



How to build community.

How to support someone through loss

Summary keywords

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Speakers

Jake Lloyd, Barnabé Anzuruni

Episode 13: How to support someone through loss

Jake Lloyd 0:15

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Loss and grief affect all of us at some point in our lives. The death of a loved one. The end of a relationship. The loss of a job. Well. Maybe even the destruction of a home. Whatever the cause, if you've ever wanted to support someone you know who is experiencing loss but haven't been sure how best to help them, then this episode is for you. I'm Jake Lloyd. You're listening to the How to build community show. And today, we're asking an expert to share his best advice with you.

Barnabé Anzuruni 0:57

There are times that language cannot provide the kind of comfort you need. The best way from experience is to listen. Not to stop you. Not to talk to, you know, to take. To try to. To put sense in your head. Just to listen.

Jake Lloyd 1:14

That's the voice of Barnabé Anzuruni. He is based in Kenya, is originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo. He's a theologian. He works with Tearfund, and he has a special interest in how people recover and grow through the grief process. And in this episode, he'll tell you what things you should and shouldn't say to people who are grieving. Why it's important to create space for people to lament. What kinds of practical support you can offer and how the grief process can ultimately lead people to grow. But I began by asking Barnabé to introduce himself and as well as his background as a theologian, an academic and a church minister. He told me about his own experiences of the subject we were talking about.

Barnabé Anzuruni 2:05

Personally, I've gone through moments of loss. Some of them are still fresh in my mind. We were born eight, a family. Me and my siblings were eight. But at the moment we are five. So, we lost three of our children. All the three were lost in a span of four years. So it was one loss after another, one death after another. Of course, that was during a time when we were refugees, we were living as refugees in a neighbouring country. So it was not easy, it was not easy. In another instance I can remember, which is most recent, it was a loss of the kidney function for myself. At the moment I live with a transplanted kidney, a donated kidney. So all that period was a period of grief. I get support from friends, support from colleagues, support from the church and so on.

Jake Lloyd 3:12

So during this time, what did he learn about how best to support someone through grief? Here's the first thing he told me.

Barnabé Anzuruni 3:20

I can say that there are times, Jake, there are times that language cannot provide the kind of comfort you need. Sometimes all kinds of words of encouragement, the scripture, even that some people will bring to you. Sometimes they sound uninspired, sometimes even sounds deficient to deal with the emotional anguish. Words sometimes do not provide the comfort those facing great loss need. No matter how strong sometimes your theology can be, sometimes no matter how strong the scripture you talk to someone who's grieving is in an attempt to provide support. Sometimes all that does not truly bring the comfort that one needs.

Jake Lloyd 4:16

If words then can fail to bring comfort, can they actually also cause harm, even if they're well-intended?

Barnabé Anzuruni 4:25

When someone is grieving, sometimes and most of the time they lament. Lament is an integral part of healing. I guess that sometimes those who bring support to someone who's mourning, they don't understand the place and the role of lament during grief. And that's why you find that when someone's lamenting, they tend to stop them. When you lament, you cry, pouring out your heart and talk, all those things you need someone to be there to just listen, not to stop you, not to talk to you, not to take to try to put sense in your head, just to listen as you are crying out, as you're pouring out your heart. So sometimes words do not provide the immediate support you need. Of course, words will be needed towards the end of the process. But as someone is freshly grieving because of the loss that they've experienced, the best way from experience is to listen to them, be there for them, a time also to weep with them, weep with them, and all that will be very much important to lead the person in that process.

Jake Lloyd 5:49

So if listening is so important, how can people do this effectively? This was his advice.

Barnabé Anzuruni 5:57

Be there. Be there with the person. Allow them to talk. Because when you listen, you used to sympathise. You ensure that they have space to pour out their hearts. Of course, someone may not talk when they are grieving. They just want silence. Give them that space. So that's, basically the listening here is to allow the person to be themselves during that time of grief. How do you do it? Presence is important and ensure that the person feels supported, feels encouraged. Because the last thing that someone who is grieving does not need is loneliness. When you are grieving and lonely, it's different. So the presence of the person who supports is there and that is needed. Of course. Don't talk. They will cry. Provide that listening. Allow them to be talking. Allow them to be crying. Allow them to feel that they are valued. But also is not only listening. They may need specific support. Because when you are grieving, definitely you may not do the things that need to be done. So for you, as you listen, as you are there, offer to support. And of course, you don't have to ask, 'can I do anything for you?' That question may not be relevant. Just provide support. And of course, acknowledge that as you listen, you also need to acknowledge that the situation is very bad because the last thing that you need to hear is to for someone to diminish the cause of your grief. So listening is the first thing that someone will need was in my time of grief. I needed it to talk and people listened. Cause when we talk and someone listens, we feel valued.

Jake Lloyd 8:14

I then asked Barnabé to explain a little more about what practical support people can offer. I told him that my instincts might be to cook a meal for them. Here's what he said.

