

# FINDING YOUR WAY

*after*

Your Parent Dies



*Hope for Grieving Adults*

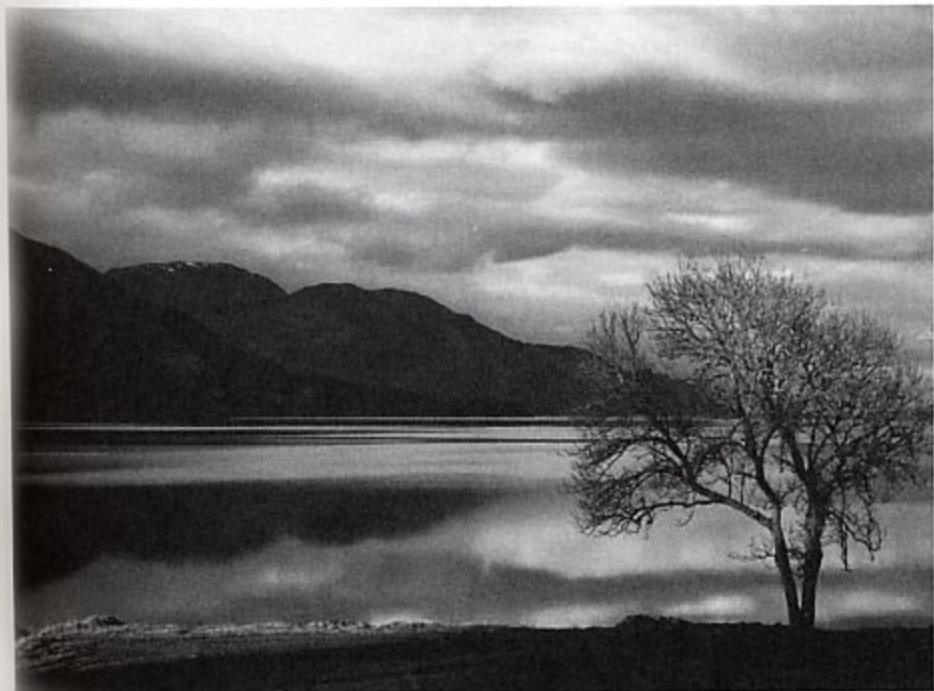
---

Richard Gilbert

# FINDING YOUR WAY

*after*

## Your Parent Dies



*Hope for Grieving Adults*

---

Richard Gilbert

with a foreword by Darcie Sims

ave maria press    Notre Dame, IN

Scripture quotations are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible, copyright © 1993 and 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

---

© 1999 by Ave Maria Press, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever except in the case of reprints in the context of reviews, without written permission from Ave Maria Press, Inc., P.O. Box 428, Notre Dame, IN 46556.

Founded in 1865, Ave Maria Press is a ministry of the United States Province of Holy Cross.

[www.avemariapress.com](http://www.avemariapress.com)

ISBN-10 0-87793-694-3 ISBN-13 978-0-87793-694-7

Cover and text design by Brian C. Conley

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Gilbert, Richard B.

Finding your way after your parent dies : hope for grieving adults /  
Richard B. Gilbert ; with a foreword by Darcie Sims.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-87793-694-3 (pbk.)

1. Parents—Death—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Grief—  
Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Adult children—Religious life. 4.  
Consolation. I. Title.

BV4906.G55 1999

248.8'66—dc21

99-23753

CIP





## *Contents*

<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	9
<b>Foreword</b> .....	11
<b>Introduction</b> .....	15
<b>I. First Steps on the Journey</b> .....	21
1. <i>What's wrong with me?</i> Nothing!—You are bereaved .....	23
2. <i>This is not like anything I've felt before.</i> It is different—Your mother or father has died . . .	33
3. <i>I feel so shattered—my life is in pieces.</i> Reinvestment is hard work .....	45
<b>II. Stops Along the Way</b> .....	53
4. <i>Why does everyone want a piece of me?</i> Boundaries are important .....	55
5. <i>I often feel so empty and alone.</i> Finding connection to spirituality .....	61

