

THE BELOVED BESTSELLING CLASSIC

GRIEVING
THE *Loss* OF
SOMEONE
YOU *Love*

DAILY MEDITATIONS
TO HELP YOU THROUGH THE
GRIEVING PROCESS



RAYMOND R. MITSCH
AND LYNN BROOKSIDE

A *Daily Guide* THROUGH *Grief*

Few losses are as painful as the death of someone close. No valley is as vast as grief, no journey as personal and life changing.

Compassionate and wise guides Raymond Mitsch and Lynn Brookside shine a light on the road through grief. They can help you endure the anguish; understand the stages of grief; sort through the emotions of anger, guilt, fear and depression; and face the God who allowed you to lose someone you love. A series of thoughtful daily devotions, *Grieving the Loss of Someone You Love* shares wisdom, insight and comfort that will help you through and beyond your grief.



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As of the reprinting of our book, word has come to me that my co-author, Lynn, passed into glory in August of 2012. She was an invaluable addition to this book. When I was in the last throes of writing this book, I fell desperately ill and Lynn came to my rescue. She added a much needed feminine touch to our book as well as much needed editing flourishes. It wouldn't have been the book so many have loved without Lynn's touch. May God use her words to touch people's lives even beyond the grave. As the apostle Paul reminded us in 1 Corinthians 15:54-55, "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" This book is a testimony to the fact that death no longer holds us hostage to its sting.

Ray Mitsch

INTRODUCTION

Ray went out on an emergency call a couple of years ago with his father-in-law, Paul, who is a veterinarian. Paul had been called to his animal clinic because a dog had been badly injured in a car accident. Once he had determined that the pooch was too injured to be helped, there was nothing left to do but put him out of his misery. Ray assisted Paul by holding the frightened dog in his arms while Paul gave the dog a fatal dose of a sleep-inducing drug. Ray was stunned by the remarkable swiftness with which the animal moved from life to death. In an instant, a living, breathing being was gone, never to return. Ray was compelled to face, once more, how fragile life is. The entire experience brought back all of his grief over his father's death.

Ray's dad died when he was just twelve years old. An only child, Ray and his dad had been extremely close. His dad's death came at a time in Ray's life when he was particularly vulnerable to feelings of loss and isolation. In addition, adolescents and pre-adolescents are particularly keen on having control over their lives, so the powerlessness Ray felt in the face of death was even more devastating than it might otherwise have been.

Ray was too young to have the resources to grieve adequately. He was afraid to cry for fear of appearing to be a sissy. He was unaware of the havoc that unexpressed grief can play in a person's life, so he had a much greater incentive—or so he thought—for stuffing down

his sorrow and “getting on with his life” than he did for expressing his sorrow. Besides, Ray’s mother was counting on him to be “the man of the family” now. He had to be strong for her.

All these things caused Ray to postpone dealing with his sorrow. Now, years later, Ray finds that he’s forced to deal with his grief a little at a time as opportunities like putting down a dog present themselves. Perhaps that’s one reason Ray has chosen to become a psychologist, so that he can help others avoid the pitfalls into which he fell. That’s certainly why he wanted to write this book.

Lynn had a similar experience. When Lynn lost her first child within hours after her birth, she didn’t know how to grieve. She hid her sorrow deep within and vowed never to let it out. It took many years for her to come to a place where she felt able to release her immense sadness. During those years her hidden grief took its toll. It was only when she finally acknowledged and processed her grief that she was able to shake off its effects.

Our hope is that you, the reader, will experience “good grief.” That you will use the pages of this book as signposts meant to lead you to the other side of your grief.

The psychic wound we experience when we lose a loved one to death is much like the physical wound caused by a bad burn. Burn victims are in extreme danger of infection. If an infection takes hold under the scab that develops over the burn

it can become life threatening, even when the burn itself is not. The only way to be sure that no infection develops is to scrub the wound periodically, which is extremely painful and said to be one of the worst aspects of the healing process.

