

Grace Grief Notes

A Word From Chaplaincy

Thirty-eight years ago in the middle of February, Frances and I were sitting on top of a lush green hill overlooking the Buddhist monastery of Lantau Island off the coast of Hong Kong. I was a teacher in Hong Kong at the time and Frances was the 12 year old daughter of a Swiss couple who were my

Special points of interest:

- Coping with the Loss of a Spouse
- Book Review: It's Ok That You're Not Ok
- Volunteering Opportunities

friends. That day her parents had not wanted to hike up the hill, so Frances and I took off and up we went for a better view of our beautiful surroundings. I loved being with Frances. In my opinion, she was a little mystic who knew how to be still in the majesty of nature. She loved pink flowers and bunnies and could easily paint them.

As we quietly sat there, Frances said to me, "When Buddhists die, do they go to heaven?" Treasuring her thoughts, I asked, "What do you think, Frances?" Her reply, "I think they do. God loves all people." Two weeks later on February 28, 1981, I received the worst phone call of my life. It was Frances' mother. She was sobbing uncontrollably. "Frances just died," she cried. My initial response was disbelief and shock. Unfortunately, unbeknown to them, a faulty hot water heater had leaked carbon monoxide into the bathroom when Frances was taking a bath.

For a long time afterward, I felt as if I were living in a nightmare of sadness, anxiety, and depression. And I was bewildered about God? Why would God allow such a perfect child to die? Later, when I read [A Grief Observed](#) by C.S. Lewis, I felt an odd comfort in knowing someone else had experienced similar feelings in grief. After his wife died, Lewis described God this way, "Go to Him when your need is desperate. . .and what do you find? A door slammed in your face. . . . After that, silence."

I went to seminary because of Frances. I was on a quest to discover who God really is. I studied the phenomena of loss and grief because of Frances. And because of Frances, I was reminded that "God loves all people" especially, I might add, people who are grieving. In hospice, almost daily, I am reminded that even tears can reflect the light which comes through the [open](#) door of heaven. Still, every February 28, my heart aches from missing a little girl who was such a precious gift to this world.

Chaplain Bonnie Nash

If you would prefer to receive this newsletter electronically, please contact Jessica Steele at jgsteel@gracecaring.org.

Coping with the Loss of a Spouse

Grief is arguably one of the most difficult things a human can experience. Oftentimes in life, individuals face many losses that perpetuate grief such as the loss of a job, pets, dreams, and unfortunately people in our lives who we love the most. Those who have encountered the grieving process know it is as unique as the individual themselves. While recognizing the distinctiveness of grief, it is important to acknowledge that not all losses we experience will be grieved in the same way. This can be due to an endless number of factors including; life circumstances, nature of the death, age, support system, relationship with the deceased, and much, much more. Many individuals who have gone through the loss of a spouse become involved in a mourning process that differs from what they have felt with previous deaths due to the intimate relationship you shared and the potential responsibility to now take on new roles.



With the loss of a spouse, there is no doubt that your world has completely changed.

You may be feeling numb, sad, angry with them for leaving you, scared, shocked, etc. All of these emotions are normal and valid. There is no order or timeline when it comes to grief. You may feel like you lost your best friend, your go-to system of support, and/or, the person who truly knew and understood you. While processing the death of a spouse, even the simplest daily tasks may begin to pose difficulty and you may be looking for some additional resources on how to manage with this massive change in your life. Some ideas to assist you with coping with this significant loss are as follows:

Join a Grief Support Group: It may feel beneficial for you to speak with other individuals who have lost a spouse.

Take Care of Yourself: Do your best to ensure you are getting enough food, sleep, and exercise.



Rethink Making Major Decisions: It may be a good idea to avoid making big decisions, such as moving, quitting a job, etc. until you have had more time to process the death of your spouse.

Grief of Others: Remember, others around you, such as children, grandchildren, friends, etc. are grieving the loss as well, but the way they grieve may differ from you, and that's okay.

Faith Community: If you are a member of a faith community, don't hesitate to reach out and ask for prayers or support.

Professional Help: Try not to be afraid of seeking a therapist or counselor. Some individuals find talk therapy to be helpful in processing their emotions.

Time: Grief creates a rollercoaster of feelings and emotions. We all grieve at different paces and create our own timelines.

