

Be a Light to Those Grieving this Holiday Season



Every Christmas I set out a reindeer that is missing its left ear on the mantle above my fireplace.

To anyone else, it would appear to be a Christmas decoration that has long served its time and is overdue on making its way to the trash, but I won't ever get rid of it because it was hers. And oh, how my mom

loved her Christmas decorations.

This year will be the fourth Christmas and holiday season I've experienced without my mom, and while time does ease the pain of her passing, it doesn't ever fully erase it. In the first few months after her passing, I remember looking at the calendar and dreading the holiday season that was upon us. First would come Thanksgiving, then Christmas, and then New Year's. All stark reminders to me that one of the most treasured and special people in my life was no longer there. Every holiday tradition looked different to me, and every family gathering made my heart ache a bit more. As painful as it was (and still is) to grieve her loss, I felt the presence of Jesus with me every step of the way, comforting me, and lamenting with me.

You may have experienced a loss yourself and understand how difficult it can be to navigate the holiday season without your loved one. As we enter the upcoming holiday season, consider ways you can be a light to those around you who are grieving the loss of a loved one.

Ways you can help someone grieving during the holidays:

- 🦌 **Acknowledge their pain.** Any holiday after a loved one has passed away is difficult, but the first ones are often the hardest to know how to navigate. It helps to acknowledge that the holidays look different now for the person who has lost their loved one. Maybe their mother is the one who always hosted Thanksgiving, or their father or grandfather always had a special Christmas Eve tradition he shared with the kids in the family, and once that loved one passes away, those traditions change and often, are never the same again. This type of change can be difficult for the griever to process. Simply reaching out with a card, phone call, or text message can bring the griever comfort and help them feel less alone.
- 🦌 **Mention their loved one's name.** Share stories and memories of them. We often think that bringing up someone's loved one who has passed away will make them feel worse or sadder. I promise you; they are already sad and missing their loved one.



They are already thinking about them and how different everything is without them. Sharing stories and memories and speaking their loved one's name out loud helps the griever know their loved one has not been forgotten, and their presence is still acknowledged.

- 🦌 **Invite but don't expect.** Holiday gatherings with family and friends are one of the things that can make the holidays so enjoyable and fun. But for a griever, especially a new one, events and gatherings can be overwhelming. It's wonderful to extend them invitations but let them know there is no pressure to attend, and that it is okay if they cancel plans at the last minute if they aren't feeling up for something. You can also offer to pick them up and go with them to a gathering, so they aren't going into a social situation alone.
- 🦌 **Offer practical help.** Do they need someone to wrap their Christmas presents for them? Do they need someone to finish their shopping? Or help with baking a cake for the church Christmas gathering? It's wonderful to offer practical help and encouragement to them throughout the holiday season.
- 🦌 **Consider giving a gift in memory of their loved one.** It doesn't have to be a big gift or even one of great monetary value. It can simply be a way for you to show them you are thinking of them and their loved one. It can be a photograph of their loved one, a special memento, a donation made somewhere in their loved one's honor, etc. It is truly the thought that counts!
- 🦌 **Stay connected to them.** The holidays can be a lonely time for grievers. Regular check-ins, cards, texts, etc. help people know they are not alone (even though to them it may feel as if they are very much alone). Simple phrases like "You are on my mind today," "You are loved," "_____ (loved one's name) is so missed," and "I'm thinking about you," go a long way in helping to encourage someone experiencing a loss. Listen with intention to what needs they may have (try not to assume), and regularly pray with and for them as you can.

It's important to remember that grief takes many forms and is different for every person. Grief carries an enormous weight with it. It can be a comfort at times, a brutal force, or an uninvited guest that stays too long. But it can also be hope and strength, and memories, and the courage to keep going.

Jesus is right there with us through it all.

How can you be a light to those grieving this holiday season?

— Amanda Martinsen

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