

Insights Learned Thus Far

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Shortly after my dad passed away, I began adding new items to the website, but I never realized how the site would be used or what shape it would take in regards to its development. In addition I never imagined how many visitors would stumble upon the site. Hearing others share their specific loss with me has certainly been helpful as I struggle to make sense of my new reality. This connection allows me to see that I'm not alone and that others share a similar journey.

Early on, I pointed out that I was in no condition to extract any lessons from my dad's passing away. It was too premature and even now, it's only been one year. I have learned some things already, but this process of gleaning key insights will be a lifelong one. It's a process everyone must, unfortunately, face at some point in their lifetime.

Pain can be one of the most productive learning tools if you're open to learning from such an experience. Of course I would prefer having my father alive over learning about loss and grief at this time of my life; however, I can't change the events that happen around me. I can only change myself and what resides within my heart.

In light of this I've chosen to not let bitterness become my central focus; instead, I've decided to acquiesce to the process and search for what God wants to deposit within my life. God had reasons for allowing my father to leave this life which are questions that will always be unknown to me, at least in this lifetime. Without trying to address why I've come to that conclusion here, in this reflection, I simply want to focus on a few insights I've learned over the course of one year, some which I may have stumbled upon; others came from talking with those who experienced a similar

loss. If you have lost a close loved one, hopefully there may something here which may help you as you search to move forward with your life.

I feel quite alone in this new journey I'm on. No longer do I have my father's insights, his experience, and sound wisdom to lean on. Then again, I've learned from my parents the importance of going directly to God first, for wisdom and, then, to trusted individuals especially when I must make a major decision.

Please realize these are things I've learned since my father died. If you're just beginning this journey, some of these things would not be appropriate for you and they may even appear insensitive. I recall feeling that way at certain times.

About a month after the funeral was over, we decided to join a group that focused specifically on grief. The group was large and the stage at which each person was at made it quite uncomfortable at times, since some individuals had lost their loved ones a few years back. These specific individuals talked with hope, almost to the point that their pain was somehow gone. Inside, I was numb and filled with disbelief as were most in that room. I couldn't see any hope nor could I join in their so-called optimism. At times it even made me angry and their input felt insensitive, even though I don't believe they ever meant to be. I sincerely believe they were trying to offer some form of encouragement to us, but I wasn't ready to hear it at that stage of my grief.

With this article, I'm only sharing things I've learned thus far, which, in my opinion isn't a long time. But I want to share them with you because I feel they are honest and could be helpful. Some of these things may hurt as you read them, but, on the other hand, some of these things can normalize certain thoughts, feelings, or behaviors you're struggling with. I would also stress that with each point, don't just read one and go to the next one. Read one, digest it a little, and then come back to it later on and re-read it again. You may even consider praying about each point and

see if there might be something that is pertinent to you at that point in your phase of grief.

Well, I pray there may be something for you which may help you along your own personal journey of loss. Even if there is nothing you glean from this, realize you're not alone.

Your fellow sojourner,

Justin

1. Focus on the "knowns," not the unknowns.
2. Grief is cyclical, not linear.
3. Allow yourself time to mourn.
4. Find others who share similar losses.
5. Don't seek simplistic answers to very complex questions; you won't get them. However, it's very normal to want answers.
6. After the funeral is over and everyone is gone, you will sense grief like you hadn't felt before, a feeling that you're all alone.
7. Remember things aren't normal; then, don't live as if they are.
8. You are permanently changed. You view life much differently than others.
9. You will gain a new sensitivity to those who have lost a close relative.
10. Take one day at a time.
11. Life is very fragile.
12. Don't say, "I'll do that in 10 years." You may not have that opportunity.
13. Each day you have is truly a gift given. Don't waste it.
14. Just when you think you're moving on, grief will re-surface at the most unusual times. It's ok.
15. Men typically run from their grief, most often through their work.
16. Women tend to talk about grief through their network of relationships.
17. You will experience a variety of feelings. Allow the process to take its course.
18. Don't try to replicate what you used to do, especially for the holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries. It only heightens the awareness of your loss.
19. Keeping busy isn't dealing with your grief; it only prolongs it.
20. Don't compare yourself to others. Mourning is unique to each individual.

21. When someone tells you they understand when they haven't experienced a loss similar to yours, just forgive the person. They really don't understand.
22. Seek small opportunities for change to take place in your life. Don't rush into "moving on."
23. Be honest with yourself and tell God how you really feel. He's big enough to handle your venting, your anger, and understands you more than you know yourself.
24. It's not a bad thing to say you're depressed. However, prolonged despair should be addressed at some point.
25. Journaling is a great way to get those feelings inside - out.
26. Counseling is not a bad thing. Don't see yourself as one who has a problem, but someone who wants to grow.
27. Participating in a group that focuses on grief allows you to find others who have a common ground.
28. Forgetting obvious tasks, leaving things undone, and neglecting to do something important will happen more often than you want. Don't feel embarrassed.
29. Trusted friends are God's gifts to you. Appreciate them, love them, and thank them.
30. It's ok to feel out of place in large settings, special events, or things you once shared with your loved one.
31. Try to focus on what is good about the person you lost. Find things you're thankful about them and their life. What things can you learn from them that you can pass on to your loved ones or others that come across your path?
32. Death can be the end of or the beginning of life. It's really a matter of perspective (very personal and birthed out of my Christian faith).
33. Even when you don't feel his presence, anchor your broken life in God's. (very personal)
34. Someone who just listens to you can be the best form of healing.
35. Respect your feelings, even as awkward as they may be.
36. It's very easy to get into ruts, places where we get stuck. When that happens, try something new, even when you don't feel like it. (This comes with time).
37. Exercise is a wonderful way to deal with stress. You won't feel like it at first, but it really is amazing how much better you will feel.
38. Even in your brokenness, find opportunities to touch the life of another. Don't try something huge. Just saying thank you is a huge form of giving. (You'll know when those times come. Don't rush into this.)
39. Moving forward doesn't mean you're disrespecting your loved one. In fact, you're probably honoring them more than you think.
40. Humor is very important. Allow this to be a part of your healing.

41. Grieving is not simply crying over your loss; it's also talking about what you're going through.
42. Grieving can provide an immense opportunity for growth.
43. New losses only highlight the loss of your loved one.