

Facing a Father's Feeling of Failure

Wayne N. Taylor

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Do men and women experience grief differently? Wayne N. Taylor, a father who has faced the loss of a child, does think that men process grief in a unique way. In his candid memoir, *Facing a Father's Feeling of Failure*, Taylor honestly chronicles his own grief process following the death of his infant daughter. Written both to help himself heal and offer advice to others, Taylor's reflections hold nothing back as he relives his darkest days and reassures other fathers that dramatic reactions to such a profound loss are completely normal.

Since the publication of *On Death and Dying* in 1969, many psychologists have used Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's "5 Stages of Grief" as a model for the mourning cycle. The proposed stages look linear on paper: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. If only recovery from trauma could be so tidy. With *Facing a Father's Feeling of Failure*, Taylor suggests a different model based on his own experience: He portrays grief as a circular process, involving feelings of helplessness, loneliness, questioning, and, above all else, anger.

Taylor shares each stage of his bereavement since the death of his daughter Ashley, following a tragic accident at a babysitter's house thirteen years ago. His straightforward, first-person perspective lends immediacy to many scenes. Especially powerful are Taylor's memories of being told that Ashley was in the hospital and the intense interactions with doctors and family members that followed. Right away, we learn Taylor's default coping mode: anger, anger, and more anger.

Anger appears twice on the circular diagram Taylor uses to illustrate the grief process, and it crops up frequently throughout his narrative. He goes through other stages—depression, guilt, isolation, and questioning among them—but the anger never really quits. Taylor finds this is also true of other men he counseled during his recovery. He suggests that women, including his first wife and Ashley's mother, seek solace in sharing their sorrow with others, while men need an outlet for their intense anger. Taylor turns to martial arts training, and he recommends that other men find similar outlets.

While Taylor's emotional journey was inherently cyclical, repeated explorations of the same subjects make for less compelling reading as the pages turn. What was undoubtedly therapeutic for the author—rehashing his feelings about Ashley's babysitter and what happened the day of Ashley's death—becomes tiresome for the reader, as he goes over familiar territory without many additional insights.

Taylor's writing is sincere, and his earnest tone may help readers overlook grammatical snags like subject-verb disagreement, sentence fragments, and awkward phrases. Occasionally, Taylor drops a necessary word from a sentence, but it's not hard to pick up his meaning.

Facing a Father's Feeling of Failure combines the informal feeling of a personal journal with the inspirational message of a self-help title. It accomplishes Taylor's goal of creating a book that may "help others who have yet to find their way in dealing with a significant loss."

SHEILA M. TRASK (September 26, 2012)

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