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A Guide to Grief

How to survive the
journey through
heartbreak.



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Introduction

Getting Beyond Grief

By Caryn Rivadeneira



A few nights back, my son came downstairs with a chunky string of fake pearls that once belonged to my paternal grandmother. He had gotten them out the old pink jewelry box of hers I keep on my window box. As he put the necklace around my neck, I caught a whiff of her perfume—something I hadn't smelled since she died over ten years ago. But as the scent filled my nose, a sadness filled my heart. But it was a good sadness—the kind that hurts a bit when you think back to nice memories of being shown love in the ways only a stern, immigrant grandmother can show love and when you wish she could be here to see her great-grandchildren with good Swedish names.





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It's a good sadness because as your mind wanders through memories, it gives way to a happiness at just having known the person. That's how I know, at least, that I've moved through and beyond the grieving process. This contrasts sharply with the deep grief I've felt during this past year as I watched my parents marriage of 35 years crumble and my childhood home sold. While I am working my way through the "stages" of grief, I've got a while to go before I say I'm done grieving—the key is to avoid getting stuck anywhere along the way and staying open to how God may want me to use my experience for his glory.

At least that's what I've realized after through this packet of articles. No matter where you are on your journey through grief, I hope you'll find this download as helpful as I have. While many of the stories here revolve around people who are grieving because of the death of a loved one—as you may be—I found that the principles talked about apply to grieving for any reason.

I hope God uses this to bless and comfort you.

Caryn Rivadeneira

Contributing Editor, KYRIA downloads,
Christianity Today International



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Leader's Guide

How to use “A Guide to Grief” for a group study



“A Guide to Grief” can be used for individual or group study. If you intend to lead a group study, some simple suggestions follow.

1. **Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.**
2. **Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.**
3. **Alternately, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.**
4. **Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.**
5. **When working through the “Reflect” questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for women to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.**
6. **End the session in prayer.**





A Grandmother's Grief

Ten years ago, Kathy Wilburn Sanders lost her grandsons in the Oklahoma City bombing. Today she talks candidly about the pain of her loss and her faith in Christ.

By Jane Johnson Struck

On June 11, 2001, Timothy McVeigh was executed for his role in the deaths of 168 adults and children during the Oklahoma City bombing of the Murrah Building on April 19, 1995.



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While his death brought closure to the tragedy for most Americans, for many, closure remains elusive. Among those is Kathy Wilburn Sanders, now 51, who lost grandsons Chase, 3, and Colton, 2, that day. Her daughter, Edye Smith, had dropped Chase and Colton off at the Murrah Building's on-site childcare center only a few blocks from where she and Kathy both worked. As shock waves rocked the neighboring buildings, Kathy and Edye ran to the federal building only to find a gaping hole where the daycare center once existed. They knew instinctively their babies were gone. That night, as Kathy and Edye watched the television coverage, a camera focused on a solitary blue sandal amidst the smoldering rubble—the one Chase had worn that morning.

Almost immediately, the media turned Chase and Colton's grieving mother and grandmother into visible symbols of a nation's grief. Then, disturbed by inconsistencies in the reports surrounding the bombing, Kathy and her husband, Glenn Wilburn, began aggressively investigating it on their own in an effort to make sense of the tragedy that forever changed their lives.

Today Kathy, who has since remarried after Glenn's death in 1997, writes about her experiences in investigating the facts behind the bombing in *After Oklahoma City* (Master Strategies Publishing). And on its tenth anniversary, Kathy shares how her faith in Christ survived this trial intact—and has made an impact on others.

What prompted you to write this book?

Eighteenth-century British statesman Edmund Burke once said that evil flourishes when good men do nothing. Glenn





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and I both felt we needed to do something—to find out as much about the bombing as we could. We felt we owed that to Chase and Colton. During all those years of traveling and interviewing different people—including members of the Aryan Nation—I kept journals. People encouraged me to turn them into a book.

What emotions did its writing dredge up for you?

My emotions have been like a roller coaster. The sweet memories of my precious grandsons, Chase and Colton, are always close to the surface. Even ten years later, those memories bring tears to my eyes. I've found most people don't understand those tears. But if you've lost a loved one, especially a child, you want to keep his or her memory alive.

Nothing compares to the death of a child. A piece of you dies with that child. When I watched those babies being lowered into the ground, my faith in Christ was shaken. Glenn and I heard parents of children who survived say on TV, "We asked God to keep our little boy safe, and he answered our prayers." Well, we prayed for our boys, too—and we lost them both.

So you struggled with belief in God's goodness?

Yes. The night we buried my grandchildren, I argued with God: "I prayed for Chase and Colton; I asked you to watch over them and keep them safe. Why did you let this happen?" Every Scripture I ever memorized flew through my mind, such as John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." God, this is your love for me? You loved the world so much you did this?





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Glenn was so angry with the Lord. He would tell you flat-out no loving God would allow this to happen. Two years after the bombing, he died of pancreatic cancer. I think he really died of a broken heart. Thankfully, in the 11 months it took Glenn to die, he made peace with God.

At the time, Edye had more faith than I. She'd say, "I know I'm going to see my children again in heaven." But I thought, Maybe I've been wrong all these years. Maybe those little boys are just going to rot in the ground. For the first time in my life, I thought about killing myself.

What stopped you?

I didn't want to add to Edye and Glenn's misery. But I prayed to die. I wanted to die.

Then one day John Walsh of television's America's Most Wanted spoke to a group of survivors. Walsh, whose son, Adam, had been murdered, pointed his finger in our faces and said, "You will grieve deeply, but you will survive." That gave me hope. I realized a time of crisis isn't the time to lose your faith; it's the time to use it.

We went through major stuff. But when I eventually quit asking "why?", I began experiencing peace. It's been a long journey toward healing. I think it's best described this way: If you suddenly lost your eyesight, you'd get up every morning and still mourn the fact you couldn't see the beautiful sunrise. You now have a life you didn't want or choose, but it can still be a good life, a blessed life. You learn to adapt to it. That's what I've done.





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How did you feel God's comfort in this ordeal?

For the first month after the bombing, a group of people from our church brought us dinner every night. For a *month!* But we didn't just feel God's love expressed to us by the church; we felt the love of a nation. We got so many cards and letters.

But some well-intentioned friends said things like, "Well, Chase and Colton are in a better place now. They're with Jesus." That didn't bring any comfort—I wanted them home with me! I've learned it's better to tell grieving people you're sorry and to love them. Sometimes there aren't any words to fix a situation.

