

GOOD GRIEF

We are never fully prepared for the death of someone really close to us. Even if they have been thoughtful enough to leave a Will and instructions for their funeral, and although we may have anticipated the outcome of a long period of terminal illness, death itself is raw and affects us in unexpected ways. It can take years to assimilate.

Some try to take the sting out of death by making the funeral as cheerful as possible. 'A Celebration of Life' may be preferred to the word 'funeral'. These bespoke ceremonies usually look back rather than forward, with the emphasis on happy memories of the death person. Although elements from any religion or secular source may be inserted, there is little acknowledgement of the sadness left behind, or our common need of forgiveness and God's promise of life everlasting. The emphasis is on past achievements rather than future hope.

After the body has been cremated or buried and relatives and friends have gone home, the slow, punishing pain of grief begins to take its toll. It takes years to work through and there are no short cuts, whether mourners are religious or not.

The American Rabbi Earl Grollman studied the impact of bereavement and wrote:

"Grief is not a disorder, a disease, or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical and spiritual necessity, the price you pay for love. The only cure for grief is to grieve".

Christians who are bereaved may chastise themselves if they feel worn down by sorrow. Do they not believe in Christ, who has prepared a place" for those who love Him"? Yes, thoughtful friends will remind them that Jesus Himself wept when His friend Lazarus died. Grief is normal, however strong the faith and God's care may be conveyed through the love of friends, when religious language seems unfamiliar. Good friends will know that mourners are thinking about their loved ones most of the time: it isn't morbid, and they should be encouraged to talk about their deceased loved ones.