



A safe space to talk and listen

Newsletter

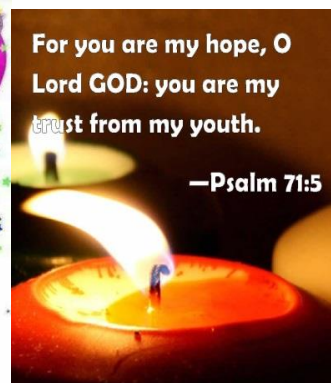
Written and compiled by
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JOURNEY THROUGH GRIEF: HOW TO COPE ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS WITHOUT YOUR LOVED ONE

Grieving at Christmas Time

“Dealing with grief is challenging at any time of the year, but with the holidays being so focused on family, Christmas time can be a particularly tough period if you have lost a loved one”.



Whether you have lost a spouse, parent, child, friend, or sibling, the empty chair invites you to journey through grief toward life-giving healing. You'll learn how to incorporate new traditions on special days like anniversaries, Christmas, birthdays, by creating memorials that gives honour and affirm your loved one's life, rebuild your individual sense of identity and more. (Samuel J Hodges IV, Kathy Leonard).

- “Missing loved ones during Christmas is normal, but that doesn't mean it's not difficult. Family and togetherness are such big parts of the holiday season”.



In Jesus we have a hope, so when you are going through your journey of grief, take Him with you- “allow your mind to picture Him right there beside you”. His Word tells us that, “When you pass through the waters, He will be there with you; and through the rivers, they will not sweep over you; and when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you”.

The important thing to remember is that, “there is no right or wrong way to celebrate Christmas following the death of a loved one. Whether you choose to be surrounded by your family, friends, or spending this time on



your own, the important key is to plan and prepare ahead as to how you would like to spend the days leading up to Christmas or on the day itself”.



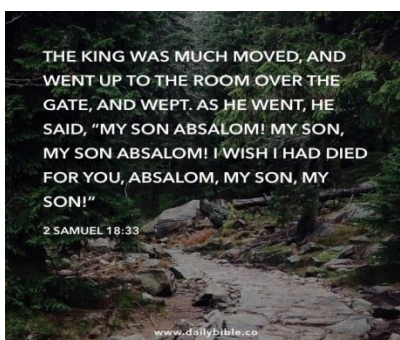
Understanding the difference between Bereavement, Grief and Mourning

- **Bereavement** is the *period of time* immediately following a loss, during which you experience grief and express mourning.
- **Grief** is the internal emotion. It is what you think and feel on the *inside*. You can grieve and keep that emotion hidden from the world.
- **Mourning** is the *outward* expression of grief. It is showing and doing. When you cry, you are mourning. When you talk to someone else about the death, you are mourning. When you write in a journal, put together a photo display, or write a thank-you note for a casserole you received, you are mourning [Dr. Alan Wolfelt].

Grief in the Bible

In the Bible, there are many stories about people who suffered loss and the grief, for example:

- Abraham mourns over the death of Sarah (Gen. 23:2)
- Mary and Martha, mourning Lazarus, then Jesus wept (John 11:31-35)
- Jacob mourned over Joseph's supposed death (Gen. 37:34-35)



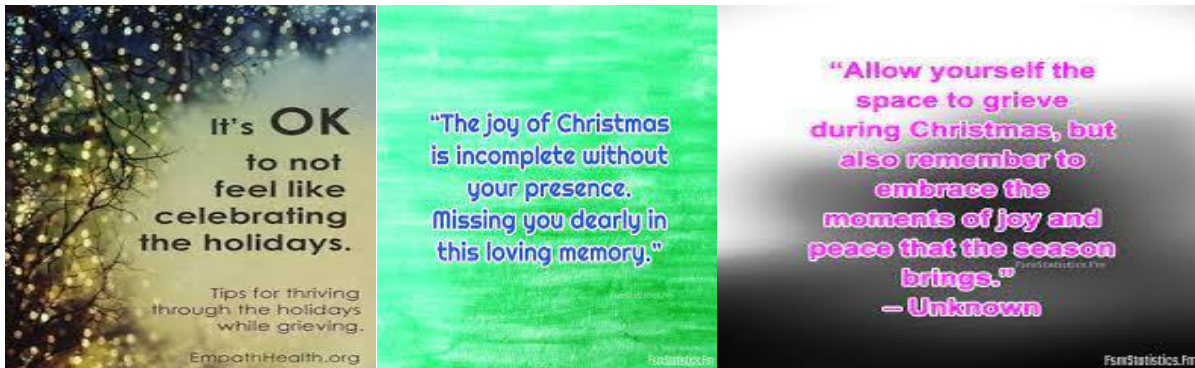
“Tears do not reflect a lack of faith. Tears are a gift from God that helps to wash away the deep pain of loss.”



