

Daily Treasure
Journey to Christmas – (Christmas Grief Relief)
Week 4, 12/3/23
Sunday

When Christmas is Not the Most Wonderful Time of the Year
Sharon Betters

Today's Treasure

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion— to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.

Isaiah 61:1-3

Dear Friends,

It's The Most Wonderful Time Of The Year, It's the Hap-happiest season of all... except... when it's not.

Harry Connick Jr.'s merry lyrics sharply contrasted with the sad tears and unending ache in my chest that accompanied me every minute of every day in the days leading up to our first Christmas without our sweet youngest child, Mark. Christmas was on our minds even the night of his death. On our way home from the hospital that hot July night Chuck grabbed my hand and whispered, "Christmas, what will we do about Christmas?"

We know many who read and listen to Daily Treasure are deeply grieving, whether from the loss of a child, a spouse, a relationship, a life-long illness, or a life you didn't choose. Your grief runs deep and the holidays amplify your sorrow. This week's devotionals are designed to help prepare you for Christmas in the darkness of your grief. And for those of you who are not in deep grief, it's our hope you will be better equipped to understand your friend's broken heart and how to come alongside her.

In the early years after Mark's death, the anticipation of the holidays often felt worse than the holidays themselves. Thirty years later, I experience joy in this "most wonderful time of the year" but not because it's the hap-happiest season of all. Because

for many it's not. About two weeks before Thanksgiving I began to feel disorganized, disconnected, and emotionally edgy. Responding to irritations patiently is more difficult. Anger and impatience vie for top billing in situations that don't normally rattle me. And every year Chuck reminds me, "Sharon, your root problem is grief. You miss Mark and the holidays crack open the door for sadness to make an appearance."

Over the past few years, my extended family's grief has deepened. My sister and her family continue to search for ways to create joy when an empty chair reminds them my brother-in-law is gone. Two of my siblings each lost a child this past year. Memories of preparing for Christmas with my dear friend, Diane bring tears not only for myself but for her dear husband and children whose godly and beautiful matriarch is gone from this earth. Each year brings more losses and the freight train of sorrow still surprises me with its ferocity and power.

One reason the holiday season is so difficult for grieving Americans is that marketing gurus tap deep into our core need for community and family. The most effective ads are those that imply healthy, conflict-free relationships. Thanksgiving and Christmas are ready-made opportunities for stirring up our God-given hunger for peace and whole families.

Divorce, broken relationships, childlessness, loss of a loved one, financial disaster, singleness, conflict-filled marriage, illness with no end in sight - none of these fit the "hap- happiest time of the year" template so all of those ads magnify the holes in our own broken lives and push us to try our hardest to create the illusive feelings of belonging and being needed.

The anticipation of our first Christmas without Mark amplified his absence. Like so many broken people, I wanted to jump from November 1 to mid-January. Yet, somehow, I knew this first Christmas without Mark was the most important Christmas of my life. Such truth exhausted me yet also drew me to use what little energy I had to search for the "riches stored in secret places" designed to help me experience Christmas in a life-transforming way (Isaiah 45:2-3).

And so, my grieving friends, I want you to know - before you give into the desire to skip Christmas, understand - that Christmas is for those who mourn, for those who grieve.

Christmas is for those of us who mourn and grieve because Jesus conquered the very things that create such sorrow in our hearts. Ironically, when viewed through a grid of pain, the Christmas story can cultivate and nurture the seeds of hope and redemption our God planted on that first Christmas. The darkness, the blood, and the death

surrounding the birth of Jesus can serve to make His light even brighter for those who are desperately seeking their way on this black pathway of grief.

