

Letters of ENCOURAGEMENT

God Loves You  No Matter What

December 18, 2024

A Note from Beth Palmer

Hello Friends,

Christmas is so fun! There's so much magic in the air, and family celebrations can be moments of true joy, and kids are so excited, and there's those amazing soft ginger cookies we always make, and the music! "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" and "O Holy Night"! And the pretty candy cane Christmas lights on those trees on Dublin Rd!

My family laughed so hard one year while failing to get us all in a selfie with Mom's "Merry Christmas" needlepoint readable in the background (not in reverse)!!



But also...

I know you know that this is a hard time of year for a lot of people.

A lot of us unconsciously expect the ideal Norman Rockwell thing, and the aggravation when life doesn't match our expectations isn't any fun at all.

And our losses hang heavy in our hearts more so this time of year. Grief sits there right under the surface, threatening every moment with irritability and swear words and (*worst of all*) tears, throat closing up, brain can't focus, breathing goes shallow, eyes start to water...

I know you know.

For some of us it's a Blue Christmas.

For some of us the longest night of the Winter Solstice is symbolic for the griefs we hold.



My Dad died on August 10 this year.

My emotions are messy and intense and complicated.

My relationship with my Dad was *incredibly* difficult for me, and I also feel a lot of affection and tenderness for him.

And as much as I want my thoughts to be organized and rational and concise around this complicated grief, they're just not. Trying to write this Letter of Encouragement feels a bit too much, too soon, too hard.

Dad's dying was quick and surprising: it was just three weeks from pneumonia diagnosis to cancer diagnosis to death.

But the last seven years of memory loss were a long, slow decline. Thankfully he always knew us, but my brothers and I did so much work on Dad's behalf, all of which was really hard: managing his healthcare, living situation, and finances (and cleaning up his financial mistakes, *so stressful!*).

I know some of you know what caring for an elderly parent can be like.

So in part I'm relieved that he's not struggling anymore, and I feel some freedom from the caregiving tasks and the worry.

Things used to be better between us. When I was in high school and college, we were close.

But Dad struggled with big anxiety, depression, and grief his whole life, exacerbated by my brother Rand's death in 1986, and he took it out on the rest of us in harmful ways.

As much as I worked hard on our relationship, we never got back to a place of ease. I'm relieved that I don't have to deal with his disrespect anymore.



One huge gift of his memory loss was that Dad mostly forgot all the things that made him anxious and sad, and he finally enjoyed some peace. His kindness and respect resurfaced — such a gift to experience that side of him again! *That's* the Dad I miss.

Thanks be to God, I can see some gifts in this grief.

Dad's memory loss and needs and dying brought me closer to my brothers, John and Paul. Amazing gift. I got to spend so much time with John as we cared for Dad! (Paul's in Seattle.)



I can also honestly (sometimes) say that tuning in to my emotions has been a gift.

The Tuesday before Thanksgiving I started sobbing while I was trying to work. I kept trying to focus, but when I finally realized my body was trying to get my attention, I closed the laptop and took a break. I was so mad that the grief was muscling in again, interrupting my to-do list, and I was just so sad that Dad's gone.

Earlier in my life I would just power through. There's a job to do, so you just do it. And of course you do it at 150%, A+, because that's what you always do, even though your neck muscle is fully cramped and you're hangry and snapping at your husband.

"I'm FINE. I've GOT this."

I've been less interested in powering through since Dad's death, and that feels like a gift.

With what I know now about how emotions live in the body and cause problems if not attended to, I have simply *had* to let go of the task list and let myself feel my feelings — like *that's* my job.

To let whatever's happening inside of me have some space to rise up and roll through me, taking however long it takes...

To listen to and feel my sadness, my anger and resentment, my love and affection for my Dad... To attend to the complexities of my grief...



When I allow instead of resist my feelings, they get released sooner and I feel better more quickly.

I also understand forgiveness with new depth these days.

Of course when someone you love dies you need some time off work. And when you *do* work, you don't do your job as well or even care about your (awesome, meaningful) job all that much. Stuff simply doesn't get done, or done as quickly or as well as usual.

But you know what? *People forgive you.* (You all are really good at forgiveness, thank you!)

And I experienced an amazing, surely God-given capacity to cut myself some slack, to be gentle with myself, to receive grace from others and, perhaps more importantly, to show *myself* grace, after a lifetime of being hard on myself. Such a gift.

My friends, I hope you have a gentle Christmas.

I hope you can stop for even just a few moments occasionally and let yourself feel whatever you feel, even if it's messy and intense.

Whatever heavy thing your heart is carrying, I hope you can trust that you can place it in God's capable and comforting hands and rest a while.

I hope you can trust that *you* are held in the arms of a truly loving God even when you can't power through, and I hope you can trust that forgiveness is real.



May you be reminded that your grief is proof that it all mattered, that you loved deeply.

Much love to you,

Beth



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