

GETTING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

Words of Comfort for Those in Grief



ANNE PETERSON

The Perfect Tree



Photo courtesy jessicapetersonart.com

Thinking back six years ago,
to a Christmas memory,
my grandsons, Jude and Charlie,
hung the ornaments for me.
They handled them with gentleness,
as I watched full of pride.
Most ornaments were visible,
and some were tucked inside.

My eyes just focused
on one branch,
—four ornaments together.

I simply had to ask them,
or I'd wonder why forever.

“Did you want to
spread those out?”
I pointed to the tree.

“No,” they said in unison,
“that’s our family.”

Dear Reader,

There's a good chance that you are grieving right now. People all around you seem like they are caught up in the holiday spirit, you are just trying to make it to the next day.

You keep hearing about joy, but you're not feeling it right now, and even when you have those moments, they fade away quickly.

Just know what you're feeling is perfectly normal. Your whole world changed the day you said goodbye to your loved one. I just want you to know you are not alone.

The one thing that kept me going through each day was knowing that God was right there. And on those days when I couldn't feel his presence, I trusted in what God's word says. Feelings are fickle and when we're grieving, they are all over the place.

Please feel free to check out other material I've written. And know that if you are reading this right now, I am praying for you.

I decided to start praying for those who would be reading this, even before I finished it.

I know you're hurting and you feel like you'll never feel normal. But I can tell you that God is with you. He understands how you're feeling, and he loves you very much. How do I know? He left us a love letter.

And when you are up to reading, check out the Psalms. Through each page you will be able to see God's love.

Thank you for checking out this eBook.

Warmly,

Anne

I'll Replay Them

The day you left,
I saved your place
inside my memories.

And I replay them often
as I think of you and me.

Whenever I am missing you.
I simply will rewind
those times of us together
and I'll watch them
in my mind.

A Special Thank you

I'd like to thank those who took the time to comment when I needed help. I am so blessed to be able to write articles. My hope is that I will encourage others with my words. And yet, when I feel like I need a hand, my readers are so helpful. All I have to do is ask and they jump right in. So thank you, so much. You guys are so encouraging.

About the Same

I guess I thought as time went by,
 my pain would then subside.
But I must just confess to you,
 my pain still hurts inside.
I miss so much about you,
 like mentioning your name.
And so, although it's been awhile,
 I feel about the same.

Introduction

My name is Anne Peterson. I'm a poet, speaker, and published author of 15 books.

Christmas is almost upon us. But some of you are hurting. Maybe you have a knot in your stomach because of your grief. The holidays are a struggle because all you can think of are the times when you still had your loved one. The day they slipped away changed everything.

What if you could go through the holiday season without the feeling of dread?

What if your struggle could be a little less?

I'm praying for you. I'm praying that you can do more than just count the hours till the holidays are over.

Part of Me

The holidays are almost here,
they're right outside my door.

And I wish I felt differently
like all those years before.

But since the day
you slipped away,
my heart is broken still.

And I cannot stop missing you,
and know I always will.

People do not understand,
they want me to move on,
but how can I feel differently
when part of me is gone?

Looking for Christmas?

Look Deeper, you'll Find It



Photo courtesy Pixabay

It used to be easier to see Christmas. We might see Santa in a store or two, but that's not all the signs we'd see.

There used to be carolers. People who would brave the elements just to sing the all-familiar carols. I used to be among them.

And yes, stores were crowded. But shoppers sometimes held doors for other shoppers, they didn't trample them on the way to a Black Friday sale.

The anticipation of a longed-for Christmas gift has been replaced by a list you're expected to fill.

Placing your newly wrapped gifts under the tree you wonder if they'll really like what you've chosen or will you get an obligatory "thank you."

Christmas is still here

It's just hidden sometimes, but that's okay. While we're told to have a Happy Holiday, we know it's Christmas. No matter what they call it.

Children used to sing, "Away in a Manger" at school assemblies with smiling parents joining in, misty-eyed.

Listen carefully

We need selective hearing.

We need to silence the noise and listen for the music. In the distance, you may hear a mother humming a lullaby. She cradles the infant, holding him close. This baby is the King of Kings.

Did she care he was born in a stable? Perhaps her greatest care was the one all mothers have — that he would be okay.

Yes, you have to listen for Christmas.

For Christmas will come whether we anticipate it or not. No matter how we see it.

—*Yes! Christmas is here. I'll have extra time off work*

—*Oh no. I'll have extra work to do*

—*Yes. I get to see my family.*

—*Oh no. I have to see my family.*

We'll be pulled in many directions at Christmas.

There will be things vying for our attention, our approval, dare I say it? Even our money.

Be still

We won't find Christmas in the chaos, nor in the malls. We won't even find it at the many Christmas parties we'll attend. Parties with too much food, too much drink. Too much everything.

No, we won't find it there. But make no mistake, we will find it. We'll find it in the quietness.

And if we hush ourselves within, we might hear angels rejoicing.

One year I wondered what Jesus thought about Christmas. And he told me this poem...

Don't Forget me

As you're making preparations
for the coming days ahead,
As you're baking and you're shopping,
each night dropping into bed,
While you're putting final touches
on your almost perfect tree,
Would you take a precious moment,
just to stop and think of me?
People make their celebrations,
some are big, and others small,
I just find it disappointing
they don't think of me at all.
For it was so long ago,
I was born one silent night
And my Father up in heaven,
lit the sky with one great light.
As you celebrate this Christmas
with your friends and family,
Just remember — it's my birthday,
and your party is for me.

When All you Have are Memories:

A Poem about Loss

You sit alone with memories,
of when they slipped away.
You wake with little energy
to make it through each day.
Your loss is overwhelming,
the pain is so surreal,
you never knew it possible,
to feel the way you feel.

The world keeps spinning
all around,
as if you were not there,
and comfort keeps alluding you,
if comfort's anywhere.
I know you're feeling empty,
your heart lies on the floor,
and yet, you wonder if you'll feel
this way forevermore.

I want you to remember,
the pain you feel is real,
and though you've tried
your very best,
it's pain you can't conceal.

And so, I'd like to challenge you
with something you can do,
take a precious memory,
one that's close to you.

