

*The Holiday
Season
and Grief*



*Helpful ways for those who grieve to
heal and find hope.*

It is impossible to get away from the celebration of the holiday season in our culture. It is on every corner of your city, and your mind, memories shared with your loved one who is no longer here. Well-intentioned friends and family members encourage you to stay involved in traditional activities, not understanding how difficult it is for you.

Grief is intensified during this time.

Pastor Kevin Robinson offers a very simple change of perspective that has helped many blend their grief with the Christmas season. Pointing out that the decorations of the Christmas tree can bring instant pain as you remember someone you love is not here to share it with you, and so he suggests we see each decoration as one of the ways that our loved one has decorated our life. It could be, with some work on a change of perspective, that decorating your tree becomes a time of healing for you as you share together the gifts and decorations you have in your life because of this person. Beginning new traditions as well as treasuring favorite memories is important for you.



The Gift of Grief

Death takes away. That's all there is to it. But grief gives back. By experiencing it, we are not simply eroded by pain. Rather, we become larger human beings, more compassionate, more aware, able to help others, and better able to help ourselves. Grief plunges us into sorrow and forces us to face the finiteness of life, the mightiness of death, and the meaning of our existence on this earth. It is possible to be forever bowed by grief. It is possible to be so afraid of one aspect of it that we become frozen in place, stuck in sorrow, riveted in resentment or remorse, unable to move on. But it is also possible to be enlarged, to find new direction, and to allow the memory of the beloved person we have lost to live on within us, not as a monument to misery but as a source of strength, love, and inspiration. By acting on our grief, we can eventually find within ourselves a place of peace and purposefulness. It is my belief that all grievers, no matter how intense their pain, no matter how rough the terrain across which they must travel, can eventually find that place within their hearts.

Excerpts from "Giving Sorrow Words"
by Candy Lightner



You Have Choices

While everyone else is getting ready for the holiday laughter and gift giving, you may only be painfully reminded that you are without the presence of someone you love. Even when surrounded by family and friends, there can be a sadness and depression from loss.

Decide what activities to participate in and avoid those that increase your pain. For example, Susan decided she would retain the freedom to choose where she wanted to be on Christmas until that morning, saying “I never know how much energy I’ll have or how I will feel until that day.” And on Christmas morning decided to have dinner with a few women she had met in a widow’s support group. She chose to go to her family’s for dessert.

It is important to try and discuss your choices with others, especially those who are affected by them. They are grieving as well and their ways of dealing with grief may be different.

Bringing significance to your pain and the life of your loved one through a meaningful memorialization is extremely helpful. Personal and private activities as well as the family participating together are healing and provide the opportunity to establish new traditions.

Some Ideas From Others;

- ♥ Purchase a small evergreen tree, decorate and replant it after Christmas
- ♥ Light a candle each day through the holiday season in honor of the deceased.
- ♥ Purchase a gift for your loved one then donate it to a charity, or donate the amount you would have spent on a gift to charity.
- ♥ Hang a special Christmas stocking or ornament in their memory.
- ♥ Offer a dinner prayer or toast in their name.
- ♥ Set aside a time and share with each other holiday memories that include your loved one.

Another helpful activity is to find opportunities to help others. Being useful and helpful makes you feel good and thereby relieves you, if only temporarily, of your feelings of sadness and grief. Every moment of relief is helpful, and a good opportunity to start a new tradition. Check with The Salvation Army, the Jesus Center, The Red Cross, Cancer Society, local churches, synagogues, hospitals, nursing homes and service clubs. It can be as simple as baking cookies for your neighbor who doesn’t have family or is ill. By refocusing your energy onto someone else, you will begin to feel stronger.



Take care of yourself. Bereavement can be a threat to your health. At the moment you may feel that you don't care. But those feelings will change. You are important, your life is valuable, and your body needs good nourishment more than ever. Consider a vitamin supplement if your appetite is not what it should be. Fight the tendency to rely on junk food because it is easier and faster.

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Accept what has happened. You may ask yourself over, and over why the death occurred, without finding any answer. This is normal. There may not be an answer, only acceptance.

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Join a support group. New friends, who have had a similar experience, will give you much strength as you go through grief.

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Associate with old friends. This may be difficult at first, but when you can, talk and act naturally without avoiding the subject of your loss. This will teach both you and your friends, that life does go on.

