



The Nature of Grief and Grieving ...on The Widow Walk

(By Howie Soucek, Rev 4-10-23)

INTRODUCTION

“Know your enemies!” — This old expression carries great wisdom.

Since ancient times, it has been imperative for anyone under threat—whether an individual warrior or an entire army or nation—to learn as much as possible about a current (or even a potential) enemy, by using reconnaissance, spies, surveillance,...

And the wisdom of understanding our “enemies” is not limited to military objectives, considering that the best football teams will learn in advance as much as they can about an opposing team—and the same for a debate team, et cetera. Thus, if sin and Satan are our enemies, it behooves us to understand as well as we can how they work, so as to minimize our suffering in the world while we are in the process of enhancing our overall well-being and our Relationship with God.

The terminal illness or death of someone dear to us is a horrific trauma that is unique to each of us and one which no one else can truly understand. Yet, ...what we have in common is powerful and important—which is, that *we all do suffer in our grief!* And it is the many different ways that this suffering/grieving is manifest that constitute our enemies—enemies which can morph along the way on our walk, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Such manifestations can include any one or combination of: feeling isolated or lonely, fear, anger, self-pity or sadness, bitterness, hopelessness, confusion, lethargy, powerlessness, and even the onset of suicidal tendencies. *These* are our enemies, every one, ...separating us from one another and from God, and thus, to compound our misery.

For those of you who would like to better-understand the nature of our own grief and grieving, I offer four sections of thought.

The first two are largely secular/intellectual and include valuable, well-established information that can help you to understand what is happening to you in a rational way. I found them published online, by:

- 1) the California Hospice and Palliative Care Association, Feb 2020, including the “My Story” of their Director of Membership, Programs, and Services; and
- 2) Psychology Today, wherein an article by Dr. David B. Feldman originally posted online in July 2017 provides helpful details about “The Five Stages of Grief.”

And the second two of the four sections of thought provide you with reflections on the nature of grief and grieving in a spiritual context, ... which is not to say that either context is more important than the other. Rather, consider that they are both equally important for you to reflect upon as you contemplate your own, personal journey of grief. These second two sections, then, include:

- 3) My Own Story of unexpected experience upon the loss of my wife; and
- 4) C. S. Lewis' own account of personal loss, which is both similar yet also different from my own experience.



By way of the California Hospice and Palliative Care Association:

My Story

"I'd like to share my story with you in hopes that I can help you feel supported, know that you are not alone, and feel open to look for and accept resources for help. Four months ago, I lost my husband and father of our two teenage children. I had just started this new position with CHAPCA and didn't have the experience of hospice yet; and literally three weeks later, I had to live the experience firsthand. After two agonizing months of watching his health decline and ultimately passing away, I felt an overwhelming amount of emotions that I still carry with me today, as I am still grieving. Aside from feeling angry, sad and scared, I mostly felt overwhelmed...like the weight of the world was now on my shoulders. I am 41, a widow, and left with two children who are broken. I kept asking myself "I can barely handle my own grief; how can I possibly get my kids through this"? The calls, texts, messages poured in for the first few months. And then suddenly...it was quiet. It was then that I was able to truly process what had happened. I allowed myself the alone time to grieve, sought the help of a therapist, and slowly added in the things that I used to enjoy like reading and art and spending time with friends. I have the good memories that I can cherish and make me smile and I hold on to those to get me through.

Death is an experience that changes you. Through this process, I've learned so much about myself, and ultimately the realization that although it seems like life will never be the same, the sadness eventually eases. Slowly, that dark cloud lifts until one day, when you don't even realize it, your focus has shifted and your new normal has begun. I encourage you to allow yourself to feel the emotions and process in your own way, in your own time frame. This is your journey. You are surrounded by people that love you and will be there for you. You don't have to go through this alone. If you feel like you need grief and bereavement help, hospice agencies have a team of people who can help, even if your loved one did not pass away on hospice. I welcome you to reach out to me if you would like help locating a grief or bereavement counselor in your area. I truly feel like I was placed in this position for a reason and I am so grateful to be

able to share my story and use this platform to let you know that you are not alone and there are resources to help you with your journey to heal."

