

Twelve important things to remember about the grieving process

1. Grief work, though very painful, is good and holy. Jesus tells us: “Blessed are those that mourn, they shall be comforted” (Matt. 5:5). Grief is the way God intended for us to deal with loss. It is nature’s way of healing a broken heart. The world’s way is denial. It tells us to “move on” even before we have started to grieve. Grief work (and it is work) is the only thing that will heal our loss or at least help us to live with it. Jesus wept when he heard about Lazarus’s death. His tears and ours are holy and sacred, and not something to be embarrassed about. In his book, *Life after Loss*, Bob Deits says that grief “is the last act of love” that we give to a deceased loved one. Deits encourages people to “wear their grief with pride” rather than deny it. Pain is, at least at first, the only thing that is left after our beloved is gone. We tend to want to hold on to it.
2. Each person’s grief process is unique and different for at least two reasons. First, each of us is different. We bring to our grieving a unique history. For instance, we may or may not find it easy to name and express our feelings. We may or may not have grieved previous losses. We may have a history of facing or avoiding difficult issues. Second, each grieving process is unique and different because of the nature of the relationship we had with the person we have lost. Each relationship has its own texture and history, all of which will play out in the grief process. For example, a wife may be very angry that her husband kept her in the dark about their finances or never let her drive their car. Another survivor who might have shared everything with his/her spouse and might have gone everywhere together will most likely miss his/her spouse everywhere he/she goes. So while grieving people have lots of similar experiences, each grieving experience is unique because of who we are and because of the nature of the relationship we had with the person we lost.
3. The vast majority of people know little or nothing about the grief process. This is the main reason why people say insensitive things like “It’s been a month. It’s time to move on.”; “You need to quit all this crying and get hold of yourself.” Non-grievers want us to be over with our grief much sooner than we are ready. When they ask us how we are doing, they usually want us to say we’re fine. Most people are uncomfortable with grief.
4. There is no correct timetable to grief work. Each person must be allowed to grieve at his/her own pace. People who move through a loss rather quickly are not superior and neither are they necessarily less caring. People who take more time are not inferior and neither are they necessarily more caring.
5. Time alone does not heal a loss but it gives us distance from a loss. Grief work is work. The normal grieving process takes time, effort, tears, prayer and the support of others. When we feel bad about feeling bad, we must remember that if we had a broken leg, we wouldn’t feel guilty about taking the time necessary to heal. Why should it be different with a broken heart? Our broken heart also deserves its healing period – even if it takes several years. There are physical injuries that take several years to heal.
6. Grief work is messy and uncomfortable. We may take two steps forward and three back. Our grief will rise up within us at the most unexpected and inopportune times and places.
7. Grief counselor, Bob Deits, writes that “the way out of grief is through it” and that “this is the most important thing we need to learn about the grief process.” There are no “quick fixes,” no shortcuts. Because grief work is so demanding, we will be constantly attempting to deny it and seek quick ways around it. We must keep ourselves motivated to stay in the process.
8. We need other people. Very few, if any, of us can do effective grief work alone. We do ourselves a favor when we let others in on our grief. And we need to be able to tell others that what we need most from them is not advice but a compassionate listening ear.
9. We need to remember that forgiveness is usually a very important part of the grieving process. This may include, with the grace of God, forgiving God, church, family members, doctors, friends, neighbors, coworkers, ourselves and even the deceased for dying. We may need to deal with and forgive unresolved past hurts and issues with the deceased loved one. (If

forgiveness is an issue, you may want to read my four-page article on How to Forgive God, Others and Self.)

10. Religious faith may help or hurt our grieving process. Some people's religious faith tells them that weakness in the face of loss shows a lack of faith. Such a religious belief will be a big obstacle to grieving because it will consciously or subconsciously push us to deny and repress our pain. We may be constantly trying to show how strong and faith-filled we are. On the other hand, a religious faith that truly believes that God brings good things out of bad events may be very helpful. For many people of faith, a part of the grieving process is renegotiating their relationship with God. Like Jacob, we may have to do some wrestling with God (Genesis 32:23-32).
11. As we interact with other grieving people, we may judge that our loss is much more severe than other people's loss. We may find it hard to sympathize with folks whose loss is not nearly as bad as ours. If we find ourselves thinking like this, we need to remember that most people tend to believe that their loss is the worst there is. The important thing is that we honor our own and others' experience of grief and loss. We can say to ourselves: "I am experiencing grief and I need to honor it so that I can heal."
12. It often gets worse before it gets better. Many grieving persons are distressed that, three months into their grief, they are feeling more, rather than less, pain. The reason for this is that in the first months (especially in the case of a sudden death), we are in shock. Our body is numb and we cannot feel our loss. This is the body's way of protecting us from feelings that we cannot cope with during the first months of our loss. As time moves on, we begin to thaw out and feel all the tough feelings connected with loss. Also, during the first months we may deliberately keep ourselves very busy with paperwork and other activities and rarely take time to be present to our pain.