I used to be the same way. I'd sugarcoat the gospel by glibly saying, "Just give it to the Lord." Or I'd tell God what I needed, as though I had the authority to give him an assignment! But I began praying, "Show me, Lord, what you want me to do. Show me how to work through this." That prayer spurred me into action—like corresponding with convicted criminal Timothy McVeigh and co-conspirator Terry Nichols.

You corresponded with your grand-babies' killers?

Yes, I wrote to Timothy McVeigh. I met his father and his sister. I wanted to learn everything I could about him because I wondered, *How did this young man get so twisted?* But he never responded to my letters.

After my husband died, I went to Terry Nichols's trial on my quest to learn everything I could about the bombing. But somewhere along the way, things started changing. At Nichols's trial I saw this woman off by herself; I found out





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she was Terry Nichols's mother, Joyce. I introduced myself and said, "I'm so sorry about what's happened to your family." We began to eat lunch together, and as our friendship developed, Terry slowly transformed from Terry the Bomber to Terry, Joyce's son. One day he looked at me in the courtroom; our eyes met, and I didn't know what to do. So I mouthed, "Hi, Terry."

I ended up visiting him in prison, hoping he would tell me what he's told no one else about the bombing. I wanted Terry to come to terms with what he did and tell me because it's the right thing to do.

It's amazing you reached out to the perpetrator's family when your pain was still so raw.

This was nothing I'd planned to do or that I'd even particularly prayed to do. It was just something that took place in my heart.

For example, Terry Nichols's son, Josh, was 12 at the time of the bombing. I got to know him and his mother, Terry's ex-wife, Lana Padilla, during Timothy McVeigh's trial, so I invited them to stay with me if they ever came to Oklahoma City.

A few months later, the doorbell rang, and there were Josh and Lana. They ended up staying with me for four days. Josh and I really hit it off, and on the third day, Josh asked me to take him to the memorial site. It was the weirdest thing—to visit Chase and Colton's memorial with the bomber's son.





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Before they left, they wanted to take Edye out to eat. Later, after she left, Josh shook his head. "I don't believe it," he said. "Edye said she liked me—and she even seemed to like my dad, too." I said, "Josh, Edye and I are Christians, and our Bible tells us that the Lord wants us to forgive others as he's forgiven us." I added, "I've written your dad and told him I don't know what his part in that bombing was, but whatever it was, I've forgiven him."

Josh was another victim of the bombing; he was a very troubled young man who was made fun of at his school and nicknamed "bomber."

I saw Josh last summer, when Nichols's Oklahoma trial was held. This time Josh didn't have that wild, crazy look in his eyes. Lana said he'd given his heart to the Lord and turned his life around. How awesome!

People who've suffered often have more compassion for others who suffer. Before the bombing, when I'd see something on TV like a plane crash, I'd say, "Oh, that's too bad." Then I'd change the channel. Now when I see devastation on TV—like what happened on September 11—it stays with me. I know it's not only about who's dead; it's also about all those left behind.

Do you ever feel as though 9/11 overshadowed the Oklahoma City bombing?

The devastation of 9/11 was like nothing I've ever seen. But that doesn't make our losses any less significant.





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I was invited to be on the *Today* show in Manhattan the day the planes started flying again. I flew in over the smoldering ruins of the World Trade Center and was taken to Ground Zero, where I had the opportunity to talk with firefighters and policemen.

What did you tell them?

I wanted the people of New York to know they *would* survive. I'd been in their shoes; at the time I didn't know if I could survive, but I did.

What do you hope your book will accomplish?

I hope it offers hope and comfort to others. I want people to see that without the Lord, I wouldn't have made it. God's grace is sufficient. People say, "Oh, I couldn't do what you've done." Well, you could. There's nothing special about me. But you don't have that kind of grace until you need it.

When I look back at it, I'm appalled at my audacity in demanding answers from an all-powerful God. Things happen that we don't understand, that we have no answers for. But it's OK to admit we don't have the answers.

Just because we ask Jesus into our life doesn't mean we're never going to have problems. But in my journey beyond despair, I've seen how the Lord has protected and directed me. And I can still approach God's throne of grace and love and adore him.

Jane Johnson Struck is the former editor of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN. This article first appeared in the May/June 2005 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.





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Reflect

- *In the midst of grief, what does it mean to hear someone say, as John Walsh did, that you will grieve deeply, but you will survive?*
- *In what ways might you open your heart to let the Holy Spirit use your grief for God's glory?*



When the Grief- Stricken Get Grief Struck

Two pastor-tested techniques to help
mourners complete their journey.

By Rodger Murchison

Timothy often took a lawn chair to the cemetery to sit by Sally's grave and talk to her. He'd tell her what he had been doing and how much he loved her. He often left the cemetery in tears. They'd been married 32 years. Two years after her death, Timothy still grieved her loss.





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This was understandable, but when I discovered that he broke off every new relationship out of guilt, and that he went to the cemetery to cleanse himself for allowing a female friend in his life, I realized something was wrong. Timothy wasn't progressing through the healing process of grief. He was "stuck."

Many people who see pastors for counseling after the loss of a loved one (usually through death or divorce) come because they struggle to move through their pain and into new life. Time may have begun the healing, but it hasn't finished the job. Not all their stories, however, are as unusual as Timothy's.

Sue and Bill lost their baby in the ninth month of gestation. On a rainy afternoon, they invited me into their family room to plan the funeral. As we discussed the service, they also expressed the anger they both felt.

"I'm confused and I don't understand why this happened," said Bill. "Who is to blame?"

"I blame God," Sue said. "I prayed for this pregnancy. I prayed for this baby. How could God do this?"

For months Bill and Sue came to my office. Often they would lash out at God, accusing him of killing their baby and robbing them of their future. At one level, their behavior was a normal display of the anger associated with grieving. But over time this pattern became an invariable mantra of woe. Their attitude toward God spilled anger into every area of their lives. Instead of progressing into further stages of grief, Sue and Bill were "stuck" in anger.





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While the process of grieving varies from individual to individual, it typically follows a pattern. When the progression toward healing is obstructed, people often need help. And pastors can help them get "unstuck."

Diagnosing the Dilemma

One familiar progression of grief is the five-stage process outlined by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross: denial, anger, bargaining, guilt or depression, and acceptance, in that order.

You can recognize a person who is "stuck" in one of these stages when his or her attitude, behaviors, relationships, or even theology become defined by one of the stages of grief over a prolonged period of time. Bill and Sue, for example, had allowed anger to dominate their emotions, and they consistently redefined God through that lens. For Timothy, his relational patterns suggested that he was stuck in guilt and depression.

