

Grief and Loss / He is Risen!

Carol: Well...you've got a big smile on your face. What's been happening?

Tammy: On the way here I met my friend Mary whose second baby was born this week on the way to the hospital.

Carol: On her way to the hospital!!

Tammy: Yes - her husband pulled over and got round to the back door of the car just in time to catch the baby popping out. Then they noticed they were parked by a tourist bus full of people who saw more on their trip than was planned!

Carol: I'm Carol, with you again for our second special Easter program. We're going to hear some more of the Easter story later and all that happened after Jesus died, but first...

Tammy: The baby was fine, breathing, but still attached by the cord so they laid him on his mother's belly and headed to the hospital to finish the process.

Carol: OH. Am I glad that wasn't me!

Tammy: Or me, but it made me think about being born while still attached; the baby had not fully separated from its mother. Hi, I'm Tammy – I'm so pleased to be with you again.

We don't often think about how we start life with the pain and loss of separating from the lovely, safe, warm womb we started in.

But we have Fran here today to share some thoughts with us about this kind of pain. She is a counselor and often talks with people who have lost something, or someone, important to them. Welcome, Fran.

Fran: Thinking about loss and grief, I was reminded of how we constantly move through that cycle of being attached and close, then separating, feeling sad about the loss, and then attaching again in new situations. It happens to all of us doesn't it? We may get close to a friend, then they move away – or we move away, and we find a new friend!

Tammy: It's strange to think of birth as the first separation in a long line of separations we will have in our lives. I guess like lots of things we have to finish something to be able to start new things don't we? Finishing is often difficult. Maybe that's why babies cry when they're born. It's sad separating from mum to start this life!

Fran: Yes. We're so looking forward to the start of life with a new baby we don't really think about the finishing of their secure life inside us.

Tammy: No we don't!

Fran: I think lots of finishings are like that. We would rather not think about the pain of endings so we just look ahead to the new start. I'm finishing a job soon and I find myself focusing on what I'm moving on to, so I don't have to think about the sadness of the people I will miss who I have been very close to for a long time.

Carol: I can understand that. We seem to talk about grief and loss in our lives over big stuff like deaths and tragedies but you are talking about everyday things like job changes or maybe moving to a new house.

Tammy: I've heard that saying: "it's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all."

It's easy to say, but I think it glosses over the pain of loss. For some people, losing loved ones causes such terrible grief that they never recover.

So, Fran, are you really saying grief and loss is a constant part of life?

Fran: That's right. In a way we can't talk about loss and grief without talking about the importance of relationships. We seem to accept grief when someone dies, but we are constantly experiencing grief in our lives...as we lose things, and people, that are important to us.

I believe we are designed by God to be close to others. We need others for our sense of well-being...to feel good about ourselves. In a good relationship we feel valued, important, loved, that we matter. When we lose someone with whom we have felt some of those good feelings, we miss them and feel sad.

In my culture we are taught to keep our feelings hidden so when there is loss we try not to show our sadness. That's really not healthy. I wonder if this happens in your culture?

Grieving a loss is a natural process with strong feelings that at times can overwhelm us. We may feel we'll never recover but if we let ourselves go through these feelings we will get to the place where we're ready to pick up and carry on with our lives. The memories and the good feelings in those memories live inside us, and are always there for us to go back to.

Tammy: So is grieving the same for all of us?

Fran: No, we will all do it in our own way and time, but there are some feelings we recognize as part of this process.

Let's think about someone who finds out they have a terminal illness. They are going to die. After the shock of finding out, a person may not be able to face what's happening, so they try to carry on as normal, almost pretending nothing has changed. They can't believe it's happening to them.

We call this denial and it's a way of coping while coming to terms with bad news.

As they realize it's true. They may get angry. Maybe they're cross with themselves if they feel they've done things to cause it; angry it's happening to them and often angry with God. They may say, "Why me?"

And they want to bargain with God or with others, "If I do 'this' will I get better?" Or to God: "If I live for you will you heal me?"

Carol: On Women of Hope today we're talking about grief and loss. Some time ago, you talked with us about depression. Fran is that part of grieving?

Fran: It may be. We've talked about denial and anger and bargaining. There may be a time when we have lost all hope and feel powerless. We can't get back what we have lost, maybe a loved one or good health or anything else that we value. This can be a dark and despairing place. Sometimes people get stuck here and develop depression. Then they may need some help. However, as we gradually accept that we are going to lose something or have lost someone. We begin to come to terms with that loss and make the choice to go on, to pick up and continue to build our life.

