

How to Deal with Loss During the Holidays and Beyond

The holidays are filled with both joy and grief. Learn how to embrace both.

By Guest Contributor Lisa Donohue, CLC

Silent night, Holy night. All is calm...

Well, maybe not calm and sometimes not bright. In the silence we learn to recognize that we feel, sometimes allowing memories or losses to resurface in ways unimaginable.

The 2020/21 isolating sound of silence proved to be deafening, disruptive, and hopelessly persistent, exposing deep fears, unmet longings, and disengaged relationships screaming for attention far more personal than 'likes.' Simon and Garfunkel sang it well over 50 years ago.

"And in the naked light I saw,

Ten thousand people maybe more

People talking without speaking

People hearing without listening

People writing songs that voices never share

And no one dared

Disturb the sound of silence..."

... "Fools, said I, you do not know

Silence like a cancer grows..." (Lyrics by Art Garfunkel, The Sound of Silence)

THE ASSORTMENT OF LOSS HAS BEEN STAGGERING.

We lost those we love to disease and natural causes. Add to that the inability to hug and comfort others, sit bedside, or grieve together. We lost the grace of community, the acknowledgment of pain, and time to honor a life well lived. Gone is our loved one's place in our life and their role in our relationships. Loss upon loss without the opportunity to share it with others.

We lost the ability to plan with confidence, to hope without fear, to dream without skepticism. We lost control of our liberties and our sense of safety. We lost jobs and with that we lost our picture of the future.

Why does acknowledging loss feel so dangerous and grieving somewhat pointless?

Culturally, we've learned to *get over it*, whatever the painful "it" is. Podcasts, studies, lists, taking care of others instead of self, and over commitments litter grief's healing groundwork.

Ironically, where grief is submerged it grows silently, providing the nourishing, fertile ground where void and inner sadness flourish. Because grief is **somatic**, meaning that it lives in our body physically not just emotionally, *suppressed* grief will balance itself, often to a state of numbness. Mild depression, for example, can be a symptom of unexpressed grief.

But in the same way, *expressed and healthy grieving provides the path back to experiencing the abundant life.*

So how do we move into **healthy grieving**?

1. Acknowledge your loss.

Validate significance or the void left behind by bringing your loss to an active place of acknowledgement.

Questions one might ask to help retrieve the loss from its safe and hidden place include: What or whom do I miss? How does this loss impact my daily/spiritual life? How did this loss change my sense of self or worth or security? When do I experience this loss most greatly?

2. Allow yourself to feel the loss.

Genuine grief may come in very small layers over a very long period. This is normal. Those who've lost a loved one may experience grief in waves, sometimes crashing and sometimes in rhythm with certain hours of the day, memories, or holidays. This is also normal.

Life is fragile and your feelings of loss are unique, but you're not alone.

Questions that aid in feeling the loss might include: What made this relationship special? How does this change affect my sense of belonging or connection? What was the positive or negative change that has most disturbed my sense of being? What makes me angry/sad/fearful/joyful?

3. Ask for help.

Perhaps the most therapeutic of all steps is the strength to seek care.

Often family and friends are too close and cannot provide the strength to hold your sadness without wanting to fix it. They may even deny your pain as a means of suppressing their own ("You're fine.")

Seeking professional care from a Christian counselor, life coach, or care provider brings safety, boundaries, and surprising grace. Most have walked through much suffering as well and are trained to hold your story with dignity.

4. Anticipate the cloud to lift.

In his book, *Gentle and Lowly*, Dane Ortlund reminds us that "For those not in Christ, this life is the best it will ever get. For those in Christ, for whom Ephesians 2:7 is written is the eternal vista just around the next bend in the road, this life is the worst it will ever get."

This life *is* hard. Loss *is* painful, and grief *is* exhausting. But Scripture reminds us that *For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven...*

A time to be born and a time to die.

A time to plant and a time to harvest.

A time to kill and a time to heal.

A time to cry and a time to laugh.

A time to grieve and a time to dance.

Grief is the bridge that allows us to pass from one place to the next, a gentle movement of hope. And as promised, one day soon, we'll experience an eternity where all *is* calm, and all *is* bright.

To hear Lisa and the Hardin's discuss this topic and others, [click here](#) to subscribe to our **Youtube Channel**.

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