



Dealing With The Loss Of A Child

By

Dr. Mel Whittington

□ ***Licensed Professional Counselor***

Counseling Resources

2202 E. 49th St., Suite 300, Tulsa, OK 74105

918-747-8886

□ ***Minister of Equipping Ministries***

Will Rogers United Methodist Church



Life Missile





Studies and Statistics About Grieving Parents

- In 1985, surveys showed that 80 – 90% of couples that suffered the loss of a child would divorce.
- A 1999 survey indicated that only 12% of the married parents who lost a child divorced.
- One/quarter of these who divorced said the death had little or nothing to do with the divorce.



Issues Couples Face *after the loss of a child*

Issues Couples May Face:

- ❑ The first six months following the loss of a child is when the majority of divorces occur. Problems that couples often encounter while dealing with grief include:
- ❑ Lack of communication with one another.
- ❑ How to parent their other children.
- ❑ Over-protectiveness of other children.
- ❑ Whether or not to have another baby.



Issues Couples Face *after the loss of a child*

Issues Couples May Face: *(cont.)*

- ❑ Differences in how to grieve.
- ❑ Blame and guilt.
- ❑ Turning to alcohol and drugs.
- ❑ Talking about the deceased child.
- ❑ Wondering when and where and how to deal with a child's belongings.
- ❑ Decision about whether or not counseling is needed.



Issues Couples Face *after the loss of a child*

Issues Couples May Face: *(cont.)*

- ❑ Financial concerns.
- ❑ Turning away from one another.
- ❑ Men tend to feel anger sooner than women.
- ❑ Women tend to feel sadness sooner than men.
- ❑ Men want to "do" something to make things right again.
- ❑ Women just want to "be."
- ❑ If a couple had problems before the child's death, those problems can become more difficult to deal with.



Issues Couples Face *after the loss of a child*

What We Learned

- Remember that life is precious.
- By being overprotective of our children and one another, we were cheating all of us out of life.
- **Talk to One Another**
- **Don't ignore or try to bury your feelings.. Share your feelings of helplessness, confusion, anger, depression, pain, guilt, fear and even hate.**
- Learn and understand the stages of death and dying. Don't allow yourselves to get stuck in one of the stages. If you find your spouse becoming aloof, or if disharmony begins to get more intense in your relationship, seek counseling. **Don't try to get through this alone.**



Issues Couples Face *after the loss of a child*

What We Learned (cont.)

- ❑ **There Are No Quick Fixes**
- ❑ Although the first two years are the hardest, it is important to **get on with living your life and to not dwell on your grief.**
- ❑ **Effective coping with bereavement really depends on our ability to mourn properly.** And, when a loved one dies, there are many things which will help us cope better with the pain.



Better Coping through ...

- **Caring people** - Family, friends neighbors, colleagues, strangers in a self-help group who have “been there” and can offer empathy. Such a network can give support and help you re-establish yourself. A lifetime habit of close, caring relationships is the best possible preparation for bereavement.



Better Coping through ...

- **Time** - Everyone reacts differently to a loss. It is hard to estimate a “normal” grieving period. All we can safely say is that it will probably take a lot longer than you expect.



Better Coping through ...

- **Understanding “the facts of death”** - Knowing what to expect, and knowing your options, helps. Express your feelings – talk, weep, be angry. You are not alone; all grieving people need such outlets



Better Coping through ...

- **Accepting a changed life** - The details will change; your work and your personal relationships may suffer. It is unavoidable.
- **Reaching out for help** - Others cannot always make the first move. They may be afraid of intruding on your privacy. Make your needs known.



Better Coping through ...

- ❑ **Keeping in touch with your physician and following instructions** - This can help you deal with the physical side-effects of grief.
- ❑ **Accepting the inevitable.** Some things in life have no basis in logic, they just happen. Accepting this can prevent much bitterness and self-blame.



Better Coping through ...

- **Accepting that life is for the living** - The final stage of grief is new life. Though it is hard to believe now, at the right time life can be restructured without guilt.



Better Coping through ...

- **Helping the children** - Seeing their grief often minimizes your own troubles. Children need your support. Don't try to protect them; give them facts using everyday language. Be honest about your own feelings; they are looking to you for clues about suitable behavior.



Better Coping through ...

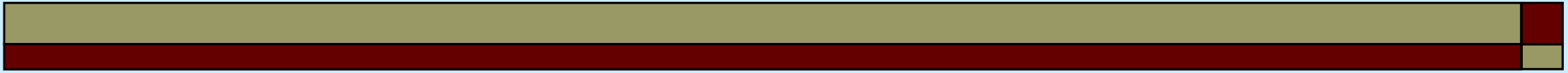
- **Not rushing into major life changes** - Moving, remarrying or having another child are examples of this. This is no time for major decisions. Your judgment may be poor; the changes could add to your stress. Wait a year; make big decisions then. Introduce new relationships slowly and carefully; let them grow



Better Coping through ...