How to manage Christmas without a loved one

Talk about your grief at Christmas

- If you've recently lost a close family member or friend, this Christmas will inevitably be different. Before you make plans, try talking about the fact that it might be really hard this year. That way others will feel that it's OK to be sad and there's no pressure to put on a brave face.



Plan ahead and be prepared for Christmas

Especially for those who are spending the first Christmas without their loved ones, it is important to acknowledge that this year will be different to other years, and will be tough; therefore the best coping mechanism is to plan well ahead.

- Remember to be flexible in your planning because you never know how you'll feel one day to the next, a flexible plan gives you the option to choose what feels right.
- Think about where and how you would like to spend Christmas. For example, what you would rather or rather not do.
- You might want to consider whose home you will spend Christmas, bear in mind that it's easier for you to leave someone else's home than to ask family or friends to leave your home if you're feeling too overwhelmed on the day.
- In your planning, set realistic expectations for yourself. Remind yourself that Christmas will be different. Decide if you can still handle past responsibilities and expectations.

Remember also that whatever plans you have in mind, ensure that you discuss these in advance with those you're spending Christmas with. It is important that you communicate these clearly and ensure there is a mutual agreement.



The first Christmas after you lose someone is hard.

You will feel like not celebrating, but you will go along with it for the kids, for the family.

It will hurt.

The presents not bought. The chair not sat in. The memories of past Christmases that threaten to suck the joy out of the whole day.

But you will get through it. You may even raise a smile between the tears.

If you can - thank God for the Christmases you had with them. Light a candle. Cry. Start a new tradition in their memory.

Next year won't be as hard. Trust me.



Rituals and traditions

Rituals and traditions are an important part of cultural heritage. However, in planning ahead, especially if this is your first Christmas without your loved one, you could consider that in addition to traditions, it would be special and appropriate to add some new traditions that acknowledges your loved one's absence. On the other hand, you may decide to skip the old traditions altogether because not only does it triggers memories of your loved one, it can also be unbearably painful.

- The most important thing to remember is there is no right or wrong way to celebrate Christmas after the death of a loved one. However, it is important to discuss with family members what activities you would like to include/exclude or skip altogether.

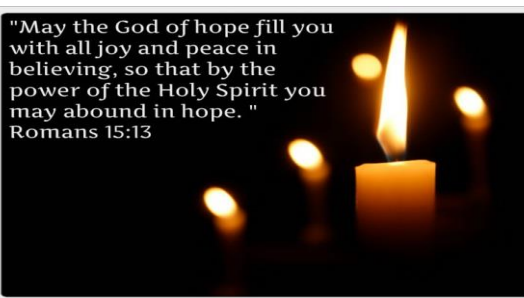
Some examples of new rituals and traditions include:

- Light a candle in honour of your loved one.
- Buy a special ornament in memory of your loved one and hang it on the Christmas tree.
- Visit your loved one's grave or the place their ashes were scattered
- Uphold a minute silence in memory of him/her.
- During the Christmas meal with family members and friends, raise a glass in honour of your loved one's memory and/or ask everyone at the table to share their favourite memory of him or her.

(mindhealthcollective.com)



"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." Romans 15:13





If you have young children, try to make Christmas special for them by creating some new memories, despite the sadness you are feeling.

- Create a memory box. Fill it with photos of your loved one or memory notes from family members and friends. Ask young children to contribute drawings for the memory box.

“Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after someone dies. Treasure them! Share them with your family and friends. Recognise that your memories may make you laugh or cry. In either case, they are a lasting part of the relationship that you had with that special person in your life”.



Remember that, traditions (old and new) can be a source of comfort especially at Christmas; they can also be painful. Only you can decide if keeping traditions and, or adding new ones will help or hinder your healing process. But bear in mind that ignoring Christmas altogether may not help.

- Remember also that things will get better over time even if it doesn't feel that way right now.

Accept that others deal with grief at Christmas differently

According to one writer, it is important to understand that people deal with holiday grief in different ways. Conflict within a family can sometimes arise when we have expectations of how others should grieve. You will be coping with bereavement at Christmas in your own way, but try to be sensitive to others' needs. Don't be afraid to talk openly about what Christmas and grief mean for you.



Please Note!

Visit our webpage: wntcg.org/bereavement

The Bereavement Café ministry is part of The Willesden New Testament Church of God



The Bereavement Café Support Group recognises that “enduring the pain of grief can be one of the most difficult challenges you will face in your life. At its core, loss creates a void, a hole in your life that must be faced”. If at any time you are having suicidal thoughts or any other negative feelings, please don’t sit in silence. We are here to help and support you.