~ Sarah Dorricott, Director of Membership, Programs and Services

About Loss and Grief

The death of anyone in your life is always very difficult. When someone you love or know is terminally ill and you watch their pain and suffering as their health declines, it can be one of life's most difficult and isolating experiences. How do you survive the ordeal and go on without a person who has been such a vital part of your life and world? Grieving the loss and adjusting to the related changes is slow, hard work.

Grieving is a very personal experience and while we have long known about the stages of grief identified by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, we also know that each person grieves in their own way and in their own time. There is no 'right way' to grieve. Grief is not orderly and predictable; some individuals handle it better than others, some go through the stages in order, some don't. Grief lasts until it's done, which is far longer than our society generally recognizes.

Types of Grief

Anticipatory Grief

When a person or family is expecting death, it is normal to begin to anticipate how one will react and cope when that person actually dies.

Sudden Loss

Sudden unexpected loss can temporarily overwhelm or even immobilize anyone.

Complicated Grief

When the duration of grief is prolonged and interferes with a person's ability to function, grief can become "a way of life."

Stages of Grief

The commonly accepted stages of grief were first written by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross in her 1969 book "On Death and Dying". *[Italics in brackets are by Howie Soucek]*

Denial

"This cannot be happening to me". Complete disbelief is a common reaction to a terminal diagnosis. You refuse to accept what is happening. *[This can include inordinately preoccupying myself with something else (such as work or travel) as a distraction, deflection, or deferral that only masquerades as "acceptance."]*

Anger

“Why is this happening to me?” You feel like the unlucky one, angry at fate, at God, at the Doctor or at yourself for not doing enough. *[This can include “blaming,” whether justified or not.]* “If only” questions and regrets are common. *[This can often take shape as “guilt.”]*

Bargaining

“Make this not happen and in return I will...” You promise anything if only God will let them live.

Depression

“I am too sad to do anything.” Deep sadness is an inevitable part of loss. *[...or “I don’t even care about anything... don’t feel like doing anything... can’t make decisions... don’t want to be alone, but don’t want to be with anyone, either... don’t know WHAT I want...”]*

Acceptance

Accepting death as a part of life. Your loved one is gone and will never come back. You will go on living and make a new life for yourself. *[...but just not to be confused with denial! Acceptance is complicated, involving more than the human brain, but it is one of the most helpful steps on our path toward health and happiness. Think “The Serenity Prayer.”]*

Responding to Grief and Loss

Sometimes grief is immediately overwhelming, other times the depth of sadness and pain is not realized until several weeks or months after a loss when the permanence of the loss becomes very real. Life does not get back to normal. Grief can affect every aspect of life, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Every survivor is vulnerable. Some struggle with strong emotions. Many experience guilt, both for things they did and things they didn’t do. Some are angry at God. Many feel disorganized and can even forget, for a moment, that a death happened. The intense, all consuming response to grief eventually will subside.

Managing Grief and Loss

- Accept that you are grieving and be open to your feelings.
- It’s ok to cry, and to be angry at your loss.
- Take care of yourself: eat well, exercise, get enough sleep and get back to doing the things you enjoy.
- Reach out to friends, go to a movie, take a walk or just visit.
- Plan ahead, expect that holidays, birthdays, anniversaries will be difficult.
- Don’t let anyone tell you how you should feel, including you. This is your journey and you are handling this situation the best way that you can.

- Redirect your focus by keeping busy or by helping others.
- Postpone making major decisions.
- Join a support group - an opportunity to talk with people who understand.
- Remember that every hospice program offers grief counseling to the family for up to one year following the loss. Many hospice programs offer bereavement services to the community, whether or not your loved one died under hospice care.

