

# Dealing with the Loss of a Loved One

By Doug Hamilton

## Part F) The Most Important Thing of All: Remembering to Remember.

In review of the series on *Dealing with the Loss of a Loved One*, we have covered a number of different areas. In the first lesson it was Five Sobering Truths About Grief that we must incorporate in the strategy. In lesson two we covered the Five Stages of Grief: Disbelief, Yearning, Anger, Depression and Acceptance. Lesson three dealt with the Guilt of Grief. Lessons four and five dealt with Grief: “How can I help you?” and “How can I help me?” In the last lesson, we will cover the most important thing of all concerning grief, Remembering to Remember.

### Opening Thought:

To better understand, try to imagine your own death. Would there be anyone left behind to grieve? The odds are your friends and family would be greatly hurt if you were to pass away today. What about ten years after you die, how many of them will be left behind to reflect on your existence? What about fifty years from now? What about one hundred years from your death, would there be any one left behind that even knew your name? Unless we are someone famous, the memory of us will be at best relegated to a death certificate in a filing cabinet, a marker on the ground and a position on a genealogical tree. Most other people in the world will enter the ground to never be thought of again once their generation dies. One thing for sure, everyone that had a personal relationship with you will someday be gone. You will be at best a statistic in the eyes of the world some day.

How does that thought make you feel? Not very important? A bit insignificant? Kind of worthless? Your personality, your temperament, your thoughts, your humor, your joys and your sorrows will all go to the grave with you and soon will be forgotten when your loved ones are finally gone. That is a rather humbling thought, but a sound reality. This is the pattern of the final lesson, for all of us just want to be remembered by someone.

### Remembering to Remember

When someone from our circle of friends or relatives passes on, it hurts greatly because we have a personal relationship with them. Since relationships are simply investments of time in one another, the loss of life makes it impossible to personally share in that relationship anymore. Their death ultimately brings to a close that connection and we are left with only memories of that person. It is in the rekindling of these memories with others that the person is able to seemingly come alive to us again and provide a sense of satisfaction, comfort and happiness. We must remember to remember as the greatest step in coping with grief.

### The commemoration begins immediately following the death of the loved one.

Acts 9:36-39 Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated *in Greek* is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did. <sup>37</sup> And it happened at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room. <sup>38</sup> Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, imploring him, “Do not delay in coming to us.” <sup>39</sup> So Peter arose and went with them. When he arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them.

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- This is one of the more touching moments of scripture and often focuses on the wonderful miracle that occurred when Dorcas was raised from the dead by the prayer of Peter and the working of God. As their dear friend's body lay before them, they were weeping and reminiscing with "*all the tunics and garments that Docas used to make while she was with them.*" They were Remembering to Remember!
- Over the years I have visited with many survivors shortly after the death of their beloved. Even before the funeral, the "Remembering to Remember" principle is obvious. I personally have witnessed following a death...
  - ...a grandchild asking his grandmother, "Where is grandpa? I miss him!"
  - ...a grieving child crying because their daddy was not home to tuck them in that night"
  - ...a widow pointing to the family pet and saying, "This was always my husband's little buddy."
  - ...a broken-hearted parent pointing to their daughter's pictures on the wall, saying "She always took such good photos."
  - ...a group of friends recollecting what a great person that man was."
  - ...a co-worker talking about how she always showed up on time and in a good mood.
  - ...a brother telling about all the great memories he had with his sibling while growing up on the farm.
- These are all signs that the "Remembering to Remember" process has begun. There is something deep inside the heart of a human that beckons him or her to reach into the mental files and recollect their memories concerning the departed. We must Remember to Remember for it is at our very core of humanity to allow people we love to live on beyond their time here on earth.

## Commemoration continues at the funeral and in the burial.

Ecclesiastes 6:3 makes reference to a "proper burial". Funerals and burials have been occurring since man has been dying and leaving behind those to share the memories.

