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On Grieving

Selected Scriptures

Our studies at Grover Road Baptist church has been in the Book of Genesis. Slow consistent progression has delivered us to Chapters 34-39 wherein several death scenes are documented. immediately thereafter there is rape, murder, incest, other types of death, relocation and many other grief triggering events.

During the Post Graduate level of studies almost a year was spent at a local hospital studying Clinical Pastoral curriculum. The first assignment was with the terminally ill children. It was observed that as far as the patient was concerned they were too young to know that they were not supposed to be ill. They did not cognitively grasp that death was imminent to them and consequential to those who loved them so.

A study of death and dying ensued in an effort to understand the dynamic that these people were undergoing. One of the authors consulted was Elizabeth Kubler Ross, the recognized authority in the subject. Where much was learned about helping others cope with the reality and finality of death, other coping skills were incidentally touched upon. Death is not the only grief causing event in everyday life. Some of the other major grief causing occasions are the same as the major stressors ie: gaining or losing a job, relocating to a new place, divorce and traumatic events such as rape, robbery and other violent crimes.

The Scripture currently under study has multiple circumstances where the grieving process is triggered and people must cope with everyday life in miserable circumstances. Shechem Rapes Dinah 34:1-3, Semeon and Levi murder the men of Sechem, 34.25ff, Rachel dies (giving birth to Benjamin 35.16-21, Reuben went and lay with Billhah his father's concubine. And Israel heard of it. 35.22, Jacob and Esau together bury their father Isaac—35:27-29. And so the narrative goes on and on.

Perhaps the greatest source of grief nonetheless is death. Death is imminent. Scripture foretells that, "It is given unto man once to die"... (Hebrews 9.27). One of the best sources to acquire insight into these events and to gain more knowledge into the subject is, The Kübler-Ross model, or the five stages of grief. The model was first introduced by Swiss-American Psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her 1969 book, *On Death and Dying*

The stages, popularly known by the acronym DABDA, include:

1 Denial — As the reality of loss is hard to face, one of the first reactions to follow the loss is Denial. What this means is that the person is trying to shut out the reality or magnitude of his/her situation, and begins to develop a false, preferable reality.

2 Anger — "Why me? It's not fair!"; "How can this happen to me?"; "Who is to blame?"; "Why would God let this happen?"

3 Once in the second stage, the individual recognizes that denial cannot continue. Because of anger, the person is very difficult to care for due to misplaced feelings of rage and envy. Anger can manifest itself in different ways. People can be angry with themselves, or with others, or at a higher power, and especially those who are close to them. It is important to remain detached and nonjudgmental when dealing with a person experiencing anger from grief.

4 Bargaining — "I'll do anything for a few more years."; "I will give my life savings if..."

5 The third stage involves the hope that the individual can somehow undo or avoid a cause of grief. Usually, the negotiation for an extended life is made with a higher power in exchange for a reformed lifestyle. Other times, they will use anything valuable as a bargaining chip against another human agency to extend or prolong the life they live. Psychologically, the individual is saying, "I understand I will die, but if I could just do something to buy more time..." People facing less serious trauma can bargain or seek to negotiate a compromise. For example "Can we still be friends?" when facing a break-up. Bargaining rarely provides a sustainable solution, especially if it is a matter of life or death.

6 Depression — "I'm so sad, why bother with anything?"; "I'm going to die soon so what's the point?"; "I miss my loved one, why go on?"

7 During the fourth stage, the grieving person begins to understand the certainty of death. Much like the existential concept of The Void, the idea of living becomes pointless.

Things begin to lose meaning to the griever. Because of this, the individual may become silent, refuse visitors and spend much of the time crying and sullen. This process allows the grieving person to disconnect from things of love and affection, possibly in an attempt to avoid further trauma. Depression could be referred to as the dress rehearsal for the 'aftermath'. It is a kind of acceptance with emotional attachment. It is natural to feel sadness, regret, fear, and uncertainty when going through this stage. Feeling those emotions shows that the person has begun to accept the situation. Oftentimes, this is the ideal path to take, to find closure and make their way to the fifth step, Acceptance.

8 Acceptance — "It's going to be okay."; "I can't fight it, I may as well prepare for it."

9 In this last stage, individuals begin to come to terms with their mortality or inevitable future, or that of a loved one, or other tragic event. This stage varies according to the person's situation. People dying can enter this stage a long time before the people they leave behind, who must pass through their own individual stages of dealing with the grief. This typically comes with a calm, retrospective view for the individual, and a stable mindset.

In closing there is one important piece of knowledge that needs to be passed on. Where these "stages" are a result of much study one needs to note that now everybody goes through every stage and not every event triggers the subsequent grieving process in this particular order. Finally, not everyone suffers the process in the same amount of time.

The best ministry to the grieving is to just be there for them. Presence gives comfort of not being alone.