Unfortunately, the choices we face as people who are grieving are not so clear-cut. Many of us opt to take what looks like the easy way out. Once the memorial service is over some of us refuse to continue to “scrub” the wound caused by our loss, declining to deal with the “infection” that may be developing just below the surface. We are either unaware of, or unwilling to face, the emotional death that may lie in our future as a result of this neglect.

Until recently, more serious burns, those that covered a large portion of the body, presented an even greater risk. Burns tend to ooze liquid from the lymphatic system. People often say that the burn is “weeping” because droplets of liquid seep from the wound. Before the advent of synthetic skin people were known to die from losing too many precious bodily fluids before skin grafts could be done. In many ways, the grieving process parallels this problem, for it’s possible to keep our wound open too long, to get “stuck” in our grief, and to allow it to drain energy and the very life from us.

In our culture we tend to acknowledge physical wounds but neglect emotional ones. That’s particularly true where grief is concerned. We would not expect a burn victim to show up at work after only three or

four days in the hospital on the theory that he will “work” himself back to health. Yet, traditionally, employers in this country allow for only three or four days of bereavement leave. For some reason we seem to expect people to “work” their way out of their grief. It was not always so.

There was a time, not so many generations ago, when people routinely expected a family to “go into mourning” for a year or more after the death of someone close. It was traditional for people to wear black for an entire year following the death of a loved one. Wearing black was more than just a formality. It was a way of reminding themselves and those around them that they were still in a fragile state and needed to be treated with special regard.

The grieving process is never “neat and clean.” It wasn’t so generations ago and it isn’t today. There is nothing pleasant about experiencing that kind of sorrow. It is intensely painful, even gut-wrenching, and it takes time; often, lots of time. In the process we may ask questions we have never asked before, questions about the nature of God and the worth of life in general. We feel numb. We feel confused. At times, we may feel enraged. But most of all, we feel the hurt. There is no standard for grieving. Loss affects each of us differently so, of course, people don’t grieve exactly the same. In spite of all our differences, however, there are still some constants in the way humans deal with grief. It is these constants that we have addressed in this book.

We are aware that our readers will be at different stages of grief. Some will have lost their loved one only recently. Others may have suffered their loss some time ago. We have endeavored to minister to the needs of people in both groups. Your pain is real regardless of how long ago you lost your loved one.

Because we each move through grief in our own way, at our own pace, the devotionals contained here are not necessarily meant to be read in order. You may find that one is more fitting for a particular day than another. You may decide to go back to one that seems more suited to your needs on a certain day. Or you may wish to jump ahead in search of something that will speak to your needs on this day or that. That's okay. This book is merely meant to be a tool. The important thing is to keep scrubbing your wound. Eventually, in God's time, your tears will turn to laughter and your mourning into dancing.

Ray Mitsch, Ph.D.
Lynn Brookside

EVEN *Christians* GRIEVE

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

A friend of Lynn's, Kate Dunbar, tells this story about attending a seminar given by psychiatrist and author Elisabeth Kubler-Ross: "I sat listening to this tiny dynamo describing in her heavily accented English an incident that occurred while she was doing the research

she later published in *On Death and Dying*. Kubler-Ross visited an extremely large hospital in search of terminal patients willing to speak with her about their experiences with death and dying. She said that by the time she had worked her way from the first floor to the twenty-second, she had not located one doctor or a single nurse who was willing to admit that any of their patients was terminal. In the entire hospital there was not one patient dying! Yet, there was a morgue in the basement that ran the entire length of the building. 'That,' Kubler-Ross said, 'Was when I realized that I *must* educate!'"

Since that time, Kubler-Ross has forever changed our culture's attitude toward death and dying. Through her research she has identified the five stages of grief, providing a road map, of sorts, for all who must traverse that hitherto unknown territory. It is true, of course, that each of us grieves somewhat differently. Each of us is an individual, so naturally we grieve as individuals. There is no one road map that is perfectly suited to everyone, but there are certain major landmarks most of us will pass on our path to healing.

