

In Your Journey Through Grief, You'll Never Walk Alone

They say you're never supposed to start a story with "The phone rang," but the phone did ring, waking me from an exhausted sleep at 2:00 a.m. My husband's son had stayed with him at the hospital to allow me a few hours at home. Now I heard this voice say, "You need to come to the hospital."

And after three hours, I returned home a widow.

Nothing can fully prepare you for the experience of grief. Even if your loved one's death was not a complete surprise, your world has shockingly changed forever. Your life, your thoughts, your time, your belongings, your emotions, your daily routine, your faith—suddenly they all feel foreign. It can be difficult to even recognize yourself. What do you do now?

The reality of grief you find yourself in is almost never what you thought it would be like. Your world has been ruptured in a way you never could have anticipated. A part of you is gone. Maybe it feels like *all* of you is gone!

You might wish you could wake up from this nightmare and discover it was just a dream. But that isn't possible.

"Grief is a journey." I heard and read that statement many times in the early days after my husband's death, and I hated the idea. I didn't want to go on a journey! I wanted someone to tell me what to do. I wanted someone to know how to get through this quickly, how to stop hurting, how to do grief "right" so I wouldn't keep struggling. With billions of people having lost loved ones in this world, surely someone, somewhere had figured it out and could tell me what I needed

to know.

But no one could tell me, and no one can tell you either. No one had your relationship with your loved one. No one felt quite the same love, dysfunction, joy, quirkiness, humor, tension, security, pain or longing that characterized your relationship with your spouse, child, parent, sibling or best friend. Yes, others have experienced all those emotions. But no one has experienced them the way you have. Your relationship was unique, and your grief will be unique as well.

The morning I arrived home from the hospital a widow, I sat down with a cup of coffee and my Bible. I opened it to 1 Corinthians 15, Paul's treatise on death and resurrection. I felt lost. My head had known that barring an unusual miracle, this day would come, and I did not doubt God would be there for me. But my heart desperately needed a touch point, something to hold on to. That day and in the weeks and months that followed, I desperately wished for God to take away the pain. I wanted God to magically bring me out of the valley of grief and make me all OK again.

He didn't. And He probably won't for you either. Death hurts. It's supposed to hurt.

But I discovered something that is more powerful than the relief of pain. I discovered that hope and pain can coexist. That's one of the biggest differences about grief for the believer. The sting of death hurts just as bad. The loss is as great. Your heart is as raw and bleeding as anyone else's. You are as confused, overwhelmed and exhausted as anyone could be. You feel like part of you, half of you, all of you is ripped away.

Yet at the same time, sometimes in the very same instant, you have hope—a hope rising from somewhere deep in your soul that even death cannot take away or tarnish. It's a hope that says,

“I know that I know that I know this is not the end,” even when everything around you looked and feels like it’s the end. It’s a hope that believes everything your senses are telling you in the darkest moments are not the whole story.

Your faith may be shaken with the death of your loved one, and allowing Jesus to “go there” with you may seem impossible right now. You may have some deep questions to wrestle over with God as you move along this journey. You may feel angry at Him. None of that is a surprise to Him or makes Him love you any less. His shoulders are big enough to carry you regardless of how long or convoluted your grief journey is or may become. He’s still inviting you to “go there” and to allow Him to go there with you.

 *Adapted from The Christian’s Journey through Grief by Carol Peters-Tanksley, copyright 2019, published by Charisma House. Death is a part of life, and everyone experiences the loss of a loved one at one time or another. This book will help you understand and embrace the process with the hope that only a Christian can have. To order your copy, click on this link.*

Prayer Power for the Week of June 2, 2019

This week, continue to pray for our nation and its leaders as they tackle issues that affect us and the world. Pray for the protection of our allies and for our president to have godly wisdom, counsel, direction, protection and strength to persevere in the face of overwhelming challenges. Read 2 Chronicles 7:14, 1 Corinthians 15, 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

For more of Dr. Carol’s lessons about her grief journey, listen to the podcast included with this article.