

When Grief Knocks You Down, Look Up

It was a typical hot July day in Houston. Our family, four children and nine of our grandchildren, had just returned from a family vacation at the beach. The news that we were to have another grandbaby made the time even sweeter. “Yippee,” as we Texans say. The Smith gang has always been the vacation type. We love games, competition, laughs and awards.

Bryan David, 47, was our second son, married, with a 12-year-old daughter. He was the family comedian, the fun one! When he walked into a room, everybody knew and felt it. B.D., as we lovingly called him, was always joking and making us laugh. His goal in life was to come alongside to pray for and help the underdogs.

As a 6-year-old, Bryan gave his heart to Jesus during a revival in Kansas. We were itinerant music evangelists in the '70s, and Bryan was our child who loved to sing in front of an audience. He would often receive standing ovations, then try to milk the crowd for more, bowing as if he were at Carnegie Hall.

In the early '80s we settled down as worship leaders in the Houston area. Bryan graduated from high school, went to Bible school for two years and returned to Houston to work for a local ministry. He loved art: drawing, sculpting, welding and music.

Bryan played the trumpet, drums, guitar and piano. His God-given love for music motivated him to start a children's band called Tickle that played for Chick-fil-A grand openings in Houston. Nothing made Bryan happier than to see children giggle and dance to his silly original music.

[A Time to Mourn](#)

But our lives as parents changed drastically on July 23, 2021. Bryan had contracted COVID-19 but had tested negative for a week. He hadn't been in the best of health, but no one would have guessed it. That life-changing day, Bryan called us to say he was having trouble breathing, and I (Eddie) encouraged him to go to the hospital right away. His wife, Alexa, drove him there, but because of the COVID restrictions, she wasn't allowed in, and we couldn't see him either.

Our hearts break to say we had no real communication with our son after that day. By the time he was admitted to the hospital, his cell phone was already dead. Doctors immediately sedated our sweet son and placed him on a ventilator. We prayed fervently day and night, but doctors took him off the ventilator for only four days.

We never expected that Bryan would die 21 days after being admitted. We wrestled with feelings of helplessness, wondering why this was happening. It was hard—very hard.

Because we are authors and Bible teachers, we would broadcast prayer alerts and updates almost hourly. Thousands around the world prayed for Bryan's healing. Comforting messages and prophetic words flooded in from South Korea, Uganda, Singapore, Canada, England, Nigeria, South Africa, Norway and beyond. As prayer leaders we have seen thousands of answers to prayer, miracles of all kinds. Our ministry is about prayers answered, celebrations of victory and joyful breakthroughs—not death.

Having both been in full-time ministry since we met and married 51 years earlier, we had often ministered comfort to other families in their losses. Suddenly, we realized how little we really understood and how limited our well-intentioned efforts were.

Both sets of our parents had gone on to heaven, as had Alice's brother and one sister. *But this was different.* A 47-year-old

is middle-aged, and we had assumed that Bryan would live to see his beautiful daughter graduate from high school, finish her education, meet and marry the man of her dreams and have children of her own. Now he was gone in the prime of life.

At 2:47 a.m. the morning of Aug. 14, 2021, Bryan David Smith died. The sudden realization of his death was like drowning in a tidal wave of sadness. Our hearts were broken, for indeed grief is the price we pay for love. Still in shock and enduring painful, sleepless nights, we were faced with a service to celebrate his life.

Funerals are about death. A celebration of life service is about life. That meant going through our massive collection of photographs and videos with his wife, writing the obituary, selecting the music, locating a place to conduct the service and notifying his friends.

Friends and relatives blessed us by coming to help celebrate what Bryan had meant to them. Some drove long distances or flew to Houston for the event. We realized they were also there for us. Bryan's friends were there, many of whom we had never met. His daughter was stunned; we were sure she still hadn't comprehended the loss.

There is comfort and healing as friends are drawn to a grieving family. But we learned that it soon fades as the friends depart and the grief remains.

It is the presence of our Lord, He who sticks closer than a brother (Prov. 18:24), that brings necessary comfort as we continue to process the loss of our Bryan.

How to move on with life has been our biggest challenge. It's often said, "Time heals all wounds." As we write this, a year has passed. Although we have each made progress in our own way, even time will never fully heal the loss. It only lessens the pain.

8 Lessons We Are Learning in Our Grief

1) Nothing about grief is natural. It is comforting to know that death is only a doorway, not the end of life, but a transition in life. The loss of an adult child ranks at the top of the list of life's most traumatic events. We felt as if we'd been ambushed, robbed of our son. But God saw it differently. He says, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of one of His saints" (Ps. 116:15a, NIV). Bryan had come home.

Our son's death was almost unbearable, especially for me (Alice). It was as if a part of my heart had been cut out. Although weeping helps, it doesn't change a thing. We had a lot to learn about grieving, but it would have been even more painful had we not had the assurance that Bryan was in the presence of the Lord. Some would say we lost our son, but we didn't lose him. We knew where he was. Mental Health America explains the ramifications of the death of an adult child this way: "The loss of a child is an overwhelming sense of injustice, unfulfilled dreams and senseless suffering. The parents may feel that they're somehow responsible for their child's death."

2) The grieving process is different for each of us. It has to do with many things, including whether we know the Lord. As Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, "Brothers, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope." How we grieve relates to our personality, our age, our experience, our relationship with the departed and how they died. Was it a natural or violent death? Was it sudden, or did it follow a long-term illness?

