

## *Fear Itself*

**“No one ever told me that grief felt so much like fear.”**

C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

How can someone be here and then not? Even after all my losses, I still can't wrap my head around it. How can someone be here and then not? When this becomes a reality it makes everything questionable... *What is going to happen now? How will I survive this? How will I go on? How can I bear this pain? Will I ever laugh again? Will this happen again to the people I love? Am I going crazy? Will I forget her? Will I ever see him again?*

We can be so afraid to face life without our loved ones that we, in a sense, can stop living as well. Often the trauma of our loss can make us feel like the world is no longer a safe place.

Fear is a huge part of grief. The death of someone we love can be so shattering, so devastating and shocking, so life-altering, that it can often make us quite afraid of many things, even life itself. We can so fear the future that we don't want to move into it. We can so fear the present that we want to run away from it.

**“Grief feels like fear because it leaves you reeling in uncertainty.”**

Pat Schwiebert, R.N., *Fear and Grief*

One thing that loss teaches us is that we are powerless over life and death. This feeling of powerlessness can permeate all aspects of life, even those over which we do have some control.

The fear of facing life, or the future, can stop us in our tracks and paralyze us for a time or for the remainder of our time here. This is one of the reasons I so appreciate the *Serenity Prayer*, a short meditation that can be a very helpful GPS as we navigate through loss.

***God, Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change.***

Before we can reach serenity, which is the removal of our fear, we need to get in touch with the things which we are wrestling with ***that cannot be changed.*** When we finally come to the realization that the battle is fruitless and unwinnable, which can take some time (*it's different for everyone*) we can begin to gather ***the courage to change the things we can,*** and perhaps begin to experience ***the wisdom to know the difference.***

**“Courage doesn’t happen in the absence of fear. It happens because of fear. Courage is refusing to let fear win. Courage is reclaiming one’s life in the midst of the rubble that loss leaves behind. Courage is saying ‘yes’ to life even if one’s heart is pounding.”** Pat Schwiebert, R.N. *Fear and Grief*

As if we are not in enough pain, our brains can sometimes reach out for more, like when we feel guilty for a brief moment in which we feel like we are forgetting. We can easily be frightened and convinced by the *stinkin thinkin* voice of grief that we are actually capable of forgetting our loved one. This is impossible. Yet grief can make us feel that we are somehow betraying our loved one by being disloyal to the acute, constant pain and heaviness that we have been carrying. This can happen when a smile suddenly and involuntarily forms on our face, or when we catch ourselves laughing (God forbid!).

**“The fear that we are forgetting. This compounded by the fear that we have not grieved enough, hurt enough, been in pain enough, mourned enough...loved enough. The dangerous misconception is that, if we had truly loved enough, if we were adequately honoring the memory of our beloved, we should never, ever, even for a split second, be free of the pain...”**Susan Arlen, M.D., *Bereavement Magazine*

The pain needs to subside. We need the relief and the release. We cannot live the remainder of our days in the acute, chronic, constant pain of early, raw grief. Most of us spend some time there, but we are not meant to stay there forever.

None of us needs to do this brutal work of grief alone, it's way too frightening. We need to mourn, we need to let it out, we need to release, and we need to let others help us along the way, all the way.

We are still here, and we deserve to live. I pray that our fear can be transformed into hope and serenity.

**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**

*Kevin J. Keelen*  
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