Supporting Someone who is Suffering from Grief and Loss

- Our immediate response is to ask, “Are you ok?”, when someone suffers a loss. “Are you ok?” is difficult to hear for someone suffering a loss because they are not ok. The best thing that you can do is acknowledge their loss, “I am sorry for your loss, I am thinking of you, I am here for you”.
- Don’t **expect** a response from someone who suffered a loss when you reach out in-person, phone call or text. Those suffering a loss are feeling overwhelmed. They need time and will reach out when they are ready.
- Once they reach out, listen to them. Let them do the talking. When someone suffers a loss having someone listen to them, uninterrupted, is therapeutic for them, being able to express their emotions.
- Acknowledge their feelings and remember everyone grieves differently. Responding with “I am so glad you are able to share your feeling with me”, is the right response.
- Understand that life for them has changed and that getting back to normal will take time.
- Reach out over the next few months, not just the first few weeks. When someone is suffering a loss, it’s the months that follow that can be the hardest.
- Be specific when offering assistance. “What can I do for you” is not helpful. Being specific gives someone who suffered a loss permission to accept assistance.
- Remember holidays, birthdays and other special events. A phone call or card means a lot.
- Don’t be afraid to share happy or funny memories with someone who has suffered a loss.



By way of *Psychology Today*, by David B. Feldman, Ph.D.:

Why the Five Stages of Grief Are Wrong

Lessons from the (non-)stages of grief.

I like to play a game with the college students in some of my psychology courses. I hold up some juicy prize—a gift card to a local coffee shop, bookstore, or restaurant—and promise it to the first person who can name the five stages of grief. Invariably, at least three students prattle them off within a few seconds, making it very hard to know who

deserves the reward. What's particularly amazing is that many of these students have never taken a psychology class before.

Among the general public, one of the most commonly known and accepted psychological concepts is that grief proceeds in stages. If you already are familiar with the stages of grief, you have psychiatrist and visionary death-and-dying expert Elizabeth Kubler-Ross to thank for it. Through her many books and tireless activism, Kubler-Ross managed to change how much of the world thought about death. She helped soften some of the stigma that had previously been present, making it a little more okay to talk about and get support for loss.

What you may not know, however, is that Kubler-Ross didn't originally develop these stages to explain what people go through when they lose a loved one. Instead, she developed them to describe the process *patients* go through as they come to terms with their terminal illnesses. The stages—*denial*, *anger*, *bargaining*, *depression*, and *acceptance*—were only later applied to grieving friends and family members, who seemed to undergo a similar process after the loss of their loved ones.

Grief turns out not to be so simple.

Studies now show that griever's don't progress through these stages in a lock-step fashion. Consequently, when any of us loses someone we love, we may find that we fit the stages precisely as Kubler-Ross outlined, or we may skip all but one. We may race through them or drag our feet all the way to acceptance. We may even repeat or add stages that Kubler-Ross never dreamed of. In fact, the actual grief process looks a lot less like a neat set of stages and a lot more like a roller coaster of emotions. Even Kubler-Ross said that grief doesn't proceed in a linear and predictable fashion, writing toward the end of her career that she regretted her stages had been misunderstood.

The unfortunate side effect of our society's erroneous but firm belief in the five stages is that many people wind up criticizing themselves for "not doing grief right." When people buy into the idea that there's only one healthy way to grieve, then it's easy for them to attack themselves when they naturally find that they're doing it differently. This kind of self-criticism never helps anyone.

Even if the stages aren't exactly gospel, there are three important lessons to take from Kubler-Ross' work, no matter what our unique grief process may be like.

Lesson 1: A Little Denial Is Natural

Asserting that denial is healthy may seem odd given that psychologists have long considered denial inherently harmful. Research now tells us that this is not the case. Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, psychologist and expert in psychological trauma, has observed that denial can be healthy in moderate amounts. It's the brain's way of "dosing" itself. Just as medicine is good for us, fully facing the reality that a loved one has died is ultimately good for us. But too much medicine too quickly can cause

unpleasant side effects. Similarly, being forced to confront difficult grief-related emotions all at once can be unnecessarily painful.