And sit and think about the one
your heart keeps missing so;
and hold onto that memory,
and never let it go.
For few will understand you now,
nor understand your grief;
they struggle just to comprehend
a pain beyond belief.

But there's one thing
that I have learned,
—one thing that I can share.
Your grief is your connection,
to the one no longer here.
Just because your loved one died
and took their final breath,
doesn't mean your love will end,
when their eyes closed in death.

For true lives forever,
and when our pain is deep,
it shows we deeply loved them,
with a love you're sure to keep.

Grief Does Not stop Just Because it's a Holiday



Photo by [DAVIDSON LUNA](#) on [Unsplash](#)

You can't wait to see family members.
You are dreading seeing family members.

The empty chair is going to be the only thing you see.
Just walking in where everyone else's family is intact
is unbearable.

Is it even possible to be thankful with a broken heart?

Give yourself grace

Grief stings. It reminds us of what was, even though we're sure we'll never forget.

When I had miscarried, the world kept showing me all the children in the world.

When Mother's Day came, I saw only mothers and their daughters.

It happens with each loss. It hurts and I can't stop it. So maybe we try too hard. Maybe the point is not to manufacture thankfulness, but instead to take note of things.

Yes, your loved one is not here. Our granddaughter is not here this year.

Because our son is married, we alternate holidays. Three years ago their 14 month old daughter, Olivia, was here. But she slipped away.

We are fortunate we have other grandchildren, even a brand new one, Livie's little brother, Benjamin. But as much as we love him, and we do, we miss Livie.

So how can we be thankful when we hurt?

I believe the answer lies in where we are looking.

Look up

I know this is hard. You may be grappling with the one who holds the keys to life and death. You may be in the questioning stage, or even angry. And that's okay. He can handle not only your questions, but even your anger. He's that big.

Look up because he's the only one who really does understand. He's the God of all comfort and he will comfort your broken heart. He's good with hearts.

Look up because if you look anywhere else, you are probably going to see reminders of your loved one, or the empty spot that now remains because they are gone.

Look up, because there is no place to look other than up. He is the hope-giver.

Do something different

Maybe instead of trying to do the things you used to do, you should try to do something different.

Instead of getting together with all of your family, maybe you want to just be with a few people. People who know how you hurt, because they hurt too.

Some people go out for dinner instead of meeting in familiar places that serve only as reminders.

Light a candle

Sometime in the hours ahead, take a special candle and light it. And just sit and reflect on time you spent with your loved one.

Conjure up memories, and if there are few, that's fine. Grab any that your mind releases.

And be in that moment. It's like reliving a dream we had. One where we didn't want to wake up.

And as you look into the flame, think of something you loved about your loved one. Yes, I know I'm asking you to hurt, but the truth is, you already hurt. I want you to see there can be value in our hurts.

Cry

There is healing when we allow ourselves to embrace our pain.

God shows us the humanity of his Son when he showed up at his friends house, where one of them had died. And what did he do?

John 11:35 says it in two words. Jesus wept.

Don't you think that was kind of strange since he knew what was going to happen? He knew in moments his friend would be alive again.

Jesus wept because he allowed himself to be with those who hurt. It says in Psalms 34:18 Jesus is near the broken hearted.

It's in pain that I see him the clearest.

God values our tears. He keeps them in a bottle. In Psalms 56:8 he tells us the significance. Not only of our tears, but our sorrows as well.

When my son, Nathan Peterson lost his daughter he wrote this song. It was his message to his wife.

Listen to Nathan's song: Cry

Give

This one is hard to do, and maybe you're not there yet. But if you can give to someone when you are hurting, it may help ease your pain.

Even if it's just one smile you manage to give while your heart is broken. Or the fact you look into the eyes of the person who is trying to scan your few groceries. Give something.

The story was told of a woman who was totally depressed from all her losses. Week after week, she saw her counselor and nothing seemed to lift her out of her dark place.

It was then the counselor remembered that her client liked to garden.

“Do you have any plants in your house?” the counselor asked.

“Oh yes,” the woman replied. And she actually had a glimmer in her eyes as she named the kinds of plants and how long she’s had them.

“This is what I want you to do,” the counselor responded. “I want you to take and cut off a little part of the plant to start a new plant. You can pick three or even four if you like. Will you do that?”

The woman looked confused, but she agreed.

“Then I want you to give those away to three people you know.”

The woman left that day, and it was a couple of weeks before she saw her counselor again.

The counselor noticed something significant when they were reunited. This same woman who hardly

would look up in their sessions, bustled in the room, anxious to tell what happened by sharing her little plant cuttings.

Something happens when we give. We somehow have to look from our source of pain to something outside of ourselves.

So give. And don't worry that what you give is small. Giving is healing.

I wish

I know there are people who just want to get through the holidays. They don't feel particularly thankful, and they just want to cross it off their calendars.

I wish I could take your pain away, I really do.

I wish you could wake up and have the kind of Christmas you always had, because your heart was still intact.

I promise

I'll pray for you. And if you feel brave and you want to tell me who it is that you've lost, I'll pray for you specifically.

But in the meantime, know this. You cannot trust your feelings.

Our feelings go up and down at will. But you can trust in truth.

So no matter how you feel, know this. God does care about you. God weeps with you. And one day God will put death to death.

How do I know? He tells us that in the Bible, and God doesn't lie.

Not Everyone

Not everyone's merry at Christmas,
with a smile you can see on their face.

Not everyone's singing the carols,
that are playing all over the place.

At Christmas we often remember
our Christmases down
through the years.

When loved ones are gone,
waves of grief become strong,
and Christmas is seen
through our tears.

This is What I Got for Christmas

It's the little things that mean the most



Photo Courtesy www.Jessicapetersonart.com

This is for you, Grandma,” Ruthie said, handing me a little boot ornament.

“I made it myself. It got broke, but you can fix it.”

“I just love it, Ruthie,” I told her, meaning every single word. “It’s beautiful.”

Next was Charlie and he handed me a tiny heart ornament. Painted a beautiful red.

“Charlie, this is beautiful, I just love it. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Charlie said in his 9-year-old voice.

