

Three Husbands

5 STEPS TO MANAGING LOSS OF A LOVED ONE

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“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed spirit” – Psalm 34:18





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“Blessed be the God and 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





This booklet is meant to help those recovering from the loss of a spouse, relative or friend. Sometimes we need extra help and for those looking for a shoulder to cry on it seems that there isn't enough personalized support in this department. At least, when I lost my first husband in 2001, there was very little resources to help with dealing with grief on the internet. I say first husband because I had 2 husbands that passed on to the other side. One suffered from Advanced Prostate Cancer; the other from Liver Disease which resulted from alcoholism and drug abuse. There is a program called GREIFSHARE that I did use in 2003 at my church that helped me after 2 years. I am so grateful for that support. But, we need the help immediately; not years later when the scars of grief are hidden.

At that point, we need major cosmetic surgery of the soul to finally heal from something that will never disappear. Moreover, it must be managed daily just like trying to lose weight or sculpt your body through weight training. It's a journey that will lead some to spiritual enlightenment, in order to find the true love and peace within.

It is important to share your loss with those who have experienced the same type of grief. When you share your pain of loss it will help you realize that you are not the only one. You are not weird because you don't seem to get over the loss, but unfortunately it isn't prudent to share your pain with people who have never experienced loss or other family members or friends that just want you to move on. They really do not want to deal with your tragedy. They have their own troubles and they may kindly listen once or twice, but you will end up feeling rejected at some point which is not what any of us needs when grieving. However, It is okay to speak to supportive family and friends that understand and also want to reminisce the good times and memories of a loved one.

Also, we are all so different when dealing with grief. Some may move on with their scars and never deal with it (which will eventually rear its' ugly head in the least inconvenient moment), others will let the sadness of loss linger on (which will show on their less than jovial face, day-in and day-out, eventually showing up in illnesses like depression, anxiety or cancer) and others will manage their daily sadness with positive outlets (but, not really dealing with the anguish of grief), yet others will self-destruct by negatively self-medicating. Below are 5 typical coping choices from my experience (of course, these are not the only choices, but these are the ones I have observed in my life and others):

1. Move on (Ex: Ignore what happened)
2. Linger on with sadness (Ex: You never ignore what happened)
3. Escape your reality (Ex. Move away to another state, country, etc....)
4. Positive Outlets (Ex: Work, Hobbies, self-help books and positive relationships, Travel, Religion/Spiritual/God, Jesus, Holy Spirit)
5. Negative Self-Medicating (Ex: Alcohol, illegal drugs or prescription drugs, negative relationships)



I must add that I am not a psychologist or doctor, however I did have a few psychology classes when I was in college. Moreover, I have gone through therapy at different times in my life. I am only sharing my experience on the subject of grief which I have been dealing with for 20 years, and one of the best things you can do to manage grief is writing your feelings in a journal or helping others navigate through the process. Therefore, this booklet is my way of managing my own emotions which sometimes have to be expressed when you can no longer suppress them, and hopefully help someone else in the process. I have also added some professional writings and noted them in Resources. Especially, the 5th step on “Have a Plan and Take Your Time”. I found a website “What’s Your Grief?” that has several resources and writings on specific actions you can take, so therefore, I borrowed one of the articles for this pamphlet because I could not have said it better myself.

After pondering what I have the most knowledge of, it turns out it is grief. Why? I’ve had two husbands pass away, a father and just recently my mother(the hardest loss of all). So, my knowledge is mostly of how to manage grief when losing a husband as a young wife, as well as, parents, relatives or friends. I am now married for the third time to the love of my life and have 4 step children, however I never had children of my own. But, I have had dogs over the years, and I currently have my Toy Papillon and a Siberian-Husky.

My main concern is young widows and where they turn to for help in a crisis. I am seeking to connect to the young widows that have no children and through no fault of their own have found themselves in a financial crisis and with no help or support from family, friends or church. I realize this might be a small group, but I find that I am more equipped to specifically guide this scenario. God has also led me to grieve for this particular group of women. However, I find that most of my strategies to manage the loss of a beloved spouse can be applied to many areas of life and the loss of a loved one, divorce, pets, job, dreams, career, home and financial stability. So, my hope and prayer is that whatever I share in this booklet will be helpful to someone who is looking for comfort and direction when they most need it. I pray that God will embrace you and comfort you with His peace that surpasses understanding. That you know God loves you and is always there for you. All you have to do is start a conversation with Him and let Him know how you feel and ask Him for direction and whatever you need at the same time glorifying Him for never leaving you, nor forsaking you.