I met Nancy several years ago at a grief workshop for a hospital staff. Each of the 12 participants shared their stories of grief. When Nancy's turn came, she rigidly sat on the edge of her chair. Her voice cracked as she told us of the death of her mother when Nancy was six years old. The day of the funeral, when she expressed her want for attention by being loud and obnoxious, an aunt took her aside and demanded that she shape up and "be good" if she wanted to see her mother again in heaven.

For 30 years Nancy defined good grief as shaping up, pretending it didn't hurt. After telling her story, she cried, and when we gave her permission to express her grief, she





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convulsed in a violent display of emotion that embarrassed her. She didn't know how to express grief. She never returned to a workshop session.

Even after 30 years, she could not healthily admit and express grief. She couldn't weep and "be good" at the same time. She was stuck in denial.

Our church's minister to single adults, Dr. Wayne Hunsucker, and one of our deacons, Dr. Allan Josephson, who is also chair of the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Department of the Medical College of Georgia, and I identified two techniques to enable the "grief-stuck" to continue the healing process.

Draw the Line

Initially, grieving individuals tend to continue relating as they were accustomed to before their loss. They haven't learned any other way to live except in relationship with the person they lost. In the case of a divorced woman, for example, she might continue living with the hope that if she could prove her love just one more time, he might not leave her after all. In the case of a widower, he might continue talking to his wife daily, for he hasn't learned where else to turn.

Even though continuing in the old relationship is no longer possible, a grieving person may have a difficult time accepting the new reality and might not know how to move through the pain to begin a new life. The first thing we can do to help is to enable them to recognize the conclusion of the old life and the beginning of the new.





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Wayne Hunsucker uses a technique he calls "drawing the line." He draws a bold, white line across a chalkboard in front of the grieving person. "That line," he says, "separates where you were from where you are now, between what was and what is."

This simple, visual image helps people to understand that they have been reacting to life according to old patterns that just don't work anymore. In grieving, many people react to their emotions as if those emotions are all that matter. The intense feelings stop them from seeing the life that could be lived. Drawing a concrete, practical line removes some of the focus on feelings and helps people visualize for the first time that life can exist after grief.

Many people respond with great energy to the idea of drawing an imaginary line. By keeping that line in their minds they begin to recognize their old, incapacitating patterns and adopt new, healthy patterns.

When Wayne met Jennifer, she was defeated. At our church's divorce recovery workshop, Jennifer anxiously told her story. When she and Bob divorced after ten years of marriage, she felt a great deal of guilt. Bob had become more critical and less attentive to Jennifer over the years, and Jennifer responded by becoming more docile and malleable to Bob's demands, trying to live the way Bob said she should. When he finally divorced her, she blamed herself for not living up to Bob's expectations.

Wayne drew the line on the chalkboard for her and encouraged her over weeks of further counseling to draw it in her mind.





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Then, one day, an excited, exuberant Jennifer called, "I got it! I got it!" She had been vacuuming when it hit her. She saw the bold, white line in her mind. She saw herself drawing the line. She was finally able to understand that she was Bob's wife no more. And since she was no longer married to Bob, Bob had no authority over her home. Jennifer said she suddenly threw down the vacuum cleaner wand, thrust her hands on her hips, and shouted with great confidence, "This is my house!" From room to room she went, saying over and over again in each new room, "This is my house!" Jennifer was able to demarcate for herself a line between where she had been and where she was. She had begun the work of being present in her life, today.

For our earlier example, Timothy, his fixation on his deceased wife was denying him had with his wife and the new life he was called to. Yes, his love, respect, and appreciation for his wife will always be an important part of his life, but located in an appropriate place, his memory. Timothy could be reminded of an important hospice quote, "If we don't let our loved ones die, they won't let us live."

Reframing

After a line has been drawn, life has forever been changed. But changed to what? How are new tomorrows shaped?

"Reframing" is a counseling technique that invites the person to focus on his or her loss from a different perspective. The loss doesn't change, but the way one looks at the loss, understands the loss, and responds to the loss does. Just as a painting takes on new dimensions when given a new frame, people who reframe their grief can discover new strength.





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The author of Hebrews gives an example: "If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desired a better country." Instead of bemoaning the loss of comforts in the previous land (as the Moses-led Israelites did many years later), Abraham's people trusted that God was leading and blessing them. For Abraham, the "promised land" was more than a new place in which to dwell, it was also a reality of mind and heart, reframing life in the belief that God had called him to a significant new life.

Barbara and Mary had both been in grief counseling over their divorces. Each of these women was in her mid-forties and had been married for 20 years. The grief of divorce was similar for each of these women, but their willingness to reframe their lives was dramatically different.

Barbara was willing to allow her life and faith to be reshaped. She said, "This pain of divorce, my grief, has forced me to question my beliefs. My faith is being stretched and enlarged. The God I now believe in at age 45 is different from the God I believed in at age 25. I wonder, though, which of us has changed."

In contrast, Mary remarked, "It has been a long time since my divorce, and things ought to be getting better. I don't want my friends around, not even my church friends. Where is God in all my pain?"

While Barbara was willing to risk change with the prospect of growth, Mary was stuck. She refused to reframe her life.





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Getting Fitted for Frames

Traumatic moments change people's lives. They change people's views of God, of themselves, and of life. Rather than battling to resist those changes, reframing frees a person to grow through them. But how do you help a person find the right frame?

For Bill and Sue, who lost their baby, their grief was stuck between their understanding that God shouldn't allow such pain and the fact of their obvious suffering. Something needed to change to release that anger and enable them to resume a healthy grieving process.

After we talked about reframing, I guided them to look at the Psalms of lament. I helped them to look at their child's death, not inside the frame of a God who couldn't understand suffering, but in the frame of a God present in it. Today, Bill and Sue are the parents of four healthy children. I still remember that rainy afternoon in their family room and thank God that he is present in our beginning and in all of our new beginnings.

Sheila had been married for 32 years when she discovered that her husband was having an affair. She was devastated. Though there were efforts at reconciliation, the affair only gave the couple reason to end a marriage that had long been dying.

When Wayne met Sheila she was an angry woman. She attended the first session of a divorce recovery workshop and sat through the entire two hours, not saying a word or physically responding to anything that was discussed.





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As it happened, Sheila and Wayne walked out to the parking lot together. He asked her if she was all right, that it seemed to him she was very angry. She immediately told him that she would not be coming back to the workshop the next week because she did not need what we were offering.

