How to Minister to Grieving Parents:

Unique and Challenging Pastoral Moments

Part 2

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My Aim:

To help Pastors and ministry leaders understand the unique challenges connected with the loss of a child

How Frequent?

- Stillbirth rate: 1:115 births, 1 every 20 minutes
- Years of impact after loss? 10 years
- Number of people experience miscarriages: 1 in 5

Uniqueness of Child Loss

- Often younger couples
- Usually unexpected and shocking
- Unprepared for the pain
- Puts a huge strain on the marriage
- Dads and Moms grieve differently
- Lack of understanding by friends, family and church

Funeral Considerations

- The absence of any memories without a funeral is really painful
- Closure is important
- Simple, private, and brief – graveside is good but very unnatural to leave a child behind
- A place to go in the future for grieving or comfort
- Other children need to understand and grieve
- Family and friends are very important post funeral

At birth / death

- Realize Mom has to deliver in the OB unit with other babies being born
- Be sure that someone is available to take pictures when appropriate. Photograph everything and anything.
- Encourage parents to name their child and for everyone to call the child by the name
- Any mementos become very important (e.g., footprints, strand of hair, clothing, cap, etc.)
- Encourage as much time as desired with the deceased child
- Make space for Dad and Mom, and Family only

Stages of Grief:

- Denial / Shock / Numbness
- Fear / Anger / Loss of Control
- Bargaining / Regret / Replay
- Lament / Uncontrollable Emotions / Depression
- Acceptance / New Normal

Survey of four couples:

1. What was most helpful during your grief?
   - Time alone with spouse
   - Friends who took care of our kids
   - People who also experienced loss of a child
   - Presence of people who loved us long-term
   - Assistance with daily tasks
   - Anything that distracted our attention
   - Someone who really understood and made me feel normal
   - Mementos
   - Specific Scripture, journaling, books on grief

Survey of four couples:

2. What was not helpful?
   - People who made comparisons to their non-related experiences
   - Unannounced visits
   - Unhelpful comments
   - Violations of personal space
   - No check-ins after a month
   - Friends or family who forget

Survey of four couples:

3. What was most surprising?
   - The uncontrollable nature of emotions
   - How hard nights are
   - Loneliness even when with people
   - The new normal was really hard
   - How long the pain lasted and how fast others moved on
   - How protective we are with our other children
   - Sleeping problems and nightmares
   - How this affected our marriage
   - How frustrated I feel about everything
   - The negative effect on my relationship with God
   - How hard it was to pack up the room

Survey of four couples:

4. What are you most afraid of?
   - Never feeling normal again
   - Something bad happening to our other kids
   - Becoming a bitter person
   - People forgetting about our child
   - Losing a memory
   - Never conceiving another child