



Coping with the death of a spouse

By Dennis Franck

It is one of the most difficult changes to navigate in life — the death of a spouse. The loss makes its appearance either suddenly or gradually, stealing one's loved one, and leaves the remaining spouse to deal with the realities of grieving, loneliness, memories, making decisions alone and all the other adjustments that come as a result of living life without one's partner.

Marta Felber in her book *Finding Your Way After Your Spouse Dies* reports that friends would ask her, "What hurts the most?" She said her answer was always the same, "Loneliness for my loved one."

Here are some suggestions to help deal with the reality of loneliness.

ACCEPT YOUR LONELINESS

Most of the time we want to run from difficult feelings. The challenge is to understand and accept that loneliness will reach us more about who we are and who we are becoming. We can learn from this uncomfortable invader.

LOOK FOR AND SPEND TIME WITH FRIENDS

It is OK to need and depend on friends, especially during times of loneliness. Be open and honest with them about the difficulty. One of God's most prized gifts to us is a good friend!

RECALL THE GOOD TIMES

Intentionally remember, even make a list of, the pleasant memories you shared with your spouse. What first attracted you to each other? What qualities did you discover later? What was your favorite time of the day, favorite foods, places to go, etc.? Consider family times, vacations, holidays, birthdays, wedding anniversaries and special occasions. Yes, these can be difficult memories; however, the joy from these may also bring personal comfort.

EXPLORE YOUR INTERESTS

Make time to explore the things that excite and interest you. What do you like to do? What do you like to watch? What would you like to learn about? With whom could you do these things?

FIND A PLACE TO BELONG

If you are not in a healthy church that accepts, affirms and genuinely cares for people, begin looking for one that does. Look for a church that will teach you the principles of God's Word that will enrich your life and spirit. Some churches have support groups that may prove beneficial.

EXERCISE

Regular exercise may help you feel better about yourself and your situation. Exercise usually raises one's self-esteem.

SET SOME GOALS

Determine objectives for yourself that will improve your life. What books would you like to read? Where would you like to visit? What things would you like to do with friends? What abilities would you like to strengthen?

KEEP A JOURNAL OF YOUR THOUGHTS

Writing your thoughts on a regular basis can prove to be a comfort when looking back upon them later, especially when considering the positive ones

Healing in His presence

you experienced and the lessons learned.

TRUST YOUR SPOUSE TO GOD'S KEEPING

God knows your loved one! He is acquainted with his/her life. Death is not the end. A child of God moves to a better place at death.

Depression and sadness do not have to continue. God can bring new blessings in this new season of your life. **tpe**

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My grandmother sat quietly in the crowded church. She wanted to join the others praising the Lord but she couldn't shake the gnawing pain of loneliness. She closed her eyes in prayer and wept silently. Then someone gently gripped her hand. Within moments, the feelings of emptiness and abandonment were replaced with peace. Grateful for the prayer and concern, she opened her eyes to thank the person. No one was there! She knew Jesus sat beside her that night.

Although Grandma had served the Lord most of her life, she was not immune to loneliness. A research team from England and Australia recently reported one in three people is lonely and that the malady is a contributor to high blood pressure, heart disease and depression. But they also discovered those with strong religious faith were less likely to be lonely.

When death severs a relationship, feelings of emptiness and void are normal because God created us with a desire to be connected to others, especially a spouse. Only He can repair that brokenness. Through prayer and meditation on His Word, the relationship with Him deepens and wholeness is restored. We may not tangibly feel God's hand during times of loneliness as did my grandmother, but His presence is a reminder we do not face the future alone. **tpe**

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