"But you are so angry," Wayne said. "Don't you think it would be wise to pay attention to that anger, try to understand what to do with your anger?"

Sheila stopped, turned, then took a step toward Wayne. She leaned into his face and said, "I am divorced. What am I supposed to be other than angry?"

Wayne said that what she was supposed to do was the work of recovering from that loss, that she was supposed to try visualizing Sheila without a husband, Sheila as a person standing on her own two feet, focused on her own life, regardless of what had happened in her marriage. Wayne told her that staying focused on her anger at her former husband left her no energy for focusing on how she was going to develop her life after the divorce.

Without saying a word, her countenance changed again. Her eyes softened. She did not blink, but stood there looking at Wayne, studying him.

Wayne said, "This is your life, Sheila, not his. What are you going to do with Sheila's life?"

Sheila needed that simple reframing. She had to see her life without her husband's presence. She could feel bad all she wanted—feel bad that her marriage had ended, that he had





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the affair—but those bad feelings would not help her with reframing her life into something useful for the present day. Reframing eventually helped Sheila learn new and healthy ways to deal with her anger.

C. S. Lewis writes poignantly in his book *A Grief Observed* after the death of his wife: "I thought I could make a map of sorrow. Sorrow, however, turns out to be not a state but a process. It needs not a map but a history. Grief is like a long valley, a winding valley where any bend may reveal a totally new landscape."

When travelers can take another step, we can gently nudge them in the right direction.

Rodger Murchison is associate pastor of First Baptist Church in Augusta, Georgia. This article first appeared in the Spring 2001 issue of LEADERSHIP.

Reflect

- *Describe a time when you found yourself or a loved one stuck in grief. What helped get the grief unstuck?*
- *At which stage of the grieving process do you think you are most prone to get stuck? Why? What might help you through that stage?*



Praying for Hope

What a dying infant taught her
mother about God's ways.

By Nancy Guthrie



This is my fault. I didn't pray enough for a healthy baby. That was my thought in the hours after we received our daughter Hope's diagnosis. She was in her second day of life and numerous "small" problems pointed to a larger problem. The geneticist told us Hope had a rare metabolic disorder called Zellweger syndrome. He explained that because she was missing a subcellular particle called peroxisomes, her systems would slowly become toxic and shut down. "Most children with this disorder live less than six months," he said.



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My first reaction was to conclude this "curse" was the result of my prayerlessness while Hope was in the womb. I had some prayer guides for praying for my forming child, but I didn't use them much. When we learned of her condition, I began to think I was paying the price.

That night, after my husband David and I were left alone with the pain of the news, we lay in bed and, out of our fear and despair, cried out to God. I'm not sure of all that we said. Eyes open and looking up, I know we said, "We need you. We need courage. We need wisdom. We trust you." I think we expressed trust more out of a desire to trust than a confession of the reality in our souls.

In the days and weeks that followed, we found ourselves praying together often in bed in the dark. We were profoundly aware of our utter dependence upon God. We were powerless to change our situation and desperate to see God work. We also found, as time wore on, that we prayed less often. We felt guilty that so many people were praying for us so diligently when we were so prayerless. Yet it was difficult to know how to pray. How do you pray for a child who is going to die?

Submitting to Disappointment

The secretary from church called and told me that we were on the church's prayer list and that they were asking people to pray for God to work a miracle and heal Hope. I told her, "That is not how we feel led to pray." We did not ask God for that. Maybe we were afraid to pray that, or to expect it, when the diagnosis seemed so sure and grim.





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In those early weeks, God seemed to speak to me clearly. I never heard an audible voice. He spoke to me the way he always does—through Scripture. A few weeks after Hope was born, my Bible-study group looked at the story of Hagar, who had run away from Abram and Sarah because of Sarah's harsh treatment. Hagar wanted to escape her difficult situation, but God spoke to her in the desert and told her, "Return and submit."

The lecturer asked us the question, "What is God calling you to submit to?" I knew God was calling me to submit to the journey we faced with Hope—not to fight it or cry out asking him to change it, but to submit to his plan and his purposes.

Shortly after that, we were looking at the story of the angel who came to Mary and told her she would give birth to a son. How did this "favored" one respond? "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." She submitted, though what God brought to her life, from her perspective, must have looked like a disaster.

Again I sensed God calling me to submit to the plan he laid out before us—to walk through it, trusting him in the midst of sorrow and difficulty and disappointment. On Christmas day we took Hope back to the hospital and visited with her doctor and nurses. Our nurse, Ginny, told us about another recent birth at the hospital. The mother was a nurse there, and the other nurses had been amazed by the joy and peace with which she accepted her severely disabled baby. Ginny told us how the couple had planned on someday adopting a special-needs child.





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What struck me most was her description of how these parents prayed. Early in the pregnancy, instead of praying, "God, give us a healthy baby," they began to pray, "God, give us the child you want us to have." Their submission to God amazed me, and their prayer pierced my heart. Surely that is the kind of prayer our Father desires to hear—not "Give me what I want," but "Give me what you want me to have."

It reminded me of the Psalm that says, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart" (37:4). I've always found it somewhat humorous the way some people interpret this verse: just get close to God, and he will give you what you want. But I think this verse says when you truly find your delight in the Lord, God molds and shapes the desires of your heart so that you truly want what he wants for you.

Written Into Every Cell

Hope's life captivated so many. Children, especially, prayed for Hope. But, like us, they didn't really know how to pray for her.

One day, after Hope's diagnosis had been public for a week or so, our 9-year-old son Matt hopped in the car after school and immediately asked me, "Mom, is there any chance that Hope might live?"

I knew why he was asking. The class prays at the end of each day, and I'm sure that many of the children were asking God to heal Hope. It left Matt confused. Should he be expecting God to do that or not? I told him God can do





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Praying for Hope

anything, but he might choose to heal her by making her perfect in heaven. And whether she was here with us or in heaven with him, she was in God's hands.

I was taken aback a few times by those who insisted on praying for Hope's healing. I appreciated their sincere compassion and belief that God can heal, but I saw it as a misunderstanding of her true condition. Her syndrome was so rare, I felt they didn't understand how pervasive it was. I wanted to say, "Would you pray for God to 'heal' a child with Down syndrome?" I expect that most people, no matter how much they believe in God's healing power, would not pray that. That's because they understand that Down syndrome is written into every cell of a person's body. It is the same with Zellweger. This was not a disease that invaded Hope's otherwise healthy body. Every cell of Hope's body was marked by Zellweger, which began its destructive work even while she was being "knit together in her mother's womb" (Ps. 139:13).

