

Grieving With a Grateful Heart

Three years. Christmas Eve marks three years without my amazing husband, Bob, who was also my absolute best friend, confidant, handyman, pastor, grill master, biking buddy. Becoming a widow has been the most painfully jarring loss I've had to go through in life thus far. While Christmas can be such a joyous season, it can also heighten our painful losses.

I've learned a few things about loss along the way. People grieve differently, and I think one's grieving experience is shaped by various factors such as the emotional health of their relationship, manner of death, unresolved issues and so on. I also learned everyone who loses a loved one has some degree of regret that's difficult to talk about. I struggled with a few regrets, such as I should have I spent more time with Bob and worked less. I wish we could have traveled more together. I shouldn't have argued with him about this or that.

When our loved one dies, it's only natural to feel profound sadness, even depression, and to withdraw or isolate ourselves. I certainly experienced my share of sadness, and how I wished many a time that I could press the fast-forward button on grief. But no. When we lose our loved one, we have to slog through grief every single day, like it or not. And it sometimes feels like a roller coaster—some days, we feel OK, and other days, not.

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I know I'll be missing Bob for the rest of my earthly life, but when I think back over the last three years, I can say with certainty that there have been a number of things that have helped me grieve in a healthy way, such as counseling

myself with God's Word, thanking God, having an outward focus, serving Jesus and people, initiating activities with friends. And of all these activities, I'd have to say that grieving with a grateful heart is at the top of my list.



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Particularly in the first two years, every time I began to feel like I was going down that sad, downward spiral of gloom, I'd often go for a walk and force myself to start verbally thanking God for anything and everything related to Bob, such as:

- Thank You, Father, for giving us 35 years.
- Thank You for five years with cancer.
- Thank You for giving me such a godly and devoted husband.
- Thank You that our sons had such a great dad and that they were adults when Bob went to heaven.
- Thank You that I partnered with him fully in ministry and suffered alongside him.
- Thank You for all those romantic sunset barbecue dinners at the beach.
- Thank You for all the special dates, family trips, bike rides, kayak adventures and more.

Amazingly, cultivating a grateful heart reaped surprising benefits in my life. I discovered that my determined, intentional efforts to thank God in the midst of my sadness changed my mood by the end of those walks. Even though I was of course still grieving, my heart was now grateful to our heavenly Father. My focus would shift from my unfortunate

earthly loss to the blessings graciously given me by my sovereign, loving Father.

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This regular “exercise” gradually became more of a natural habit. I also found that the more I thanked God for various blessings, the more He showed me other things I could be grateful for. Having a grateful heart enabled me to focus on blessing others around me too.

I’m also grateful for the friends and family who reached out to me over the last few years, helping me with house projects, inviting me to teach at various events and doing fun activities with me. All those things helped me move forward in a healthy way.

Perhaps this approaching Christmas season highlights painful losses for you as well. Maybe you’ve lost your spouse, son or daughter, dear friend, job, or perhaps you’re struggling with health or other issues.

May you be greatly encouraged that our sovereign Lord “is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Ps. 34:18, NIV). As you look to the Lord, He will certainly walk with you through your suffering. Despite your trying circumstances, take time to thank God daily for the benefits He’s bestowed upon you. You’ll be surprised at how blessed you are.

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits” (Ps. 103:1-2, ESV).

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