My coping choice is Jesus. So, I will encourage in this booklet the religious/spiritual aspect of cultivating peace and surrendering the loss of your spouse, relatives or friends to the only One that can truly heal us from all infirmities; our Father and Lord Jesus Christ.

If you have no religious or spiritual belief, then I encourage you to keep an open mind and seek to find out why my choice is God and I pray that you find peace, comfort and encouragement in reading and learning how to manage/recover from your grief. And, when you’re ready have an intimate conversation with God, and pray, ask and tell Him what’s on your mind. ***“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” -Matthew 5:4 NKJV***



Step 1: Acknowledge Your Grief

Acknowledging your grief is an important step in the grieving process. Your feelings are valid, and it is okay to cry, scream, feel tired, depressed, angry, anxious, feel nothing at all and become less motivated. There are so many emotions and feelings that can develop from losing a loved one. But, the most important thing is to know that all these emotions are necessary to begin the journey of healing. At the same time, keeping in mind that those feelings are okay, so long as they do not become a habitual occurrence and overwhelm your life in a permanent negative way.

One of my less stellar memories from my grieving is anger. Somehow, anger creeps out in the most unexpected moments. In my case, I was surprised and unable to control the feeling, even though it resulted in hurt for the person the anger was directed at and hurting myself. None the less, I continued my rampage. Today, I am grateful for that anger because I now know how to deal with it in healthier ways. It has taken most of my life, but I now understand that anger can be funneled by helping others, journaling, reading the Bible, praying, meditating, practicing one of your hobbies or talents like singing, dancing, exercising, writing or painting to name a few. You can learn something new or create beautiful and peaceful surroundings. Not to mention, that anger is part of the grieving process and you should not beat yourself up about it or feel guilty because that doesn't serve you well or help focus on why you have anger in the first place which can be triggered by the loss of a loved one, but can also be a deep anger that comes from your childhood or other past events. With that said, hobbies or talents can't be used to escape or ignore the feelings and emotions of grief that flood our daily life.

I am mentioning anger first because it is the most destructive emotion that I experienced. Now, alcohol or drugs is not the best either, and it can lead to devastating results like an accident where you and others get hurt. So, let's stick with acknowledging your grief and taking the time to feel your emotions and deal with them in a safe place with love and support whether it be with family and friends or a therapist or just reading this pamphlet. One thing I do know is that processing grief is not something that you can do alone or quickly. In other words, if you have no one to support you, then it is time to pray to your Father in Heaven. If you are a believer in God, then it should be easy and your first step is to pray and communicate your feelings to God and also ask Him to send you someone that might be able to help.

In summary, acknowledging your grief is necessary, in order to begin the journey of healing, you must acknowledge and accept that it is okay to feel a flood of emotions. However, how you deal with those emotions is crucial to your well-being and ability to function effectively with the world around you. If you haven't already gone through some of these emotions consider yourself forewarned about anger and drugs and alcohol. Side note, when it comes to using negative coping choices like drugs or alcohol, "Just Say No!"



Step 2: Focus On Your Mental Health

Focusing on your mental health is key to creating a battle strategy that will guide you through the maze that is grief. First, accept that you are mentally at a vulnerable state of being and immediately pray, seek help from your church, find a support group, therapist, family or friend. I recommend a program called GriefShare that may be available at your church or online. You can also look to ministries at church like Stephen Ministry which help you get on your feet by connecting you to a mentor, if you are a member at your church they may have a ministry like this that mostly deals with your spiritual health and growth. Moreover, once you speak with your mentor they will find out where you need help and they will connect you with other team members that can take care of practical things like finding a job, and dealing with financial stress, etc., and this will help you to not feel alone. The mentor should help you come up with a plan that will keep you focused, and in turn will keep you from having a mental breakdown. Some of us need less help than others, but it is always a good idea to seek support, as soon as possible. You need someone to hold your hand while going through the sadness and numbness of losing someone you loved.