And next Jude placed his little gift in my hand. I carefully removed the red tissue paper and uncovered his ornament which was a painted present with a bow.

“Mine doesn’t have to go on the tree,” Jude volunteered. You can put it anywhere.”

“I think I’ll put it on a tiny easel,” I said. “What do you think about that?”

“That would be good,” he answered in his soon to be eleven year old voice.

I sighed, looking at the ornaments that were put on the tree right along with the ones Grandpa was given. The tree that my grandchildren decorated this year.

“I made one for you too,” my thirty-something son said.

Reaching it out to me I smiled and took it, eager to see what he had come up with.

And then he added three words which took my breath away.

“It’s Livie’s feet. Heather and I made a mould of her feet on the day she was born. This is a relief from that mould.”

Ever so gently, I removed the red tissue paper. And as I unwrapped it, I carefully traced the little ornament with my fingers. Livie’s ornament was placed in a prominent spot on the tree. She had not been forgotten at all.

And while we welcomed Livie’s little brother, Benjamin, this year, we still kept a spot in our hearts for the 14-month-old miracle God let us meet and love.

As we sent up white balloons on the day of her funeral, we knew one day we will see her again. I’m not going to lie, it’s been hard without Livie.

And it didn’t matter that we were told she would not be here long. With each passing day and week, we started to hope maybe she would continue defying what they said about babies with Trisomy 18. Maybe she would be around for a while.

But March 11th, 2016, Livie took her last breath here,

and her first in heaven.

She went to sleep in her mother's arms and woke up in the arms of God.

I look at the little ornament on my tree and I have to sigh. To think I could have a memento of that wonderful day when she came to be part of our family. A place she would always have.

Christmas is a time of celebrating the birth of Jesus. The one who came as God's gift to us.

And this Christmas is a very special one. Full of homemade gifts wrapped with love. Just like little Livie.

Will We Always Hurt on The Anniversary of Losing a Loved One?



Photo by [Esteban Hernandez](#) on [Unsplash](#)

It seems like only yesterday.

That's what people say who have lost a loved one. Either that, or, "I can't believe it's already been ____ years!"

And then there are the anniversary dates. You know, the ones where you relive every painful moment. It makes you wonder, will we always hurt on the

anniversary of losing a Loved one?

I guess the answer is: I don't know. Because everyone grieves differently.

For some people, that day is a painful reminder of what they no longer have. For others, they have learned how to take the precious memories of their loved ones, and somehow weave them into their present life.

When a person holds an important place in your life and then they are gone, you are forever changed. I've heard from people who have lost their husbands, and they say not only is their life partner gone, but so is their identity. Everything has changed for them.

The firsts

When our precious granddaughter slipped into heaven, all the "firsts" were the hardest.

The first time we went to their house and she wasn't there.

The first time they came over to our house.
The first anything.

Then you get through that year and you take a big breath. It's gonna get easier, right?

When I lost my mother, I was only 16 years old. And if you were to measure how old I was emotionally, I would have clocked in younger than that.

That whole first year I was depressed. This was told to me from my good friends. All I knew was my life was changed forever, and I was going to be an adult and felt unready.

Just seeing anything that reminded me of my mom was so painful. And that didn't get easier. Because when you lose a parent, you still have life to live. So I struggled at the next performance of our chorus from school, at my graduation, every Mother's Day, Christmas, and every other holiday.

I struggled whenever I was sick. Well, you get the idea.

When your loss is an infant, you grieve the child and you also grieve all the things you will not get a chance to do.

We stood at our granddaughter's gravesite and sent up balloons into the deep blue sky. So blue it

reminded me of her eyes. And we did a memorial the following year. Before I sent up my balloon, I kissed it.

“This is for you,” I whispered.

And now I’m looking at the calendar and seeing that it’s been two years. And yet, I am still reliving everything.

I’ve heard it said, “Time heals all wounds.”

I’m here to tell you that’s **not** true.

Grief is an ongoing thing. And we do a disservice to anyone in grief when we have expectations of how long it should take before they move on.

Here’s the truth. You never move on. You just learn how to accept that your life is changed forever.

My sister was the victim of domestic violence. I have missed her ever since September 12, 1982. And I’m sure when I take my last breath I will still be thinking about her.

My brother, Gus, had pancreatic cancer, and we watched as he slowly got worse and lost his ability to remember.

My brother, Steve, died of a heart attack. And I didn’t

get to say goodbye to him.

I mention all of them to make this statement: I am well-acquainted with death.

Am I angry they are all gone? No. Was I ever angry? Yes. Same as when I had my miscarriage. And I worked through all of that.

I think our anger at losing our loved ones is being human. And thankfully, God understands our emotions. He's the one who made them.

But I also believe that I'll see those I've lost again. I believe we're separated by a veil. And there are some days I wish I could just lift that veil a little and peek in on them.

But I'll wait. God helps me to just wait.

One day I'll sit with them again. And there will be no more pain, no more suffering, and no more goodbyes. That day God will put death to death.

Reframing

So how do we look at the losses in view of life?

For the longest time, I felt guilty that I was here and they were gone.

I felt like I couldn't enjoy my life because they were not sharing it with me.

They call it "survivor guilt."

When I would see my sister's children, now grown with families of their own, there was a part of me that was thrilled. Happy, that I got to share in their lives. Happy, because I know that's what we would have done, had she not died.

But there was another part of me that would rise up with anger. Anger that I was here seeing what she should be seeing.

Then one day I had a thought, What if they're not missing anything?

What are we gonna do now?

The thing is, as long as we live and breathe, we will face deaths of loved ones. It is certain. How we face them is up to us.

I am a writer and a poet. And for some reason unknown to me, when I hurt the words just come. So I

take my pain and I make it into something that will help. Sure, it feels good when I write, but my words aren't just for me. There's some for you too!

And I'm glad to say that we have that choice.

On my sister's birthday I would like to find this one cookie that she and I would eat as kids. That's my goal to find that devil's food cookie that was white on the outside. I'd have her favorite candy bar, but yuck, she liked Heath bars. No, thank you.

And on my mother's birthday, maybe I'll listen to a song she liked, Elusive Butterfly. I'll do that in honor of her.

