

WE ARE OVERCOMERS. YOU CAN BE, TOO!

A COMPILATION OF ARTICLES WRITTEN FOR A BLOG
ABOUT GRIEF RECOVERY BY WENDY TATRO, REBEKAH
TATRO, AND ELISABETH TATRO



Standing in the emergency room June 1, 2006, we could never have imagined the joy we now experience.

Our husband/dad was bigger than life.

He loved God and he loved people. He was wise, smart, and very funny. People were instantly at ease with him. He had a huge heart. Kids loved him. He was a dynamic speaker and a charismatic leader. He was a loyal friend.

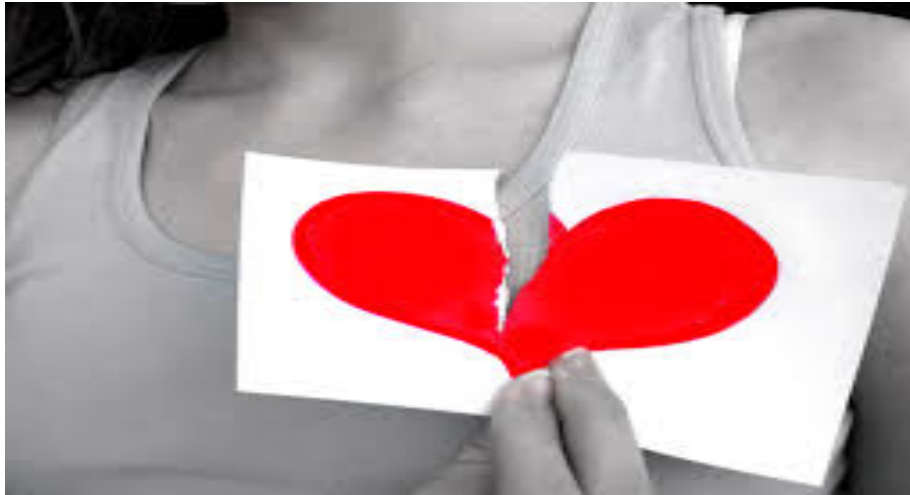
He always said he loved "his girls" more than anything else.

He left a legacy in 51 years that most people could not accomplish in 100. In the face of such loss it's amazing that we can enjoy life the way we do now.

This collection of articles is a celebration of God's faithfulness! God truly is "A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows." Psalm 68:5

We hope to help others by sharing our process of transformation.
You, too, can be hopeful for the future!

THE REASON WHY YOUR BROKEN HEART ISN'T HEALING!



This first article came out of a pretty deep kitchen-table-conversation.

Wendy: Girls, what's the first thing people need to know when they experience a tragedy?

Rebekah: People who go through a traumatic experience start off in a state of shock. Pretty quickly, however, they must recognize two things or their healing process will stagnate. #1 They must recognize that trauma leaves wounds that need to be healed. #2 They must recognize that they can choose to be passive or proactive about their recovery.

Elisabeth: People talk about a "wound" resulting from tragedy and loss because it feels that way inside. A lot of people don't understand that as three-part beings, our spirits and souls can be injured internally, just like our bodies can be injured, physically.

Wendy: Yes, an emotional wound is actually a hole in your soul. Your initial tendency is to feel that no one and nothing can fill the hole.

Rebekah: After facing the fact that the tragedy has left them with emotional wounds, the second thing people have to recognize is that they can choose to be passive or proactive about their recovery.

Elisabeth: If you dislocate a shoulder, you can't be passive about your recovery. An emotional injury requires proactive treatment, just as a physical injury does.

Rebekah: Just as physical injuries generate painful symptoms, so do emotional injuries: sadness, fear, anger, blame, guilt, unforgiveness, resentment, bitterness, etc. By leaving serious, emotional wounds untreated, we allow a flood

of painful, life-altering emotions into our hearts and minds. We live our daily lives with swirls of painful questions and thoughts circulating, coloring everything we see, hear, do, and touch.

The Bible says it this way, *“Keep vigilant watch over your heart; that’s where life starts.” Proverbs 4:23 MSG*

This resonates with me because I lived it. I was home from my first year of college for two weeks when Dad went to heaven. My mom, sister, and I had planned to spend the summer with my dad. Instead, we spent it planning and hosting memorial services (one in-state, one out-of-state, and one out-of-country) to commemorate his life.

After a traumatic and stressful two months, I went back to college, saying that I was fine. I remember a friend asking about my summer on the first day back in my dorm. “It was good!” I told her, positively. (I didn’t think it was okay to be anything other than positive.) She asked without hesitation, “But didn’t your dad die?” I remember saying back to her, “Yes, Lisa, he did!” in a chipper voice.

I realize in hindsight that I was deeply hurting inside and was doing next to nothing about it. It was needless to suffer silently while waiting to feel better. That passivity made things worse, not better.

Elisabeth: People often say, “time heals all wounds.” But time, alone, doesn’t heal anything.

LET'S GET TO WORK ON THAT BROKEN HEART!



In our first article we addressed “why” you must be proactive about your healing process. Now it’s time to tackle the “how.”

Wendy: Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, noted psychiatrist, identified the five stages of grief as denial, anger, bargaining, sorrow, and acceptance. Having gone through the grief process and looking back, we learned through experience what Kubler-Ross discovered through research...that denial is a common stage of grief.

