

# Seven Ways to Cope With Grief

*We're rarely prepared to lose a loved one.*

**T**he surgeon lifts the knife, the limb is severed, blood flows. Fortunately, the patient is anesthetized; the doctor had prepared her for this loss, and powerful medications would diminish the pain. Now she has to renegotiate life practices, relearn how to use the rest of her body to compensate for the missing part.


Losing someone we love is somewhat like this epic event, except that one is not always prepared. We don't always know in advance. We aren't anesthetized when it happens. And no pain medications are available to ease our grief.

I certainly wasn't prepared when my husband simply dropped dead halfway between the kitchen and the garage two years ago. No goodbyes. No last "I love you"s. To make matters worse, we had just had an unpleasant disagreement, and now my soul was weighted with guilt on top of shock. As the ambulance personnel tried to pump life back into his still form, I cried into his ear, "Live, Mirko, live!" But his blue eyes registered nothing, and a friend hugged my trembling body as I faced the consequences of life in an evil world.

## **COPING WITH GRIEF**

In the following days, weeks, and months, God brought thoughts to my mind and people to my home to guide my grieving. Through this very difficult experience, here is what I have learned:

**BRENDA KIŠ**



**1** *Lean into your grief.* Don't try to ignore it, deny it, cover it up with busyness, or run away from it. If we are to fully heal, we must fully grieve. So what does that mean? It means that you face what has happened and think about it in the context of prayer. Cry your feelings and fears out to God. Thank Him for the years you had together, for the impact of your relationship. Confess what you need to confess about that relationship and receive forgiveness. Then praise God for His wisdom and understanding, for His ability to see what you cannot, for His love greater than yours for the loved one you lost, and for His plans that may seem to have been cut short. Remember, you are praying from the dimension of time, but God answers from the dimension of eternity. As your world appears to implode, God's timeless provision for His children is still available.

**2** *Tell and listen to stories about your loved one.* One month after my husband died I invited some of his students from the university where he used to teach to my home on Sabbath. We ate together, then we sat and talked about my husband's life and what was significant to each of us based on our personal experiences and relationships with him. We took a walk down his favorite road, where he and I had passed many pleasant hours together on foot. We watched a DVD of one of his camp meeting sermons that focused on his life story, then I gave each student a copy of the DVD along with a book he had written. The students

stayed until late in the evening, and we were all blessed in remembering together.

**3** *Go to the places your loved one cherished and relive them once more.* The next time you go may not hurt as much. Eventually you will be able to build a new story without that person, and without feeling guilty for letting go.

**4** *Allow your vision to open wider.* How we think about events is powerful. Envision the span of history on earth. View yourself as one of billions of survivors who have even thrived after their loss. If they made it through, you can too. In fact, you can grow and become a better person, more compassionate and understanding. Begin to see people through God's eyes, wounded by the same enemy who brought death to your door.

**5** *Make grief your ally as you seek to bless others.* Don't let your loved one's life go to waste. As I sorted through my husband's things, I thought of ways they could be useful to someone else. I recycled his clothing by donating it to the seminary where he'd taught, for international students who often come under challenging circumstances and with few belongings. His papers and articles went to the Center for Adventist Research as a resource for students. His library was packed up and sent overseas to smaller schools in need of resources. I wrote his life story for my sons and gave it to them on Father's Day. You can also bless others by finding people who need a card of

*Ask Him to show you ways to make your suffering a conduit to reach the world for God.*

encouragement, some fresh-baked cookies, a visit or an invitation to your home. Knowing what it feels like to be lonely and thrust into a new and unwelcomed world without your loved one, you can find ways to minister to people who also are suffering.

**6** *Try out new things in your quest for a new identity.* One of the aspects of grieving that I never anticipated was an identity crisis. As Mrs. Kiš I knew who I was and what role I played. I had never before been a single woman out from under the wings of either my father or my husband. "Who am I now?" was a question that drifted about in my subconscious. I had to find my new self.

Once I was done dealing with my husband's things, I thought about the changes I wanted to make in my house and started renovating. I changed my hairstyle and bought a few new clothes. I went to programs with or without others. I traveled to new places. I made some new friends and set new goals.

Above all, remember that you are still the beloved child of God that you have always been. Good fathers don't abandon their children; instead, they help them through the twists and turns of life. "My God shall supply all your need" (Phil. 4:19, KJV), is something I reminded myself of often.

