

five ways to honor

GRIEF THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

By Stephanie Cochrane




A DISCLAIMER:

Grief is not a disease to be cured
nor an injury to be numbed.

This is not a prescription.

Instead, I hope you'll think of it
like a booth at a farmer's market.

Take what you think will be good
and nourishing, and pass by the
rest.



1. TALK ABOUT THEM

This doesn't come as naturally as we sometimes expect. There are lots of reasons I don't talk about my brother, especially at this time of year. People are trying to celebrate. They don't want to hear about death, I tell myself.

In fairness, maybe a holiday party isn't the best time for a three hour sob session. But that's not usually what I'm holding back. It's the simple things.

"This was Jeff's favorite pie," or "Let's play Scrabble. He was so good at it."

I keep quiet, not wanting to dampen the mood. But healing doesn't happen if we pretend no harm was done.

Say your person's name. Say how much you miss them, how you ache to share another meal.

When you stand back and admire your tree, say how much they would've loved it. Or laugh because they hated Christmas time.

Tell the old stories. Remember out loud, with other people in the room to hear. Your person is a part of you forever. It's okay to talk about them accordingly.

2. DON'T TALK ABOUT THEM

We're designed to mourn in community. We are also designed for joy. Learning to hold that tension is the lifelong work of grieving.

There are days when everything from salting the eggs to the show we watch before bedtime compels me to share a Jeff story. Other days I don't think of him at all.

Have reliable, gentle listeners who will be present *when you want to talk*. Otherwise, don't force it. You don't have to talk about them to prove your love.

You are allowed to celebrate guilt-free. It does not diminish your grief, and it does not reduce your person's value.

Conversely, sometimes we need to grieve in solitude, and that's okay too.

3. PLAN TO MOURN

Little known fact: my brother died on my husband's birthday. Trevor loves a party, so you can see how that day is a tricky one. Here's how I navigate that: I plan to mourn.

I set aside time early in the day to go through old photos, to cry, to reach out to my parents, to be alone, and anything else that feels honoring.

I don't try to corral my emotions. I feel them as fully as they want to be felt. Then I move into the rest of the day, able to celebrate Trevor's life with real joy.

Intentionally making space to mourn on that significant day makes the later celebration feel more authentic. It also keeps me from being overcome with grief when I'm supposed to be singing Happy Birthday.

You can expect your grief to blindsides you at some point during this season. Instead of fighting it off, pre-plan some time to invite it in.

4. CHECK YOUR EXPECTATIONS

You may have thought the work Christmas party would be no big deal this year, but then you couldn't bring yourself to attend. Or maybe you went, had a rip-roaring good time, and later felt overwhelmed by guilt.

It's jolting when our own grief doesn't show up the way we expect.

Maybe no one at church remembers that you're grieving this season, and you feel hurt and forgotten. Maybe EVERYONE remembers and you feel like a caged animal being observed for science.

When my brother died, one friend texted me every few days for weeks afterward, and another didn't bring it up at all for months. They respond differently to tragedy, but they both love me deeply.

For yourself, and for others, dole out some grace.

Don't freak out if you don't feel what you expect to feel, and don't be too judgey if others don't respond the way you expect them to respond. Even grievers don't know what to do with their grief.

5. BE HONEST



Death feels so foreign, so impossible, because we're not made for it. It muddles our brains and weakens our spirits.

