

COMFORT FOR THE GRIEVING HEART

Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

June 2015

Spirituality and Loss

“My contention is that spirituality is, in the end, a path of great consolation, great strength, and great comfort. For there is a healing force – a spiritual force, an energy greater than the self – that can, if you let it in, mend the broken places in your soul and replenish your depleted waters like an internal reservoir.”

Ashley Davis Bush, Transcending Loss

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If you would like to be added to or removed from our mailing list, or if you would prefer to receive an electronic copy, please contact Dawn at (610) 997-7125.

You may have read my title and thought, “Hmmm... Is this going to be something about religion?” We often hear the words “spirituality” and “religion” used interchangeably. Please know that when we say “spirituality” at St. Luke’s Hospice, we are talking about how individuals make meaning and find purpose in life. This may take the form of practicing in a specific faith tradition. It could be the personal expression of our unique essence and how we share and connect to all that is greater than ourselves.

In our grief, we are profoundly impacted on a spiritual level. Regardless of our background, it is very common to ask “Why?” as an expression of our deepest pain. Those around us might seek to offer comfort by trying to answer our questions with statements like “it was God’s will” or “your loved one is now at peace.” If those thoughts fit with your beliefs, they might provide a sense of comfort. But they might be painful reminders that you feel angry, disappointed, or confused at how your current situation could possibly be God’s will. Even those who have studied and contemplated deeply about the meaning of life can find themselves questioning and searching when faced with loss.

As we travel along our grief journey, our questions may remain. Experiencing loss can both affirm and challenge how we think about the world and our place in it. Eventually we either find answers that we can settle into and understand, or we make peace with our questions, recognizing that how we choose to continue living our lives has become more important to us than seeking answers.

Our grief changes us spiritually and moves us to seek strength, comfort, and meaning in familiar ways, such as through a long-time practice of prayer and meditation, or in other ways, such as discovering new appreciation for the natural world or finding purpose in working with others. On the following pages, you will find reflections and offerings that invite contemplation and conversation. Please know that it is meant to be a starting point as a collection of ideas that others have found useful. As always, I would enjoy hearing your thoughts on how you are finding meaning along your own journey.

Humbly yours,
Christine

Grief and Loss Support Groups

St. Luke's Hospice offers 6-week support groups for adults grieving the loss of someone significant in their lives. Our support groups provide a place to come together with others who have experienced the loss of a loved one to share stories, offer and receive support, and find hope and healing. A group can offer both peer support and education and information about the grief journey. It is important that participants are able to attend all 6 weeks. **Registration for the group is required.** There are no drop-ins permitted. Please note that the group is subject to be canceled if sufficient registration is not reached. Please call for more information.

Lehigh Valley Area

June 16th – July 21st, 2015

Two meeting times will be offered on those dates: **3- 4:30pm** and **6 – 7:30pm**

Both meetings will be held at St. Luke's Bethlehem Education Center (Room 103), 801 Ostrum St., Bethlehem, PA. Call Christine at (610) 997-7132 to register for either group.

"Everything that has a beginning has an end."

- Buddha

Practicing Spiritual Care

From Dr. Alan Wolfelt's Understanding Your Grief

"When you are "torn apart," you may have many spiritual questions for which there are no easy answers: Is there a God? Why me? Will life ever be worth living again? That's why, if I could, I would encourage all of us when we are in the midst of grief to put down "Nurture my spirit" first on our daily to-do list.

My own personal source of spirituality anchors me, allowing me to put my life into perspective. For me, spirituality involves a sense of connection to all things in nature, God, and the world at large. I recognize that, for some, contemplating a spiritual life in the midst of pain of grief can be difficult.

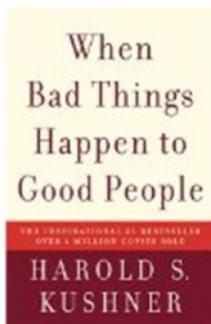
When it comes to our spiritual lives, we have an abundance of choices, all of which can be doors leading to the soul. Spirituality can be found in simple things: a sunrise or sunset; the unexpected kindness of a stranger; the rustle of the wind in the trees.

