

Crossroads Hospice Charitable Foundation



Care for Your Heart

A Conversation About Grief

By Dorothy Franks



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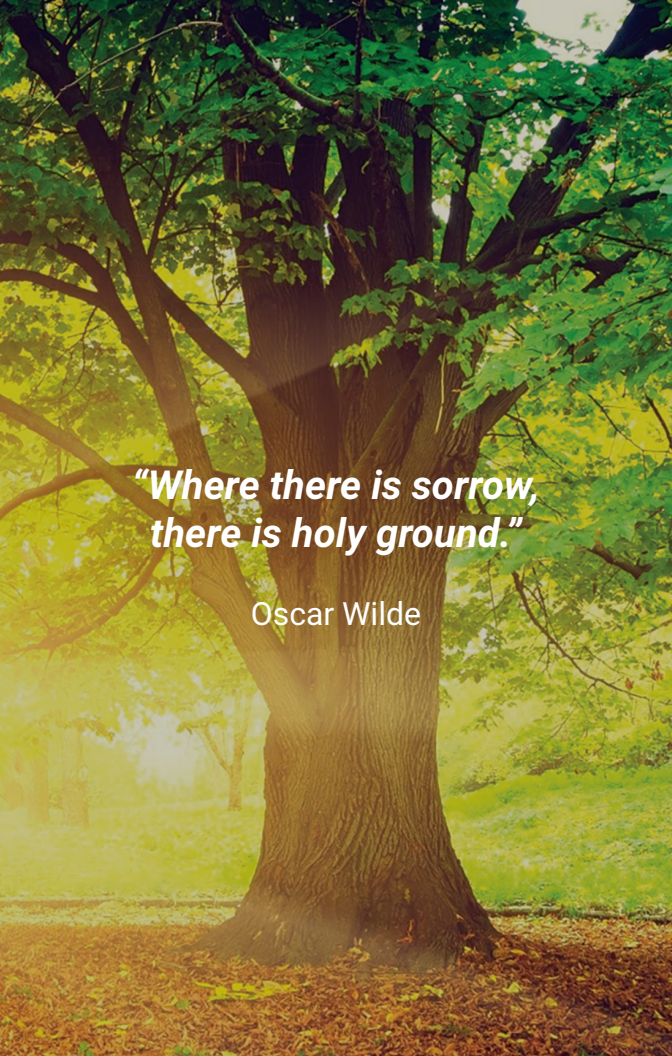
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A large, mature tree with a thick, textured trunk and a dense canopy of green leaves. The tree is the central focus, set against a soft, hazy background of other trees and a grassy area. The ground is covered in fallen brown leaves. The overall lighting is warm and golden, suggesting a late afternoon or early morning setting. A quote is overlaid on the tree's trunk.

***“Where there is sorrow,
there is holy ground.”***

Oscar Wilde

Your Sorrow

If you are reading this book, you may know sorrow. It is possible that someone you love has died, and you are faced with living your life without them.

At this moment, living alone may not seem worth the effort, but you may be willing to try to live as well as you can for the sake of those who love you. Their prayer will be that soon you will want to do it for yourself.

As you go through this time of bereavement, you may find yourself having thoughts and feelings you don't recognize. Thinking and feeling differently is normal for someone who has suffered a loss. The death of someone you love brings physical, emotional, and behavioral reactions caused by the grief you feel.

During bereavement, these feelings of grief and the stories that accompany them are important; and when you explain your grief to someone you trust, you are helping your heart to heal. Outwardly expressing your inner feelings of grief is called mourning.

Caring for your heart is necessary during this time of grief and mourning.

Love Heals

A large, faint heart shape is positioned in the bottom left corner of the page. The heart is filled with a light green color, matching the background, and is semi-transparent, allowing the background to show through it.

Love is Eternal

Love is not defeated by death. When someone you love dies, nothing can take away the love you have for them and the love they had for you. It will continue despite death, and it will not change no matter what else changes.

Hold onto this love through whatever sorrow may come. Do not be robbed of the goodness of love by the sadness and loneliness of grief.

Love is what matters, and simply believing it cannot be taken from you will help you hold onto it.

Spiritual Ties Remain

You have not lost the spiritual tie to your loved one who died. This bond cannot be corrupted by death. It remains with you for as long as you remember your loved one.

