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Chapters

turning the pages through grief



As the seasons change, many of us think about the approaching holidays and realize that Thanksgiving is right around the corner. While Thanksgiving is typically a time for gathering with family, its history is owed to the specific purpose of expressing gratitude for what and who we have in our lives. President Abraham Lincoln is credited with "codifying" Thanksgiving into a regular holiday, significant because his declaration came in the heart of the Civil War when soldiers were dying at unprecedented numbers and the nation was suffering deeply.

Already a twice-bereaved father by the time of his 1863 *Thanksgiving Proclamation*, the President undoubtedly understood the difficult experience of grief, mentioning the bereaved specifically.

At the holiday seasons, we who are bereaved especially appreciate the sentiments and expressions of comfort from those around us. But perhaps there is more that we can do. What if, in the midst of grieving through the holiday season (and specifically Thanksgiving), we stop

to express *gratitude* in the midst of our grief?

This is not to suggest that we give thanks for the loss that brought this grief about. Some well-intentioned but misdirected friends have likely already tried that tack with words such as, "Well you should be thankful he didn't suffer like my aunt/brother/cousin..."

So where can we find gratitude in the midst of this loss?

Express gratitude for specific character qualities in your loved one's life. As we take stock of the life that we shared with this person, undoubtedly some virtues stand out: faithful commitment, joyful spirit, humorous, compassionate, integrity, generous, or others likely come to mind. Create a Thanksgiving collage with words and photos that exemplify those qualities and share it with others at your family gathering. You might also want to simply record your reflections in a special Thanksgiving journal with your recollections of the life you shared. You can begin such a journal entry with words such as, "As I think about the life we shared and

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The root of joy is gratefulness.

—David Steindl-Rast

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who you have been to me, I am grateful for your...”

Express gratitude for the care of others.

Even those who feel utterly alone in their loss can usually point to someone who was particularly kind and helpful in the early days of the loss. Perhaps the name and image come to your mind of a healthcare professional, hospice volunteer, funeral director, clergyperson, or close friend who stayed by your side. Purchase a special Thanksgiving card and send to that person, including a handwritten recollection of what he or she did specifically to help you. Saying thank you is as beneficial as receiving thank you notes, even if you have already thanked this person before.

Express gratitude for what you are learning. While we might not be in the mood to learn the new skills or discover the new abilities we have, loss sometimes makes those very apparent. A widowed woman in one support group who took a Saturday morning class at a home improvement store so she could make minor home

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repairs herself. She astounded herself at what she had learned how to do in a single morning, at least with the help of the do-it-yourself home repair book she purchased.

Express gratitude for who you are becoming. Grief does not leave us where it finds us, but rather, helps us become new—and different—people. Dr. Tom Attig wrote a book entitled *How We Grieve: Relearning the World*. Truer words were never spoken: grief is a process of learning how to live in a radically-changed world. While it would be difficult to give thanks for having to make these adjustments, we can cultivate gratitude for what—and who—we are becoming in spite of loss.

Does expressing gratitude take away the pain of grief? Absolutely not. But what expressing gratitude does do is help readjust focus to see there is much good in life, in spite of the difficult experience through which we now walk. And learning to see through this new lens is a pretty good way to approach Thanksgiving.

NOVEMBER

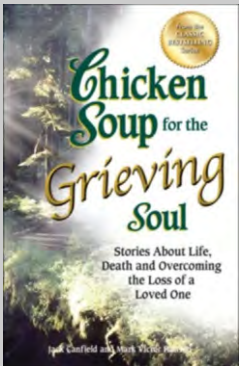
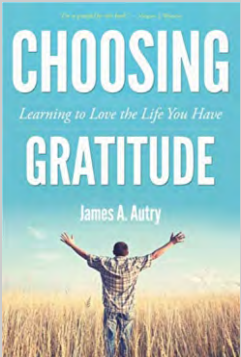
Birthstone: Topaz

Flower: Chrysanthemum

Color: Yellow

bookmarks

James Autry begins his little book of essays *Choosing Gratitude: Learning to Love the Life You Have* with these simple words: “Gratitude doesn’t come naturally. We have to learn it.” In his 50 or so short essays and poems, he reminds us not only why we should be grateful but how we can cultivate gratefulness. Way beyond the “thank you” that “lubricates the social gears of life,” this gratitude is a life perspective, Autry writes. Cultivating gratitude might not change the problems of life, Autry declares, but it certainly changes how we view the problems of life.



Chicken Soup for the Grieving Soul by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen is another fine inspirational book, filled with short and readable chapters that help bereaved people find solace and gratitude in everyday life. The approximately 60 stories that make up this volume will challenge and inspire you as you grow through the grief process.

Recipe Stories

Many of us equate our loved ones, especially, parents and grandparents with some of the foods they cooked and shared during the holidays. Memories of Grandma’s turkey gravy, Uncle Al’s famous stew, sister Mary’s stuffing. Everyone has a recipe story that we hold near and dear. The website whatsyourgrief.com has a section where people share their “Grief Recipe Stories” about people who have passed and therein include a recipe that reminds them, or is connected to that loved one. They are heart-warming and intriguing reads.

Here, Chapters shares one of the recipes you may wish to try during this season of gratitude.

ORANGE SCONES

- INGREDIENTS**
- 3 cups Self Raising flour, sifted
 - 3 tablespoons sugar
 - grated rind of one orange
 - pinch salt
 - 1 egg, lightly beaten
 - 1/2 cup cream (can be sour cream)
 - 1/2 cup milk
 - 1/2 cup orange juice



- DIRECTIONS**
- Mix dry ingredients and orange rind, then add egg, cream, milk and orange juice all at once. Mix well with a knife into dough. If necessary, add more flour to make to a kneadable consistency.
 - Place dough onto floured baking tray and form into oblong about 1/2 thick, and mark into squares. Mixture is too soft to cut and lift shapes onto tray.
 - Brush with milk and sprinkle with raw sugar all over.
 - Bake at 400°F for 20 minutes or until golden.

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