

Understanding Grief – by Revd Paul Eddy

During the past week, many villagers have stopped me to talk about friends or neighbours who have died recently – on top of the griefs we have experienced from our much-loved church members. Sadly, it seems like we are going through a season of the valley here, and many are saying they feel ‘numb’, or in the ‘fog’ of grief.

A reoccurring comment this week has been how ‘surprised’ people have felt by their reactions to a loss – especially if they didn’t know the person well. For others, they have experienced several deaths in recent times and, in Bereavement Counselling language, that is called ‘Claw-Back’ grief. It’s where you have not have time to process one grief, and to start to learn to live without that person before another death hits you. The result is that you ‘claw back’ the unprocessed first grief to add to the grief of the present death. It’s why there is such a thing as ‘community grief’ where a smallish number of people (villagers) all experience the grief of deaths of fellow villagers at the same time due to multiple deaths or, of course, when a community event/tragedy strikes.

One elderly villager told me that they’d lost seven close and long-term friends over the past 12 months – they are coming to see me over a cuppa next week and I have encouraged them to call CRUSE the bereavement counsellors in Oxford 01854 245398, or in Swindon 0808 808 1677 for an appointment, by phone, Zoom or in person – for the cost of a donation.

For those villagers who have been surprised at their reaction I have outlined below some of the many emotions we can feel at a time of loss. We won’t all go through all of them, but any that are outlined on the Ball of Grief image are common, normal and will pass over time as we learn to live without the physical presence of the person who has died. I thought it might be helpful to outline some of these emotions which may help you or a villager with whom you can share this paper.

The Tangled Ball of Emotions

Grief is often described as a "tangled ball of emotions," where various feelings such as sadness, anger, confusion, and numbness intertwine. This metaphor, popularized by H. Norman Wright captures the essence of how grief can manifest in unpredictable ways. At times, you may feel a mix of emotions simultaneously, making it challenging to identify or articulate what you are experiencing. This complexity is a normal part of the grieving process, and it's essential to acknowledge that all feelings are valid.

Coping with Grief Emotions

Understanding that grief is not linear and can manifest in various ways is crucial for coping. Emotions may fluctuate, and it's common to feel overwhelmed at times. Here are some key points to consider:

Embrace All Emotions: Allow yourself to feel the full range of emotions that come with grief. It's okay to feel sad, angry, or even relieved at times.

Seek Support: Connecting with others who understand your experience can provide comfort and validation.

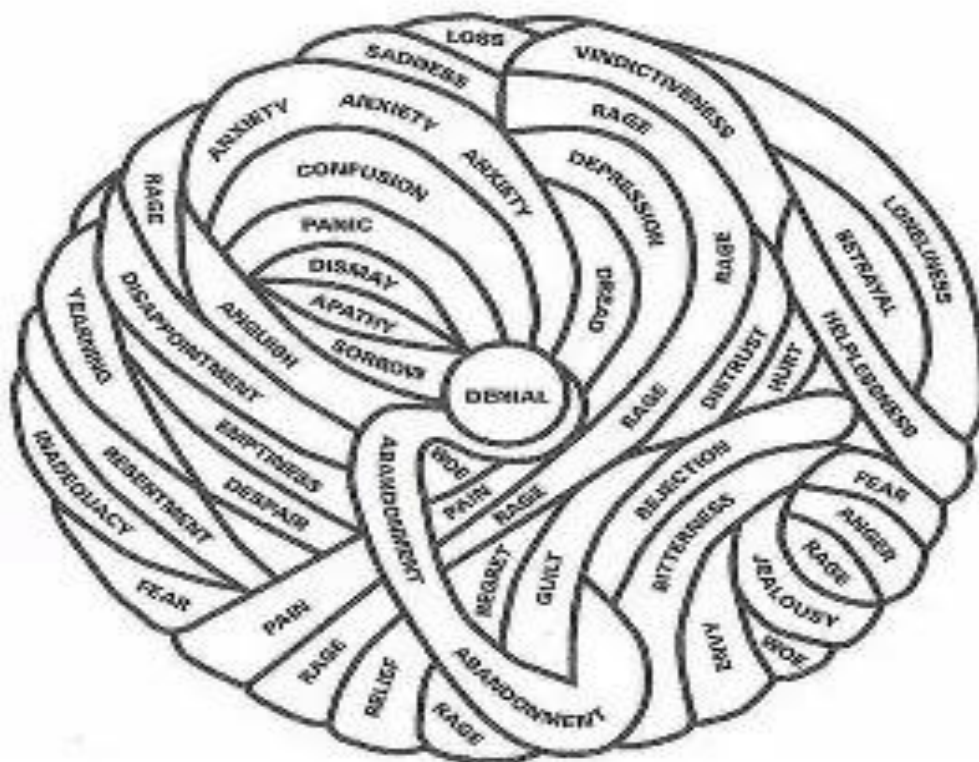
Practice Self-Care: Engage in activities that nurture your well-being, whether through physical exercise, creative outlets, or mindfulness practices.

Acknowledge the Journey: Recognise that grief is a personal journey, and there is no right or wrong way to grieve. Each person's experience is unique.

By using these analogies and strategies, individuals can better understand and navigate the complex emotions associated with grief, ultimately finding a path toward healing and acceptance.

BALL OF GRIEF

A TANGLED "BALL" OF EMOTIONS



Stages of Grief

A few words about the so-called 'stages' of grief. Firstly, we don't proceed from step one, to step two and onwards in an orderly pattern, and in equal stages. Many never experience some of the stages, others seem to get several stages at the same time or, in a different order to that set out below.

It's also worth remembering that the stages were developed by a psychiatrist who studied patients who had just been told they had terminal cancer, and the stages are those she observed in them between diagnoses and death. So the context of these stages are somewhat different to, say, if someone you love dies after a long and fruitful life. That said, it's helpful to note the stages and to know that how you feel at the time is 'normal' and, that you will move on - either through talking about the loss or, with support from others.



Conclusion

I hope that the above is a help to you, or to others grieving. Do reach out if you'd like to chat with me, or with Maz Galley, and do seriously consider calling CRUSE for independent support. Every blessing.

Revd Paul Eddy
Tel: 01367 710 267 Email: vicar@stdenys.org
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