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Postpone major decisions for a year. For example, wait before deciding to sell your house or change jobs. The intensity of grief will have had a chance to decrease so that you can think and make clear and reasonable decisions.

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Recording your thoughts. Journaling will allow you to focus on what you are feeling, as well as help mark your progress.

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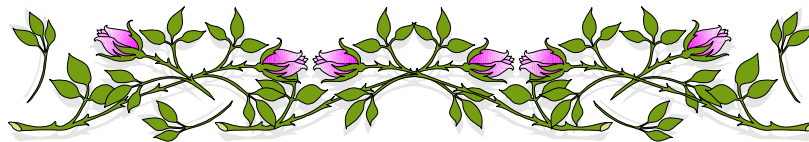
Get rid of imagined guilt. You did your best and if you made mistakes, remind yourself that we are all imperfect. Only hindsight is 20-20. If you are convinced that you have real guilt, consider professional or spiritual counseling.

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Take advantage of your religious affiliation. If you have been inactive in matters of faith, this might be the time to be more involved again. The Bible has much to say about sorrow, grief and healing.

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Grief can be crippling.. There comes a time when tears should be subsiding, and life is being lived again. Sometimes just a few sessions with a trained counselor will help you to resolve the anger, guilt, and despair that keeps you from functioning.



Taking a Break from Grief?

Grieving is hard work, perhaps the hardest work we will ever do. Like any hard work, there are times that we need to put it aside, to return to it later. Give yourself permission to feel good, to laugh, and even to have fun. Some bereaved individuals feel guilty if they find themselves enjoying an activity. It may feel selfish, or uncaring not to hurt. Welcome your moments of relief; don't feel guilty about them. Feeling good and laughing is your body's way of letting you relax and regain some strength for a few moments during your grief. Taking a break is difficult to do when grieving. We cannot control our feelings or regulate our pain. We sometimes experience an overwhelming wave of grief at a most inopportune time; you may be at a restaurant or grocery store, or listening to the radio, when a song unleashes the memories.

Try to structure opportunities for respite. Physical exercise can offer such an opportunity. Others may find moments of pleasure in pursuing hobbies

and activities that brought joy before. For some it could be painting, for someone else baking.

If baking is the one you like, be sure to share with others; sometimes we can find respite with others. They have a valued role in providing diversion.

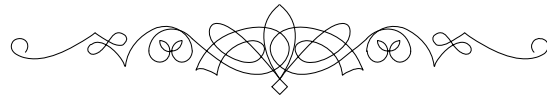
So difficult as it is, we need to find moments to nurture ourselves. This helps us face the intensity of our grief. There are moments, despite our loss, where we can find joy in life once again.

Excerpts from
“Hospice Foundation of America Journeys”
Written by Kenneth J. Doka



In the *Old Testament* of the Bible, the book of *Genesis* records that following the death of Sarah, her husband, Abraham, wept and mourned for her.

Genesis 23:2



And in the *New Testament* in the book of *John* it speaks of *Jesus'* sorrow over the death of his good friend Lazarus. It shares that even *Jesus* experienced grief. And that He took the time to weep.

John 11:32-36



Suggested Reading:

❖ After – Loss

A recovery companion for those who are grieving

By Barbara Hills LesStrang

❖ No Time For Goodbyes

Coping with sorrow, anger and injustice after a tragic death

By Janice Harris Lord

❖ You Don't Have To Suffer

A handbook for moving beyond life's crises

By Judy Tatelbaum

❖ Widow to Widow

Thoughtful, practical ideas for rebuilding your life; challenges, changes, decision-making & relationships.

By Genevieve Davis Ginsburg, M.S.

❖ Dr. Joyce Brothers Widowed

America's best-known psychologist writes intimately about her own widowhood-and advises others on coping with loss.

By Dr. Joyce Brothers

❖ Grieving

How to go on living when someone you love dies

By Therese A. Rando, Ph.D.

❖ 150 Facts About Grieving Children

Not everything you ever wanted to know...but a darn good start!

By Erin Linn

❖ Awakening From Grief:

Finding the way back to Joy



Newton-Bracewell Chico Funeral Home also has a lending library.

We sincerely hope this information will help you
make the memory of someone
you love a positive part of your
holiday season.

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