

Caring for families

# Along The Way

Helping you understand your journey through grief.

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# A Meaningful Christmas ....

By Dr. Bill Webster

I realize for many of you, this past year has brought an unexpected twist in your life journey. I am always very conscious that when someone you care about dies, your world changes. For you, the world looks and feels different, and with it this Christmas. For everyone else, it is the season to be jolly; it's the most wonderful time of the year. But you probably don't feel the same about your world this Christmas.

I have three gifts to give you for a grieving Christmas. The first is for you, the second has to do with your loved one, and the third concerns your family and friends.

My first gift is for you. Maybe you are facing this Christmas season with dread. Here are a few suggestions:

- Recognize this Christmas is different.
- Plan ahead. Decide what you want to do. Act rather than react.
- Re-examine your priorities.
- Avoid "shoulds" and "oughts."
- Make the changes you think are best.
- Take responsibility for your own happiness.

*Create a special tribute to your loved one. Involve children in this if you can.*

- Look after yourself. Don't abandon healthy habits.
- Be compassionate with yourself if things are not perfect this year.

The next gift focuses on your loved one. They may be gone, but I am sure they will be very much on your mind:

- Acknowledge your loved one's presence.
- Create a special tribute to your loved one. Involve children in this if you can.
- Light a memorial candle to remember them at this season.
- Be honest about your feelings, and be sensitive to what they are trying to say.





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- Don't be afraid to relive your memories.
- Let the light of the years shine on the event rather than letting the event cast its shadow on the years.

My final gift has to do with others around you like family and friends, who are probably grieving too:

- Balance solitude and sociability.
- Ask for and accept help.
- Set differences aside.
- Learn to say "No."
- Take a break from things.
- Try to find something positive in your life.
- Take care of any children involved.
- Try to do something to help someone else who is hurting.
- Remember, there will be other Christmases.

Finally we need to face the future with hope. There's a little verse in the Christmas story of the Wise Men that often goes unnoticed. After finding the baby in Bethlehem, they returned home "by a different route." They had to find a different road forward than the way they had come. When you have experienced bereavement, you suddenly find life has taken on a whole new direction. And we find ourselves and our lives having to go on in a whole new direction. Sometimes in life we have to find new ways to get to where we need to be.

Perhaps you face this Christmas with some apprehension, and, this year, you feel like the light has gone out of your life. Nothing seems quite right, and you wonder if you have the strength to go on. But my friends, no matter how dark your situation, remember one thing: there is not enough darkness

in the whole universe to hide the light of even one candle. Even when there is a flicker of hope, that spark overcomes the gloom. It may not banish it completely, but it is never all dark as long as there remains one glimmer of hope.

So come on, and light a candle. Light a candle in memory of your loved one, but also light a candle for yourself ... to indicate that you believe there is hope for you to find your way through the darkness, even though life has taken an unwelcome turn and you are heading home in a different direction than the one you expected or even wanted.

So, this Christmas season, hold on to what is important.

- Celebrate the person's life as well as acknowledge their death.
- Don't allow looking back at the past to spoil what you have in the present.
- Enjoy what you have as well as grieving what you've lost.
- Believe there are reasons to go on, even though you may not see what they are right now.
- Believe in people, and in life, in love and laughter, and in hope!
- Believe in yourself, that your determination will help get you through.
- Believe that no matter how difficult your circumstances that life is important and can still be meaningful.
- Believe in a brighter tomorrow, and in possibilities beyond even your bravest dreams.

You will be surprised how that flickering flame of hope will continue to burn, even though it may not be easy. Your supply of strength and patience may seem low, but hang in, because no matter what has shattered your hopes, your dreams or even broken your heart, you are not beyond repair.



# ... And a Better New Year



By Dr. Bill Webster

I don't do New Year's resolutions. I just don't have the will-power. Besides, the moment you "blow it" (which is usually by January 2), you give up on your resolutions, and slip back into more of the "same old, same old." I prefer to set goals. Things I want to accomplish in 2017. Goals are something you can keep working towards.

For you, maybe this past year has brought many changes. Sometimes after a loss, the way we see everything in our world changes. At times we may even regard ourselves differently. But we have to be careful.

Not too long ago, I was having trouble with my eyes. I just couldn't seem to focus on the newspaper, and everything seemed just a little foggy. I made an appointment with my ophthalmologist, who checked my eyes and pronounced all was well. When I told him about my problem, he took my glasses, examined the lenses through a light, squirted some liquid from a spray bottle, and cleaned them with a tissue. Then he put the glasses back on my face.

Wow, everything looked so clear! You see the trouble wasn't with my eyes or my vision, the problem was the filters through which I

was seeing my world. And often after suffering through bereavement, sometimes the way we see the problem is the problem.

The real problem is not the circumstances, but how we view these situations. Sometimes we need to check the glasses through which we look at our world. Are the "spectacles" through which you filter your view of things giving you an accurate picture? What's your vision for 2017; the goals you want to reach; the accomplishments you want to fulfil; the places you want to go?

But you may ask, how do I set goals for this new year? Let's see if we can make it easier. One of Stephen Covey's "7 Habits of Highly Effective People" is: begin with the goal in mind.

Imagine where you want yourself to be one year from now in the various aspects and compartments of your life, and then work back setting manageable objectives that will enable you to reach your desired goals.

Write these intentions down on paper. What would 2017 have to look like to make it "better" for you? What personal goals and ambitions would you like to reach? What would you have to do to bring about that happy outcome? How about family? What would

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bring the people closer and make the next festive season one of thanksgiving?

Only you can determine the things you write down on that paper. But when you have done it, you have a vision. You have established goals, and now you must set objectives by which, step by step, day by day throughout 2017, you can build towards making that vision a reality.

I find my own goals are getting more personal, and, I like to think, more focused on what is really important in life.

- My goal is to listen more.
- My goal is to offer more random acts of kindness. More notes left on the counter for my wife, or frequent words of appreciation to people like checkout counter staff, or (and I mean no disrespect) the "little people" in life who far too often are neglected, mistreated or unappreciated. It makes their day ... and it also makes mine.
- My goal is to laugh more. Let's send more email cartoons, clever articles or jokes to each other. We all need a good laugh now and then.

• I would like to take more chances, and not play it "safe." I also want to travel lighter in life.

• "Someday" and "one of these days" are losing their grip on my vocabulary. If it's worth seeing, hearing or doing, I want to see and hear and do it now. Why wait, when it may never happen if you do.

• My goal is to show a cheerful disposition. Try to lift people's spirits, or surround yourself with people who have a knack of doing that for you.

• Whenever possible, make life a pattern of experiences to savour, not to endure.

Even though I probably have more time to look back on than to look forward to in my life, I'm going to try to live 2017 as if it were my last, while doing everything I can to ensure that it isn't. For people who take that attitude, the best is always yet to come.

As Peter Drucker puts it: "The best way to predict the future is to create it."

And if you do, you will have a better new year.

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