

FINDING
COMFORT AS
YOU JOURNEY
THROUGH LOSS

grieving
with hope

SAMUEL J. HODGES, IV | KATHY LEONARD

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SAMUEL J. HODGES, IV
AND KATHY LEONARD



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Preface

You are to be commended for using the precious little energy you have to read this book, because if you're grieving the death of a loved one or friend, you may feel you cannot go on. Picking up a book to find strength is like trying to move your car from your garage to your driveway—by lifting it. Your emotions can be overwhelming. Questions and regrets may plague you. You may feel abandoned, alone, and deeply sad.

This book represents hundreds of hours of interviews with people who've experienced the death of a loved one, including Christian counselors and teachers and others who care for the bereaved. These people have been there, and they want to share how they made it through. Through their insights, you'll find out what to expect in the days to come, what to do with your emotions and your questions of "why," and how to get through the days when you feel you can't.

Most importantly, you will discover how to have hope and peace amid your heartache and pain. You don't have to walk this journey alone. As you'll see, others have made it through grief. You will too.

1

What to Expect in Grief

My emotions may be all over the place. But that is considered normal.

Sabrina Black

Heal me, LORD. . . .

I am worn out from my groaning.

All night long I flood my bed with weeping and
drench my couch with tears.

Psalm 6:2, 6

Having an idea of what is normal in grief and what to expect will help you in the midst of this confusing, exhausting time. As you read this chapter, you'll discover thoughts and emotions commonly experienced by people grieving a death. We want to assure you that what you're experiencing is normal, yet unique.

Your Grief Is Unique

You've attended funerals. You've comforted grieving friends. You've seen death on TV. Now it's your turn. Having observed grief from a distance, you knew it would be rough. But you didn't think it would be like this. Sandy, whose son died, describes grief this way:

You go outside and look around and you wonder why the whole world doesn't stop for this period of time. People are still going to amusement parks and eating ice cream cones. Don't they know what horrific thing has gone on? It's like a nightmare.

Adding to the pain is the fact that well-meaning friends do not truly understand what you're going through. But that's okay. Grieving with hope begins, in part, by recognizing that what you're feeling is unique to you.

"No one else really understands the depth of your love and the depth of your feeling for the one who has died," shares Zig Ziglar, motivational speaker whose daughter died. "People can say, 'I know how you feel.' But the reality is no one knows how much you loved the one you lost."

Other people cannot comprehend the specific nature and depth of your pain because the details woven together to form your relationship were unique to that relationship. Sabrina Black, family counselor, explains:

Even though you may talk to ten parents who have lost a child, ten women who have lost a husband, or ten men who have lost a wife, every situation is different because of our relationships, our backgrounds, the way we process things, the dynamics between the two of us. Our situation is unique to us.

Although your grief experience will not mirror anyone else's, grieving people often struggle with similar thoughts and emotions. Throughout this book, we've compiled the experiences and advice of people who've faced grief and

found hope. Finding out what's normal in grief and what to expect will help ease your mind and keep you moving forward through your grief process.

Common Experiences on the Journey of Grief

Depression

One of the most common reactions to the death of a loved one is a deep feeling of sadness. Low energy, fatigue, trouble sleeping, difficulty making decisions, and feelings of hopelessness often accompany the sadness.

“My mother would wonder why I kept the room so dark and why I was lying down so much,” shares Kimberly, who lost her grandmother. “That’s how I wanted it. I wanted it quiet, I didn’t want to eat, and I didn’t want to be bothered. I would look at the phone and just watch it ring.”

Susan Zonnebelt-Smeenge, a Christian psychologist, said that after her husband’s death “it felt like there was nothing left, that my life was over.”

During grief, these types of depressed feelings are natural, but how do you know if you should be concerned about the length or severity of these feelings? Talk with your doctor. Talk with your pastor. They can give you wise feedback on how you are navigating the grief process. You could even ask them, “Do you think I’m making enough progress on my grief journey?” Also, spend time with others who know what grief is like. They can encourage you, which can keep you from getting too depressed. But if in your depression you begin to entertain thoughts of suicide, talk with someone who’s been trained in suicide prevention right away.

