

Grief
by iPriority

Grieving is not linear. It is spiral. The mind takes in what it can handle, and one may seem to be moving on, then a memory or sensory detail invades, or further trauma piles on, and one drops back into a trough of despair, from which another active effort is needed to make the next, larger loop forward. – Gail Sheehy, from Vanity Fair

Enough research has been conducted to tell us what we can expect during the grief process – all the rip-roaring fun we'll have passing through the stages of denial, anger, bargaining, sorrow, and acceptance. They say that at the anniversary of the loss from which grief birthed, grief's symptoms shoot up to the same intensity felt when the event first occurred. As time hauls us towards Sept. 11, 2002, we find ourselves thick in the heart of another hurricane season. As if the months and days between Sept. 11 were the watchful eye of the storm and now, embarking on the anniversary of last year's horrific attacks, the winds pick up and the destruction begins again.

Shortly after the death of his beloved wife, C.S. Lewis wrote, "In grief nothing stays put, one keeps emerging from a phase, but it always recurs. Round and round. Everything repeats. Am I going in circles, or dare I hope I'm on a spiral? But if a spiral, am I going up or down it?"

Some grief sufferers distract themselves by keeping busy; others sit and stare at the wall. Our minds may play the same tapes over and over again. Different memories but the same despair uniquely expressed and endured. We can comfort one another during this unpredictable season by our presence in the lives of our friends and family members, our shoulders made to lean on, our ears made to listen. Sometimes caring friends suggest solutions when there aren't any. They tell you what to do in order to get over the loss of a loved one – get out, take a trip, plan fun things, meet new people. One woman said of such advice: "I have a stock answer for their stock advice: I am not lonely for the presence of people, I am lonely for the presence of my husband. But how can I expect these innocents to understand that I feel as though my body has been torn asunder and that my soul has been mutilated? How could they understand that for the time being, life is simply a matter of survival?"

This woman mourns so much more than the loss of her husband's presence. Not only his presence, but also what he brought out in her and what he brought out in their family and friends is forever absent. C.S. Lewis aptly describes this intangible angle of loss in the *Four Loves* when he wrote:

In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets. Now that Charles is dead, I shall never again see Ronald's reaction to a specifically Charles joke. Far from having more of Ronald, having him "to myself" now that Charles is away, I have less of Ronald...In this, Friendship exhibits a glorious "nearness by resemblance" to heaven itself where the very multitude of the blessed (which no man can number) increases the fruition which each of us has of God. For every soul, seeing Him in her own way,



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doubtless communicates that unique vision to all the rest. That, says an old author, is why the Seraphim in Isaiah's vision are crying "Holy, Holy, Holy" to one another (Isaiah 6:3). The more we thus share the Heavenly Bread between us, the more we shall have.

It's a spiral; it's a matter of survival. But what is considered loss need not be *lost*. As the winds pick up and the destruction begins again, consider what C.S. Lewis said; "The more we thus share the Heavenly Bread between us, the more we shall have."