As we start the Month of December, I'll share a few journal entries I wrote the first Christmas without Mark along with some "grief relief" moments, both practical and spiritual, that helped turn my heart toward Jesus when every breath was an effort. I hope those of you who are anticipating Christmas as the happiest time of the year will pray for those who want to pull down the shades and sleep through the next month because every Christmas tradition, trinket, decoration, or song heightens the deep longing for what was, for something more. I'll offer you some life-giving treasures of encouragement you can give to grieving friends, and practical ways to help turn their hearts toward Jesus. In the meantime, I invite everyone to listen to Preparing for Christmas in the Darkness of Grief, a conversation between Chuck and me. ([LINK](#))

Friends, Christmas is for those who mourn.

Treasured by Him,
Sharon

LIFE-GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT

For those who mourn: give yourself permission to experience Christmas differently and start thinking about how to navigate the potential emotional minefields. Ask the Lord to give you glimpses of the "joy to the world" Jesus brings.

For a grieving friend: Encourage your friend to start thinking through how she will spend the month of December, including decorating, traditional activities, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day.

Christmas Grief Relief Resource: We don't know what we don't know. My friend, Vaneetha Risner knows grief and shares how to help the hurting during the holidays. [LINK](#)

Christmas Grief Relief Resource: Preparing for Christmas in the Darkness of Grief, a conversation with Chuck and Sharon Betters: [Podcast LINK](#)

PRAYER

Lord, may we find a path through the holidays that helps us focus on the monumental birth of our Savior and how His birth gives us hope in the middle of deep sorrow.

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

You are Mine!
Sharon W. Betters

Today's Treasure

*Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your very great reward.
Genesis 15:1*

*If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.
Galatians 3:29*

What gives us the strength to get through the holidays when our hearts want to give up? I never want to forget the anguish and tears and even days of darkness and despair in those first years without Mark. I did not believe I would – could – live this long without him. Yet, here I am, calling back to those in the deepest sorrows – God is sovereign and you can trust Him. How did this happen? I share most of my story in my books, Treasures of Encouragement and Treasures in Darkness. Readers learn that my theology held me when nothing else could. A key truth was and is the promise of God's presence. Friends, what better time to sink into the precious blanket of God's love than the birth of Immanuel – which means God with us?

This core truth helped equip Mary, the mother of Jesus, for the journey God marked out for her as we see in the declaration of the angel:

*Fear not! For you have found favor with God! And the Lord is with you!
Luke 1:30*

Friends, Mary was about to embark on the hardest pathway of her life. Yes, she would experience priceless treasures along the way, but she would also live out a parallel life that invited fear and grief. And through this angel, God tells her He is giving her all she needs for the journey – the most precious gift of all – the treasure of His favor and Presence. He gives us the same gift as we travel with sorrow wrapped around our souls. His presence as described in Scripture, becomes the grid through which we can navigate how to walk by faith in the Land of Grief.

God's promise of His presence was not the first time His children heard these profound words. Let's start with a strong theological foundation and eavesdrop on an ancient conversation, a verbal exchange where God gives the mother of all gifts to Abraham and everyone in Abraham's family (which includes you if you are a child of God (Galatians 3:29). To begin to understand the deep emotion of this moment, reach back into your own treasure chest of memories and recollect the delight and joy you experienced when you gave your loved one a priceless gift. That's how we imagine God felt when Abraham began unwrapping this precious gift placed in his hands by the very heart of God. Abraham was not seeking God and we think he was a moon worshipper. In this unique conversation (Genesis 12:1-3) God says (my translation), "Abraham, you're my child now. I chose you. From this moment on, I am binding you to me, I will walk with you. As we walk through life together, I will teach you what it means to be my child. When you are faced with difficult choices and painful circumstances, remember this. I am with you always. I will bless you. You in turn will be a blessing to others. Through you, I am creating a community, a family with more people than you can count. You will be a blessing to others and this covenant community will be a blessing to many because of my Presence."

In Genesis 15:1 God continues this conversation with the words:

Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your very great reward.

In response to Abram's fear, God promises His Presence which is the greatest protection and reward of all. So what does this have to do with my life choices? Or what to do on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day? Or how to reconcile my deep sorrow with trusting God in the dark places? I have often said that when Mark went to heaven, he took my mind with him. I couldn't think straight and to this day admit I have trouble making quick decisions. But God did not leave me or you without a grid through which to push life decisions.