When we lost our granddaughter, one of the hardest things was seeing my son and his family go through it. Watching my son in pain I asked God if he knew how I felt. And of course, he did.

God reminded me that he watched his Son die. Death. It's certain. And we can't do anything about that.

In fact, we are not in control of many of the difficult circumstances of our lives, but we are responsible for how we respond to them.

And I choose to honor their memory.

And I'm touched that my son, Nathan Peterson, has also decided to honor the memory of his daughter, the one he'll always love. Listen to his song, Dance Again.

The chances are pretty good that if you are reading this, you have lost a loved one. I'm sorry for your loss. Really sorry. And I hope in your journey of grief you have found things that have helped you with your broken heart.

Because you see, even that is a way to honor our loved ones. We are saying to the world, this person I lost, they were valuable, and I will NEVER forget them.

As far as Anniversary dates, think of some way to honor your lost loved one. It will make all the difference in the world.

I Know

(God's message to the griever)

I know that you are hurting,
since I've brought
your loved one home.

I know your heart is broken
as you sit there all alone.

I'm asking you to trust me;
to believe I know what's best.

And I will give you comfort
and help your heart to rest.

I know that you are hurting
but my child, you need to know.

There is a day you'll understand,
the day I bring you home.

A Conversation with my Friends

While writing an article on grief, I reached out to my Facebook audience. In the past, I've found them so helpful. This time was no different. I decided to show you our interactions. It is not edited, but just as it appeared about a year ago.

I want you to see is how universal grief is. When someone has lost a loved one, it hurts and the person in grief sometimes feels all alone.

Whenever I've hurt and reached out to others, people will do one of two things. They will either respond, or they will back away. I'm learning when some back away they have their reasons. But those who don't back away have probably been touched by grief as well.

This is the very paragraph I posted and what follows are their responses. I pray something will touch you but even more than that, I want you to know you are not alone. Here's our conversation...

I need your help. I'm writing another article. What was one thing that helped you through the holidays when you were grieving?

Faye Stoeffler Bryant

<https://www.fayebryant.com>

What has helped me are the stories about past holidays with the loved one now gone. Laughing with others about the things we laughed about then. Recalling the life of that dear one we lost.

Anne:

Faye, thanks for sharing.

May I ask, did you feel this way when you were first grieving, or did it take you a while to get here?

Faye:

Maybe it's because of the way we handled the memorial time, but even at the beginning, we shared the stories of the loved one's actions, words, laughter, and tears. We let each other cry and laugh. We understand that death is a part of life, even when our hearts are breaking.

I think the holding back cripples us. That when we see something and think,

"Oh, that's just like ____ would do." but when we say nothing, we are doing ourselves a disservice.

Anne:

Faye, I agree. The griever is already fearful that others will forget their loved one. They need to hear

their name, say their name. And for those who don't want to bring the loved one's name up, because they might hurt the one in grief. It's too late...they already hurt. And it hurts more when no one mentions their name.

Faye:

Exactly! And in the sharing, we are opening ourselves and giving permission to feel and express feelings. Our society has gotten to the place that showing emotion is wrong. Tears are deemed shameful.

Anne:

And yet, God sees tears valuable enough to save in bottles. I know, I have plenty of bottles up there. I think one of the best gifts we can give someone who is grieving is the right to feel what they are feeling. We just need to be with them in their pain.

Faye:

Yes! I talked with a young woman last night who has lost her grandparents and her mother in the past three years and has not truly grieved any of them. She was apologizing for not being able to sit through a veteran's recognition because her grandfather had served and it was the anniversary of his death. He had raised her, so the loss was more like losing her dad. She was ashamed of her tears because people have asked her why she still cries. It's so sad.

Anne:

Faye, I'm so glad you were with her. If nothing else, when we see those who are still grieving because they haven't felt free to express their feelings, we can always lift them in prayer to our Father who truly understands. God values our tears and He is close to the broken-hearted. It was years before we had any answers about my sister's disappearance though we believed she was dead. Some griefs are complicated. And when you see your loved ones grieving, your grief is compounded.

Faye:

I agree. I'm glad I was able to speak life over her. I will pray for her and seek her out in coming weeks to encourage her.

Anne:

Those who have experienced God's comfort can pass that on to those who grieve. In fact, that's what he wants us to do. We are to be channels, not reservoirs.

Nicki Freeman Griner:

I miss my Gram so badly and at the holidays, it can bring me down. So I honor her by using her dishes for special meals and I fix the foods she used to fix. It helps! It makes me feel a little closer to her.

Anne:

Thanks for sharing that, Nicki. I think every meal probably tastes better on her dishes.

Jodi Dirks, photographer

www.facetofacephotos.com

It's good to remember (vs avoid talking about) the family member who has passed.

Anne:

Jodi, when you were in the holiday season following a loved one's death, did you want to keep up with the traditional ways, or did you find it helpful to do something different?

Jodi:

I think it can vary for each person as well as depending on who they lost. For me, losing my nephew, it was helpful to keep some of the traditions (like a silly string fight outside at Easter after the egg hunt) and carry that on with the younger cousins. However, I have friends who have lost their husbands, and they tend to want to do things differently for holidays.

Anne:

Jodi, I agree. And I suppose because we are all different we'll all have different responses. In sharing these different ideas maybe the readers will relate to

some of them. I **love** the string tradition. I know my grandchildren would love it.

Jodi:

I agree. I also think for some, it may vary year to year. Grieving is a life long process. I don't think one ever stops grieving, but they will learn to grieve differently as time passes.

Anne:

Jodi, yes. And I don't think *anyone* has the right to tell another person how long their journey should take. That just makes the griever feel worse.

Teresa Colón

<https://www.woundedbirdsministry.com>

I was 16 when we lost my sister. I needed our loss acknowledged, but I also needed her to not be the center of the holiday. For me, this looked like keeping tightly to all our traditions and not changing what we did because she was gone.

Anne:

I hear what you are saying. I know when I was 16, we lost our mom. I did not have a personal relationship with God at that time and my whole world fell apart. Plus, I was emotionally more like 14, if even that.

