Recently I had a conversation with a friend who told me that she had just screamed at her husband for no reason. She was so upset because, as a rule, she is a very mild person. She told me that she had been struggling with many anger issues over the past week, and she had stopped liking the person she was becoming. Just that weekend, she learned that a woman who had taken her in when she was a teenager had died. She had not previously known this wonderful lady who took her in, but the lady raised her like one of her own for years, and they were still very close. She called me crying because she had begun to hate herself, was depressed, and of course, was very angry at the world. When she asked, I told her that she had never given herself a chance to grieve the loss of her mom. When her mom died, they had an unresolved conflict between them.

There were things that she had wanted to say to her mom, and she never had the opportunity to tell them. Each time the emotions boiled over, she had experienced the same reaction that she was experiencing now: to push them back as quickly as possible so she could move on with life. Her dog had died earlier this year, and she went through the same emotions. I have known her since she was a teenager, and she has been caught in this cycle of unexpressed grief for years. Unresolved grief can be powerfully destructive and often occurs when tension and friction exist in the relationship. So, what do you do when somebody passes away, and you cannot have closure with them? This can be especially burdensome when the relationship has been strained or difficult, as in my friend’s instance.

First, I want you to know there have been books written on this subject, so this short article is by no means exhaustive. But some ideas include:

- Allow yourself time to mourn.
- Acknowledge the relationship might have been strained or even difficult.
- Write down areas you wish you could have talked through and issues that should have been resolved.

In some cases, forgiveness is not possible due to the nature of the offense. If this is the case, I have found that burning that paper and symbolically ending it can sometimes help. Some people will “pretend” the person is there and talk with them. If this becomes overwhelming, many therapists are trained to help. Give one a call. My friend and I decided to have a “telephone memorial service” over the phone as she lives far from me. We are going to lay mom to rest after all these years. I pray that will bring her the peace she has looked for and provide the needed closure.