

**Guidelines for Grieving:
Balancing Sadness with Self-Care**
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The following guidelines have been adapted from a workshop I created on grieving. They have helped me through my personal grieving, and I have used them professionally as well. My hope and prayer is that they will help you to enter into the important work of grief as you heal.

- 1) Grieving takes a lot of energy. Therefore be gentle with yourself. Treat yourself like you would treat a friend...be kind to yourself. **Try this today:** write out "I am a precious child of God" (or something like that) and place it on the mirror in your bathroom or bedroom. Then read it every day. This may help you to be gentle with yourself.
- 2) Use your time wisely. Spend time with people who listen and validate your feelings, and give yourself permission to not spend time with those who don't know what to say or those who say insensitive things. **Try these today:** call a friend who will listen and talk with him or her. Let them listen to you and let them validate you. Also, give yourself permission to not talk with somebody who doesn't understand.
- 3) Create time and space to grieve. Set aside a specific amount of time (half an hour, an hour, a day at a retreat center, etc) and really get in touch with your feelings. Let the tears come. Perhaps use photos, videos, etc. to prompt the feelings if you need to. Jesus cried and He understands the need to cry and the need to let go. But, He has also redeemed the entire grief process. He has been through this so you don't have to do it alone. Christ desires that we grieve with Him. He will help us to heal our grieving. **Try this today:** depending on your needs, look at your calendar and call a retreat center to set aside time with the Lord and yourself. Here are some local retreat centers: St. John's Guest House: 363-2573 or Christ the King Retreat Center in Buffalo: (763) 682-1394. If you go on a day retreat or overnight one bring this sheet with you to think about things you can do.
- 4) Remember a good thing that your loved one would want for you. So many times when I was grieving the loss of my mom (in 1995) or my dad (in 2005) I would remind myself: "what would mom want for me right now?" or, "what would dad want for me right now?" Because we believe our loved ones are with God we know that our loved ones would want us to feel the feelings of grief but not get consumed by those feelings. Our loved ones would want us to know that faith tells us we will see them again and that in the meantime God can heal us. **Try this today:** when you are sad, tell yourself it is okay to be sad; it is ok to cry. Then remind yourself of a good thing that your loved one would want for you.

- 5) God can turn our grief into gratitude. This may take time, but it is true. Rom 8:28 tells us that all things work for the good for those who love God. If this is the first time reading that, please re-read it and memorize it. God loves us so much that by the power of the Holy Spirit, God will heal our grieving and will turn it into something that will work for the good. God can do this in many different ways. After there has been healing in life, we can expect that the Holy Spirit will bring somebody into our lives who are grieving. When that happens and we have had some healing, we can be a source of hope for them because we have gone through that healing journey already. **Try this today:** read Romans 8:28 and write down what it means for you in your grieving.
- 6) Make time to do things you *used* to like to do. I love Martial Arts, and I try to go every Thursday evening: it is my “group therapy.” After my dad died in Nov. of 2005, Thursday night came, and out of habit I went. After coming home my wife asked me “did you have a good time?” After a long pause I said, “No, I didn’t, but I went.” At certain times in the grieving process we have to do the things we used to like to do before our grieving started. But, we have to balance that out with self-care as well, and it is a tricky balance. But as we go through the grieving process this can help. **Try this today:** take a moment to list some of the things you used to like to do before your grieving started and pray about which ones the Holy Spirit wants you to do this week or this day:
- 7) Watch the way you view yourself. You are not the problem; you are precious. Never make yourself the problem. Don’t believe any lies about yourself, and don’t ever tell yourself any lies. We all talk to our selves; that is normal. But we need to ask: are these positive or negative statements? Some common negative self-statements would be: “how could you be so stupid?” or beating yourself up with regrets (“if only I had told her before she died . . .”). If you are saying these negative things, please stop. Then, start telling yourself some positive things about who you are: you are God’s child, God loves you, God cares for you, you are good and beautiful because God created you good and beautifully, etc. **Try this today:** Tell yourself something positive right now! Also, if you use any negative statements (as listed above) please stop those today; they are not helping your healing, and they may indicate that you need to do more grief work.
- 8) Stay in the power of the present. Our Christian faith is present and future oriented. Of course the past is powerful and we need to remember the past to grieve it. But we need to avoid being owned by the past (being consumed by remembering). **Try this today:** when you find yourself being owned by the past, place your hand on your heart and tell yourself the date, the time, and where you are. Remind yourself that you are God’s child and that the Holy Spirit can heal the past and bring good from it. Then, call a friend who will validate your pain. Or write out your pain, knowing that Christ can heal it.
- 9) Laugh, laugh, laugh, and then chuckle a little. When we laugh the brain releases endorphins, which are morphine-like chemicals that our brain gives us! We need to balance the heaviness of grieve with laughter. **Try this today:** pull out some funny photos of your loved ones and let the laughter come. If the tears come that is ok too. Humans can feel joy and sadness at the same time.

- 10) Know what you can and can't control. You can't control the grieving process, but you can control what you eat, drink, etc. It is tempting to try to "numb" our difficult feelings with alcohol, drugs, misplaced anger, etc. But when we follow some of these grieving-guidelines we will need to numb our feelings less. **Try this today:** if you are drinking or numbing your feelings of sadness too much talk to somebody you trust; don't wait. God, who loves you tremendously, wants to heal you.

- 11) Ask for help when you need it. There are trained professionals who can help you with the healing process. Asking for help is a good thing, and God desires to bring healing in your life. The grieving happened in relationship so the healing will happen in relationship. Seek out a relationship that can provide healing if you need it.

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