Janoff-Bulman isn't advocating ignoring reality. Instead, she believes that denial is the brain's way of making sure that we don't get too high a dose of grief before we're ready. The brain naturally gives us "denial breaks." These breaks allow us to relax, regroup, and ready ourselves for the difficult feelings we must inevitably face.

Denial becomes unhealthy only when it's unshakeable. In such cases, people sometimes fail to face ["accept"] their grief. Taking a temporary breather from grief to watch a movie, have a distracting conversation with a friend, or just daydream for a while, is healthy, but trying to avoid it altogether can have harmful consequences. As a general rule, the only way out of grief is through it. If the emotions are there, it's important not to run from them. But we shouldn't feel we have to face them all at once, either. Grieving appropriately means allowing ample time to remember and feel the loss as well as embracing occasional opportunities to distract ourselves and regroup.

Lesson 2: Grief Can Shake Our Faith

Faith doesn't just refer to religion. We have faith in many things—in ourselves, in others, and in the future. When someone passes away, our faith in these things can be shaken. It may seem like the world will never be the same again. We may wonder if we will ever be the same.

People often find themselves asking questions like: "How could this have happened to such a good person?" "How could the world be so unfair?" According to research by psychologist Melvin Lerner, on some level, most people believe in the old saying, "What comes around goes around." We have faith that, if we behave well, good things are supposed to happen to us. Many of us are taught this belief as children and don't entirely surrender it as we age.

Life isn't always fair, however, and people don't always get what they deserve. The loss of a loved one challenges these beliefs. As a result, people sometimes find themselves feeling guilty. If the world is fair and our loved one has died, it's easy to believe that we must have done something wrong. Some people even try to bargain with God (one of the stages of grief). They may promise to be more moral, just, understanding, or caring if only their loved one returned. It's important to remember, however, that death has medical and physical causes—causes that aren't our fault or, usually, anyone else's. It's natural to question the fairness of losing someone we love. Ultimately, however, death is neither fair nor unfair. It's simply an unfortunate reality.

In addition to questioning our faith in fairness, we may start to question our faith in ourselves. Some people find themselves wondering, "Who am I without my loved one?" This is especially likely if they and the loved one were close for many years. They may have trouble remembering who they were before that person came into their life. People

often define themselves by the roles they play in close relationships. They think of themselves as spouses, siblings, children, friends, mentors, or caregivers. When someone passes away, we may lose one or more of these important roles. In this situation, it's natural to feel confused, sad, and even angry (some of the experiences Kubler-Ross captured in her stages). Grief takes time because it entails accepting the loss of these roles and redefining ourselves. During this time of change, it's important to remember what has not changed. Although much has shifted, some constants usually are present—our remaining friends and family are a good start. It's important to take comfort in what is stable and use this as a “home base” from which to build new faith in who we are.

Lesson 3: Grief Usually Leads to Acceptance

Central to Kubler-Ross's stages is the notion that grief is a *process* that eventually leads to acceptance, her last stage. Although most people never stop missing their departed loved ones, the painful emotions they feel shortly after the death almost certainly eventually soften. It can be comforting to keep this in mind. If we tell ourselves, “This will never end,” “I'm weak for feeling this way,” “I'm going crazy,” or some other negative (and probably not fully accurate) statement, we'll wind up feeling needlessly worse. If we instead reassure ourselves that “This is normal and won't last forever,” it will be easier to honor our loss without added burden.

It's important not to rush grief, however. Many grieving people have told me that friends have given them all kinds of estimates on how long the grief process should take. One person may say a few weeks, while others might say anywhere from a few months to a number of years. These people aren't lying; they're simply conveying their own experiences. But grief is very personal, and each of us is entitled to our own schedule. While people sometimes continue to experience moments of moderate sadness even several years after losing a loved one, most people's strongest feelings of grief—known as “acute grief”—begin to lessen within a few months. But it's important not to criticize ourselves if our grief doesn't act like most people's.

Grief isn't a race to the finish line, and it isn't a contest to see who fits Kubler-Ross's stages best. It's a natural, though emotionally difficult, part of life, and one that can't be easily explained by five simple stages.

