

Dealing With Grief During The Holidays" Tidings Of Comfort And Joy"

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A CHANGE IN THE SEASON

Christmas is a time of cheer when family and friends gather together and share traditions. However for those who have lost a loved one it's mixed with sadness and grief. Many of us are not comfortable with grief; our current culture certainly isn't. Allowing only three days for bereavement and by the time the flowers have wilted most of our friends are tired of hearing the stories of the deceased. However, **THERE IS HOPE.** Just remember that grief comes in phases or waves. At one moment you will feel just fine and the next moment you will feel something quite different. It may be a feeling of sadness, anger or a sense that the whole thing is surreal. These feelings are uncomfortable and natural. If the death was sudden and unexpected it may take years for the reality to sink in. If this is your first Holiday season without your loved one expect the wallop. Give yourself permission to be sad. It takes more mental energy to fight or ignore a feeling than it does to just accept it. Move toward the grief. Your reward will be more energy for creativity like planning things that can be done to honor the deceased this holiday season.

WHEN TIME DOESN'T HEAL

Grief waits. Choosing not to cry or grieve the loss of your loved one is not a healthy choice. Time alone will not heal. Grief is incredibly patient and it will wait until you are ready to acknowledge it no matter how many years it takes. Often a person will express a different emotion in order to hide grief such as humor or anxiety. *"Laughter can conceal a heavy heart; when the laughter ends, the grief remains."* Proverbs 14:13 It takes an awful lot of effort to fight those uncomfortable feelings, and that doesn't feel good either. So, as they say, "No time like the present" - accept the unpleasant feelings of grief. Sadness, anger, and denial are natural responses to loss, and remember it takes much more mental energy to avoid a feeling then it does to accept it. Accepting the feeling doesn't mean that you have given up on anything it only means that you have accepted something that you have no control over.

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TOO MUCH FOR ONE PERSON

Compounded losses can complicate grief. Sometimes we lose a loved one and...our job...mobility...relationships. This makes the grieving process even tougher. When the losses stack up, so does the grief. Please give yourself a break and take the time to acknowledge each loss individually. Giving yourself permission to be sad normalizes the feeling and lessens the negative impact. Each loss needs to be acknowledged before we can assess any good in the situation. A loss due to suicide may have different religious and social implications. Don't keep the cause of death a secret. Find someone you can speak freely to so that you don't have to be weighed down by the burden of the secret. People may be more understanding than you give them credit for. The following verse reminds us...

“He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort that God has given us.” 2 Corinthians 1:4

WHAT TO DO WHEN GRIEF TURNS TO DESPAIR

Grief can segue way into a feeling of despair or depression, when this happens we need more support than friends can offer. If you have the following symptoms please seek professional help.

- Feelings of worthlessness
- Slow speech and body movements
- Inability to function at work, home, and/or school
- Finds no pleasure in previously-enjoyed activities
- Hallucinations of the deceased

A NEW NORMAL

It is important to understand that we never “get over” the loss of a loved one. We just adjust to a new normal. We find our new status quo; the stage of our life post loved one. There is something intrinsic in the thought of death that is just wrong. It is the ultimate reminder of our fallen state and what Christ came to save us from.

However, when you accept this as a normal response it once again opens opportunities for more positive feelings. *“He will remove all of their sorrows, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and its evils are gone forever.”* Revelation 21:4

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Here are some suggestions that you can do to help yourself through your grieving process.

- **Express your feelings in a tangible and creative way** - Write a memoir or make a scrap book of the person; list the ways that the person has contributed to your life. Create a story or piece of art that is inspired by the loved one.
- **Find support** - Join a grief support group and/or seek out a professional therapist.
- **Give in the loved one's name** - Make a donation to the loved one's favorite charity or club.
- **Remember to take care of yourself** - Make sure that you are getting enough sleep, eating right and getting enough exercise. These things can all make you feel a little better. Don't medicate the pain of grief with drugs or alcohol; this will not ease the pain it will only give you additional problems to deal with.
- **Find your own grieving pace** - Each person is different, so each grief is different. Don't let others tell you how to feel. Only you know how long your grieving process will take.
- **Plan ahead** - Holidays and anniversaries can be tough. Plan for the wave of emotion to come and schedule in some time to grieve.

If you know someone who is grieving here are some suggestions that you may find useful.

- **Be a patient listener** - Your friend is going through a mix of emotions right now. Just listen and give advice sparingly. Psalms 119:28 says *"I weep with grief; encourage me by your word."*
- **Use words of comfort** - You can acknowledge the pain but realize that you can't make it better.
- **Be patient with your friend** - Depending on the relationship and the circumstances surrounding the death, grieving can take years. Be prepared for a long process.
- **If you know a child who is grieving, you may want to make a comfort object** - You may want to take some material that reminds the child of the deceased and create a quilt or plushy toy.

"For our perishable earthly bodies must be transformed into heavenly bodies that will never die."

1 Corinthians 15:54

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