

forgiving someone who has left or died.

*Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever, Amen.*

Forgiving means bearing them no ill-will. It does not mean forgetting. That is a further stage in the process of loving. Christians believe that we can be forgiven by God, a kind of cosmic/global forgiveness that releases us and gives us confidence to move forward with a clean slate. Do talk with a Christian you trust, and share your pain.

Hold on to memories



These are important. Listen to and share old stories⁷. Make a box of memory items to visit them when you want to. There will be a time when other things (clothes?) need to be passed on, for you to move on.

Bear with your family

Tensions can be raised when there is a death in the family. Remember all are bereaved and if children are grieving, do tell their school.

Pastoral care and funerals

The priest and some others are authorised by the Church of England to take Christian funerals. One of them will visit and want to hear your story and pray with you. They will offer pastoral support and offer to contact you after the funeral. With your help they put together a Christian funeral, possibly with music, poetry, eulogy, hymns, prayers, reading and address. The content is flexible.

Will my loved one go to heaven

Christians believe in life after death and that all of us fall short of perfection and one day will face the judgement of God for the landscape we have painted in our lives. Where we have made mistakes and not corrected them, where we have ignored both God and good, and gone our own way, when we have treated others badly, then we face the anger of God. However Christians are also convinced that, whilst we are guilty, our sentence is commuted to zero because of the mercy and love of God shown to us in the life of Jesus.

Behaviour and belief come into this. Some people believe in God but behave dreadfully, others behave well but reject God. Take the opportunities to improve your spiritual life, make yourself right with God. Christians claim a hope for the future and an assurance of love which helps speed through the times of grief.

Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief.³



Coping with grief

All of us, at some time or another, have to cope with grief. It may be the death of a

loved person, or the death of a pet, the break-up of a partnership or marriage, the end of a job or the breakdown in a relationship with a friend. All of these, and others, leave one with grief. Millions, every day are coping with new grief but you do not have to cope alone.

What does Christianity bring?

Christians believe that God's Spirit is alive in everyone and if you can begin to recognise that reality it will temper the feelings of loneliness. My mother used to tell me the words of an old hymn which said

With Christ in the vessel, I can smile at the storm.

Smiling through grief is not usual, but her point was that I should keep in mind the promise of God that nothing can ever separate us from God's love¹. Even in the darkest moments, we do not have to grieve alone.

Christians view death as a door to a new life⁴ and that God is actively healing our broken

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¹Rom 8:38-39, ²Psalm 23, ³Mark 9:24, ⁴Job 19:23-27,

⁵Psalm 139:7, ⁶Matt 6:9-13, ⁷Luke 24:13-24, ⁸Heb 11:1

world, so, even *in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil*² there is an eternal hope, bigger than the pain of grief⁵.

Loving doesn't stop when someone dies. It is just not returned in the same way any more. That's why grief takes time, because love does not die: typically a very close death takes two to five years to be able to move on. Don't be alarmed if you still hit the wall from time to time, many months later.



Beginning: shock and disbelief

I spoke to a couple who had lost their child and their overwhelming feeling was numbness. They could not believe it. Thankfully they were able to cry, because that can be a key relieving factor. They kept looking where the child would normally be, and expecting it all just to be a bad dream.

Sometimes we lose our rational thinking: 'I simply cannot accept the situation. I disbelieve it, particularly when I wake in the morning.' And sleep may not come easily. Absorbing the reality takes time and needs support from others. Supportive friends are important, but also space, and it may help to physically lift your shock from your body up to the God of love, several times every day.

*What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear*

*What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer
Oh what peace we often forfeit
Oh what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer*

Shock may take weeks or even longer before it surfaces. Sometimes busyness over funeral arrangements, emptying and selling houses, organising memorials, informing relatives takes over, and space to stop and deal with your own emotions is missing.

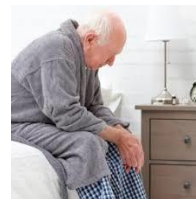
Maybe the realisation that life will never be quite the same again, only arrives when all the arranging is over and the hole in life becomes apparent.



And then: yearning

In all this there is a deep sense of sadness, tears, anger, aching for the person, and indeed there may be a physical pain, but in the pain of grief there are seeds of healing. You may feel you don't want to eat anything, or to eat too much; you may be permanently tired yet unable to sleep. You may want to dull the pain with smoking, drinking, drugs or medication.

Whilst a lot of this is normal, if you do feel you are not coping, or you are turning to a chemical solution, the time to get help is NOW. You must talk. Better to talk than circle down a spiral of depression.



And then: realisation

The hole appears and everything changes. You may feel fearful because you have to do things on your own that you have not had to do before, that the carpet has been pulled from under your feet, lacking confidence in your own ability to cope. Again recognising the presence of God in your life definitely helps. The most frequent command in the Bible is to 'fear not' which is easier if you have faith⁸.

Sometimes: anger and guilt

Why did God let this happen to me? (There is a leaflet on this). Why did X have to die, why didn't they try to live longer for my sake?

A woman, looking back over her life, asked the Lord a question: "As I'm looking down, I see two sets of footprints on the sand. But when life got tough I see only one set of footprints." "Tell me, Lord, why did you leave me in those difficult times?"

The Lord smiled, "Oh, my daughter, those were the times when I was carrying you."

Was there anything I could have done, did I do right, did I let them down. If only I had the opportunity to do or say ... before they went. I mourn the relationship that never was.

And, often, much needs forgiving

At the heart of the Lord's Prayer⁶ are words about forgiveness. Forgiving ourselves and forgiving others are both important, as is