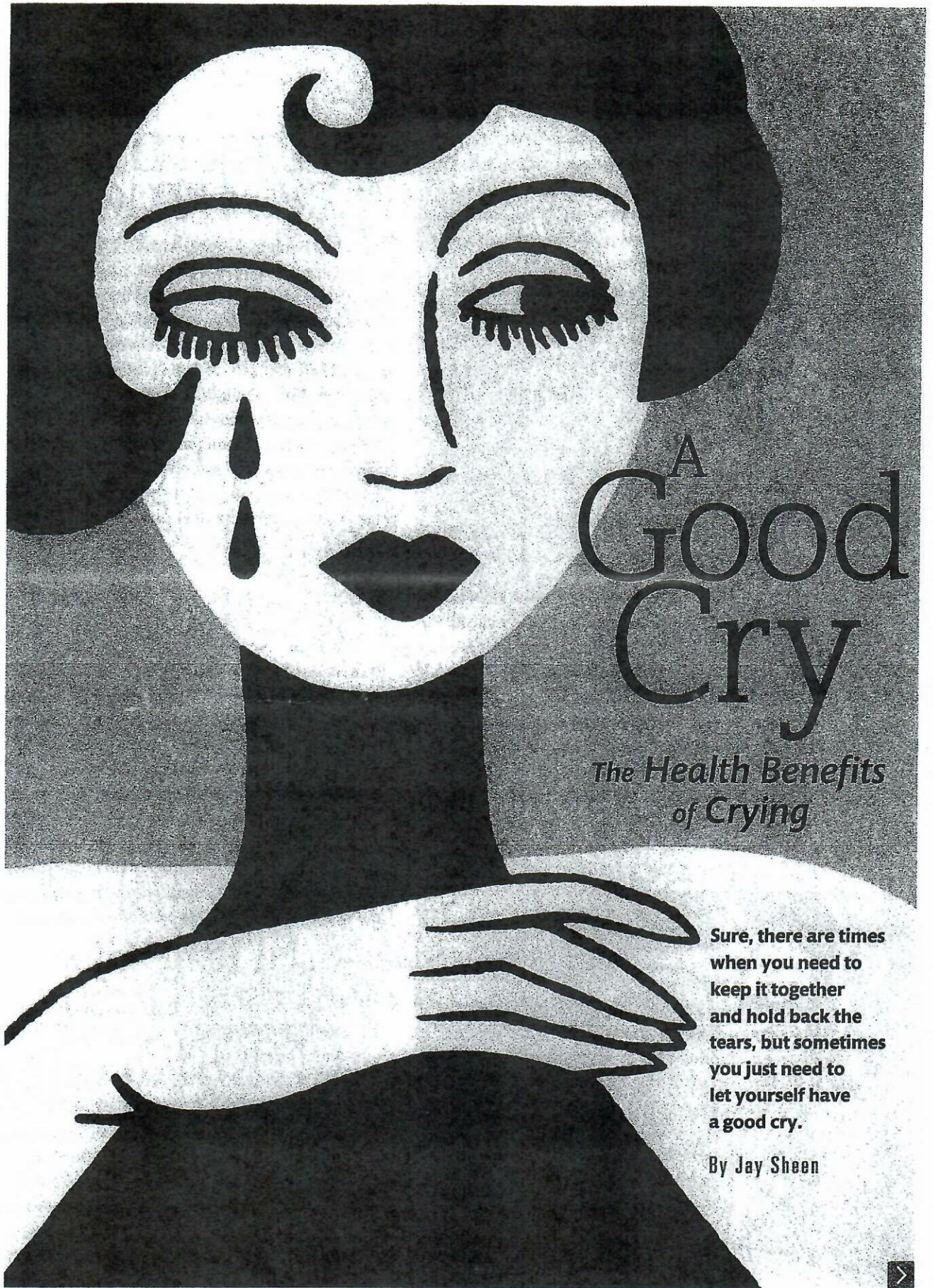
**7** *Live in the presence of God.* When loneliness seeks to overwhelm you, speak aloud to the ever-present Christ. I was continually surrounded by the atmosphere of heaven during my grieving. Because Jesus was already my dearest friend, His presence was felt throughout my mourning. Even though my most intimate earthly friend was gone, my Best Friend was still with me. This kind of relationship is cultivated through time spent together in daily devotions. Read His Word. Talk to Him. Ask Him to show you ways to make your suffering a conduit to reach the world for God.

