

# Understanding Grief<sup>1</sup>

Dave Thurston

<b>Grief</b>	<i>Disappointed, Unhappy, Upset, Dissatisfied, Discouraged, Tired, Loss, Misunderstood, Sick, Grieving, Lost, Heartbroken, Sorrowful, Distressed, Hopeless, Dejected, Hurt, Anguish, Agonised, Depressed, Devastated, Despairing.</i>
<b>How grief communicates.</b>	Grief is broadly defined as the experience of loss. Grief is the umbrella word over the vast mix of things you feel when you lose something or someone important to you. Grief over any good thing, including any good relationship, points us Godward. Grief hurts deeply because we are so aware of just how good a gift God has given us in that close friend, the physical ability to go for a walk, the chance to live near family etc. Our grief then, rightly processed, makes us long for when Jesus returns, when he will wipe away every tear.
<b>How grief relates.</b>	Understanding grief as an experience of loss can help us to understand how God intends it to work in our relationships, especially if we've lost a loved one. At times in grief we need to not relate to others we need to process our grief alone, but the need to be alone needs to be balanced with dealing with grief in the presence and comfort of trusted others. When our losses remind us of unique connection to the person or thing we loved, we can feel isolated and alone. As a result, we rightly yearn for the simple presence of others who represent relationship and love that hasn't been lost, and the hope of recovery.
<b>How grief motivates.</b>	Beneath the varied emotional experiences of grief, is a signal to God and others that says, "I am hurting and I need you" and yet sometimes, we may try to hide the fact that we are grieving out of embarrassment or not wanting to burden others. Of course grief, when not directed properly, can lead to getting comfort in all sorts of inappropriate ways.
<b>How to...</b>	
<b>Identify grief</b>	Grief is the exploration of the significance of the loss we have experienced. Through grief we come to understand that which has been important and meaningful to us and begin to process its absence. It eventually can invite thanks to God for the gift of that which we have lost. The specific experience of bereavement is both a personal and communal experience and sharing with others who care, allows healthy healing of the wound of grief.
<b>Examine grief</b>	The Bible, far from shying away from grief, invites us to experience different kinds of grief through the Psalms: Psalm 51 – the grief of guilt; Psalm 55 – the grief of betrayal; Psalm 31 – grief of any kind. Grief is painful and makes us feel vulnerable and exposed, but God invites us to explore the nature of our loss and find in him one who both understands loss but also one who promises that through Christ the best is yet to come. Attempting to insulate ourselves from loss is neither Christian nor healthy.
<b>Evaluate grief</b>	Being human means that we are a subject to both the highs and lows of life, but how we handle the low of grief is a mark of being a follower of Christ. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13 Paul says, "Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope." Our loss is no less acute than others but our loss is experienced against the backdrop of the gospel promise in the death and resurrection of Christ of the new heaven and the new earth: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling-place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death" or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" (Rev.21:3-4).
<b>Acting in response to grief</b>	In the midst of grief it is hard to know how to act, and different griefs work differently in each of us. Part of our appropriate response as a person in grief is not to think that we can or will conform to some pattern; grief takes its course. For those of us who know and love those experiencing grief, our best and most helpful posture is to 'be a companion in the journey from grief to healing'.

<sup>1</sup> Based on *Untangling Emotions* J. Alisdair Groves & Winston T. Smith p183-196.