A few generations ago it was expected that a family would “go into mourning” for a year after the loss of their loved one. They traditionally wore black for a season, not just as a formality, but to remind themselves and others that they were in a fragile state, in need of special care. In some ways our culture has evolved but in the case of grieving, we are less informed. Our culture, in general, does not make space for grief. We are not taught how to express grief in a healthy way. We often muddle through the process.

Rebekah: As I mentioned in my story in our first article, I went back to college after losing my dad and didn’t feel the permission to grieve. I ended up in an extended denial phase that greatly delayed the healing process. In the book, *“Grieving the Loss of Someone You Love,”* the authors state, *“Once the memorial service is over some of us refuse to continue to ‘scrub’ the wound caused by our loss, declining to deal with the ‘infection’ that may be developing just below the surface.*

We are either unaware of, or unwilling to face, the emotional death that may lie in our future as a result of this neglect.”

I know what they mean by “emotional death.” I spent a lot of time going through the motions of life with very little meaning attached to anything I was doing.

Elisabeth: My experience was very different than my sister’s. Shortly after my dad went to heaven I began to see a Christian counselor who I met with weekly for a year. During that year my counselor walked me through the stages of grief. I remember my first meeting with my counselor. I was very resistant and skeptical. I knew I had a wound from the loss of my father but everything inside of me wanted to hide what I was feeling and just try to deal with it on my own.

One of the first things I was told in my counseling was that I didn’t need to carry this alone and try to heal myself. I instantly began to weep. Being given the permission to let go and being told that I wasn’t alone opened a door inside of my heart. That was the beginning of my healing.

Grief is isolating; it causes us to turn inward. But the wounded can’t heal themselves. That’s why we have doctors.

YOU NEED AN ANCHOR FOR THE STORM!



Wendy: Emotional support is very important in recovering from a loss (we'll talk about that in a future article) but the most important support is spiritual. What does "spiritual support" mean? Well, as we've said before, a loss creates a hole in your heart. People, alone, cannot fill that hole. People can only give you what they have. People can spend time with you, listen to you, and give you advice. But only one person has the power, the ability if you will, to heal you. Only a loving God, the One who created you, can heal that hole.

People can sometimes have a difficult time turning to God in the midst of loss because they believe God "did this to them." Sadly this is a pervasive belief. However, the Bible (the book God gave us so we could know Him) shows something very different.

Rebekah: Yes, the Bible says God sent His Son, Jesus, to earth so we could know God. Jesus said He only did what the Father told Him to do (John 14:31) and only said what the Father told Him to say. (John 14:24). If God were the source of all loss shouldn't we see a picture of Jesus killing and hurting people? The reverse is actually what we see as we look at Jesus' life on earth.

Wendy: In the Bible, we read several examples of Jesus raising someone who had died (Matthew 9:23-26, Luke 7:11-15, John 11:1-44). Several scriptures state that Jesus healed all who came to Him, showing God's compassion for hurting people (Matthew 4:24, Matthew 8:16, Mark 6:56).

Jesus very clearly taught about the source of loss. He said, "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life." (John 10:10) The "thief" Jesus referred to was Satan, whom the Bible shows in many passages as the enemy of God and the enemy of people.

(Genesis 3, Matthew 4:1-11) In Acts 10:38, Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples, said that "Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him."

Elisabeth: Also in Psalm 116:15 we see this statement: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." One version of the Bible states that verse this way: "The Lord cares deeply when his loved ones die." The Bible shows us the real picture of a loving God who cares deeply about your loss.

There is coming a day when the devil will no longer have the power to destroy in peoples' lives. Until that day, our loving God is ever ready to help those who are hurting. If you are hurting, you only need to ask Him for help.

THE ABSOLUTE KEY INGREDIENT TO HEAL YOUR GRIEF!



Elisabeth: In our previous article we made the case that God needs to be your spiritual support. In this article we want to focus on “how” to let God be that support for you.

Rebekah: The greatest way that God supports us in times of grief is by loving us. Many people see that as a “band-aid” solution to their pain. I think that’s because God’s “love” has been described in such ethereal terms that it’s been downgraded to a flimsy buzzword. In reality God’s love is a concrete substance with the power to heal anyone and anything. In addition to misunderstanding the power and depth of God’s love, people also misunderstand how to access it.

Elisabeth: I had always had a communicative relationship with God but when dad went to heaven I found myself angrily holding God at arm’s length. As I mentioned before, I was in an internship at that time and was required to spend time with God daily. I remember reading my Bible during those times but refusing to talk to Him as I normally would. Meanwhile, in my required counseling sessions, I angrily rehashed the same issues over and over. After multiple sessions without progress my counselor intuitively ordered me to “go out and get right with God.” Following his instructions, I went out on a hill and sat silently. I didn’t know what to say or where to begin. Finally, I just said out loud everything that I was feeling. I literally said out loud, “I’m sad and really angry and I don’t know what to do.” As soon as the words came out, I felt the love of God wrap around me. That was the real beginning of my healing.

Rebekah: I think we over-complicate the process of receiving God’s love. All it really requires is for us to give God an invitation to love us. As Elisabeth demonstrated in her story, that invitation can be as simple as admitting to God

how you feel. In my own moments of grief and distress I experience the greatest peace when I ask God to help me. When I extend the invitation to Him, He always responds with love, comfort, and assistance.

Elisabeth: When you experience motion sickness on a boat, they tell you to stare at the shore because it's the only thing that isn't moving. In the midst of grief we experience waves of emotion from one day to the next. When you fix your eyes on your feelings, you fix your eyes on the tossing waves. You need to keep your eyes on the stable shore that God's love provides. He has always loved you, will never stop loving you and His love isn't based on what you do.