Feeling like You’re Losing Your Mind

You likely find it difficult to concentrate and make simple decisions. You lose track of time. You may forget your friends’

names, how to get places, and other basic facts. If mental glitches are causing problems at work or home, write down what you need to do and ask others for help in making decisions. Scaling back on how much you're trying to do can be beneficial, as your body may be telling you that you need more time before going full speed again.

H. Norman Wright, grief therapist and trauma specialist, describes some mental capacities that may not function as well during your grief:

In grief your memory plays tricks on you. There are things you remember, but then you wonder, *Did that really happen?* You may be talking to someone and all of a sudden, *What was I talking about?* When you're in grief, you don't concentrate very well, and the person you lost often dominates your mind.

What's most important is this: do not get frustrated with yourself. Your mind and body are on emotional overload.

Feelings of Denial

You can expect feelings of denial at first—denial that your loved one is truly gone, denial that you can go on without your loved one. Denial helps you portion out your pain to a degree you can handle at that moment. It's natural, and it's helpful. At some point you must move beyond denial, but at the beginning it's to be expected.

Joanne's ten-year-old son died in a car accident. She shares:

I was in denial in the beginning. I didn't want to leave my house for fear that my son would come home and I would miss him. I also thought if I kept his things around me, kept his pictures next to me, cried over them all the time, that would keep me close to him.

Denial helps by buffering the shock of your loss. But as you might suspect, denial can also become a problem. This

happens when you continue to believe your life can go back to the way it was and when you think happiness can be found only in the way things used to be.

Denial is also a problem when you deny that you are hurting or that you need help from others. You may say, “I’m okay; I can handle this on my own—I *am* handling this,” when you aren’t. Denial then becomes a crutch, and you need to admit how you really feel about your situation and accept help from others.

Physical Problems

Directly or indirectly, grief affects every area of your life. You may experience physical difficulties. Due to your fatigue, lack of energy, and overall stress, you may be more susceptible to colds and viruses. You may have heart palpitations or dizziness. Your stomach can feel queasy. Headaches can result from tension, fatigue, or dehydration.

Be aware of how you feel. Visit a doctor if you don’t feel well, as your symptoms may be the result of a problem other than grief. Make conscious daily decisions to do what is right to keep up your physical health. Eat healthy food, drink lots of water, and make a point to get some type of exercise, even if it’s just a short walk in the fresh air. Take time to rest, but don’t overdo the amount of time you spend in bed.

Relief

If your loved one experienced a long illness before his or her death, you may have feelings of relief—relief that your loved one is no longer suffering, relief that your days aren’t overwhelmed with hospitals, feedings, cleaning, assisting, and taking care of your loved one’s needs. Be comforted by the fact that relief is never something to be ashamed of; it has nothing to do with your love for the person who died. It’s a normal response to an exhausting and difficult situation.

“During Mom’s last few months,” says Judy Blore, director of an organization that helps the bereaved, “I was begging the Lord to give Mom a ticket home. On the day she died, I was relieved that she was no longer suffering, yet I hated that death came and I couldn’t stop it. I was relieved that we didn’t have to care for her anymore, and I was relieved for my husband that my life was not controlled by my busyness with something else.”

A Tangled Ball of Emotions

Picture a ball of yarn, not neatly rolled but with knotted, overlapping strands and sections tangled together. What a mess to sort through . . . but it *can* be done. Your emotions in grief are like that tangled ball: knotted, jumbled, and confusing.

Before your loved one’s death, you had certain ideas of what emotions a grieving person would experience. But until you experienced the death, you did not truly realize the variety of intense, unpredictable emotions intertwined: anguish, anger, loneliness, regret, guilt, apathy, fear, and more. Sometimes your emotions feel so tangled that it’s difficult to distinguish what emotions you are feeling. This is a common experience.

