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# The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month  
by Sally Ensley



## Finding help when we are hurting

When asked several months ago to write an article for this resource page, I had no idea that my attention would be turned to the area of grief. However, for the last six months or so, working through a grief process has consumed much of my time and energy. Not that my grief was worse than anyone else's; it has just been different.

I have been grieving a criminal act that was done against my son. And even though my son has come through this seemingly stronger than ever, his mother continues to struggle. Those typical questions and statements of "Why?" or "It's not fair" were all I could come up with for quite some time. And even though I am still in this grief process, I am trying to do my "grief work" so that I, too, can come out stronger than ever.

As ministers, whether professional or lay leaders, we work almost every day with people who are somewhere in their grief process. Being in one myself, I better understand what a long process that can be and that it is not just the death of a loved one that sends us into grief.

According to Hardy Clemons in *Saying Hello to Your Life After Grief*, other causes of grief can include divorce, loss of a job, moving away from your place, someone leaving home, a disappointing child, loss of aim or identity, a birth defect, surgery or illness, rupture of a friendship, loss of a dream or opportunity, or (in my case) a violation of one's self or one's loved one. With all these different events able to cause grief in the lives of our church family members, it is safe to say that many people in our congregations are hurting whether we know it or not.

I had an opportunity to preach a few weeks ago and shared three things I have experienced through my grief process and

therefore have found to be true. Especially as a minister in my church, I wanted our congregation to understand that *it is all right to be angry with God*. He is big enough to handle it. I think that may have been the first time many of our members were ever given permission to be mad at God ... to ask God "Why?" I hope this was a freeing concept for them to hear.

Again as a minister who is supposed to "have her act together," I also wanted our people to know that I have been reminded *it is all right to ask for help*. This is not a sign of weakness or a lack of faith. God gave us each other not only to worship and serve together, but also to help each other through life's tough times. "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (1 Thess. 5:11).

My third point was to remind listeners to *stay close to God in the not-so-bad times*. If we have a loving and trusting relationship with God, we can better handle the difficult times.

Early in my grief process I found L.B. Cowman's devotional book *Streams in the Desert* to be very helpful. Although first published in 1925, it continues to offer help to the hurting and it does it in small doses — which is typically all that someone beginning the grief process can manage.

Later in my journey I reread John Claypool's classic writing, *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler*. In this book Claypool shares about the death of his daughter, Laura Lue, to leukemia. I had read this book several years ago at the time of my brother's death and found the honesty that Claypool put into his writing to be both inspiring and refreshing.

Charles E. Poole's book *Don't Cry Past Tuesday* was another helpful reading. Included in it are 12 sermons that seek to,

in Poole's words, "hang the holy possible" in front of people in need. Three sermons speak to those who struggle with death, loss and grief. Three speak to those who bear seemingly endless burdens. There are four sermons for persons who are frightened and bewildered by the difficulty of life. The final two sermons address those who wonder if they have anything to offer God or anyone else. Each writing is brief, to the point and very helpful.

Most recently *Saying Hello to Your Life After Grief* has been extremely helpful. However, Clemons warns in the introduction that this book "can be read too soon in one's process of growing through grief. At first in dealing with grief, we are often not ready to embrace or even hear much about God's promise of new life." I would agree!

After six months, after a criminal trial, after seeing my son grow through this experience, I am just beginning to allow God to move me into the future. According to Clemons, in making our way through the stages of grief we must: Say hello to grief work, say goodbye to our loss, say hello to God, and say hello to our future. Clemons also includes a chapter titled "Pastors Are People Who Grieve." Here, he stresses the need for ministers to take time to grieve and not always feel they must "be strong" for everyone else.

While heartache, pain and grief are not pleasant things to talk about or live through, they are a part of life. As long as there is evil in this world, it will continue to touch our lives daily — sometimes just in more devastating ways than others. Whether you as a minister or lay leader are the one grieving or you are seeking to minister to those in grief, I hope these resources will be helpful to you. **BT**

**THE RESOURCE PAGE** is provided by the Congregational Life office of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in partnership with *Baptists Today* and for those dedicated lay leaders working in the educational ministries of local churches. This month's page was written by Sally Ensley, minister of education and mission at Signal Mountain Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tenn.