Wendy: If you're grieving or hurting we recommend you pray these verses taken from Ephesians 3:14-19: *Heavenly Father, I pray that from your glorious, unlimited resources You will empower me with inner strength through Your Spirit. I invite Christ to make His home in my heart as I trust in Him. Please give me the power to understand how wide, how long, how high, and how deep Your love is for me. Then I will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from You.*

DON'T DO IT ALONE!



In this article we hope to convince you to be accountable while recovering from a loss. We realize that it might be the last thing you want to do because it is often easier to hide your pain.

Grief is supposed to be a process. Professionals say people do not move through the stages of grief in any given order, but the important thing is to move through them. You should not be building a home at any stage of grief and staying put.

The truth is, you can be blind to your own progress. You need a mirror to reflect how you are doing. That requires you be accountable to someone.

What we mean by “accountability” is simply having a person in your life who is reflecting your progress. This can be professional help such as a grief counselor, but that level of accountability is not necessary for everyone. An emotionally mature person who you can be honest with can also serve as an accountability partner. The point is to be accountable...sharing what you are thinking and feeling. This is particularly important in the first months after your loss.

Wendy: I think personality type, age, and maturity has a lot to do with how much accountability we need. I didn't see a counselor but I was meeting with friends regularly who were observing how I was moving through the steps. Praying with others was particularly helpful for me, especially regarding all of the tasks that came with being a new widow. The list of tasks was overwhelming...directing a ministry, finances, insurance, taxes, etc. The Lord gave me a prayer partner who prayed with me weekly over my list of “issues.” This gave me hope and we saw the Lord take care of each item on the list over the course of time.

Rebekah: It is particularly important to find the right accountability partner when you experience loss at a young age. As a young person with little life experience, you don't know what you need and neither do your peers. Many of your friends are caring but too uncomfortable with your situation to even mention it, let alone provide the support that you need. It can be very lonely.

Elisabeth: I had friends who were extremely kind and caring but didn't know the first thing about guiding someone through grief. For me, meeting weekly with an older, Christian counselor offered the accountability that my younger friends couldn't provide. He would encourage the healthy grief patterns I was exhibiting and point out the unhealthy ones. He would even give me specific assignments, based on what he could see that I needed.

Wendy: Being alone and silent can take you to a dark place. So, although it can be difficult to be with people, it is necessary for healing. We are not meant to be solitary creatures. We are called to lift one another's burdens. So open your heart to someone you can trust and let them reflect your progress. Once you are healed, you can do the same for someone else.

GIVE TO LIVE!



As we've shared before, the "thief" (Satan) comes to steal and kill and destroy. (John 10:10) Satan is evil. He will kick you while you're down. He will tell you that your life will never be the same, will never be fulfilling again, and that you will never recover. One way to combat these thoughts is to be proactive in serving others.

This may seem like a strange thought...to serve someone else when you feel you need to be served. But serving others brings a sense of fulfillment and gets your mind off of you.

Satan's aim is to get you to wallow in your pain so that you are only looking inward. When you serve others you are focusing outward.

Wendy: Shortly after my husband's departure, I sensed the Lord directing me to volunteer in a new position in our church's Bible school. I didn't think I had the time to add another commitment to my schedule but I obeyed. The tasks I performed were simple, but the commitment made me get out and be with people. My service led to an opportunity to teach a course the following year. I eventually developed and taught three courses, which opened a door to more teaching opportunities. All of this built my confidence and gave me an opportunity to serve others and use my gifts.

Elisabeth: One caution is to make sure you have the right motive when adding activities into your life after a loss. I went to the opposite extreme in an effort to hide my pain in busyness. But loss is draining and I found that I was not able to emotionally sustain my endless list of activities.

I was short tempered and hard to please. I needed to pull back. I learned this after pushing to the point of having several major physical issues.

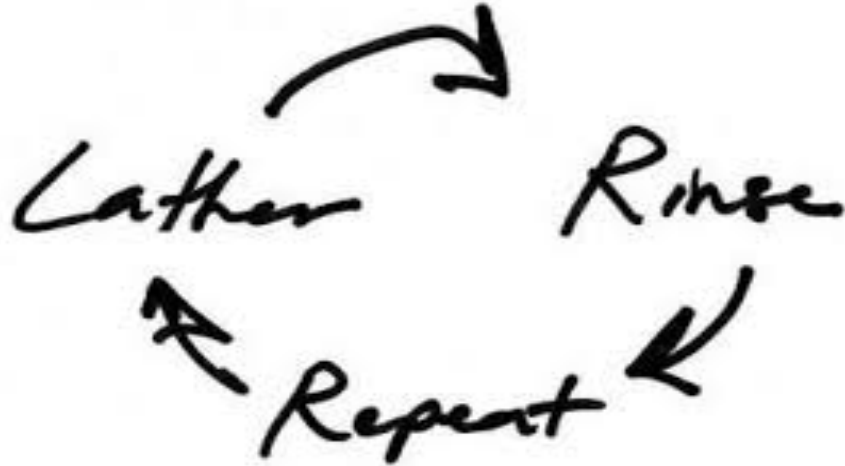
My physical pain woke me up to the emotional pain that I was ignoring.

Rebekah: You have to find the right balance after your life is upended by a loss. Underactivity = too much time to wallow. Overactivity = no time to heal.