You may feel this connection whenever you find yourself remembering the beliefs and opinions your loved one had. In times of discouragement, let their good opinion of you prevail.

Love and spiritual relationship cannot be taken from you by any power on earth. As things are, though, every relationship you will ever have will be time limited in the physical realm.

So it is with your loved one who has died. Their physical absence is deeply felt, and the lost and sad feelings of grief are with you now instead of the joy and comfort of their presence. This is your bereavement.

The task you are facing with the loss of the physical aspect of your relationship is that of establishing a good and complete memory of your loved one in your heart and mind.

You are replacing their physical presence with memory. It is not enough, but it's a place to start.

Each time you are able to speak honestly with someone about the person who died, you are creating a stronger memory.

Each story you tell about them serves the purpose of creating a larger place for them in your heart.

Signs and Symptoms of Grief



Natural Grief Reactions

Grieving the loss of a loved one is painful and depletes your energy. Everything can seem overwhelming. You may doubt yourself during this difficult time and wonder if you are “normal.”

To reassure those who are grieving, the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization provides a list of natural grief reactions so that you are able to see the “normal” experience of many people. The NHPCO says that when you are grieving, it is natural to:

- Feel emotionally numb
- Have difficulty believing the death occurred
- Feel tightness in your throat
- Feel heaviness in your chest or stomach
- Eat more or less than usual
- Have a desire to smoke, drink, or use other drugs more than before
- Have difficulty sleeping, awaken early, dream of your loved one—sometimes nightmares—feel exhausted, and lack energy
- Have difficulty making decisions
- Feel as though life has no meaning

- Be overly concerned with your health and even develop symptoms similar to those of your loved one (although, if you haven't seen your doctor for a while, this might be a good time for a check-up)
- Feel low at times of birthdays, holidays, and other special occasions
- Feel preoccupied with financial concerns. Spend more than usual
- Tell and retell things about your loved one and the experience of their death
- Talk things over with the deceased.
- Feel mood changes over the slightest things
- Feel guilty for what was said or not said or for not having done enough for your loved one
- Be irritated at the wrong person, wrong situation, or at the world
- Feel angry with your loved one for leaving you
- Sense your loved one's presence, believe you hear their voice, or expect them to come back
- Experience an intense preoccupation with your loved one
- Cry at unexpected times

- Feel self-pity and not feel needed
- Feel relief. Feel guilty for feeling relief
- Find it difficult to concentrate

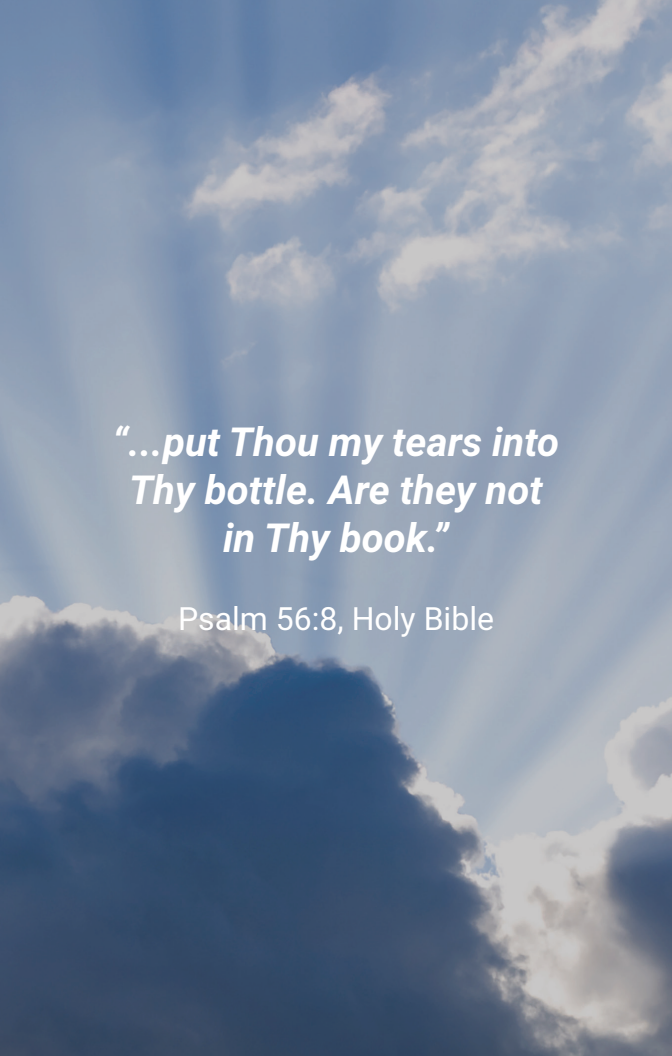
These are natural grief reactions. They are common to anyone who has lost a loved one. There is nothing wrong with any of these reactions.