Our support group offers:

- ✚ A safe environment for those who are living with grief either through the loss of a loved one or any other significant loss you might be experiencing right now in your life.
- ✚ We believe that sharing can help to you feel connected with others who are going through a similar experience.
- ✚ Sharing your story can also help those who are more recently bereaved to feel understood on their journey of grief

The next Support Group is on Sunday 17th December 2023, immediately after the morning service. Why not join us and share your story/listen to others who are also going through the valley of the shadow of grief; it is a space for you to share or just sit listen to others.

Other Resources available over Christmas:

CHRISTMAS HELPLINES

IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW FIND YOURSELF IN CRISIS AT CHRISTMAS PLEASE REMEMBER YOU ARE NOT ALONE

CRUSE – Bereavement Helpline - 0808 808 1677

Samaritans – 0800 116 123

NSPCC – 0808 800 5000

Childline – 0800 1111

Rape Crisis – (England & Wales) 0808 802 9999

AGE UK – 0800 055 6112

Alcoholics Anonymous – 0800 9177 650

HOPELineUK – (Prevention of Young Suicide) 0800 068 41 41

The MIX (Essential Support for Under 25's) – 0800 808 4994

Silverline – Helpline for Older People – 0800 470 8090



**CHRISTIAN
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FREEPHONE (UK) – 0808 801 0585

Lines are open 8PM to MIDNIGHT - 7 DAYS A WEEK
Calls are confidential and do not appear on callers' bills

OR EMAIL: niki@christianhelpline.uk
www.christianhelpline.uk

*God is close to the brokenhearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit*
(Psalm 34:18)



Remind yourself that there is no right or wrong way to grieve at Christmas but, there are also a few things that you could do to help you cope:

- Remember you don’t have to put on a brave face if you’re feeling sad.
- Acknowledge that this will be a difficult day for you and your family.
- Don’t feel guilty of something you should have said or done.
- Allow yourself to cry if you feel the tears coming on

Offer Yourself Some Grace

- One of the best things you can do is give yourself permission to feel whatever it is you're feeling. Try not to fall prey to the belief that you have to feel a certain way or do certain things in order to make the Christmas “normal.” If you feel sad, allow the tears to come; if you feel angry, allow yourself to vent some steam (in a controlled manner). (verywellhealth.co).

Look after yourself



- Self-care is the key, and wellbeing is the goal.
- Set realistic expectations for yourself- It's okay not to accept all invitations you get; it's okay to do things differently than you have in the past.
- It is important to get plenty of rest, eat regularly and stay active.
- Talk about your feelings.



Be Honest with Yourself

- Don't pretend that you are feeling fine whenever you are not. You are setting yourself up for failure.
- Respect and acknowledge your feelings whatever they are, but look for moments of joy in the midst of your grief.
- Ensure that your needs are known to your family and friends, but also listen to their needs too. Slow down and allow your feelings to come, pushing them away makes them louder and more intense; ask a family member or friend to sit with you to just listen, or be with you in silence.

No Guilt Trip!

Some people can experience feelings of guilt when their loved one dies. You may find yourself wondering if you could have done more to help, or feeling guilty about something you said or didn't say to them when they were alive.

- Set aside guilt, self-consciousness, and any other negative emotions.
- Focus on the positive- love, healing, encouragement, and the support of family members to see you through during this difficult time.
- If there are real regrets such as not saying goodbye, if you missed your last chance to tell them you love them, or you were too busy and didn't spend quality time with him/her, then think ahead; is there something I've learnt through all this that I can adopt into my lifestyle for the future?





Remember that we can turn our ‘failings’ into ‘positives’, and allow our current situation to change future priorities.

- The real answer to guilt is forgiveness. If we did make mistakes, we need to forgive ourselves. We’re all human and we all have weaknesses, so let’s allow ourselves to acknowledge that we did our best under the circumstances. We should go easy on ourselves and remember all the things we did for our loved one during our time together (Care for the Family).

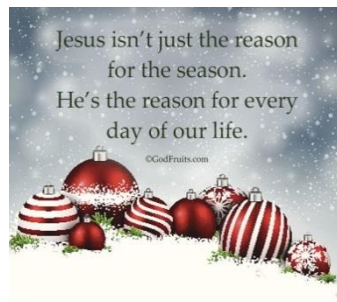
Journaling: Benefits of keeping a journal include:

- Clarifying thoughts
- Recording memories
- Become more aware of our emotions.
- Make sense of our thoughts as we write them down.

Allow yourself to be immersed in the celebration

- Allow yourself to experience unexpected joyous moments this Christmas. You might worry that some may think you are being disrespectful towards your lost loved one if you enjoy the Christmas celebrations. But try not to feel bad or guilty if you find yourself immersed in celebration.
- Also remember the real reason why we celebrate Christmas!

For unto us a
Child
is
Born
Isaiah 9:6



- ✚ The resources used in this Newsletter are taken from Books on “Grief” and various Internet websites on grief.

Our prayer is that you will find this month’s Newsletter helpful in your journey of grief.

BLESSINGS - The Bereavement Café Support Team