



Good Grief

By TIM NELSON

Bad things happen – deal with It

When a well meaning friend tells you that you need to just deal with a difficult event in your life, too often what they really mean is, “don’t talk to me about it.”

Whether we are facing job loss, divorce, death of a loved one, or the collapse of a highly travelled bridge in our hometown, many of us have been conditioned to find quick answers to deal with our sadness.

“You’ll find another job.”

“It was a bad relationship.”

“Death is a part of life.”

“Be thankful—it could have been worse.”

On the face of it, all of these statements are true. So why don’t those words necessarily make us feel better? The answer is, because we must first allow ourselves time to grieve before we can truly move forward.

When the 35W Bridge collapsed, all of us were stopped dead in our tracks. We were in shock. We were scared that maybe someone we knew was on it at the time it went down. We felt a pit in our stomach and anger started to boil within us as we tried to comprehend how something this tragic could happen.

As the days and weeks have passed, we have listened to news

reports about the victims, possibly visited the site of the accident, and in general, tried to move on. But there still is that a lingering ache and a need for answers. In other words, we are grieving.

As a society, we don’t deal well with grief. As a matter of fact, grief is one of the most off limits topics of conversation in the United States. For generations, we have passed along clichés like, “don’t feel bad,” “it’s God’s will,” and “you need to be strong,” rather than giving ourselves permission to take time to feel bad.

While I am not advocating that we all sit in a circle holding hands singing, “Kum Bi Yah,” I am saying that we need to take the opportunity in the wake of this tragedy to stop and think how we deal with grief in our lives. What messages are we passing on to our children about healthy grieving? What toll does unresolved grief take on our personal lives, our families, and our jobs.

Before any of this can happen, we must first be able to recognize what grief is and what are its causes.

Grief is triggered by the change or end of any familiar

pattern of behavior. It is our emotional reaction to loss in our lives. It is the capsule that holds the feelings of anger, sadness, relief, and gratitude.

Grief is not a sign of weakness or something that goes away because we say the words, “I’m OK.” As human beings, we all experience feelings and emotions that make us who we are—people who care about one another.

So in the coming months, when you hear someone say, “deal with it,” take their advice. Deal with it by allowing yourself the time to grieve. Whether it be talking with someone about your feelings, writing your thoughts down, or taking part in a healing ritual, acknowledge that grief is “normal and natural,” and not something to be ashamed of or explained away with trite phrases.

(Tim Nelson is the co-owner of deRuyter Nelson/A Place To Remember, a St. Paul communications consulting and publishing company. He is a Certified Grief Recovery Specialist, author, speaker and leader of Grief Recovery workshops. See www.deruyternelson.com, or email him at tnelson@deruyternelson.com.)