



THE CARE COURIER

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COPING WITH COVID-19: Dealing With Grief and Loss

Rev. Dr. Melinda Contreras-Byrd reflects on grieving in the time of COVID-19
Article published at: <https://www.ptsem.edu/news>

Grief is a natural, God-given emotion that demonstrates that we have loved and been loved. By it we are enabled to process our losses, and forced to learn flexibility and risk-taking. For many it is the first time that we are faced with a situation that time and effort and even our most devout prayers cannot change.

It is in this reality-shaking experience that we truly understand that there will be no more chances to apologize, no more hugs and kisses, no more opportunity to mend a relationship. Death comes with the challenges of a process of grief wherein we acknowledge our loss, express our sadness and fear, and then rise to the challenge to begin the work of transformation.

Over time we learn to change our declarations from loss and sadness to gratefulness and joy over what we once had. The challenge of death and grief is to stay in the present and not keep looking back to what is lost, or forward to what no longer is. In the present we can see the positive — the blessings that still remain, the everlasting memories of that person and relationship.

Now, we must admit what no longer is, and then move to rearrange our lives in order to fill the newly emptied spaces. But this time of COVID-19 presents new and deeper challenges. We can no longer utilize the ways that we have successfully coped with death. We U.S. Christians express our love, unity, and respect for the deceased by participating in the rituals of church funerals. But how do we cope with death in the absence of funeral gatherings? Our unique challenge now is to question and rethink the bottom line emotional and spiritual imperatives that funerals have afforded us.

Churches have come to represent the sacred space in an unholy world, the place we encounter God and God's people. Perhaps this pandemic has forced us to recognize that God is not confined to a building — even one that holds wonderful and unforgettable memories. We cannot contain God to a building. This is one powerful truth that COVID-19 can lead us to. *(article continues, next page...)*

Grief vs. Depression

Grief

- I know why I am sad.
- Initial reactions are strong and intense but vary over time.
- I have ups and downs in my mood.
- Sometimes I want to be alone; sometimes I want to be with others.
- I accept some invitations for activities and decline others.
- I am angry about my loss.
- I cry sometimes.
- I am preoccupied with thoughts of my loved one.
- I have had changes in sleep, appetite and energy.
- I respond to others with warmth and reassurance.

Depression

- I can't identify why I am sad.
- My reactions are intense/persistent.
- I feel chronically low/sad.
- I refuse most activities; I don't enjoy much about my life.
- I am angry with myself.
- I have no enthusiasm.
- My sadness is always there; it does not vary.
- I am preoccupied with my sense of worthlessness, hopelessness and self-blame.
- I don't respond to others with warmth or reassurance.

-William Worden, Ph.D

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IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, PLEASE CALL THE REV. MAUREEN DOHERTY 319-505-3048.
WEATHER ALERT: If schools or businesses are closed, the meeting is canceled.
Please feel free to bring a friend — All groups are free and open to the public!

Note: New location and day group meeting time

DATES: September 10, 17, 24
October 8, 15, 22, 29

WHERE: Kearns Funeral Service
3145 Kimball Avenue
Enter "Community Room" Door

TIMES: 11:00 AM-12:30 PM or
5:30 PM-7:00 PM

Afternoon & Evening
Grief Support Groups

*We will provide pizza for all. Bring a drink!
(A soda vending machine is also available.)

DATES: September 3rd, October 1st

WHERE: Kearns Funeral Service
3145 Kimball Avenue
Enter "Community Room" Door

TIME: 5:30-7:00 p.m.

Grief Support Pizza Night



Want to be on our mailing list? Give us a call, and we can add you to our quarterly newsletter list.

Continuous Care
1519 West Fourth Street
Waterloo, IA 50702



Funerals give us support through the opportunity to gather with blood relatives, church family, and close friends of ours and the deceased. We need this support, especially at this time. But we have found that Zoom gatherings can offer us some sense of this unity and support. For many of us, the altar railing and the pulpit hold special significance. In lieu of this option, a picture of the altar railing can be displayed as a background on Zoom during an online service. The preacher may also preach the eulogy from behind the pulpit, online.

We are comforted from hearing others join us in declaring the gifts and graces of our beloved one who has died. But we can ask friends to help us to create memory books that can be shipped and shared. We can meet our need for participation by creating a box of items that represent the loved one and making that the centerpiece of a Zoom family gathering. This new form of “home going” still offers those grieving the chance to gather, see each other, gain a feeling of unity, show their love and respect, and end with a sense of closure. During this pandemic, we must use our sacred creativity to rise to the challenges.

The grief process offers a psychological challenge. As Christians we have erroneously come to believe that we ought to be able to handle everything — and handle it well — if we are spiritually mature. Yes, we are to try to follow Jesus’ example, but here is what our “Fathers of the faith” missed in their teachings: Jesus was divine, we are not.

