

Grief at Lent

Lent is the forty day period that precedes Easter observed by many Christians. It is a time of spiritual introspection and self-examination that leads to renewed, stronger faith and a closer relationship with God. If you think about it, the personal reflection of Lent is rather like the soulful contemplation most of us experience at some time in our grief. **When we grieve, we look inward** - we see who we really are, what we're really made of, what it is we value, what it is we're holding onto. At the core of our inmost being we find whether our faith is a superficial ornament of life or the essential foundation on which all of life is built.

A few days after Ash Wednesday I was driving along trying to figure out why I wasn't feeling very attuned to Lent this year. As I paused to look inside my own heart, I realized that my sense of disconnection had to do with distractions – the daily care of a mother with Alzheimer's disease, the demands of business, the persistent state of being barely above the water line in my volunteer and personal commitments. My laundry list includes all the things of this world that often keep us from diving below our grief-battered surface to find what's still whole and what's really broken.

When we grieve - especially at Lent - sometimes it's sufficient simply to identify and acknowledge our distractions and pray that our mind, heart, and soul will find some deeper focus. Perhaps we make the spiritual effort to see the interplay of grief and Lent in our lives, or maybe we defer our soul-searching to a time when some balance and order return to life - when the muddle is less, when we have a clearer view of life, when we can breathe again. **There are no rules for Lent or grief.**

What I've found this year in daily Lenten moments is that I must direct my focus away from the distractions of life intentionally in order to be still, to rest, to listen. When I do, I find within my restless soul the unexpected residue left by grief, some ash and trash in desperate need of a good, vigorous cleaning. Often in the dark dampness of our grief a kind of emotional mold develops - the insidious kind, the kind that's not easily detected from the outside, yet we know it's there. In the wounded recesses of our heart, negativity, cynicism, guarded resentment, and protective pride can grow and flourish without our even being aware. If mold attacks our home, we test and assess, then launch a full-scale attack of remediation. In grief we need the will to put on our spiritual hazmat suit and purge our heart and soul of all that threatens our emotional and physical well-being, of all that blocks the way that ultimately leads us forward, beyond our grief.

At Lent and in grief we seek a deeper experience of the grace of God. Look within. God's grace is the love that destroys all our pride. This is Lent. As we grieve, we see more clearly that God's grace is the essence of love at work in our lives, the sacred gift that restores us and makes us whole.

And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen and establish you.

1 Peter 5:10-11

Keep me this day, O God, in the sufficiency of your grace.

Julie Yarbrough Beyond the Broken Heart offers spiritual grief and bereavement support with encouragement, comfort, and hope for those grieving the death of a loved one. As you journey through "the valley of the shadow of death," I hope this website and the Beyond the Broken Heart resources provide the comfort, support, encouragement you need to guide your way back to renewed hope and fullness of life. It is my prayer that you will experience both personal and spiritual growth as your broken heart is transformed through God's healing grace.
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<http://www.beyondthebrokenheart.com/blog/view/34/grief-at-lent>