

## Acknowledging life

When we support the mourning process of one who is bereaved, we are not dwelling on the death, but instead we are acknowledging life. If you acknowledge the life of one who has died, surviving family members may remember you as one of few people who actually helped in their time of bereavement. It sounds too simple, but it is true. How often do well-meaning friends try to keep our minds off the one who died, failing even to speak their name, in an attempt to protect us from the pain of our grief?

If life of someone special has just been snatched away from you, that person's life is still very much on your mind, even though the fact of the death may have overtaken your life. In fact, you may be using all your energy just to try and grasp the fact that the life has indeed ended. Acknowledging the life of the deceased can help us begin to understand that they are gone, and that we must begin to adjust to that reality.

But we also need to acknowledge the lives of the surviving loved ones. Sometimes the event of the death comes upon a family like a whirlwind. Attending to the death and the flurry of activity that it sets into motion can cause a family to lose sight of the living. Children may be forgotten altogether as adults fail to recognize the needs of grieving children. Instead of acknowledging the pain of the loss, family members sometimes speak of being strong for each other and fail to share in the most powerful emotional experience that we will have as families.

To acknowledge the lives of those who remain after a loved one dies is to acknowledge the needs of those who mourn. We are all different in how we fill those needs, and yet we are all the same in that our healing is helped along by those around us acknowledging that a living, breathing person has entered into a powerful season that we sometimes call the season of grief. We feel the pain and sorrow because we are alive. When others acknowledge that, they honor both the life of the deceased and our need to mourn.

Acknowledgement of the living is especially important for children. They learn how to balance the frightening paradox that life ends and life goes on at the same time. Focusing attention on the living while acknowledging the death can ease their anxieties about what will happen to them or other loved ones after someone important dies.

We acknowledge the sacred struggle that goes on in a soul trying to adjust to the absence of a loved one. Those who mourn need our care and compassion as the soul protests the emptiness that it somehow knows that it cannot fill. Encourage someone you know who is mourning to share their story with you. When you do, you will be offering them the gift of acknowledging life.