



Christmas with a New Normal

By Nancy Shonamon, Christian School Representative

This year, Christmas will be different in so many ways. It was just a couple of months ago when I was heading east on I-70 toward the Midwest with a broken heart. Over the years, I have lost count of how many times I have taken this trip. Family holidays, weddings, graduations, births, and annual vacations all hold rich memories for our family. However, this time it hurts. I will be arriving at my brother's house, greeting his family, greeting his dog, but my brother will not be there. The dynamics of a worldwide pandemic have forever changed the dynamics of our family.

Many people have lost loved ones. The world continues to grieve at the unrest or memories of how things used to be. It is safe to say there are very few people who have not been affected by a sense of loss this year. Once we look past the initial numbness, there comes a point where we seek to establish a "new normal." Holidays can be the most sensitive time for those managing grief. For some people, it may be almost unbearable to find any sense of "normal."

The world often looks to us, as followers of Christ, for answers during moments of heartbreak. In our own grief, how do we face the challenges of loss during the holiday season? How do we take care of ourselves with our personal sense of loss yet reach out with the love of Christ to those who are hurting around us? Galatians 6:2 encourages us to "Stoop down and reach out to those who are oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ's law" (*The Message*).

Helping to bear someone else's burden provides a connection that often holds us together as human beings. This sense of community serves to strengthen us and provides a path for us to walk through our

personal grief processes. This holiday season, I challenge you to be intentional about creating a “new normal.”

Practical Ideas

- Remember, you are not alone in your grief. Reach out to others who have lost loved ones. Send a note, share a memory, or gift them with a tender moment to sit and reflect about their loved one in a positive way.
- Look for a chance to serve or give to someone in need. Inevitably, when we set aside our pain for a moment and give to someone who is struggling, there is a healing balm that begins to break through the dark places in our own hearts, bringing a sense of hope and awareness of the goodness still left in this world. Self-pity can often be seen in a better light when we look at the dynamics of those hurting around us.
- Remembering our loved ones through traditions may hurt, but leaning into the grief and sharing moments with others is healthy even when it may not feel good at the time.
- Be sensitive to the grieving process. Individuals process the sense of loss differently. Some people may need a simple visit that is lighthearted to fill up a moment. Others may need to cry on a shoulder. Allowing people to grieve in their own way is a dynamic gift to give.
- Create new traditions. Hang a memorial ornament on your tree. Adopt a needy family. Look for others who now find themselves alone at Christmas and invite them to your family gathering. We now have a tradition of making an annual donation or gift to a charitable cause in memory of our loved ones who have departed.

A sense of appreciation for friendships and relationships often creates the connection that holds us together as human beings. Being intentional about celebrating these connections is an incredible avenue to fighting the loneliness and isolation a loss can often bring. Our world will be forever changed by the current dynamics in the world. May we rise to the challenge of bringing a renewed health and healing by embracing a new normal and loving those around us.

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