Your feelings will tell you that something isn't right, but they must not have the last word. Feel your feelings, but don't live by them. God needs your witness. You have been left alive for a purpose. When you find it, you can live well and joyfully. ♣

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# A Good Cry

*The Health Benefits  
of Crying*

**Sure, there are times when you need to keep it together and hold back the tears, but sometimes you just need to let yourself have a good cry.**

**By Jay Sheen**

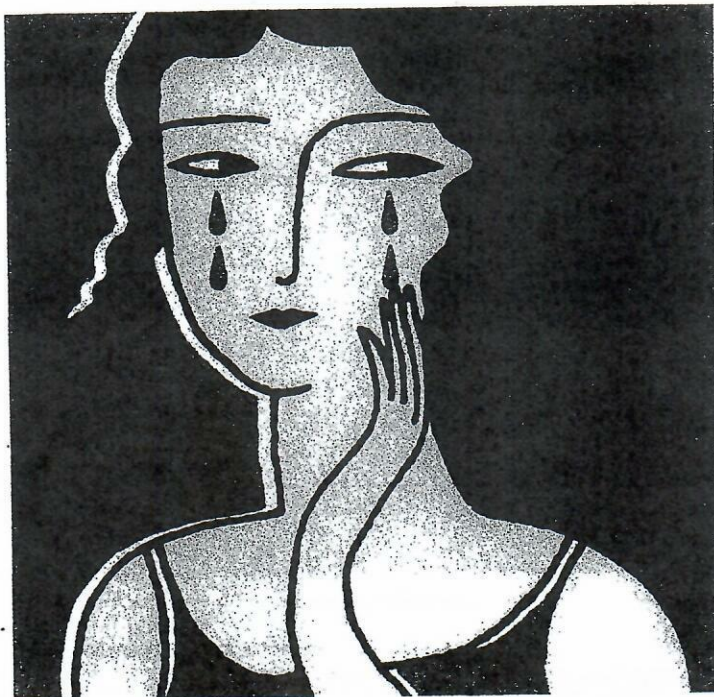




**W**hen people experience frustration, loss, sadness, or stress, some immediately put up emotional barriers, forcing themselves to be strong. Others, however, give themselves permission to shed tears. When they cry away some of the pain, they generally feel better. The reality is that crying can be good for you. Here are some of the health benefits:

## Crying is an important safety valve.

Leo Newhouse, LICSW, writes this in the Harvard health blog: "Crying is an important safety valve, largely because keeping difficult feelings inside—what psychologists call repressive coping—can be bad for our health. Studies have linked repressive coping with a less resilient immune system, cardiovascular disease, and hypertension, as well as with mental health conditions, including stress, anxiety, and depression. Crying has also been shown to increase attachment behavior, encouraging closeness, empathy, and support from friends and family."



## Crying improves your mood.

You might think that crying will make you feel sadder, but most people simply feel better after a good cry. There is science that supports this human experience. Scientists categorize three different types of liquid in tears. The first two are called "reflex tears" and "basal tears." Their purpose is to remove irritants, such as smoke and dust, and lubricate the eyes to prevent infection. Their content is 98 percent water. The third category of tears is "emotional tears." They flush toxins out of the body and actually release endorphins, the body's natural feel-good chemicals, which ease physical and emotional pain.

## Crying soothes you.

Researchers have learned that crying activates the parasympathetic nervous system (PSNS), an important part of the human nervous system which helps the body rest, relax, and release. Tom Bunin, LCSW, explains that PSNS "is the name of the system that calms you. Para . . . means against and sympathetic refers to the sympathetic nervous system, the system that revs you up when stress hormones are released. The parasympathetic nervous system is designed by nature to oppose the sympathetic nervous system and keep it from causing hyperarousal."

## Crying helps you heal emotionally.

After a major loss such as the death of a loved one, crying can help you heal faster. Tina B. Tessina, PhD, a psychotherapist and author of *It Ends with You: Grow Up and Out of Dysfunction*, says, "Everyone needs to know how to grieve and how to be sad in order to get over difficult events. There are a certain number of tears you must cry to let go, and getting on with crying is the fastest way."



## Crying relieves stress.

When stress isn't relieved, people often turn to alcohol or drugs to reduce the stress. Shedding some tears is a much healthier alternative. When you view tears as one of the body's natural healing mechanisms, you'll be more likely to let yourself cry now and then and less likely to try to cope by becoming numb or turning to addictions.

## Crying strengthens connections.

We often hesitate to cry in front of others because we don't want to appear vulnerable or emotionally weak. Rather than feel shame or embarrassment over tears, try to remember that emotional vulnerability can strengthen your significant relationships. When we are able to cry in front of others, we allow them to see a different side of us, one that is softer, gentler, and vulnerable. By sharing those emotions with your family or close friends, you can form a deeper, more authentic bond.