Carol: So for someone who's dying compared to someone who's struggling to live after a friend or partner has died, is the grief different?

Fran: In some ways, yes... but we may still experience some of the feelings we have just been talking about – denial, anger, bargaining. However, the way we cope depends on our personality as well as the circumstances we're facing.

I was thinking about my mother's slow death and how we were able to talk a lot together as she was dying. We said a lot of important things in that time so I was ready to accept her death before it happened.

This was quite different from when my friend was killed on a motorbike and it felt such a waste and I got really mad with God about it. It took much longer to reach a place of acceptance because I was so unprepared. I had lots of "if only" thoughts. Like, 'if only' she hadn't gone out on the bike that day she wouldn't have had the accident.'

Carol: So are there ways that we can help when someone suffers a loss?

Fran: There certainly are. The most important one is just being there and letting the person who is sad talk about it if they want to or not talk about it if they don't want to.

I heard a lovely story a while ago of a man who popped over to see his grieving neighbor whenever he saw him sitting on the back deck in the evening. They would watch the stars together often without saying a word. As summer was ending the neighbor said, "I think I can get on now. It's been good sorting out my memories with you."

Carol: Oh that was special - and because the neighbor sat with him – even though he didn't say much – the man was able to think about the person he'd lost sort out his memories!

Fran: Yes – but there are times when it is important to talk about the person or situation that has been lost. Often, particularly when someone has died, people stop talking about them don't they? They think that by not mentioning the one who's died, it's easier for the person who's sad. Actually the opposite is true. Talking and sharing memories of the one who has died is usually helpful.

Tammy: We've just been talking today on Women of Hope about the feelings we go through when we lose something, or someone, close to us.

Fran, I've often heard people say things like: "he should be over it by now", or "it's time she got on with her life and stopped feeling sorry for herself." I know the Bible says: "there is a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time for dancing" but how long does it take?

Fran: Well, Tammy, that's the big question! You're right that people often expect others to get over it quickly. We can accept people being sad for a short time, but then we expect them to return to normal. When there's a big loss in our life we don't return to normal if by normal we mean how we used to be. If my husband died I would never get back to being how I was. I would eventually move on and be the new me but I would be different. Loss changes us.

Tammy: So some people will take longer than others?

Fran: They certainly will. We can't hurry another person. Supporting someone in their grief – however long it takes them – is very loving.

Tammy: Do people grieve in different ways?

Fran: Yes, they do. Some of us grieve by keeping to ourselves for a while, spending time alone. Others throw themselves back into work and daily routines and try not to feel the pain, but that probably means they take longer to really work through a serious loss.

However, going back to routines can give us a structure that helps us cope when we feel everything is falling apart.

We can only do it in our own way and our own time. So it's important, as a friend, to stay alongside a grieving person and let them do what they need to do to cope.

Having said that, some people do get stuck in their grief and may need help from a counselor so they can move on.

Tammy: So, Fran, is grieving something we get better at with practice?

Fran: It sounds funny to talk of practicing grief...but you're quite right. If we grieve the small losses in our life well, in a sense we do practice.

However, some losses we are never ready for...and some people certainly seem to have more than their fair share of sadness and loss.

Tammy: What about children?

Fran: A very important question. When we are sad as children, and our parents support us well - that is good practice for the future.

Tammy: So how do we support them?

Fran: I think we can help our children to learn to handle loss by being there and allowing them to be sad about the losses in their life as they are growing up. Don't tell them not to cry – or not to be sad. I don't think grief ever gets easier but we do learn that we can get through it and recover.

Tammy: Thank you so much, Fran. I've learned so much today about grief and the different feelings we may experience denial, anger, and bargaining, then maybe depression and finally acceptance.

Carol: And the part I remember most is when someone is grieving the best thing we can do is just be there for them, stay their friend. Let them talk about it when they're ready.

Carol: You're with Women of Hope on our second special Easter program. Last week, we heard about how Mary, Jesus' mother, stood nearby and watched as her precious son died on a wooden cross. Imagine the grief and loss in her heart.

Have you suffered the death of anyone close to you? Someone you love? A child who has been taken away from you ahead of time or an adult you have lived with for years? You will know what the pain is like.

