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**The right kind of support and comfort can make all the difference for someone who is grieving.**

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When Laurie Hancer's husband Marty was diagnosed with gallbladder cancer, the family motto was #makinglemonade, says Laurie, a Thrivent member from North Hollywood, California. "We needed to make the best of our time." That time was only six-and-a-half months from diagnosis until Marty's death on Oct. 3, 2018.

Marty had been a Lutheran pastor for 25 years, and he and Laurie were both born and raised and living in Minnesota before they relocated to California for his job in 2016. "We had a huge friend base," Laurie says. While everyone in their lives cares about Laurie and the couple's two grown daughters, she says that after Marty's death, she realized people "sometimes didn't really know what to say or do and would say things that aren't really helpful."

Many of us have been in this situation. How do you support someone who is grieving? The most important thing is that family and friends should make the effort to be there for the journey and not assume the journey is two weeks, two months, or even a year, says Thrivent member Dr. Debby Baker, a clinical psychologist and programs director for the Community Grief Center in Greeley, Colorado. "It can be long term, and you need to be there for them all along the way."

There are specific things that people can do that are most helpful for those who are grieving.



## If You Are Grieving

### Have a support network around you.

They are people who will check in on you and help you with everything from mowing a lawn to helping with meals to listening and being present.

### Speak with a professional counselor or attend a grief program.

You may find it helpful to go to a professional who understands the manifestations of the grief process and may have suggestions and resources to help you on your grief journey. A lot is trial and error.

### Seek pastoral guidance.

This type of counseling can help you stay focused on God's presence in your life. A good pastor is equipped to meet you at your place of spiritual need with Christian counseling and an understanding that scripture is a source of strength and encouragement.

### Keep yourself healthy.

It may be difficult at first, and you may have to force yourself to do some things you don't want to, but it's important to do what you can to keep your immune system healthy. Eat well. Get enough sleep. Take a walk. These things can boost your ability to stay in a healthy place physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

## Power of Words

Our society, as a whole, is not very comfortable with death. *"While death is a normal part of life, and we will all grieve, society is uncomfortable with people who grieve, wanting them to get over it quickly,"* Baker says. *"People will often stop talking about your loved one, thinking that saying their name will cause you pain. But the most beautiful word is the name of your loved one. It's helpful to those who are grieving to hear that name and share stories."*

Laurie finds it comforting when people acknowledge that they, too, are grieving Marty's death, and then they talk about a particular good time they shared with him. *"At Marty's funeral, the bishop said, 'Keep the stories coming,'"* Laurie says. *"I love hearing the stories and memories, some of which I share and some I don't."*

Although people mean well, they do, sometimes, say the wrong thing. For example, it's not uncommon to hear, *"I know how you feel."* But you never really can understand what another person feels. *"Let the grieving person experience their own grief and say something like, 'I understand this must be terrible,'"* Laurie says. She also finds it helpful when people ask, *"How are you doing today?"* as opposed to the more general, *"How are you doing?"* *"If you ask how I'm doing, do you mean this minute? Overall? 'How are you doing today' is manageable,"* Laurie says. *"Today might be a good day. But if I'm on the beach with friends one day, it doesn't mean I won't be curled up on my bed the next."*

The easiest thing to say to someone grieving, suggests Baker, is *"I'm sorry for your loss' or 'I'm sorry for your pain, but I don't know what you're going through.'" Then let the grieving person know that you will walk alongside them and make the effort to do so.*

## Open Up and Listen

*"It's not [the job of friends and family] to fix or heal a person who is grieving,"* says Thrivent member Steve Winther, a grief facilitator in a support group run by Bayside Church in Roseville, California. Winther, a licensed marriage and family therapist, and his wife, Kathy, lost their oldest son to cancer six years ago. To support someone, he says, *"Create safe ground for the person and give them the opportunity to be heard and understood. We shouldn't preach to them or tell them what they should or shouldn't be doing. Just be present in silence."*

Ask that person what they need and how you can assist. They may just need you to be with them. If they're comfortable, they may talk about their struggles, which can be therapeutic, Winther says.



## Financial Steps for Grieving

After a loved one dies, taking care of the financial aspects can be overwhelming. To make it more manageable, follow these five steps:

### 1. Gather key financial documents.

- Will, trust and other estate records
- Life insurance contracts
- Current bank, brokerage and retirement account statements
- Birth and marriage certificates
- Vehicle titles
- Mortgage or deed documents

### 2. Assemble a financial support team and set up appointments.

Your team might include:

- Your financial professional
- An accountant
- An attorney
- A trusted family member or friend

### 3. Review your income and expenses, and consider how they may change.

### 4. Cancel, transfer, or change the following in your loved one's name.

- Credit cards
- Driver's license
- Vehicle title
- Memberships and subscriptions
- Social media accounts

### 5. Notify necessary organizations and agencies about your loved one's death.

- Health, life, and auto insurance
- Social Security Administration
- Banks and credit unions
- Retirement plan administrator(s)
- Three credit rating agencies (Equifax, Experian, TransUnion)
- Veterans Affairs, if a veteran.

*"We don't have to guide them down a particular path of thought or fill them with a mini sermon on what God's doing in all of this. It's just asking the Lord to help us be what they need and running in tandem with them as they progress through their journey."*

Laurie finds her faith to be helpful. *"I always believed that we will go on to something better. Marty believed that and preached that,"* she says. *"Marty was scared not for where he was going but for us being left here. I feel like he's taken care of; it's just us coping with this world. My beliefs are a strength I have to fall back on."*

Other ways to be supportive include sharing online. During her husband's illness, Laurie found strength in what visitors to Marty's *CaringBridge.org* page had to say. Another source is books for supporting someone who is grieving. Winther suggests, *Recovering from Losses in Life*, by H. Norman Wright, a Christian marriage, family, and child therapist.

In the end, says Laurie, it's the simple things that she finds most helpful, like saying *"I'm here for you," "I love you,"* or *"Let me know how I can help."*

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At our heart, we are a membership-owned fraternal organization, as well as a holistic financial services organization, dedicated to serving the unique needs of our clients. We focus on their goals and priorities, guiding them towards financial choices that will help them live the life they want today and tomorrow.



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