

## **Feelings and Grief**

### **KEOM & ElderHope**

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This is the script from Barb's segment this month on the Community Focus program at KEOM, 88.5FM. It deals with the powerful feelings that surround the grief experience. It was taped live at the KEOM studios.

### **KEOM & ElderHope**

**April 29, 2003**

**Q: So, Barb, what are we talking about today?**

A: Well, today I wanted to talk a little about the grief experience, and the powerful feelings that accompany grief. Many of the listeners may remember the Academy-award winning movie *Shadowlands*, starring Anthony Hopkins. In that movie, Hopkins plays the real life character, C.S. Lewis. The story centers around his very tender love for his wife, Joy, and the way that his life changed as a result of meeting her. The movie also relates the process that led to her death. Lewis never intended nor wanted to fall in love. He was drawn into it, quite powerfully. And, so, the pain of his grief was enormous, after having been so changed by this previously unknown quality of love. The gifts that her love gave him, through the suffering that accompanied his grief, were enormous. One of those gifts was his best-selling book, *A Grief Observed*, an introspective and very accurate portrayal of the grief experience. I guess I tell that story to reinforce the idea that grief has a potential for good, though it never feels like it at the time.

**Q: We don't often feel any good that can come out of it.**

A: Exactly. It requires that we, as Thomas Attig put it, relearn the world. Our entire world shifts, including our relationships to ourselves, the one who has died, others who knew the deceased, and the world itself, the tasks that we are called on to do.

**Q: When you speak of our relationship to ourselves, what do you mean? How does that change?**

A: It changes because when the deceased was around us, they may have made us different. Maybe they helped draw out our strengths, given us courage to believe in ourselves, or take on challenges that we might not otherwise have done. As well, they may have led us to doubt ourselves, or to be fearful, and to draw back from engaging in life. In any case, they may have played a part in the roles we played in life. Now, with their death, we have to figure out how to go on, how to be who we are when we aren't really sure who we are, what our roles are now - without that person.

**Q: And with the world? How does our relationship to it change?**

A: It changes because our identity often changes following the death. C.S. Lewis, to use the

previous example, is once again single, and eligible. He doesn't feel eligible, and indeed, doesn't want to be eligible. But, he is. We also have to change our relationship to the deceased. All the things we did with them have suddenly dropped away, are no longer. So, it's not unusual to hear a wife who has been visiting her husband in the nursing home for the past three years say, "Last Wednesday I drove to the nursing home like I always used to do, and as I was getting out of the car, realized he wasn't there any longer. I just sat in the car and sobbed." Often, many of the things we used to do change for us.

**Q: So, you began the segment today, talking about the good that can come out of the grief experience.**

A: Right. Relearning our world, while painful, sometimes unbearably so, causes us to see our world more deeply and profoundly. We learn that we never really lose our loved one. That's part of our relearning the world. They find a new way of being with us. This is perhaps the biggest challenge especially for the elderly, who may feel more isolated in their grief. It's so important that when an elder experiences the loss of a spouse or other loved one, that we offer special understanding and support to help them cope with their loss and changes in their life. Listen to them, offer specific ways to help maybe mow the lawn or pick up some groceries or bring a lunch to share at the nursing home, and let them know that you care. Although it may be hard for them to see any good coming from grief, they may, at the very least, know that others care for them, want to help them with some of those life changes, and may learn that they are never really alone a very hopeful thing!

**Q: Where can listeners get more information about grief, Barb?**

A. The library and bookstores have plenty of resources on grief. Certainly, C.S. Lewis's book, [A Grief Observed](#), is an eloquent and touching resource on grief. Elderhope.com has a list of books that have been helpful to others about grief. Listeners can contact a local hospice to get information about grief support groups and other available resources.