

Awaken
to Good Mourning



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Early Mourning



The Loss Event

The Loss Event, the death of your loved one, has caused your life to change drastically! Whether you have had time to prepare for the death, as in a long-term illness, or the experience came about suddenly and unexpectedly, things as you knew them will never be the same again. I know that this reality is not a pleasant one to face, but it is one from which there is no escape. Life has changed! Right now, you may be feeling an almost overwhelming sense of loss and misdirection. This is to be expected at a time like this.

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Because of the Loss Event, you find yourself in the beginnings of the grief process, or the Early Mourning Phase. During this time, you will likely receive encouragement and support from friends and family while you begin facing your grief and making many important decisions following the death of your loved one. Although there is no guarantee that you have an established support system, most people do have a network of family, friends, or co-workers from which to draw support.

I encourage you to lean heavily on those who make up your current support system. Perhaps you have a best friend, neighbor, or social group from which you can draw strength. Most people have a desire to be a source of help during times like this. Although you are facing a personal loss, you do not have to be alone in the process. You might find it useful to share this book with those closest to you so that they can have a better idea of the situations ahead of you and feel more at ease as they work to be your companion on your personal journey of grief.

Characteristics of Early Mourning

The process of grieving and mourning the loss of a loved one can be very difficult at times and is often

complicated. You may experience a wide variety of emotions as you mourn this loss. The emotions described in this phase of grief are merely representative and tend to be the primary ones felt in the Early Mourning Phase. Just because we discuss an emotion as it relates to this particular phase does not mean that it is unique to just this phase. You may well experience any emotion mentioned here in another phase as well. The overlapping of various emotions often occurs as you move through each phase of this process. As you read on, you may be able to grasp some knowledge of what you can expect as you begin the work of mourning your loss. This can serve to ease some of the discomfort and fear that often accompanies entering into the process of grief.

I. Shock and a Feeling of Numbness

Initially, a strong sense of shock and feelings of numbness may occur. These are common experiences and may provide you with a sort of cushion from the pain and reality of your loss. Shock and numbness can serve to allow your mind to catch up with the brutal physical reality of what you have experienced and prepare you to move through the funeral and the first few weeks of the Early Mourning Phase of your grief.

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2. Mechanical Responses

Closely related to the initial shock and numbness is the phenomenon of responding to daily tasks and demands in mechanical ways. Some have described the experience as feeling like a wind-up toy as they move through a daily routine that has become much different from their former one. Early on, this can be a sort of blessing in disguise.

In the hours and days following the death of your loved one, and prior to the actual funeral itself, others may perceive your responses as rather robotic in nature. So often, people who do not understand this part of the grieving process will comment on how strong you are or how well you are doing. They may not be aware of what is actually taking place inside you. Early on, there may be a lack of readily observable emotions, which may give others the false impression that everything is moving along well for you. The truth is that your body, mind, and emotions are protecting and insulating you from the horrible pain of your loss in order to allow you to move steadily into the reality of the process.

3. Disbelief and Denial

A sense of disbelief and denial of the reality of your situation is also a natural part of the early phase of this

process. It is so difficult to come to grips with the fact that one whom you loved so much is no longer with you physically. Feelings of disbelief and denial are signs that you are beginning to grapple with the harsh reality you face. You want things to be different—you want them to go back to the way they were. You may even feel that you are in a dream from time to time, one from which you will soon wake up and all will be back to normal. Unfortunately, you are not in a dream and the reality of your loss demands attention.

Mourners have often found courage to embrace the pain of their losses by routinely repeating something like, “I find it hard to believe that this has happened to me!” Sharing this sentiment with those in your support system routinely opens the door for sharing other thoughts and feelings related to your situation, and sharing creates healing.

4. Confusion and Disorientation

Yet another characteristic of the Early Mourning Phase is the sense of confusion and disorientation you may experience periodically. These feelings are common components of this phase of grief, and each individual can experience them in different ways based on a number of variables. Questions as to why this tragedy had to happen to you and your family, how you will be able to

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go on without your loved one, and how you will face the many changes ahead of you are common ones asked during this time. Please give yourself permission to ask such questions—they can open the door for you to begin to deal with your loss in healthy ways.

Do not expect yourself to have everything together or have all the answers. It is perfectly normal to feel confused and disoriented, to be devoid of answers. Answers to your questions will likely arrive in time as you learn to work through your feelings of grief in healthy, healing ways.

5. Isolation and Withdrawal

You may also experience the desire and need to isolate yourself or withdraw from decisions, people, responsibilities, and pressures for a while. This too is a common response to the initial distress of dealing with the loss of a loved one. The ability to withdraw for reflection and introspection can be helpful as you seek to determine the directions most beneficial for you and your family. Embrace these times and help others who care about you to understand that the desire to pull away from time to time is common and not out of the ordinary. This isolation can be a source of strength for you as you seek to use alone time to begin to get in touch with your personal thoughts and feelings.

6. Anger and Betrayal

During this early phase of your grief, you may also experience feelings of anger and betrayal. Your anger may be closely connected to the “why” questions mentioned earlier. You may be angry with God, yourself, a doctor, the situation, another relative, or someone connected with the loss of your loved one. You may also feel that life has betrayed you in some way. This sense of betrayal often relates to the shattered dreams, goals, hopes, and plans you may have shared with your loved one. You may even feel betrayed by or angry with your loved one for leaving you behind.

