

July 21, 2020

GRIEVING HEALS

Dear Friends,

I've had a dear friend for over 30 years who visits quite frequently, but like everyone else, he has been unable to visit for months due to the lockdown. He is a monk, a friar really (there is a subtle difference) and even though he lives in a monastery with other men, he spends the bulk of his time alone. Thus, he often (quite often) talks to himself. He was able to visit last week for the first time since February and we were thrilled to finally be together. For two days I kept saying, "What did you say?" and he kept saying, "Oh sorry I was talking to myself." Just before he left I told him, "You know, you spent more time talking to yourself than to me don't you?" Because he is very funny and sharp witted, he of course responded by saying, "Well I guess I'm better company!" We laughed all the way as he walked to his car.

In today's reflection from Dr. Wolfelt in *Grief One Day at a Time*, he talks about our self-talk and how in grief it can often be self-defeating. Quite often in early grief especially, we tell ourselves that we will never be ok again, that we will never have any joy or laughter again, that life will be impossible without our loved one... We often judge ourselves and our feelings by thinking we need to be feeling differently, that we are somehow weak because of our grief. We tend to beat ourselves up with negative self-talk, as if we don't have enough pain. We often pile more pain on top of our existing pain with the stinkin thinkin that we are no good, unworthy, somehow to blame,- that we could have done more, should have done something, that we failed in some way, that we are responsible, that we could have prevented all of it.... Wolfelt says, "It's understandable the way we sometimes talk to ourselves. We're broken, yet we live in a culture that sees grief as illness and mourning as weakness."

No matter how much grief counselors or facilitators may remind people in early grief that it will evolve, it will change, it will soften, - it usually makes very little difference. These are things that we all need to find out for ourselves because early on we are so convinced that this 'condition' is permanent. In grief, it seems, that it is only in experiencing all these things that it

does evolve and eventually soften, but you can't get to the healing place without first experiencing the harsh reality of the pain, anguish and all the difficult and confusing feelings that come before it. Wolfelt goes on to say, "We can't change the death. But we can change how we talk to ourselves about it." Try to catch yourself when you find that you may be judging yourself or your feelings. Let yourself be ok with being sad, angry, tired, lonely, and depleted. Also try to let yourself be ok if you have a moment of forgetting about the loss; a moment of laughter or joy... often we judge these feelings too with guilt or shame. I find it helpful to have a mantra- a mantra is simply a repeated phrase or prayer or meditation that runs through our heads. A positive mantra such as: "I am eventually going to be ok," or "I can and will get through this, countless others have, so can I," or "I am loved," or "Give me strength," or "I am stronger than I know," can be very helpful. I think it's best to try to find your own mantra and make it your own by repeating it to yourself over and over.

I wish I could say there were an easier way through grief, but there is no easy remedy or solution, there is no pill or magic wand. As we have said so many times before, the only thing that heals grief is to grieve. But in your grieving, I hope you can be like my friend and feel free to talk to yourself as much as you want or need to. I'm quite sure that many, if not most of us, have mastered the 'talking to yourself thing' during this time of lockdown and isolation. But as we move forward, try to make sure that you are nice to yourself as you do it. Be compassionate, gentle, kind, loving and most of all patient with yourself and with your grief. You are not ill, you are not crazy. You are grieving. Try to let yourself be ok with that for now (we really have no other choice).

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Peace and Serenity, Kevin