

Tears for Sowing: Women's Ministry to Widows

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"As I sit to write this entry, the reality of where I was this same time, same night last year is so vivid in my mind. I was standing in a funeral home chapel filled with flowers, plants, pictures and people in front of my husband's casket next to my children talking to, and listening to one person after another express their condolences, love, and their sorrow over our loss.

I, the women's ministry leader who had walked this path numerous times before with so many women was now the one experiencing this numbing reality. My eyes could see the truth of the situation but my mind could not comprehend the facts. The man I had been married to for 27 ½, years who loved me as Christ loved the church, who loved the Lord with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength and taught our children to do the same, who honored his mother and his father, was no longer alive on this earth.

Throughout this year the "God of all comfort"(2 Cor 1:3-4) has shown Himself faithful to His every word. God's people have been His hands and feet ministering to our every need. Did this remove the pain or this season of sowing tears? Absolutely not. I have and continue to experience every part of this God-allowed journey.

As an RN for over 20 years who worked in the ICU and as a cardiac nurse and as a women's ministry leader for over 12 years, I had been with many individuals and families through death, dying and grieving. I knew the stages of grief, the realities of the grieving process and what grief did to you mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. This knowledge helped me to know what was normal in the way I was thinking, feeling, and acting but so many women in our churches and communities who experience the loss of a loved one have no clue what to expect.

They don't know that with God they can make it. They think they may be losing their mind. They may get stuck in the grief process and not recognize it. They may become bitter instead of better.

Women's ministry leaders are on the front lines to help these women navigate through to their new reality. Who better to walk with them than someone who understands what they are going through (especially if they have walked this path themselves).

Here are some things to understand as you minister to those who have lost a loved one

1. **Use effective communication with someone grieving**
 - Remain calm and non-judgmental
 - Mention the deceased by name
 - Be honest about how you feel
 - Make short visits
 - Don't take over their decision-making process
 - Don't over spiritualize
 - Let them cry and express emotions
 - Listen and take your conversation clues from them, silence is ok

2. **Don't say, "I know how you feel"**

3. Know the stages of grief

- Shock and Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

4. Remember each person is unique, each loss is unique and it is a process not linear but cyclical at times.

5. Know the effects of grief on a person mentally and physically as well as emotionally and spiritually

- Mentally: hard to make decisions, concentrate or think clearly
- Physically- tire easily, may experience chest pain, impaired immune system, need for a healthy diet
- Emotionally- the stages of grief
- Spiritually- questioning God and their faith

6. Help those who are having a hard time processing their grief by suggesting they

- Journal
- Remember Realistically
- Read the Word
- Create a diagram of their losses
- Return to familiar places
- Say good bye to the way things were

7. Know when to refer them to a professional

- When there is evidence of drug or alcohol abuse
- Suicidal thoughts are consistent and recurring, or a plan has been made
- There is a total withdrawal from family, friends and colleagues
- Depression becomes clinical (when it becomes more of a lifestyle than a passing mood)

Be aware of helpful resources

Help for the Hurting (on the wm website)

From www.lifway.com

Women Reaching Women in Crisis

A Trusted Friend When it Matters Most by Tim Clinton and Pat Springle

Experiencing Grief by H. Norman Wright

The God of all Comfort by Dee Brestin