These feelings of anger and betrayal are perfectly normal and are to be expected. Work to find healthy and helpful ways to express your feelings without getting down on yourself if you occasionally express them in unhealthy ways. Expressing your anger verbally by saying something like, “I am so ANGRY that this has happened! I don’t deserve this!” tends to give healthy vent to the energy swimming around inside you. Engaging in physical activity such as walking, running, gardening, or weight lifting, is also a way to release the energy associated with anger. Work to avoid doing or saying something that might hurt you or another person. If you do occasionally lose it, people around you will likely

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understand and be supportive of your need to express your emotions during this time. We will take a closer look at anger in the Characteristics of Mid-Mourning.

The loss of your loved one has caused you to enter into the grief process, a process that may be partially or wholly unfamiliar. You have briefly explored some of the experiences that are characteristic of this Early Mourning Phase of the process:

- Shock and a Feeling of Numbness
- Mechanical Responses
- Disbelief and Denial
- Confusion and Disorientation
- Isolation and Withdrawal
- Anger and Betrayal

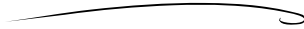
As you move into this process, you are encouraged to share your feelings openly with those who make up your immediate support system. You may even want to share this book with them so that they might be able to support you more completely along the way.

Snapshots from My Personal Journey

That's for Christy! That random, disconnected thought pierced my consciousness the moment I heard

the siren in the distance! A sense of panic and dread entered my soul. I did my best to shove the thought to the back of my mind—with little success. She had been gone only ten minutes; she should have been to work by then. Still, that nagging, gnawing uneasiness persisted.

I went about the tasks of preparing for my day and helping Kacie get ready for hers. That day was “Brownie Day” for Kacie, so she was dressed in her Brownie uniform and—appropriately, I might add—having a brownie and milk for breakfast. One more normal, routine day awaited all of us . . . and yet . . .




The phone rang and free-floating anxiety gripped my heart! “Accident? Where?” Anxiety ramped up to panic! “Is she okay?” Images of where Christy could have had an accident on her way to work flashed through my mind, none of them good! “Yes, I’ll get there as quickly as I can!” I couldn’t believe my ears! An accident! Ambulance! Hospital! Urgency! How could this happen? I asked myself.

Noise from behind caused me to turn around. Kacie had heard my conversation—the brownie and milk hit the floor. She was curled in a fetal position on our bed, crying—she needed me—she needed her mommy!

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Taking her into my lap, I made three calls—one to Christy’s parents, one to Kacie’s school, and a third to my friend and life insurance agent, Ted Cantrell—all the while doing my best to comfort her and tell her everything was going to be okay. “Everything is going to be OK . . .” If only I could say that with confidence.



I drove as rapidly as possible across town to the hospital as waves of anger, disbelief, confusion, and anxiety swept over me. Visions of Kacie’s sweet face contorted by fear as I left her at her school with her school counselor filled my mind’s eye, causing my heart to ache. I drove and thought, drove and prayed, drove and . . .


What had she done? Wasn’t she paying attention? Was she okay? Why this? Why now? Why us? God!

Hospital parking lot. Ambulance under the canopy—Christy’s? Patient liaison waiting for me. Ushering me into a waiting room.

“The doctors are doing all they can! The best we have are working with her. We’ve already lost her twice, but she’s a fighter! I’ll keep you posted. I’m so sorry.”

Somewhere else—that’s all I wanted, just to be somewhere else! Almost without thinking, I began making calls to friends, family, and co-workers—sharing the

news, asking for prayers, hoping that I was dreaming. I wasn't and I knew it!



Amidst crowds of people who had arrived to provide support in the hour or so I had been at the hospital, the doctor entered the room. All noise faded away. Anticipation and hope filled the faces of all present. What was the verdict?

"Mr. Hundley, I'm so sorry to tell you this . . . there's no easy way to tell you, but your wife is dead!"

His words hit me with the force of a brick wall, and I collapsed face-first on the floor between the sofa and telephone table in the room. I was crushed, devastated, disbelieving! All I wanted to do was disappear into the floor beneath me never to reappear.

"Mark, get up, get up. It will be okay. It will be okay." God bless those friends and family members doing their best to comfort and support me!

It would NEVER be okay again . . . EVER! Didn't they know that? Lies! All lies! I suddenly found myself looking down on myself from an upper corner of the room—surveying a surreal scene! That has to be someone else on the floor! That's not me! This is not happening—not to me! Oh God!

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I later understood that I had a dissociative experience, something that can happen in extreme times of stress. I was brought to my senses and back to myself by an internal prompting to get up and start doing the next things that had to be done. I sat on the sofa and talked with the doctor—numb, confused, and mechanical—going through the motions.

“Daddy, how’s Mommy?”

Kacie’s sweet, timid voice wrested me from the emotional and mental fog in which I floundered. I motioned for my precious seven-year-old daughter to sit in my lap. I held her close and kissed the top of her head. I took a deep, ragged breath and began.

“Kacie, Mommy won’t be coming home with us again. Mommy’s body was hurt too badly in the accident and it won’t work anymore. Kacie, Mommy’s dead!”

Those words shook her as they had me and she wept silently, her body convulsing with each sob. The two most difficult tasks I had ever faced—telling my daughter that her mother was dead and holding her, knowing that I could do nothing to eliminate her pain—caused me to teeter on the brink of despair. Then her question . . .

“What do we do now, Daddy? Big question for such a small child!

“Kacie, I’m not sure what we are going to do, but I do know this, we have our faith, we have our family and friends and we have each other, and we’re going to make it. We’re going to make it!”

Thus, our journey toward good mourning began.

Questions for Reflection

1. How has your life changed because of your loss?
2. With whom do you feel most comfortable sharing your thoughts right now?
3. What is the most difficult part of the situation you face right now?
4. What is the most important thing you need those in your support system to know right now?

