

Holiday Prayer for Bereaved Parents

Adapted from

A Decembered Grief: living with loss while others are celebrating

Lord, help me to define safe boundaries.
Protect me from the clichés, the easy answers, and the tendency of people to say “if I were you”.
Guard me from the “oughts”, the “shoulds”, the “have tos.”
Help me grieve well this day, this season.
You gave me my child for that special time.
Help me not to dash through my grief.
Give me strength to do what, at that moment, I think I can’t do.
Give me the wisdom and courage to say right things, to do right things.
Surprise me again today, with your grace sufficient to my grief.
Amen

’Twas the Month Before Christmas

By Faye McCord (bereaved mother)

from Compassionate Friends (UK)

’Twas the month before Christmas and I dreaded the days,
That I knew I was facing the holiday craze.
The stores were all filled with holiday lights,
In hopes of drawing customers by day and by night.
As others were making their holiday plans,
My heart was breaking—I couldn’t understand.
I had lost my dear child a few years before,
And I knew what my holiday had in store.
When out of nowhere, there arose such a sound,
I sprang to my feet and was looking around,
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash
The sight that I saw took my breath away,
And my tears turned to smiles in the light of the day.
When what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a cluster of butterflies fluttering near.
With beauty and grace they performed a dance,
I knew in a moment this wasn’t by chance.
The hope that they gave me was a sign from above,
That my child was still near me and that I was loved.
The message they brought was my holiday gift,
And I cried when I saw them in spite of myself.
As I knelt closer to get a better view,
One allowed me to pet it—as if it knew—
That I needed the touch of its fragile wings,
To help me get through the holiday scene.
In the days that followed I carried the thought,
Of the message the butterflies left in my heart -
That no matter what happens or what days lie ahead,
Our children are with us—they’re not really dead.
Yes, the message of the butterflies still rings in my ears,
A message of hope—a message so dear.
And I imagined they sang as they flew out of sight,
“To all bereaved parents—We love you tonight!”

14 Spiritual Tips for the Holidays

Adapted from Compassionate Friends (UK)

1. Prepare
2. Unplug the Christmas mania
3. Celebrate sensitively
4. Give the generous gift of forgiveness.
Forgive yourself or anyone you believe might be responsible in some way for the death. Forgive those who you believed failed you. Forgive the clumsy whose words do more to hurt than to soothe. Forgive God if you believe God took your child.
5. Give yourself permission to say “no thanks” or “I’ll pass”
6. Journal your grief—it’s the only way to see how far you’ve come when you think you’re not moving forward
7. Nap
You are new in the world in this way
8. Network with other grieverers.
Remember the old Jewish proverb—those who suffer alone suffer most
9. Nurture yourself
Think of 3 things you could do to be kind to yourself over the holidays
10. Remain open to seasonal surprises
11. Remember realistically
The Jewish term “hesped” means balanced memories - making the dead child a saint leads to parental guilt
12. Say your child’s name
13. Visit the cemetery or scattering ground
14. Beware of numbing activities - excess, alcohol

Tips for the Season

- ☞ Buy a beautiful Christmas candle and light it each day through December. It can be a daily, silent reminder of your child and, maybe, make the whole house seem just a little bit warmer.
- ☞ Plan your shopping trips ahead of time or try creative alternatives. Try shopping at a different mall and go early in the day, before bumping into all those merry shoppers.
- ☞ Enlist the help of others in wrapping your gifts. Many friends would love to help but need to be asked.
- ☞ Consider changing your traditional family Christmas letter. Feel free to mention your loss. You may feel good sharing your feelings and others may benefit from hearing it as a reminder of the “true meaning of Christmas”.
- ☞ Give yourself permission to change family traditions. Doing things differently this year may help to ward off some bad memories or expectations.
- ☞ Try a new idea when you are getting ready to hang up Christmas stockings. Go ahead and hang one up for your child. Encourage each family member to write a note to the child that can be read on Christmas Eve. A flower placed in the stocking for Christmas morning is a sweet sight.
- ☞ Determine to do one special thing for someone else in December. Maybe you know someone who is hurting like you or a lonely neighbor who could use a short visit. Perhaps you could make cookies to give away, pick out a special card to send or take a plant to someone.
- ☞ Contribute to your favorite charity in your child’s name.
- ☞ Pamper yourself this month. Be determined to buy yourself a present.
- ☞ Plan on taking time to cry. It is normal to have to cry during the holidays. Holidays intensify all emotions - why should your loss be any different?