If you have doubt about your capacity to connect with God and the world around you, try to approach the world with the openness of a child. Embrace the pleasure that comes from the simple sights, smells, and sounds that greet your senses.

Ideas to help you care for your spiritual self during your journey through grief:

- Create a sacred mourning space
- Start each day with a meditation or prayer
- Organize a tree planting
- Visit the great outdoors

Nurturing a spiritual life invites you to connect with nature and the people around you. Your heart opens and your life takes on renewed meaning and purpose. You are filled with compassion for other people, particularly those who have come to know grief. "



When Bad Things Happen to Good People

Rabbi Harold S. Kushner

“When Harold Kushner’s three-year-old son was diagnosed with a degenerative disease and that he would only live until his early teens, he was faced with one of life’s most difficult questions: Why, God? Years later, Rabbi Kushner wrote this straightforward, elegant contemplation of the doubts and fears that arise when tragedy strikes. Kushner shares his wisdom as a rabbi, a parent, a reader, and a human being. “(Review reprinted from Amazon.com.)

A Meditation on Grief

“A friend took me to the redwoods, where the trees talk with God, and it was a thick-barked tree five or six hundred years old that made me think Grandma was near. It’s been twelve years since she died, and though no one understands, I carry her behind my left eye where the spirit sees. I leaned into that ancient tree, making small noises. The laurel leaves rustled. The younger trees creaked along with me. I miss her terribly. And though I resist feeling the loss and emptiness of not having her around, when I lean into that grief, it always in aftermath makes everything more vibrant, more real.

I’ve learned that grief can be a slow ache that never seems to stop rising, yet as we grieve, those we love mysteriously become more and more a part of who we are. In this way, grief is yet another song the heart must sing to open the gate of all there is.”

Mark Nepo, *The Book of Awakening*

*Before me peaceful
Behind me peaceful
Under me peaceful
Over me peaceful
All around me peaceful.*
- Navaho prayer

*God is closest to those
with broken hearts.*
- Jewish Proverb

*Be still, and know that I am God.
Be still, and know that I am.
Be still, and know.
Be still.
Be.*

*- Meditation using
the words from Psalm
46:10*

“Conscious Breathing”

“As you breathe in, you say to yourself, “Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in.” And as you breathe out, say, “Breathing out, I know that I am breathing out.” Just that. You recognize your in-breath as an in-breath and your out-breath as an out-breath. You don’t even need to recite the whole sentence; you can use just two words: “In” and “Out.” This technique can help you keep your mind on your breath. As you practice, your breath will become more peaceful and gentle, and your mind and body will also become more peaceful and gentle. ... Our breathing is the link between our body and our mind. Sometimes our mind is thinking of one thing and our body is doing another, and mind and body are not unified. By concentrating on our breathing, “In” and “Out,” we bring body and mind back together and become whole again. Conscious breathing is an important bridge. ... When we breathe consciously we recover ourselves completely and encounter life in the present moment.”

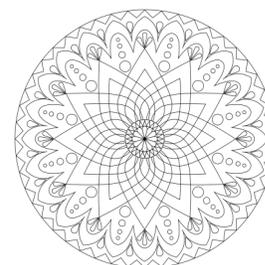
Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step*

Resources for Children and Teens

Mandalas

Mandalas, or “circles,” can remind us of the wholeness that exists in life. We notice circles everywhere in the natural world. They can also represent our relationships with one another and our connection to the universe. The use of mandalas appear in spiritual practices across cultures.

Whether you find mandala patterns to color or you choose to create your own (either through drawing or using objects), working with mandalas can be a unifying and peaceful experience.



The following instructions, found on PlayfulLearning.net (“Making Mandala Art with Kids”), details how to create a mandala from natural materials.