According to Kubler-Ross those landmarks, or stages, of grief are: denial, anger, bargaining, sorrow and acceptance. We will not necessarily feel all of those things in that particular order. In fact, we probably will not. But those reactions will appear from time to time throughout our grieving process. At times they will be mixed together, one feeling piled on another. We may find ourselves angry, bargaining and denying

all at the same time, or in quick succession. At other times we may find ourselves deeply mired in one particular stage for a matter of weeks or, in some cases, months. One thing is nearly certain, however, we will pass through all of those stages sometime during our grieving process—even if we are Christians.

Christians are not exempt from grief, not yet anyway. When we lose someone, we, too, will deny; we will hurt; we will weep; we will rage; we may even bargain with God. The difference for us is that we have *hope*. We have the hope of one day seeing our loved ones again and the comfort of knowing that we do not walk alone through the storm of grief. Grief is meant to be experienced in community, not in isolation. It's important to remember that we are members of a family—the family of God. We can take our denial, our rage, our desire to bargain and our sadness to our loving heavenly Father, who can and will carve stepping stones of them—stepping stones leading to acceptance and, ultimately, healing. It's equally important that we take this same sadness, denial, rage, and even bargains to those in our “family” who have been down this road before, and can come back to meet us in this journey.

If we trust Him (which may be tough to do sometimes), all things are possible, including, or especially, our healing. Trust him for that when you can and accept and be gracious with yourself when your pain makes it so that you cannot. God is faithful and true, a rock against which you can lean your faith, even as the winds of mourning howl around you.

Help THROUGH THE *Grief*

*Carry each other's burdens,
and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*

GALATIANS 6:2

When we first receive the news that someone we love has died, most of us experience some degree of shock. Shock is a normal, God-given response to this sort of traumatic news. It sees us through the first difficult days immediately following our loss. It gives us time to process the gravity of that loss and allows us to “wake up” to its true import gradually.

Eventually, however, the shock wears off and we are faced with the painful reality of our loss. It is then that we truly need our friends and family to be there for us. Too often, however, our friends come near only during the first few days following the death of our loved one. Then they gradually drift back to their own lives, most of them convinced that we are functioning quite well without their help. They have seen us maneuver through those first few days while our pain is still numbed by our shock. They don't desert us deliberately; they actually believe we have no particular

need of them. And we live in a society that is so fast paced and overloaded-with-responsibilities that the everyday demands of our schedules can squeeze out even the best intentions to keep in touch, to offer assistance. Only those who have lost a loved one may be aware that we are really heading into the center of the storm rather than coming out of it.

It's important for us to give ourselves permission to ask people to meet our need for comfort so they know that need is legitimate. We need not feel apologetic. We can take it upon ourselves to remind close friends and family members that we are still in the midst of the storm. We have to fight the tendency to think that if people loved us, they would just know what we need without telling them. Unfortunately, in our information saturated world, our needs can simply "fall off the radar" of those who love us. Our reminders don't have to be confrontational. We can simply tell our friends that we are having a particularly difficult day and that we are missing our loved one a great deal just now. As crazy as it sounds, we can even ask them to help us through our grief. Most people to whom we are close will respond to such a reminder. They need only to be invited to deal with our hurt. Naturally, we all have some friends or family members who have difficulty dealing with people on an emotional level. Those are *not* the ones to turn to for comfort. But most of us have at least one person in our lives who will respond in love when we make our needs clear to them. We need not walk through this storm alone.

It's also important to be mindful of the fact that Christ is always beside us, walking with us through the storm. But we mustn't fall into the trap of believing that our awareness of Christ's closeness is all we need. That is simply not so. God created us to be in fellowship with others of our kind. We are not being immature Christians, "disloyal" to God, or ungrateful when we openly acknowledge that we need to be comforted by friends and family.

Make it a goal today to reach out to others and be honest with them about your experiences (emotionally, physically, mentally), just now, within the storm.