

GRIEF'S LIKENESS TO FALL

WHAT IS LOST, WHAT IS LEFT, WHAT IS POSSIBLE

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Distributed by Bereaved Parents of the USA – 2019.09.26



As we prepare for a transition into cool mornings and early sunsets... As the trees let go of their leaves in preparation for a season of rest and recovery, it allows us to reflect on what is lost, what is left, and what is possible.

What is lost?

I always look forward to the first signs of fall; the leaves begin to slowly change, brisk mornings, and the sun begins to change from a penetrating light to a hazy glow. As the season progresses, the leaves begin to change into vibrant colors and slowly release from the trees. Within weeks we are left with empty branches, cool days, and a sense of stillness. I am reminded of how we can associate this transition with the initial phase of grief. Grief can leave us empty without our loved one. The way in which our lives have completely changed from vibrant life to numbness and pain. When grief informs our whole world, it can leave us lonely and desperate for connection to our roots and core. In nature the experience of fall is very purposeful. Trees need to let go of their leaves in order to prepare for the harshness of winter. In grief, we sometimes need to preserve our core for a period of time in order to one day grow again.

What is left?

As nature begins to prepare for winter, preservation becomes critical. Every last bit of sunshine and water is stored in order to survive a cruel winter. What we see in the outside world may be empty branches, brown grass, and flower blooms falling away. However, the internal experience is a very different process. Everything is still very much alive and fully functioning. As we move into the “what

is left” phase of grief, this can be a similar experience. While our life will never be the same again, grief work can help us slowly identify what is left in our lives. Our core group of friends, family, and support help us nourish and preserve, but they can help us grow. They can help us remember that through loss, we can rediscover life and remember there is still love and connection in our lives.

What is possible?

As fall transitions into winter, we are left with a period of bleakness. It feels as if nothing is ever going to grow again. Survival is a battle for months. However, this period has purpose. The leaves fall down to the forest floor to provide enough nourishment for the earth’s soil to grow more leaves for when spring arrives. Each year when the laurels grow and the bluebonnets begin to emerge again, I am reminded of what is possible. In the final phase of grief, we are reminded that we can find meaning and joy in life again. We can transform our experience of the harshness into nourishment for our souls. Far too often, we fear the dark and adore only the light. The same can be said for grief. What I try to remember is we need balance and perspective as this is what allows for our experiences to be whole.

These symbolic associations are powerful reminders that Mother Nature has an incredible influence on our lives. Death forces us to examine the purpose of life... I believe that our connections to our loved ones are not gone, but our relationship may be different. With balance and purpose we can allow ourselves to love and trust again.