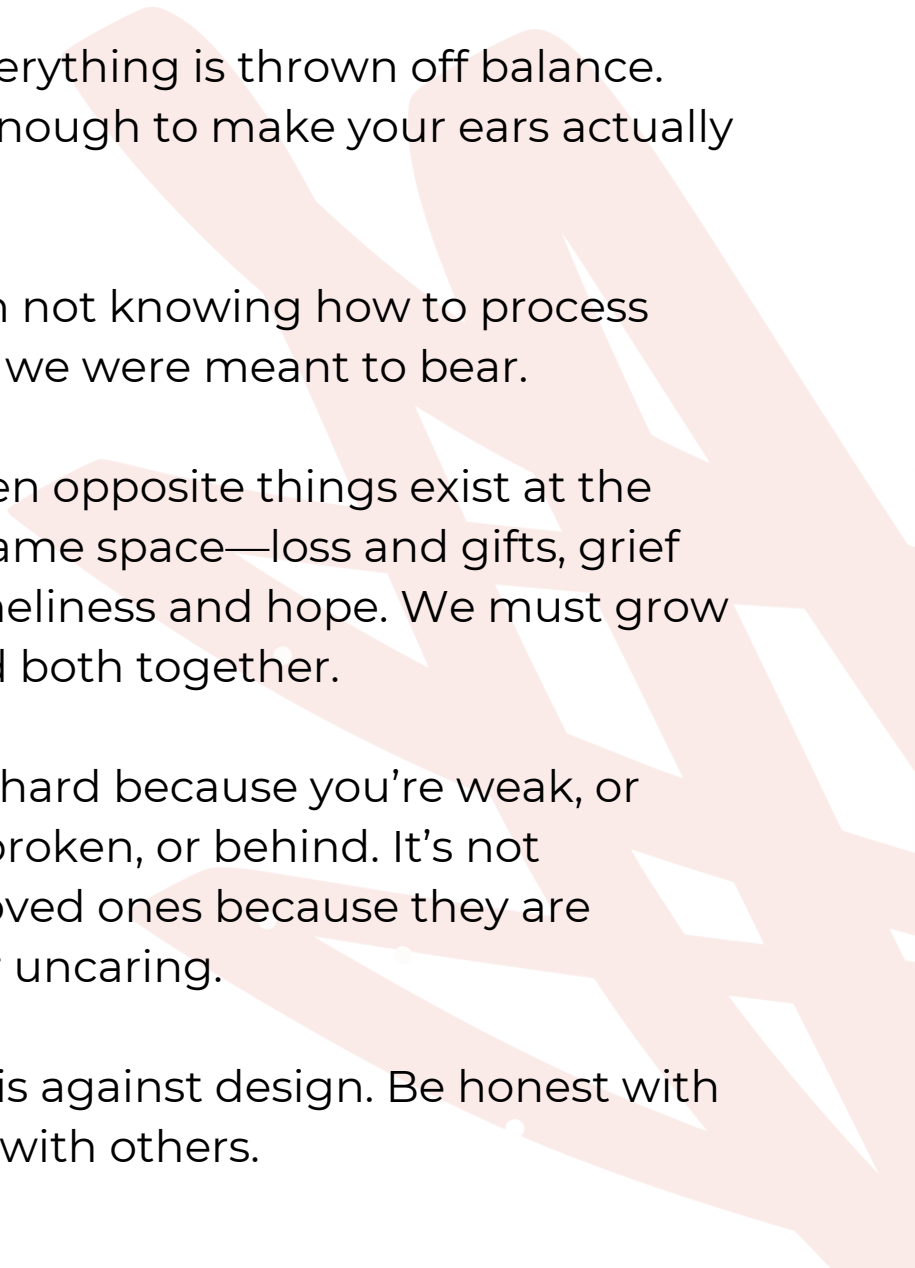
Like losing a leg, everything is thrown off balance. The dissonance is enough to make your ears actually ring.

There's no shame in not knowing how to process loss. It is more than we were meant to bear.

This is a season when opposite things exist at the same time, in the same space—loss and gifts, grief and celebration, loneliness and hope. We must grow our capacity to hold both together.

This is hard. It's not hard because you're weak, or unenlightened, or broken, or behind. It's not awkward for your loved ones because they are callous or distant or uncaring.

It's hard because it is against design. Be honest with yourself. Be honest with others.



Hi there. I'm Steph.

I'm a western small town girl
trying to find my way
through the DFW metroplex.

I spend most days doing a
little writing, a little cooking,
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THANK YOU FOR READING.



I'd love to hear from you!
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