There are things you can do to help yourself feel better, such as:

- Crying and expressing your grief to understanding people
- Eating three good meals a day
- Getting enough rest
- Exercising and engaging in recreation

Feelings of Grief

It is hard to live through a grief experience and adjust to life afterwards. Nothing seems the same, and our security is disturbed by that, but if you can accept the company of other people, it helps, especially if some of them understand grief from their own experience. Deep in grief, one person may say, "I have no hope."

A vertical image of a bright blue sky filled with soft, white, fluffy clouds. Sunbeams radiate from behind the clouds, creating a glowing effect. The overall mood is peaceful and hopeful.

***“...put Thou my tears into
Thy bottle. Are they not
in Thy book.”***

Psalm 56:8, Holy Bible

Another person who has faced sorrow may say, “I remember feeling that way, and I feel more hopeful now.” Knowing how others have coped provides assurance.

Some time alone is fine, but isolation is not good for those who are grieving.

A broad range of feelings is expected during the process of grieving. These vary from person to person depending on the nature of our relationship with the person who died, our personality, our coping practices, our cultural and religious background, our family history, the people around us and so on.

No two people have exactly the same feelings when it comes to loss and change. However, when you are grieving, it is natural to:

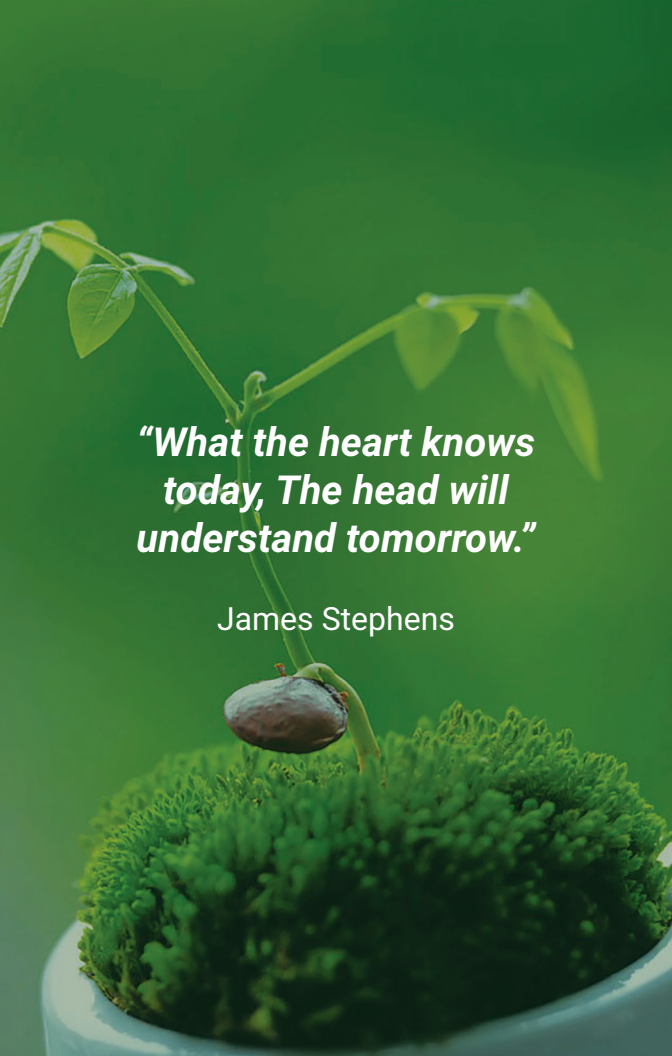
- Feel sadness and longing
- Cry at unexpected times
- Experience fear, worry, frustration, exhaustion, anger, regret, confusion, anxiety, despair, or a host of other emotions
- Feel relieved, peaceful, or content
- Feel loneliness, uneasiness, helplessness, hopelessness, or depression

- Want to spend time alone
- Have a desire to get away
- Feel disorganized, lost, or unsure of yourself
- Feel a bit on edge or react strongly to minor events
- Feel overly sensitive when dealing with people

It is important to recognize your feelings and accept them. There is no right or wrong way to feel, and how you feel is how you feel.

