

HEALTHY GRIEF

A newsletter exploring the definition and pursuit of healthy grief in the wake of deep loss. Written specifically for the Oklahoma Palliative & Hospice Care Bereavement Community.



OKLAHOMA
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I am Alone!

by Chaplain Cameron Stanley, MDiv

Oftentimes, we feel alone in our grief. No one else knew them like we did. No one else had the depth of relationship with them that we did. No one else knew exactly what made them happy, sad, excited, or mad. Since no one else had the relationship with them that we did, no one else can possibly know what our grief is like. **I am absolutely alone in my grief!**

Many times, we allow ourselves to succumb to the lie that, in order to be there for us, someone must exactly understand our grief. Yet, this is not possible. Grief is the emotion we feel when we can't express our love anymore because the subject of our love is gone. But no one loved them like we did, so no two people's grief is the same. But this does not disqualify someone from being there for you. Listen to the firsthand account of Caleb Greggson, "Honestly, the people who cared best for me in those years weren't those who had experienced something like I had. It was the people who loved me enough to listen over and over again, to tell me when I was believing something false, to *stay*." *

But where do we find people who are willing to listen, and to sit in the silence? For many of us, we find this in our family or in close friends. Others find this in their religious community. This is especially helpful, because these are people who can not only listen and affirm how we feel, but they can remind us of eternal truths that can anchor us in the midst of the storm of grief.

Sometimes, however, even these people aren't willing to listen or be there for us. When all others fail us, **we have a heavenly Father, who will never fail to listen to us.** Not only this, but He understands what we feel better than anyone else. Listen to the words of Hebrews 4:15-16: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Our God finds joy in our dependence upon Him. Yes, this grief is hard. But God understands. He hears our prayers, and He reminds us that **we are never alone.**

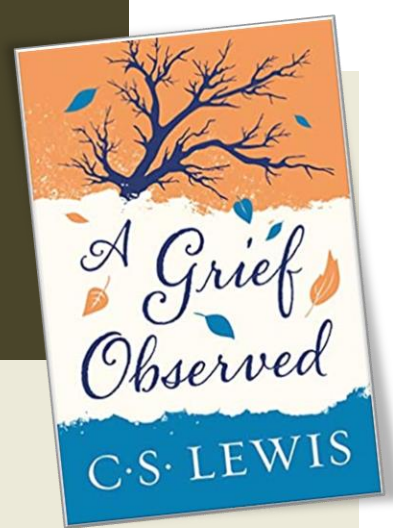


Thanks to one of our volunteers, we were able to gift one of our bereaved with a pillow made from a garment that belonged to her late mother. We love our volunteers!

* For the full article, visit: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/lessons-lonely-sufferer/>

Recommended Reading

A Grief Observed is C.S. Lewis's honest reflection on the fundamental issues of life, death, and faith in the midst of loss. Written after his wife's tragic death as a way of surviving the "mad midnight moments," *A Grief Observed* is an unflinchingly truthful account of how loss can lead even a committed believer to lose all sense of meaning in the universe, and the inspirational tale of how he can possibly regain his bearings.



The Loss of a Spouse

by Chaplain Cameron Stanley, MDiv

My greatest weakness as a hospice chaplain is my inability to empathize with many of those that I have the privilege of visiting. I do not understand what it is like to face the end of my life because of a terminal diagnosis. I don't know what it is like to ponder the reality that, at this time next year, I will probably not be here anymore. As well, I don't understand the incredible grief that comes with the loss of a spouse; the loss of the one person who understands me better than anyone else in the world. I can only imagine that this loss is unlike any other, for you lose the one you would share this grief with, the one person you have always been able to depend on in life up to this point.

Because of my lack of experience in this area, I consulted the words of C. S. Lewis, written in the wake of the tragic loss of his wife. A man best known for his children's series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lewis has written on a greater number of topics than most authors. Among these, is his *A Grief Observed*. In this short work, Lewis compares the feeling of grief to the feeling of fear. The similarity to this feeling is not that one feels afraid during grief, but rather, that one cannot feel relaxed, or at peace, while afraid. It is in this way that grief is like fear. Before, there was never enough time to complete the day's goals, but now, there is nothing but time. Now, it seems that every day is a continual waiting; a waiting for something that will not come to pass. And it is here, in this waiting, a waiting that you know will never end, that it is nearly impossible to find a sense of relaxation or peace. And this is a perfectly rational way to feel. After all, Lewis states, "**her absence is like the sky, spread over everything.**"

"I think I am beginning to understand why grief feels like suspense. It comes from the frustration of so many impulses that had become habitual. Thought after thought, feeling after feeling, action after action had H. for their object. Now their target is gone. I keep on through habit fitting an arrow to the string, then I remember and have to lay the bow down. So many roads lead thought to H. I set out on one of them. But now there's an impassable frontierpost across it. So many roads once; now so many *culs de sac*."

– C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

Perhaps you understand what Lewis is describing as you experience the loneliness that follows the loss of a spouse. Perhaps you have felt the truth of Lewis' statement, "**Grief is like a long valley, a winding valley where any bend may reveal a totally new landscape.**" Not only this, but this grief is further complicated by the terrifying thought of coming to a place where this one you've loved for so long isn't a part of your thoughts every day, hour, and minute. Yet, to some degree, this is where grief must go, if it is to be healthy. Your grief must eventually reach a point where you are able to find purpose, value, and meaning in your own life outside of the relationship that was so severely torn from your hands by age, sickness, or injury.

For Lewis, and I would hope for me as well, should I ever find myself in this struggle, he found this purpose, value, and meaning through his faith. He recognized that his grief and his emotions led him to a place

that distorted his understanding of both God and life, and the goodness that is found in them. Lewis stated that we often view God and others in our life through the lens of our emotional experience of them or what they are or are not able to offer us. Though he is persuaded to continue in this mindset, Lewis asserts that we need God, and we need others. We need them in their true form, not an emotionally distorted, self-contrived picture of them. The only way that we are able to achieve this, the learning of how to release our dependence on our late spouse and begin a dependence upon God and other relationships in life, is to see them for who they are, not what they are able to give us. Our faith and experience are not a means by which we receive consolation, though, with time, they can give that, but rather, that which give us purpose, value, and meaning, outside of love for our spouse. Practically, this means greater devotion to one's faith, commitment to and dependence upon others, and, above all else, a willingness to admit that **grief is not a journey taken alone**. Yes, you will still grieve, though the burden will become lighter, but your foundation for meaning can be found in something more permanent.

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

Call the Oklahoma Palliative & Hospice Care Office at
(405) 418-2659

Or find us online at www.oklahomahc.com



Healthy Grief is published quarterly to provide information about Oklahoma Palliative & Hospice Care's Bereavement Program and to provide support throughout the grieving process.

OPHC's grief counselors are available for support through providing grief resources, personal home visits, helping find grief groups, and many other ways. Please call if we can be supportive to you in any way during this time.