3

The previous two sections, largely secular, can greatly help us to navigate our grief journey by arming us not only with the rational information we need to better-understand what is happening to us, but also with the knowledge that what we are experiencing—even if entirely different from that of another griever—is entirely normal and natural.

This combination of information and knowledge alone can bring a significant measure of “peace of mind” about what we are experiencing, despite its trauma—this, especially, when we realize that we are not alone with our grief, ...unless we choose to be.

However, in addition to the secular, there is another dimension of what we are as human beings that also needs to be addressed when we experience any traumatic situation, including our grieving process. That dimension is the spiritual, and it pertains to our relationship with God, regardless of our personal understanding of what God is or of our relationship with God.

And as surely as there is a great variability of human reactions to grief in the secular context of knowledge, emotions, and social interactions, ...so also is there great variability in the spiritual context.

Your personal reaction to grief in the spiritual context may be entirely in accord with your religious beliefs and practices—or, it may be completely unexpected. Indeed, sometimes you do not know how you are going to react to a certain trauma or emergency until you are immersed in it. And this applies to the duration as well as the nature of your reaction.

One can hope and pray that those with whom you commune spiritually will prayerfully acknowledge, seek to understand, and show compassion for any reaction you may have to your personal grief that may run counter to “the norm” for some period of time.

Here, I would like to give you two, real-life grieving reactions to the loss of a loved one. The circumstances of loss are very similar, ...and yet these two reactions of grief in the spiritual context are quite different—some would say that at least initially, they are at the extremes of difference.

Importantly, however, one reaction is not “better” or more appropriate than another, even in the spiritual context, as it is not for us to judge—but rather to love—one another.

My Own Story followed 45 years of a rich, fulfilling marriage, the last 19 months of which involved my beloved’s three brain surgeries and multiple therapies, my primary caregiving for her in our home under Hospice direction, ...and—while on my knees and touching her at our bedside—the intimate witnessing of my love’s long, last breath released, inches away from me, in answer to my prayer, and upon my last words to her.

Overwhelmed with grief, I wept, deeply, for a time, as I held my hand gently on the side of her face and kissed her one last time. I do not remember what I was thinking, but I do know that my consciousness was completely consumed by my personal sense of loss and self-pity, and I felt saddened beyond measure.

(Here, I must deliberately add that never have I regretted, denied, or felt ashamed of having felt this way, as anything other than “normal and natural.” And, this grieving part

of me continues to make its presence known to me, all these years later, as naturally human.)

But as I knelt there, weeping and touching her, it entered my mind that I had been sublimely blessed in my relationship with her, ...whereupon my state-of-being became completely transformed at that very moment.

All at once, I felt as if I were a stand of trees, suddenly filled with a rush of wind that was fresh, cool, and bracing—and as though I could hear it and feel it, ...filling me and moving me.

I immediately stood up, ...and never—never have I felt the Presence of God more closely and more powerfully—embracing me, comforting me, empowering me—than at this moment. It was overwhelming ...and powerful beyond description.

My two sons were with me, and the three of us connected our hands around Lin, with my granddaughter joining us, as we experienced this moment, saying what Lin deserved and earnestly thanking God for the blessing of Lin in our lives and for His tender and timely act at this moment.

Indeed, I praised the Lord, aloud, for blessing me beyond measure with the Relationship He gave to me and Lin to en-Joy for so many years, ...and I KNEW that our Relationship was going to continue ...*now and always!*

This was an awe-some, wondrous and life-changing moment, *with Love glowing like the sun* ...and with warm appreciation for a life exceptionally well-lived. Praise God!

“Even in the midst of the grief, we praised God.”
—p. 9, *Heart Scribe Vibes*, by Micah Dillon

Remember that my experiences at this moment (and similar ever-after) are in the spiritual context. But this is NOT to deny my deeply palpable and indescribable feelings of dis-ease (sadness, loss/amputation, confusion, isolation, and a profound pain at the core of my being in the world)! Indeed, you will see evidence of this throughout my own journal of bereavement.

