

# WORDS OF INSPIRATION

## Dealing with Grief

I imagine that for many of you, you are spent. Drained. Your cup has run dry. You've experienced too many hard things. You're physically exhausted and tired of wearing the PPE. You're probably a little scared. You just feel off. And I'm sure for many of you, things at home are difficult because of this crisis. You're all experiencing change that is difficult. We have a name for this experience: grief.

Typically, we associate grief simply with death (which many of you also have had a first-hand look at), but the truth is, we experience grief any time we endure change that we perceive as negative. Think about it: negative change is what *loss* is. As health care professionals, you've probably seen and experienced a lot of it. You've witnessed more deaths that you're used to. Maybe you've lost co-workers, family, or friends. We've all lost what's normal, like our routines, time, security, and even those little things we all enjoy (like going *out* to dinner and hugging friends).

And the problem for many of us is that grief is something we don't "do" very well. So, in times like this, people like me (from the Christian tradition) have a tendency to look to Jesus for help. And Jesus helps us here, because he too experienced grief in profound ways. Whether or not you're a Jesus follower, I think Jesus shows us a very helpful way to walk through it.

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*Hello! My name is Matt Agresti, and I'm a pastor at a church in Monmouth County called Park Church. Before I started at the church, I was a chaplain at Riverview, Ocean, and Jersey Shore University Medical Centers. I genuinely miss working alongside all of you fantastic, dedicated, and skilled health professionals. I love my work now, but I'd also love to be in the mix with you to support you during this health crisis.*

In the last days of Jesus' life, there's a scene in the Gospel of Matthew (26:36-46) where Jesus is "deeply grieved, even to the point of death". He's about to die, his friends are betraying him, his own people want him dead, he's sorrowful and troubled. So, he goes to a garden to pray. In this quick scene, we can learn four easy lessons on walking through grief:

1. **He names it.** He doesn't hide it, explain it away, suppress it, or pretend he's feeling something else. He calls it like it is. There is something very powerful and liberating about simply putting words to what you're feeling. It's something that's worth reflecting on, and trying yourself.
2. **He doesn't go through it alone.** He invites his closest friends to support him in the midst of his darkest moment. Even though they disappoint him by falling asleep, for Jesus it was still better to go through it with others than alone. When we open our grief up to others, they probably will also disappoint us (forget to check in, say the wrong thing, etc.). But it's still better with them, than without. Invite other people in.
3. **He prays.** He goes to God for help, support, direction, and strength. I don't know if you're a praying person, but if you are – now's a good time to get back to it. If you're not, maybe this is the time for you to connect spiritually with whatever higher power you connect with.

4. **He finds meaning in it.** Jesus trusts that God will do something meaningful through his suffering (Christians believe that God reconciled the estranged world to himself though Jesus!). I hope you are able to find meaning through this unique time of suffering. You should be able to, because you are literally on the front lines saving lives, reducing suffering, and caring for the most vulnerable. Whatever you do in health care, what you do always has profound meaning – but it is especially magnified in these difficult days.

Whether you'd call it grief or not – there's a good chance that's what you're feeling. And so, my hope for you, in the most general terms possible, is that you can get through this better than you were before. Try one or two (or all) of these steps, and I bet you'll find strength, comfort, and meaning to help you make it through.

If I were a chaplain still, I'd love to be next to you to walk through this with you...and support you, pray for you, and help in any way I could. But for now, these words will have to do. Thank you for what you do.

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