

VETERANS MAGAZINE

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NAVIGATING
THE DARK
VALLEYS OF
GRIEF & LOSS

Larry Bronghton is an award-winning entrepreneur, bestselling author, keynote speaker, and former US Army Green Beret. CBN News has called Larry "the nation's foremost expert on leadership and entrepreneurship." He has been featured in national publications and has been a guest expert on every major television and cable network.

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In the playground through the college of loss, grief drives its busy track. It's the whine of a voice yearning to hear just one more, the empty space on the other side of the bed, the silence that fills a home where laughter once lived. It's the loss of playful abilities, the end of relationships, the refusal to understand the world. Each loss is an intimate narrative I will embrace through by acknowledging their impact.

Expressions of grief are as diverse as the personalities that experience them. Some are more openly demonstrative to the friends and loved ones; others are more withdrawn. Others experience an irritable anger that shifts with each step. Physical symptoms may surface, emotional waves may crash with intensity, and behaviors may alter as we seek to navigate our new reality.

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Through art may seem like a hard time task, taking time of ourselves through this journey is a real act of self-compassion. It's allowing to the soul to breathe without a timetable or expectations. It's finding solace in sharing our story with those willing to bear witness to our pain. It's engaging in the simple rituals of daily life, which anchor us to the present. Exercise, nutrition, and meditation pillars upon which we can lean.

In times of grief, major decisions loom like mountains on the horizon. We're counseled to pause to allow the fogging to become clear before choosing our path. Journaling can serve as a map of our inner terrain.

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NAVIGATING THE DARK VALLEYS OF GRIEF & LOSS



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In the quiet after the storm, in the still moments when the heart feels heavy, we find ourselves at the threshold of grief. It’s a path walked by many, yet it bears the solitary footprints of our own journey. The death of a military comrade, family member, service animal, or pet; a dream that once felt tangible that has slipped away; the breakdown of a once secure marriage; or the unexpected farewell to a phase of life—each carves a unique landscape of sorrow within us. And while the terrain of loss is vast and varied, it’s traversed by a common thread of human resilience and the quest for healing.

My own journey through the valley of grief includes the death of a brother, parents, friends, and comrades. I’ve also traveled the lonely road of divorce, failed business ventures, and betrayal. It was, however, the blunt force trauma of a freak car accident that snatched the life of my 17-year-old son, while simultaneously providing a crash course in spiritual, emotional, and physical pain that has impacted every area of my life. The crushing weight and despair I experienced was unlike anything I’d ever heard of, read about, or been through in my life. In the darkest of times, alone at home, the pain was so raw that I sobbed, cursed God, screamed, and wailed as if demons were clawing at my insides to escape my soul. Miraculously, somehow the sun would rise again.

In the pilgrimage through the valleys of loss, grief shows its many faces. It’s the echo of a voice we long to hear just once more, the empty space on the other side of the bed, the silence that fills a home where laughter once lived. It’s in the loss of physical abilities, the end of relationships, or the relocation to unfamiliar grounds. Each loss is an intimate narrative, and we honor them by acknowledging their impact.

Expressions of grief are as diverse as the personalities that experience them. Some are worn openly, a testament to the fierce love and deep connection that endures. Others are carried in silence, an invisible weight that shifts with each step. Physical symptoms may surface, emotional waves may crash with intensity, and behaviors may alter as we seek to navigate our new reality.

Grief is indeed a process, one that is inherently circuitous. There may be days when denial stands guard, a temporary respite from soul-crushing pain. On other days, acceptance may feel within reach, only to be followed by a resurgence of anger or bargaining. Relief may intertwine with regret, and in the rare, unexpected moments, joy may dare to surface, reminding us that our capacity to feel remains unbroken.