Wendy: I do recommend that you serve in a capacity that does not add emotional or mental stress. Keep it simple and remember the eternal principle of sowing and reaping. When you give, you always get more in return.

Rebekah: When you sow into someone else's life, you are really sowing into your own life. This is smart to do when you've experienced a loss and are experiencing need in your own life.

RINSE AND REPEAT!



Grief doesn't play fair. Emotions are unpredictable. Throughout the process of time, you will have to repeat the healing steps.

Psychologists say that there are five stages of grief. They also say that there is no given order through which people move through the stages. One thing is sure...you can't predict the triggers that bring up memories of your loss. When the triggers happen you'll have to repeat the steps.

Wendy: I think one of the hardest parts of recovery is being patient with yourself.

Elisabeth: It takes time to heal from a loss. Give yourself room to have hard days in your recovery. Recently while looking through family photos I found myself crying. While crying is a normal, healthy part of recovery I felt that there was a deeper meaning this time. So I stopped, prayed and asked God to show me what was the cause. I was physically tired, and a hard week had worn me down emotionally. Instead of allowing frustration to take over, I chose to be patient with myself and took a nap.

Grief isn't always complicated; simple things can be dealt with by doing practical things.

Rebekah: Grief does get better with time because the moments of grieving become far more spread out. After enough time has passed, you can go days, weeks, months at a time without a moment of grief. However, when a moment of grief does hit, it can hit hard, sometimes as hard as in the beginning. That's why having a process to deal with those moments is so important.

You can't let a moment of grief pull you into a dark spiral. You have to define the moment so that it doesn't define you.

Wendy: Remember, it takes time to heal fully. The deeper the loss the longer it may take you to heal but you *will* heal by following the steps. When you have a particularly difficult day, re-read our earlier posts and be reminded of God's loving kindness. I can't emphasize enough how important it is to allow the Holy Spirit to comfort your heart.

Having presented the steps to healing, we can now start offering suggestions for particular situations.

MAY I HELP YOU?



“Following the death of his beloved wife, C.S. Lewis noticed people deciding whether or not to mention his loss as they approached him. He said that he hated it when they did mention it and he hated it when they didn’t. That is the predicament many people find themselves in when they come upon us after the death of someone we love. It will ease things for everyone if we can acknowledge the awkwardness people may feel and give them permission to respond as best they can. It will also free us to be ourselves, acknowledging the full force of our feelings.” -Grieving The Loss Of Someone You Love

Wendy: Two realities exist when you experience the loss of someone you love. First, others often feel awkward in knowing how to approach you. Second, you feel awkward not knowing when your emotions are going to betray you. Both situations produce uncomfortable interchanges between people.

The awkwardness may cause people to avoid you and you to avoid people...at a time when you really need people to talk to and listen to you. You cannot control how other people address you but you can choose how to address them.

Elisabeth: You encounter three types of responders after a loss. The first type of responder over-comments, making the encounter painful and uncomfortable. The second type of responder under-comments, avoiding the topic entirely, making you feel as though they don’t care about what has happened to you. The third type of responder is balanced - they express sorrow for your loss and offer support without asking prying questions or making light of your situation.

Rebekah: When someone walks up to you (even years after experiencing a loss) you don’t know which type of responder you are about to encounter.

For that reason it is absolutely key that you learn the art of being gracious early in the grief process.

Elisabeth: Be prepared that people are going to (unintentionally) hurt you. They are going to make insensitive remarks at inappropriate times. It makes it easier if you choose to be gracious toward them. People need a cue from you to know what to do because it was *your* loss. They don't know where you are in the grief process or what you need from them at that particular moment.

Rebekah: There will be times when you need to "help them help you," so to speak.

Wendy: A good way to describe it is to say that people don't know how to "be" with you. You as the grieving person have to help the other person be comfortable with you.

Rebekah: One thing that has helped me is choosing to see things from the perspective of the other person. Most people truly are trying to be kind and sympathetic toward you.

Elisabeth: The bottom line is that "love never fails," as 1 Corinthians 13 says. More on this topic in our next article.

YOUR ULTIMATE SURVIVAL GUIDE!



You don't have to be a victim of grief. You can be an overcomer.

Elisabeth: Let's break down the term, "overcomer." The dictionary defines the word "overcome" as to prevail over, to render incapable, or powerless. The concept of being able to prevail over your grief can seem unimaginable. But we aren't overcomers alone, we are able to render our grief powerless only with God's help.

Rebekah: The concept of letting God "help me" used to sound very vague to me. I understand now that it is much simpler than I once thought. It doesn't involve work on my part but it does involve me making space for God in my thoughts, time, and life.

This is how I do it: I stay open to God (I actually think of Him as my Father) and I regularly invite His help into my life. I build "access points" into my days where I can meet Him. These "access points" are activities like reading the Bible for a few minutes, sitting quietly and letting Him speak to my spirit, attending a church service, listening to teaching, reading edifying books, and interacting with others who are like minded.

None of these things are difficult on my part. They simply require opening my Bible or pushing play on a teaching or getting myself to church or getting quiet so I can hear God's voice. I learned a long time ago that God is more than happy for me to simply make the opportunity and for Him to do the work.

Every single time that I have reached for God, He has responded with a moment of healing or deep revelation or a sense of peace and love. Even small "access points" like a couple of minutes glancing over a Bible passage can bring answers to deep, deep issues.

