

# Grief Workshop

**Ministry Conference 2012  
with Jill McGilvray**

## **Grief is**

...the sum of all our responses to a loss  
...not just our sadness

It is:

- Individual
- Understandable...imagine if you didn't grieve
- Unpredictable
- Overwhelming
- Not time-bound

## **Grief has many causes**

Kinds of loss: Material, Relational, Systemic, Functional, Intrapyschic, Role

*"Endings are the price we pay for beginnings"*  
Earl Grollman

## **One description: The perfect storm of grief**

*The waves of emotion,  
the winds of disturbed behaviour,  
AND  
the fog of disturbed thought processes*

*Graham Fulton*

## **Many reactions to grief are “normal”**

- an exaggerated version of self
- regressive behaviour – as if we were younger, less mature
- melancholia, deep sadness
- yearning, longing
- clinging , withdrawal
- shortened attention span, loss of concentration
- idealisation of what (or who) was lost
- physical reactions - insomnia, pains, nausea, susceptibility to colds etc, change in appetite and sleep patterns – up or down
- perception of guilt
- a range of emotions – sadness, anger, panic, fear, guilt...

## **And grief is individual**

There are differences including:

- personality,
- gender,
- cultural expectations,
- behaviour modelled in the family,
- pre-existing conditions,
- emotional or mental health, medication, addictions etc

## **In fact the surprising thing is that people get through it**

“The trouble with thinking of grief as an injury is that if you had an injury that big you’d be dead.” Mal McKissock

But for some people the pain goes on and on.....

*“...preoccupying, incapacitating and immobilizing (the grieving person) for a prolonged period in a way that causes concern to the bereaved person and his or her family and friends.”*

(McKissock 1991)

## **Things that further exacerbate the severity of the loss:**

- Suddenness of the loss
- Traumatic witness
- Death of a child
- Ambivalence
- Pre-existing mental illness

- Concurrent crisis
- Centrality
- Perceived preventability
- Changes to roles (no longer a wife...)
- Decreased (or lack of) social support
- Overly prolonged dying and/or bioethical decisions
- Lack of reality
- Disenfranchised grief

### **How can we help? What can we do?**

We can't fix it...the only thing that could 'fix it' would be for 'it' not to have happened.

How can we make a difference that is positive?

### **It helps if we...**

- Assist in the first few painful days post loss – including the viewing if required and the funeral if it's a death
- Resist the urge to try and fix things
- Slow down, don't DO so much as BE
- Listen, listen, listen
- Pray for and with a hurting person
- Give appropriate encouragement from the Bible at the right time
- Are honest
- Allow them to grieve
- Throw out what is not valuable

### **Learn to...**

- Keep confidences – it's not your story to tell
- Don't judge
- Consider the effects of your words before you say them
- Acknowledge that you have much to learn from your grieving friend