

1 The death of a loved one

Coming to terms with the loss of a loved one is not easy. If you have recently been bereaved, we hope these pages will be of help at this difficult time.

A funeral service should be a time to acknowledge our loss, of looking back and giving thanks for a life, as well as to affirm our faith in God and commend our loved ones to God's love.

Where will the funeral be held?

The time after a bereavement can be quite confusing with many decisions have to be made, some quite quickly. We can help you to arrange the service, and there are several choices which you can make. You may have booked arrangements with a funeral director prior to reading this information, however if you wish to make changes this can be arranged quite easily.

Arrangements for funerals can vary considerably and we are pleased to fulfil your requests as far as possible. The options are:

The entire service held in Church

Many people appreciate the opportunity for all or a major part of the service to be held in the church. Our church is available to you for the funeral service, the building is warm and welcoming as well as versatile, capable of seating up to 250.

We have our own organist and you may chose whatever hymns or music you may wish to include. If the entire service is to take place in church, the coffin is carried out at the end of the service and the relatives are able to stay and meet with those who may have travelled to the funeral.

We may be able to provide refreshments and offer the use of the premises for a reception if you should wish.

The church is also equipped with a P.A. system with a hearing aid loop for the hard of hearing.

A service in church followed by burial or cremation

Often there is a request for part of the service to be held in the church and then the committal to take place at the cemetery or crematorium afterwards. In this case the major part of the service with hymns, readings, address, etc. will take place in the church and then the service would break. After travelling to the cemetery or crematorium a very short service would follow consisting of prayers and readings.

The entire service at the crematorium

Sometimes families prefer not to use the church and conduct all the proceedings at the

crematorium. The crematoria are at Amersham and Oxford and both has large chapels and resident organists. There are CD/tape players if you wish to play music instead of hymn.

The service lasts approximately twenty five minutes.

Organising the service

Much of what occurs is for you to decide; we will of course be pleased to offer advice in arranging a service which you feel is appropriate and which would pay suitable tribute to the life of the person who has died.

A funeral service should be a time to mark our loss, of looking back and giving thanks for a life, as well as an opportunity to affirm our faith in God and commend our loved ones to his care.

The service will usually follow the following pattern:

- Verses from the Bible:
- a prayer affirming our Christian faith:
- a hymn (or music from CD or Tape)
- a reading and an address. In the address we will say something about the person who has died and about bereavement:
- Prayers of thanksgiving for life of the loved one:
- a hymn (or music from CD or Tape)
- The committal in which we commend the person who has died into God's hands.
- After the blessing the service is concluded.



Occasionally people like to include a reading of some other literature which means a lot to them or the person who has died.

Sometimes a member of the family or a friend will give a short address in which they speak in a more personal way from their own experience.

We are pleased to accommodate your own personal requests to include items in the service. It is increasingly common for relatives to ask for a piece of music to be played by the organist, or a track from a tape or CD.

Loving and Losing

BEREAVEMENT: The cost of living and loving

Loss is a part of the cost of living and loving, indeed of simply being alive and giving of ourselves to others. It has been said that:

“only the unloving and the unloved escape from the pain of grief “

The opposite side of this is that the more deeply we love the more severe also can be the pain of loss.

It is helpful to know a little of the process of healing which we go through. This will reassure us that the intense grief which we feel is natural and not a sign that we are falling apart. Of course, much of what is said is helpful not only for those suffering bereavement but any kind of loss. This may include divorce or separation from those we love.

WHAT IS GRIEF?

At least three aspects of life are affected by grief.

Our relationships with other people

We are all affected when somebody else suffers and a grieving person affects those around and some people feel embarrassed. To reduce the discomfort other people may avoid us or try to reduce contact as much as possible.

This is sometimes done for sincere and kind motives even if it is very unhelpful. Folk may cross the road when they see somebody coming who has been through bereavement so that they do not have to talk about it!

When they do meet, the subjects spoken of may include anything but the bereavement, because they think that you would not want to mention it and it would cause upset!

Some people speak of feeling a sense of isolation and loneliness. Grief overshadows all normal relationships as we adjust to the change in condition, being a single parent, widow(er), divorced. To a certain extent we become different people.

Our bodies

Our bodies react to bereavement in many ways. Headaches, stomach pains, arthritis, or many other complaints can suddenly become apparent and make us feel as though we are falling apart.