We did nothing for Christmas which was sad, but in

our Greek culture, that's what you do for 40 days. There were five of us ranging from 18 down to 7. It was excruciating.

My friends told me I was depressed for about a year. Back then, there were no offers of going to a counselor. The hardest thing for me was performing in a chorus concert at Christmas. Mom had died November 4th.

As I stood on stage with all my classmates, I imagined her out in the audience. She had never seen me sing and she was unable to come to my first concert. With tears in her eyes she told me she would come to my Christmas one.

Now that I think of it, she *did* hear me sing for that Christmas concert. She had the best seat in the house.

Teresa:

There's a lot going on in my world right now that makes this a very timely topic. Even though my sister died in 1994, for various reasons we grieved independently of each other. With recent events, another sister and I are grieving together now, and it's healing on an entirely different level.

If I were to do it over again, I would want to do a Lost-One-focused event. Maybe it would be "opening

presents” of memories or poems or letters. Maybe it would be taking your loved one’s favorite holiday tradition and making it about them. I would also suggest that it not be a solitary activity; having someone who grieves *with* you is a huge lift.

Anne, I had moments like the one you had with singing, just not at the holidays. My heart breaks for you reading that story.

One other thought: I remember my mom saying that she felt like she was just “going through the motions” that year. I think it’s important to validate those experiences and also to remind people that doing less so that they can honor their emotions is far more important.

Anne:

Teresa, thanks for all your input. I know when my son and daughter-in-law lost their 14 month old, daughter Livie, my granddaughter, I thought it would be a time we would grieve together. It was not. So I think it’s great that you are able to grieve with a loved one. It’s not always possible. I love the ideas you shared of the Lost one event.

Robin Klammer

<https://medium.com/?@robinklammer>

I think putting aside a time to remember your lost

loved one specifically, and celebrating their life for those moments. Remembering that everyone grieves differently and it may look different from the outside, but the pain is still there. Take time for yourself even if just a few moments. Remember that your loved ones don't want you to suffer.

Anne:

Robin, thanks for your comments. Remembering our loved ones is a way to love them till we see them again.

Melanie Durfee Pickett

<https://melaniespickett.com>

Losing my Mom in August of 1996 was heartbreaking. The best thing I found was to make foods that reminded me of her, to remember the sweet Christmases she provided for us for years, and to repeat her traditions.

It made me feel closer to her. Helping others in the name of the person you've lost also helps. Donate in their name. Do what helps you.

Don't participate in something if it's too hard.

Cry if you need to cry, don't care about who sees it.

Surround yourself with things and people that will

comfort you. I still shed a few tears on Christmas because I really miss my Mom and Dad, but I delight in all the wonderful people I have in my life and know that would make them happy too.

Usually on the night of any day I especially miss my Mom, I will have a cup of tea in one of her pretty teacups and sort of "toast" her. Sometimes my sister and I will do this together across the miles.

Anne:

I loved your comments. Especially the one of you sitting and drinking a cup of tea in her cup and toasting her. That must be comforting.

I remember wanting my mother's china for years. And when I got it, it didn't hold the joy I thought it would. Maybe because she hardly got to use it. Giving people the right to feel what they feel is so important.

Melanie:

Anne, Exactly. I cried in many places. The grocery store was a tough one because I went shopping with her a lot, from childhood on up. It was a huge reminder of her. I stopped feeling stupid about crying in the store. People need to know they don't need to hide it.

Anne:

Here is my son, Nathan's song, Cry in case you didn't

hear it yet. He wrote for his wife, Heather one day as they were grieving.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0sYEB0OrqY>

Monica Vico

<https://www.hopestreamradio.com/under-way>

(as Leith Channen)

To be honest, this has probably been the hardest grieving time. But it's been complicated in that Andrew died right at the time when our four boys were beginning their own lives, at university and a couple married.

Our very first Christmas, we were set to do pretty much as we always had, it's what everyone wanted. And in the middle of our Christmas Day lunch, one son got word that their apartment had been broken into...

So we had to curtail the celebration and we packed up to go help them deal with that.

As all the boys are some distance away, coming back home and juggling in-law Christmases has proved very challenging, as well.

Now I'm remarried and that's added another layer.

It's been 8 years and I don't feel like we found a new normal. I'm learning to take it year by year and to focus on the gift of the birth of Jesus.

That being said, there are a couple of elements the boys hold sacrosanct: stockings and, of course, food: my homemade Danish pastry and Yule log.

I suppose my advice is to do what you feel you need to do. And, as others have mentioned, don't suppress the grieving when it surfaces. You'll probably sense what your heart needs even though it hurts incredibly.

Anne:

I'm sorry you haven't found a new normal yet, but it will come. I have learned that focusing on the manger is the best thing at Christmas time. And who knows loss more than God does? No one.

I loved what you said at the end of your comment and that's what makes writing this article challenging. Everyone IS different, and what soothes one person may not soothe another. I do think sharing stories of the loved one lost is a good idea because one fear people griever's have is that their loved one will be forgotten.

And when you still miss them, you can be accused of still being in your grief. The thing is, you will always miss them.

When my son, Nathan and Heather lost little Livie in March 2016, it was SO hard. But in his grief he wrote music. And hopefully his music will help others who are hurting.

Monica:

Grieving is an ongoing process though the intensity, duration and frequency change a lot. I think those who are stuck in grief (sadly, that does happen) are those who aren't able to allow life to continue. Grief becomes the framework of their lives rather than a dark and prominent thread in the tapestry of their life.

They may try to tie others down with it too, or at least trigger guilt that they aren't cementing themselves in the loss.

Interestingly, when I was dating my 2nd husband, he was often aware that there was a grieving piece surfacing even before I figured out what was going on. And he always gave me the space I needed or the shoulder to cry on. I don't think I could have married someone who was threatened by Andrew's presence in my life and with my sons.

For Carlos, it's definitely complicated. He's cognizant of the fact that without that death, he wouldn't have me and yet he hurts too, seeing the one he now loves most in this world suffer such a depth of pain. Weird,

huh? That's where knowing that this has been God's plan all along is the only way we can make sense of it and carry such conflicting emotions without being torn apart. Does that make sense?

