



# THE HEALING POWER OF GRIEF

*Although painful, grief can help bring us closer to the Savior.*

**By Steven Eastmond**

Licensed Clinical Social Worker

**T**he life plan that John (John is a composite of many real people) had in mind for himself didn't include his wife getting cancer in her 60s. He was torn between the hope that she would get better and the reality that his wife continued to decline. When she died, John felt pain he had never experienced.

As the days turned into weeks and the weeks into months, John's pain did not seem to relent. He felt as if he had lost his world, his mind, and his faith all at once, and there did not seem to be any hope. John's grief was consuming, and he could not seem to find comfort.

This story is similar to many shared with me as I worked as a hospice social worker. The loss of a loved one is one of the most difficult trials we can face in mortality. Understanding what grief is and what is common for people to feel when someone dies can help us experience a measure of peace while going through the grieving process.

## **What Is Grief?**

Grief is the emotional, and often physical, response we have when we experience loss. The more profound the loss, the more profound the grief will be. Grief can involve virtually every emotion or can leave us feeling numb and disconnected from the world around us.

Manifestations of grief may include hopelessness, anxiety, anger, denial, guilt, incapacitating fatigue, difficulty in controlling emotions, lack of concentration, loss of interest in people or activities, and feelings of being overwhelmed.

As a result, some, like John, question their faith in Heavenly Father because the pain is so overwhelming. They find it difficult to recognize the help the Lord is extending. Reassuring is the promise from Isaiah: "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows" (Isaiah 53:4).

Sometimes the hardest part about grief is simply not understanding what is happening. Knowing a few principles

can help us successfully make our own journey through grief.

### **Grief Is Painful, but Do Not Avoid It**

Grief hurts, but it can be the salve that helps us heal when it is allowed to do its work appropriately. The first step in handling grief is to recognize that the pain is a normal part of the process. It needs to be acknowledged, not avoided.

The scriptures are filled with examples of grief, loss, and the associated pain. Job grieved deeply upon learning of the death of all his children (see Job 1:18–21; 2:13; 6:1–3). After a tremendous battle between the Nephites and Lamanites, many thousands were slain, and “surely this was a sorrowful day; yea, a time of solemnity, and a time of much fasting and prayer” (Alma 28:6). Although David’s son Absalom caused him great disappointment and sorrow, David loved him deeply, and the scriptures are clear about the pain he felt upon learning of his son’s death (see 2 Samuel 19:1–4).

Grieving is not a brief process. Be patient with it and give it time. As with a physical wound, the pain of losing a loved one requires time to heal.

### **Feeling Sorrow Does Not Show a Lack of Faith**

After a faithful member of the Church passes away, the surviving family members commonly report feeling profound peace that they will see that loved one again. At the same time, however, family members usually feel



*The Savior has said, “Thou shalt live together in love, insomuch that thou shalt weep for the loss of them that die” (D&C 42:45). I have learned that grief is the price we pay for loving someone—and that the price is worth it.*

a song then popular. She was my dear companion for more than two-thirds of a century, my equal before the Lord, really my superior. And now in my old age, she has again become the girl of my dreams.”<sup>1</sup> President Hinckley’s profound grief did not equate to a loss of faith.

### **The Price of Loving Someone**

The Savior has said, “Thou shalt live together in love, insomuch that thou shalt weep for the loss of them that die” (D&C 42:45). I have learned that grief is the price we pay for loving someone—and that the price is worth it. None

tremendous sadness. It is important for us to understand that one can feel both sadness and peace at the same time.

I have worked with many good people who wondered if they had lost faith because they felt profound sorrow at the passing of a loved one. They mistakenly thought that a person with a strong testimony should not feel deeply saddened at a loved one’s passing—as if mourning the loved one’s death were synonymous with a disbelief in the afterlife or the Savior’s promises.

In the October 2004 general conference, President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) expressed his tender feelings concerning his wife. “My children and I were at her bedside as she slipped peacefully into eternity. As I held her hand and saw mortal life drain from her fingers, I confess I was overcome. Before I married her, she had been the girl of my dreams, to use the words of

of the people I have worked with said they would give up the love they had for a family member in order to avoid the grief that came from losing that family member. When loved ones pass from this side of the veil to the other, they continue to be just as important to us as when they were with us. Because we love them, we can't really expect to completely "get over" losing them.

I have stood at the bedsides of many people as they passed from this life, and I have had countless experiences that have strengthened my knowledge that our loved ones are in many ways as present with us after death as they are during life. We cannot typically see them, but they are often there to help us through our various challenges—including our grief over their passing. President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) taught: "Sometimes the veil between this life and the life beyond becomes very thin. Our loved ones who have passed on are not far from us."<sup>2</sup>

### Grief and the Atonement

Death is part of our existence here on the earth. Nevertheless, through the Atonement and Resurrection of His Son, Heavenly Father has provided a way for us not only to overcome death but also to be comforted and healed. Through the power of the Atonement, "the sting of death" can be replaced by the peace that the Spirit brings (see Alma 22:14).

Elder Merrill J. Bateman, who served as a General Authority from 1992 to 2007, said: "Just as the lame man at the Pool of Bethesda needed someone stronger than himself to be healed (see John 5:1–9), so we are dependent on the miracles of Christ's Atonement if our souls are to be made whole from grief,

sorrow, and sin. . . . Death's sting is softened as Jesus bears the believers' grief and comforts them through the Holy Spirit. Through Christ, broken hearts are mended and peace replaces anxiety and sorrow."<sup>3</sup>

Referring to the sorrowful Friday on which Jesus's followers grieved His death and then to the glorious Sunday on which He was resurrected, Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin (1917–2008) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said:

"Each of us will have our own Fridays—those days when the universe itself seems shattered and the shards of our world lie littered about us in pieces. We all will experience those broken times when it seems we can never be put together again. We will all have our Fridays.

"But I testify to you in the name of the One who conquered death—Sunday will come. In the darkness of our sorrow, Sunday will come.

"No matter our desperation, no matter our grief, Sunday will come. In this life or the next, Sunday will come."<sup>4</sup>

Some nights are much longer than others, but the morning always follows. Death brings deep sorrow, but our joy will exceed our ability to comprehend when our reunion with deceased loved ones finally comes. Yet peace is not reserved for the next life only; we can feel peace now, even in the very moment we are feeling pain. How thankful we can be for the sacrifice of our Savior and the healing power His Atonement can bring us in spite of our grief. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). ■

#### NOTES

1. Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Women in Our Lives," *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 82.
2. Ezra Taft Benson, "Life Is Eternal," *Ensign*, June 1971, 33.
3. Merrill J. Bateman, "The Power to Heal from Within," *Ensign*, May 1995, 13.
4. Joseph B. Wirthlin, "Sunday Will Come," *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 30.



### ANSWERING QUESTIONS

#### What is the purpose of sorrow and suffering?

"Our Heavenly Father . . . knows that we learn and grow and become stronger as we face and survive the trials through which we must pass. We know that there are times when we will experience heart-breaking sorrow, when we will grieve, and when we may be tested to our limits. However, such difficulties allow us to change for the better, to rebuild our lives in the way our Heavenly Father teaches us, and to become something different from what we were—better than we were, more understanding than we were, more empathetic than we were, with stronger testimonies than we had before."

President Thomas S. Monson, "I Will Not Fail Thee, nor Forsake Thee," *Ensign*, Nov. 2013, 87.