Madeleine L'Engle, in her excellent Forward to Lewis' *A Grief Observed*, notes, “Perhaps I have never felt more closely the strength of God's presence than I did during the months of my husband's dying and after his death. It did not wipe away the grief. The death of a beloved is an amputation.”

Thus, I have had both “the Good” and “the bad” dwelling within me simultaneously—and *inexplicably*. I see them. And I recognize intuitively and also through practical experience that the Good—*without eliminating the bad*—simply subordinates it or renders it impotent.

Even these several years later (and until I myself pass away), I continue to experience a despairing, tearful grief at times, but in each instance (and just as at the moment of her passing), *when I become conscious of the Presence of God by the Holy Spirit*, I am lifted up into a state of Peace and even Joy. This is an elegantly simple, if unreasonable, phenomenon.

Normally, all I need to do to initiate this consciousness of Presence is to consider a few of my uncountable blessings and to be earnestly thankful for them. ...And to do this is a choice that I can discipline myself to do, as with any other purpose for self-discipline.

To me, this is an example of “Amazing Grace.” Who can explain it? ...and yet, it could not be more Real. We each are given the capability to “Real-ize” this, but only as we choose to do so.

4

In C.S. Lewis (think: *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Great Divorce*, and many others), we find an intellectual giant and lay-theologian, who also experienced such a loss as did I. He and Joy Davidman fell deeply in love, and they resolved to become married, *even knowing at the time that she was terminally ill with bone cancer*.

As with Lin and me, theirs was a holistic relationship, nurtured in the matrix of God’s Love. And as did I with Lin, he became her primary caregiver during her final weeks and unto death.

Lewis loved to write extensively about things important to him, and his book, *A Grief Observed*, describes his experience of bereavement in such a raw and personal fashion that he originally released it under the pseudonym N. W. Clerk to keep readers from associating the book with him. Ironically, many friends recommended the book to him as a method for dealing with his own grief. Only after Lewis’ death did his authorship become public.

I must point out the important therapeutic value for himself simply found in the drawing out of his grief from deep within, formulating it into clarity in his mind, and then passing it out of himself through his arm, then through his hand, and onto the paper—in the writing of his thoughts, his feelings, ...his true state of being. His book was simply the result of his having kept a personal journal about his grief-journey beginning soon after his loss, and evolving over a period of time.

The following are some excerpts from his book. While some of his observations are very similar to my own, a few of them are quite the opposite. *My purpose is for you to seek to understand and to accept how differently we grieve—and to know how important it is for us to have—and to share—compassion for one another rather than to judge one another.*

There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting.

...but the bath of self-pity, the wallow, the loathsome sticky-sweet pleasure of indulging it—That disgusts me.

Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. ... but go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence.

I cannot talk to the children about her. The moment I try, there appears on their faces neither grief, nor love, nor fear, nor pity, but the most fatal of all non-conductors, embarrassment. They look as if I were committing an indecency. They are longing for me to stop. ... I can't blame them. It's the way boys are.

I see people, as they approach me, trying to make up their minds whether they'll "say something about it" or not. I hate it if they do, ...and if they don't. ... perhaps the bereaved ought to be isolated in special settlements like lepers.

The act of living is different all through. Her absence is like the sky, spread over everything. ... The remembered voice—That can turn me at any moment to a whimpering child.

But don't come talking to me about the consolations of religion or I shall suspect that you don't understand. ... They tell me she is happy now, they tell me she is at peace. What makes them so sure of this?

What reason have we, except our own desperate wishes, to believe that God is, by any standard we can conceive, "good"? Doesn't all the *prima facie* evidence suggest exactly the opposite? What have we to set against it? ... Time after time, when He seemed most gracious He was really preparing the next torture.

And grief ... gives life a permanently provisional feeling. It doesn't seem worth starting anything ... Now there is nothing but time ... What's wrong with the world to make it so flat, shabby, worn out looking? Then I remember.

