

A Grief Among Many

If I tried to sum up my hopes and my prayers for my recently deceased sister, I could not do it in a few words. Like most of us who grieve over a loved one's death, I find that I need some help in living with and hopefully, recovering from the pain of a life that was meant to be so much better than it was. Yes, I do pray about my grief. Yes, I do talk and pray with my wife and a few friends about it. However, I believe that grief, like joy over the birth of a healthy baby, is a cause for the community who knew the person to gather to recognize that a life has ended here. We gather either in celebration of their life or in grief over the death of the person and probably both. I base my claim on what John Dunn in 1624, "No (person) is an island." No one lives and dies without affecting many people. How we live our lives also has a huge bearing on how we believe that life ends and what happens at the point of death.

It seems to me that Californians do celebrate life, and we do it well. However, the culture within which Jane and I acquired most of our life values, did not celebrate life all that well. Many people from Northern New England do not feel enough joy to celebrate life. Life has often been too hard for them. Instead, they grieve deeply when yet another person that they cared about dies. So, knowing something of the lifelong suffering that my younger sister underwent (which she only revealed to me after she had divorced both of her abusive husbands), I hesitate to tell anyone that faith is enough to cope with death.

For many people it is. However, trusting God to turn even the greatest suffering (especially that of Jesus) into something that ultimately will work for good does require some openness to recognize God is at work in us. I have faith that God is even now working, through my grief and that of June's two sons for us to cope. It might not be as much as we ask for, but it will be enough.

When we doubt that it will be enough, I suggest that we pray for guidance and then open and read the Bible. Then pray about what you just read and pray for openness to God's love. One of my favorite texts is, [2 Corinthians 12:7-10](#). St. Paul acknowledges the impact of his weaknesses and suffering on himself, but he also testifies to God's presence in his and, implicitly, in our grief and helplessness. If that text is too much to accept at the moment, I invite you to read and pray the [23rd Psalm](#). God always knows what we are feeling, but we need to listen to what God is saying back to us during our periods of grief. This is true whether we experience ten-minute periods of sadness randomly throughout a 3-week time frame, or acute grief that goes on for 6 -18 months. There may be someone who is frustrated with our grief and how it can cause us to be less available for them. Some people may even say to us, "Get over it!"



I asked my mother in 1959 following the death of my brother minutes after he was born, whether we ever get over grief. She spoke out of her own experience, and she said to me, “No. It just hurts less with time.” We did not have a Bible when I was a child. Otherwise, we could have read it and used it to find God’s Word speaking to us in the midst our grief. Whether death is expected or not, it comes to each of us. It is better to be as prepared to die at any moment as well as well to have to face the reality of the deaths of our friends, family, military personnel and other people as possible.

My experience says that each person’s death is a spiritual experience—not entirely unlike birth. To borrow a line from a line from the priest-psychologist & spiritual mentor Henri Nouwen, death is something like being reborn into a new world—perhaps even more so because we have had a lifetime of experiences here to equip us be “born” into a higher level where we can love and serve God more fully.

If there was anything unique about my sisters` death it was that she did nothing to stop it from happening. I spoke to her a dozen or more times about her death and how much care she wanted if she was terminally ill. She was clear, and when the time came, she acted in perfect accord with her previously stated values and died. I believe that she is in a place where there is no more pain, humiliation, abuse or any other form of suffering. She knows more about God now than her older brother who has a doctoral degree in ministry. Isn’t that wonderful and worth giving God thanks?
I think that it is!

As always, I welcome your [responses](#).

Rev. Larry LaPierre

31 July 2018