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GRIEF IN HUMAN EXPERIENCE



THE subject of grief has many ramifications. Let me point out at the beginning that we cannot confine the experience of grief to the death of a loved one. There are many situations in life that are comparable to this. Per-


haps the emotional distress is less in degree but much the same in quality. In grief we have to begin with a withdrawing of love from someone or something. We have invested a great deal of affection and feeling either in a person or in a particular thing. This may be a father, a mother, a wife, a child, a job, a leg, or a plan to marry. When the object is taken away, the love that was invested "has no place to go" and in a sense is dammed up within us. Frustration intensifies the hurt and the sense of loss and is a principal component of the emotional pain we call grief.

In dealing with grief we have to remember that there are characteristics which can be called normal and some characteristics which are abnormal or pathological. Let me first describe what might be termed normal symptoms of grief. And here, of course, like everybody else I am deeply indebted to Lindemann who has done some of the finest work in this field. I must also acknowledge a debt to Richard Young, Paul Johnson, and Ernest Bruder.

A Consideration of Symptoms

I. Physical Distress



Just what are the symptoms of normal grief? Basically you have physical distress. Your parishioner will be bothered by a variety of physical symptoms like these: Sighing, tightening of the throat, shortness of breath, feeling of emptiness in the abdomen, feeling of exhaustion, dry mouth, food tasting like sawdust, loss of appetite, sleep not restful, painful breathing, choking sensations, breath feeling like a knife thrust, legs giving way, lack of muscular power, a feeling of hurt, and so on. Not all of these will necessarily appear in each case. They can come on momentarily or they can come on in waves. Intensity and duration will vary widely. These are the least worrisome of the effects of grief, because they will gradually disappear more or less naturally. This is the part that friends and relatives can accept, I think, without too much trouble. Most people



A minister spends many hours each year grappling with the aftereffects of grief caused by death, illness, accidents, and unhappy human relationships.

Who does not feel his helplessness to assuage the flood tides of woe that sweep over us all sometime or other?

Here is the wise counsel of a Christian minister with the psychological background to qualify him to speak on this theme.



will feel that when you are suffering from grief you will have some of these things to trouble you. They would probably be surprised or even disturbed if such symptoms did not appear.

II. *Changed Sensory Functions*

A second kind of symptom is an alteration in the functioning of sensory faculties. Reality seems to dim somewhat. The person makes such remarks as, "I feel as though I'm in a dream." There seems to be a distance between them and the familiar things of their lives. Sometimes there will be walking in the sleep. Things often do not seem as they used to seem. One looks at life through a sort of haze, as though he were coming out of an anesthetic. He is in an intermediate zone between the conscious and the semiconscious. He is emotionally distant from people.

There may be, too, a preoccupation with the image of the deceased. The woman thinks frequently about the form, the face, the voice, and the touch of the person who is dead. She finds it hard to do things and cannot seem to get up to do anything. The wife who before could take care of her whole house now cannot even seem to raise her cup to her mouth. She is troubled with lassitude and a lack of energy.

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There is an emptiness here too. She cannot share with her husband. She is not able to turn and say, "Honey, isn't that beautiful?" Or, "Honey, do you . . . ?" There is no one to share the experiences that formerly were all shared. Even the arguments are missed. She thinks, "I know if John were here, he'd say that was crazy. I can just hear him saying it. I wish he were here to say it now." Life becomes empty, distasteful. Often the wish to die becomes almost an obsession.

This preoccupation with the image of the deceased is likely to make friends think that the bereaved one is becoming mentally ill. This is especially true if the widow

says that she felt she saw John yesterday evening. At this point friends become concerned. They do not know that a person may hallucinate in normal grief a few times after the death of the loved one. Hallucinations may occur as much as four months later, in the opinion of some, and still be within the normal range. Often the hallucination will be of the auditory type—the bereaved one imagines she hears her husband's voice. Naturally these hallucinations are upsetting in their nature; they are, however, not necessarily pathological.

III. *The Guilt Complex*

A third symptom found in normal grief is a feeling of guilt. This is an area in which the Seventh-day Adventist ministry has done very little. We have generally proceeded on the premise that there is no guilt in grief; in other words, that all anger is gone when loved ones die. If one ever had feelings of hostility for the dead, they are certainly gone now. Yet, often there is much guilt in normal grief. How many of you, if a loved one were to die, could say, "Never did I fail to do everything that would make her happy. Never did I do anything to make her unhappy." Could you say this about your wife? When a loved one dies, such thoughts as these come to mind: "Why didn't I do that when he wanted me to?" "Why did I talk to her like that only two weeks ago?" The husband who has allowed his wife to go out of the home to work (and for the best of reasons), may not have done a reasonable share of the housework. He will say to himself, "Maybe I could have made things easier for Mary and maybe she wouldn't have gotten sick so easily." The teenager who has been worrying his mother sick night after night, or the girl who has been "going with" the wrong kind of young man, can both find much to feel guilty about. The girl may think, "Why did I bother mother so much. Maybe if I had been the right kind of girl, God would have healed her as an answer to my prayers. Maybe He couldn't answer my prayers for mother because I wasn't doing what I was supposed to be doing." (By the way, our theology can create a lot of guilt. We find occasions for guilt pointed out not only in the Scriptures but also in the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy, where many more are brought out in de-

tail. We often do not have a sense of forgiveness equal to our greater knowledge of guilt.) If there is an accident, we may say to ourselves, "Why did I let my boy go swimming that day? Maybe if I had said No, he'd still be with us. He wouldn't have drowned." Or, "If I hadn't been late to my appointment, maybe my husband wouldn't have had the accident. He wouldn't have been driving fast to make up the time." "Maybe my child wouldn't have been run over if I had been a more careful mother."

