

We are here today to talk about loss and the grief that accompanies it.

Grief is the anguish we experience after a loss and the yearning for what was. Today we are mourning our loss and honoring our grief.

Grief is a natural response to a big change in life and not something to be feared or ignored. Grief is a unique emotion that is universal to all of us, yet each one of us will also experience it in a different way. In times of grief we can feel sadness, anger, desperation, numbness, and even small amounts of joy. There is no right or wrong way to grieve, there are no steps or tasks we can do to move through grief faster. We cannot logic our way through grief, we can only feel it. We feel Grief as anguish when we remember our loss.

Today, My hope for you is to never “get over” your grief, rather for your life to slowly grow it.

I am sure most of you have heard of Kubler-Ross’ 5 stages of grief, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. You may have even heard of Kessler’s 6th stage of meaning making. This is a great starting point of understanding the wide range of emotions that people feel. And there is so much more.

It is wonderfully typical to feel sadness at what is lost from your life and anger at the unfairness of it. We would all bargain for 5 more minutes with the person we loved or another chance to keep the health and autonomy we once had.

We may feel joy when remembering a fond moment, relief the person we love is no longer suffering and relief that we no longer have the burden of caring for that person. You can have moments when you are consumed by all you have lost, and moments where we forget our loss entirely. You may feel numb and like you are “just going through the motions” and not fully comprehend what you are doing.

These feelings do not come in stages and they do not predict what will happen next. One emotion does not lead to another and there is no end to grieving. In 5 years you may hear a

certain song and feel the sadness again. Someone may experience a loss similar to yours and the anger may arise again. This is typical, your body and your heart is remembering. You are not crazy. It's a reminder of your love.

Grief can be prolonged and it lasts for years, this is not a pathological psychosis, however I would strongly encourage you to seek counseling to help you cope with that suffering.

Sometimes grief can be masked. Think of a stoic person who does not like to feel or express emotion, they may go to the doctor for numerous ailments when nothing is ever found to be "wrong". Those emotions are suppressed, and they are coming out in physical ways to get the attention they need.

To tell you a little about myself.

When I was 24 my mother went into hospice care after living with breast cancer for 4 years. I quit my job and along with my father and brother, cared for her until she died at home. This is a defining moment in my life. The time spent caring for her, bathing her, putting lotion on her feet, sitting and holding her hand, are terrible, brutal, and beautiful memories I would not trade for anything. Glennon Doyle calls this feeling Brutiful and I think that fits perfectly. The Hospice team was there for us and provided wonderful peace and support while my mother died. My mother dying and the hospice experience was so profound and so positive, it changed me and led me down this path.

When we know a change is coming, we may experience anticipatory grief. This can make it hard to live in the moment and increase anxiety about the future. When I was taking care of my mother during her final weeks, The chaplain spent time with us, providing counseling while waiting for my mom to die. I was a newlywed, we were saving for house and not even thinking about children yet. This chaplain spent time with me processing the conversations and experiences I would never get to have with my mom. She gave me space and guided me to make the memories I wanted to have with my mom. To try and be as much in the moment as I could giving love and comfort to her.

To my dismay, I learned anticipatory grief does not take the place of grief after the loss. The weeks and months after she died, the heartbreak and anguish were overwhelming. I wanted to

skip this part, I felt I had already done the hard part. Then the first Thanksgiving came, then Christmas, then my birthday. I had a long way to go.

Anticipatory grieving can help abbreviate the grieving timeframe. When my grandmother-in-law died, she had dementia and did not know any family members anymore. My mother-in-law was sad her mom and died, however, she had also grieved the slow fading of the memories along the way. And, in some ways, the death was a relief. My mother-in-law's care-giving responsibilities were finished.

Sometimes our grief is delayed we cannot process our grief in the moment, there may be too much happening and other things can take precedence. In the same 6 months of my mother's death, My grandmother also died, my cousin completed suicide, and the family dog died. This was too much for my brother. The dog was more his dog, and he was close with this grandmother. This compounded grief led him run away to the mountains to find himself again. But first he needed to be an adrenaline junkie trying to escape the pain grief brings.

The secondary losses may also take time to kick in and be seen. My mom always did everyone's taxes, she was an accountant and helped us with all our finances. My father had to learn how to pay the bills, on time, and how to schedule his appointments. He became isolated because mom was no longer there to plan get-togethers with friends.

The way a person died may bring feelings of shame, like suicide or overdose, and this may push someone to feel disenfranchised of their grief. My Aunt and Uncle are still ashamed their son completed suicide 22 years ago and do not speak of him by name.

A death may also bring on a need to make change. My friend's brother died by an overdose of fentanyl, he probably did not even know there was fentanyl in whatever he took. My friend and her family have become advocates for narcan and encourage everyone to have a nasal spray on them in case of an emergency.

Grief can be minimized by those who do not understand the full impact of the loss. The loss may not be perceived as a big deal, such as a miscarriage or a pet's death. You can always get

another dog or have another baby. You may not feel allowed to grieve a death, such as an ex-spouse.

There may be disapproval over how you choose to grieve, that you are not doing it “right”. If you are more quiet in your grief, journaling your emotions in private, that family member who cries each family gathering may accuse you of not caring enough about the person who has died. That can be very hurtful.

Death is not the only thing we grieve. We grieve many different things in our lives. Yes, we grieve the death of special people around us. We also grieve the changes we experience over time. They may be deeply personal like the loss of a job, ability, or autonomy.

My father in-law was recently diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease. He was a physical man who played golf and enjoyed long walks, now he is tired all the time, shuffles when he walks, and is no longer able to drive. This loss of physical ability to do what he wants, and the autonomy to do it has been a tough pill to swallow. He misses playing in the back yard with the grandkids running around in the grass and driving himself to have breakfast with his friends. He is anticipating the time when he will not be able to take care of himself at all. This is not the future he has envisioned for himself, and he is grieving this loss.

Some may have generational grief over how their ancestors were treated, and the profound sadness of how they are still treated. We can grieve collectively and a group after a disaster as we did after 9/11 or vicariously when we see grief around us like so many of our first responders do.

Many of us are grieving our culture and heritage, feeling rejected and afraid at who we thought our neighbors are. There are those grieving the destruction of our environment and how the less fortunate in our world are treated.

These are all typical and deserve care and support

We can experience beautiful moments when a hoped-for change is coming. The exciting new job in a new city, your child growing up and moving out. There is joy in the change, however you may also grieve what you are losing such as friends, community, and routine.

Grief can be cumulative, and right now we need to watch closely for this one because of how much is happening in the world around us.

So how can we alleviate some of this anguish we feel because of our loss?

Today is a great example. Speaking the name of our loss, honoring our feelings, and remembering the good and the bad. Feeling comradery in these hard feelings together lessens the load and we feel less alone.

Creating rituals that maintain that connection to your loved one such as setting a place for them at special meals or having a small home shrine to speak with them when you want to.

Seeking supportive counseling when you feel the grief is too heavy. If the grief feels like it's too much, then it's too much. Finding that unbiased person to bring these feelings into the light can be freeing.

Most importantly, have compassion with yourself. You are doing the best you can right now in the moment. This is enough. When you have energy and the emotional bandwidth to do more, then do more. When you need to rest and recuperate, cocoon up and take time to heal. Follow your heart, not what someone else tells you to do. Your next step is exactly that, one step.

Presented by Michelle Schelle, Nov. 1, 2025 Commemoration of All Soul's Day, Mary of Magdala