Second, praying or meditating is very effective in maintaining your spiritual faith and peace when the whole world seems like it is caving in around you. Just know that it is just an illusion. You will come out of the darkness into the light again, but it will take time and effort on your part to trust that everything will be alright. Be patient and take it one step at a time. Open your neglected Bible or install the Bible app (YouVersion) and start a reading plan or search for a topic on grief. One of the best things you can do for yourself is grow spiritually when dealing with loss. I understand that many people in their loss tend to blame God or curse religion, but that is not going to serve well in honoring the life that just transitioned to the other side. If not for ourselves, then we owe it to the one we loved to live a life that is full of spiritual maturity, peace and love.

Third, find your passion again for the things that you once loved. For example, maybe it's been a while since you went to the beach or went for a walk in nature. When you do these things make sure you take your Bible, a journal or motivating book, so you can sit and write down messages that God whispers to you or write down plans and dreams that you have been meaning to accomplish that you may have given up. The idea is to focus on you for a little bit and it is okay to be selfish for this activity. Make it a daily practice to start an intimate conversation with God and be selfish in your time with God: He will be pleased and be so proud that you are putting Him first and coming to Him with your needs.





Step 3: Create A Positive Environment

Creating a positive environment is a great way to help your visual, auditory and olfactory senses. Visual Therapy is one way to focus your energies on the new life that you are about to embark on. Even though, you are still allowing for time to grieve, it is helpful to focus on your next steps like tidying-up your home from clutter and organizing your bills that might be piling-up due to sadness. From my own experience, do not let your bills get behind you will regret it later. Unfortunately, I had a good credit score in my first marriage and never made a late payment, but after he passed away, I lost it and well it was quite a struggle that was unnecessary to say the least. At that time, I was not communicating with God the way I do today. However, shortly after my first husband's passing I came to Christ and surrendered all of my burdens to Him, and things did lighten up after that, but I still had to deal with the consequences. So, my hope is that while you are reading this, it will save you the pain of neglecting your bills. Just Do It! Do not procrastinate on your administrative responsibilities. It will eliminate undue stress in the long run. Other things that you can do to enhance your visual surroundings is redecorate or rearrange one room that you can sit and read or meditate in.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” Matthew 11: 28-30 NKJV

Auditory therapy is a great way to cheer up a weary soul. Play your favorite music like your favorite Christian group on Alexa or dance music like salsa, pop music or classical music or oldies. Whatever, suits your mood. Keep in mind that sometimes it is appropriate to play a sad song, in order to cry just because crying soothes the soul. Once you are done crying and you will know when, you can go back to a relaxing meditative music. Sometimes I play spiritual and relaxing YouTube videos on my SmartTV which helps with Visual and Auditory senses. Make sure that no matter what type of music you choose it helps your soul fly and heal. However, sometimes pure silence can be healing and just focusing on breathing by meditating. For example, breathe in for 4 counts and out for 4 counts. Keep it simple. If you're a Christian, you can repeat a verse from the Bible like, *“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” - II Timothy 1:7*

Olfactory therapy which will cater to your sense of smell. Light up a scented candle along with your relaxing music and grab your favorite blanket or throw, sit in your favorite chair or sofa and journal all of your thoughts and start a thankful list. These habits can be a blessing on your laziest days. Baking your favorite cake or chocolate chip cookies can be an amazing way to breathe life into your oven and make your home smell warm and welcoming. This might make you take up a cooking class or nurture your inner chef. Wash your bed linens and clothes with your favorite detergent and fabric softener and notice how wonderful it is to wear clean clothes and sleep in the freshest sheets. The idea here is to wake up your senses. Another great



pastime is to draw a bath with bubbles or your favorite soothing scent, as well as, pamper your skin with a refreshing moisturizer. My favorite is Juniper Breeze by Bath & Body Works! I can only buy it on eBay or amazon since the original is no longer sold at the store.

Step 4: Be Gentle with Yourself

There is a phase during the grieving period that we tend to blame ourselves for the death of our loved one. We start wondering if we helped them enough. If we encouraged them to seek help in time would they still be here with us. Did that argument we had trigger the Cancer? Again, the argument doesn't help anyone, but it is not the reason your loved one died. If you tend to be an enabler to an addict, then you may wonder if the argument or your willingness to go pick-up the last bottle of alcohol was the reason they passed away. Of course, you had nothing to do with it. So, if you are torturing yourself over the possibilities of it being your fault. Stop it, right now!