It is good to be honest with yourself and others. Grief that is shared is grief that can heal, so it is helpful to express yourself with truthfulness.

As with talking about your thoughts and feelings, writing in a journal can be helpful, especially during times of anger and depression when you may fear that others would be hurt by the power of your anger. Later, looking back over what you have written may supply you with insight. In addition, it can help to practice relaxation techniques and meditation.

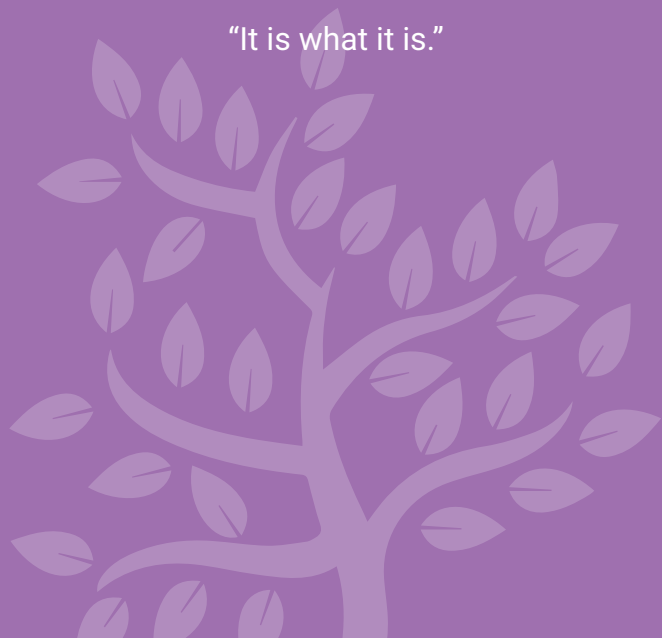


***“What the heart knows
today, The head will
understand tomorrow.”***

James Stephens

Accepting the Truth

“It is what it is.”



Accepting the Truth of What Is

Seeing What Is: Acknowledging the reality of what has happened helps you complete the first step toward accepting the truth. Talking to someone you trust about the person who died and explaining your grief helps you see what is.

Understanding What Is: Defining how things are different now that your loved one has died and realizing everything you miss about them helps you more fully understand the depth of your loss and the significance of it—to understand what is.

Feeling What Is: When the full significance of what has been taken from you becomes clear, pain comes to you again; and it may seem too much to bear.

Nobody can stand being in strong emotional pain without trying to do something about it. This is when grieving people resort to using alcohol and other drugs, constant busyness, excessive spending, and any of the many other things human beings do to ease their pain. These compulsive behaviors do provide temporary relief; that's why we return to them time after time, but there are always consequences for choosing these escapes.

We all know what they are. To find more lasting relief with better consequences, we have to feel the pain we want to heal. This means stopping the compulsive acts in order to feel what is.

Long-term relief comes from letting others care about you and simply being able to speak honestly about your grief. Expressing yourself in other ways helps, too.


Playing, writing, or listening to music is helpful to many people, and using art in any of its many forms allows expression of grief. Writing in a journal, especially in times of trial, helps you understand what has happened, what you think about it, and how it affects you. Other things that help are spending time with uplifting people and allowing others to pass on by, attending your own spiritual services, and doing things that allow you to feel free to breathe.

It is necessary to say here that some behaviors can change your life forever, even if they make you feel good at the time. Grief makes you vulnerable to others' demands.

Promise yourself not to make any life-changing decisions until at least a year past the loss of your loved one.

Believing What Is: Acceptance says, “yes, this has happened” or “it is what it is,” **not** “I am okay with it.”

It might be hard to believe, but you will not always feel as bad as you do now. You will feel better.



