

Lifelines

Dr. Ed Jordan © 2026

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Topic: *Kindness is medicine to the Grieving*

Kindness is Good Medicine!

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Often we feel inadequate about how to relate to someone who just experienced a significant loss, or multiple significant losses. We feel empathy towards the person, but being with someone in the grip of grief makes us uncomfortable. Sometimes we really don't know what to say, because no words seem to be appropriate. Most of us are not comfortable facing death, because it makes us realize our own frailty and mortality.

Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross was one of the pioneers of examining the grief process. I had the privilege of attending a week of her lectures at the University of Nevada, Reno during my senior year. The stages of grief are: Denial, Anger, Depression, Bargaining, and Acceptance. They are not necessarily sequential, and a person can go back and forth in the various states of mind.

As I learned more from this brilliant Swiss psychiatrist, my life took on a quiet depth in being a friend to people working through the myriad of emotions grief brings. But the most interesting thing was that I became more aware of my physical life's finality; none of us are guaranteed tomorrow, or next month, or next year. One of Dr. Kübler-Ross' quotes was: "You never learn to live, until you learn to die." It is when we accept the brevity of our life that we delight in every marvelous moment and encounter.

Life is shorter than most of us think or hope. So rather than wasting life, you begin to embrace many of the miracles that we generally take for granted. You begin to do some things on your bucket list. We are in awe of autumn leaves, which display some of their most beautiful colors just before they exit the tree. You listen to what your loved ones are saying, and treasure the conversations.

Today I was reading from the early losses and grief of Job, and the words of his friends whose judgments and insinuations were like putting salt on an open wound. They wanted him to confess what he had done to displease God, for he must have done something bad to have lost all his possessions and had all his children killed in a single storm. I once heard a spiritual speaker describing "Job's friends" as being like people who come to visit you while you are on oxygen in ICU, and they unknowingly stand on your oxygen tube. I think that is a pretty good image of friends who automatically assume you did something bad to be experiencing hard times, and try to "fix you" through their cross-examinations.

Job reacted to his grief-driven hopelessness. All that he had built up over the years was gone in a day. All his children were wiped out by a tornado in one swath. He had lost his possessions, lost his loved ones, and lost his future, as well as his health. And his friends, rather than sitting quietly with him, or being supportive of him in his time of need, were trying to suggest why this bad stuff happened, so he could repent and fix it.

Job makes a helpful statement to all of us who wish to support someone going through grief. In Job 6:14 (NLT) we read: "One should be kind to a fainting friend, but you accuse me without any fear of the Almighty." The word "kind" is "lovingkindness" which is a tender, gentle, calming love and loyalty. It is the patience and encouraging love of God to be tender with us when we are hurting.

A person in grief has an empty hole where their loved one once filled the void and was a supportive presence for them in the worst of times.

We don't need to "fix" someone, nor deny them their need to share their feelings. They need us to be a calm, quiet, friend, bringing love, kindness, a listening ear, and helpfulness. Sometimes a person just needs to talk and process some of what they are feeling. Our role is to be all ears, combined with some loving presence, even when we don't know what to say.

The fall and winter holidays are times when a loved one's absence is most glaring, and often painful. We can spend some time with friends, listening, caring, and being present with them when they need someone to be there. We don't have to talk that much. Just be present with them. That is a kindness of being a friend.

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