First of all, it is not your fault. It was just their time to go and unfortunately, if it was due to addiction they were fighting a disease that only God could take away. They need a lot of support to overcome addiction and they need to walk the road to victory by acknowledging that they need help and they need to want to heal from whatever drives them to self-medicate. Most of the time, you are never in that equation.

Second, your only job is to be kind to yourself and cultivate kindness in your life and to those around you. Make sure you take the time to encourage yourself and others with remembering good memories about your loved one and reminiscing the good times with them and without them.

Third, treat yourself to a spa day. Make an appointment for a stone massage, manicure, pedicure or facial. Book a cruise, go hiking, take a beach vacation, go fishing, go to an amusement park or take a drive to nowhere and see where it takes you. The idea is to focus on yourself, reward yourself for getting through a very difficult time in your life and celebrate the life of your loved one. Take the time to analyze what you learned from the experience and how will you funnel all of that grief into something positive and productive.

In conclusion, do not blame yourself for something that was not your battle to begin with. The battle was theirs and in the end it only belongs to God!

“You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, who is with you...” -II Chronicles 20:17





Step 5: Have A Plan And Take Your Time

“You’ve been there before. Heck, we’ve all been there.”¹

It’s been a long week, you’re tired, the weather’s not that great, and it is utterly impossible to imagine anything as enjoyable as changing into your pajamas, ordering a pizza, opening a bottle of wine, and snuggling in for some quality couch time. Sure you made plans to meet up with friends, but it’s okay to cancel just this once.

Fast forward and you’ve rescheduled those plans. You’re due for some quality time with friends, but the same couch is tempting you to come hither. “*Come sit on me,*” it says, “*Netflix*” awaits. And, oh, what is this? *Why it’s a big comfy blanket.*” It’s decision time friends, what will you do? The easy thing – give into the couch, or the hard thing – see your long lost friends?

Personally, I engage in these battles all the time, and I bet you do as well.

Round one: Make healthy dinner vs. grab take out

Round two: Go to the gym vs. “*no thank you!*”

Round three: Call a friend and make plans vs. don’t commit to doing something you might not want to do later

Round four: Sign up for that class vs. self-doubt and cynicism

Ideally, you would always decide to invest your energy in the things that bring you fulfillment, enjoyment, satisfaction, and connection, even if these things felt challenging. But being realistic, we know that most people opt for the easier choice from time to time, even if it isn’t the wisest.

This may be especially true when you’re grieving, because when you’re grieving you have a whole slew of reasons for taking shortcuts, disengaging, and withdrawing socially and emotionally. Here are a few:

- You feel distracted or as though you can’t focus on anything other than your loss/grief.
- You feel like you have to conserve your energy to deal with the emotion and stress of grief.
- You feel as though the things you once enjoyed now seem meaningless or unimportant.
- You disengage from activities because they remind you of your loved one.
- You feel anxious about seeing people/social interaction.
- You feel anxious about running into grief triggers.
- You feel anxious about becoming emotional in front of others.
- You no longer feel like a capable and competent person.



- The world no longer feels like a safe and reliable place.
- It feels safe and comfortable to *not* push yourself.
- Engaging in activities feels like a betrayal or as though you're "moving on".
- You think you will feel better in time, so you decide to stay at home and wait it out.

It's protective and adaptive, when you only have so much energy, to focus it on the places where it is most needed. It's normal to let some of your day-to-day routine fall by the wayside during times of hardship and crisis. However, one should be mindful of how much they are cutting out and for how long. There is often a fine line between temporarily disengaging and more harmful long-term social and/or emotional withdraw.

Consider this, disengaging from previously fulfilling and enjoyable activities can contribute to depression. The [Society of Clinical Psychology notes](#) that,

"When people get depressed, they may increasingly disengage from their routines and withdraw from their environment. Over time, this avoidance exacerbates depressed mood, as individuals lose opportunities to be positively reinforced through pleasant experiences, social activity, or experiences of mastery."

Although depression and grief are different, both experiences may cause someone to retreat from life and, in either scenario, that person is cut off from sources of support, coping, and positive emotion and may ultimately end up feeling worse.

