

# *Surviving The Holidays*

## *A practical guideline while you are grieving*

### **Introduction**

Helen Keller wrote: "The most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or touched, but are felt in the heart." Holidays touch our hearts. And now, because of a death of your loved one, holidays will touch your heart in a different way. Acknowledge and embrace your grief and all the pain and fear that come with it. It is real and it is a part of who you are. Remember, you are grieving because you have loved.

We grieve not only the person we have lost, but also the life we lived with that person –and now have lost. We also grieve the time we spent sharing the important moments of our life. Holidays represent some of those moments, as each family followed its own rituals, traditions and customs.

First, know that the anticipation of the holidays is always worse than the day itself. Secondly, know and accept that it will be different –and painful. Although you may feel like scattered pieces of a broken puzzle, perhaps the pieces can be rearranged, and pieced together to form a different picture. Our task is to learn to live with what we've got instead of what we want.

Here are some ideas, and steps you can take that will both honor your loved one, and comfort you. They will hopefully make your holidays a little easier, but also more meaningful for you!

### **Have a plan and be prepared**

Recognize that the holidays will be a challenge. Talk to others who have dealt with grief and get wisdom on how to survive.

### **Keep the tissue handy**

Don't be surprised by tears and sadness, and don't fight them off. Instead, carry extra tissues. Let the tears come.

### **Tell me again**

Instead of trying to push back memories of your loved one during this season, ask friends and family members to share their recollections of the person with you in photos, stories and mementoes.

### **Be patient with yourself**

Be gentle, kind and patient with yourself. Give yourself the time it takes to be comfortable with your different life. Affirm out loud if necessary, that with God's help you can keep going.

### **Break with tradition**

If certain family traditions are making you uncomfortable this year, consider changing them, or skipping them entirely. Remember, you are not throwing your traditions out the window. You are simply modifying them this year and allowing yourself space to heal. Simplify as much as possible –when you grieve you have less energy for other things.

### **Make a list**

When you are grieving, you may experience a lack of concentration. It's normal to be distracted and forgetful as you grieve, so feel free to lean heavily on your lists. No doubt you feel like your life is beyond your control. After all, if you could control things, your loved one would still be alive. Using lists can help you gain a sense of control. Make a list of what you want to do. What you don't want to do. What can you delete from your "to do" list? Who can help?

### **Listen to yourself**

Deep down inside, you know best what you need as you grieve. Pay attention to what you find yourself wanting, and what you wish others were helping you with. Most people care, and are looking for ways to support you, but simply don't know how. Learn to lean heavily on the One who knows your sorrow –and cut the humans some slack.

### **Share the love**

If it's just unbearable to not buy a gift for your deceased loved one, consider buying one, and then giving it to someone who would not otherwise have a gift.

### **Trust your own clock**

Use this time to look inward, to reflect, and to evaluate what has meaning for you. Many people who are grieving learn new and valuable things about themselves that will enrich their lives for years to come.

### **Make memories gifts**

Your loved one gave you all kinds of gifts during their life. Companionship, laughter, kindness...what do you remember? Write them down and treasure them!

### **Give it some thought**

Pick out three to five meaningful activities or rituals. Involve each family member in the decision, and figure out how each individual can do the one thing that is most meaningful to him/her.

### **Children's needs**

Focusing on making a good holiday for your kids can provide you with motivation you wouldn't otherwise have. For children, whether they have lost a parent, grandparent, sibling or other loved one, life goes on...especially during the holidays. Despite this, they do need a vehicle to express their grief as well. Have the child make a special card for the deceased, involve them in a task that helps others, have a special gathering that shares memories, allow a child to choose a special ritual performed by the deceased which they can now do, and get a special candle which is lit in honor of the deceased.

### **Just say “no”**

Sometimes, attending a party where everyone expects you to be up, chipper, and “over” your grief, is torturous. If that’s the case for you, simply don’t go. Kindly but firmly tell your friends you will not be attending. At the same time, don’t automatically say “no” to every invitation that comes along –you may be surprised at how much you enjoy being in the company of friends again. You know better than anyone what you need at this time.

### **Hold onto your wallet**

You can’t buy grief away. Think twice before buying extravagant gifts. Are you trying to make yourself feel better by spending money?

### **Take care of yourself**

Take walks, drink plenty of water, eat healthy food that gives you extra energy. Think of things that you enjoy, and treat yourself to them.

### **Share your holiday**

You don’t have to be alone during the holidays. Volunteer at a soup kitchen, visit a nursing home, and collect toys or food for the needy. Share yourself and your love.

### **Look for joy**

Try celebrating what you do have as you realize what you are missing. If you find just one little chuckle in a day filled with tears, embrace it and enjoy it for the moment. Don’t be afraid to have fun –laughter can be just as healing as the tears!

### **Prayer**

Allow others in your church family to share your burdens, and be in prayer for you and your family! Come forward on Sundays to pray with the Prayer counselors, or send your request to [prayer@bethelsf.org](mailto:prayer@bethelsf.org) for our prayer chain to cover you.

### **You will survive!**

You may hurt, but you will survive. You will not always feel the way you do right now. You will get better. Joy will one day be restored to your life. Don’t deny yourself life because someone else has died. Allow grief to increase your purpose and focus! Reach out continually to the Lord. He is right there to catch you and carry you through this season of your life. Visualize God’s presence, if it helps –is he holding your hand, carrying you on his shoulders?

“For I know the plans I have for you  
Declares the Lord,  
Plans to prosper you and not to harm you  
Plans to give you a hope and a future”

Jeremiah 29:11