Some people speak of intense tiredness and exhaustion. All of our reserves of energy can be used up simply in order to cope. This is a natural reaction to loss. The body passes through a crucial stage in the first 6-9 months. It is important to look after ourselves, to eat and sleep properly. There is nothing wrong with spoiling ourselves a little either!

Our feelings and state of mind

There are emotional stages through which most people pass. These stages are not neat and tidy and one may feel several of them going on at once. We are all different and so we all have unique feelings. It is possible to swing from one stage to another, or indeed hardly experience one stage at all.

This does not mean that the grief of one person is deeper than another, simply that we have different ways of experiencing and coping with loss. We will now look at what these stages are.

THE STAGES OF GRIEF

It is worth understanding the stages of grief. This should not mean that we treat grief lightly as if it were just a phase that somebody was going through.

Progress is not automatic and somebody may still be grieving deeply after 20 years if they have not been helped through the process of bereavement. One never recovers from bereavement, and yet there should come a time when we are able to live with our loss.

Stage one DENIAL AND SHOCK

The bereaved person is in a state of shock and unable to accept what has happened, everything seems so unreal. This is a necessary defence mechanism. Bereaved people often refer to somebody who has died in the present tense as though they are still alive. A common remark may be;

'It's not really sunk in. I can't believe it. I think he's going to walk in the door as usual. Maybe after the funeral it will seem as though it has really happened'.

We may feel tightness in the throat or emptiness in the stomach. There may be tiredness or inability to breathe. When we are with people in this stage of grief there is no need to say something clever, it is enough simply to be there. The bereaved person may simply want to talk about the one who has died, to reminisce. They need to know that it is alright to be upset and express their grief. Some other faiths and culture are much better at this than our culture. One day reality hits home and, despite the pain which it brings, this is progress.

Stage two

ANGER

The question which may overshadow everything is 'Why me'? Many expressions come out such as,

***"It makes you wonder sometimes, she was so young and never did anybody any harm.
Then you see all those rapists and murderers
and nothing happens to them.
I can't believe in a God
who lets that sort of thing happen".***

There may be anger at God for having allowed this to happen. There may be anger at the doctors or the hospital, indeed anybody who can act as a scapegoat.

This is natural outrage, there is no need for anybody to try to make excuses or give rational explanations or theological argument.

Neither is there any reason for those who are upset to feel guilty about their anger! This is a natural part of the grief process. All that is required is assurance and the understanding that grief brings a genuine burden which can be very painful.

It may be that the person we are most angry with is ourselves as we think of things in the past, missed opportunities or things we wished had never happened.

Stage three BARGAINING

Sometimes people will try to look for a way out of the situation.

***'I cried last night and prayed that God
would take me too.'***

There can be a movement between fantasy and guilt,

'I think that he may come back'.

Some people are sure that they have seen their loved one on a bus or in a crowd, even that they have seen a ghost. Others never touch a room or refuse to throw anything out, in the hope that somehow they may be able to preserve things the way that they once were.

Stage four DEPRESSION

There can be a deep sense of regret over lost opportunities in life, or there could also be a sense of guilt,

'perhaps if we had tried a different doctor.'

Guilt in its many different varieties is a normal part of grief and it can cause depression. It may be that it makes us feel that we do not want to go on. It is important to realize that this is something we all feel and sometimes for a considerable length of time. It is important to find people to talk to - grief needs an outlet and we must be able to cry and express our emotion. Of course we also need to be reminded that we can talk to God.

Stage five ACCEPTANCE: LEARNING TO LIVE AGAIN

The time comes when we are able to 'let go' of our loved one, leave them in peace and to experience new life again. It is the time when memories can be treasured without a terrible sense of pain.

Of course this may be a long time away. Learning to live again means adjusting to being a different person in one sense. Losing somebody is like having a part of oneself cut off. It takes time to reaffirm life and invest in new relationships and responsibilities. It is like learning to live all over again.

We are all different and can experience different things at different times. Nevertheless one thing that the bereaved nearly always have in common is that it takes time to recover.

We need to be able to give time to express ourselves and understand a little of how we feel as this will help us not to get stuck in the bereavement journey. If you have felt the pain of bereavement then eventually you may be able to help somebody who is going through the same pain. Often what we need most is simply somebody to listen and love.

The Bible offers comfort and hope. It speaks of the great hope that life is longer than our years and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the gift of eternal life is offered to all who believe in Him.

A selection of Bible readings

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul.

He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Psalm 121:

I lift up my eyes to the hills where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord watches over you the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm, he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and for evermore.

John 14

Jesus said, 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.'

Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?'

Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'

Romans 8

What shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.