

The Three Most Important Questions You Can Ask Yourself When Mourning

By Lou LaGrand

The death of a loved one always changes us. We have no choice in the matter. Why? Because the interaction with our loved one is gone along with the past; it cannot be retrieved. When our interactional self dies it changes our identity and who we identify with. Life is new and different without the presence of the deceased.

The result of the death of our loved one means we have to develop new routines, sometimes change roles or develop new skills, and restructure our lives knowing our loved one is no longer physically present. One very effective method of doing all of this is to ask ourselves three key questions.

These questions were developed by a colleague and friend the late Dr. Catherine Sanders. She was an outstanding grief therapist and continues to help thousands through other counselors who have used them. I present them to every support group I conduct. They provide great direction and can be used as evaluating tools through the days and months of adapting to the absence of our loved one.

1. What do you want to take from your old life into your new life? Through the years, here are a few of the things other mourners have shared with me that they wanted to take with them into their new life. The deceased loved one's humor, gentleness, strength, or commitment. My patience, my faith, my cherished memories, my cooking skills, my artistic ability. I want to keep the closeness of my step children. Positive attitude. Continue to travel. The love I've had in this life. Being a good listener.

Review your strengths, relationships, and memories. Choose what you want to continue on with and write them down next to the question. And work on them.

2. What do you want to leave behind? Here is what other mourners have said they wanted to leave behind. Anger, old routines, regrets or guilt, alcoholism memories, not putting myself first, rushing, resentment, being a worry wort, sadness, being a fifth wheel, my impatience, being critical, heartache and pain, and negative memories of the illness.

With this question, take the time to review your life and the things you would like to work on changing and list them in order of priority.

3. What do you want to add to your new life? This is a very critical question as it speaks to where you will invest your energy in the work and purposes that give life meaning. We all need a dream. Others have shared the following with me regarding what they wanted to add. Skills, abilities, courage, humor, more rest, memories to nurture, new traditions, more exercise, model my heroes, forgiveness, new friends, new interests, independence, more understanding of others, faith and hope, and take better care of myself.

Here are some additional guidelines to get the most out of this self-analysis. First, write the three questions down on a sheet of paper. Sit in a quiet place and answer the questions. Put the sheet away and come back the next day to reread what you wrote. Pick the number one item from each of the questions, the one you feel is most important.

And here is the most critical factor. Decide on the specific behaviors you are going to implement in order to follow through on what you said you are going to do. For example, how will you develop a certain skill or a positive attitude? How will you leave behind what you said you were going to leave behind. And what specific

actions will you take to start adding to your new life. Write out the behaviors and start practicing them. You must take planned action.

As the days and months go on, periodically review your list. Add anything you have discovered that needs to be addressed. Revisit your list to start on a new item once you have taken care of your first priority. You can get through your loss and reinvest in life.

Use these three questions as your beginning guides.

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