1. Start your circle in an area which will allow your art work to grow, such as a beach, a field, or a space of floor at home.
2. Once you have determined your area, gather your materials nearby so you have them in an easily assessable space.
3. Choose the central piece for your art work and sit this in the center of your working area. For all of our creations we tried to select a large item or an item we only had one of to be the central piece, such as a large piece of sea sponge or drift wood.
4. Choose another collection and form a ring around the central piece much like a tree ring. This may be a circle of shells surrounding the central coral piece, or pine cones surrounding the large flower. The main focus here is to make sure you make a complete ring around the first piece, therefore the inner piece is completely contained inside the outer circle.
5. Continue this pattern adding new circles made out of different items until you believe your piece is complete. A minimum of 5 rings is suggested.

Additional possibilities could include creating a mandala to be a permanent piece of art and glue to a canvas. You can also use man-made collections to create mandalas such as toy cars, marbles, or buttons. The possibilities are limited only by your imagination!

How about some new music?

Try searching “new age,” “nature sounds,” “meditation,” or “healing” on your radio station. As you listen, notice how your body responds. Are you breathing more slowly? Can you feel your body relaxing? Are your thoughts slowing down? Music can be a powerful way to calm your energy and soothe your spirit.

Camp Evergreen

A free bereavement camp for children ages 8 -16

July 24th – 26th (register by June 26)

Camp Fowler, Orefield, PA

Sponsored by SpiritTrust Lutheran Home Care & Hospice

To request more information or to register,

Call 1-888-882-4530

Honoring the Journey

Additional Places to Find Support and Share Your Story

This is a listing of free bereavement resources in the area. If you have a need for something and don't see it on this list, please call Christine at (610) 997-7132 for referrals to other services.

Cancer Support Community of Lehigh Valley with St. Luke's offers the Hope and Healing Series, a series of creative classes at St. Luke's Cancer Center-Anderson Campus, primarily in the Hope and Healing Room. Any person or loved one affected by cancer can register for this series. Programs offered include T'ai Chi, Drumming, Art of Healing Dance, Labyrinth, Jewelry Making, Journaling, Men's Group, Heart Rhythm Meditation, Yoga, and Creative Expression. Classes are open to anyone affected by cancer. Programs are free, but registration is required. Call 610-861-7555 or email info@cancersupportglv.org to register or for more information about classes, dates and times.

The Compassionate Friends offers ongoing support groups for parents, grandparents, and adult siblings grieving the loss of a child, grandchild, or sibling.

TCF of Lehigh Valley meets at Sacred Heart Hospital, 2nd floor, 421 Chew Street in Allentown. The group meets the 2nd Monday each month at 7pm. For more information, call 484-597-0240.

TCF of Quakertown meets at St. Luke's Hospital, ground floor, 1021 Park Ave in Quakertown in Taylor Conference Rooms A&B. This group is held the 2nd Tuesday each month from 7:30 – 9pm. For more information, call 215-536-0173.

TCF of Easton meets the 2nd Thursday each month from 7-9pm at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, 2115 Washington Blvd. in Easton. For more information call 610-866-5468.

TCF of Carbon County meets the 1st Wednesday each month from 6:30 – 8:30pm in the Palmerton Community Ambulance Association, 501 Delaware Ave in Palmerton. Please call 610-826-2938 for more information.

Family Answers holds a Survivors of Suicide support group at 402 North Fulton Street in Allentown, PA. This group is held the first and third Monday each month from 7-8pm. Call 610-435-9651 for more info.

Free Spirits is a group of more than 2 dozen older widows who go out to lunch once a month to keep active and offer support to each other--and to newer widows. Most are members of Church of the Manger UCC, Bethlehem. Call 610-866-8223 for more information.

Grand View Hospital Hospice offers many groups and services that change seasonally. Please call 215-453-4210 for more information.

GriefShare Groups are a faith-based, evangelical approach to grief and loss. GriefShare groups are provided at several locations in the Lehigh Valley. To find a location near you, please visit www.griefshare.org.

Lehigh Valley Health Network offers grief support services in the form of counseling, support groups, and workshops for adults and children, as well as a lunch club for women. For more information, please call 610-969-0330.

VNA/Hospice of Monroe County offers a support group the 1st and 3rd Wednesday each month at noon. Call 570-421-5390 for more information.