God has so ordered that men, being in need of each other, should learn to love each other, and bear each other's burdens.—Sala.

Sometimes the guilt comes from the feeling of relief that is experienced in spite of the grief. When a badly retarded child dies or an individual suffering interminably from an incurable disease finally succumbs, it is almost impossible not to feel that the best thing for all concerned has happened. And yet there can be guilt from questioning whether we welcome the relief because of our unwillingness to carry the burden any longer. Even when reason tells us that we have done all we could and would cheerfully have done more, there is often a tendency to feel guilt. This is probably due to the fact that we are basically selfish and that our motives are seldom completely unselfish. In dealing with grief, we want to make it possible for the guilt to be expressed. This is what we ministers often prevent. We are so quick to give reassuring texts, to salve feelings. The husband does not get a chance to say, "She sometimes made me real angry, pastor, but I loved her very much." Or the wife to say, "Sometimes he'd almost drive me crazy with his teasing, but I loved him." Many times, as soon as a person dies, we canonize him. He is idealized. This is another way of paying off the feeling of guilt. If you make him very, very good after he's dead, that sort of pays up for not treating him so well before he died. It's sort of undoing—a defense aroused by the anxiety of feeling guilty. One tends to wonder a bit in cases where excessive and endless attention is given to the deceased's grave or to his den.

Sometimes the feeling of guilt comes

from an inability to grieve at all. A woman was in my office some years ago. She is one of our finest workers and a delightful person to know. She told me, in connection with the problem we were discussing, that when her father died, she and her sister were so happy they laughed. This is not a normal way to talk about a father. She was telling this honestly for the first time outside of the family. The reasons for her feelings became evident in our later conversation. For this woman to try to persuade herself that she was deeply stricken when her father died would have been a lie. She had to come to terms with this reality. Another woman came to see me because of trouble with her teen-age son. Soon we began talking about the father—how long he had been dead, what influence he had had over the boy, and so on. I detected a slightly odd note in what she was saying. Moving along the road of thought she seemed to have opened, I soon found out that she was relieved when he died and so were the children. She said her home was much happier after the death of her husband in an auto accident. Not a person in the home had any regrets about it at all. This kind of feeling, of course, colored the relationship of the mother to her son and had much to do with the whole climate in which he was growing. But this had to be faced honestly. To keep this from sight would have kept us from getting to the root of her trouble with the boy.

Guilt then, is a real thing, and we often do not give it a chance to come out. If kept in and unreleased, it can have a part in causing a breakdown years later. It is somewhat like a hidden abscess that has not been drained and has built up a tremendous pressure from the pus that is forming inside.

IV. *Attitude of Hostility*

Another characteristic often found in normal grief is the presence of hostility. We ministers almost never take into account sufficiently that with grief there can often be anger, bitterness, resentment, and irritation. Some national groups display this more obviously. They may actually have fights at a wake or a funeral. Liquor served on such occasions makes it easier for such feelings to come into overt expression. Sometimes the anger is directed toward the doctor. "Maybe if we had had a

different doctor he wouldn't have died." Or, "If the doctor had come when I first called him, he might have made it." Sometimes it takes the milder form of not wanting to be bothered by other people. Sometimes it appears in strong feelings against God. "Why did He have to let this happen to my child—to me—to my husband?" If the individual could verbalize his feelings freely, he would be able to say that for the moment at least, he hates God.

Sometimes there is anger directed at the deceased, usually in an unreasonable manner. A husband will think of his wife and wonder how she could do such a thing to him as leaving him. This is particularly true of a man who has had a maternal sort of wife. A child will be tempted to feel, "I don't like mommy; why did she go away?" Occasionally we make things worse by saying that Jesus took mommy away. Then the child feels resentful against Him. We tend to apologize for God in cases of grief as though He needed a defense. This, mixed with platitudes of reassurance, does very little to help.

(To be continued)

Retire to Something

THEODORE VAN DELLEN

[Many readers are interested in this subject, and we are glad to reproduce Dr. Van Dellen's helpful article with the permission of the Chicago Tribune-New York News Syndicate, Inc.]

"Retirement is for those who prepare for it" was and continues to be a good adage. The welfare state has taken care of the financial aspects for many, but more than a monthly check is necessary to make the majority of retired persons happy. They must prepare to enjoy their leisure time.

Some industries are taking a positive approach to this aspect of retirement by conducting lectures on how to prepare for those years after 64. Employees of 50 to 55

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are invited to attend and in some instances, the wife also is asked. The teachers are said to be experts along this line and discuss personal adjustments, health, work and leisure, living arrangements, and finances. These different facets of retirement are mentioned because more than a hobby is needed to be happy in the leisure years.

Retirement should not be a roleless period. On several occasions we have said the individual is happiest when he retires to something. This applies to most of us, including men and women who welcome retirement as a release from an uninteresting job.

It is important to indulge in some advance thinking on the subject to prevent it from becoming a useless period. This may mean a new but less exasperating job or moving to more pleasant surroundings near relatives or friends. Others will enjoy the freedom to stroll, read, observe, or do whatever they want to. Constructive, self-satisfying activities make the retiree feel useful and needed.

The saddest group are those who retire to nothing. These individuals come from the top as well as the bottom of the industrial ladder and spend their time dwelling on what they retired from—position, wages, and companionship. They could have used a little advance guidance.

Preparation for retirement ought to be started years beforehand because many of the wonderful things in life take time to appreciate. A man who never has read a book, made a garden, or gone to a concert cannot bank on enjoying these things the week after his 65th birthday. The seed of interest must be cultivated through training and education, starting well ahead of the change. The need for good health also must be appreciated.