

THE BIBLE VIEW

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A Definition of Grief

Dr. Hewlett

Grief can be the effect of wounded affection and the effect of discovered, but undeserved, unkindness. It is the pang a mother feels when she first learns that the child of her fervent prayers and cherished hopes has become profane and profligate (“morally unrestrained”). It is the throbbing emotion of the generous heart when thwarted or interrupted in the benevolent design it has conceived.

“Grief drives men into habits of serious reflections, sharpens understanding, and softens the heart.” — John Adams

Grief

Bill Brinkworth

For much of my saved life, I have been around and ministered to older people and those with special needs. As can be expected with those folks and all others, death visited many of their loved ones.

After the passing of someone who meant a lot to them, I tried to comfort and encourage them. However, after the loss of my wife of 37 years, I now have a better understanding of the grief they were experiencing.

I believed I was being compassionate and helpful, but after experiencing what it was like to lose someone close to me, I realized that I was not as understanding as I should have been.

As is often the case when God allows one to go through a problem, I have lately been exposed to others who have also recently lost someone close to them. I have noticed that people handle their loss or emotions differently.

Without warning, tremendous bouts of sadness bring torrents of tears to many. Perhaps the sight of another person, activity, or thing brings back memories that trigger more sadness.

Many experience anger, guilt, confusion, lack of enthusiasm, and some may find themselves not wanting to be around others. Many notice their decision-making and thinking abilities are diminished. The overwhelming acquiring of duties that the deceased used to do may also bring on more grief.

Those not going through the heart-wrenching sadness of loss wonder why the grief-burdened person does not "just get over it" and have no idea what it is like to lose a child, friend, or spouse that had meant so much to them or to handle overbearing challenges. Some never "get over it," and pangs of sadness or immense anxiety continue to torment one's thoughts and behaviors.

I have talked to one who lost her husband almost two decades ago, and she still has not "gotten over it." That deceased person was a part of her life, and now she stands all alone, missing an integral part of herself.

The thoughtless "get over it" attitude just won't work with someone who spent a lifetime loving and living with a person, raising a child, or not having the changes or difficulties they are now facing. In many cases, the deceased person made the surviving person more complete, and now they feel like half a person.

Since it seems God is allowing me to encounter many grieving people crossing my path, it would be helpful to know what the Bible teaches on the subject.

Although every person handles grief differently, as far as I have been able to find, there is no quick three or four-step process to fix or shorten one's grieving process according to the Bible. However, one can find more about the subject in God's Word, which can be encouraging to those disturbed by a mountain of distress and help them realize the naturalness of their grief and anxiety.

It is found in the scriptures that:

- God can be grieved. Since we are created in God's image (Genesis 1:27), we have many physical, mental, and emotional traits that our Creator has. There is a divine purpose for our having the ability to grieve and be heavily troubled over certain situations.
"And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." Genesis 6:6 God was broken-hearted that His creation was given over to great wickedness continually.
"How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert!" Psalm 78:40 The people of Israel knew what was expected of them, but they lied, disobeyed, and did what angered their Lord. Those actions and many, many others broke God's heart.
- The Holy Spirit can be grieved. The Spirit God sent to help mankind can also be grieved over the wrong works of man. The Spirit is made so heavy with grief over what a sinner has done that He will not work in a person's life, often until that person gets it right with Him.
"But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them." Isaiah 63:10
"And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." Ephesians 4:30

Grief is a natural emotion that most people will experience at some point. It is part of life, but we can learn to handle what happens in our lives by seeing how people in the Bible handled their immense stress.

- Job was overcome by grief as God allowed him to endure great testing and trials.
“So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great.” Job 2:13
“Oh that my grief were throughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together!” Job 6:2
“Though I speak, my grief is not asswaged [to make something burdensome or less intense, painful or severe] and though: I forbear, what am I eased?” Job 16:6 Also: Job 16:5-6.
- David experienced grief. The pressure brought on from his enemies and the heavy burden from being amidst many troubles, weighed heavily on him.
“Have mercy upon me, O LORD, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly. 10 For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing: my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed.” Psalm 31:9-10 Also: Psalm 6:7.
- King Solomon experienced grief. The actions of his wayward son grieved the king; however, he learned that a great sadness in one’s life can be helpful in life’s continuing trials.
“A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him.” Proverbs 17:25
“For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.” Ecclesiastes 1:18 Also: Eccl. 2:23.
- Isaiah experienced grief and prophesied about the Saviour and the grief Jesus would bear.
“In the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow, and in the morning shalt thou make thy seed to flourish: but the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow.” Isaiah 17:11
*“He [Jesus] is despised and rejected of men; **a man of sorrows**, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” Isaiah 17:11* Also: Isaiah 53:10.
- Jeremiah experienced grief.
“Woe is me for my hurt! my wound is grievous: but I said, Truly this is a grief, and I must bear it.” Jeremiah 10:19
“Thou didst say, Woe is me now! for the LORD hath added grief to my sorrow; I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest.” Jeremiah 45:3
- Jonah experienced grief.
“And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.” Jonah 4:6
- Paul, most likely, experienced grief.
“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” Hebrews 13:17
- We can grieve over what we have done.
“Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.” Genesis 45:5
- We can be grieved by what others have done.
“So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did eat no meat the second day

of the month: for he was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame.” I Samuel 20:34

“And the victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people: for the people heard say that day how the king was grieved for his son.” II Samuel 19:2

- The wicked may be grieved at the sight of a righteous person. (This may explain why those with liberal philosophies and politics get so mad at those trying to live a righteous life.)

“The wicked shall see it (Psalm 112:1-10), and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away: the desire of the wicked shall perish.” Psalm 112:10

As can be discovered from the Bible, grief can be a result of extreme pressure, changes against one’s beliefs, or after the loss of a loved one. Grieving is a God-given emotion that places a high value on heartache and love and may help some avoid sin or ungodliness.

God would not give us an emotion that would harm us. Perhaps it is a safety valve to enable us to cope with tragedy or change. There is no easy fix for the mental pain it can cause. Again, each sufferer handles grief differently.

When I found myself thinking and doing things that were not normal for me after the loss of my wife, a loved one brought to my attention, “You are not going crazy, it is just grief.” There is no predefined way one will handle grief; it just happens.

Grief is an emotion that puts a high value on life, doing the right thing, and directs some to respect life more. The loss of a loved one also keeps our temporary life on Earth in perspective. We are just pilgrims passing through this life, awaiting and occupying it, hopefully for the cause of Christ, until it is our turn to leave.

“Grief teaches the steadiest minds to waver.” — Sophocles