

How can I find relief?

From *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance*, the award-winning book from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans

Practical suggestions

Maintain a daily routine.

Consistency becomes important in relieving stress. Try to get six to eight hours of sleep a night. On the days you can't sleep, at least rest. Try to eat three meals a day. On days that food doesn't sound good, try to eat at least something.

Use faith resources.

God has provided a variety of resources to help you in the midst of your sorrow. These resources include prayer, the support of your pastor and congregation, hearing the Gospel preached, receiving the Lord's Supper, and reading God's Word. Through these means, the Lord applies His healing balm.

Reconnect with God's gifts.

Music, art, poetry or other ways to reconnect with some of God's gifts can help lift that cloud of despair.

Take time to feel.

Build in quiet time to be alone and undistracted. Privately writing about our experiences and observations can contribute to a sense of release and understanding.

Confide in someone.

Burdens shared are not as heavy. Accept the caring gestures and listening ears of many others graciously, recognizing that your turn to reciprocate will come.

Ritualize the loss in a personally significant way.

Find creative ways to memorialize losses—ways that fit the person you are and the transition you have undergone.

Allow yourself to change.

Losses of people and roles important to our lives change us. Embrace those changes. Find opportunities that exist for growth, however bittersweet that growth may be.

Release anger.

Venting anger, of course, can be done constructively or destructively. Certainly, throwing a pillow is much preferred over throwing a fist. Writing an angry letter, knowing it won't get sent, is far better than saying mean things that cause pain and perhaps regret. In your prayer life, tell God that you put the anger into His hands. In faith, because of God's love for you in Christ, you will let Him be the judge to preserve and protect, and to administer punishment or forgiveness.

Exercise.

It's a powerful antidote for depression. As we exercise, our bodies release endorphins. These proteins can help give us a feeling of well-being again, without the need for medication.

Avoid chemicals.

It's important not to try drowning out our pain with drugs or alcohol. Alcohol may seem to give temporary relief. But alcohol is a depressant, and aren't we already depressed enough? Avoid stimulants such as caffeine, nicotine and sugar. These can add to that feeling of shakiness. Generally, medications are not needed, and if they are, it's for specific symptom relief. There are no pills for grief. Self-medicating can be very dangerous. It's best to consult a physician before taking any over-the-counter preparation to relieve distress. There may be times when a physician encourages use of medication. If so, follow instructions carefully and report back any changes in symptoms.

Help the body and mind work together.

Find ways to break down a task so it isn't as overwhelming as it might seem at the start. Breathe deeply. Take that walk. Watch the sunset. Go out for dinner. Sit and stare at the walls, if that's all the energy you have at the moment. Ask for help from God and from other people.

Healing takes energy. We must give ourselves time. We must resist the temptation to try to measure up to all the "shoulds" people have for us. All in all, the most important thing we can do is learn to be gentle with ourselves.

Grief counseling content by Margaret Metzgar, M.A., LMHC, the founder and primary therapist at the Transition and Loss Center in Seattle, Washington. Spiritual content by Rev. Jon Viekler, Lutheran pastor.

© Copyright 2009. Thrivent Financial for Lutherans. All rights reserved.

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans grants a limited right to print this page in small quantities for noncommercial use, as long as the above copyright line remains fully intact on the page.