

Touchstone #9 For Hope and Healing Your Heart; Seek Reconciliation, Not Resolution
Adapted from: Understanding Your Grief by Alan D Wolfelt, PhD

"Mourning never really ends. Only as time goes on, it erupts less frequently." Anon.

How do you ever find your way out of the wilderness of your grief? You don't have to dwell there forever do you?

The good news is no, you don't have to dwell there forever. But just as with any significant experience in your life, the wilderness will always live inside you and be a part of who you are.

A number of psychological models describing grief refer to "resolution" or "recovery" as being the destination of your grief journey. You are probably already aware that your grief journey will never end. People do not "get over" grief. A total return to "normalcy" after the death of someone loved is not possible – we are all forever changed by the experience of grief.

Reconciliation

is probably a more appropriate term for what occurs as you work to integrate the new reality of moving forward in life without the physical presence of the person who died. With reconciliation comes a renewed sense of energy and confidence, an ability to fully acknowledge the reality of the death and a capacity to become re-involved in the activities of living. There is also an acknowledgement that pain and grief are difficult, yet necessary parts of life.

As the experience of reconciliation unfolds, you will recognize that life is, and will continue to be, different without the person who died. Changing the relationship with the person who died from one of presence to one of memory and redirecting one's energy and initiative toward the future often takes longer – and involves more hard work – than most people are aware of. We, as humans, never resolve our grief, but instead become reconciled to it.

We come to reconciliation in our grief journey when the full reality of the death becomes a part of us. Beyond an intellectual working through the grief, there is also an emotional and spiritual working through. What had been understood at the "head" level is now understood at the "heart" level.

Reconciliation doesn't just happen. You reach it through intentional mourning by:

- talking it out
- writing it out
- crying it out
- thinking it out
- playing it out
- etcetera....!

To experience reconciliation you must be prepared to go "through" your grief. You don't get to go around it, or transcend it, you must go through it. And while you are going through it, you must express it if you are to reconcile yourself to it.

You will find as you achieve reconciliation, the sharp, ever present pain of grief will give rise to a renewed sense of meaning and purpose. Your feelings of loss will not completely disappear, yet they will soften and the intense pangs of grief will become less frequent. The unfolding of this journey is not intended to create a return to an "old normal" but the discovery of a "new normal".

Signs of Reconciliation

As you embrace your grief and do the work of mourning, you can, and will be able to demonstrate the majority of the following:

- a recognition of the reality and finality of the death
- a return to stable eating and sleeping patterns
- a renewed sense of release from the person who has died. You will have thoughts about the person, but you will not be preoccupied with these thoughts
- the capacity to enjoy experiences in life that are normally enjoyable
- the establishment of new and healthy friendships
- the capacity to live a full life without feelings of guilt or lack of self-respect
- the drive to organize and plan one's life toward the future
- the serenity to become comfortable with the way things are, rather than attempting to make things as they were
- the versatility to welcome more change in your life
- the awareness that you have allowed yourself to fully grieve, and you have survived
- the awareness that you do not "get over" your grief; instead you have a new reality, meaning and purpose in your life
- the acquaintance of new parts of yourself that you have discovered in your grief journey
- the adjustment to new role changes that have resulted from the loss of the relationship
- the acknowledgement that the pain of loss is an inherent part of life resulting from the ability to give and receive love

Reconciliation does not come in one great moment of "arrival", rather in subtle changes and small advancements that are not always noticeable at the time. It is helpful to have gratitude for even very small steps forward. If you are beginning to taste your food again, be grateful. If you mustered the energy to meet your friend for lunch, be grateful. If you finally got a good night's sleep, rejoice!

*"There was no sudden, striking and emotional transition.
Like the warming of a room or the coming of daylight, when you first notice them
they have already been going on for some time."
C.S. Lewis*

Of course you will take some steps backward from time to time, but that is to be expected. Keep believing in yourself. Set your intention to reconcile your grief and have hope that you can, and will, come to live and love again.

If you would like more information on any of our programs,
or would like to arrange for bereavement support for yourself or a family member, please contact:

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