Our decisions start with this truth: I belong to Christ. Those four words reveal I am Abraham's seed which means I am part of the fulfillment of God's promise to build a huge family from the seed of Abraham. Therefore, the same promises He made to Abraham are part of my eternal inheritance, and yours. Every promise God made to Abraham belongs to me and you if you know Jesus as your Savior. God promises me His Presence, He will bless me and I am part of a covenant community (spiritual family). It's in this family I will experience blessings and learn how to be a blessing.

Whether in the mundane moments or in my most broken places, this truth carries me, whether it is in deciding how to spend Christmas the first year after our son's death,

when I struggle with depression or a broken friendship, or even interactions with grandchildren or friends, His word reminds me:

God Himself has said, 'I will not in any way fail you nor give you up nor leave you without support. I will not, I will not, I will not in any way or degree leave you helpless nor forsake you nor let you down, relax my hold on you. Assuredly not!'
Hebrews 13:5, Amplified

Friends, Jesus starts His time on earth with the name, Immanuel or God with us. He ends His earthly life with these words to His disciples and to us:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.
Matthew 28:19-20

Let every Christmas light and candle, every symbol rejoicing His birth, every Christmas carol remind us of the eternal power of His presence and drive us deeper into the light of Jesus:

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
John 1:5

LIFE-GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT

For those who mourn: Give yourself permission to grieve and make decisions that are best for you and your family. I found it helpful to start every day by writing my feelings in my journal, reading scripture (one Psalm, one Proverb) and two devotionals, My Utmost for His Highest and Streams in the Dessert. Some days I began and ended with tears but often the Lord broke the ache in my chest for just a little while through the power of His Word. During December, I focused on the Christmas story and the Lord revealed treasures I had never seen before, each one designed to remind me of His presence, that He is the Lord my God and knows my name.

To help your grieving friend: Give her a journal or a short devotional where she can also record her thoughts. Offer to read through a short devotional together and then meet to talk through what you read or heard, i.e. go for a walk every day or schedule a phone call. We know of women who use Daily Treasure as the foundation of their shared devotional times.

Christmas Grief Relief Resource: Preparing for Christmas in the Darkness of Grief, a conversation with Chuck and Sharon Betters: [Podcast LINK](#)

PRAYER

Lord, the Christmas story tells us that Your name is Immanuel, “God with us.” Remind us that Your Spirit is still with us. We give our hopes and fears to You, through this holiday and every day.

Daily Treasure
Journey to Christmas – (Christmas Grief Relief)
Week 4, 12/5/23
Tuesday

The Train is Coming
Sharon W. Betters

Today's Treasure

Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.

Psalm 62:1-2

No matter how much we plan and prepare for the holidays, I know we will all agree, especially those like me whose loss was thirty years ago, the train of grief can and will run us down when we least expect it. This blog post, written nineteen years ago, captures the power of the train but also the grace God gives – not to outrun it but to lean into the pain and discover priceless treasures in the darkness.

The Train is Coming

Adapted from Treasures of Encouragement Blog Post, July 6, 2011

Nineteen years ago this morning (July 5, 2011), I dropped off our sons at their new job. I especially remember how proud sixteen-year-old Mark seemed, dressed in a crisp white shirt and tie. His previous work experience was in construction and this new job meant working inside in air conditioning. It was a normal day, like any other day, except it wasn't. And the only One Who knew how upside down it would end was our God.

That year July 4 was on a Sunday. We celebrated Communion during the worship service. Our sixteen-year-old son, Mark, sat on one side of me and seventeen-year-old Daniel sat on the other. I rubbed their backs as they bowed to pray before taking the elements.

What was in their minds? Was this a special moment with the Lord or were they thinking about our cookout plans and getting together with friends for fireworks later?

