, undeserved catastrophe. This takes a hard and rigorous searching of the soul.

Often, our grief excludes those systems, beliefs, and friends we used to count on for discourse. Working through a grieving process can be a lonely, exhausting, and relentless process. Sleep disorders, eating disorders, and mood swings often characterize the period surrounding grief. Our constant questioning may require the help of professionals (psychotherapists, psychologists, or clergy.)

Become better, not bitter

The grieving period can take months, even years. In time, courageous individuals choose to become better rather than bitter. We realize that the only way out of grief is through it. We don't get over it. We get used to it by incorporating the loss into our revised beliefs and philosophies. Only then can we continue on with our lives.

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Some Quiet Valentines

While watching an evening sunset
Fade in the western skies,
We know that when tomorrow dawns,
From the east the sun will rise.
Although it may be hidden
By veils hanging low,
We're sure it will appear again
And we'll feel its warming glow.
And so it is with life,
When seen through misty eyes,
When our world is suddenly dimmed

And we plead and ask those whys.
It is then we learn, 'no man is an island.'
As someone wisely said,
As we travel life's uncharted course
And by an unknown hand seem led.
To walk that path of sorrow,
Enduring life's great loss,
But by chance or fate that someone's
Path we are guided to cross.
That someone through kindness
In his own way does impart,
A warmth and a tenderness
That so lifts a sad heart.

For it's the depth of their smile
That lifts this sorrow of mine,
And by far they are the best suited
To be our Valentine.
We may be someone's Valentine
And never be aware,
In these caring, still-grieving hearts,
Our children's love is there.
We've no choice but to continue
On life's uncharted way,
And be thankful for those quiet friends
Who brighten up each day.