What you’re going through is normal. You are experiencing so many different emotions in grief, and you’re not used to having to process that many emotions all at once. Your emotions all seem to be coming at a rapid pace, and because they’re coming so quickly, you’re overwhelmed by them. These things will slow down at some point. It won’t be right away. Tomorrow you’ll probably still feel like you’re losing your mind. Just hold on. It gets better.

Sabrina Black

Accept that your emotions are a tangled ball and that this is to be expected. Sorting through a tangled ball takes patience, perseverance, and deliberation. Winston Smith, counselor,

recommends, “Don’t edit or censor what you’re feeling. Those powerful kinds of feelings are normal, and they won’t hurt you. Let the feelings expose the questions of your soul so that you know exactly what you need to be bringing to the Lord and asking for help with.”

Spiritual Dryness

While many people turn to the Lord during their grief, others have no desire for prayer, Bible reading, or church. If that’s how you feel, tell the Lord. Ask him to give you a desire for these things; they are crucial for your healing even though they may seem difficult to do. Here are some other suggestions to help you:

Some days I would just get the car keys, go to my church, and ask for a pastor or someone else who would pray with me.

Connie

Get your Bible out and open it to any place because the Bible says that all Scripture is beneficial. Meditate on the Word of God.

Sabrina Black

Many bereaved people say, “My prayers are dried up. I don’t want to read the Bible. I appear to have lost my faith.” And I will say to them, “No, you’ve not lost your faith at all. You can’t pray because frankly you don’t know what to say. But nevertheless you can exist in a comfortable silence with the Lord at this point: ‘I don’t know what to say, but I’m here.’” Then little by little the threads are picked up again.

Rev. Richard Bewes

To go to church can seem very intimidating, but church is a resource that’s going to put you in contact with people who can help you grow. If you can overcome that fear of walking in the door, and then make yourself available to what God

can do through that, you'll see the benefits available to you and you'll find there are a lot of people who feel exactly like you do.

Lois Rabey, author, speaker, and widow

I continued to do the things I knew would keep me close to God, even when I was angry about the deaths, even though sometimes when reading the Bible I would close it and think, *I don't feel better*. Because God was my hope, I still wanted to read, I still wanted to pray, I still went to church. Even though there was an absence of joy, I knew that didn't mean God had left. I knew as time passed God would do the healing. That was the hope I held on to, and he did.

Nancy

Emotional Ambushes

Some books teach that you will pass through and complete certain levels or stages of grief. The reality is you will jump back and forth. You may be well into the grieving process, thinking you're doing fine, when an emotion hits. And it feels as strong as it did those first few weeks. Even several years after a death, intense emotions can be triggered by certain memories, events, smells, and sounds. We call this being ambushed by grief. As Meb says, "Grief is a funny thing. You feel like you're pretty stable, and all of a sudden, you're not."

What has triggered an emotional ambush for you? It may be a song on the radio, a person who resembles your loved one, an item in the grocery store, a letter in the mail addressed to your loved one, a smell, a sound, a news story.

Norm, Jan, and John share their experiences with unexpected emotions:

Eight years after Matthew died, we had a young man working in the yard. I talked to him, and I came inside and was really bothered. I didn't know why.

My wife looked at me, and the tears were coming down her face. She said, “He looks just like Matthew.” The coloring of his face, the hairline, the eyes. It brought back that sense of loss once again, and we just held one another and wept.

But on the other side of it, it was a blessing because God had allowed us a peek at what Matthew might have looked like had he lived.

H. Norman Wright

I’m in the grocery store, and I can go down that aisle ten times and not be bothered. Then the eleventh time I see something he loved, and it makes me cry. So I cry a little bit, and that’s okay.

Jan

We are never safe from the unguarded moment. When my mother had been dead for about a year, I was at a local coffee shop reading a newspaper. From behind me I heard this click, click, click. It was an elderly person with a walker who was coming in. All of a sudden, I had tears in my eyes. All it took was a sound. My mom had the same kind of walker.