## Abraham bought a cave for a family mausoleum space at Machpelah.

- Genesis 23:17-20 So Ephron's field, which was in Machpelah, which faced Mamre, the field and cave which was in it, and all the trees which were in the field, that were within all the confines of its border, were deeded over<sup>18</sup> to Abraham for a possession in the presence of the sons of Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city.<sup>19</sup> After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field at Machpelah facing Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan.<sup>20</sup> So the field and the cave that is in it, were deeded over to Abraham for a burial site by the sons of Heth.
- Abraham had just lost his wife Sarah and was compelled to provide her a burial space. Not only was Sarah buried there, but Abraham (Gen 25:9), Isaac, Rebekah, Leah (Gen 49:31) and Jacob (Gen 50:13). Today this sight is referred to as "The Tomb of the Patriarchs" and is one of the most holy locations in the world by the Muslim, Jewish and Christian faiths. This is true because the memories of the Patriarchs are rekindled in the hearts and minds of the visitors.

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## Many Examples of the Proper Burial Memorializing

- Deborah was memorialized in Genesis 35:8 designated “the oak of weeping”
- Rachel was memorialized with a pillar of stone in Genesis 35:19-20.
- The greedy quail-eating gluttons were memorialized in Numbers 11:34 by naming the cemetery as the “graves of the greedy”.
- Saul finally received a proper burial in 2 Sam 21:14 by the Jabesh-Gileadites following his death in battle with the Philistines.
- It was a memorial marker that indicated the burial of a prophet in 2 Kings 23:13.

All these and more were there to communicate a message of remembrance when it came to their burial, whether good or bad. People were to look at the tree, a pillar or simply the graves and REMEMBER! Look at the typical funeral of today and all the focus on remembering the one that passed.

- There is a visitation service the night before in which the family and friends remember many stories and accounts of the departed.
- Often there is arranged a large collection of photos outlining their lived and accomplishments.
- A visitation in the evening prior to the funeral where people will view many photos of the departed to call into memory the life stories.
- There might be a flag in the casket to remember that the person served the country in the military service.
- The body is on display to allow the person to remember what their loved one looked like in the past. It helps them realize the finality of the moment.
- The next day there is a funeral which will partly focus on the message of remembrance of the life of the individual.
- There is typically a time set aside in the service that is for people to come forward and recollect about the departed.
- Nearly the entire funeral process is not for the dead, but for the living so they can call into remembrance the loved one that is no longer among them.
- We must not take lightly the need to “Remember to Remember”.

Remembering to remember can be carried out in any number of ways. It can be a song or a hymn. It can be a picture on a refrigerator to an entire photo album. It might be a card sent on a holiday to a phone call reminding them that you have not forgotten.

## Remembering the Lubbock Six

It was May 2, 1999 on a lonely stretch of Highway 82 in New Mexico. A bus loaded with about eighty teens from the Green Lawn Church of Christ collided with a breakaway trailer, resulting in the death of six teenage girls. What was to be a high point of the year for the youth group turned into a nightmare beyond comprehension. Not only was the church family in shock, but the entire city of Lubbock was devastated. Hundreds waited with the family as carloads of youth began to arrive back at the building.

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In a memorial service the next night, nearly 8,000 members of the church packed into the municipal coliseum to hold a special memorial service for the families. Over the next few days, thousands attended the six funerals of these teenage girls.

Meg Flynn, the effervescent mission-minded girl that often attended our events at the Sunset, has a memorial fund bearing her name to this day. There was also a song played at her class graduation three years later. It was written in her honor and won a major award from the state.

Sara Johnson, the fifteen year old, whose parents own a group of restaurants has one named after her, called Sarah Belle's Tea Room. The restaurant is a way for them to remember their daughter. Her mother was quoted, "You have a choice when something like this happens. You can die inside but walk and breathe, or you can live. We chose to live."