***“Although the world is
full of suffering,
It is also full of
The overcoming of it.”***

Helen Keller

Recovering

Let Hope Grow



Grief Requires Respect

Your loved one may have suffered through a long illness, or their death may have been sudden and unexpected. There is no way to compare the different paths grief may take as it comes to us. We just know it finds us all.

Each and every person's grief is unique, just as each relationship is unique, but the element that is the same for all of us is what grief asks of us.

The one thing grief requires is our respectful attention. Accepting the truth of your grief, and believing it deserves to be expressed, indicates your conviction that your grief is worthy of this kind of attention.

Remember Your Loved One

Remembering your loved one well is honoring the relationship you have with each other—that spiritual tie that cannot be broken. It is as though their presence is transferred from their existence on this earth to a presence in your heart.

Each time you talk about the one who died, your memory of them becomes more vivid. It is best to talk about these things only to people you trust. Your cherished memories should not be given to just anyone.

Keep Honest Memories

There must be so much you miss about the one who died. These are the things you talk about—the things you miss.

Since your loved one was a complete human being, there must be some things you don't miss, too. You may not want to talk about these things so much, but it is good for you to acknowledge them to yourself. By admitting that your loved one was not perfect, you are able to remember them as the fully-functioning individual they were.

It isn't necessary to dwell on these imperfections, but admitting them is part of the care of your heart—being honest with yourself. So, remember well and truly.

If Only

Regret is the word that describes how you feel about the things you wish you had done differently. Regrets are about things you did that you wish you could take back, or things you didn't do that you wish you had done. Maybe you even regret some of the thoughts and feelings you had about your loved one. Everybody has regrets. It's part of being human. Where regrets are concerned, it is important to see What Is.

For instance, there are times when, if you had knowledge of the future, you might have acted differently. Did you have knowledge of the future?

If you were a perfect person, you never would lose your temper or say mean things. Are you perfect?

These are simple examples, and most people could benefit from talking about regrets to a trusted person such as your minister, priest, rabbi, counselor, or other. It is good to decide if there is anything to actually be sorry for or whether simply being human explains the shortcomings you remember.

If, upon examination, there is valid reason for feeling guilty, you can apologize and make amends. Amends can be made in any way that seems appropriate to you. For example, you could do some anonymous act of kindness your loved one would have approved of or anything you know they would have liked.

Even though you may think it is too late to apologize, you can still write your thoughts in a letter to your loved one. Somehow, reading the letter to another person helps fulfill a spiritual need we all have to know that someone bears witness to the important things in our lives. If

you don't want to share your letter with anyone, though, don't do it. Ultimately, you will want to read your letter to your loved one at a place that helps you feel close to them.

Resentments

Resentments are about things your loved one did or didn't do that frightened, hurt, or made you angry. These resentments may be small, such as feeling insulted when your loved one complained about your cooking, or large, such as feeling hurt that they left you. Resentments may be expressed in a letter to your loved one in much the same way you expressed regrets. It is good to talk with your minister, rabbi, priest, or counselor so you can get to a place of forgiveness before reading it to your loved one.

You will want to be honest in this letter, and include your communication of forgiveness. You deserve peace now, and forgiveness is the path to peace. Read your letter to your loved one in a well-chosen place.

A good reason for acknowledging resentments is to help you construct true and honest memories. If you can be truthful about your hurt and anger,

you can probably be truthful about anything. This honesty helps you remember things more accurately. True memories are at the heart of recovery.

I Want You to Know...

There may be things you wish you had said to your loved one but weren't able to say, and now you feel the opportunity is lost. You can complete this communication by telling them now in a letter.

Most of the time, the things we wish we had said have something to do with how greatly we appreciated them, how much we loved them, or to thank them for something. Expressing gratitude is a blessing to the one who gives it.