John Trent, president of StrongFamilies

A Word of Encouragement

No matter how long you’ve been grieving, you will make it through. What you are experiencing right now is a normal part of the grief process. The people who share their insights in this book have been there; they have an understanding of what you are facing. Let the words in this book guide you in knowing what to expect and how to respond as you move forward through this necessary time of grieving.

2

Coping with Grief

People will say, “You’ve got to be brave. You’ve got to be strong.” When you’re grieving, that’s not the time to be brave. That’s not the time to be strong. You need to be human.

Zig Ziglar

So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Isaiah 41:10

Since each person’s grief is unique, there’s no one way to deal with the pain you’ll experience on your journey toward healing. There are, however, many who’ve gone before you. Some of them spent time talking with us because they wanted to help others. They shared what their grief was like—what worked and what didn’t. The following are some

simple and practical steps many of them took to deal with the overwhelming nature of grief.

Know That Grief Is an Expression of Love

Daily, we hear about death—the death of movie stars, politicians, athletes, and other influential people. Local news tells us about murders and fatal car accidents. World news tells us about war casualties, epidemics, and deaths caused by natural disasters. Yet, despite the number of deaths we hear about, often we're unmoved. Granted, we may think, *That's awful* or *What a tragedy*. Sometimes we may even make a donation to help.

But your reaction to hearing about a death in the news is nothing like the grief you're experiencing now. Why is that? As Zig Ziglar says, it's because grief is a by-product of love. He says, "Grief is the recognition that you've lost someone you love. It's the price you pay for loving someone, because if there were no love, there'd be no grief."

Grief can be debilitating. It can be something you desperately want to escape. So strong and powerful are the emotions of grief that you may even begin to wonder if something is wrong with you. Understanding that grief is the recognition of your love for the person you lost can help you to be patient with yourself as you grieve.

Do the Next Thing

Grief can cloud your mind, paralyze your body, and make simple tasks difficult. Edward Welch, counselor, shares a practical piece of advice: do the next thing.

It sounds like fairly shallow counsel, granted. But grief and suffering can feel like such a weight that they can immobilize you. It can feel like once you're immobilized, you will never

start again. Oftentimes people in bereavement will say, “Okay, I need to do the next thing.” What is the next thing? It can be very ordinary. It could be getting a glass of water; it could be brushing your teeth; it could be taking a shower; it could be making a phone call; it could be vacuuming; it could be going to work.

As you wake to each new day, say out loud what you need to do next. Tell yourself to get out of bed, take a shower, and make yourself breakfast. Do the next thing one step, one moment, at a time.

Another idea is to keep a small notebook, handheld computer, notepad, or recording device handy. Record what you need to do each day as the tasks come to mind, even the simplest tasks. Grief makes it difficult to concentrate and to remember, so this activity will help you stay on track.

Patricia, who experienced the deaths of two of her children, her husband, and her father, shares a Bible verse that kept her moving forward each day: “My verse is ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me’ (Phil. 4:13). That’s what got me out of bed every day, that’s what kept me going minute by minute.” You too can embrace this Bible verse—this promise from God—for yourself. He will provide the strength you need daily to accomplish each task as it comes.

Postpone Big Decisions

What decisions are you facing as a result of the death? Selling the house? Changing jobs? Relocating? Unless you *must* make the decision now, postpone the decision for at least a year.

H. Norman Wright explains:

Sometimes when you’re in grief, you don’t make the best decisions. They could be out of impulse. In doing that, you could generate another major loss in your life. For instance, you may say, “I just can’t live in this house anymore. I’m

going to sell it.” After you sell it, you realize you were there for thirty years, and you have so many memories that are there, and you’ve taken away the opportunity to process those memories of your loved one who has died because you’re no longer in that home.