Another of the girls, Talitha Beeman, had her funeral at the Green Lawn church building. I knew her parents and attended her funeral. They played the song "In the Arms of an Angel" in the service, a song that I never heard until that morning. Every time I hear that song on the radio, I think of her family and the loss that they suffered. It was one of her favorite songs at the time and has become an indirect memorial for her.

All the girls have a memorial plaque bearing their names in the foyer of the Green Lawn Church. Whenever a new person asks what happened on that day, there are many that can still share in the joys and sufferings of these young ladies. Now you know a little about them. That is the nature of Remembering to Remember, allowing you to share in the memories of others who have passed on.

### Jesus has the greatest memorial plan of all-time!

Jesus was placed in the grave to begin the "Remembering" process.

- Luke 24:1-9 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. <sup>2</sup> And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup> but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup> While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; <sup>5</sup> and as *the women* were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, *the men* said to them, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead?" <sup>6</sup> "He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup> saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." <sup>8</sup> And they remembered His words, <sup>9</sup> and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest.
- They were to remember what Jesus said about His execution and resurrection from the tomb, to which they did.
- We must never forget what Jesus said about this area of His life. It is the core of what we are to believe.
- 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures..."
- We must remember to remember that this is the core of the faith.

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### We must “Remember” that we are deserving of death!

- Luke 23:39-43 One of the criminals who were hanged *there* was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!”<sup>40</sup> But the other answered, and rebuking him said, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?”<sup>41</sup> “And we indeed *are suffering* justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”<sup>42</sup> And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!”<sup>43</sup> And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”
- The lesson of the thief on the cross isn’t that Jesus saved Him based on the death, burial and resurrection principle of Christianity, for this is obviously occurring before the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. What it does teach is that the thief saw his guilty position on the backdrop of an innocent Savior.
- We must remember that we are bad to the bone and rotten to the core, deserving of eternal judgment from God. We must never forget that we are 100% condemned in our sins so that Jesus can be 100% our Savior. If at anytime we fail to remember this fact, Jesus cannot remember us concerning His kingdom.

### We must “Remember” that we die to Christ and live for Christ.

- Romans 6:3-4 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?<sup>4</sup> Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.
- Romans 12:1-2 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.<sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.
- This begins at baptism, making the covenant of death, burial and resurrection centered in our life. We continue this process by dying to ourselves and living to Jesus with the choices that we make. We must remember this.

### We must “Remember” that this is a continual covenant for us.

- 1 Corinthians 11:23-25 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread;<sup>24</sup> and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”<sup>25</sup> In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me.”
- Years ago while in the cemetery industry, I noticed that certain memorial markers had many pennies placed on the top. One particular grave of a young man that died in a car accident always had about couple of dozen of pennies every time I saw it. When I asked the mother of the young man what was the meaning of this, she said that the pennies were a token of visitation of the grave from the friends and family. Leaving a penny simply said that someone came out to the grave because they were remembering the young man that meant so much to them. It was a “penny for their thoughts.”

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- Jesus was so perfect, so loving, so wise, so innocent, so beaten, so humiliated and so crucified for being the Son of God that it should break the heart of every thinking man and woman that reasons these facts of history. If there was a grave to go to and leave a penny, we could and would go to it to remember. Since Jesus emptied the tomb on the third day, there is no place to go “Remember”.
- Therefore when we partake in the Lord’s Supper when coming together on the first day of the week, we are remembering that Jesus broke His body for us and shed His blood for us. I like to think we are placing a penny at the empty tomb of Jesus and bringing our minds to the common thought of what He did for us. This is something that should always be done in “Remembrance” of Him, nothing more and nothing less.

### In Closing:

As long as we have people in our lives that we love, we will always be at risk of suffering a loss of those people. When we do, will be ready? I hope that what has been covered over the six lessons will be of some assistance in *Dealing with the Loss of a Loved One*. May God bless you and keep you in your hour of need.

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