I began to see some people's insistence on her healing as, perhaps, a lack of faith. Or maybe it was shortsightedness. If she had been healed of Zellweger syndrome, she would still die someday. Instead, God chose to give her a new body, and he spared her from further pain—not just the physical pain of her condition but also the pain that is a part of every person's existence in our fallen world.

From God's perspective, it was not a tragedy for her to die. It feels like a tragedy to me, but I find God's perspective reflected in Isaiah 57:1-2:





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"The righteous pass away; the godly often die before their time. And no one seems to care or wonder why. No one seems to understand that God is protecting them from the evil to come. For the godly who die will rest in peace."

Last week there was a prayer service for Taylor, a boy in our church who is fighting cancer. How I would love to see God work a miracle and rid his body of the cancer that is slowly robbing him of life! I love his parents, and because I know firsthand how awful and painful it is to watch your child die, I don't want them to have to endure it. But I also know God says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Is. 55:8).

Surely we can ask God for what we want. We can freely tell him that what we want is for those we love to be healed. We know he's our Heavenly Father and desires to give us good gifts. The problem is, I don't always know what to ask for. I want to give my son good things. But that is not always what he asks for. He wants Cocoa Pebbles and I give him shredded wheat. I know better than he what he needs. I have his best interest in mind, so I don't always give him what he asks for. Sometimes God's "good gifts" don't appear that way to me. He gives me broccoli when I want ice cream. Sometimes he allows suffering when we want healing.

Not Trying to Change God

A friend came and asked me how I am praying for Taylor in light of what I've been through with Hope. I told her that I found myself praying, "God, give us your perspective on sickness, on loss, on death, on healing."





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I don't want to change God's mind. His thoughts are perfect; I want to think his thoughts. I don't want to change God's timing. His timing is perfect; I want the grace to accept his timing. I don't want to change God's plan. His plan is perfect; I want to embrace his plan and see him glorified through it.

Hope spent 199 days with us and then God gave her Ultimate Healing. I can't say my experience with Hope has taught me everything I need to know about prayer. I still feel like a failure when it comes to prayer because I am often so prayerless. But I think I've come to a fuller understanding of what it means to pray, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Without even saying a word, Hope taught me to pray that way.

Nancy Guthrie works in Christian publishing and lives in Nashville, Tennessee, with her husband, David, and their son, Matt. This article first appeared in the July 2000 issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY.

Reflect

- *In what ways have you struggled with thinking the source of your grief was caused by your own lack of prayer?*
- *Nancy was able to separate what felt like tragedy to her from what God saw it as. How does that viewpoint impact your own emotions?*



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Reflections on Suffering and Grief



Quotations to stir the heart
and mind.

Compiled by Richard A. Kauffman

Our grief work is not really complete until we have found some meaning in our grief. It is true that our emotions need healing, but so does our belief system or theology.

—H. Norman Wright, Recovering from the Losses of Life

Once, when I asked an elderly friend if she regretted not having had children, she responded in her characteristically forthright manner. "It was the great tragedy of my life." Each life must hold one, I think: one pain that overarches and obscures all others, one haunting irreversible fault for which one can never atone.

—Nancy Mairs, Ordinary Time





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To regard grief as somehow unworthy of a Christian who believes in the resurrection is to forget the example of Christ who was so often "moved with compassion," who wept at his loss of Lazarus and prayed the longer in his agony. We cannot shortcircuit human processes; we have to give the experience time to come home to us before it can become a motive for hope and a promise of fuller life.... Grief is only unchristian if it is wholly self-centered or if we never emerge from it.

—*Maria Boulding, Prayer: Our Journey Home*

One might argue that our task as priests is not primarily to condemn sinners but to facilitate the work of the Spirit so that all suffering, merited and unmerited, may be redeemed.

—*Father Jon Darrow in Susan Howatch's novel, Absolute Truths*

It is not enough to cure the plague; we must learn to weep for it. Yes, we must learn to weep! Perhaps that is the supreme wisdom.

—*Miguel de Unamuno, The Tragic Sense of Life*

It is impossible for one to live without tears who considers things exactly as they are.

—*Gregory of Nyssa, De Beatitudine*

The principle is simple: when words are most empty, tears are most apt.

—*Max Lucado, No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*





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God does not make our lives all shipshape, clear and comfortable. Never try to get things too clear. Religion can't be clear. In this mixed-up life there is always an element of unclarity. I believe God wills it so. There is always an element of tragedy. How can it be otherwise if Christianity is our ideal?

—Baron Friedrich von Hügel, Letters to a Niece

Suffering is surely good or bad only according to the results it produces. Had it been a bad thing in itself, the Son of God would not have taken it for his chosen instrument for the cure of the worldI do not mean by this that we should lessen our attempts to alleviate pain and remove the causes of distress, for such is the simple duty of charity; I only mean that what we cannot remove is not wasted.

—R. Somerset Ward, To Jerusalem: Studies in Mystical Religion

And who's to say which is more incredible—a man who raises the dead ... or a God who weeps?

—Ken Gire on Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, Incredible Moments with the Savior

Richard Kaufman is a former editor for Christianity Today. This article first appeared in the May 2002 issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY.





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Reflect

- *Which of these quotes resonates most with you? Why?*
- *Maria Boulding says, "Grief is only unchristian if it is wholly self-centered or if we never emerge from it." Have you ever considered your grief to be unchristian? Why or why not?*



When a Friend Hurts

How you can help her get through her grief.

By Sheila Wray Gregoire



“If there's anything I can do ... ” I heard these words repeatedly three years ago on that rainy day when we buried our 29-day-old baby boy, Christopher. Most people who said them acted so awkwardly, I felt as though I had to cheer them up.



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But others were more at ease. One friend, Anne, quietly shared how she was encouraged by our reliance on God during Christopher's battle with a serious congenital heart defect. Another friend, Pam, e-mailed me, "I planted some violas for Christopher today, just outside my kitchen window." While neither gesture was extravagant or profound, both shone some light on a very dark day.

Why do some people seem to know what to say to someone in pain, while the rest of us flounder? The reality is, being close to someone who's heartbroken is difficult. We don't want to compound her pain by saying the wrong thing, yet we earnestly desire to help lessen her suffering, just like Jesus, who came to "comfort all who mourn" (Isaiah 61:2). When our heart breaks for someone else, we reflect God's sadness. How can we also reflect God's comfort? First we need to understand what comforting does—and doesn't—involve.

