

NO SHORTS CUTS WHEN GRIEVING

Baptist Times 5 February 2004

There is nothing harder than losing someone we love. If only it were not so! The truth, however, is that when we have loved deeply, we hurt deeply when the object of our love is no longer with us. In the first week or so, neither kind words from friends nor sleeping pills from the doctor seem to make much difference. We discover that grief is something which we have to work through for ourselves. And yet, what a difference it makes, when there are others there to help us through the months, if not years, that lie ahead. Inevitably the minister has a key role to play in caring – but not only the minister. For as the Apostle Paul once said, it is the task of all the members of the ‘body’ to care for one another (1 Cor 12.25). But how can we care for those who have lost loved ones? In the first place, by being there with them and acknowledging their pain. Sadly, sometimes people feel embarrassed to talk about the loss of others and so, as it were, walk by on the other side. But simply ignoring the pain of the other actually compounds the pain, and makes the bereaved feel all the more lonely. Far better to go up to the bereaved and together with them reminisce about the loved one they have lost. If in the process tears result, we should not be too concerned. For tears are part of the normal response to the loss of a significant person in our lives. Indeed, if we don’t express our grief, then all kinds of psychological complications can arise. In the words of the Turkish proverb, ‘He that conceals his grief finds no remedy for it’. Unfortunately, some Christians encourage the bereaved to rejoice in the new life which their loved ones now enjoy, as if crying for the loss of a loved one is wrong and is a sign of a lack of faith. But this refusal to face up to the pain of death and to own loss is a nonsense. Life for our loved ones, now free from their earthly limitations, may now be much better, but we may well be the poorer for our loss. If we are to be helpful to the bereaved, then we need to be realistic about their loss. Furthermore, we also need to reassure the bereaved when they become perhaps concerned by their sense of disorganisation or of depression, that grieving does take time, and that it is natural not to get over the loss of a loved one quickly; and that it is natural too to think that we have come to terms with our loss, and then all of a sudden to find all the old feelings overwhelming us again. Indeed, it is generally reckoned that the grieving process can take anywhere between two to five years. During that time we need to be there for the bereaved – especially at the time of the anniversary of the death, or of a birthday or wedding anniversary. There are no short cuts to caring for the bereaved. Caring takes time, for grieving takes time.