

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
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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

1. 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.
2. 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](http://markinc.org/ministries/treasures-in-darkness/) (http://markinc.org/ministries/treasures-in-darkness/). Granted, the enormous pain remained, but we were comforted by leaning into the pain and being with those who loved and missed Mark, too.

3. 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.
4. 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 <https://anchoredhope.co/>

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>

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.