

Stop Saying ‘God Works Everything Out For Good’ to Those Grieving Right Now

Almost seven years ago, I suffered a miscarriage during a holiday weekend.

For me, that holiday was Easter, not Thanksgiving or Christmas. Yet, the fact that others celebrated while I mourned wasn't lost on me.

As other families enjoyed egg hunts, ham dinners and rejoiced that “Jesus is Risen!” I struggled to pull myself out of bed, heat up microwave mac n' cheese for my kids and not cry constantly.

Being aware of the grief-free festivities of others was difficult. I wished that I too could celebrate. But I couldn't. Easter that year—and for many years after—was marked with sorrow.

Perhaps you understand, and this holiday season is hard for you. Or, it could be that it's difficult for someone you know and love.

Maybe it's a friend who's lost a loved one to death. It might be a family member who is in the midst of unemployment and the financial instability that results. Perhaps someone in your life faces a health challenge that limits their energy and ability, or has recently walked through a divorce or unresolved family conflict.

How can you support someone who grieves during the holidays? Here are five ways you can be there for them.

1. **Be patient**

I've observed that we don't all grieve in the same way or in the same timing. Perhaps you've noticed this too.

Take my husband Ted and me. I'm a feeler and verbal processor; he's a helper and a doer. It takes me longer to grieve, while his process is shorter. We've had to learn to understand this and be patient with each another.

You can do the same for those in your life who are grieving. Make an effort to understand how your loved one mourns and to respect how long it takes them. Don't expect their process to be identical to your own.

Also, be prepared for the fact that they may experience a range of emotions during the holidays. There may be moments of joy and festivity closely followed by tears and sadness. Be patient and allow them to feel both extremes. Don't expect them to fit into one box.

2. **Be a listener**

In my book *Braving Sorrow Together*, I share how listening is one of the best gifts we can give someone who's grieving. This holiday season, make it your goal to actively practice the words of James 1:19, which is "be swift to hear, slow to speak."

Too often, we want to offer unsolicited advice or even share Scripture passages that they aren't ready to hear yet. This can include the words of Romans 8:28b, which says, "All things work together for good to those who love God"

Instead, it's best to say "I'm sorry" or "I don't know what to say," and choose to simply listen. If you do decide to offer them encouragement from the Bible, pick verses from the Psalms, such as "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted" (Ps. 34:18), that offer the comforting reminder that God isn't blind to their pain and neither are you.

3. **Be practical**

After our miscarriage, as well as several job losses Ted and I walked through, I felt most loved when others met our practical needs. We had friends bring us dinner, help us pack, watch our kids and even paint the house we were trying to sell.

This holiday season, reflect on the loss your loved one is facing and ask yourself what practical needs you can meet. For example, if it's unemployment, consider giving them a grocery store gift card or surprising them with the turkey or Christmas tree you know they want but can't quite afford.

4. **Be inclusive**

While writing *Braving Sorrow Together*, I talked to two friends who walked through painful divorces. Both shared with me how they still wanted to be invited and included by others.

Whatever loss your family member or friend is facing, look for ways you can include them in your holiday festivities. It's possible they won't be able to say "yes" to your invite, but I guarantee your remembrance of them will remind them that they are loved.

5. **Be flexible**

The holidays are a time for traditions. Many of us have activities and events we look forward to every year. When someone faces loss, though, it's helpful if we can find ways to be flexible with our plans in order to support them.

If someone you love is suffering from health issues, maybe they don't have the energy to attend a Christmas party or event. However, they might love to sit on the couch, watch a holiday movie and drink eggnog or hot chocolate. Look for ways such as this that you can adapt your plans in order to love and support them.

This holiday season, you can show the love of Jesus to others by actively supporting and being there for them as they grieve. These five ways will help you remind those you love that they don't have to brave sorrow alone. {eoa}

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