At a recent outdoor concert followed by a fireworks display, Dan told me the night reminded him of July 4, 1993, one of his last nights with his brother. His comment took me back to seeing our kids, their cousins, and friends in our driveway, deciding who would ride with whom and where they would meet up.

We had just finished a 4th of July barbeque that included both sides of our family, lots of cousins and grandparents and aunts and uncles. Within minutes the loud laughter and story-telling subsided as different family groups left to watch fireworks in their own neighborhoods. Chuck and I declined all their invitations to join them, saying we would watch the neighbor's mini-displays from a blanket in our own backyard.

While the neighbors illegally set off their fireworks, we reminisced about the "laughter in the walls" of our home and wondered what the next year would bring. Deep contentment and joy soaked our souls. No one, no one could have known that within 48 hours, our lives would be forever changed. Our son, Mark, and his friend, Kelly, would die in a car accident ten minutes after they left our home.

The train of grief is coming. The vibration caused by its thundering speed and the faint, lonely whistle in the distance warns me. Yes, it is coming. I know it is useless to try to outrun it. I have learned over the past 19 years that the train can also bring strange comfort and treasures, especially around July 6. Within the past week, a special friend who didn't know Mark told me she started praying more for us at the beginning of every July. During a recent worship service, she thought about Mark and wondered what part our drummer son might have had in the worship band. Another young friend who attended school with Mark, starting in preschool, shared a funny story I had never heard. Mark's cousins shared a memory that made me laugh and they reassured me that they think of Mark a lot. The coming train gives them the courage to mention his name.

Every time we celebrate Communion, I think about July 4, 1993, and I wonder again what Mark was thinking about the last Sunday we worshipped together. The approaching train of grief drives me to search for meaning and to watch for treasures of encouragement designed to help me withstand the power of the anticipated collision.

Today I remember how Jesus thanked God for the bread and wine at the last meal He would share with His disciples, knowing a cruel death awaited Him within hours of that meal. Picture the peace He displayed as He thanked God for the provision of sustenance, His disciples not realizing the thanks was an act of surrender to God's purposes for Him. I picture myself at the table and Jesus looking into my eyes and firmly exhorting me: Do this in remembrance of me. He knows my circumstances, my anguish, my longing for what was. Yet my big brother reminds me that thanking God for the blessings He gives us, no matter the darkness, and perhaps especially in the middle of the darkness, helps equip me for whatever may be coming. Jesus thanked God for blessings in the middle of anguish and by thanking God, He surrendered to God's sovereign love.

On July 6, 1993, Grief pushed its way into my soul but unbeknownst to me, joy snuck in, too. And slowly, slowly, Joy inched her way to the front of the line, pushing Grief back into a

corner. Yet Grief is always with me, often hidden and forgotten until a song, a memory, or a story releases the pent-up longing for Mark. But, friends, Grief can become a friend because it brings opportunities to experience treasures in the darkness we would never see were it not for sadness. Grief keeps us connected to our loved one even thirty years later and I am grateful for those moments when I hear the train's whistle in the distance. The sound sends me running to the Lord where He has revealed the secret for surviving the coming collision. He is my Refuge, Rest, Rescue, and Rock. Grief draws me into His heart and keeps me connected to our son.

The train is coming. But the train will not destroy me for I am learning to thank God for His provisions, His blessings and to surrender to His purposes. The train is coming. But I am not afraid.

LIFE-GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT

For the Grieving: The train of grief carries ferocious sorrow but in the middle of the darkness, look for the light of Jesus. Ask Him to open your heart and eyes to treasures you will only discover in the darkness. Lean into the pain and run to Jesus, your Refuge, Rest, Rescue, and Rock. You may be getting ready to go to a Christmas event and in those moments grief runs you down. Ask the Lord if going to the event holds gifts of encouragement for you or if you need to stay home and allow your grief to overwhelm you. Whatever decision you make, He will be with you, just as He promised.