Additional Resources:

- ♦ <https://what-syourgrief.com/grieving-death-spouse-significant/>
- ♦ <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/mourning-death-spouse>

"Grief is praise, because it is the natural way love honors what it misses."

-Martin Prechtel

Grace Hospice Book Review

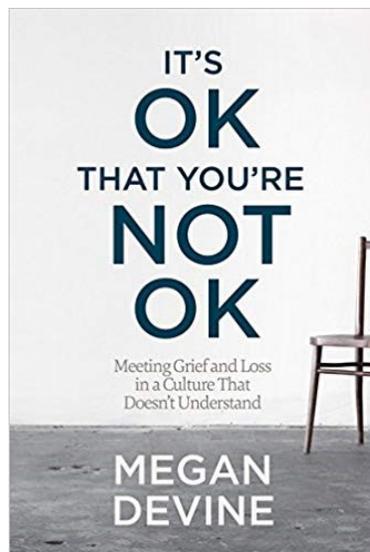
By: Jessica Steele, MSW, LGSW
It's Ok That You're Not Ok: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture That Doesn't Understand
 Copyright 2017 by Megan Devine

In a very candid and honest approach, the author of *It's Ok That You're Not Okay*, speaks about her life following the unexpected death of her husband, and highlights some of the unhelpful comments and suggestions that were made to her in the midst of her early grief. As both a therapist and a widow, Devine provides unique perspectives based off of both research and personal experiences. She breaks her writing up into four main sections which focus on different components of grief and societal perceptions. Grief and loss happens to everyone and with that comes a lot of misunderstanding and displaced emotions. Devine speaks to the difficulty in not knowing how to ask for help during the grieving process, while still knowing that help is desired and needed. An emphasis is placed on the goal of this book so that readers are not misled as to the power of the author. Devine states, "This book is not about fixing you, or fixing your grief...This book is about how you live inside your loss" (p. 8). It is clearly deciphered starting from the very beginning that no one has all the

answers when it comes to bereavement. While grief is not something that can simply be fixed, it is something that can be tended to. Pain after the loss of a loved one, is a normal and healthy response, even though it hurts. Although no one can take the pain away from you, it is possible to reduce the amount of suffering, and it is essential to recognize the difference between the two. Suffering tends to occur when our feelings are being dismissed, we're feeling unsupported, we aren't getting enough sleep, or enough to eat, etc. Suffering is also what can cause those feelings of fear or anxiety. These are the topics that can be addressed and assist you in living inside your loss. Devine openly discusses and shares about all of those themes and provides suggestions on how to cope,

through a variety of exercises and/or activities. She provides phenomenal insight on unspoken truths related to death, love, and the healing process. The significant theme of society's lack of understanding related to grief is prevalent throughout the duration of this reading. Devine touches on the cultural idea that an individual should "move on" after a designated amount of time. She shares that acknowledgement of a substantial loss is the only real medicine there can be for grief, but that it is often overlooked by society, and even by those who we love the most. The author does a beautiful job in helping readers find a sense of normalcy in what feels like such an abnormal time, and creates a safe space for readers to explore their grief emotions. This book can be a great read for those navigating the turbulent waters of grief and delivers the friendly reminder that, "You're not crazy. You're grieving. Those are very different things" (p. 130).

"This book is not about fixing you, or fixing your grief...This book is about how you live inside your loss."



Grace Hospice

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The mission of Grace Hospice is to serve God by recognizing that every person deserves to live out his or her life with respect and dignity, free of pain, and in an environment that promotes quality of life.

Interested in Volunteering?

As you may be aware, we offer volunteer services to our patients and their families. Most of our volunteers come to us because they know first-hand about the comfort and support these volunteers provide to others. If you or someone you know would like an opportunity to give back to the hospice program, we encourage you to consider volunteering for Grace Hospice.

Our volunteers can visit patients and families, offer short respite for families needing to attend appointments, bake cookies or special treats, make phone calls, read mail or books

to those who can no longer make out the fine print, watch movies, play games,



or simply be a comforting presence. We invite you to consider putting your talents to use by helping those that need a little extra support.

Please feel free to contact Sarah Matthews, the volunteer coordinator for Grace Hospice, if you are interested in becoming a hospice volunteer, or learning more about our Hospice Volunteer Program. You can reach Sarah by phone at 612-843-6816 or by email at smmatthews@gracecaring.org.