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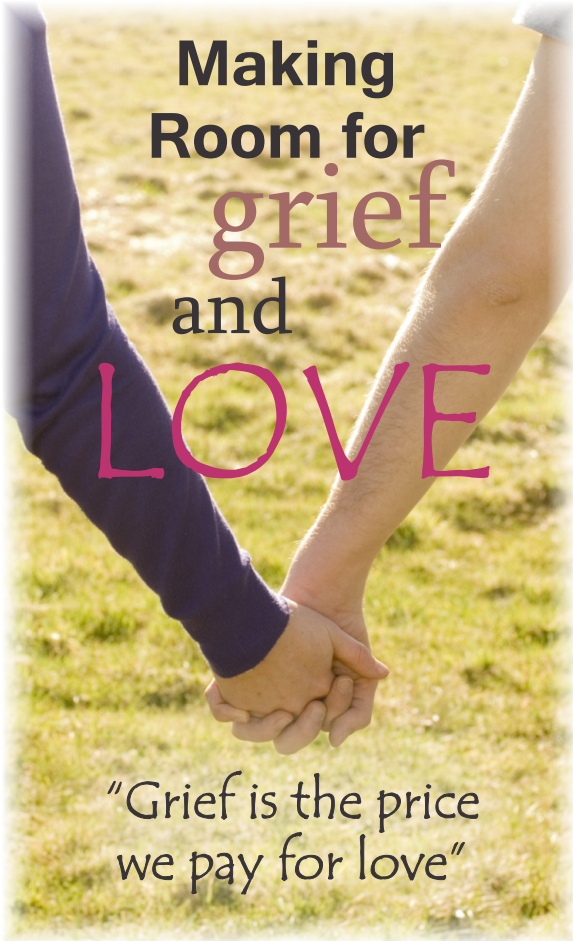
# {chapters}

*turning the pages through grief*

**T**hough the quote has been attributed both to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century British scholar, C.S. Lewis and to Queen Elizabeth II, the words still ring true, whoever first spoke them: "Grief is the price we pay for love." In an incredibly ironic sense, these words remind that grief is experienced when relationships are disrupted. To be sure, sometimes grief is more about longed-for qualities in a relationship that never materialized, but in any case, grief is determined by relationship.

So it makes sense that we hurt deeply when that relationship changes—abruptly or over time. You may love your home and the physical dwelling provides comfort and security, literally a "place to lay your head." So when the bank takes that home in foreclosure or the house burns in a wildfire, grief is a natural result. Loss is felt because there was a relationship with the object (the physical dwelling) and the meaning of that relationship (security, safety, history, and much more).

The death of a loved one brings about grief in like ways, even when the relationship was not "everything I hoped it would be." But over a longer time than most people realize, the bereaved person's life has to be "readjusted" to the "new normal," a



**Making  
Room for  
grief  
and  
LOVE**

*"Grief is the price  
we pay for love"*

life that no longer includes the physical presence and the regular interaction in this relationship.

So what can you do about grief and you make these readjustments? Here are some important ideas to include.

**First, remember that grief takes time.**

While some people adjust to loss quickly

and do not seem to be "any worse for wear," it is several months before many people begin to sense the grief fog lifting. Some specialists in grief have suggested that grieving people (and their families and friends) should expect the loss to hurt acutely at least through the first cycle of seasons, the anniversaries, holidays, and "firsts" of that long first year.

**Second, be mindful that grief is a process.**

Most people do not simply awaken one day to find life abruptly better and the feelings of sadness mysteriously gone. Rather, grieving people most often report a gradual lifting of the sadness over time with both good days and bad days along the way. Do not despair when you have a bad day; the ups and downs of bereavement are inevitable for most people. This is

**Fall 2012**

*"The depth of the feeling continued to surprise and threaten me, but each time it hit again and I bore it...I would discover that it hadn't washed me away."  
~Anne Lamott*

# {Q & A}

## My late father keeps popping into my head at odd moments out of the blue. Is this normal?



Yes, it is quite normal to think about your loved ones who have died during the course of your everyday life. There will be things that remind you of them—a song, a joke, a certain event, of special moments you shared, and at times nothing at all will trigger thoughts of those who have passed. People, especially a parent, may always be with you on some level in your subconscious. There is no need to try and block that person from your mind in an attempt to “move on.” Acknowledge that you just thought of him and let your thoughts settle on whatever you are feeling at that time. You can honor his memory by enjoying these unbidden moments of remembrance.