<b>III. Traveling With a Surviving Parent</b> . . . . .	67
6. <i>I still have one parent.</i>	
Surviving with a surviving parent . . . . .	69
7. <i>Someone is taking over for the parent I've lost.</i>	
Additions, not replacements . . . . .	77
8. <i>I never expected this.</i>	
Aging: new challenges with a surviving parent . . . . .	83
<b>IV. Solitary Paths</b> . . . . .	87
9. <i>My tears were shed long ago; why are they here again?</i>	
Childhood losses experienced all over again . . . . .	89
10. <i>I have some very deep wounds.</i>	
Even those can be healed . . . . .	93
11. <i>I've experienced a "double whammy."</i>	
Adopted—when you feel a little different . . . . .	99
<b>V. A Final Word</b> . . . . .	103
<b>VI. Resources</b> . . . . .	107
A. Scripture, hymns, and prayers . . . . .	109
B. Printed and recorded resources . . . . .	117
C. Organizations and support programs . . . . .	124



## *Chapter 1*

---

*What's wrong with me?*

Nothing!—You are bereaved

Do you remember Dick Loudon? My guess is that it's a name forgotten. That was the character played by Bob Newhart on the "Newhart Show." What particularly struck me as funny about the character was his profession: he billed himself as the author of "how-to" books. He really believed that one could write a how-to book on any subject, and that, in every case, he was the perfect author to do it.

"How-to": in this age of instant-everything, we believe that time is money, and we will grab anything that will help us get through life with ease and haste. We have how-to books on

---

everything from building a healthy marriage to using the Internet to making household repairs.

When it comes to grieving, though, things are different. There are no how-to books on grief. Some people may believe they can write one, and I know many bereaved who search for them, but the truth is that there is no book for *your* grief, *your* feelings, *your* readjustments to this new world without your parent(s), the many tasks that require *your* attention when your energy is at its lowest. No one knows your sorrow. No one can give meaning to your feelings, and no one dare direct or control your feelings, tell you that “you should be over this by now,” or suggest (as I heard countless times), “Your Dad lived to eighty-four, and he was sick for a long time; he’s better off now.” Maybe he was better off, but *I wasn’t!*

Wading through the advice we are given, we often grieve in silence, puzzled and occasionally fearful of our feelings. We wonder what might be “eating away at us”; we look for some ray of hope that will lead us through sorrow to life and hope. In the end, though, there is only one pathway: *your* pathway. It is the pathway of your feelings.

Even within one family, various individuals can have very different experiences of grief. Each person’s journey is different, and his or her feelings give expression and meaning to those journeys. Each person—including you—must be free to move along his or her own pathway. Thomas Merton once remarked, “How do you expect to arrive at the end of your journey if you take the road to another one’s city?” (James Miller, *One You Loved Has Died*, p. 8). Giving each person in your family the freedom that he or she needs will prevent these differences in grieving from becoming a source of conflict.



---

The experience of losing a parent in death is almost universal—and yet many who feel this loss for the first time are surprised at how painful it can be. Even those well into adulthood are often taken aback by the deep sense of loneliness, the sense of being “orphaned,” that the death of a mother or father can bring.

In *Finding Your Way After Your Parent Dies*, Rev. Richard Gilbert has created a compassionate guide for those struggling with the loss of a parent. Bringing many years of experience in bereavement counseling, Gilbert sketches out some of the issues that arise in the wake of a parent's death and offers practical suggestions for navigating these difficulties. From the disorientation that can come immediately after death to relating to the surviving parent to healing old emotional wounds, the topics dealt with here will be of tremendous help to many.

Combining a warm, empathetic approach with an expertise in grief, Gilbert's *Finding Your Way After Your Parent Dies* is a resource that will be deeply appreciated by those who have lost a parent and by those ministering to them.

---

**Richard B. Gilbert** is ordained by the Evangelical Anglican Church in America and is a well-known author and speaker in the field of bereavement care. His previous books include *HeartPeace: Healing Help for Grieving Folks* (Abbey Press).

 **ave maria press®**  
Notre Dame, IN  
[www.avemariapress.com](http://www.avemariapress.com)  
A Ministry of the United States Province of Holy Cross

ISBN-13: 978-0-87793-694-7

ISBN-10: 0-87793-694-3



9 780877 936947