



PREPARING FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Some days you never forget. Especially a day of great joy and satisfaction...or a day of enormous pain and sorrow.

Thanksgiving Day, 1973 is one of those days of pain in my life. I was a cancer patient lying in a bed of a large cancer hospital. My mind was filled with doubts and fears—but worst of all, I couldn't be with my dear wife and three lovely children.

August 5, 1977 is another unforgettable day. I said good-bye to my mother, at age 57, after seven long years of illness. She was the center of all holidays in our family. Her touch made them very special. No holiday since has been the same. You know what I mean. Does anyone begin to understand? The empty feeling. The sorrow no words can express.

Do you wonder as this holiday season approaches, the first one since you lost your special someone, how you will survive? I've counseled those who grieve for some time now and I've learned that no one thing works for everyone. Perhaps nothing will help ease the pain right now...even God, who you know cares, feels distant. If that's true—if that's how dark it is right now—then I pray that God will give you the special strength and care you need.

But let me gently urge you to read on a little further. I care about you. Maybe there's one thought that will bless you. I hope so.

I want to give some suggestions for coping with the holidays this year. Of course, I know there are no easy answers as you struggle with the pain. But those who grieve have often mentioned these principles to me. Maybe these thoughts will help you a little.

- Randy Becton



Recommended Reading:

“Don't Take My Grief Away From Me”
by Doug Manning

“A Grief Observed”
by C. S. Lewis

“The Comfort Book For Those Who Mourn”
by Anna Trimiew

Websites:

www.griefnet.org
www.journeyofhearts.org
www.recover-from-grief.com



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A Message for Those Who Grieve

PREPARING FOR THE HOLIDAYS: 12 Healing Steps



By Randy Becton



12 HEALING STEPS FOR HOLIDAY GRIEF

Number one: You will want to **expect this time to be hard**. But you will survive. I did not say holidays will be anything but difficult. You've never had to do this before. We do a better job of coping if we expect some things to be hard.

Number two: I'm asking you to **be easy on yourself**. Some of the struggle of going through a difficult loss is not just finding the strength to get through the loss, but it's how hard we are on ourselves. We expect a superhuman strength that, when the chips are down, we likely won't have. We become very critical and sometimes even destructive toward ourselves.

Why can't we be content and honestly accept our weakness? You who leave a crowded room to cry alone—I'd like you to consider staying with the people...they need to know that grief is part of the real world. Some of you may think, "I've got a child. I have to be strong for him." You've put a burden on yourself that's pretty incredible. How about just being honest with him? Are you going to teach him to fake it till he makes it? Or is it better to model, "This hurts, son." If someone could give us the gift of being gentler with ourselves, we'd do better.

Number three: We need to summon all the emotional support, spiritual support, and good mental health principles we can get. **Don't be afraid to ask for help**. You're not self-sufficient. Ask one friend, "If I get down, can I call and talk with you. Will you keep my calls confidential—just between you and me?" Then use that friend for a safety valve.

I made this request of a friend. At two o'clock one morning I called him because there were these fears. I asked him, "Remember I asked if I could call you? I need to talk to you." He said, "Start talking. I'll wake up on the third or fourth sentence. But I'm glad you called." He saved my life that night.

Number four: Don't be afraid to enjoy something or somebody. It's okay to enjoy something. **It's okay to enjoy somebody**. A widow once shared with me her survival

technique for social occasions. Before attending any gathering she would say to herself, "I'm going to give these people the gift of enjoying themselves. And I'm going to try to watch them enjoy themselves and that will be enough for me."

What happens when we grieve is that we work to accept the reality and experience the pain without the person. After time we finally begin to withdraw the emotional investment we had in that person since they're not here anymore. We may someday re-invest it. We are slow to re-invest, by the way, because we believe that this dishonors the member of the one we loved. But, eventually, we come to a point when we say, "When I do this, I'm not dishonoring his or her memory." This is healthy grief that finally, on your timetable, allows you to re-invest yourself.

Number five: Draw on your faith and **tell God exactly how you feel**. In this period of grief, some who have a strong faith are going to be embarrassed at your feelings toward God. One widow told me, "I told God I was so mad at Him for letting my husband pass away on Christmas day." We can be angry at God and we can tell Him all about it. It's okay. He understands. He wants us to bring Him our grief.

Number six: This one requires the greatest strength of all. **Be gentle with your consolers**. They don't know what to do or say. But they're going to do something and say something. Just forgive them. Give them needed but undeserved kindness. And the worst are the ones who think they know what to do and say. You're going to have to forgive them double.

Number seven: A very important principle of mental health is to **do something out of love for somebody**. Be careful of actions born from duty or expectation—buying Christmas gifts for the grandchildren, sending a birthday card to your aunt. You'll enjoy a marvelous feeling that you are a worthwhile person when you do something out of love for someone else. You will want to do this—not because of their need, but because of your need.

Number eight: **Try not to withdraw**. Let friends include you. If you receive three invitations for social activities, try to take at least one. And you can say, "This will be hard for me. But, yes, I'll come. Would you be willing for me to not stay the whole time?" Try to push yourself out a little bit. It's a mentally healthy thing to do.

Number nine: I know this is painful for you, but **let the past memories flood you**. It is genuinely human to do that. You and I are a part of everything that has ever hurt us. And it's a permanent part of us. I have a massive scar on my hand where I went through a window at the age of twelve. It reminds me of the 4½ hours the doctors needed to sew my hand back together. That scar is a part of me. That experience of insecurity is a permanent memory. Now, the good news is that good experiences, those times of joy, are also in our memory bank. Let those past memories flood you.

Number ten: **Draw strength and hope from your faith**. You decided long ago to trust a God who cares. You can call on that faith to help see you through. You must repeat these faith statements from conviction, for you're not always going to feel them emotionally. I have said things that are true when many times I didn't feel them. I believe God has done something that has forever changed the face of human suffering—He raised His Son from the dead! If you believe that—then now is the time to restate it. There is a God who cares.

Number eleven: **If you wish, visit the graveside and talk**. Or take a favorite picture from that album in the closet and talk, and cry. It may be on the anniversary of the time you lost him or her that you need to set aside a two hour period to go walk and talk in the graveyard. Don't say, "That's too painful." There's something healthy for you when you walk toward your pain. So you'll want to let the reality be with you.

Feel free to apologize to your loved one if you carry some regret about how you failed him or her. You can forgive him for not being all he could have been. Just tell him good-bye. You can even forgive him for leaving. People who talk to those they love and lose may be smarter than the rest of us.

Number twelve: I started with "expect it to be hard, but you will survive," and I want to conclude with, **"Remember that you are normal."** Dr. Joseph Worden says it will take at least four seasons—one full year—to make significant progress in dealing with your loss. Maybe two or three. I notice many make the mistake of putting a timetable on grief. Nobody can tell you how long it will take you to reach that healthy level of coping. We're all different. Your task is to work through from the ache to sweet sadness. The good news is that you're likely to get there. Why do I believe that? Well, I like the Old Testament reference to God as our strength and refuge, "a very present help in time of trouble." He will get you there.