*The Heart of Grief: Death and the Search for Lasting Love* by Thomas Attig (Oxford, 2000).

With his lyrical style of storytelling, Tom Attig has brought comfort and encouragement to the grieving heart. Perhaps the greatest value of this book to grieving people is the multiplicity of stories Attig has shared, stories from the lives of other grieving people. The idea is not to “compare tales,” because no one's experience of grief really compares to that of another.

However, reading the stories of other people, learning from the ways they made sense of their individual losses accomplishes at least two important goals. First, these stories gently remind us that these people survived—and even thrived in spite of grief, reminding readers that we can, too. But the brief stories of others provide signposts on our own journeys through grief, offering landmarks and ideas for making sense of our own losses. The stories of others in grief do not provide a roadmap or a GPS with turn-by-turn instructions; instead, the stories of others provide pictures of the directions others have followed, the words they found helpful, the explanations with which they grappled.

In his introduction, Attig promises, “I want to show you what it means for us to hold someone in our hearts by describing ways in which loving give-and-take can and does continue after another dies. Those who have died give us the legacies of their lives. We, in turn, give them places in our hearts, places at the vital centers of our lives alongside everyone and everything else we hold there” (p. 6). In *The Heart of Grief: Death and the Search for Lasting Love*, Attig delivers on this promise.

### bookmarks

#### ...Love, from front

one reason a journal is helpful; you will be amazed upon reading present journal entries in six months or a year.

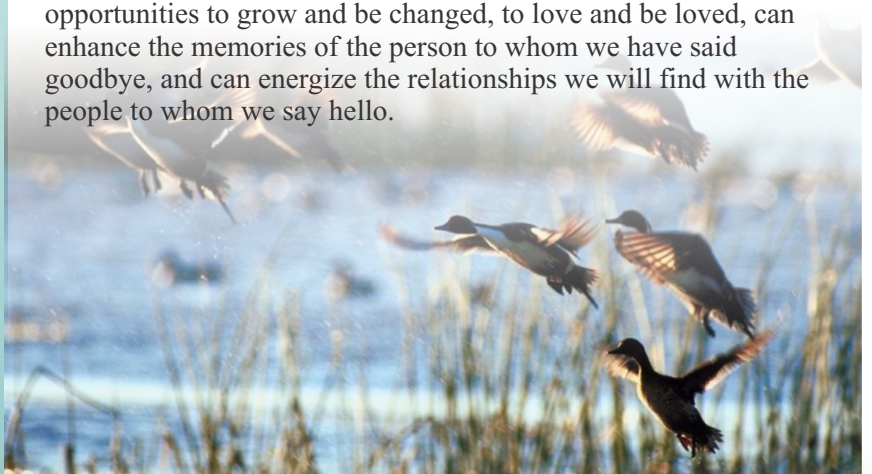
#### Third, develop a balanced life.

Watch what you are eating, and with your doctor's permission, seek to increase your exercise. Physical well-being makes a positive difference in grief, as does developing thinking skills, seeking spiritual growth and discovering new things. Your memory and ability to focus might have temporarily vanished, so you will probably find that reading short amounts and writing brief accounts will be easier than trying to read an entire book—or even chapter—at one sitting.

#### Fourth, connect with others.

Join a bereavement support group, seek the care of a supportive community of family and friends, talk to a clergyperson, or make an appointment with a mental health professional. Whatever you do, work hard to not isolate yourself. We all need time alone, but no one is helped by excessive withdrawal. Connect with supportive others who will encourage you in the grief journey without telling you that you simply need to “move on.”

Grief is a price to be paid, for sure. But it is also an opportunity for growth. Grieving people often report that, in spite of the sadness of the loss, their lives have been positively changed. New opportunities to serve, new relationships to discover and new challenges to face all make us into the people we will become in our grief. None of these “growth points” makes the loss worthwhile, nor do they make the pain any less. However, these opportunities to grow and be changed, to love and be loved, can enhance the memories of the person to whom we have said goodbye, and can energize the relationships we will find with the people to whom we say hello.



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Fall  
2012

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