## Crying kills bacteria.

A good cry can be a good way to kill bacteria, according to health writer Lizette Borrelli. "Tears contain the fluid lysozyme—also found in human milk, semen, mucus and saliva—that can kill 90 to 95 percent of all bacteria in just five to 10 minutes. A 2011 study published in the journal *Food Microbiology* found tears have such strong antimicrobial powers they can even protect against the intentional contamination of anthrax. Lysozyme can kill certain bacteria by destroying bacteria cell walls—the rigid outer shell that provides a protective coating."



## Crying calms you down.

Most people feel calmer and even blissful after a good cry. That's because breathing stabilizes, heart rate decreases, and blood pressure lowers. One study revealed that nearly 89 percent of people feel better after crying, with a mere 8 percent feeling worse. The simple fact is that crying is physically calming.

## Crying helps you learn about yourself.

Sometimes we turn away from unpleasant emotions and suppress them. Crying is what helps us recognize that something is amiss. That awareness leads us to look more closely at ourselves and the source of our pain. Once the problem or pain is identified, you can make the necessary adjustments and take the appropriate steps to move forward. So, when you feel tears welling up, don't feel you have to hold them back. Whether you're crying about a person, a job, or a difficult situation, your tears help you know what is important to you. ❖

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Based in Oklahoma, Jay Sheen specializes in writing about mental and spiritual health.



# Adding Up to Happiness

Solutions to many of our most perplexing personal problems can often be found by applying a kind of creative arithmetic

OVER LUNCH RECENTLY, an old friend and I talked about life. She admitted that she'd been lonely since her husband died. "Yet I can't complain," she said. "I had a good marriage. The kids are on their own. My job isn't exactly thrilling, but it's secure, and I retire in 15 years. So what else is there?"

What else indeed! A woman of 50—able, experienced, attractive—assuming, in effect, that her life is over. I've seen this often, and in much younger people—the resigned conviction that change is impossible. What many of us fail to realize is that it's possible at *any* age to improve the quality of our life.

But we have to initiate the process ourselves. By taking a new job or moving to a new locale we can propel ourselves, forcibly and excitingly, into the stream of life. It's like

pruning an overgrown tree: the result is new growth and more fruit. A widow I know sold her house and bought a van so she could travel the country showing her silverwork at craft fairs. She has made friends from Maine to Florida; she winters in the south and summers in the north, and looks ten years younger. "There's so much I haven't seen yet," she said. "It's not too late."

It's almost never too late to do, on some scale, what you've always wanted to do. The key is to move forward, to make changes. The path many of my acquaintances have taken to greater happiness may be thought of as a kind of creative arithmetic, with additions, subtractions, multiplications and divisions. Chances are these steps will work for you, too.

*Add to your life by trying something new.* Remember the first-day-

of-school challenger? That annual shakeup obliged you to mix, reach out, discover. Last winter, I decided to take a plumbing course. Like most girls of my generation, I had been programmed to be hopeless with tools, but very soon I found I was intrigued by vises and wrenches and the fact that I could use them.

When I consider which of my friends seem happiest, most alive, I observe they're the ones who are constantly expanding their skills, interests and knowledge. Ronnie had never grown so much as a cactus when she was asked to tend a neighbor's prize pink African violet. One day she found a leaf that had broken off and stuck it in water. Several days later, tendril roots appeared. Charmed by her success, she bought some purples and whites. Now she has a unique collection.

Other friends have had similar experiences. David enrolled in college the year he retired. Will, a young teacher, spent a summer tracing family connections in Nova Scotia and next year plans to visit Irish relatives discovered as a result of that trip.

*Add to your life by turning limitations into opportunities.* If your life has a built-in constraint, struggle against it or use it to your advantage. When an industrial accident confined Martin to a wheelchair, he was overwhelmed by the feeling of uselessness. One day I asked if I could give his telephone number to my daughter's teacher, in case there should be an emergency when I

couldn't be reached. Soon he was performing a similar service for other working mothers. Word got around, and now he runs an answering service. The money he earns helps pay for extras his pension wouldn't cover. "Above all," he says, "I'm *doing* something, and touching other people's lives."

Another friend, suddenly widowed and faced with a lowered standard of living, has embarked on a career as a house sitter, using her tiny apartment merely as a base. Last winter she lived in a Boston town house while its owners vacationed in warm climes; she spent this summer looking after a Tucson bungalow.

*Subtract from your life possessions that are a burden, activities you no longer enjoy.* When I was growing up I admired my mother's wedding china, which stood in a cupboard and was brought out only for dusting. "Someday this will be yours," Mother said. During my young-married years, when I longed to entertain with style, that fine china remained in her cabinet. When it all came to me last year, I realized that at this stage of my life I don't want possessions requiring special care. So I passed the china on to my daughters. They're delighted; I'm relieved of a chore.