Anne:

Monica, yes. It makes perfect sense. I know someone who fell in love with someone who had lost his wife. She felt like she was living with the woman's ghost. I know there are some who can get stuck, but it's unfair for some to assume those who are still missing their loved ones who have died, are stuck in their grief. We do not know the pain another carries. And even if we have experienced a similar pain or loss, we still do not know their loss.

Monica:

Anne, that is definitely not a fair assumption. If there's one thing I've learned it is that grieving is unique to each person. I try to remember that when I see a response that doesn't immediately make sense to me.

I also learned that others have differing levels of grief tolerance and so I tried not to tax too many with a burden they didn't really understand. It was unhelpful to ask it of them—for me and for them. A complicated learning curve, for sure!

Alice Taylor CVACC

<https://www.yourtayloredlife.com>

Ten years later I still have a very hard time with the holidays ... especially Christmas.

I would have to say the thing that helps me the most is my husband. He seems to pay more attention to how I'm feeling ... as only a husband can do ... and attempts to diffuse a situation before it happens with a quick hug or distraction. Or he'll say that he misses her too. Something just to let me know that he knows what I'm going through and that he's there for me. At Christmas I buy myself a Swarski angel to hang on the tree. I also allow some time alone with myself, usually before the beginning of a busy day, to simply remember and reflect on the relationship my sister and I shared.

Although not on a holiday, on her birthday and death date I do visit the cemetery and leave a bouquet of two roses on her gravesite and I bring an identical one home for me and place it on my home office desk. I also release two helium balloons at the gravesite. One for her, and one for me.

Anne:

Alice, I love that your husband empathizes with you. And when a spouse doesn't, we have freedom to say, "I am hurting right now."

My husband, Mike has a closet full of hugs for when I hurt. Other times too. But when I'm hurting, being wrapped in someone's arms does help. And hearing he misses our granddaughter too, helps me. It just seeps right into my heart.

I love the things we can do to deal with lost loved ones. We released white balloons for Livie's funeral. Then we did it again a year later and I kissed mine before I let it go. What a comfort it is if we know our loved ones knew Christ. For then, it's just see you in a while.

The pain of never seeing a loved one again would be insurmountable.

Patti Iverson

I cannot fathom losing my twin sister, Peggy. Period. Sure, I believe God would work it out--but both of us think we cannot be on this earth without the other. We live in different states (in more ways than one!) but have still been womb mates for 68 years. She is part of me--more than my leg, or torso--or heart. I read all these things and wonder, hmmm, what would help me then? Sheeeesh! I feel like sobbing just writing this, altho we've discussed it for years. No preparations for some things. And no, I don't wanna be the twin that goes first and does that to her, either.

Sob sigh...

Debby Zaller Stephens, Certified Life Coach/speaker

The thing that helps the most is not forgetting the loss, talking about it and sometimes changing up your traditions.

Anne:

Thanks Debby. Some get comfort from continuing the traditions, and some get comfort from starting new ones. Thanks for your comment.

Debby:

Anne, at some point you may be able to go back to the traditions but one of my deepest losses things could never be what they were, so we started a new normal. It is a family decision based on the loss.

Anne:

Debby, yes. I know what you mean. I feel bad for people who were never able to talk about their loss. I have a good friend and when her baby died, people subtracted themselves from her life. She said it was so painful.

Debby:

Anne, unfortunately our culture passes over grief much too quickly. The phone stops ringing, cards stop, but the grief hasn't. After losing my mother in

June this is where I am. Somewhat lost with little support.

Anne:

Debby, I'm sorry that has been your experience. I found the same thing when I've gone through grief. I guess I just grew to accept it, though I thought it was sad. I used to be part of a group called Harbor when I lived in a different town. It was for people who struggled with addictions, or emotional struggles, even grief. When I went through my sister's murder trial, that group was SO supportive. As well as a homicide group I joined. In those groups I felt accepted and free to share any of my feelings. We all helped each other in that way.

Debby:

Anne, That it is why I have continued my card ministry for over 27 years. People are hurting and need to know someone cares.

Anne:

I think it's a great ministry you are doing. I'm sure people appreciate them. You know I used to do art shows and craft shows and people would pass by and buy other things that were for sale by other vendors. But I believed I was supposed to be there. I created poetry pieces that would resonate with people who were hurting. And there, beside my baskets of poetry pieces sat a box of tissues.

Patti:

Anne, ohhh how lovely poetry speaks to the heart and how very kind to have the tissues at the ready!!! We never had traditions after about age 5 and with our dad gone and mom drunk... well, you know! So we developed our own traditions--all new--all special and good. Yet still, every Christmas I can't help but have a little pity party on some special Dec. eve==blame it on the lights and Hallmark movies 'n music and the tears and memories flow all by myself and it is cathartic for me.

When I lost my folks or siblings I think I just self medicated and stayed away from everybody and hid. Would WANT to do the same today... but who knows? It's ok to need to sort it all out and sob then come together later with loved ones.

Anne:

Exactly my point. Everyone IS different and they deal with things differently. I tend to pull back for a while, regroup and then try to re-enter. I think re-entering is tricky.

Patti:

I know! But God is good and will always pull thru--yup yup we know!

Susan Lyon, proud grandma

Anne, this is more like a list than a comment... What helps me is concentrating on the beauty of the holiday, my mother's nativity set (in the family since I was 2), making her favorite recipe. The sights and smells of Christmas, the tree, fireplace, beautiful decorations, festive candles, they soothed our grief.

Giving thanks for family/friends and focusing on the story of Christ's birth.

Telling my mother I miss her helps me, whether it's heard or not.

Also, giving myself the gift of time alone, perhaps walking downtown on a snowy day, bundled up, looking at holiday store windows, just thinking and/ or praying.

Permission to cry (preferably alone) is healing for me. When the loss was fresh, I couldn't cry at all. The first year of holidays without my mother, I was completely numb, not feeling festive in any way.

I focused on her grandchildren, my children, to get a glimpse of her through them. They were her heart and all I had to do was realize I had her heart right there, in their presence.

I kept that thought close, never letting it go.