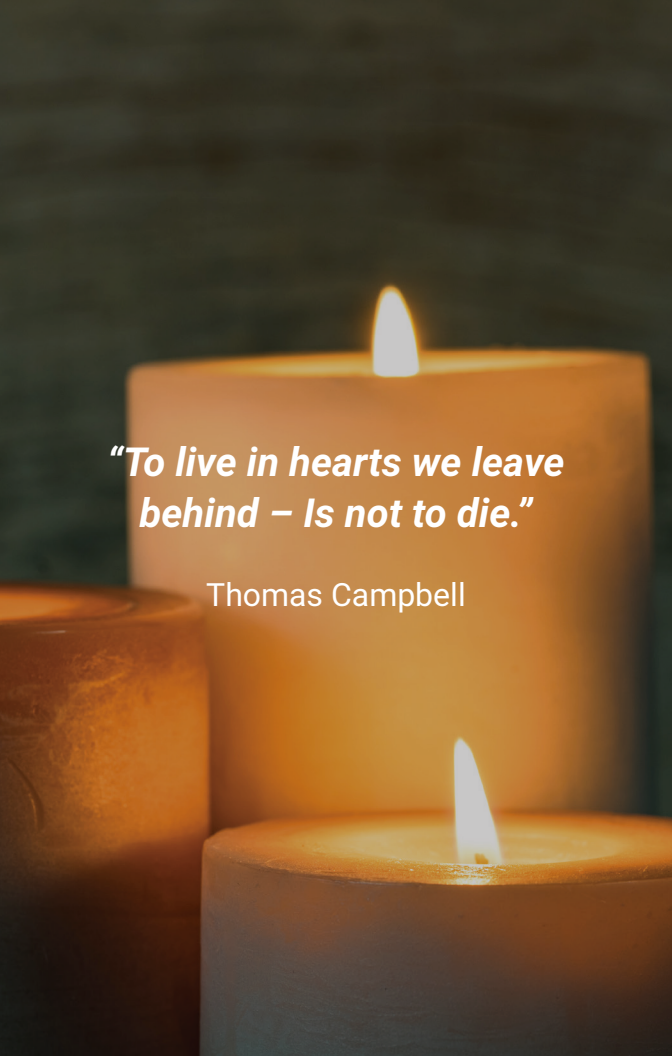
This letter might be written with precise, detailed descriptions or it might be in broad, general terms. Do this your way. After it is written, you might want to share your letter with a trusted person. Or it might be personal and private, and you only want to read it to your deceased loved one. Either way, you are the best judge of how to do this letter.

About Your Letters

If, after reading about regrets, resentments, and unspoken communication, you want to combine them all into one letter, that is an acceptable choice.

If you prefer to write then read one category at a time, that is a good choice, too. Whatever works for you is exactly the right way to do these letters. Writing the letters is about completing unfinished business between you and the person no longer with you. Unfinished business can keep you distracted and cause you to miss the warm feelings of the remaining love and spiritual relationship.

There is hope for comfort and peace.

A photograph of three lit candles in a dark setting. The candles are lit, and their flames are visible. The text is overlaid on the image.

***“To live in hearts we leave
behind – Is not to die.”***

Thomas Campbell

Holidays and Special Occasions

“This time, like all times, is a very good time if we but know what to do with it.”

Chinese Proverb

Remembrance for Special Days

During holidays and other special occasions, our thoughts often turn to the significant people no longer in our lives. This can leave us with feelings of emptiness and loneliness. We may approach the holiday season with a sense of dread because of the longing these days evoke.

This is a good time to do something that symbolizes your feelings for your loved one or somehow recognizes your relationship. Performing a physical act to celebrate your spiritual and emotional connection will help you during the holidays.

Having a plan for the occasion can lift your mood when special days are coming up because just knowing how you are going to cope is reassuring. When the ceremony you plan for your deceased loved one is completed before the holiday gets into full swing, you can feel that you have recognized your absent loved one first during the holidays.

This type of remembrance does not need to be elaborate. In fact, small personal things seem to be the most comforting. Some examples might be:

- Planting a flower in memory of your loved one
- Putting out their favorite decoration
- Writing a message on a helium balloon and releasing it in a special place
- Lighting a candle
- Putting out a picture
- Saying a prayer
- Telling stories about the person
- Making a toast at dinner
- Serving their favorite food
- Taking a walk in a place they liked

You might want to do this ceremony with other people or you might prefer to do it alone. You know what is right for you. It is important, though, to take your time and close the ceremony by thinking about how you have been touched by this remembrance.

