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Susan E. Murray  
*Andrews University*

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## In the Midst of Sorrow

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

Some years ago, English archaeologists found a sealed tomb inside a cave in Egypt. They broke through the outer coverings and came upon a beautiful, carved stone coffin. On the outside was the name of a little girl. Centuries ago, two heartbroken parents laid their only daughter to rest. As the archaeologists were about to open the sarcophagus, they discovered another inscription: “O my life, my love, my little one, would God I had died for thee.” The two men looked at one another and shook their heads. They sealed the cave once again, so moved by what they saw and read that they just couldn’t bear to intrude into the privacy of those sorrowing parents. They left love and death to their eternal vigil.

I was touched by this story. To these men, more important than their archaeological find was the grief of these parents so long ago. Sorrow and grief are among life’s most common and strongest emotions. We can all identify. Why, then, are these emotions so difficult to handle, and what should our reactions be to this universal human experience? I suggest that it is because we most fear separation, at our deepest core. When we lose something, or someone dear, we realize that what we thought we could still give or receive can be no longer. This takes a strong grip on our heart.



Jesus certainly faced grief and sorrow. Two incidents give us clues as to how He handled these difficult emotions. The first is His reaction when He learned that John the Baptist, His own cousin, had been beheaded. “Now when Jesus heard about John, He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself” (Matthew 14:13 NASB). When bad news comes, most of us want to get away from people and be by ourselves. It is a natural response. Sometime later, Jesus called His disciples and took them apart from the crowds to be by themselves. Then He left them and went by Himself to pray.

This can be a helpful approach for us—to withdraw for awhile (but not for too long), spend time with our loved ones and friends, and then turn to the Great Comforter

in prayer. However, if we grieve too long by ourselves we may lose our sense of balance and perspective. This may lead to grieving not for the one we lost, but for ourselves. In the midst of Jesus’ grief, He did not lose sight of the needs of others. For Jesus, as for us, great healing comes from work and from doing something for someone else—even in the midst of sorrow.

A second incident in Jesus’ experience was at the tomb of Lazarus. Jesus cried! In his book, *Putting Away Childish Things*, David A. Seamands suggests Jesus wasn’t ashamed to admit His sorrow and express it openly. David says, “He must have wept very freely because the following verse says that the bystanders commented, ‘Behold how he loved him’” (John 11:36). The next thing Jesus did was pray. Also, He kept reminding those mourners present about the resurrection.

We need not be ashamed of weeping or withdrawing for a time, getting help from our friends and family, praying, or talking about Heaven and the resurrection. These are normal and natural therapeutic ways to handle our sorrow. Our children, too, deserve to know how to handle sorrow and grief.

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Susan Murray is a professor emerita of behavioral sciences at Andrews University, and she is a certified family life educator and a licensed marriage and family therapist.