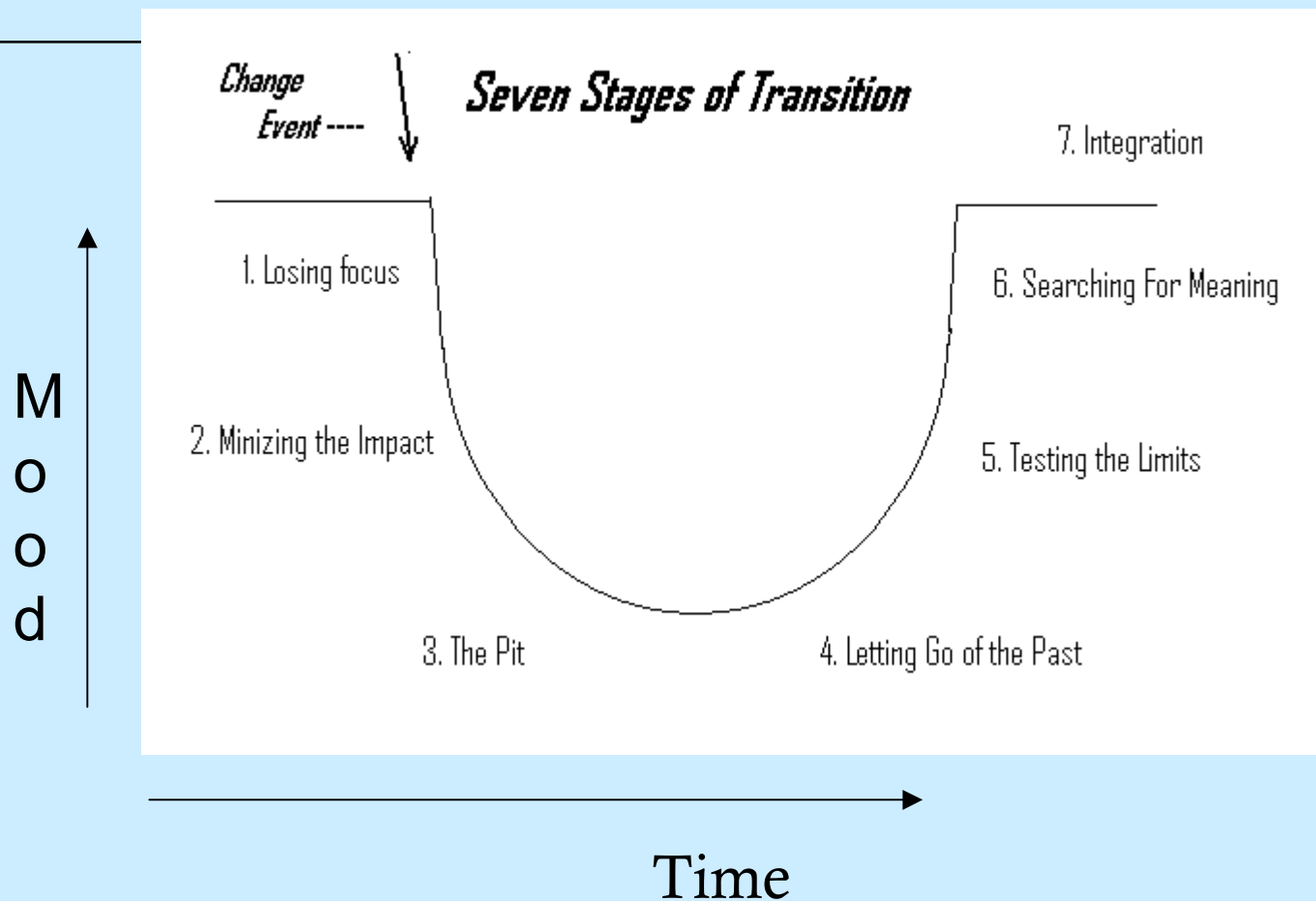
Understanding that ...

- ❑ **Every transition begins with a loss.**
- ❑ **To make the transition is the challenge. I must have hope**
- ❑ **One of the best approaches I have found is to determine what it is that I have lost.**





The Stages of Transition





Better Coping through ...

- ❑ **It seemed that we had lost most everything important at that time. Let me illustrate**
- ❑ **But, we really had not**
- ❑ **It became important to determine what we had lost.**
- ❑ **(If Janie was sitting outside waiting for us)**



Dealing with the loss of MY child

- *The previous clinical thoughts are helpful and are given to you to use and adapt to any situation.*

What follows is more personal and reflects my spiritual thoughts which have sustained me and Pat and my daughter, Ann, and her family.