Standing in the middle of my bedroom, in the dark...
Just saying “ I miss you, I miss you,” and “God I need
your guidance, I’m not coping”
Personal yes, but the truth!

Stories about her, shared as a family, precious
memories.

Appreciating little blessings and again, just feeling
grateful

Anne:

Thank you, Susan. Very heartfelt. That was beautiful.
And I like how you can enjoy her through the children.

I shared a silly little thing with my grandchildren that
my mom had shared with us when we were kids. And
it felt like I gave them a tiny visit from her.

Nancy Bouwens, Certified Life Coach/Speaker

<https://www.nancybouwens.com>

Anne, I know many have responded relating to the
physical loss of a loved one. Another perspective is
from one who grieves because their family is broken.
There are broken expectations —broken dreams .

Children may be in addiction and while families may
try to be normal, everything seen and unseen is
broken. We had to navigate “normal “ for our other

children and also for the broken one, always reaching, waiting for him to come home from a quick errand so we could continue our holiday. Addictive behavior is like a “living loss” and it creates a vacuum too, different but some of the same.

Anne:

Nancy, what you shared is so important. Loss is loss and it's hard when you see those who are broken and you want so much for them to be okay. I have a friend who ministers to those who have children who are addicted. The pain in that group is so deep.

Living with losses is so difficult. But they are similar as you mentioned, the broken dreams. There is so much pain in the world. And broken dreams. We all have them.

Sometimes our disappointments will eventually lead us to a place of acceptance. But some dreams will never be realized. And we can see evidences of that in people everyday.

I used to marvel at someone I knew who wanted children and did not have them. She lived her life helping others and knowing her dream would not be realized. And yet, she chose to still trust the God who said, "no."

So whether the broken person is dealing with those

broken dreams, the result of a decision they made, a death, an addiction or whatever. That person will still get to a crossroads and have to decide. Is God worth trusting since he could have answered this desire differently? Some of us are know this God personally. We learn that he DOES work all things together for good. And we live long enough to see Him working.

But in scripture it talks about many who died without ever seeing promises fulfilled.

They finished well. And that's what I want. I want my last breath to be one that praises God for what he's given me. And I want to praise him for what he's withheld. For God is good no matter what. His goodness is NOT conditional. Is He good because He does good? NO! God can't be anything but good.

Katharine Trauger, Blogger

<https://homescool.blog> and

<https://theconqueringmom.com>

Having a choice, as a woman whose husband had died at Thanksgiving, of skipping Christmas all together, was a true gift. But given that gift of a choice, having to decide, and deciding that joining family after all was do-able, changed it all. Not feeling forced to participate, but rather, choosing to go on.

Anne:

Thanks, I think that's an important point. To give the griever the freedom to do what they want to do but to do it with grace. The griever can barely deal with their own feelings. Additional ones are too much.

Katharine:

It was, I think, a choice between “selfishly” giving up and zoning out, OR realizing her children and her departed husband’s parents would grieve twice if asked to give up seeing each other, opening gifts, etc. So going the route an “unselfish” mom would be expected to choose became, in the end, the only choice. However, that it was a choice—that it was her choice—was the salve on the entire thing.

The offer given, to spend Christmas with a family of non-celebrators, who had a guest house and offered a warm welcome—the offer, itself, and that it was without obligation—was her ticket to freedom. Choosing to be alone or choosing to bless family, either one, was guilt-free and cost-free. Perhaps that was the best gift.

Anne:

I remember a time in my life when my husband went through intense counseling. We went to Chicago for a few weeks and one friend graciously offered us her apartment. It was such a precious offer. We got to be together as a small family and process the very

difficult things we were going through. It was a refuge.
Us and God. All because she responded to the Lord.
It truly was a wonderful gift.

Kaye Berry

<https://www.facebook.com/MZKayePeoria>

Nothing.

Anne:

That one word tells it all. I just wonder if you are
saying nothing would help at all, Kaye.

Kaye:

Nothing helps at all, just a little time. Once someone
has taken a part of your heart it is never replaced.
Hopefully you give another piece of your heart to
someone.

In my belief system we love many, family, soul mates,
friends, life, and helping others. :)

Anne:

Kaye, yes it certainly feels like some of your heart is
gone.

Kaye:

Hugs to you.

Ellen Richard

I hope this doesn't sound cliché but for me, when I sense deep sadness that comes with grieving, I look hard to the Lord to lift my soul in praise to Him. Singing songs of hope and encouragement really helps me. I lean in hard when the pains grip my heart. I just have to remember and remind myself of His goodness and mercy. It gets me through every time.

Anne:

While I think this eventually happens for some, it's not always right away.

Ellen:

Anne, If I had not chosen to exercise my young "faith muscles" in this way I would have lived in utter despair. I do know what you mean. It isn't the first course my mind went for sure.

Anne:

Ellen, there were times some people have grieved and at the time they didn't believe yet. One of my significant losses was like that. I was only 16 and I did NOT know the Lord as yet. And it was the most devastating thing not knowing him and feeling so alone. And when I think that there are so many people in that position, it is really sad.

For those of us who did know God personally, it is a completely different experience. One of earnest

expectation. But some words we share with a person in grief mean little without that personal relationship.

Ellen:

Anne, that is so true. That kind of hopelessness has to take its toll. Sorry you went through all that. I also had a devastating loss at 18. I believe the Lord used that grief to draw me to him. At 19, I was saved. God bless your efforts Anne. I believe it's important. You my friend, will do the article justice.

Anne:

Ellen, thank you for your encouragement. I was saved as a young adult. And God fulfilled what he said in Psalms 27:14, "When my father and mother forsook me, God took me up."

And he has been my Father ever since. There is nothing like when God draws us to him. Nothing.

Vassi McNally, grateful daughter

Sitting in a room alone looking at photographs of my Mom really helped.

Anne:

I can see how that would help, Vassi. Especially when that time is for sitting with the memories alone. You know you'll see her again.

Looking at her pictures is a very different experience

than it would be for someone who doesn't have that earnest expectation. For the person who does not know God personally, it is pure torture. They know nothing about what the future holds. They can only feel the sting of the loss.