Christmas Grief Relief Resource:

<https://www.amazon.com/Treasures-Darkness-Grieving-Mother-Shares/dp/0875527981?SubscriptionId=AKIAIOCEBIGP6NUBL47A&tag=&linkCode=xm2&camp=2025&creative=165953&creativeASIN=0875527981>

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>

For the Grieving Friend: Give up the goal of fixing your friend. Our first Christmas without Mark, at the last minute I skipped out of attending and participating in a women's Christmas event. I could not bear the idea of being with a group of happy, joyful people. I needed to weep. A dear friend learned of my absence and hurried over to our home to sit with me. She exchanged the special event for moments of grieving with her broken friend. One caution, this was a close friend. As much as you may want to be the one by her side, make decisions about how to help your friend based on the level of your friendship. Your task might be to pray as another friend rushes to her side.

PRAYER

Father, the train is coming, but instead of running from the grief, show us how to lean into the pain and reveal Your presence through treasures in the darkness.

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: [LINK](#)

Christmas Grief Relief Resource: Preparing for Christmas in the Darkness of Grief, a conversation with Chuck and Sharon Betters: [Podcast LINK](#)

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.

Daily Treasure
Journey to Christmas – (Christmas Grief Relief)
Week 4, 12/7/23
Thursday

Christmas Relief Tips, Part 1
Sharon W. Betters

Today's Treasure

But now, this is what the LORD says— he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

Isaiah 43:1-2

Children in foster care and many adopted children deeply grieve during the holidays, even little ones. They may not understand why they are so distraught or angry but display their hurt through wild emotions that seem to have no rhyme or reason. Or they might withdraw, unwilling or incapable of expressing the sorrow buried in their hearts. They don't know that they are grieving, they just know that something is broken or missing. Wise parents embrace these moments as opportunities to help their child better understand themselves. Parents will limit their child's activities and protect them from being in situations they cannot handle. And they will choose not to take their child's behavior personally.

As I listened to my friend tell me what she was learning in her foster care classes, I realized once more: that grief is grief. The seminar presenter was describing me! Recognizing the irritability and impatience I start experiencing a few weeks before Thanksgiving is rooted in grief frees me to take practical steps to help navigate the holidays. In those moments when I feel like an out-of-control child, the Lord says to me:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you, Sharon, pass through the waters, I will be with you, and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

Isaiah 43:1b-2

No matter how broken, helpless, or despairing our emotions, when we belong to Him, we can face the minutes of each day, trusting our Father to keep the promise of His presence and protection. Here are some of the grief relief tips I used as a means of walking through those early holiday seasons:

GRIEF RELIEF TIPS, PART 1

1. Give yourself permission to grieve for what was so you can accept the holidays will never be the same. At the same time, give yourself permission to enjoy what is and look for new treasures.
2. Cut your expectations in half or more. Minimize the Christmas clutter. Try one tree instead of three! Buy cookies instead of baking. If the thought of hosting overwhelms you, whether on Christmas or throughout December, delegate to a family member or friend.
3. Speaking of those cookies, sugar highs and lows contribute to raging emotions. Avoid overeating and using food as an emotional crutch. It will have the opposite effect. Choose to eat healthy foods, and stay hydrated, especially if you are crying a lot.
4. Be disciplined when it comes to your children, especially those who are grieving for whatever reason. Stay as close to their schedule as possible and limit the sweets.
5. Speaking of children. Stay in tune with the emotional swings of your children. Allow and encourage them to enjoy the holidays. Be alert for moments when their grief hits hard in ways they don't understand. For instance, their reaction to the loss of a favorite blanket or toy might seem extreme but it's likely their inconsolable sobs, anger, or frustration is rooted in their inability to express their own fear of more losses. Be willing and ready to change plans in a minute if it's obvious your child needs quiet time rather than noisy, sugar-filled activities.
6. Move. Chuck advises people struggling with depression: "If you're lying down, sit up. If you're sitting up, stand up. If you're standing walk. If you're walking, run. In other words, force yourself to get moving." Better yet, ask a friend to meet you at the park and walk and talk or cry. Start small if moving is new to you. But get moving.
7. Recognize you are emotionally raw - be ready to forgive and to be forgiven. If you are grieving a loved one, take your regrets to Jesus and accept His forgiveness as well as His love that covers every sin. If someone hurts you, be ready to forgive as you have been forgiven.

