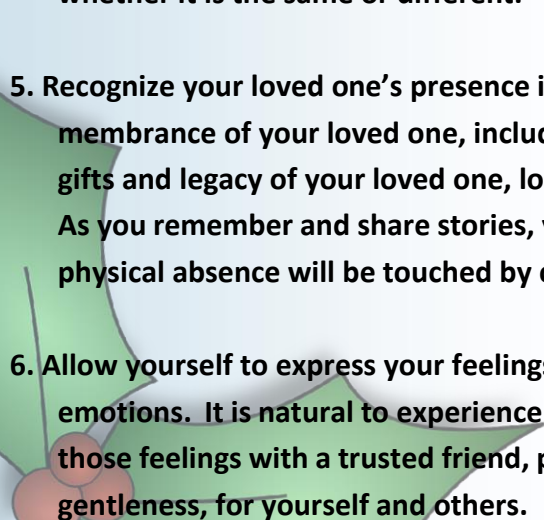


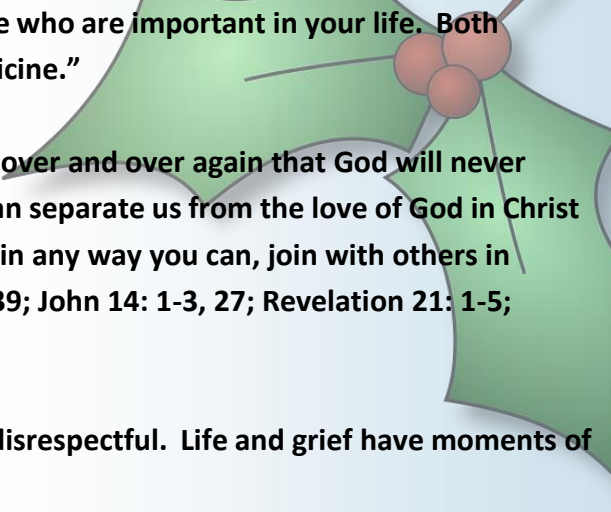
GRIEF AND THE HOLIDAYS



Christmas! It is a time of rejoicing, of joy to the world, of childlike excitement and gift-giving. But for some, this season carries with it pain and unrealistic goals. There are those carrying burdens and pain who are yearning to see the light shining in the darkness. For those who have experienced the loss of a loved one, it is hard to celebrate at all, especially when it feels like the world expects it. If you are grieving or struggling, Christmas is likely not to be all bright lights and merry cheer; you may be experiencing its opposite.

Here are some tips for handling the holidays if you are grieving or carrying heavy burdens.

1. Remember: There is no one right or wrong way to grieve. Each person experiences grief and loss in a unique way. There is no one right or wrong way to celebrate or mark the holidays at this time in your life.
 2. Decide what you can do, and communicate it to family and friends. It is much more affirming than saying what you cannot do. Ask: Where will I feel comfortable Christmas Eve/Day? Do I want to host or be a guest? Travel or stay close to home? Do I need to do things differently?
 3. Think about and communicate how much you want to keep things the same, or, if you want to make changes. Everything is not the same when a loved one is not around, so it matters that you choose what is best for you. If you are part of a family experiencing grief and loss, this can be good and courageous conversation to have, and it may bring some healing and solidarity amidst the pain.
 4. Re-examine your priorities. This may not be the year to keep up with all the rituals (baking, decorating, cards, etc.) you have done in the past. Honestly reflect, with no “should’s”: Do I enjoy these rituals and will they be nourishing to me this year, or do I need to let go of them right now? If the rituals are important but seem like too much work or are hard to handle, find someone to share them with; talk to your family and friends about what you would like to engage in together – whether it is the same or different.
 5. Recognize your loved one’s presence in your life and the life of your family. Light a candle in remembrance of your loved one, include a chair at the table, fill a stocking with words reflecting the gifts and legacy of your loved one, look at old photos or listen to music that you shared together. As you remember and share stories, your loved one lives on in your heart and in your life by grace; physical absence will be touched by comfort and healing, gratitude and hope.
 6. Allow yourself to express your feelings – without judgment. Holidays magnify the intensity of emotions. It is natural to experience sadness, anger, confusion and 100 other emotions. Share those feelings with a trusted friend, pastor, counselor, or family member. Practice acceptance and gentleness, for yourself and others.
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7. Accept the caring offers of others and reach out to those who are important in your life. Both receiving care and caring for others can be good “medicine.”
 8. Remember that you are never alone. We are promised over and over again that God will never abandon us; that there is nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Read comforting scripture, pray – talk – to God in any way you can, join with others in worship and service. (Psalm 23; Romans 8: 31-35, 36-39; John 14: 1-3, 27; Revelation 21: 1-5; I Corinthians 13: 8-13)
 9. Do not be afraid to have fun. Laughter and joy are not disrespectful. Life and grief have moments of joy and sadness, laughter and tears.
 10. Get enough rest. Holidays and grieving are both exhausting.

May you find comfort and strength this Christmas, and experience some moments of hope and joy,

Rev. Heidi Hudnut-Beumler

Candlelight Service of Hope and Healing

Sunday, December 8, 2024

7:00 p.m.

