

HELPS FOR THE HEALTHY CHURCH April 20, 2001: Responding to Loss

A free email encouragement to leaders from the Columbia Intl. University Center for Church Health
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See end of newsletter for response information

Archibald Hart among other counselors believes that one of the leading root causes or triggers to depression is a failure in responding to a LOSS. Healthy leaders are learning how to mourn.

During a recent church consultation weekend, I was having dinner with the pastor and his wife. They have come through a tough 18 months in the church with tremendous pain and several families leaving the church. Yet they are enduring and God has the leaders and the people in a healing process. I turned to the wife and said, "How are you doing through all that has taken place?" Her eyes looked away and after regaining composure she said, "The hardest part is being alone and feeling there is no one I can talk with about what we are experiencing."

If someone goes through a close death the community would not let him or her grieve alone. Yet often the community and the mourners do not know to move through those living losses. Death of a relationship, even after drastic attempts have made to restore it to life fail, along with the death of dreams, plans, and hopes all lead us into seasons of sadness. How leaders respond to loss effects their capacity to endure. Some just leave and those who do not resign may be snared deeply by depression, bitterness, suspicion, or cynicism.

The quote below has been helping me handle some losses in my life. May it encourage other leaders to find God's embrace in the long night.

Make sadness your ally instead of your enemy. God's solution for resolving your loss of relationships, dreams, ideals, and opportunities is SADNESS. Rather than something to be avoided, this sadness, or grief, allows you to let go of what you *cannot* have in order to make room in your heart for what you *can* have.

Those who don't feel safe enough to grieve find themselves holding on to lost hopes and relationships. Then it is difficult for them to seek new attachments, since the ghosts of the past still occupy their emotional life. Solomon understood the value of grieving: "The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, while the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure." (Ecc. 7:4)

So it can be good to be sad, but we must not confuse sadness with depression. Depression is the inability to process loss or rage. It's a heavy paralysis of the soul that won't allow it to finish resolving a problem. Sadness is actually the antidote to depression.

Depression is static and unmoving, but sadness moves toward resolving loss. That's why David declared, "Weeping may last for a night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning." (Psalm 30:5) (Hiding from Love by John Townsend, pg. 100)

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