We are just humans relying on the power of God to work in our humanness. Until that happens in our lives, we must offer up whatever imperfect gifts of faith we have while in grief, uttering as the unnamed and desperate father of a possessed child did, “I believe Lord, but help me with my unbelief.” And we must offer up our prolonged grief, and our ongoing tears, our guilt over words spoken out of frustration and anger, and our inability to work miracles, knowing that God sees our hearts and accepts our imperfect gifts.

Lastly, we are the church universal, the vehicles of God’s power and grace — but we are earthen vessels. Times of grief and loss can lead us in many directions. But the best healing direction is toward a sister or brother. Take the risk to admit that you are not at your best, and that you need support. Let go of the false Christian bravado that “it’s just Jesus and me.” If in your focus on ministry you have lost your connection with peers who will support, nurture, and hold you accountable, this is the time to rebuild or create them.

When faith directs our journey, there is something redemptive in every plot twist.

Death is part of a season. Seasons change. Winter turns to spring.

Death leads us to everlasting life, and weeping may endure for a night — but I am a witness that joy will always come in the morning!



Loss of a Parent Poem

Now that I am gone,
remember me with smiles
and laughter.
And if you need to cry,
cry with your brother or sister
who walks in grief beside you.
And when you need me,
put your arms around anyone
and give to them
what you need to give to me.
There are so many
who need so much.
I want to leave you something —
something much better
than words or sounds.
Look for me
in the people I’ve known
or helped in some special way.
Let me live in your heart
as well as in your mind.
You can love me most
by letting your love reach out
to our loved ones,
by embracing them
and living in their love.
Love does not die,
people do.
When all that’s left of me is love,
give me away as best you can.

— Author Unknown

The Master Class On Grief We Didn’t Ask For

By Mariann Edgar Budde, excerpt published: Sojo.Net, Sojourners, August 2020

How can we live now in a way that our future selves—and generations to come—will look back with gratitude?

While we were not strangers to grief before the pandemic, these months have been something of a master class. “Each person’s grief is as unique as their fingerprint,” writes grief counselor David Kessler. “But what everyone has in common is that no matter how they grieve, they share a need for their grief to be witnessed.” We are witnesses to one another’s grief.

In our witness, we must acknowledge that loss is not equally distributed. Those of us with privilege have allowed this to happen, and we have much to answer for before God; there is so much that we must work to change. And we don’t have all the time in the world.

I hear empathic grief in parents who can’t spare their children the sudden disruption of their lives and the loss of rites of passage for which they have spent years preparing. And I hear it in children of elder parents who are sick with worry, and in family members of those deemed essential workers who, by choice or compulsion, risk their lives each day. I hear it in the business owners doing everything they can to keep employees on the payroll; in teachers, caregivers, advocates, and in my fellow clergy.

Grief propels us to do whatever we can to make things better and to offer hope and meaning for those we love. Spouses stand outside nursing-home windows with signs that say “I love you”; lines of cars drive by the house of a child celebrating a birthday or graduation; concerts are organized via Instagram; volunteer networks provide food and essential supplies to undocumented families. This is grief mobilized for good, helping us to do something to redeem the time we’re in.

We all have our stories to remember when the pandemic has passed -- not that we got through it, but how — how we loved and cared for each other, how our hearts were broken open, and how we resolved to change things. Poet David Whyte asks: How can you live now such that your future self, and all who come after you, will look back with gratitude? How, in other words, can you become now the blessed saint of your future memory?

In John’s gospel, Jesus speaks to himself as a shepherd who calls us each by name and whom we follow because we recognize his voice. He also speaks of himself as a gate through we enter and find salvation. Here’s the line I invite you to dwell upon in the days to come: “Whoever enters by me will be saved. . . I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly,” he said. I wonder where and how

do you need to be saved? What would it look like and how would it feel like to experience being saved now?

It’s a risky question to ask. But if we don’t ask it, how can we enter a conversation with the One who calls Himself our Good Shepherd, and who promises salvation in the midst of our lives as they are and our world as it is?

This is what salvation looks like for me: when Jesus comes to me as the whispering voice, the presence of divine love. And when he encourages me and teaches me in a way of love that is merciful, forgiving, sacrificial and universal.

I believe that in Jesus’ life, His suffering, death and resurrection, God reveals and invites us all to join in the divine mystery of bringing life out of death, and meaning from grief.

I believe that salvation is deeply personal, but not individual. “We will walk in the Kingdom of God together,” wrote the priest activist Daniel Berrigan, “or we won’t walk in at all.”

We are closest to Jesus and most like Him in our grief for those we love in their suffering. That’s what propelled Him to the cross - His love and His grief for us all. This grief propels us to take on, gladly, whatever is needed to make things better, to wrench whatever meaning we can from this ruined house for love’s sake.

Followers of Jesus are not immune to human suffering, nor are we spared anxiety or grief. He never promised us that. In fact, He prepared us for the exact opposite—that like Him, ours would be the way of the cross, which is the way of salvation through suffering, not around it. In our master class on grief, He is the master teacher.



We do not grieve without first loving.
We do not love without first gaining
more than we could ever lose.

~ Sunrise Greetings card