

# Understanding Grief

## *Baptist Burden Bearers*

### ***Grief is a merciless adversary***

There is a famous quote that goes something like this, “Know your adversary!” That principle can be echoed, in various forms, by many successful coaches, business owners and military leaders. The basic premise is that in order to win in whatever endeavor you are engaged in you must know and understand your opponent, your adversary or your enemy. Conquering grief is no different. If we are to overcome the devastating effects of a traumatic loss in our lives we must know and understand our main adversary ... *grief*. Please carefully read through the following truths about grief and how it effects our lives.

### ***Grief is more than a natural reaction to a significant loss***

Grief is actually the outward aspect of an *internal injury*. In order to overcome, heal and conquer your grief you must accept the fact that you have been injured and need to be treated as such. Grief is not like a disease that can be completely healed with little or no after effects. Instead grief is like an injury such as a broken limb or a heart attack. It attacks our entire being and leaves lasting scars that must be dealt with. Grief can never be eliminated but it can be conquered.

### ***Grief isn't readily accepted by our culture***

In our modern society and even in some instances within our churches grief is treated as a subject to be avoided. Grief may well be the most ignored, the least understood yet the most devastating of inflictions that anyone can endure. Most of our culture looks upon someone that can't handle their grief as having a mental issue. At the same time many of our Christian brethren view grief, or at least grief that is lasts more than a few days, as a lack of faith.

### ***Grief is misunderstood by almost everyone***

Grief may very well be the most ignored and least understood “injury” and yet still have the most devastating effect on our lives. Consider the following scenarios.

Scenario one ... You and your family are traveling together in the same vehicle and the unexpected happens. You're involved in a major accident. You are the only one hurt but the result of your injuries is the loss of a leg. Your recovery calls for weeks/months of medical procedures then weeks/months of physical therapy. After that comes job retraining and undoubtedly several years of readjusting to a different lifestyle. Family, friends and co-workers all pitch in to help in any way they can. In most cases insurance covers much of the medical costs. Additionally you are flooded with contributions from friends, church members and even people you don't even know. In short, other Christians, churches and society itself all rally around you to provide what support they can.

Now consider scenario two. You and your family are traveling together in the same vehicle and the unexpected happens. You're involved in a major accident. This time you're not injured. Instead, one of your children is killed. Your “recovery” consists of flowers, calls of condolences from friends and co-workers, a visit from your pastor ... and meetings with the staff from the funeral home. Then, after three to four days, the funeral is over. Friends and co-workers have gone back to their normal lives. Your pastor has switched his focus back to his usual responsibilities with the church ... and your boss expects you to return to work and perform as usual. Next we must answer the questions - Which scenario “hurts” the most, has the most devastating effect on our lives and yet gets the least amount of support? Which scenario creates the most questions as to “why” and “how will I ever recover”?

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### ***Grief affects you emotionally***

This is the most obvious and the most acceptable grief reaction in our culture. We expect people to react emotionally when they suffer a significant loss. Yet we still try to “keep a stiff upper lip” because our society doesn’t tolerate excessive grief. However, even if you give the impression that you are “keeping it together” you can still be suffering from the emotional effects of grief.

### ***Grief affects you physically***

The sudden news of a death in the family or any traumatic event can result in weakness in your legs, sickness to your stomach and even an overall physical collapse. This physical pain can also recur over and over again as you progress through your grief journey. At times these physical pain episodes can even be as severe as they were in the beginning. This is normal and should never be interpreted that you aren’t healing. There is a medical condition called “Stress Induced Cardiomyopathy” or “Broken Heart Syndrome”. One of the main causes is an extremely stressful situation like the death of a loved one. The result is a temporary weakening of the left ventricle of the heart. This could last for a few days to a few weeks. The coronary arteries can spasm and create circulation problems and severe chest pain.

### ***Grief affects you mentally***

Many bereaved people experience various mental issues after a traumatic grief event. Memory loss can be quite common and in fact even expected. Additionally, thoughts may race through your mind that you have never experienced before. This could be thoughts about your own suicide to thoughts about your own sanity. Again, this is normal and even expected with severe traumatic grief.

### ***Grief affects you spiritually***

Regardless of a person’s spiritual condition very few Christians can endure a traumatic grief event without having some level of “questioning” of God’s intentions. The non-Christian, in most cases, may fall back on the false cliché “If God is good then why does He let these things happen”? On the other hand a Christian may not outwardly express their “spiritual confusion”. However, the “Why God?” may only be an honest admission away.

### ***Grief doesn’t “go away” on its own***

There is a familiar saying that “*time heals all wounds*”. While that sounds encouraging and provides a glimpse of hope for the future that statement alone isn’t completely true when it comes to grief. Since grief is comparable to an injury you can’t just ignore it and wait, and wait, and wait and then hope that someday you will be healed and the pain will go away. It does take time to recover from a trauma and travel the grief journey but *time alone is not enough* to properly heal and recover from grief.

### ***Grief is unique to every person***

The uniqueness of grief is just as varied as the uniqueness of every individual. There may be similarities with others in the way a person handles his/her own grief but everyone will cope differently. There is no one way to grieve. There is no one journey to travel. There is no one size fits all when it comes to grief.

### ***Grief affects children and infants just as much as adults***

There is a notable quote expressed by many grief experts that says anyone old enough to love is old enough to grieve. Children *and* infants grieve just as much as adults. Even though they do grieve differently in many ways they still grieve just as deeply. Because of this children and infants must have their grief dealt with just as much as the adults in their life.