One therapy that has proven effective in treating depression is called behavioral activation. Through behavioral activation, depressed clients increase their engagement with activities that provide them with opportunities to experience social support, well-being, positive feelings, and confidence. Following a similar line of reasoning, we might assert that the more *grieving people* engage with life, the more opportunity they will have to process their emotions, connect, receive support from others, and experience positive feelings.

Before you get overwhelmed, we are not talking about going "back to normal" or a complete reintegration with your "normal activities". We're talking about actively choosing small and worthwhile activities and deliberately planning to do them. Let's talk specifically about this means.

What have you stopped doing since experiencing the death of your loved one? More specifically, what do you no longer do that you used to previously enjoy or find fulfilling? These may be things that you stopped doing because...

- You don't have the time
- They require too much effort
- They remind you of your loved one
- They seem less fun.





Now, what if I told you that by deliberately deciding to do these things again, or by choosing new things to try, that you might start to feel a little bit better? Or that by doing these things you are actually, in many ways, coping with your grief? Some outlets – like supportive friends, journaling, advocacy, art – help you directly process your grief-related emotions and experiences. While others are simply healing in that they help you connect with others, feel a sense of mastery or fulfillment, allow you to feel calm and at peace, increase your physical wellbeing, or simply help you to feel human again.

I know these things seem small in comparison to your big problems and stressors, but one way to think of coping is as small steps on a very large staircase, where each step could potentially help you feel a little bit better.



Getting started:

Ask yourself, what does a typical day currently look like?

Literally, write your hour-to-hour schedule down and ask yourself:

- What is filling up your time?
- Is it filled with a whole lot of nothing or is it filled with way too much?
- In looking at the activities, how many feel draining?
- Be honest, how much of your day is scheduled around worries, anxieties, and the need to avoid?
- How many activities are there in your schedule that help you (1) take care of yourself (2) directly cope with your grief (3) feel positive feelings?
- What used to be a part of your schedule that you've now stopped doing?

Make a plan.

If you've cut out activities that used to be an important part of your life, things that had inherent value, then it may be time to schedule them back in. Now, some of these activities may no longer feel pleasurable, perhaps because nothing feels pleasurable, they may remind you of your loved one, they require effort, or because they force you to confront difficult emotions. You should consider scheduling them in anyway. Once you get over the hump/your fears/anxieties – whatever it is – you may find that these activities are worthwhile again.





Next, consider what other positive/constructive/therapeutic activities you could begin to work into your schedule for the first time. Are there coping tools you'd like to try? Are there ways you want to honor and remember your loved one? Are there physical health issues you'd like to work on? Think about these things as well.

Implement.

After you've taken stock of your schedule and the types of activities that are missing, it's time to schedule them in. Literally, schedule them into the hour. You may want to think about your day leading up to the activity as well. For example, if you want to go to the gym at 10 am but you typically sleep until 9:30 am, you may need to schedule an earlier wake-up time and a breakfast time as well. Be realistic and be honest with yourself.

It may help you to ask other people to keep you accountable. Ask someone to do the activity with you, or at least ask them to follow up with you to make sure you did it. If you have a counselor or support group, talk to them about your plans and ask them to ask you how it went next time they see you.



As they say, “just do it”.

Don't give in to your excuses, rationalizations, or reasons why not. And if you are skeptical, then prove us wrong. In other words, just try it and see.

While engaging in the activity, pay attention to how you are feeling. Comparing yourself to how you felt at your worst, not your ideal best, do you feel any better? If the answer is yes, good! If the answer is no – I feel worse – then ask yourself why because this may be useful information as well.

Be prepared for it to be difficult at times.

After someone dies, some of our most valued and fulfilling experiences are often colored with a tinge of pain. Part of coping with grief is learning to tolerate and work through painful emotions so prepare to feel frustrated and to doubt yourself and to feel all sorts of emotion – but please believe it is worth it in the end.”

Special Note from Barbara Autery: I am putting these E-Grief Pamphlets together to make it a simple read. It has been my experience that, when going through grief, it is easier to take information in small doses, so a 12 page pamphlet made sense to me.




Sources and Resources:

1. [COPING WITH GRIEF](#) / COPING WITH GRIEF: ELEANOR HALEY

<https://whatsyourgrief.com/share-your-grief/>

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“And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” -Matthew 5:3-12