For the Broken-Hearted: Midnight Mercies, Walking with God Through Depression in Motherhood by Christine Chappell. Check out Christine's free Midnight Mercies Virtual Summit – a collection of video conversations with numerous women who have experienced loss and depression. [LINK](#)

Schedule regular time to sit with Jesus. Play hymns or worship songs as you read Scripture, pen in hand, ready to jot down thoughts and especially treasures from God's Word. Pray for those you love.

For the Grieving Friend: Offer to meet your sorrowing friend at a local park to walk or just sit and enjoy the sunshine. Bring her favorite drink and be ready to sit on a bench and talk or simply cry with her.

While this article is written for people coming alongside grieving people, Nancy Guthrie's insights can help grieving people better understand conflicting emotions. [LINK](#)

Christmas Grief Relief Resource: Preparing for Christmas in the Darkness of Grief, a conversation with Chuck and Sharon Betters: [Podcast LINK](#)

PRAYER

Oh, Father, You promise to go with us through the raging oceans of grief, the rivers of sorrow, and the fires of depression, anger, frustration, and longing for what was. Give us a glimpse of Your presence today.

Daily Treasure
Journey to Christmas – (Christmas Grief Relief)
Week 4, 12/8/23
Friday

Christmas Relief Tips, Part 2
Preparing for the Holidays When Your Heart is Broken
Sharon W. Betters

Today's Treasure

*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.
Isaiah 43:18-19*

"Your mother has six other children. Why is it so important for you and your family to go to her house for Thanksgiving? She might be relieved to have six fewer people. There will be so many others, she won't know you're not there!"

My friend's response to my dilemma about where to spend Thanksgiving revealed she had no idea of my family's DNA. There was always room for more at my mother's table, especially on Thanksgiving. And saying that my mother would not miss us was like saying we weren't as loved or valued as the others.

For many years Chuck and I enjoyed two extended family Thanksgiving dinners and Christmas celebrations, in an effort to hold on to our own childhood traditions. Our family of six added to the chaos and laughter of my big family yet we looked forward to closing out the day with the more quiet, peaceful meal with Chuck's family. We faced hard decisions when we recognized we just couldn't face eating two big turkey dinners in one day.

Years later I thought about this conversation with my friend. One of our children was missing, never to experience Thanksgiving or Christmas with us on this earth again. Would we miss him less because we had three other children? Of course not. For the first time in almost twenty-five years of marriage, we spent Thanksgiving at home. A tomb-like silence seeped into every corner. If only we could go back in time, to the family celebrations we assumed would always be part of our lives.

For so many years after the death of our son, tears accompanied every effort I made to "save Thanksgiving and Christmas" for our family. I wanted so much to hang on to the past, to recreate the joyful celebration of those growing-up years. Some of my empty-nester moms and newly single moms struggle with these same challenges: wanting so much to go back to the anticipation and joy of those childhood years and struggling to give themselves permission to enjoy a new season of life as their children reach adulthood.

In time, God created new traditions, and new memories, for our "new normal." This Thanksgiving we look forward to enjoying the hospitality of Dan and Laura along with Chuck and Melanie's family. We'll stop by Heidi and Greg's to get our Thanksgiving hugs because though we will be in a houseful of loved ones, one family will be missing as our daughter hosts her husband's family. We will make choices to embrace the joy of the day, but don't be fooled, while every chair at the table is filled, there are empty chairs in our hearts.

Grief is hard work. If your heart is broken today, I pray you will lean into the pain, crawl up into the lap of our God, and pour out your heart.

