

~ continued from page 4

I have heard a lot of people talk about how their friends came around immediately after the tragedy but never came back. What they usually forget is that those people said, "If there is anything we can do to help, anything, please let us know." Now, some of them don't really mean it - but a lot of them do. Let people do things. They don't know how to provide grief counseling...but they know how to mow grass. Let people help you.

7. "PERSONALITY INTENSIFICATION"



I learned a new term recently that helped give a name to something I had observed. That happens when sudden grief occurs. A gerontologist at our church was conducting a class on the problems of aging. One of the things he said is that, as people get older, a phenomenon occurs which is called "personality intensification." As you get older, you just get more like you have always been.

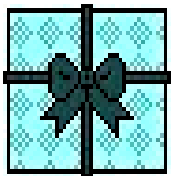
You've probably seen this in older people. If they were grumpy as young people, they are going to be even more cantankerous as they get older. If they were sweet and loving all their lives, they are probably going to be folks who grow old gracefully.

Well, I think the same thing happens when grief enters your life. The motivation to monitor and adjust the way you behave just kind of melts away and your personality characteristics intensify. For some people, that can be a blessing - they may have needed to open up and be less careful about life. For others, it can be really disastrous.

Sometimes you hear folks say that the death of a child is likely to cause the death of the marriage of that child's parents. That's just not true. What happens is personality intensification. If there were cracks in that marriage relationship, the stress on those cracks will be intensified by the child's death. On the other hand, if that marriage relationship was a strong one, it will grow even stronger.

It's not by accident that the customary wisdom of the ages is "Don't make any major life decisions for a whole year after the loss of a loved one." You are not yourself and you shouldn't expect yourself to be yourself.

8. THE FINAL GIFT.



Finally, I want to tell you something that I have begun to realize as the years have passed since the night that Tim and Don and Don's best friend died. I have realized that by their deaths and the deep permanent scar it left in my life gave me a gift of immeasurable value.

The final gift bestowed by any loved one who is torn from your grasp is a clear and unforgettable awareness of what is permanent... and what is temporary. We live in a "death-denying society" a society where the death rate is 100 per cent but where no one wants to mention it.

Every person who dies gives a priceless gift to those who stay behind. That gift is awareness of death and its manifold implications for our lives. Death awareness is about living. It brings the maturity we need to live our lives with wisdom and joy ... to stop cringing at the thought of eventual death... and start living with the daily enthusiasm of those who are packing for the big trip.

CLOSING

Let me close with the final words from "When There Are No Words:" My prayer for you is that you will have peace, that you will have good grief, that you will be honest with yourself letting out what is within you and refusing to govern your ways of grieving by what you think others might be expecting that you ought to do, that you will allow your loved ones the same right to their own ways of grieving never assuming that they should want to cry when you feel like crying or talk when you feel like talking or sit and stare when you want to, that both your life and your death will be greatly enhanced by the perspectives that enter your life when a loved one exits your life, that you will become daily more comfortable with the realization that, as my son, Don, used to tell me, "Death is just a part of living."

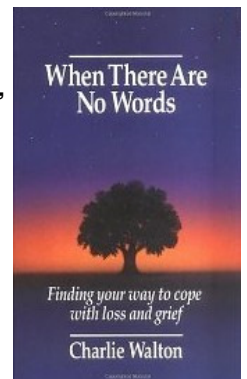


By Charlie Walton, TCF Atlanta, GA
Author of many books on grief
Reprinted from TCF Atlanta Online Newsletter in
Memory of Charlie Walton who passed January 7, 2011

Books Written By Charlie Walton:

"When There are No Words"

This book describes that terrible moment when you desperately want to say something to console a friend or loved one and no words seem appropriate.



Packing For the Big Trip

Twelve Faces of Grief

Oh God! Oh God!

Twelve Reflections on the First Twelve Weeks of Grief

Living with Loss While Others Are Celebrating

"Laying It on the Line With God"