Janice Roberson Aldridge:

Children help, or skipping the holidays and working till I drop

Whitney McKendree Moore

<https://www.RecoveryintheBible.com>

Looking at photographs helps -- any and all -- seems to flow the grief into Gratitude!!

Anne:

Gratitude, yes. And to keep our eyes on the giver of all good gifts. Our loving Father.

Sandra Orellana:

For me it was hard - memories . But the beach helped me because - no snow . No Christmas decorations etc.

Anne:

Yes, I could see how that would be nice. Letting the waves rush in, take some of your sorrow, and rush out again. It sure sounds good to me. I think I'm part bear anyway.

Alicia T. Rust, writer,

LifeSoDaily.com

Faking it, but it's exhausting. I'm open to ideas.

Anne:

I find the best thing is to be with your feelings, even if they are sad. You can't stuff, or they'll just resurface. Then it's bad.

Karen Elizabeth Monteith, writer, fibre artist

<https://www.karenmonteith.com>

Nothing helps at the moment of loss. Being alone with thoughts and memories and knowing that the extreme sadness will eventually diminish is good to know.

Renee Tarantowski Baude

<https://Medium.com/@reneebaude>

Taking quiet time whenever I needed it. I'm no longer curious about things that will upset me.

Elizabeth Wharton

<https://www.thatbeautifultruth.com>

Going somewhere different for a bit. Once for me it was taking my kids to an indoor water park resort for a couple days. Once we took a family trip to visit

friends we rarely see. Not only does the novel change of scenery give some breathing space, but there also aren't memories lurking at every turn.

Denise DiNoto, writer, blogger, advocate

deedescribesblog.wordpress.com

Volunteering helped me get my mind off my loss, and made me feel like I was doing something worthy. I also avoided my triggers, which meant I didn't listen to many Christmas carols the first year after my sister died.

My Prayer

Father, in this moment,
help me clearly see,
the people I have in my life,
—the ones in front of me.

You know I miss my loved ones,
especially today.
Please give them each
a hug from me.
In Jesus' name, I pray.

Leftover Love

What do you do with leftover love,
like the love I reserved for you?

How can I go on just living my life,
when I'm not even sure what to do?

Where can I take all this love I have saved,
and will it stay good through the years?

I suppose I could put it inside of a pot,
and water it well with my tears.

I Saw Him

A poem about Christmas



Photo by [Greyson Joralemon](#) on [Unsplash](#)

I saw him.

No one knew I was there.

I escaped the crowds, the lights, the glitter.

That's not what I wanted this year.

I wanted stillness, I wanted peace.

And where better to find it than with him?

His eyes were on his mother's face.

He was busy being *in* the present.
being the present.

I looked at his tiny fingers.
They would one day touch the sick, heal the lame.
Oh, how I wanted to kiss those fingers.
He wiggled his toes.
His little feet that would one day be called *Blessed*.
For bringing the good news.

I saw his face.
I could tell he had seen God.
It was undeniable.
Such a pure face.
Yet, one that would one day be spit upon.
Slapped without cause.
A face that would show compassion.
A face always lifted to the Father.

I'm glad I came. I can look at presents any time.
Parcels wrapped in brightly colored paper.
But how often can you see a gift
wrapped in swaddling clothes?
A gift God himself picked out for me.

He looks calm. Content. And why not?
He is the product of a Father's love.

Love personified.
Love that gives sacrificially,
like Father like Son.

I smell the fresh hay he lies in.
In a manger, a feeder for animals.
He could have been born in a palace,
with all the riches of the world.
But why? He left all that in heaven.
And if he *had* been born in a palace,
who would he relate to?
The noble? The mighty?

No. He came for those who know they are sick.
For those who see their need.
He came for me. For you.
He came for us.
She holds him gently, as if he'll break.
His tender skin, unblemished, for now.
He will bear the marks of mankind.
He will be pierced.
He will have holes.

I'm free to leave, but somehow I can't.
I won't.

The world is busy.

Lines of traffic, lines of shoppers.

Lines leading nowhere.

I'd rather stay and watch.

I finally feel at home.

I wish I could move in closer,

but that's not for now.

One day, though, I *will* look into his eyes.

I will touch the hands that healed those like me.

I will bow at his feet.

This one who came for the world.

I look up and see the magnificent night light

God hung in the sky.

It shines so brightly, everything is clear.

I breathe in and out, in and out.

With the very breath God gave me.

My heart is full.

I will take this moment with me forever.

You can have all the rest.

It means nothing.

I've seen Jesus.

About the Author

Anne Peterson is a poet, speaker, and published author of 16 books. Among those books are two memoirs. Broken: A Story of Abuse, Survival and Hope, and Always There: Finding God's Comfort Through Loss. To connect with Anne you can go to her website. Or connect with her on Facebook. If you haven't received her free eBook, Helping Someone in Grief: 17 Things You Need to Know, you'll find it on a tab on her website.

Anne's tagline is: *Life is Hard. I write words to make it softer*. Anne is well acquainted with grief, having lost five of her seven family members. And through each and every loss Anne experienced God's abiding presence. No matter what, God never stepped back.

Anne has written articles for Christianity Today, and she's a regular contributor to crosswalk.com.

A Long Journey

Grief is a very long journey,
a journey you take on your own.
And no one can know
all the sorrow you feel,
for it is your sorrow alone.

Grief is an awful intruder,
it comes and it stays
night and day.

And no one can look
at the way that you grieve,
and tell you,
“No, this is the way.”

Other Books by Anne Peterson

Memoirs

Real Love Guaranteed to Last

Broken: A Story of Abuse Survival and Hope

Always There: Finding God's Comfort Through Loss

Poetry Books

Droplets: Poetry for Those in Grief

Inside Myself: Real Poems for Real People

He Whispers: Poetic Talks with God - Volume 1

He Whispers: Poetic Talks with God - Volume 2

He Whispers: Poetic Talks with God - Volume 3

Chills: The Eerie Side of Poetry

Art Books (Collaborations with Jessica Peterson)

Make Believe: A Picture Poetry Book

StoryLines: My Lines of Poetry—Her Lines of Art

Children's Books

Emma's Wish

The Crooked House

Lulu's Lunch

Sonny Follows His Heart