Dealing with the loss of MY child

Previient Grace

- It is amazing how God prepared me for this event that forever changed my life and made my faith stronger.
- Earlier that year, I had taught a class on *"Faith For Tough Times"*
(Lessons to that were soon applied)



Dealing with the loss of MY child

- I was preaching our monthly healing service and had just delivered a sermon on *“What’s the Worse Thing That Can Happen?”*

1 Peter 1:3-5

- *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [4] and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, [5] who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”*



Dealing with the loss of MY child

- When we realize these truths – when we focus our identity with these truths – then the worst thing that can happen to us **CAN'T HAPPEN!**
- We are Shielded by God's power



Dealing with the loss of MY child

- But, then I start wondering again. If this is true, then why do we seem to get harassed by so many problems: illness, emotional stress, relationship and financial problems? If God is our shield, what's the deal? Why be stressed? Why do we still suffer trials and tribulations?



Dealing with the loss of MY child

- Listen to the scripture **1 Peter 1: 6**
- *“In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, 7 so that **the genuineness of your faith** — being more precious than gold that, though perishable, **is tested by fire** — may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”*



Dealing with the loss of MY child

- There is a purpose to these trials and tribulations. They come: to make us stronger; to refine our faith; to prove the power of God's promises;
- to teach us that combining our faith with God's promises, we CAN do all things through Christ who strengthens us!



Dealing with the loss of MY child

- In preparing to present this lesson / sermon, I was forced to evaluate and commit to the truth of this idea: *“Even though we may suffer terribly, the worst thing that can happen, being eternally separated from God, CAN'T HAPPEN!”*
- *This was the wonderful grace of God's preparation for what was to come.*



Dealing with the loss of MY child

- One of the last preparations that God provided for us was ...

Janie had sat on the bed with us and ...

- On December 22nd, 2002, I learned that next to “the worst thing that can happen” CAN happen.



My Sincere Response

- *Our friends wondered how we were dealing with this tragedy. (Some asked the dumbest questions.)*
- *Our formal response was “We have learned that we cannot break God’s promises by leaning on them! Consequently,*

2 Corinthians 4: ~~7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.~~

8 *We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 [we feel] persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.*



My Hope is *The Blessed Hope*

Titus 2:11-13 "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."

This word "HOPE." Has different meanings

- I hope that you like me.
- I hope that you will appreciate my presentation.
- I hope that I will lose 50 lbs. – fast!



My Hope is *The Blessed Hope*

- Each time I open the refrigerator door (and that happens several times a day) I hope that something new to eat will have materialized.
- I find that people come to me in my practice, with hope that things will get better with my coaching.
- Psychologist William Marston asked 3,000 people, "What have you to live for?" He was shocked to discover that 94% were enduring the present while they waited for the future, waited for something to happen, waited for "next year," waited for a "better time," waited for "someone to die," waited "for tomorrow," unable to see that all anyone ever has is today, because yesterday is gone and **tomorrow exists only in hope.**



My Hope is *The Blessed Hope*

- You see, you out there in the sunshine (those of you who have not had your faith challenged) **MAY** believe the gospel – you **may** have faith ,
- But those of us in the shadow (those of us who have been put to the test) **MUST** believe the Gospel – we **MUST** rely on our faith. There is nothing else to sustain us. For you see, without faith there is no HOPE



My Hope is *The Blessed Hope*

- In Titus 1:2 we read that this hope the bible talks about also consists of eternal life. In Titus 2:11-13 we read, "*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.*"
- *The Greek word translated as “hope” is NOT the “hope-so” kind of word. It’s use here means ...*
Unconditional Certainty
- ***This is the Basis of Our Hope in the time of the loss of a child.***



My Hope is *The Blessed Hope*

Other Scriptures

- *“Don’t you know, everyone of our days are numbered before anyone of them takes place”*
- *And "O Death, where is your sting? Where is your victory?"*
Jesus said, *I am the resurrection and I am life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, yet shall they live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I hold the keys of hell and death. Because I live, you shall live also.”*
- **Because Jesus lives, Janie lives and because of the UNCONDITIONAL CERTAINTY that He is coming again, I can face tomorrow!**



My Hope is *The Blessed Hope*

- Once again, the worst thing that could happen, CAN'T HAPPEN as we maintain our faith.
- If we focus on the promises of God, it is amazing what we can do.
- Our attitude comes from what we are focused on. What we focus on will determine how we deal with the trials of life.



My Hope is *The Blessed Hope*

- When the storms of life come crashing against you -- when the "wolf comes banging at your door -- when all evil seems to be focused on destroying you, then your God waits for you to combine your faith with His promises and proclaim....



My Hope is *The Blessed Hope*

- (Isaiah 51:6 Isaiah 51 Isaiah 51:5-7) "*Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail.*"

The worst thing that can happen, can't happen



My Hope is *The Blessed Hope*

- *John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*



Hope

For those who mourn:

- ❑ Be assured One *can* survive.**
- ❑ Maintain physical exercise.**
- ❑ Allow yourself to experience normality. *Celebrate remembrances.***
- ❑ Accept the fact that grieving is a normal process. Allow yourself to express emotions.**



Hope

- Refuse to blame God. Accept the reality of death.**
- Accept the ministry of others.**
- Exercise care with your other children.**
- Refuse to play the "what-if" game. Cherish your faith.**