Comforting Isn't Explaining God's Will

When Judy's eight-year-old son, Kyle, was hospitalized with a life-threatening infection, a close relative wrote her to say God was punishing her for not attending church. Needless to say, the letter did little to encourage Judy.

The need to explain people's suffering is natural. Even Jesus was asked, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). Jesus replied that things aren't always so straightforward. In this case, the man's blindness was so "the work of God might be displayed in his life" (John 9:3). My friend Melissa





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confessed that when she first heard of Christopher's illness, she believed it was a result of my husband's previous involvement with role-playing games. But when she gave birth to a stillborn son a year later, she apologized for judging us.

Comforting Isn't Fixing the Problem

When Judith lost her daughter two weeks before her due date, many people assured her, "At least you know you can get pregnant." Marilyn, who lost her son when she was 21 weeks pregnant, was likewise told, "At least you have children at home." And my husband, who's a pediatrician, often heard, "Think of what a better physician you'll be after having such a sick child." Trying to cheer people by telling them the character-building benefits of their suffering does little to comfort them. Those "benefits" can never compensate for the loss someone feels when a loved one dies.

Comforting Is Making Yourself Available

To comfort a friend is to focus on her feelings, not yours. Once we recognize we're helpless to explain the problem or to fix it, we can concentrate instead on meeting our friend's needs as best we can, perhaps in the following ways:

Be there. We printed 70 programs for Christopher's funeral, but we ran out long before the service began. The number of people who attended overwhelmed us. God used their presence to comfort us during that difficult time. When 9-year-old Randy died after an unsuccessful liver transplant, his mother, JoAnn, was moved when 16 intensive care nurses braved rainy, icy weather for two hours just to be at the funeral.





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We often underestimate the impact our mere presence can have. But a hug, a pat on the arm, or attendance at a memorial service is often as valued as anything else.

Listen. Listening involves encouraging your friend to express her feelings. Pam Vredevelt, author of *Empty Arms*, says many women find it easier to suffer in silence because others won't initiate discussions about their loss. So if your grieving friend says, "I don't know how I'm going to get out of bed tomorrow," help her open up by asking her a question such as, "What's the scariest part of facing your day?" Then really listen to her answer. Try responding in a way that allows your friend to express what she really feels.

Tell how the person/situation affected you. When Christopher died, I was left with a huge hole in my life—while others' lives stayed the same. Telling a grieving person how you were affected by her loved one, even if it was only minimally, lets her know you feel her loss, too. Writing that memory on a card or in a letter is helpful. Over the last three years I've repeatedly turned to my cards for comfort.

Tell her how you've been praying. In June 1998, Brenda's husband, Rob, died suddenly in a car accident. They had three young daughters. The card Brenda found most uplifting explained in detail how her friend had been praying for Brenda and her daughters. When your prayers are wails, and despair is overwhelming, knowing others are lifting up the things you need can ease some of your burden.





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Tell her your story. When Christopher died, I was touched by all the women who came to me with their own stories of "empty arms" and babies lost. Being able to share with someone, "I remember when I felt as though I couldn't breathe, let alone eat," helps a friend know she's not crazy, that others have also felt that kind of pain. Be cautious, however, about saying "I understand how you feel"; some people might find this presumptuous. Though every loss is different, you can share your stories to let people know they're not alone. This is the heart of the apostle Paul's urging to "comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God" (2 Corinthians 1:4).

Offer tangible help. In the days following Christopher's death, we were often asked, "Is there anything you need?" Few people, however, feel comfortable admitting they need help—even if they're grieving. Yet when my friend Raj said, "This Tuesday I'm bringing you and Keith dinner," we had no choice—and we were grateful. The more specific your offer, the more likely someone will accept it.

Follow through. One of the hardest things about losing someone is that eventually everything on the outside returns to normal, while on the inside you still feel torn apart.

Grief doesn't end when the funeral's over. Though there are days when we almost forget our pain, there are others when the reality of our loss hits us all over again, just as it did those weeks, months, or even years ago. With time those days grow fewer and further between, but they still occur.





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To make a special difference in someone's life, follow through with your friends who mourn. Marilyn remembers with gratitude a woman from her church who sent her a card every few months, long after the others stopped coming.

Send a card on the anniversary of someone's death, or on what would have been a birthday or an anniversary. Or you could offer to baby-sit or prepare a special meal.

Don't worry about this reminding your friends of their loss. The grief will always be there. As one woman who lost a child remarked in Carol Staudacher's *Beyond Grief*: "It's as though people believe if you're not talking about your loss, you're not thinking about it. That's as ridiculous as assuming if you're not thinking about breathing, you're not doing it." JoAnn says that eight years after her son Randy's death, she still receives cards from several friends on the anniversary each March. It touches her to know others think of him, too.

Comforting someone who grieves can be scary, because it reminds us of our fears. We don't have to fix our friend's problem or say anything profound; comforting doesn't have to be onerous. Make yourself available to meet your friend where she is. In doing so, you can surround her with love at a time when she feels most alone.

Sheila Wray Gregoire, a freelance writer and home business owner, lives with her family in Ontario, Canada. This article first appeared in the November/December 2000 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.





Reflect

- *In what ways have even well-meaning people heightened your grief with their insensitivity?*
- *What are some ways you could help friends and family understand what you need most from them during your time of grief?*



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Saying Goodbye

Packing up Grandpa's earthly belongings taught me what's really valuable.

By Brenda Sprayue



When my husband, Brian, and I were first married, we lived around the corner from his grandparents. These were no ordinary grandparents; Grandpa and Grandma Jones had been the ones Brian ran to as a boy every time his mother, who suffered chronic ailments caused by anorexia, went back into the hospital, or his stepfather, who never really accepted him, became hostile and played cruel psychological games with him.





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One day, when ten-year-old Brian once again showed up at Grandma and Grandpa's doorstep hungry and in tears, they insisted he move in with them. There was no argument from his parents. So from that day on, Brian's grandparents, who were in their seventies, were his parents.

Arthritis and back spasms didn't stop them from sitting on the hard bleachers for every one of Brian's basketball and baseball games. Grandpa lovingly taught Brian to fish and garden, and even introduced him to Christ. And although money was tight, his grandparents sent Brian to college, which is where we met. When Brian brought me home to meet them, they immediately accepted me as part of the family. I grew closer to them than to my own grandparents.