Talk with others about decisions you are facing. Seek people who give wise, expert, biblically based counsel. Grief author Lorraine Peterson says, “Seek a person who is able to give you competent advice, a person who is a strong and committed Christian but also knowledgeable in the area. For example, if you have to make a real estate decision, talk to someone who can help you in that area. If it’s a business decision, find someone who knows about business. Ask God to put the right people in your path who can help you make those decisions.”

Once you’ve received wise counsel, prayerfully weigh the pros and cons of your options. As you decide, remember that the way you feel now may not be how you will always feel. Take time to pray about your decision, being sure to look to God’s Word for guidance instead of telling God what you’re going to do.

You may think you are capable of making a good decision right now, but Robert DeVries, seminary professor, who experienced his wife’s death, says, “We don’t always think straight. You may think you are thinking straight, but as a matter of fact, your mind is clouded with all the emotions and the experiences that are going on. I know that on my own grief journey it took me quite a while to make what I thought were responsible decisions.”

Lean into Your Grief

Many people try to push down their emotions and hurt, stuffing the pain and anguish inside in order to get through the day. This doesn’t work. In fact, it makes grief last longer.

Sandy, whose son died from cancer, was living what she describes as a nightmare. Drained and despairing, she sought advice from a friend who had also lost a son.

“Karen,” I said, “How do you do this?”

She said, “I’m going to tell you something that sounds kind of cold. The best thing to do is to lean into it. Just take it like waves of an ocean. Don’t try to run from it. Don’t try to numb it. Don’t try to pretend it isn’t so. It’s part of your life, so feel everything. Smell everything. Be in all the moments.”

Looking back maybe a year or so down the road, I could say that was some of the best counsel I was given. Simply to lean into the grief, to embrace it. You don’t have to like it. That’s not what that means. It means you let it take you where it will, and you will go to places in your soul you’ve never been.

We understand how difficult it is to let yourself mourn, cry, and express your emotions. But fully experiencing grief is one of the most important things to do to experience comfort and healing. Consciously acknowledge and feel each of your feelings. Accept that this is the norm right now. You won’t always feel this way, but for now, find a place, time, and way to let your emotions out.

Move toward God

During grief, people move either away from God or toward him. But understand that when you move away from him, you hinder yourself from receiving the help he offers. Listen to the help God wants to give to those who are weary and weak:

Do you not know?
Have you not heard? . . .
He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.

Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;
but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint. (Isa. 40:28–31)

Take this time to develop your relationship with God. Get to know his character. Learn about his promises. Try to see things from his eternal perspective, for God has already begun a plan to put an end to all suffering and pain. And the plan will ultimately produce a world in which “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. 21:4).

As you learn about God, don’t forget to talk to him. The Bible says to “cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). That means he can handle anything that’s on your mind—your worries, fears, doubts, and anger.

Elisabeth Elliot’s first husband was murdered. Several years later she remarried, and her second husband died from cancer. She talks about what it means to offer her grief to God and the benefits of doing so:

As I was lying in bed one night before Addison (my second husband) died, I was so helpless and feeling so afraid of the future. I was thinking, “I can’t stand one more day of this.” It was as if the Lord told me then, “Offer up your pain.” I felt like saying to the Lord, “I offer you my pain, Lord, but what is the good of that? What use can you make of it?” It was as though the Lord was smiling at me lovingly and saying, “That’s not your problem. I will take care of that.”

So after the deaths of my two husbands, I did that. Daily, whenever the dagger would stab my heart, which we all know it does at unexpected moments, I would offer it up. If I was in a place by myself, I would lift up my hands and say, “Lord,

here's my pain. I give it to you. Now transform it for the good of others."

I had heard a sermon when I was in Wheaton College, and I have never forgotten one phrase. A missionary woman said, "If your life is broken when given to Jesus, it may be because the pieces will feed a multitude."

