

3 Things Never to Say at a Funeral

by Brian Orme

When it comes to grief and loss, Dr. Brené Brown, a research professor at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work says, “Rarely does a response make something better, what makes something better is a connection.”

When trying to comfort a good friend or family member during the death of a loved one we usually find ourselves searching for the right words to say, but often our words unintentionally derail the grieving process. The words we say to the grieving are usually meant to comfort, but sometimes they become grief deflectors.

Here are three things we should probably stop saying to someone who’s recently lost a loved one. These simple phrases are meant to be a healing balm to the suffering but are hurtful and cause more pain.

If you want to validate someone’s loss and give him/her permission to grieve, stay clear of these phrases and just be present and with the person.

1. “They’re in a better place.”

This phrase tends to make the person who’s grieving feel like their current struggle isn’t credible, because if they were truly spiritual they would know how great this moment really is!

When Jesus came to Mary and Martha after his good friend Lazarus died, he joined the mourners. When it comes to grief, vulnerable empathy always beats the spiritual catchphrase. Resist the urge to inject a quick dose of hope and offer your solidarity instead.

2. “At least they’re not suffering anymore.”

No one wants their loved one to suffer, but you still desperately want them to be present. If we go back to Jesus at Lazarus’ gravesite, I can’t imagine him saying to Mary or Martha, “Well, at least he’s not suffering anymore.” Jesus was racked with sorrow himself and through his tears he gave others permission to grieve—human connection at its deepest.

3. “Time heals all wounds.”

This is a terrible cliché and it trivializes the present pain—pointing to the fact that it will heal... just hang in there! A person who loses a loved one is connected to them through their grief.

Avoid platitudes and trite phrases. Remember, it’s not your job to heal them—it’s your job to feel something deep with them and give them permission to grieve in the context of their faith. Cry, hug, pray and be present in the midst of loss. Don’t rush people through grief. Like

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