Friends, we can't run away from Grief. It is our constant companion. But there comes a day when Joy slips in and slowly but surely looks for ways to overshadow the ghost of Grief. Take little steps and be intentional by making way for Joy. Here are some of the practical ways I navigated those first holidays without Mark.

Christmas Grief Relief Tips, Part 2

8. Cut back on activities but do not isolate yourself. If large groups are difficult, plan time with a few trusted friends. Give yourself time alone to mourn, reflect, and process but do not totally withdraw. God created a community for such a time as this. Receive the gift of relationships and allow them to be part of your healing.
9. Plan ahead. Think through the events and traditions that will be too painful and look for ways of creating a "new normal." We changed how we spent our first Christmas without our son, Mark. I share a lot of the details in my book, [*Treasures in Darkness, A Grieving Mother Shares Her Heart*](#). Granted, the enormous pain remained, but we were comforted by leaning into the pain and being with those who loved and missed Mark, too.
10. Speaking of leaning into the pain. Acknowledge you are grieving. Give yourself permission to cry, to allow others to see your grief. Don't apologize for your tears. They are an expression of your love and a release of deep sorrow.

11. Help someone else. Yes, you are broken and feel helpless and hopeless, and it will be hard to offer help and hope to another. But God's grace enables us and in some supernatural way, uses serving others to strengthen our hearts. And, if you help and your emotions are unchanged, take joy in knowing you served in obedience to our Lord.

LIFE-GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT

Encouragement for the Broken-Hearted: This grief relief tip should be first but see it as the foundation of all the other tips. Spend time with Jesus. Ride your grief right into His heart. You are more vulnerable to His voice and love because you are so broken. There are "treasures in the darkness, riches stored in secret places" that He has for you - that I believe we do not experience in the light. Be on the lookout for those treasures designed to turn your heart toward Him. He wants you to remember that He calls you by name and He is your Lord.

Encouragement For a Grieving Friend: If you are looking for ways to help a grieving friend, these few whispered words, "I miss him, too." will help break the ache in your friend's heart. Just acknowledging a friend's pain frees them to experience the moment. If you are helping a child grieve, don't minimize their grief by telling them they have so much to be grateful for. Acknowledge their pain and their "right" to feel the pain. And then gently help them embrace the good by turning their attention to something fun.

Christmas Grief Relief Resource: Are you stuck in your grief journey? Consider counseling with a biblical counselor. Check out Anchored Hope online biblical counseling services at anchoredhope.co

Christmas Grief Relief Resource: Preparing for Christmas in the Darkness of Grief, a conversation with Chuck and Sharon Betters: [Podcast LINK](#)

PRAYER

Oh Father, lead us as we search for a new normal, accepting that we cannot "save" Christmas but we can experience it in a new, meaningful way.

Daily Treasure
Journey to Christmas – (Christmas Grief Relief)
Week 4, 12/9/23
Saturday

The Treasures of Holiday Presence
Sharon W. Betters

Today's Treasure

*[Jesus said,] "I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
Matt. 28:20*

As we wrap up this week of devotions let's circle back to the bedrock promise of God, the one He gave Abraham:

*Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your very great reward.
Genesis 15:1*

And let's remember this promise belongs to us if we are His children:

*If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.
Galatians 3:29*

On Christmas Eve and day, our first Christmas without Mark, I wrote in my journal:

Well, Lord, here I am. Christmas Eve. Running until I drop. Trying not to think. But I feel this might be the most important Christmas of my life. Mark's first Christmas in heaven. Our first Christmas without our child.

We felt loved by the friends who prepared and served the Christmas Eve buffet in our home before the communion service. In his Christmas Eve message, Chuck shared with the congregation the Scriptures from Isaiah that were so comforting to us. By the time we sang "O Holy Night" at the end of the service, we were emotionally spent and drew strength from the hugs and tears of friends.

