

Daily Treasure
Journey to Christmas – (Christmas Grief Relief)
Week 4, 12/6/23
Wednesday

Leaning into the Pain
Sharon W. Betters

Today's Treasure

Why are you in despair, O my soul? Why have you become restless and disquieted within me? Hope in God and wait expectantly for Him, for I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.

Psalm 42:11 Amplified

As I mentioned in Sunday's devotional, about two weeks before Thanksgiving every year I begin to feel disorganized, disconnected, and emotionally edgy. Responding to irritations without irritation is more difficult. Anger and impatience vie for top billing in situations that don't normally rattle me.

And every year Chuck reminds me that my root problem is grief. I miss Mark. Over thirty years after Mark's accident the freight train of sorrow still surprises me with its ferocity and power.

The first Christmas without Mark, identifying and admitting the root cause of my intense emotions freed me to accept grief once more will always be lurking but I could turn the tables and allow my heightened emotions to make me more aware of the heart of God in Christmas. I camped out in the comfort food of the Christmas story as recorded in Luke and John. I sat at Mary's feet and "pondered" in my own heart all the truths the Lord had given me since Mark's death, writing once more in my journal life-giving scriptural truths, designed to help me walk by faith. This extended time in Scripture cleansed my soul and settled my emotions so I could move on to the next steps of taking care of myself physically.

In the middle of my impatience breakdown, Chuck encouraged me to make a list of everything I thought I needed to do in order to keep Christmas traditions, then he helped me eliminate needless distress by giving me permission to cross off my to do list of the many tasks that weren't important to anyone but me. I have discovered a little more every year, I have to stop trying to recreate the "old Christmas feeling" and

accept joy comes in all kinds of packages. I am learning to allow God to surprise me with His treasures.

Each task remaining on my shortened to-do list became an opportunity to fill the house with worship music and though tears often streamed down my face, I tackled the tasks of the day, knowing I could stop at any point without guilt, to cry, call a friend, take a walk, and eliminate that task from my to-do list. My body and heart told me when to stop and rest. Friends, grief is hard work. Fighting the natural longing for what was requires powerful energy. Sometimes the best weapon is to acknowledge your inability to break the ache in your soul for the one who is missing or the shattered dreams. And then armed with that truth, tackle the tasks of the day, sowing seeds while weeping, believing such obedience will one day reap joy.

Choosing to celebrate Christmas in the midst of deep grief requires leaning into the pain in order to strengthen broken places. Each family must decide the way that suits it best. I found it helpful to mix old traditions with new ones. Preparing Mark's favorite foods and planning small surprises for my family gave me a sense of joy. We gave ourselves permission to laugh and enjoy memories of Mark. Laughing did not mean we didn't miss Mark. We also gave ourselves permission to cry whenever and wherever we needed to cry.

I tried to take care of myself physically by continuing to walk regularly. For you, it may be listening to music, shopping, playing sports, walking on the beach, or eating out with friends. Identify what comforts you and do it. You may feel guilty about enjoying even a few moments of life. Take those feelings to the Lord and leave them. Part of your healing will come from giving yourself permission to enjoy life again.

Friends commented that every time they heard "The Little Drummer Boy" they thought of Mark since he played the drums on our worship team. Collecting Little Drummer Boy memorabilia and drum tree ornaments became a quiet way to acknowledge Mark's continuing place in our family. What holiday memento collection might help you acknowledge your love for your departed family member?

Your Father welcomes your tears, your pounding on His chest, your admission of what feels like weak faith. My friend, when you take your longings to Him, your "weak faith" is actually priceless faith, because it reveals your trust that He is sovereign and He is the only One Who can bring any sense to this senseless moment.

LIFE-GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT

Grief Relief for the Mourning: Don't wait to have a family conversation about what each person wants or doesn't. While this conversation might be difficult because each person's needs are different and no doubt many tears will flow, planning will help alleviate potential conflict. Compromise might be required but identifying minefields gives you time to navigate them.

Christmas Grief Relief Resource: For more on how to get through the holidays, check out Grief Share's resources on holidays: <https://www.holidays.griefshare.org/>

Christmas Grief Relief Resource: Preparing for Christmas in the Darkness of Grief, a conversation with Chuck and Sharon Betters:
<https://markinc.org/help-and-hope/2016/4/30/preparing-for-christmas>

Grief Relief for a Grieving Friend: Offer to help create a Christmas prep "to-do list". Help your friend delegate tasks to her family, tasks no one else cares about and identify what tasks you can help her accomplish.

PRAYER

Father, grief is hard labor but even in the darkest moments, we can trust You are with us and though we now lament, we will yet praise You for Your faithful love.