The first few years of our marriage, Grandma lived for the weekly family feasts she hosted. But as time went by, Grandma's dinners became less extravagant, then less frequent. It wasn't long before health concerns, such as Grandpa's emphysema, kept them from driving and even attending their beloved church. Brian and I ran errands for them, did their yard work, and brought them meals.

Although Brian and I now had two young children to raise, nothing gave us more joy than helping Grandma and Grandpa. But after Brian and I had been married for several years, a new job opportunity two hours away surfaced for Brian. We were hesitant to leave them, but Grandma was insistent. "You have your own family now," she told us, "and you need to do what's best for them. We would never want to hold you back."





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"Spread your wings, kid!" Grandpa encouraged his grandson.

After we moved, other family members stepped in to lend them a hand. At first Grandma called me nearly every day. Many weekends we packed our bags and went home to visit.

Through the years, after each visit, we left their house with more than we came with, such as a box of photos, books, some table linens, or cookware. When Grandma gave us the big iron kettle in which she made her beloved Creamy Broccoli Soup, Brian had a fit. It hurt him too much to accept that his grandparents wouldn't always be there for him.

Eventually Grandpa's breathing took a turn for the worse. He went into the hospital, and we planned a visit. Something came up to delay our trip. Phone calls assured us Grandpa was doing well. When he was transferred to a nursing home two weeks later, we were told it was just "an insurance thing," that he'd be home soon.

One weekend soon after, I packed our bags, determined nothing would stop us from making the two-hour trip back home. When Brian, our two children, and I arrived, we were shocked to learn Grandpa had died only hours before. Brian and I suddenly felt very young and useless. Not quite 30 years old, we knew we couldn't begin to understand Grandma's loss after 60 years of marriage.

Following the funeral and a quiet dinner, Grandma and I said good-bye to friends and family as Brian brought the





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car around. It was then she hooked one arm through mine and feebly said, "I know Brian has to go back to work, but I'd like you and the kids to stay with me. A week would be nice."

I nodded, but I was worried. How could I possibly be so close to her grief when this was my first taste of it? Could I hold myself together for Grandma's sake?

I was willing to try—and my chance to help came sooner than expected. The next day, a strange mixture of pain and industriousness came over Grandma. "Something needs to be done about that room," she said shakily. "Would you clean it out for me? I just can't go in there."

I knew exactly which room she meant: Grandpa's bedroom, with its now-silent oxygen therapy machine and his empty railed bed. It didn't surprise me that Grandma couldn't face this one last intimate task.

Grandma handed me a roll of garbage bags. "We'll leave them in the garage for Goodwill," she bravely instructed. "Everything goes."

I stood alone in Grandpa's room, the door shut so Grandma wouldn't have to watch me stuff his leftovers into big black bags. Just standing in his space, so soon after standing at his casket, hurt as nothing had before.

I opened Grandpa's closet door. Three thin cardigans hung on Grandma's yarnwrapped hangers ... 12 perfectly pressed short-sleeved dress shirts ... the suit he wore when I married his grandson. I lingered over his immaculately organized underwear and sock drawer.





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I alternately grieved and marveled over this man who loved my husband so well. Though he'd suffered, he'd never complained. He rarely took to his bed during the day. The few times he did, he liked to have the door open to the noises of life ... the kids squealing over the toys, the Indiana University game on television. I'd glimpse his thin form barely lifting the blankets and feel an incredible rush of love.

I neatly stacked his clothes, taking much longer than I had to. When I discovered Grandpa's blue slippers under the edge of his bed, it knocked the wind out of me. It felt disrespectful to place them in a garbage bag, and even more so when I had to carry the bags past Grandma to the garage.

When the last item was gone, I sat on the bed, my heart bruised. *If I feel this way, I can't imagine how Grandma feels*, I thought. I thanked God for the privilege of having something, anything, to do to help her. But now that the job was complete, I couldn't seem to leave the room.

Then I knew why. It was too easy to picture Grandpa pattering around that room or suffering in that bed. With a quick prayer that my decision wouldn't hurt Grandma, I removed the oxygen therapy machine and bedrail, moved the nightstand and lamp, then turned the bed 90 degrees. With the bed against the adjoining wall, the empty bureaus had to be moved, too. After a little dusting and vacuuming, I told Grandma I was done.





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I held my breath as I awaited her reaction. "Oh!" she exclaimed. "Well, I can't even picture him there. I never would've thought of that. What a good idea!" We stood there for a long time, arm-in-arm, just looking, hearts filled with all kinds of feelings, among them a hint of hope. Although life is full of endings, it's also full of beginnings.

When Jesus faced his final days on earth, he concerned himself with preparing his friends for the painful separation. He wanted them to adjust to their new lives without his physical presence. For their sake, and for ours now, he spoke these comforting words: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you" (John 14:1-2).

Whenever I get wrapped up in how sad and short this life is, I challenge myself to imagine an eternity better than anything I've ever imagined. I picture my loved ones who are already there as being happier than we ever know how to be here on earth. I even believe that in some way, my God has joyfully called to Grandpa, "Spread your wings, kid!"

As Grandma and I left Grandpa's empty room that day, we smiled at the sounds we heard. My kids were taking turns goofily rolling off a beanbag chair in the living room. It took Grandma and me a moment to realize we were giggling along with them. Even on a day like that.





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"Maybe tomorrow," Grandma said to me, "you could rearrange the living room?"

"It would be an honor, Grandma," I said. And it was.

Brenda Sprayue lives with her family in Michigan. This article first appeared in the September/October 2003 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.

Reflect

- *What actions or tasks have you done that have helped you grieve?*
- *What actions or tasks might you do to help you in your journey through grief?*



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The New Normal



Life may not look the same, but you can still find reasons to celebrate.

By Michelle Van Loon

I never thought I'd miss my mom's traditional green-bean mushroom-soup casserole. But that first Thanksgiving after my folks moved to a retirement community in Florida, I felt downright nostalgic about her annual covered-dish offering—and all the good-natured teasing about her limited culinary skills that accompanied it every Thanksgiving. Celebrating with my in-laws just wasn't the same.





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My friend Carol recently told me, "After my mom died, our first holiday together with extended family was so hard. We'd always gathered at her house on Christmas Eve. But with my mom gone, our family went to my brother's house instead. Everyone tried to make the best of it, but the day felt forced and uncomfortable."

What Carol and I were both grappling with was the reality of a "new normal" for our families—a time of transition in which old traditions no longer fit.

