

Grace through Grief:

Grieving as a Grandparent

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This is part three in a four-part series on the topic of grief. It is our hope that through this series, God's people can better understand grief and see the role they play in helping others through it. God's grace comes to us in different forms – sometimes it is through the words and actions of a friend. We pray that this series equips you to be such a friend to someone.

Grandparents often have a special bond with their grandchildren, whether they see each other often or live distances apart. When a grandchild dies, grandparents often grieve twice. They mourn the loss of the child, and they feel the pain of their own child's suffering. This type of grief is compounded by feelings of helplessness. As they watch their own child suffer, they are unable to take away their pain. This makes their suffering almost intolerable.

The unique role of a grandparent and its effect on grief

Grandparents are often referred to as "neglected mourners". When a grandchild has died, they take a backseat to the grief experienced by the parents and siblings of the child. In addition, grandparents often take on the role of the "strong ones" or "protectors", often caring for the parents and siblings of the child who has died.

In their roles as both protector and mourner, grandparents often neglect to take time to process their own grief, which can lead to "complicated grief." **Complicated Grief** is intense feelings of grief that are persistent and debilitating. They do not improve with the passage of time, which makes it difficult to resume everyday life. (See [part one](#) in this series on the different types of grief.)

Often quietly and behind the scenes, grandparents grieve the memories they hoped to make with the child who died. Their joyful plans are shattered and new thoughts creep into the space these dreams once occupied.

Guilt or "survival guilt" is a common emotion among grieving grandparents. You may hear, "I have lived a long and fulfilling life. Why didn't God take me instead?" One way you may help someone find comfort in this situation is to share a verse from the Bible, such as Psalm 139 verse 16: "Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." As difficult as it might be to understand, God knows what He is doing in all of this.

In their time of grieving, grandparents often ponder the meaning of life and death, which can be painful. The idea of a grandchild dying before a grandparent violates the natural order of life. These feelings are normal and necessary to process as part of the grieving journey.

How can friends help a grieving grandparent?

As a friend of a grieving grandparent, you can encourage your loved ones to express their feelings, offering them a safe and loving space to share their emotions, misgivings and doubts. Then you can reassure them with promises of God's sovereignty over life and death, His promise of heaven, and His many promises to be with us and comfort our broken hearts. As you do this, you are acting on His behalf, delivering God's comfort to His dear children in need.

Read the other articles in this series: [The Types and Stages of Grief](#), [Surviving the Death of a Spouse](#), [Miscarriage and Stillbirth Grief](#).