

## What Your Grieving Friend Wants This Christmas

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As I head toward my second Christmas as a widower I now know the challenges begin with Halloween.

Yes, Halloween. Surprise! Filled with happy “couple” memories, it’s a tough day for a lot of widows and widowers.

Followed by Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year’s. One blow after another, in overlapping, unrelenting succession. Pummeling an already broken heart. A heart that mends to one degree or another but never heals. Not completely.

Again and again, there’s the realization that, on earth, the best is not yet to come. The best has come. And is gone.

For a widow or widower, for anyone who is grieving, no matter how happy the occasion, the gathering, the event, there can be the unalterable fact it would be so much happier if . . .

He had lived.

She had lived.

The first days, weeks and months after the death of a spouse can be a time of complete numbness. Shock. Disbelief.

A blur.

And the years that follow, no matter how many years may follow, can be a time of incompleteness. The two *did* become one, in so many, many ways. Then “we” is “I.”

It still astounds me how little I knew about widowhood before Monica died of uterine cancer in January 2013. Just as she had time to prepare for her death—and did—I had time to prepare for her dying. And did.

But didn’t. I suppose I couldn’t, not really, because I simply didn’t know what it was like. What, in some ways, would always be like.

Thanks be to God, I have a loving and supportive family. Work I’m good at and value. Health. Financial stability. A mortgage-free home. And on and on. But . . .

One description I’ve heard is that life becomes like a nutritious meal that has no salt. No spice. Or like a can of pop, of soda, that’s lost its fizz.

I don’t say this because I want to whine. I try to limit my whining to prayer. (“What were you *thinking*, God!”)

I say this because those who aren’t widowed don’t know what this is like and so when they want to help a loved one they’re unsure of what to do . . . or not do.

With that in mind, a few suggestions for this Christmas:

--Invite me to the gathering even if I may not be able to come. Accept the fact that I may want to come but on that day, that evening, it’s simply too much. I may call, e-mail or text at the last minute to tell you I just can’t leave my house. Your gracious acceptance of that helps me tremendously. Prodding or pushing guilt-buttons don’t.

--Please, please, please don’t act as if my loved one never existed. Yes, in your eyes, he may have died a long time ago. In my eyes, it seems like both a long time ago and only yesterday. Use her name. Tell me stories about her. Share happy memories.

--Your stories and memories may make me cry. Let me. I do that a lot, especially around Christmas. If I do it with you it means I trust you. I know it may make you uncomfortable. Please know my being able to do that with you may bring me great comfort. It may be just what I needed for Christmas this year.

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