

Holidays hurt, but grieving Christians can find solace in God

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GEORGETOWN—Loss of a loved one through death creates trauma, but emotions surrounding that loss can be particularly close to the surface during the holidays.

In preparation for this stressful time, [First Baptist Church in Georgetown](#) offered a “Surviving the Holidays” GriefShare meeting to help.

JoAnn Goldston searched in vain for a biblically based grief support group after her husband died more than a dozen years ago. She began her own group at First Baptist Church in Georgetown—a program that has developed into the church’s GriefShare ministry.
(PHOTO/George Henson)

“Your grief is different; it’s individualistic,” Facilitator Sharon Kelley told participants. “Someone can understand your grief, but they can’t know where you are in your grief.”

Participants viewed a video with [insights](#) about why the holidays are tough times. It cautioned them not to avoid holiday pain, provided instructions on how to plan for the holiday season and offered the hope of healing through relationships—especially a relationship with God. The presentation also highlighted warning signs, such as thoughts of suicide.

“Anytime there is a pattern of suicidal thinking, talk to someone, because right now the only one you’re talking to is yourself, and you’re not giving very good advice,” participants heard.

To fend off such thoughts, face the fact that the holidays will be hard and will hurt; this will offset panic when the bad days arrive because they are expected.

Grieving people should not fake that everything is fine, participants learned. “Some Christians treat Christmas like Halloween. They put on a mask,” which robs the person of care and prayer of friends and family who believe everything is fine.

In planning for Christmas, prioritize what “you need for it to really be Christmas,” participants were instructed. Cut back on social engagements if desired, and also farm-out some jobs if the schedule becomes overwhelming.

Some may find a visit with family more tolerable when scheduled before or after the holiday rather than on the special day. That way, the grieving person does not feel the burden of performing for others on the holiday, participants were counseled.

Healing takes time. “It might not be a good holiday the first year. That’s

OK,” participants learned.

The GriefShare ministry at First Baptist Church in Georgetown had its genesis more than a dozen years ago when JoAnn Goldston’s husband died. She looked around for support but found no biblically based help. She began her own group at the church calling it “Coming Alongside” that met twice a year.

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JoAnn Goldston talks about GriefShare.

A few years later, Church Initiative came out with the [GriefShare](#) program, and Goldston immediately was interested because the video format made it accessible for many to help in the ministry.

This year, 44 people participated in the three meetings. In addition to the meetings, participants also have daily devotionals to help them between meetings. When they meet, participants share how God has been working with them. Then they watch a video and discuss it in small groups.

More people from outside the church are beginning to join the group, Goldston said.

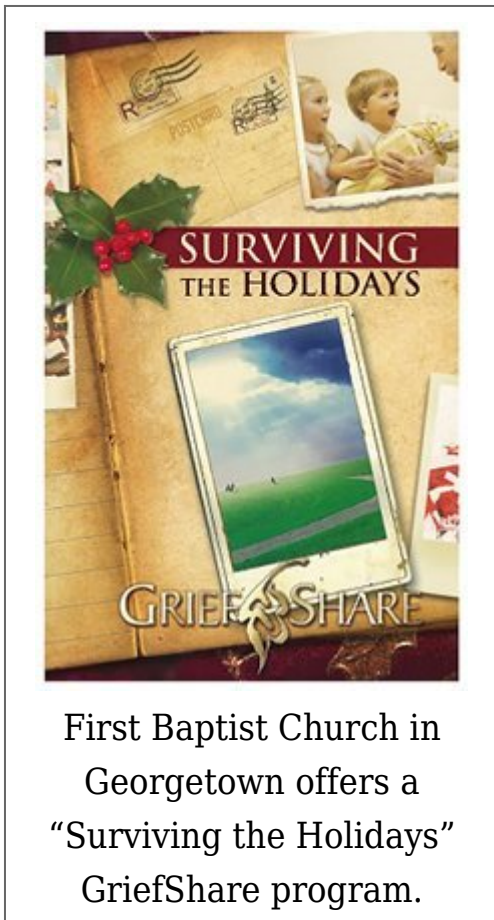
“There are four tasks we enable the members with,” she explained. One of them, and this is huge, is to acknowledge the person has indeed died and will not come back.”

Many people relate how they hear a door open and expect the person to come walking down the hall, or when they go on a trip sit down to write them a note.

“Another thing is to recognize the emotions they are having, learn some ways to deal with them and that they all go back to God. So many people, especially Christians, will deny anger. And anger is very much a part of it.

There has been a great loss. There has been a great pain. There's going to be anger," Goldston explained. "We work with them on adjusting to different losses."

For example, she said if someone's child dies, that child might have been the one in the household who always set the table. Without their recognizing it, mealtime can become a time of great stress.



"Spouses have to learn to deal with there is no one to sew a button on, no one to do the grocery shopping, no one to bring the garbage can in," Goldston continued.

"And the last step is being able to move forward, to recognize they will have a new identity. They will not be the same person they were before the loss. Chances are very good they will be even better—that God will make them stronger and more compassionate and more sensitive and more of

just anything you can think of. He just improves on the model.”

The holidays are a time of testing, Goldston admitted.

“For the holidays, expect that it’s going to hurt. It’s really going to hurt because there is so much emotion connected with holidays. And it’s not just Christmas and Thanksgiving—it’s birthdays, it’s anniversaries, and it’s the date of the loss,” she pointed out. “There are lots of dates that are different because of the emotions connected with them.”

But as the participant learned, God is there for solace.

“If you already have a relationship with God, the holidays are an opportunity to grow closer to him. Tell him what you are feeling,” said Paul David Tripp, a minister from Philadelphia.

“The person in pain and the person who is not presently in pain are exactly the same person—both are completely dependent on God for their life. One is just much more aware of the fact.”

Editor’s Note: For additional resources, visit <http://www.mastersincounseling.org/loss-grief-bereavement.html>