

GETTING HOPE BACK

DR. BOB BAUGHER

You are reading this because someone you love died—your child, your sibling, or your grandchild. The word *hope* has gone out of your life. In the last issue of *We Need Not Walk Alone* I discussed what it means to *wait* for hope. It matters not whether the death of your child, sibling, grandchild, spouse or friend was sudden or due to a chronic condition, the minute-by-minute absence of this precious person has left you dazed, shocked, confused and wondering how you can live another day.

As we know, one way of hope coming back into our life is for time to pass. However, when I asked parents, grandparents and siblings what they **did** to put hope back into their lives, they said that, at first that they cared little about hope.

Because they were in so much pain all they could imagine was another day with more of the same.

They told me that, later, however, they found hope by doing at least one of the following.

❑ FIND SELF-COMPASSION

One mom stated, “I came to the realization that few (or none) of my previous life experiences prepared me for this and therefore I had to learn to be good to myself and forgive myself.”

❑ MAKE A DECISION TO GO FORWARD

Despite their pain and missing their loved one, many people stated that, at some point they made the decision to move forward with their life by bringing the memories with them. Several dads told me that they eventually came to realize that

that they could not outrun their grief or fix it, but they had to fight to live another day. One dad said, “I had to realize that I’m a new man because my son now lives inside of me.” A man whose sister died told me, “When I realized that I wasn’t going to work through grief, I let it work through me; and I decided to have a new life and a new me.”

❑ ATTEND A LOCAL SUPPORT GROUP

Have you ever sat in a support group meeting? If so, do you remember the first time you walked in prior to the start of the meeting? Of course you

do. What did you see? People chatting, some even laughing. For a moment you may have thought you were in the wrong place because—well, these folks couldn't be people who've experienced the death of a child. However, you soon found that, indeed, this was the right place.

How did hope eventually emerge from the depths of your grief? By the gift of the so-called old timers, such as chapter leaders, group facilitators and long-time attendees who seemed to have found hope. At first you may have mistakenly thought, "These people could not have loved their child or sibling as much as I did."

However, as you got to know these folks and learned their stories, you realized that, despite their tragedies, they could laugh again and even reach out to others with hope and caring.

□ EDUCATE YOURSELF

Time and again people have told me that understanding the craziness of grief through books, articles, online materials, videos, and workshops helped them to eventually move through the dark tunnel of despair toward the light of hope.

□ GIVE TO OTHERS

If the death of your loved one is recent, the thought of helping others at this point in your life may be a far-out notion. However, there are thousands of people who, after a time, were able to reach out and offer a hand to those in need.

There may come a time in your grief journey where you find that you may be ready to offer some of yourself. Those who have chosen to take this step report that the very act of giving helps them to begin a new journey—a journey of hope, of finding their way again, of getting in touch with who they are, or discovering a new part of them

that feels right. Perhaps you're not ready. But when you are, there will be people who will be so grateful that you have chosen to help. And you will be thankful that taking this step has brought hope to your own life.

□ START PAYING ATTENTION TO THE BLESSINGS

The death of a child, grandchild or sibling can reaffirm the realization that life is very precious.

□ ATTEND A NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Each year more than 1,000 people make the decision to register online, get into their car or on a plane, check into a hotel and attend a national grief conference.

Have you ever attended? If not, then consider attending the next one.

As those of you who have attended a conference know, you walk into the hotel and see hundreds of people, each of whom has experienced the death of a child, grandchild, or sibling. The workshop and speakers provide amazing stories of hope—stories that lift the spirit and leave people with the clear message that, despite their feelings of loss and grief, they can find joy and meaning in life again. A national conference is a place filled with caring people, lots to learn, hugs, and most importantly hope.

However, you can do it, find
a way to get there.

And, look for me in a workshop, walking down the hall, in the bookstore, or at the banquet. Come up and say, "Hi. I read your article on Hope and now I'm here."