A GUIDE FOR HARD SEASONS

When the Holidays Feel Heavy

A gentle guide for grieving and weary hearts

Simplify to Glorify

A Note Before You Begin

If you are holding this guide, the holidays may feel more like something to survive than something to celebrate this year. Maybe someone you love is missing from the table, or maybe a heaviness has settled over you that you cannot explain.

The music and the lights keep arriving right on schedule, even when your heart is not ready for any of it. Nothing about this season requires you to feel merry, and your sadness does not mean your faith has failed.

This guide is small on purpose, so you can pick it up on a hard afternoon and set it down again. There is no right order for these pages, and there is no need to finish them before Christmas comes.

You do not have to hide your sadness when you come before God. He knows what you are carrying, and you can bring it to Him honestly in prayer.

What This Season Is Allowed to Be

- It is okay if this year looks smaller and quieter than the years that came before it.
- You are allowed to leave a gathering early without explaining your reasons to anyone there.
- Tears at the table or in the store aisle do not mean something is wrong with you.
- Saying no to an invitation is not the same as saying no to the people you love.
- Some traditions can rest this year, and they will still be waiting if you want them later.
- Feeling nothing at all is real too, and God is not disappointed in you when you feel numb.

Anna, Who Was There

Luke tells us about Anna, a widow who was in the temple when Mary and Joseph brought the child Jesus. She had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. Scripture does not tell us what those early years of loss felt like for her.

What Luke does tell us is that Anna served God with fasting and prayer. She was devoted to worship and was present when Jesus was brought to the temple. She gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to those who were looking forward to Jerusalem's redemption.

We cannot know all that Anna carried in her heart. But her story reminds us that loss need not close the door on a life of faith and service. Her years mattered, and Luke took care to tell us about her.

If this season brings an empty place to your table, you can bring both your memories and your questions before God. You do not have to force a cheerful ending to your grief in order to continue seeking Him.

Read her story in Luke 2:36-38.

Planning Gently

Hard days can feel a little less sharp when a few decisions are made ahead of time, on a quieter day. These pages are not a plan you have to follow, only a place to think things through before the day arrives.

Tradition or event	*Keep*	*Change*	*Rest this year*

Which gathering feels heaviest right now, and what might make it a little easier to walk into?

Who is one person you could sit near, or text, when the room starts to feel like too much?

If you need to step away, where in that house or building could you go for a few quiet minutes?

What is the least you need to do that day, and what could someone else carry for you?

For the One You Miss

Some women find comfort in making room for the person they miss, while others find that too painful this year. Either way is all right, and you are free to decide differently next year if your heart changes.

- Lighting a candle at dinner and saying their name out loud, if that feels bearable
- Writing down a favorite memory of them and tucking it inside your Bible
- Making their favorite dish, or leaving it off the menu this year
- Giving a gift in their name to someone who needs help this season

What is one memory of them you would like to keep close this Christmas?

For the Days That Feel Gray

Depression does not take the holidays off, and the pressure to feel happy can make the heaviness feel even heavier. If you are moving slowly or feeling far away from everyone, you are not failing Christmas or failing God. A smaller day is still a real day, and God is just as present in the small ones.

On the hardest day, enough might look like this:

- Eating something warm, even if it is simple
- Stepping outside for a minute of daylight
- Answering one message, or none at all
- Going to bed early without any guilt

What would enough look like for you on the hardest day?

When Someone Asks How You Are

People often ask how you are while they are passing the dishes, and it can be hard to know what to say. It may help to have a few honest words ready, so you do not have to find them in the moment.

> "This year is hard, but I am really glad to be here with you."
>
> "I am missing someone a lot today, so I may be quieter than usual."
>
> "Honestly, I am tired, and I would love to just sit with you for a while."
>
> "Thank you for asking. Could we talk about it another time?"

Scripture to Keep Nearby

The LORD is near to the brokenhearted And saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Psalm 34:18

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

Psalm 23:4

Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

Why are you in despair, my soul? And why are you restless within me? Wait for God, for I will again praise Him For the help of His presence, my God.

Psalm 42:11

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you.

Isaiah 43:2

He heals the brokenhearted And binds up their wounds.

Psalm 147:3

Prayers for the Hard Moments

Before a Gathering

Dear Father, I am walking into a room that will remind me of everything that has changed. Go before me and stay close to me while I am there. Give me the grace to stay as long as I can, and the freedom to leave when I need to. In Jesus' name, Amen.

When the Chair Is Empty

Dear Father, someone I love is missing from this table, and the empty place feels louder than the music. You know exactly who is gone and exactly what this costs me. I do not need You to explain it today, because what I need most is You near me while I miss them. In Jesus' name, Amen.

When I Cannot Feel Anything

Lord, I am numb, and I cannot find the joy that everyone around me seems to feel. You have never required me to feel cheerful before I come to You. So I am asking You to stay with me in this gray place, because I cannot climb out of it alone. In Jesus' name, Amen.

At the End of the Night

Dear Father, the day is over, and I made it through, even if it did not go the way I hoped. You were there in the moments I handled well and in the moments I did not. Give me rest tonight, and meet me again in the morning. In Jesus' name, Amen.

If the Heaviness Becomes Too Heavy

Sometimes grief or depression grows heavier than one person can carry, and reaching out for help is not a lack of faith. God often sends His care through people, including counselors and friends who are willing to sit with us.

If you are thinking about ending your life, please call or text 988 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. It is free and open every hour of every day for anyone in the United States. If you are in immediate danger or have already hurt yourself, please call 911 right away.

People I can reach out to

Name	*Phone*
My doctor or counselor	
Suicide and Crisis Lifeline	Call or text 988

A Closing Word

You may come to the end of this season tired, and that is not a failure of any kind. Whatever these weeks hold for you, you are not walking through a single one of them unseen.

Anna was serving God when she witnessed the child Jesus and gave thanks. Her story reminds us that even in seasons marked by loss, we can continue turning toward the Lord. We can bring our sorrow to Him in prayer.

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