Commit to a Grief Recovery Group

A grief recovery support group is a place where other people know the depth and intensity of your pain, and they know how difficult it is to deal with friends, co-workers, and even family members who do not understand. At a Bible-based grief recovery group, you will have the opportunity to learn more about the grief process and how it is affecting you. You'll learn how to take steps forward and grieve in a way that is healthy.

Although your grief is unique, you will meet people who have an idea of what you are feeling. You'll find that others really do relate to how you are feeling. More importantly, you'll realize how much God relates to your feelings and why he is the best comforter for you.

When attending a group, be sure to take an active role in your healing. Make a commitment to learn. Take notes. Do the homework. When you're ready, participate in the discussions. These steps help tremendously. (GriefShare® support groups are located across the US, Canada, and in other countries. Visit www.griefshare.org or call 800-395-5755 to find a group near you.)

A Word of Encouragement

You are grieving because you are a person who has loved another. That is the reason for the feelings you are having today. Since your grief response is a response of love, facing,

expressing, and coping with your emotions can be seen as an expression of honor toward, and remembrance of, your relationship.

If you are confused about the relationship you had with the person you lost and are hesitant to call it a loving relationship, that's okay too. You're not alone in feeling this way, and we will talk more in later chapters about how to cope with those confusing emotions.

3

Will This Pain Ever End?

This grief is temporary. In the beginning, it feels like it's going to last forever. Oh, how it feels like it's going to last forever.

Joanne

How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?

Psalm 13:2

This chapter discusses how to move through your pain and the importance of not rushing the grieving process. We recommend jotting down your thoughts in a print or electronic journal as you consider the insights, questions, and ideas in this chapter.

Why Grief Takes So Long

A common cry of people in grief is, "It feels like my grief will never end. I will be in this dark pit forever. Will my pain

go away? Will this sadness engulf me forever?” Rest assured, your pain will go away, but not completely. That doesn’t mean you’ll never smile again, though. As you move through this book, you’ll discover that peace and pain can coexist. You’ll find you can function in much the same way you did before you lost your loved one and still honor your loved one’s memory.

While your pain will never completely disappear, it won’t always hurt as much as it does now. The length and severity of your pain depends on factors such as

- whom you lost
- the dynamics of that relationship
- how close you were to that person
- the manner of death
- the age of the person who died

It also depends on

- your willingness to choose to move forward in healthy grieving
- how much effort you put into healthy grieving
- the degree to which you allow God to comfort you and to direct your daily life

With the death of a loved one, you have lost more than just a person. You have lost everything that ties in with that person, every role that person played in your life, every dream you had that included that person. You may grieve the loss of conversations, opinions, advice, laughter, companionship, dreams, and plans, not to mention the more concrete losses of someone to do the bills, cook, snuggle with, sit with in church and at dinner, and assist with housework and other household responsibilities. To help you take the important step of identifying and grieving each of your losses, make a list of everything you have lost connected with your loved one.

One by one, face the items on your list by first praying for God's comfort and guidance in helping you grieve that loss.

You will also find that past losses intensify current losses. Past losses need to be acknowledged, accepted, and honestly grieved over too. You might be thinking, *I don't want to go there. I don't want to open that door.* But you need to. The Bible says that by grieving these losses, you will receive the comfort God has for you: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matt. 5:4). Honest, thorough grieving leads to comfort and healing.

Winston Smith recommends thinking back to your past and asking yourself:

- How many ways have I experienced loss?
- Have I grieved those past losses? How did I express my grief?
- How did I turn to the Lord or not turn to the Lord?
- How do I see God's faithfulness so that when I look to my future I can have hope?

Develop a New Normal

Developing a new normal is part of how you will move through your pain and begin to see it diminish. Before your loved one's death, the daily patterns and interactions in your life were what you would have called normal. Today you may find yourself wishing that life would go back to normal. Unfortunately, you can never go back to, or even re-create, your past. It's gone. Instead, you must seek to establish a new normal in your life. Your new normal is one in which your loved one is no longer with you and your daily patterns have changed. But a new normal can be good, and it will help you through your pain.