Tammy: Back in history, when Jesus lived on this earth, people were sometimes crucified if they had broken the law. It was a very terrible and miserable death. A cross was laid on the ground, to which the hands and feet were nailed. It was then lifted up and fixed upright, so that the weight of the body hung on the nails till the sufferer died in agony.

Carol: We can well imagine how Jesus suffered on that cross. But how painful it must have been for Mary, the mother of Jesus and also his disciples! And they would have felt so powerless to help him...just as you might have felt when you watched your loved one suffer.

(Details of the death and resurrection of Jesus are described in the following Gospel passages: Mark 15:33 to 16:8; Matthew 27:52 to 28:20; Luke 23:44 to 24:12; John 19:29 to 20:18)

Tammy: The Bible tells us that after Jesus died on the cross, they took his body and wrapped it, with fragrant smelling spices, in strips of linen cloth. This was the burial custom in those days. Now near the place where Jesus was crucified there was a garden with a new tomb, where no one had yet been buried. They laid Jesus' body in the tomb, rolled a big stone against the entrance, and went away.

The women, who had been watching all day, waited till they saw where Jesus was laid, and then went to their homes to prepare spices and perfumes. Jesus died on a Friday and nothing more could be done until after Saturday, the Sabbath day.

Carol: Here's part of the story from the Bible (NIV)

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.

So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

Tammy: They must have felt very confused. Two days before, they had watched as Jesus was nailed to the cross. They had seen him die. They had followed Joseph of Arimathea when he took the body of Jesus and wrapped it in the linen cloth and placed it in the tomb. There was no doubt in their minds that Jesus was dead.

Carol: Yes, and the women didn't come to the tomb that morning to anoint a live body, but a dead body. That's why they brought the spices, to help cover the smell of a decomposing body. But let's continue with the story.

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running.

When the other disciple reached the tomb, he bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally, the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.

Tammy: Just imagine how they must have felt? (Matthew 28: 5-7)

It's clear that the women and the disciples saw the empty tomb. Let's continue with the story...

Carol: Then the disciples went back to their homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb, crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." Then, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there...she thought he was the gardener.

"Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

She said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which means teacher)

Jesus said, "Don't hold onto me, because I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' "

Mary Magdalene ran off to find the disciples and told them the wonderful news:

"I have seen the Lord!" And she told them what he had said to her.

Tammy: Do you think the disciples believed Mary right away?

Carol: Oh I don't think so.

Tammy: As you listen to this story you might wonder...why did Jesus have to die?

Carol: Jesus went through all this misery and shame so that we might live forever. He died to take the punishment for the wrong things we've done.

Tammy: Mary and the disciples were amazed that day to find that Jesus had come alive again.

Carol: And the Bible tells us that Jesus still lives today...in heaven with his Father. Remember what he said to Mary?

He said, "Don't hold onto me, because I have not yet returned to the Father." Then he told her to find his brothers and tell them that he said: 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' "

We can find comfort knowing that if we believe in him, we too can live again, after we die here on earth. The Bible says too that in God's presence there will be gladness and joy...forever! (Psalm 16:11) Can you imagine

that? Never again will there ever be any lonely moments. No more crying in secret. No more grief and loss or pain!

Tammy: And to think if we believe in Jesus, the living God, we need not be afraid to die. We will be able to live in the presence of the Almighty God! Wow.

Carol: Jesus is alive!! This is the reason we sing and celebrate each Easter. As the angel at the tomb said, "You are looking for Jesus, who was crucified... He is not here. He has come alive!"

The women who saw Jesus die also saw him alive...and they believed. We can believe the witness of those who saw him. This is the Good News!

Tammy: And you know what? Even today you and I can experience the presence and power of the living God, as he comforts us in our grief and loss, as he listens to our prayers and answers them.

Let's say thank you to God for this new life that we can have in Jesus.

You can join me if you'd like to...

Father God, thank you for sending Jesus, your son, to this earth...to live here and then to die to take the punishment for the wrong things we've done. We thank you that we can celebrate this Easter that he came alive again...and that he lives with you in heaven. We pray for those who are grieving today. Please comfort them.

We ask in the name of Jesus, Amen

Carol: Please contact us if you would like to know more... or to ask any questions. You can write to us at Womenofhope@twr.org.

We look forward to being with you again soon. Bye for now...

Tammy: Goodbye and God bless you...

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