Barnabé Anzuruni 8:26

There's no need to ask someone 'Is there anything I can do for you' because at that time? Someone definitely does need something done for them. Someone needs practical support. So cooking a meal, you've mentioned that, is very practical, but it also could be that taking someone's children to school and pick them up from school today. Actually, it's happened to us when I was preparing for my transplant, Jake. So all those things, what I'm trying to say during that time, you need something practical, just as you have mentioned. And the support we need is not only listening, is not only being there, but also actually doing something practical.

Jake Lloyd 0:15

I then asked Barnaby, what if people worry about saying the wrong thing to the person who is grieving? And he found this quite funny as he recalled his experiences during the time he had his kidney transplant.

Barnabé Anzuruni 9:30

Yes, thanks. And that reminds me, because we went through a lot of that. You know, when I was having our dialysis, someone will come and tell you and 'maybe you don't drink a lot of water. That why, you know, your kidneys failed!' You can imagine, people come with those kinds of things. But what I can say is that people should not compare the experience someone is going through with their own experience or with anyone else's experience, because every experience of grief is unique. Don't say, 'Okay, even me. I went through that and this is what I did'. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Just don't compare. It's like you are trying to make me feel guilty that I did something wrong. I should have done it the way you did it, you see. So don't compare. That's one of the things I can say. So don't attempt to show the person who is in grief that the cause of their grief is a small thing. That's no big deal. No, no. Just don't do that. Yeah. Whereas many people in a good way, without knowing, they want to support, they want to show that you are supported, but the way they say things come across, it's actually to put you down and to show you that you are wrong. To show you that, of course. And then there is this thing that as Christians we always want to do. There is that 'all things work together'. I don't think that is the right time to come with such motivational talk. All things work together, all is within the plan of God. Yeah, I think that's what I can say, because I personally have heard a lot of things out there. Sometimes some people would tell you because you don't. These you must. It's this. You must do this. Someone who did the same problem and this is what they did and they were fine. All those talk are not helpful in time of grief.

Jake Lloyd 11:36

I then asked Barnaby to speak as a theologian and tell me if the grieving process can ultimately lead to spiritual growth.

Barnabé Anzuruni 11:45

There is some kind of growth that happens when there is grief. I can testify to that. I can testify to that because grief is like you are burdening your heart, your heart, your soul is full and that can pull you down, that makes you heavy. And so when you get support during that time of grief and you are allowed to cry, you're allowed to talk freely to express your experiences, that burden the you've been having in your heart starts melting, it's like you feel light, you feel relieved. And that is the kind of growth that you experience. But the second other growth is, because the process of grief will always lead to a moment of praise. That is no specific time. That's one thing to emphasise because it is a process. But as you grieve, you will get to a time where you realise that the answer to your questions, the solution to your problems is God. So when you get that moment, you find that there is some kind of spiritual growth that you have gone through, that you have also gotten some kind of healing, because the healing that comes from that process is the healing that is restorative, because the healing is transformative. So when we love God as Emmanuel, God with us, we know that He is in the midst of that process, is in the midst of the suffering we encounter. So, yes, there is growth in the midst of grief. It's a process that you go through for you to be able to reach a certain level that you understand better, a certain level that when you look back you say you had to go through that for me to be who I am to be.

Jake Lloyd 13:51

So that's almost it. But finally, I did ask Barnabé if there was anything you wanted to share before we finished.

Barnabé Anzuruni 13:58

Grief is normal is a natural feeling, but it's a feeling that always leads to growth. We all don't grieve the same way now because we are all different. But the truth is, we all grieve. So that's what I can say. People need to cry. It is okay. People need to mourn. And those who provide support, they should not stop people from crying, from even lamenting as I mentioned at some points, as people work through all those frenzies that we know, denial and so on, as they accept that in the end, they will come to acknowledge that there is God in Heaven and that God is in the midst of all suffering, that God is in the midst of what we go through as human beings, and that any loss can cause grief, including the loss of health, as we discussed, including the loss of income, the loss of friendship, divorce, divorce as well. So people need to grieve because it is a stage that we need to cross as you work through that process. Thank you so much, Jake. And I really appreciate.

Jake Lloyd 15:17

That was Barnabé Anzuruni, a theologian based in Kenya, talking about how to support people who are experiencing loss. And that's almost it for this episode. Before we go, don't forget you can catch up on previous episodes of How to build community online or in your podcast player. Just search 'How to build community'. You can support this show by making a small monthly donation on our Patreon page, by going to patreon.com/arukahnetwork. You can learn more about Arukah at arukahnetwork.org. You can read and download every edition of Tearfund's *Footsteps* magazine at learn.tearfund.org. And finally, if you have

feedback on this show or suggestions for future interviews, then you can reach me via email jake@arukahnetwork.org.

But that's it for this episode. Until next time. Bye for now.

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