You can choose what you want your new normal to look like. It will be a slow process, but it will have positive results.

Consider these points as you daily seek to establish a new normal. (It can be helpful to write down answers to these questions as you try to sort through your thoughts.)

1. Which parts of your daily schedule must you remain committed to (job, family members, other responsibilities)? How have these commitments changed since the death?
2. Regarding the commitments that have changed, which changes would you prefer to keep, which changes are not helping you, and what could you do to make those situations better? In other words, what would be a better normal in terms of your daily experience at work, your interactions with family members, and how you fulfill your other responsibilities?
3. What daily rituals, family traditions and interactions, and leisure activities have changed, or will change, as a result of the death?
4. Consider which of these you'd like to continue to incorporate into your life. Consider which would be better as precious memories, and begin to incorporate new rituals, traditions, and activities that better suit your new situation.

One of the trickiest aspects of creating a new normal is doing so without guilt. Why might you feel guilt? As you decide what traditions and activities you want in your new normal, you'll realize that you probably did a lot of things (e.g., watching sports, listening to certain types of music, eating at certain restaurants) because your loved one enjoyed them. Moving forward, you may feel as if you are betraying your loved one by deciding not to do those things. Rest assured, although you may feel uncomfortable leaving those things behind, those decisions don't mean you love the person you lost any less.

Developing your new normal is a key part of your journey of grief. But it's not without its challenges. We'll share more about how to do it and what it will look like for you in chapter 6.

Don't Let People Rush You Past the Pain

Because most people truly don't understand the depth of your grief, they may make comments that cause you to feel the need to hurry up and get past your grief and pain. Do not let people rush you. Going the length of your journey—with no shortcuts or detours—is crucial to your healing. This is why Sabrina Black says it's important for you to “feel what you feel and allow the Lord to comfort you”:

Our society says, “You should be over that. That was two weeks ago; that was two months ago.” The tendency is to put on a mask and pretend you're okay. But you have to be honest with people and let them know this is not helping. You need to say, “This is what I feel. I need to experience this. I'm planning to get to the other side of it, but I'm not there yet.”

Most people you interact with have never walked the path you are on, and while they may care deeply, it is difficult for them because they can't fix you. They don't have the answers, and they can't understand how you are feeling. They think they are helping you when they encourage you to get on with your life.

Don't Try to Rush Yourself

In your case, perhaps other people are not rushing you but rather *you* are the one trying to get over your pain as quickly as possible. Yes, your pain will fade, but only when you face and work through the tough days of grief.

Robert DeVries's wife of twenty-eight years died of cancer. He shares:

One of the first responses I had after Char died was to say, “I've got to get through this as fast as I can.” That is probably a typical male response. “I'm going to fix it. I've got to be a problem solver.”

Over time, I began to realize there was no way I could ever begin to fix this. As a matter of fact, I did a lot of things I would consider now to be the wrong way of handling it. I started to remodel the kitchen. That took me about nine months. Char had always wanted the kitchen remodeled, and it was only after I finished it that emotionally I realized she wasn't even there to experience it.

That was probably one of the first times I began to accept the fact that I couldn't hurry through this grief or divert myself from it. I had to take time to focus on the grief, to stop working on the kitchen, to stop throwing myself into my job, and to sit and really work at my grief.

A good friend of mine on the golf course finally reminded me of something very simple that I knew in my head but in my heart I didn't. He said, "Look, Bob, it took you twenty-eight years to grow together. Don't expect to heal overnight." So that's the difficult part: to be patient while you're going through that grieving process because it's going to take a long time to heal.

A Word of Encouragement

There is hope. "Scripture talks about how the Lord will turn your mourning into dancing, so expect that at some point you will dance again," says Sabrina Black. "You will rejoice again, but it is going to take some time to get there."

Again, things will get better. You will begin to experience peace, joy, and healing as you continue to learn and put into practice how to grieve in a healthy manner.