[It seems that here his journal begins to reflect an evolution underway in his thoughts]:

The tortures occur. If they are unnecessary, then there is no God or a bad one. If there is a good God, then these tortures are necessary. For no even moderately good Being could possibly inflict or permit them if they weren't.

And suddenly at the very moment when, so far, I mourned her least, I remembered her best. Indeed it was something (almost) better than memory; ... *It was as if the lifting of the sorrow removed a barrier.*

[The italics and underlining are mine for emphasis. I refer to his “lifting of the sorrow” as an “acceptance of grief” — which is the freeing process that reduces our isolation from one another and from God.]

[And in speaking of the differing roles of the “masculine” and the “feminine,” he notes that...]

...Marriage heals this. Jointly the two become fully human. “In the image of God created He *them*.” Thus, by a paradox, this carnival of sexuality leads us out beyond our sexes.

God has not been trying an experiment on my faith or love in order to find out their quality. He knew it already. It was I who didn't. *[WOW!...]*

Still, there's no denying that in some sense I “feel better,” and with that comes at once a sort of shame, and a feeling that one is under a sort of obligation to cherish and foment and prolong one's unhappiness. I've read about that in books, but I never dreamed I should feel it myself. I am sure she wouldn't approve of it. She'd tell me not to be a fool. So, I'm pretty certain, would God.

Sorrow, however, turns out to be not a state but a process. ... Grief is like a long valley, a winding valley where any bend may reveal a totally new landscape. ... There are two enormous gains ... Turned to God, my mind no longer meets that locked door; turned to her, it no longer meets that vacuum...

Praise is the mode of love which always has some element of joy in it. Praise in due order; of Him as the giver, of her as the gift. Don't we in praise somehow enjoy what we praise, however far we are from it? I must do more of this. [My italics...]

She and all the dead are like God. In that respect loving her has become, in its measure, like loving Him. In both cases I must stretch out the arms and hands of love...

There is also, whatever it means, the resurrection of the body. We cannot understand. The best is perhaps what we understand least.

[Our human brain is so impressive—and vital—to our functioning successfully in the world ...and yet, it is grossly inadequate in navigating this spiritual context.]

In her Forward, L'Engle had continued, "Like Lewis, I, too, kept a journal, continuing a habit started when I was eight. It is all right to wallow in one's journal; it is a way of getting rid of self-pity and self-indulgence and self-centeredness. ... I am grateful to Louis for the honesty of his journal of grief, because it makes quite clear that the human being is allowed to grieve, that it is normal, it is right to grieve, and the Christian is not denied this natural response to loss."

Importantly also, she notes that "It is helpful indeed that C.S. Lewis, who has been such a successful apologist for Christianity, should have the courage to admit doubt about what he has so superbly proclaimed. It gives us permission to admit our own doubts, our own angers and anguishes, and to know that they are part of the soul's growth."

The last part of her statement here is most salient for me, pointing to our acceptance of our grief, yes, but as coupled with a *yearning* for the Truth that answers *everything* ... a yearning for a closer relationship with God, ... a relationship for us to deliberately *grow*.

❧ CLOSING ❧

We are each wandering our own path through the darkness of the world—our valley, our wilderness—in which we make many mistakes and in which we are hurt in many different ways. And we accordingly employ our false, egoic self to build up easy, simple defenses ostensibly to minimize or even prevent being hurt again. Withdrawal, self-pity, denial, and bitterness/blaming are only a few examples of these defenses.

Unfortunately, these defenses are like a wall we are building that only protect the egoic self, while at the same time acting insidiously to separate us from one another, from our Creation-gift, and from God—and such a path of increasing isolation leads toward a death infinitely more profound than the death of our mortal body.

Recognizing this, it is for us to employ an enduring self-discipline—in *BOTH the intellectual and the spiritual contexts*—to advance ourselves, even if only gradually through our small successes (and in spite of our failures), to navigate a path toward the Truth of God's unequivocal Love. In this elegantly simple Truth lies our Peace—ours as a gift to share with one another.

[End]