Why

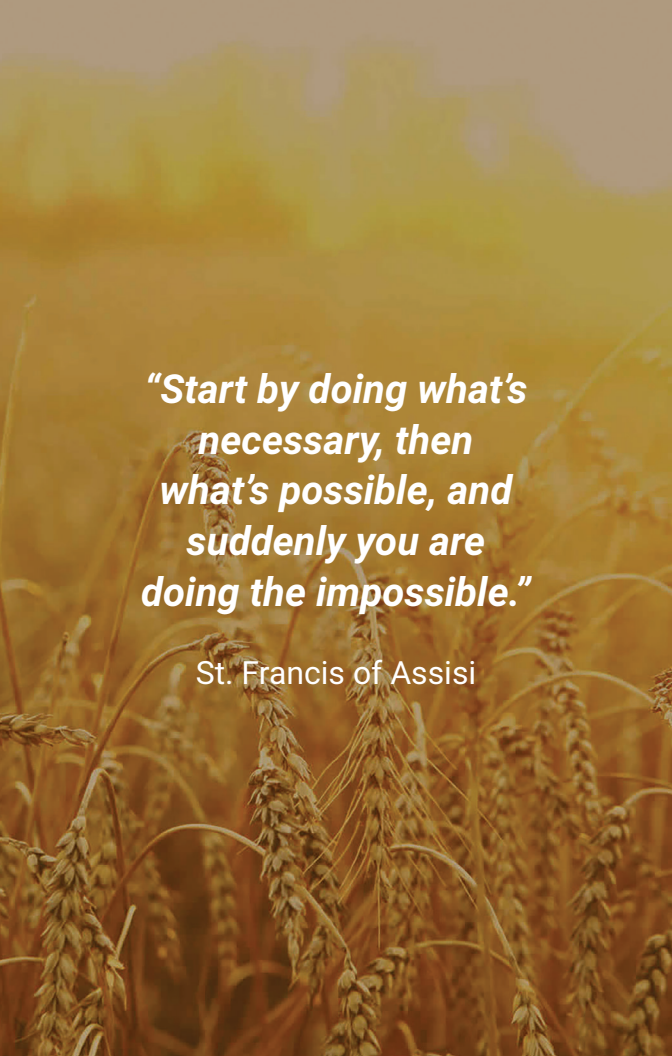
The “why” question may be the hardest question. It may seem there is no answer, yet it provides a reason to look at your spiritual beliefs. Talking with your minister, rabbi, priest or other spiritual counselor can be helpful now. They are the ones who can help most with “why” and finding meaning in your grief.

The remembrances you perform in celebration of your loving relationship also support your search for meaning, as they give your grief respectful attention.

Poet Robert Browning’s search for meaning is described in his poem, “Along The Road”:

“I walked a mile with Pleasure;
She chattered all the way.
But left me none the wiser,
For all she had to say.

I walked a mile with Sorrow,
and ne’er a word said she
But, oh, the things I learned from her,
When Sorrow walked with me.”



***“Start by doing what’s
necessary, then
what’s possible, and
suddenly you are
doing the impossible.”***

St. Francis of Assisi

When Are You Recovering?

Often, others expect recovery to take a certain amount of time, or they believe mourning should be done in a predictable way.

The truth is that no one can tell you how you should be feeling or how long you should be feeling it. Only you know. Your grief will take its own time.

There are some markers along the way that will let you know that recovery is beginning:

- When memories of your loved one bring more smiles than tears
- When you are able to view your loved one as the imperfect human being we all are
- When you are able to see that having this person in your life was a gift

You are recovering.

Wherever you are in this process is exactly right for you. May you find it acceptable.



***Memories provide comfort
And will always be with you.
May your memories bless you
now And in the future.***

Other Resources for Grief Recovery

The Grief Recovery Handbook, by John James and Russell Friedman. This book addresses loss related to death, divorce, health, and more. It provides step-by-step guidelines for recovery. Available at most book stores. More information at the Grief Recovery website: GriefRecoveryMethod.com

Don't Take My Grief Away From Me, by Doug Manning. This is a compassionate and comforting book. Available at In-SightBooks.com or by phone 1-800-658-9262

Understanding Grief, by Alan Wolfelt, PhD. A book describing how healing can be found and how to help others who are grieving. Available at CenterForLoss.com or by phone: 1-800-226-6060.



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