By Christmas morning we needed private family time. Instead of joining extended family for the traditional noisy celebration at the homes of our parents, we stayed at our house. Phone calls from family members meant so much as we tried to honor Christ and grieve for Mark at the same time.

On Christmas day, I slipped away to spend time alone in our bedroom, reading the Christmas story, meditating especially on Mary and the conflicting emotions she must have experienced from the moment the angel told her about the coming Messiah. I wondered, was she lonely, afraid, confused? What emotions swirled around her soul when she gave birth to Jesus, far from family, disconnected from everything familiar? I felt strangely drawn to her heart and the feelings she may have experienced on that dark, lonely night.

Mary's song, recorded in Luke 1:46–55, acknowledged her own need of a Savior and her absolute trust that God keeps his promises from generation to generation. I wondered if she sang this song as a sacrifice of praise, choosing to believe the promises of God in the context of unbelievable circumstances. I followed the thread of her story to the foot of the cross and wept as I married my longing for Mark to her anguish as she watched the brutalization of her beloved son. Did she wonder where God was? As if to answer my questions, God drew me back to the Scriptures from Isaiah where he repeatedly promised to never leave me alone, to guide me in the darkness, to never forget me, to always be with me. I remembered Isaiah prophesied the virgin birth of Jesus and proclaimed he would be called Immanuel, which means "God with us." The gospel of Matthew places this prophecy in the middle of the Christmas narrative (Matt. 1:23).

And do you know how Matthew ends his gospel? By his resurrection, Jesus has proven himself a victor over death. He's about to ascend to the right hand of his Father in heaven, and he promises his disciples—and his followers for generations to come—he is not really leaving them. Consider Jesus' last words: "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

*Jesus, through his Spirit, is here. With us. With you. With me.
Even now. Especially now, in the season that celebrates his birth.
(Adapted from Treasures in Darkness, Page 187)*

LIFE-GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT

Friends, as you journey to Christmas shrouded by grief, remember the promise of God's presence. Each day, set aside time to soak in His Word and when you feel alone and perhaps abandoned by your Father, read passages designed to help remind you of His promise to never leave you and with your mind, remind your heart - Our God cannot lie:

Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains. For the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones. But Zion said, 'The LORD has forsaken me; the LORD has forgotten me.' "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will

not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me. Your sons hasten back, and those who laid you waste depart from you. Lift up your eyes and look around; all your sons gather and come to you, As surely as I live,' declares the LORD, 'you will wear them all as ornaments; you will put them on, like a bride.'"

Isaiah 49:13–18

Grief Relief for the Mourning: At first, I didn't want to hear any Christmas carols, but then I began to listen carefully to the words. I grabbed on to the ones proclaiming the "thrill of hope" that weary souls experienced with the entrance of the baby Jesus into a broken and shattered world. Start with Oh Holy Night. Especially take notice of the second half of the second verse, "The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger, in all our trials born to be our Friend!"

Tell the king born in a manger who came to be your friend, tell Him your greatest need. Trust Him to keep the promise of His presence, He will never forsake His children. And trust that His presence is enough.

Grief Relief for a Grieving Friend: Sometimes God keeps His promises through the lives of other believers. Offer to go with your friend to holiday events she doesn't want to avoid but is uncertain she can handle the holiday glitz. Be prepared to leave if necessary.

Christmas Grief Relief Resource: Chuck preached this series Surprised by Suffering, shortly after Mark's death. Perhaps these messages are designed to comfort and encourage you in your own grief journey. [LINK](#)

Christmas Grief Relief Resource: Preparing for Christmas in the Darkness of Grief, a conversation with Chuck and Sharon Betters: [Podcast LINK](#)

PRAYER

Father, may Your Word and even the words of Christmas Carols remind us of John's declaration in John 1:5 – the light entered the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it. Thank You, Jesus, for conquering death and lighting the way when darkness wants to reign. Thank You for the hope of comfort and healing through Your presence – the greatest Christmas present of all.