



# GRIEF: THE JOURNEY AFTER LOSS

According to Webster's Dictionary, grief is described as "the pain produced by loss, misfortune, injury, or evils of any kind; sorrow; regret."

When we're injured—whether through an accident or by the actions of others—we often feel an overwhelming sense of loss. When we lose a loved one, it can feel as though we can't breathe, can't move forward, or simply can't imagine surviving that loss.

Grief is different for each of us. It manifests in countless ways—sometimes bringing guilt or questions that haunt us. We may feel we did something wrong, or wonder if there was something we could have done to prevent the loss. I know I did. I found myself second-guessing everything: Did I love him enough? Did I ask the right questions? Did I ask enough questions about his treatment?

## The Five Stages of Grief

Psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, in her Theory of Dying, introduced what is now widely known as the Five Stages of Grief. She described grief as the emotional response people experience when facing terminal illness or the death of a loved one.

The five stages include:

- Denial: Disbelief or shock—avoiding acceptance of the loss.
- Anger: Once reality sets in, we may feel angry at the person who died, or at ourselves.
- Bargaining: Trying to negotiate or "make a deal" in hopes of changing the outcome.
- Depression: Overwhelming sadness and despair.
- Acceptance: Not necessarily happiness, but recognition that the loss is real.

We don't pass through these stages neatly or in order. I found trying to force myself through them step by step was too restrictive for what I was actually feeling. My grief has moved back and forth through these stages countless times.

It's been four years since the love of my life left his earthly home for his heavenly one. Initially, I felt relief—his struggle to breathe was finally over. I thought I needed to be the strong one for our children, grandchildren, and friends. I don't recommend this. Putting your own healing on hold places your recovery at risk; you may find you never truly navigate the stages of grief.

Throughout his illness and after his passing, people told me how strong and stoic I was, how proud Keith would be to see how I was handling things. But my therapist warned me that this wasn't necessarily healthy. I was burying my grief so I could help others process theirs. I didn't want my daughter to worry about me. I wanted her to be proud that I didn't fall apart.



## GRIEF: THE JOURNEY AFTER LOSS (CONT'D)

I didn't cry when Keith took his last breath. I didn't cry at his celebration of life or at his memorial service. I had been taught—through losing my son, my mother, and two dear friends—that crying only upset others. Instead, I cried in the shower, sobbed at night alone, and screamed and wept in my car when faced with doing things by myself.

I made decisions I shouldn't have, which led to deeper depression and anger. I wanted everyone to see how "strong" I was and that I had moved on. This performance brought on erratic behavior, severe mood swings, and words that hurt family and friends. I often spoke without a filter, saying things I didn't truly mean. In reality, I was cycling through denial, anger, and depression—over and over again.

If I was around people, I became the fun, party girl. The moment I was alone, I fell into despair, begging God to show me why He would leave me on this earth without the one person who loved me unconditionally.

I attended three GriefShare classes. They helped while I was there, but sometimes left me feeling hollow once I returned home. Many people benefit greatly from this kind of support, and I strongly encourage it. For me, one-on-one counseling was most helpful. It gave me a space where I didn't have to filter my words, where I could say anything without judgment.

I expected everyone to be sad with me, to want to talk about my husband, to never forget. But I've learned it doesn't work that way. Why? Because while others loved him, they didn't love him the way I did. My love for Keith ran so deep—he made me laugh every single day. His care and compassion for others was what I fell in love with from the start. Keith was a true servant to people, and I admired that deeply. I feared that if I didn't keep talking about him, everyone would forget his life, and I'd be the only one left remembering him.

Grief is deeply personal. None of us process it the same way—but process it we must. I'm still learning to live with it. I suspect I will until I take my last breath. Most days, I'm happy, but it's still lonely without Keith. This is my grief, my burden to bear, and I can tell you—it's a lonely place to live inside your own head.

I've accepted that Keith will never physically be near me again. I'll never feel his warmth at night, his touch, or hear his silly jokes. But I do have my memories, my photos, the things that remind me of him. He's not here, and he's not coming back. Keith wasn't perfect, but he was perfect for me. He let me be my wild self, then gently reeled me back in. He loved me, flaws and all.



## GRIEF: THE JOURNEY AFTER LOSS (CONT'D)

This was never the road I expected to walk. I thought since God brought us together later in life, we'd grow old together—rocking on a porch, holding hands, laughing. Keith was my prayer warrior, my comedian, my love, my life.

Peace can be elusive, but over the past year, I've spent time evaluating my life, reflecting, and talking more openly with God. I look for things that would have made Keith smile. I'm proud of the progress I've made, but I know I'm still a work in progress. I may never be fully "healed"—and that's okay. I'll keep working to become a better person for myself.

When you lose someone—whether through trauma, a breakup, or death—seek help right away. There's no shame in it. It's okay to be angry at your loved one and at God. Trust me, God knows you're angry. You can't hide that from Him. Be angry at your loved one for not taking better care, if you must. But always remember: we each have an expiration date. Nothing we do—and nothing doctors do—can change that.

### Sources:

- Webster's Dictionary
- Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's Theory of Dying (The Five Stages of Grief)