When I told this story to a neighbor, he said, "You've just given me an idea." Next day he took a spade and dug up his front lawn. I couldn't believe my eyes. "Your precious Kentucky bluegrass—after all the work you've put in!"



"That's just the point," he said. "Aerating and fertilizing every spring. Watering, mowing and trimming all summer. Reseeding in the fall. This lawn costs me hundreds of hours every year. Who needs it?" Now his front yard is green with myrtle. It blossoms cheerfully in spring, takes little care and frees him to do the things he really enjoys.

*Multiply your points of contact with other people.* My life has been enhanced since I began trying to know people whose assumptions and life-styles are unlike mine. For example, because I cultivate friendships with the children of friends, I have been introduced to music, poetry and ideas I otherwise would never have understood.

A woman I know "adopts" grandparents. Usually she finds them through volunteer work, but sometimes she makes a direct approach. "I met Harry in the supermarket," she told me. "He seemed to have trouble reading prices, so I offered to help. I ended up driving him home; he asked me in for tea and now we regularly shop together. My children love Harry's stories. Harry thinks we do a lot for him, but he gives our family something priceless, a sense of the past."

*Multiply your connections with the life around you.* "My wife was the social one," Philip told me. "After she died, I was terribly lonely. Then it occurred to me that I meet lots of people every day. I just hadn't been seeing them." He struck up a conversation about fly tying with

the hardware-store manager and discovered a shared interest; the two men have since gone on several trout-fishing expeditions.

Whether you live in a city or a village, it's possible to find friends in the course of routine activities, just by taking an active part in the community. But you must make the special effort, whether it be to help out at a youth center, distribute campaign literature or make PTA posters.

*Divide your responsibilities into manageable units and delegate some of those units to others.* Living well is partly a matter of making wise choices and compromises. If you want more time, more freedom or simply more help, accept the fact that some things won't be done the way you'd like. For instance, you can divide home chores among all family members, even if this means a lower standard of cooking and cleaning.

My friend Connie, who returned to her profession in middle age, arranged to share home duties with her husband on an alternating basis: each takes total responsibility for shopping, meal preparation and laundry every other month. When I asked how things were going, Connie laughed. "His cooking runs from flavorless to terrible. But I honestly don't mind. That month of freedom is so marvelous!"

*Divide seemingly intractable problems into segments that can be tackled one at a time.* Jenny left college, over her parents' objections, to marry a musician. Two years and two children later, he vanished, leaving her



with a mountain of unpaid bills. "I used to lie in bed mornings," she told me, "unable to face the day." She began to gain strength when, instead of contemplating the whole discouraging picture, she isolated priorities.

Convinced that her best hope lay in completing her education, she listed things to be done, one at a time. "Sell car for money to tide us over. Find out about educational loans. Reapply to Boston University. Find apartment in safer neighborhood. Find good day-care center. Write Mom and Dad. Get in touch with creditors and arrange to pay when I can." By the time she contacted her parents, who'd cut off communication when she married, Jenny couldn't help but impress them with her resourcefulness.

*Raise your effort level to the nth power.* I used to wonder why TV advertisers repeat the same commercial so often. But of course repetition, intensification, has a special force. The principle of raising to the nth power works in all areas of life. Take home decoration. For years I've collected wicker. Scattered through the house, it added up to very little. Yet when I gathered every bit in one room, massing the rattan furniture and covering one wall with baskets, the impact was stunning.

In human relationships, where it matters most, intensification of effort may produce important gains—as it did for my friend Paul. He lives far from his mother's nursing home. Though he regularly sent long, newsy letters, his mother was always querulous when he telephoned. "I was beginning to wonder if I *had* a son" was her usual greeting. Paul would protest he'd just written; she would insist she'd had no word for weeks. So he gave up the letters, concluding that his mother's concentration wasn't equal to them. Now he sends a daily greeting, very short. Sometimes it's just a postcard, a snapshot, a note saying, "Thinking of you." He never misses a day—and the change in his mother's attitude has been remarkable.

HAPPINESS is always an individual matter, and so is the path to happiness. To live better, you surely won't pursue all the courses suggested. If your problem is inertia, boredom or loneliness, you'll benefit most by adding or multiplying. If your days are too frenetic, you may need to subtract or divide. The most important thing, if you're not satisfied now, is to *act*.

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A WEARY WOMAN, looking over the wreckage left in her home after a prolonged session of baby-sitting with her grandchildren, was heard to mutter: "The Lord knows I'd gladly share my last crust of bread with them if they would be sure to take it home to eat." —Contributed by Mrs. A. S. Scott