

Death and Dying **Where Life Surrounds Death**

Tips For Those Grieving During the Holiday Season by Scott Miller

Another holiday season has arrived and this can be a very difficult time for those who have lost someone close to them. While the holidays are a time of joy for many, for those who are grieving it is usually the hardest time of the year. Grieving itself is hard enough but the pain of going through the holiday season without your loved one is perhaps the greatest pain of all.

The holidays are a time for family and friends, a time of long held traditions, and this poses a serious challenge to those who are going through the grieving process. With this in mind, we bring you the following suggestions to help you and yours get through this most difficult of times...

1. Prepare Yourself for the Challenge Ahead

As hard as we try, no one has been able to come up with a way to stop time. The holidays are coming whether we like it or not. And with it will come the pain of grieving for those we have lost. A phrase comes to mind... you can run, but you can't hide.

Someone you loved very dearly may be gone, but the rest of those who love you are not and they most certainly are going to want to spend some time with you during the holidays. Hiding from the inevitable will only make things more difficult. Don't use a person's death as an excuse for pushing away those who still love you. Many of them have lost someone they loved as well, and they may need your support and caring as much as you need theirs. Family and friends are often the best support a person can get during the grieving process. Accept the love they wish to give to you during this difficult time.

Plan ahead. Don't let the holidays just pass you by. Schedule some time to spend with the ones you love. Plan some activities for the time you will spend with them. Maybe a shopping trip with friends or drive around your town to see all the different lights and decorations would be good ideas. Never set plans in stone but have an assortment of things which you and your loved ones can do instead of just sitting around the house reminiscing about times gone by. Be flexible but have some ideas of things you would like to do.

2. Don't Hide From the Pain

The pain of grieving is very real and very justified. Holding it in or trying to deny it is not only foolish but it isn't healthy. Accept your pain and see it for what it truly is; love. You loved the person whom has passed on and your pain is from them being gone. And while they may not be there in person, they are very much present in your heart. Love is not something to be ashamed of or something to hide, it is something to be shared with those around you. Pain and sorrow are as much a part of love as is joy and happiness; without pain, there would be no joy. When you loved the person before they passed on, you probably didn't hide it away as though it were something evil and horrible so why hide it away now? When you share the pain of losing someone you loved, you are sharing the love you have for that person.

3. Take Charge

Traditions are like rules; however well intentioned, when it comes down to it, they were made to be broken. As children, we lived for the opportunity to break rules and traditions, to strike out on a different path. Why not experience that joy once again? Change the meal, change the location, make new traditions; your life has changed tremendously and so can your traditions. **You can roll with the changes or let the changes roll you, the choice is simply yours.**

You may want to keep certain traditions in honor of those who have passed on and this is a great idea, but keep in mind that you are not the one who died. You need to make the best of a very difficult situation, and chances are, if the person who passed on loved you, they wouldn't be thrilled to find out you spent the

holidays lying in bed crying your eyes out while the rest of those who love you could do nothing more than stand by and watch.

Make the person who passed away proud of who you are. Show them you as are strong as the person they loved. Show that person how much you loved them by sharing that love with the people around you. Show them you can face this challenge and still make it through. Be the person whom they loved, honored and cherished. Your loved one may only be with you in your heart, but it's never too late to make them proud of you; their spirit will be with you for the rest of your life.

4. Be Realistic About the Holidays

Often times we go into the holiday season with expectations of what we should or should not do. It doesn't have to be that way. The holidays can be a magical time of year, but to expect them to be is foolish. When a person has gone many years without a particular gift, why would it all of a sudden be absolutely necessary for them to have it now? Gifts are a token of appreciation, not a necessity of life, and you should not feel obligated to give them. It is no different with sending cards to those you know. Certainly it's a good idea to contact people whom you rarely see or live far away from you, but that doesn't mean every single human being you've ever known needs a card or gift in order to remember you; if they care, they will certainly understand and more often than not would just as soon you call them so they can hear you say that everything is going to be okay.