Traditions are powerful cement for families because the rituals, packed with memories and meaning, help communicate a family's story from generation to generation: "The birthday child in our family always has his cake on the red plate"; "Grandma always makes her special pecan pie for Thanksgiving"; "The cousins always play softball at the Fourth of July picnic." Traditions tell each family member they're connected, reminding them of their shared history.

Most traditions stretch like a rubber band around the blessings of joyous transitions like a marriage or birth of a baby. But loss stretches cherished family traditions into an unexpected, unfamiliar shape.

"If we want to move successfully from one season of life to the next," writes counselor Pam Vredevelt in *Letting Go of Disappointments and Painful Losses*, "we will have to release our grip on things past. And when we do, we must expect at first to experience intense and complex emotions. As endings, empty spaces, rifts, and little deaths come our way, so do feelings of grief."





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Author Henri Nouwen writes, "Another step in turning our mourning into dancing has to do with not clutching what we have, not trying to reserve a safe place we can rest in, not trying to choreograph our own or others' lives, but to surrender to the God whom we love and want to follow."

Surrender is rarely easy or comfortable, but there are three simple things you can do to begin to accept and celebrate your first holidays in your new normal.

Acknowledge the Change

Our home was filled with a quiet sadness in the days leading up to the first Christmas after our prodigal daughter, Rachel, left home. While my husband, two teen sons, and I talked a lot about what we each were experiencing, it was the unpacking of the Christmas ornaments that reminded us the most of how things had changed.

Each year we either purchased or made a special ornament for each child. When we took the old ornaments out of storage to decorate the tree, our youngest son asked, "What are we going to do with Rachel's ornaments?" Tears filled my eyes. We discussed how the holiday might be for Rachel and prayed together for her restoration to the Lord and to us. Those kinds of conversations helped us prepare for a Christmas unlike any we'd experienced before as a family.

King Solomon's sober words reminded us to be truthful about the change that had come: "There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot ... a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time





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to mourn and a time to dance" (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2,4). We couldn't fake our holiday into feeling like those of the past. We were in a new season.

Identify Caring Support

"I thought Christmas was hard, but today was even worse," my friend Barb said when she called me at 9 p.m. on Mother's Day. "The whole day had a sour feeling to it, and we spent a lot of time bickering. All I wanted was to spend time with my kids and have fun like we used to."

Barb's desire was simple, but her request for an enjoyable day was a tall order. After her marriage crumbled earlier that year, Barb's adult children were grieving the loss of the family they'd known throughout childhood. Painful blow-ups at the last two family gatherings had left Barb wondering if they'd ever be able to gather—let alone celebrate together—again.

Barb's tearful phone call to me was more than just an informational update. Our friendship was a safe place where she knew she'd have a prayerful listening ear. There's no more powerful ministry during these memory-laden periods in a hurting person's life than the gift of presence. That support is nothing less than an intravenous infusion of grace; it's a lifeline when sorrow threatens to isolate a person.

Henri Nouwen writes, "We will suffer, and suffer with one another, but in doing so we will uncover nothing less than the presence of a God whose consolations keep us going . . . Pain suffered alone feels very different from pain suffered





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alongside another. Even when the pain stays, we know how great the difference is if another draws close, if another shares with us in it."

Support can be as informal as a phone call to a friend, or as structured as an annual event. After Sandy's teen son died in a freak auto accident, she began attending a support group for grieving parents. Each year, the group hosts a special memorial service a few days before Christmas in order to honor the memories of their children. This candlelight service gives the group's members an opportunity to grieve during the holidays. "It was the one place that first Christmas where I found some comfort," Sandy said. "While the rest of the world was focused on celebrating, I wished I could sleep through the entire month of December. That memorial service made me feel less alone."

Allow the Past to Seed the Future

Even when it seems as though a present holiday is painfully different, there's the seed of something beautiful from that past that can provide balm for the present and even begin to shape a new tradition for the future.

One grieving mother began a new tradition the year after her adult daughter unexpectedly died. Shortly before Christmas, she gave each family member money in a carousel tin (her daughter loved carousels) and the charge to spend the money creatively to help someone in need. They shared their adventures when they gathered for Christmas dinner. This new ritual provides the family with a way to remember their loved one that creates life-giving new memories.





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Transition is a necessary part of the process of living. It's an invitation to know at a deeper level the One who waits for us with a celebration and a promise to wipe away every tear. You can navigate tradition during seasons of change with a bit of advance emotional preparation and some caring support. The pain of the present is an important part of your family's continuing story—just as surely as green-bean mushroom-soup casserole and the wait for our daughter to come home to share it is a part of mine.

Michelle Van Loon lives with her family in Illinois. This article first appeared in the November/December 2005 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN.

Reflect

- *In what ways has grief impacted your family's holidays?*
- *What ways have you and your family found most helpful in dealing with grief during holidays?*





Additional Resources

A Grief Observed by C. S. Lewis (Zondervan/HarperCollins, 2001; 106 pages). C.S. Lewis's honest reflection on the fundamental issues of life, death, and faith in the midst of loss.

Turning My Mourning into Dancing by Henri Nouwen (Thomas Nelson, 2001; 128 pages). This book focuses not on how you can survive hard times but on how you can live fully in the midst of them and beyond.

Good Grief by Granger Westberg (Augsburg/Fortress, 1986). Granger E. Westberg uses gentle wisdom and acute insight into human nature to guide readers through the ten stages of grief: shock, emotion, depression, physical distress, panic, guilt, anger, resistance, hope, and finally, acceptance.





A Guide to Grief

Additional Resources

On Grief and Grieving by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler (Scribner, 2005). *On Grief and Grieving* includes sections on sadness, hauntings, dreams, coping, children, healing, isolation, and even the subject of sex during grief.

Experiencing Grief by H. Norman Wright (Broadman & Holman, 2004; 96 pages). Written to encourage anybody who's recently endured a loss, this brief, powerful book leads readers through five essential stages: shock, rage, despair, release, and finally peace.

Grieving: A Beginner's Guide by Jerusha Hull McCormack (Paraclete Press, 2006; 148 pages). Jerusha McCormack provides instead a series of signposts by which we may find our own path to a new life.

When Your Soul Aches by Lois Mowday Rabey (Random House, 2000; 160 pages). This book helps meet a widow's need for practical advice, sympathy, affirmation, and insights from other women who've shared this experience.

How Do I Help a Hurting Friend? by Rod J. K. Wilson (Baker, 2006; 176 pages). This book provides you with the tools you need to minister more effectively to those around you who are hurting.



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