I can't tell you how many times a sentence from the Bible or a phrase stated by a minister or a friend has jumped out at me in a supernatural way, bringing healing exactly when I needed it.

There are even times when I feel drawn to read certain books or do certain activities and I discover in the midst of them that the activity is a set-up from God to provide healing and revelation for me.

Wendy: Here are some practical ways to create access points for God to help you:

1. Spend time daily reading the Bible.

If you do not have a daily habit of reading the Bible, I encourage you to begin. Even reading 10 minutes daily will make a difference in your understanding of God and of His good plan for your life. I suggest you read in the New Testament for now.

2. Spend time daily praying and opening your heart to God.

Just sit quietly with Him. Some of the most profound healing experiences I had after the passing of my husband were times sitting quietly with the Lord. There were times I was feeling very overwhelmed and as I sat quietly with Him I literally felt His presence. I drew strength to get up and move ahead. At times like this you will come to know His kindness and you will feel His love.

3. Daily listen to good teaching that will help you grow spiritually.

Your spiritual health will greatly affect your healing process. Instead of having the TV or radio on as you get dressed in the morning, perform tasks at home, or drive, have good spiritual teaching playing on your computer or phone. God's Word has the power to impart life. You need life to overcome grief. So surround yourself with life! Some proven sources, which we highly recommend can be found at: kcm.org, intlfamilychurch.com, flcbranson.org, livingwordmissions.org, awmi.net.

4. If you do not already attend a good church, I recommend you start.

A life-giving church will offer what you need to help you recover...times of worship where you can soak in the presence of the Lord, teaching to help you grow spiritually, friends, counsel, and opportunities to give of yourself to others.

Elisabeth: No matter how you feel today, you can be an overcomer. Just take the proactive steps to give God access. He helped us. He will help you, too.

HELLO, MY NAME IS...



Wendy: When a loved one departs, we who remain have a new reality...without the presence of our loved one. If our loved one did not live close by, their loss will be felt but generally won't change our identity to a great extent. The effect will mostly be internal, emotional...missing our loved one.

If, however, our loved one was part of our daily life...our spouse, our parent, our child...our new reality is both internal and external. Our identity can actually be affected. These losses are the most difficult to navigate.

Rebekah: When a loved one who impacts our everyday life departs, our identity can feel shaken. Every part of our life...schedule, home, finances, and future is changed. With a loss that affects so much, how do we separate what was before and what has to be now? How do we make a new life and a new identity, to move forward?

Elisabeth: For me, my new identity started with the realization that I could not base my identity on the people in my life. The people in our lives help shape who we are, but they can't be our whole life. No one is equipped to handle that responsibility. They will inevitably disappoint us, hurt us, or as in a loss, leave our lives.

Wendy: It may seem harsh to face the fact that your identity has changed. In general, we don't embrace change easily, especially when it is forced upon us. But, for the sake of healing, you must acknowledge this reality and embrace it. Give yourself time, but require yourself to make continual progress.

In Tony Cooke's book, *Life After Death*, he wrote:

"Perhaps our goals and dreams were wrapped up in our loved one--and now that person is gone! Will all our hopes and aspirations die with our loved one, or will we be able to discover new purpose and new direction in life?"

We encourage you to answer these questions with a, "Yes! I will discover new purpose and new direction in life...with God's help." This process will not happen overnight but an attitude of faith and trust in God will enable you to move on.

Rebekah: You will get there faster by asking God to help you, to transform you, to reshape your life, and to heal you. He knows what you need more than you do and He will help you in the kindest, gentlest of ways. Take specific issues that concern you right now and give them to God in prayer, then trust Him to take care of them for you. Refuse to rehash those issues in your mind. You will begin to see growth and healing in your mind, heart, and life from the very moment that you do.

TACKLING THE PILE!



Wendy: We've shared a lot about spiritual and emotional issues because we feel these are most important in recovering from a loss. We have not forgotten, however, that everyday practical issues must still be dealt with. The required tasks of life do not stop when a loved one departs. In this article we want to start a dialogue about dealing with the practical issues that come with a loved ones' departure.

For a widow or widower, the practical issues are usually substantial. Most married couples build a life that requires two people to maintain. With the departure of one spouse, many life tasks are left for the remaining spouse to pick up. Many times the remaining spouse lacks the skill or knowledge to perform those tasks. This adds to the stress of the loss. Here are some suggestions to reduce the stress:

1. Ask for help when necessary.

This might be professional help, or merely the help of a family member or friend. If you are in this situation...having to handle tasks but not sure how...don't be embarrassed to ask for help.

2. Don't be disappointed in people who don't offer to help.

You must remember that others do not know what you need unless you tell them. True, people should be sensitive to the needs of the mourning but usually they need your lead to know how to help.

3. Do not make life-changing decisions without the advice of a trusted advisor.

Many widowed individuals consider making big decisions while they are literally in shock. Some advise a widowed individual to wait at least one year before

making a serious decision, like selling a home or relocating.

4. If you are stuck, get help.

For some, the shock of their loss causes them to be paralyzed and unable to handle basic tasks like paying utility or mortgage bills. Besides the obvious emotional effects, major financial problems can result from this type of situation. If you are in this situation it is imperative that you tell someone and ask for help.

5. Beware of romantic relationships too soon after a loss.

The need for help and companionship can impair a mourning individual's judgement. Make sure you submit all thoughts of entering into a relationship to a trusted advisor.

