

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

Christmas Relief Tips, Part 1
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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. <https://christinemchappell.com/mmsummit/>

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. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-grieving-people-wish-you-knew-at-christmas>

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, 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.