

How to personally respond to the terrorism tragedy

On September 11, 2001 around 8:45 am the lives of all Americans were altered forever. As the impact of the terrorist attacks settle in our hearts many find it difficult know how to cope with the mix of emotions that are natural in times of crisis. Many of us are reminded of other recent horrible events such as the Oklahoma City Bombing, the many school shootings and even Desert Storm. In all of these traumatic situations, people handle their grief and emotions in a variety of ways. The following are some insights and suggestions that might help you and your loved ones weather these emotional storms.

Different responses

Since not all people handle emotions in the same way we can expect to see a wide range of responses from deep sadness to a sense of shock and disbelief. There are typical stages of trauma reactions (shock, denial, anger, sadness, acceptance) and each person progresses through these stages in different ways, in various orders and at a their own pace. Some go numb and are emotionally detached –seemingly unaffected, many go through crying spells and feelings of being sad or overwhelmed, some get angry and talk a lot about justice and revenge. The first thing to do is be patient and gracious with yourself and others during these times of dramatic change. In some the events may hit emotional bruises of the past and trigger a sense of hopelessness or helplessness.

Practical suggestions

There are some important things to remember in handling your own grief. First, allow yourself to feel and tell yourself it is normal to have a variety of different emotions at a time like this. King David expressed a lot of emotions in the Psalms that may relate to you at this time.(Ps 60, 40, 28). Primary emotions are not “bad” to have. Emotions are God’s way letting you know you were impacted, much like physical pain tells you to get your hand off of a hot stove. In the same way, when someone we love dies or our sense of personal or national security is threatened we have feelings that tell us something is wrong in our heart. We may struggle with a sense of fear of more harm and a deep sense of loss of the way things were (and will never be again). Take time to let these God-given emotions inform you of the impact this is having on you. (Ps 51:6 say that God “desires truth in the inner most parts”, to teach us “wisdom in the inmost places”).

Some ways of handling emotions are better than others. Some constructive ways are to talk, pray, cry, or doing things to calm your body down, like deep breathing exercises. Your feelings will follow your thoughts, so be careful what you allow yourself to dwell on mentally. If you are finding it difficult to “Rejoice in the Lord” you may want to follow the guidance of Philippians 4 on what to do and on what to meditate. You may also want to look at the lives of King David, Job and numerous prophets in the Bible who were hit with numerous tragedies. As you listen to your thoughts and feelings bring these before the Lord to help, heal, calm and equip you. He has promise to provide for our every need (Phil 4:19), which includes emotional needs. You can sing or listen to spiritual songs, remind yourself of eternal truth and on what matters most in life. Many find comfort in knowing the extent of God’ attention to us (Ps. 139). Remember that as “God’s dearly loved children” he has a plan for your life that is for our good (Jer. 29:11). Focus on How God wants to use this in your life and in the lives of those around you to bring about His eternal purposes.

Also, allow yourself to take a break by relieving some of the normal stresses in your life for the next few days. Treat yourself to some down time. Even simple tasks can become difficult when we feel emotional. It is also ok to scream if you feel like it! I suggest going to your car to do it alone. Some other ways to deal with grief constructively are to write, read scripture, memorialize the event and talk with supportive family and friends. You may also decide to take some practical action to help the situation such as give blood, send money, go help, or host a prayer group.

Finally, take this opportunity to be a physical presence for your family. Tell them all of those things we often forget until after tragedy happens such as how important they are to us. This is also a wonderful opportunity to build or rebuild lasting bonds, so talk with your children about their reactions to the tragedy. Generally speaking, your kids will model emotions after you. Be calm and stable around your kids. They will generally

mimic what you do and say. So be careful about the amount of emotions you show. Kids will not fully understand terrorism, they do understand that their parents are upset and this may scare them. Depending on the age tell the younger ones more general information and older ones more detail according to what they can understand. Your encouragement of their emotional expression is very important at this time. You don't need to fix them or have all of the answers, just comfort them and be a supportive presence. Stay tuned for more specific articles about how to help your kids and others around you. May you find the God of all comfort peace and security in your time of need.

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