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**Causes of grief.** Look up the following verses to see biblical examples of causes for grief: Psalms 38.6; Proverbs 17.25; 1 Samuel 20.34; 2 Samuel 13.37; Matthew 17.23; Mark 3.5; 14.34; Romans 9.2. What causes you to grieve, to mourn?

**Stages of grief.** Everyone experiences grief in their own way, but usually there are recognizable stages of grief. The first is an emotional denial, like shock: we know something bad happened, but we do not feel it fully. This helps us function in the initial days of grief, but we need to transition into allowing ourselves to feel the pain as soon as we can, so we can start to heal.

When we do start to feel, we often will feel angry. It is ok to express your anger to God or to trusted friends. Being honest with God does not turn him away, it helps you sense he is near. As you process your anger, move into forgiveness and let your anger subside so you continue to heal. Read Psalm 22. Notice how David cries out in the first verse? Yet see what he says in v.23, and how he finishes the psalm? David's lament psalms always end with praise of God's righteousness and hope for God's comfort and deliverance.

The feeling most commonly associated with grief is sadness, which can feel like depression. This is the third stage of grief. Again, it is ok to cry out to God and trusted friends, it is ok to be honest with yourself about the pain. In this sadness, if we turn to God, he will bring us emotional closure and recovery. It is common to feel guilt as part of this sadness. Sometimes we regret not being nicer or more attentive to the one who is now gone; other times we take blame for the death. Fight against these negative concepts. Keep in mind death comes to all in our fallen world. Be comforted to know that under the New Covenant, with Jesus already having paid the penalty for our sins, the death of a loved one cannot be the result of God's anger toward us.

If you avoid the guilt trap while being emotionally honest through this process, you will come to acceptance, coming to terms with the truth of the situation and learning to go on in life. You will start to have moments of joy and peace again, and be more ready to invest energy in life and in those still living.

Still, you might have cycles of grief for a long time. You might feel sad even years later if a certain thought comes to mind or you see something that reminds you of a deceased loved one. Don't get discouraged about this, and don't isolate yourself. During this long healing process, stay intimate with people who will listen, pray with you and for you, and be available for you when you need them.

Focus first on accepting the reality of your loss and allowing yourself to feel the pain. Then work through that pain of grief. A third step is to adjust to the new situation of living without the deceased or with whatever other tragic circumstances brought on the grief. Then begin to move on with life. This does not mean you forget or stop caring about the deceased, just that the pain softens enough so you can accept the loss and reinvest yourself into those still living.

**Reasons we grieve.** Death is not part of God's created order, it is the result of sin in the world. Read Genesis 3.19. When Adam and Eve first sinned, God said it would bring them physical death, and since that time death has been inevitable for all living things. Read Genesis 37.34-35. Even if we are happy to know our loved one is now with God, done with the struggles of earth, we are left behind to suffer on without that person. We also grieve because this is the way God designed us to heal after tragedy. Read Luke 7.12-13; John 11.35. God understands our grief and cares about our pain, so he will use the grieving process to comfort, strengthen, and heal us. Read 2 Corinthians 1.3-4; Psalms 46.1; 147.3.

**Helping others.** We have to let people grieve, and let them grieve in their own way, as long as it is not self-destructive. Don't try to shift their focus off themselves, manipulate them into comforting you, or talk them out of grieving. Read Job 16.2. What you say might make things worse! Don't be witty or encouraging, don't tell stories from your life or offer platitudes, don't try to answer their theological questions until they reach the acceptance phase. Read 2 Corinthians 1.3-4; 7.7; 1 Chronicles 7.22; Romans 12.15. We can comfort grieving people by showing compassion and empathy, being there for them, doing kind things for them, and praying with and for them. Express your sorrow and empathy, offer an open invitation to talk or help anytime.

**Responding to our grief.** The best thing you can do is prepare yourself theologically before tragedy strikes, so be in scripture daily now! While grieving, stay in God's word then also. Read Psalms 23.4; 71.20; 119.28. While mourning, people often wonder why their prayers did not work or whether God was not as kind or powerful as they thought. It might help to remember the character of God: see Psalms 11.7; 99.5; Romans 5.8; Jeremiah 32.17. It also might help to remember that every righteous person in history has died, even Jesus died as part of God's plan.

You can find hope in scripture, especially regarding an end to your suffering and about seeing Christian loved ones again. Read Isaiah 60.20; Revelation 21.3-4; 1 Thessalonians 4.13-14. Notice Paul does not say we should avoid grieving. He says we are not to grieve like [in the same manner] as those who have no hope. Our hope is sure, so our grief more mild and brief. When the deceased was not a believer, cling to the hope that God extended grace at the last moment.

When the deceased is a young child, we have hope that our beloved is in Heaven. Read 2 Samuel 12.22-23. Most Christian theologians agree with David that children who die before the age of accountability remain in God's provision. The loss of a child, whether in the womb or already born, is a life-shattering ordeal that requires mourning. Even an early-trimester miscarriage involves the loss of a life and of a fond hope. Even the death of a grown child is a severe shock. Take care to protect your marriage, to provide each other with mutual support and love. Ensure your other children get the counseling and support they need.

Read Nehemiah 1.4. Prayer, even if it takes the form of crying out to God, is therapeutic, and God will comfort your soul as you speak to him. Be vigilant to protect yourself against spiritual and emotional attacks. Be vigilant in prayer, Bible reading, and fellowship with supportive people.

**Signs of trouble.** If you or a loved one experiences any of the following, it is important to get some help from a counselor. It is possible to be so devastated by a sudden loss that we are unable to grasp it completely; this is beyond emotional denial to mental difficulty accepting the loss. It is possible that emotional denial endures long-term, so we act as if the loss never occurred, perhaps thinking about it, but avoiding the emotions. Sometimes we rationally bury our grief inside, hoping that at some point later we will feel more able to experience the pain; this can be dangerous, because even a minor loss in the future might trigger an avalanche of negative emotion, involving that older grief. In contrast, some engage in chronic grief, keeping the loss alive avoiding closure; over attentiveness to the gravesite or to roadside shrines can foster this problem. Perhaps out of fear that people will judge our grief, we might convert our grief to physical symptoms, which we think present a more legitimate need. Feeling conflicted about grief, we might exaggerate some of the characteristics of normal grief, while suppressing others. And we might displace our grief, perhaps complaining about work or relationships with others, maybe becoming bitter toward life in general or chronically depressed.

**Last thought.** The grieving process is God's method of healing us after tragedy. Stay close to God and to your intimate friends and family, stay hopeful, trust in God to bring you closure and healing, ask for help if needed.