

Grace through Grief:

Surviving the Death of a Spouse

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This is part two 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.

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When you or someone you know loses a spouse, you lose more than a marriage partner. You lose a friend, confidant, travel companion and/or co-parent. The person with whom you shared your hopes, dreams, concerns, and time.

Loss may also be experienced before a spouse dies:

- **Loss of marriage roles.** Now, in addition to the roles you had agreed to play in your relationship, the husband and wife have new roles: patient and caregiver.
- **Loss of intimacy.** This often happens long before physical death
- **Loss of physical closeness.** Physical separation can occur when one spouse moves from the marital bed to a hospital bed in the home or to a higher level of care outside the home.
- **Loss of financial stability.** This can be a source of worry in the background.
- **Loss of dreams.** Dreams are often what give people hope for the future. When those dreams are gone, it is easy for hope to fade, too.

As you deal with all these losses, you actually are experiencing the first stage of grief, anticipatory grief. Anticipatory grief typically involves more anger and lack of ability to control emotions. Many balance feelings of hope and letting go, making it difficult to live in the present. Anticipatory grief also leads to reminiscing about the past and mourning a future without your loved one.

During this anticipatory grieving time, one way to bring peace would be to find closure with unresolved issues, reconcile differences, give and grant forgiveness, and say goodbye.

Life after loss of a spouse

There are circumstances that are especially difficult when you lose your spouse.

- Every part of your daily routine is impacted, including completing household chores, managing finances, cooking meals, going to bed without kissing someone goodnight, and more.
- Your identity as a marriage partner is shattered. Being alone may lead you to believe that a part of you is missing and that you are incomplete.
- Socializing after the loss of a spouse is rarely ever the same. It may feel awkward to join the group of friends you enjoyed as a couple. Friends may also avoid extending an invitation because they do not want to make you feel uncomfortable or out of place.

Christians who have suffered the loss of a spouse have the unique comfort of knowing their loved one is heaven, that they will be reunited once again with their loved ones. This knowledge brings comfort; yet the above circumstances still pose difficulties.



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Here are some important strategies for managing grief after losing a spouse:

- Anticipate a multitude of emotions: confusion, anger, fear, guilt and maybe feelings of relief. Making complex decisions and focusing may be difficult and you could feel fatigued.
- Take time to recognize your loss and mourn: Mourning is the open expression of your thoughts and feelings regarding the death and is an essential part of the healthy healing.
- Talk openly and honestly about your grief: Allow both laughter and tears.
- Find a support system: Family, friends and neighbors, or something more formal like grief groups or a grief counselor.
- Own your grieving process: Your grief is unique. Do not compare your process or experience to others.
- Grief and healing go together. Grieving is a process, not an event. Give yourself time and compassion as you learn to live with the loss.

Helping someone who is grieving

If you know someone who has experienced the loss of a spouse, consider the circumstances described above, where loneliness or awkwardness could set in. Be especially mindful of those times and be extra kind and supportive when evidence of those circumstances arises.

Christians can remind each other of the comfort we have in Christ and the promise of eternal life in heaven. Until we see our loved ones again in heaven, we recognize that we must continue to live out our lives according to God's purposes. The above strategies can help a grieving friend, no matter where he or she is with regard to faith in God.

Over time, your friend will thank you for sharing these strategies, your love, and your support. In fact, God is working to deliver His comfort through you. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

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

Do you or a loved one need counseling help? Appointments with our counselors can be requested online through our [Request an Appointment page](#) or by calling 800-438-1772.