Keep in mind that children tend to view the holidays far differently than adults do, but their views can be what brings the true joy often associated with the holidays. Make some time to spend with the children in your life, most children will ultimately value a hug and a kiss far more than toys. Toys last until they break (and if the kids in your life are anything like my nephew, that should be a matter of hours!), love lasts forever.

5. Find the Joy in Your Life

This is often the most difficult to do during the grieving process but it can also be the most important. You have lost a loved one, but how many others remain in your life? It may seem as though nothing positive remains but often times there are more positives than you realize. Write them down and seek them out.

Explore the talents or creativity that you haven't used in years. Pick up that instrument that you haven't touched since you graduated high school. Join a caroling or church choir group to sing like you used to. Pick up that hobby you haven't had time for or see what you can make out of all those things in your kitchen cabinets. Be creative and explore your abilities, you may be surprised at what you find.

Make a list of the things you have stopped doing in your life which you wish to do again at some point. Make another list of things you've never done but would like to try. Then go out and explore those things on your lists. Keep a record of those goals you accomplish, you may surprise yourself at what you are still able to do.

6. Do Something Special For Your Loved One

Make a ritual for yourself to perform in honor of the person you lost. It doesn't have to be anything fancy, just something in the persons memory. Guilt is a tremendous part of grieving and can often be difficult to overcome. Devoting a portion of your time to honor the person who passed on can help you to deal with the guilt. Plant a flower or tree in that persons name, burn a candle at a special place you used to go, make a donation to the persons favorite charity in their name, anything you can do on their behalf that has special meaning to you and your prior relationship. You can never bring the person back, but these small rituals can help in keeping your loved ones memory and spirit alive. Taking these actions on your own can help in easing the guilt of being a survivor because in you, they will still have life.

7. Use the Support That Others Wish to Give

While the people around you certainly aren't going through the same difficulties as you are, that doesn't mean they can't help or don't want to. Maybe they don't always say the right thing in return but they still care and wish to help. They don't wish to see you in pain anymore than you wish to be in pain. They want it all to go away too. Talk to them and spend some time with them. Use the shoulder they offer for you to cry on. Take them up on that offer to go out for dinner or to a movie. They may not understand but they are making an effort to try to help you; the least you can do is respect and honor their efforts.

Try to help them to understand the situation you are in. When they say the wrong thing, let them know but more importantly, explain to them why they shouldn't say that. When people care and are willing to put effort into it, good things can happen for all those involved.

Check out the other support options in your area as well. Most cities and towns have support groups for those who are grieving and the people there really have been through what you are going through. They will have a far greater understanding of your situation and can offer many options available to you to help you get by.

Visit your church and talk to the people there. They often have held the hands of those who have died as well as those who have lived on. They may not understand exactly what you are going through, but they work with the grieving everyday and can often help you out.

8. Take Care of Yourself

A proper diet and exercise is essential for dealing with the stress of the holidays as well as handling the grieving process. Alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine can increase depression as well as hurt your physical health. Not eating properly can hurt your immune system and lead to illness that will only make the situation worse. Eat properly and avoid over doing it, especially with alcohol.

Spend some time outside, get some fresh air and let the sun beat on you for awhile. It's next to impossible to be happy without your health, so keep an eye on the things you do. Set some time aside for yourself to do the things that you enjoy. The holidays are important for everyone and that includes you. Take care of yourself during this most difficult time.

Finally, enjoy as much of the holidays as you can. This time of year is extremely difficult all on it's own, it doesn't need your help in making it worse. Love yourself and do what you can to go on, if something is more than you can handle, then don't do it. There is no one in this world more important than you are and keep that in mind during this holiday season. You are as important as anyone else in this world is, and we all need you to play the active role in life that you are capable of. Losing a loved one can be extremely difficult and spending the holidays without them is worse. But the world needs you and everyone else in it, so please take care.

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Please remember **JESUS IS THE REASON FOR THE SEASON**