

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

The Treasures of Holiday Presence
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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.

<https://markinc.org/sermons-1/suprisedbysuffering>

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

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.