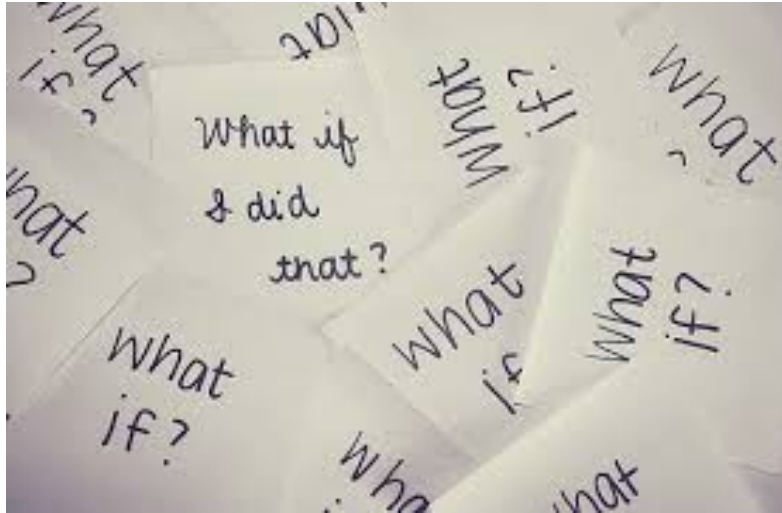
6. Pray.

From experience I can attest that the single most effective thing to do is to pray. When my husband departed suddenly, I instantly became responsible for a load of decisions and tasks for which I was unprepared. I felt as though I was dealing with a huge onion. I would figure out one layer only to find more underneath. I truly felt overwhelmed.

One day, feeling heavily burdened, I heard the Lord say, "I'm giving you a prayer partner." The next Sunday, a friend announced, "The Lord told me to pray with you!" We began meeting weekly to pray over my list of burdens...tasks to be done and decisions to be made. One by one the answers came...in the form of people to assist me, or understanding of a task, or knowledge gained. Being accountable to pray with someone kept me moving through the list and helped me to recognize that positive things truly were happening.

More practical tips can be shared but these, in my experience, are the big ones.

IF ONLY...



Regret. We hear this from so many people who have lost a loved one. If you are struggling with regret, consider this:

1. Everyone is going to die.

This is not meant to be harsh or inconsiderate of your pain but it helps sometimes to acknowledge the inevitable. Your loved one was going to die at some point. We shared before that Jesus said there is an enemy that is trying to steal, kill, and destroy in our lives. (John 10:10) The enemy is the source of death and pain. He is also a tormentor. He can make you believe you affected someone's departure from this life when it possibly is not true at all.

2. Your loved one had a choice.

Despite the commonly touted notion that God is in control of every situation, His Word says He is not. Many times in scripture we are admonished to make a choice. If God were in control of every situation, why would he ever offer us a choice? Think of the choices you made just yesterday. Did God choose what you ate for breakfast? Did He force you to wear what you wore? Did He choose every word you said? The reality is that God gives us the right to make choices, even choices that affect our mortality...like health choices. If your loved one made choices that affected their time or reason for death, you, too, have to respect their right to do so.

3. You have limited knowledge.

Deuteronomy 29:29 states, *"The secret things belong to the Lord our God..."* Only God has unlimited knowledge. Some things concerning your loved one are secrets to you. Another scripture states that only God knows the heart of a man. Allowing yourself to be tormented with regret when you don't have all the facts is not logical. The very thing you think you did wrong may not be related at all to your loved one's passing.

4. Hindsight is not foresight.

“If only I had...said this, done that, made a different decision.” You operated with the information you had at the time. Expecting yourself to have responded differently in the past based on insight you have now is unfair to yourself and completely unrealistic.

5. You need to tell someone.

Tormenting thoughts grow when they stay in our heads. Be brave. Share your thoughts with a trusted advisor who can help you see the situation clearly.

A wise advisor can help you discern whether you just need reassurance that you did the right thing or if you really need forgiveness.

6. You can be forgiven.

Even if you made a mistake, you can't change that now. You can live the rest of your life tormented or you can ask God's forgiveness, forgive yourself, and live the rest of your life free. This is a choice you must make. If you need forgiveness, this scripture was written for you: *“But if we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.”* 1 John 1:9

7. Use the experience to help someone in the future.

Heal up so you can help someone in the future through your experience. You cannot change the past but with God's help you can affect someone's future. Pray and ask the Lord to help you pay it forward. He specializes in redeeming situations. He can do it for you!

LET GO...



Elisabeth: The subject of regret is one that is personal for me. I privately struggled under the weight of secret regret and guilt for many months before gaining freedom. The list of steps we gave in our last post, "*If Only*," is the process that I followed.

The day my dad passed away he was out doing errands. I was home alone and preparing for my high school graduation party that evening. During my busy day my dad called home to ask some question. I answered, talked briefly and hung up. I do not know if I told him I loved him at the end of that call. Later that day he passed away. That was the last conversation we had. One of the first thoughts that went through my mind after I found out my dad had had a heart attack was that I did not know if I had told him I loved him when he had called. That regret grew more and more each day.

Months later in a counseling session I finally shared this regret with my counselor. I expected a look of shame, that he would agree with what I felt and admit how horrible I had been. He instead quietly asked me, "How many times do you think you told your dad you loved him over your life?" In surprise I said, "I don't know. I couldn't count how many." "Well then," he said, "Do you think your dad knew you loved him?" In tears I admitted, "Yes, he did. I told him all the time." "Then," he said, "I think you need to forgive yourself and let this go. Your dad knew you loved him. Rest in that."