We've wondered how anyone can bear the loss of their child without knowing Christ and having Him to lean on. But we realize some of you reading this article are facing this unfortunate pain. We pray this verse will bring you some

comfort: "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Ps. 34:18).

3) Jesus weeps with us. The shortest verse in the Bible is John 11:35: "Jesus wept." As late gospel recording artist Dottie Rambo sang, "Tears are a language God understands." As Scripture says, He was "acquainted with grief" (see Isa 53:3b, NKJV).

I (Eddie) was conducting a funeral for a family who had lost an adult child. As the mourners passed by the casket one last time, the mother of the deceased stopped, looked into the casket and burst into tears. Her sister tapped her on the shoulder and sternly said, "Now, don't you cry." I was compelled to pull them both aside and explain the value of tears. Both women appreciated my intervention.

As we've ministered healing to people, we have seen that if grief from a trauma such as the loss of a loved one isn't dealt with properly, within about 18 months, an illness often develops. When we've helped the person process the pain of that trauma, their healing begins to appear.

A teenage girl suffering a painful condition in her abdomen was brought to us for ministry. We asked her and her parents if she had experienced any traumatic issue about 18 months before. She couldn't recall anything. Finally, her mother said, "That's when my mother, her grandmother, passed away."

"Was the loss of your grandmother difficult for you?" I asked.

"No," she said. "I knew she was going to heaven."

When we asked, she described her grandmother's final days, how she and her mother would sit in the hospital room, knowing their loved one would soon pass.

"What part did you play?" I asked.

"I would rub her feet with oil ..." As she recalled that special

time, she burst into a flood of tears. Soon, much to her surprise, her painful condition disappeared.

Grief has no hard-and-fast rule. Some people process with tears. Others want to be alone. Some want to talk about it. The main point is not to stuff it.

4) We must not yield to self-judgment. *Did we do enough? Could we have done more? What was the last thing we said to him?* Such thinking is natural but unproductive. Regardless of what we did, we could have done more. Regardless of what we said, we could have said it better.

Self-condemnation slows the grief process. Remember, Satan is "the accuser of our brethren" (Rev. 12:10b), so he is the one accusing us. He may also try to convince us that something we said or did caused our loved one's death.

We must not wallow in self-judgment and do Satan's job for him. Know this: We are all imperfect, and we must leave some things in God's hands. His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts (see Isa. 55:8-9).

5) Worrying about whether the one who died was an unbeliever won't change anything.

Did my departed loved one know the Lord? That question arises from time to time. First, we don't know what happens during the death process. We can hope the individual received eternal life just as the thief on the cross did. But a woman once asked me (Eddie), "How can heaven be heaven to me if my son Bob is not there?"

"Do you miss your daughter?" I asked.

"Eddie, you know I don't have a daughter," she said in surprise. "We have three sons."

"So you don't miss your daughter because you never had a daughter born into this world. Heaven exists beyond time and

space in a spiritual place. I think that when we arrive, we won't miss anyone who was never born into the kingdom of God."

We don't know for sure what happens in heaven, but we do know that God will wipe away all tears from our eyes (Rev. 21:4).

6) Along with our loved one's death, we must recognize the death of a vision. As we wrote, we prayed continually for Bryan's recovery. At our request, a precious ICU nurse played worship music in his hospital room. She also placed her iPad next to his bed so we could see him.

The night before our son died, I (Alice) had one of the most powerful three-hour prayer meetings ever. I walked away from that deep intercessory prayer time with absolute assurance that God was going to restore our son. When he stepped into eternity hours later, I experienced shock and disappointment along with questions related to my authority in prayer. Be honest with God; He understands and promises to comfort you.

7) God may bring comfort through supernatural confirmations. I (Alice) received a measure of comfort through a dream I received two months after Bryan's homegoing. In the dream, a smiling, glowing Bryan, a picture of health, came walking up our driveway. He hugged me and said, "Mom, everything's new!"

I (Eddie) often see a remarkable likeness of my father, mother or Bryan in someone across a room or walking down the street. I use those times to express my gratitude for the life they lived and the love we shared.

We've sometimes heard people confess to being angry with God for taking their loved one. We understand how they have reached that point, but we have not done so. We realize anew that Jesus' mother, Mary, not only lost her adult Son, but she also watched him mercilessly crucified. The heavenly Father Himself offered His beloved Son as a ransom for all of us (see 1 John 2:2).

8) We must find ways to honor the one we lost. There are many ways to celebrate the one we've lost. We recently celebrated our Bryan on the first anniversary of his death. The family gathered at our house for a catered dinner. We looked at photographs and videos of him at various stages of his life. We laughed and cried, remembering who he was and sharing our love for him. He would have enjoyed it.

Perhaps you are, like us, still reeling from the loss of a loved one. It's important that you know you are not alone in your grief. Bryan David was a blessing beyond words, and we miss him beyond measure. But God and His Word provide everything we need.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4).

Eddie and Alice Smith are conference speakers and bestselling authors of books like Alice's *Beyond the Veil*, Eddie's *Making Sense of Spiritual Warfare* and their co-authored book, *Spiritual Housecleaning*. They are founders of the U.S. Prayer Center in Houston, Texas, where they reside with their three grown children. Find them at .