Though it may seem like a herculean task, taking care of ourselves through this journey is a radical act of self-compassion. It’s allowing us the space to grieve without timetable or expectation. It’s finding solace in sharing our story with those willing to bear witness to our pain. It’s engaging in the simple rituals of daily life, which anchor us to the present. Exercise, nutrition, and rest become pillars upon which we can lean.

In times of grief, major decisions loom like mountains on the horizon. We’re counseled to pause, to allow the landscape to become clear before choosing our path. Journaling can serve as a map of our inner terrain,

offering insights when the way forward is obscured. While some lose their faith in God, for many, spirituality provides a beacon of light, offering comfort and connection beyond the tangible world.

Within the grief community, especially for those who have served, shared experiences can forge a bond that sustains us. Veterans may find camaraderie and understanding in spaces dedicated to their unique experiences of loss. Resources through the VA and support groups provide havens where stories of loss and courage intertwine.

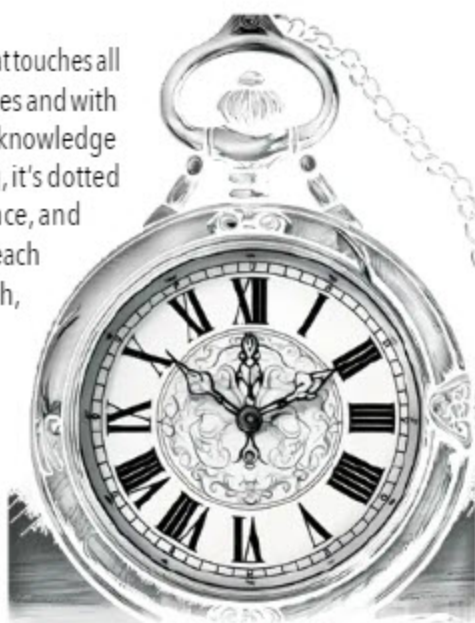
Talk therapy offers a lantern in the darkness, its glow revealing strategies to navigate the shadowy maze of grief. It teaches us that maintaining a routine can steady our trembling hands, that physical health supports emotional fortitude, and that our journey is ours alone—requiring grace, patience, understanding, and self-kindness.

There is healing power in finding meaning, and in forging connections that transcend loss. We're invited to weave the memories and legacies of those who have died, transitioned, or passed (whatever term you choose to use) into the fabric of our daily lives. In volunteering, creative endeavors, or the quiet contemplation of spirituality, we honor those who have left us behind and reaffirm our bond with life.

Yet, there are times when the weight of grief requires a companion more experienced in its landscape. Professional help is not a beacon of weakness, but rather a declaration of courage and strength. Therapists and counselors can provide the tools to build bridges over the rivers of sorrow, enabling us to continue our journey with a steadier gait.

By focusing on healing, we ultimately find ourselves at the crest of a new dawn. The journey through grief is not about reaching a destination where the pain of loss is left behind. It's about learning to carry it with grace, integrating it into the narrative of our lives. We don't move on; we simply learn to move forward. We learn to live with the absence, allowing it to shape us without defining us. We find that love endures, that memories become treasures, and that in the heart's quietest moments, there is still a song to be sung.

In this shared human experience that touches all of us, let's walk gently with ourselves and with each other. Let's find solace in the knowledge that, although the journey is long, it's dotted with moments of beauty, resilience, and hope. As we continue forward, let each step be a testament to our strength, and each breath a reminder that even in grief, we're surrounded by an unwavering human spirit that whispers, persistently, of love and renewal.



SIDEBAR: If lingering grief impedes your ability to move forward with your life, consider these counseling and support resources.

You can meet with other Veterans to talk about grief or other concerns at your local Vet Center: <http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/index.asp>

VA Medical Center locations can be found here: http://www.va.gov/landing2_locations.htm

Information about chaplaincy services available through the VA is available here: <http://www.va.gov/chaplain/>

For those experiencing the passing of a child, consider the support group, Compassionate Friends. <https://www.compassionatefriends.org>

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-Washington Irving