I felt like a huge weight had lifted off of my shoulders and the lies that the devil had been whispering to me for months were finally silenced through my telling someone. I made the decision that day that I would never let an opportunity to say, "I love you," pass me again. No phone conversation with my family ends without an "I love you." I turned that regret into a new commitment to never hold back verbalizing my love for others. I can honestly say I love more freely now than I did before.

Whatever your regret is, big or small, tell someone, forgive yourself, let it go and use it to change your life for the better. Don't let regret control you. Take your life back.

James 5:16 (MSG) *"Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed. The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with."*

HANDLE WITH CARE!



In Tony Cooke's excellent book, *Life After Death*, he wrote: "As the bereaved adjust to their new reality, friends and family will typically reach out in an attempt to lend a helping hand. If you have ever felt the sting of an insensitive remark or the kindness of a gentle word aptly spoken, then you know the power we wield when trying to comfort the grieving. We can either wound with our words or play a vital part in helping to mend the brokenhearted."

In our post titled, "May I help you?" we addressed the topic of social interaction with someone who has experienced a loss. Last time we wrote from the perspective of the person who is grieving.

Elisabeth wrote: "You encounter three types of responders after a loss. The first type of responder over-comments, making the encounter painful and uncomfortable. The second type of responder under-comments, avoiding the topic entirely, making you feel as though they don't care about what has happened to you. The third type of responder is balanced – they express sorrow for your loss and offer support without asking prying questions or making light of your situation."

This time we hope to help the person who encounters the grieving individual. To those who want to be the third type of responder, we offer the following advice.

Do say: "I'm sorry for your loss." This and a genuine hug is really all that is necessary. Wendy: In some faith circles the term, "loss" has become a point of contention. Some will say the departed person is not "lost" if they knew the Lord. Absolutely! Scripture teaches, "...to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." (1 Corinthians 5:1, 6-8 and Philippians 1:20-26) However, in stating to a bereaved person, "I'm sorry for your loss," you are not declaring their loved one is lost. You are acknowledging the bereaved has experienced a loss. This simple statement shows you identify with the bereaved person's state and that you acknowledge their pain. If the bereaved person shares more, that is your cue to continue the conversation.

Don't say: "He's in a better place."

Rebekah: Although this is a true statement if the deceased is a Christian, the bereaved person often is not in an emotional place to comprehend or appreciate theological dissertations. Remember, your goal is to identify with the bereaved person's loss, not to prove a theological point. Also, a statement to this effect can sound like criticism for the bereaved person's sadness.

Don't ask: "What happened?"

Wendy: These details are private and uncomfortable for the bereaved to share. Don't pry. In our family's experience, this question catches us off guard every time. It is extremely awkward for us because we consider the events of our loved one's passing very personal. We ask ourselves, "Why do you need to know? Why do we need to relive such a painful event just for your curiosity?" If you really must know what happened, then ask a friend of the family instead of a family member.

Don't ask: "How are you doing?"

Rebekah: This is a loaded question. Many bereaved persons have no idea how they are doing. Keep it simple for you and them. Use the following statement instead.

Do say: "I'm praying for you. Let me know if I can do anything for you." The bottom line to navigating encounters with the bereaved is having a heart to help and keeping your focus on their experience. Your discomfort in the moment can cause you to retreat or overstate. Relax and remember it is not your responsibility to make their grief disappear. Learn to genuinely say, "I'm sorry for your loss," and be ready to follow their lead.

Tony Cooke wrote, "*...the calm, reassuring presence of a friend who is sensitive and patient and who listens and shares briefly, will be appreciated during times of shock and distress.*"

HAPPY HOLIDAYS?



Rebekah: Events that celebrate family and togetherness are especially potent after a loss. Holidays hold so many reminders.

Things like setting one less place at Thanksgiving, seeing Father's Day cards at stores, or hanging your missing loved one's favorite ornaments on the Christmas tree can bring up waves of pain. We have to be strategic in the handling of these occasions so that we treat them as an opportunity to process pain and remake them into new experiences that contain their own joy.

Elisabeth: Planning is key in handling these difficult dates and all the emotion they carry. We need to learn to anticipate what our needs will be on the occasion, whether that is the company of others or just time alone with God. Learn to take care of yourself and be realistic about how hard the upcoming holiday may be.

Rebekah: Inviting someone to join you on the first holidays without your loved one can be very healing.

Elisabeth: The first Thanksgiving after my dad passed we knew that the absence was going to be very hard. We invited a very close family friend to fly into town and to stay with us. Her presence was such a comfort. She helped not only to literally fill the empty seat at the table but also to bring new memories and new energy to that first hard holiday.

Rebekah: It can also be comforting to reminisce about your loved one on a special occasion. It helps to alleviate the feeling that you are moving on without them and keeps the focus on the positive memories you have of them. It also helps to remind yourself that your loved one would want you to continue living in the present, making new, happy memories.

The best holidays for our family have been the ones where we stayed flexible, allowing ourselves to accept our feelings (whatever they happened to be when we woke up) and allowing ourselves to openly share our feelings with each other. I have observed that we do much better when we make plans in advance for important dates. A holiday or anniversary made up of the following components seems the easiest to get through: time alone with the Lord, time spent doing fun activities with family, time spent with friends, time spent reminiscing, and time spent laughing. (It is especially helpful to get out of the house on hard days and do fun, active things.

