

## Morning Devotions

### 5 Stages of Grief

No one likes to think of facing bad news today or any day – especially if it's unexpected and shocking like the sudden death of a family member or loved one. Nothing prepares you for that.

I guess you know someone who was close to you, facing news of an incurable illness like cancer. Having had my own scare with cancer at the end of 2019, I know personally how it feels. It's unpredictable and scary. But God has been good to me and I have fully recovered. But not everyone is that fortunate. I spoke to several men going through chemotherapy with me, who faced bad news of their own future. One man was planning his funeral service – he was bravely facing the inevitable.

Death and dying are not nice subjects. No one likes to take time thinking about them. Can't we talk about something more pleasant? It would be easier, of course, but sometimes we need to toughen up and confront reality. It's all part of the human condition unfortunately. Dealing with loss is difficult, exhausting, and painful.

Grief is an overwhelming feeling of sorry, pain, regret, and sadness. It feels like your heart is broken – nothing will ever be the same again. How can I be happy again? All this is a normal response. But everyone experiences grief in their own unique way.

In 1969 a Swiss psychiatrist named Elizabeth Kübler-Ross first introduced her *five-stage-grief* model in her ground-breaking book *On Death and Dying*. She had worked with terminally ill patients and wrote from her own observations. Not everyone agrees with her five-stage model, but I think it's a good place to start. They are DENIAL, ANGER, BARGAINING, DEPRESSION and ACCEPTANCE. Those important words have helped many people get through their pain of grief and grieving. Let's take a closer look at each one.

1. DENIAL: *'It can't be true – has my father really died?'* Here is the shocking news. And because it's such bad news, I go into denial. Denial is a God-given 'protection state' to help you feel safe and sane. And yet many questions remain unanswered. A bit like the movie *A Star is Born* where Ally sings "I'll Never Love Again" at the story's end. She sings, *"I want to pretend that it's not true 'cause my world keeps turning and turning – and I'm not moving on"*. It's too early to move on – and good-meaning friends come and say, *"Everything happens for a reason"*. But you're annoyed by this simplistic statement – you still can't believe what has happened. You can't move on but you can slowly move to the next phase.

2. ANGER: This is not a bad anger. It's necessary to these five stages – a healthy element of grieving. Being angry with someone else or God for allowing death to come, is a mask to give protection to your mind. Anger here is perfectly normal, even if it appears irrational. It's messy and unpredictable. Sometimes it's easier to be mad than sad. But it is important to feel the emotion of anger, so it can be dealt with. Yes, it can be scary. But once you begin to face your anger, it will start to dissipate.

3. BARGAINING: This is closely related to anger – the 'what if' stage. "If only I had taken him to the doctor earlier" or "If only I had seen the signs". Or "Why did God allow this to happen?" Guilt does play a significant role in this bargaining stage. We want to go back in time and fix the issue – and we try to negotiate our way out of the inner pain and loss.

4. DEPRESSION is the fourth stage of loss. This type of depression is not a sign of mental illness – it's an appropriate response to a great loss. You may prefer to be on your own at home. That's OK. You may feel lonely, unable to talk, as you try to

adjust. But it's all too hard. And you may feel confused. When will this nightmare end? Again, this is a normal response.

5. ACCEPTANCE: This doesn't mean everything is alright or "I'm OK". No. It's about accepting the reality of what has happened, and *I have to continue living each day*. We will never like it – but, in time, we will learn to live with the new situation, and a new reality. Our past has been forever changed. I must learn how to live with this change. We slowly begin to live again. You will never forget that person. But the sun will come out again and you will move forward.

God did not take your loved one away to teach you something. A loving Father doesn't act that way. And He will restore your life, as you learn to embrace death and loss as the circle of life. On the cross Jesus prayed to His Father, "*Not my will, but Yours be done*". That was a wonderful moment of acceptance.

The apostle Paul said in Romans 8:27 that our Father "knows us far better than we know ourselves". In the midst of grief and loss, God is our greatest source of comfort and help. He knows what we need, far better than we do.