

# Overcoming Grief

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## **Sample of Content:**

During my first year of college a life-long family friend and mentor tragically lost his son. Separated by distance, I assumed that his Christian friends, the staff at his church, and his Sunday school class would step in and wrap their arms around him and his wife. Needless to say I was surprised, one year later, when we were able to finally meet face to face.

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During my first year of college a life-long family friend and mentor tragically lost his son. Separated by distance, I assumed that his Christian friends, the staff at his church, and his Sunday school class would step in and wrap their arms around him and his wife. Needless to say I was surprised, one year later, when we were able to finally meet face to

face. When I asked him how he and his wife were doing the first words out of his mouth were, "Brian, the church failed us during our greatest time of need." Knowing first-hand his maturity and emotional soundness, I was taken back. I thought, "If he said the church failed them, the church must have really failed them."

Those who experience tragic loss, which I'm sure will include all of us by the time we leave this planet, experience sorrow that defies explanation. C.S. Lewis, struggling to put into words how he felt after losing his wife commented,

"No one ever told me that grief felt so much like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the yawning. I keep on swallowing." (A Grief Observed , p. 19)

And if there was ever someone besides Lewis that couldn't put their finger on the depth of their grief, it had to be Naomi.

The Book of Ruth tells us that Naomi was happily married to a man named Elimilech and together they had two strong sons, Mahlon and Kilion. As life goes, business took her family to a foreign country-a place called Moab. But even in that distant land their family blossomed. Life was good. Then, without even the faintest hint that heartbreak was standing at her door, Naomi's husband didn't return home for dinner. Who could have known that their kiss that morning would have been their last? Her sons eventually married, but even their weddings and talk of children couldn't take away the emptiness she felt. Finally, in a cruel twist that even Hollywood wouldn't script, she lost both of her sons. She was devastated, alone and bewildered. Naomi was so broken that Ruth 1:20 tells us that she began asking people to not call her Naomi (meaning "pleasant") anymore but Mara (meaning "bitter").

The bright spot, if there can be a bright spot in someone's tragic loss, is that there was someone who didn't leave her. Her name was Ruth, her daughter-in-law. We're told she didn't offer any deep theological explanations. There's no record that she tried to provide the "right word" at the "right time." All we hear is Ruth's promise in Ruth 1:16, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay, I will stay." And that's exactly what she did.

I never asked my friend what his church could have done differently. I didn't feel that it was my place.

My guess? Unlike Ruth, there were probably too many words and too few visits.

Brian Jones is the author of *Second Guessing God: Hanging on When You Can't See Plan* (March 2006) and the founding Senior Pastor of Christ's Church of the Valley in Collegeville, PA. More information about his writing and speaking can be found at <http://www.brianjones.com>

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