Our very best holidays have been the ones where we drove off in a new direction and spent the day exploring someplace new. Volunteering your time to help others on such dates is also extremely therapeutic for the same reasons.)

Elisabeth: Taking the time to acknowledge your loss and to process it on these holidays doesn't mean you are losing ground in your grieving process but rather that you are acknowledging the depth of your loss. Choose to be extra kind to yourself on upcoming holidays and anniversaries. Reach out to others and express what you need and choose to create new memories on difficult dates.

Give yourself permission to look back and remember but keep your heart focused on the fact that your future is ahead of you, not in the past.

THANKS FOR?



Wendy: We want to address the subject of navigating holidays again. It can be such a difficult time because of the many memories associated with a loved one who has departed.

The first Thanksgiving and Christmas after my husband departed were not easy, I will admit. However, our family took a stand to be proactive and we made conscious decisions that helped us get through that first holiday season.

Elisabeth: Thanksgiving was intended to be a day for giving thanks. But with all the emphasis on the food and the shopping, it can seem like Thanksgiving has lost its meaning. Focusing on the real meaning of Thanksgiving...being thankful...will help you get through this first holiday of the season.

Rebekah: Your greatest temptation during this season will be to turn inward, focusing on what you don't have. When you focus only on what you don't have, you are completely unaware of the good things in your life.

Elisabeth: Focusing on what you don't have breeds self-pity and selfishness. No one wants to be around someone who focuses only on themselves. So take hold of those "poor me" thoughts and turn them around by counting the blessings in your life.

Wendy: It may be difficult to see the blessings in your life when you've lost someone dear to you. But no matter your circumstances, it could be worse. I can hear you say, "I'm facing the holidays without the person who meant the most to me. How could it be worse?"

[Marion Zirkle Wright](#) is one of the women I most admire. Fifteen years ago, Marion's husband, son, son-in-law, and several others close to her lost their lives

in a plane crash in Guatemala. Think of the impact to Marion and her family. Three women in her immediate family became widows in one day. When you are tempted to think your situation cannot be worse, remind yourself that there are people who have experienced more hardship than you.

Elisabeth: Counting your blessings will cause you to become aware of the good things God has done for you and is continuing to do for you.

Rebekah: There is great comfort to be found in rehearsing the victories that God has brought about in your life. When you have experienced a loss, it is hard to look away from the negative situation. Your constant attention is focused on your pain unless you choose to look elsewhere. When you focus on the positive elements of your life instead of the negative, you replace doubt with faith and you can move forward without fear of the future. Choose to focus on God and His love for you. The positive things in your life are proof that He loves you.

James 1:17 says, *“Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.”* Keep focusing on that. Don’t let thoughts of misery and pain make you question God’s love. Surround yourself with grateful, loving thoughts during the holidays and you’ll make it through. Keep telling yourself, “God only gives good gifts. It’s not going to get worse, it’s only going to get better.”

Wendy: By the way, Marion and her daughter remarried after their tragedy. They continue to serve God in Guatemala. Their family is a beautiful testimony to God’s faithfulness and redemption of terrible circumstances. Choose to make your holidays happy days!

ONLY BY GIVING...



Wendy: The holidays can be such an emotional time. We can have expectations of the perfect holiday and when those expectations are not met we are disappointed. We served on the mission field in developing nations for seven years. Christmas time far from family, in a place where there is little recognition of the holiday, held the potential for great disappointment for our young family. We realized that we would have to change our expectations to make Christmas a happy time.

Our first Christmas on the mission field was in Guatemala. No snow, no Christmas lights, no family to visit. The sights, the smells, the sounds were all foreign to our experience. It was the perfect set up to be depressed. Our ministry leader employed Jesus' admonition that it is more blessed to give than to receive. (Acts 20:30) He knew that focusing us on the needs of others would help get us through the holidays. He called all the missionaries together, gave each of us some money, and gave us an assignment. He told us to go out on the streets and find someone to bless.

My husband and I joined with another missionary couple, added our own money, and headed out to the market. Praying for the right opportunity, we were drawn to a little boy with dirty, tattered clothing. We engaged him in conversation, bought him shoes, and asked him to lead us to his house. We followed him to a meager one-room shack where his family lived. I remember giving food to his family and praying for their needs. We left that place with a different perspective. For the rest of our holiday season we had a quiet thankfulness for our blessings.

Focusing on others changed us that Christmas.

Rebekah: We've mentioned this before but we'd like to remind you again that the worst thing you can do if you want to recover from a loss is focus on you.

Elisabeth: If you are struggling with finding the “joy” of the holiday season don’t hold back from giving. Ask Jesus to enable you to be a blessing to someone else, just like in my mom’s story. Wendy: Serve others by volunteering at a food pantry or at your church. You can babysit for young parents so they can Christmas shop. We’ve made a tradition of taking little friends shopping for a gift for their parents. These are ways our family actually got outside of ourselves during our first holiday season without my husband.

Elisabeth: Spending our Thanksgiving, Christmas, and entire holiday season this way...the giving way...helped keep our minds and hearts off of the empty seat and our loss. Instead of focusing on what you don’t have, seek to focus on what you do have and what you can do for someone else. We promise you, from our own experience, it will make this holiday much easier to not only endure but also to enjoy.

**THANK YOU FOR READING OUR E-BOOK.
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MAY GOD BLESS YOU RICHLY!**