

REDESIGNING MY LIFE AFTER LOSS

My husband and I had always made our decisions as a couple. How could I do it alone?

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As a therapist, I have helped many people face life after the passing of a loved one, but when my husband of 54 years moved on to a new life beyond the veil, I sat in the kitchen grief-stricken, confused, and unable to think.

Fortunately, our son hurried to be by my side to help me move through the next few days—the memorial service, the burial, and the many other decisions that need to be made immediately after a death. The children all came home; the memorial service was beautiful. The president over the mission where my husband and I had served also came—even with his busy schedule. Everyone supported me.

But as life settled down, the depth of my loss felt all too real. I would hear the score of the ball game and want to discuss it with my husband—but I was alone. I had to stop myself from putting his cereal bowl on the table and bringing in his paper. In sacrament meeting, I missed snuggling against his shoulder. I mourned for his loss but was happy he was with God (see Alma 28:12).

Grief lapped at the shore of my life like the waves of the sea. Sometimes it was there and

sometimes it was gone. There were times when life went on as normal. But at other moments, I felt things were falling apart.

My aloneness loomed before me like a mountain too steep to climb. I had to take one step at a time. I read my scriptures daily, as I had always done. I listened to conference talks several times a week, as I had always done. But that didn't seem to be enough.

I prayed for Heavenly Father's guidance through this adjustment process. I knew He would hear me. "Whatsoever thing ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is good, in faith believing that ye shall receive, behold, it shall be done unto you" (Moroni 7:26).

Here are a few of the practices that lighted my way.

Inspiring Words

When waves of grief overcame me, I repeated the Book of Mormon and Bible scriptures I had memorized. They sank deep into my soul. Sometimes in the middle of the night when I couldn't sleep, I repeated Proverbs 3:5–6:

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.



“In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

I began to study “The Living Christ.”¹ Could my old brain memorize it? With the help of the Lord, I began. Peace filled my soul as I meditated on the Savior, His Atonement, and His love for me.

A Memorial

I started to write my husband’s story—as a memorial to the goodness of his life. I wanted everyone to remember his magnetic personality, his zeal for the gospel, and his love of the Lord. I had collected many family histories over the years and loved doing that kind of writing. I felt my husband close. Memories of things that happened in our lives came back to me—things I would not have thought of on my own.

Art

On days when life seemed overwhelming, I wrote other things—an emotions journal, a gratitude journal. The topic didn’t matter. Writing released my feelings. But everyone walking this path will find a little different way. Other forms of art can be helpful also. I had a client, a pianist, who would come into her session saying she’d played a lot of Rachmaninoff that week, and I knew she’d been working through

some difficult feelings. I had clients who found solace through coloring, drawing, painting, ceramics, crafts, quilting, and many other ways.

Self-Care

Even when I didn’t feel like it, I took care of myself physically by eating healthy foods and exercising. My daily walk lessened the anxiety of being alone, and I looked forward to the boost of energy it gave me.

Smiling Thoughts

I’ve found that smiling is always a quick pick-me-up. Thoughts of my husband reuniting with his family gave me comfort. His father had died when my husband was a young child, and I knew they were together now, having a good time. He and his older sister loved to watch ball games together. I could see them, cheering on their favorite team.

The words of President Heber J. Grant (1856–1945)—who lost several family members during his lifetime, including three children—helped me keep this mind-set. He said: “I can never think of my loved ones . . . as being in the grave. I rejoice in the associations they are enjoying and in the pleasure



they are having in meeting with their loved ones on the other side.”²

I could picture my husband joining forces with his father and forefathers in preaching the gospel to those on the other side. Peace confirmed that principle to my soul as I read the vision of President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918): “From among the righteous, he organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness” (Doctrine and Covenants 138:30).

I am humbly grateful for Jesus Christ, who, through His Atonement, made all of this possible.

Service

Ministering added to my peace. Building new relationships fills the giver and the receiver with love. Both become givers and receivers.

A neighbor and a dear friend had just lost her husband in a plane accident several months before my husband’s death. We had long talks about the process we were experiencing. We went to church together each week, and she came every Sunday for lunch.

Another friend was in the process of losing the love of her life to cancer. He had lived much longer than the doctors thought possible. I took her cookies and visited with her. I listened as she talked about the difficulties of his care during those final months. We mourned her impending loss together.

Prayer

This entire experience has brought me closer to my Heavenly Father. I am in a more spiritual place. I love the promise in Jeremiah 29:13: “And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.” I had sought Heavenly Father with all my heart and knew He would bless me to see more clearly my purpose in life. I prayed for patience and believed the promise in Ether 12:6: “Faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith.”

Angels Nearby

Healing the heart is a journey of a lifetime. It happens a little here and a little there, but I don’t think it’s ever finished.



Loneliness just before bed was very unsettling for me. I began to picture my husband with me especially as I knelt to pray. I felt him close—as an angel near my side—and I was comforted.

Referring to Adam and Eve and their descendants, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said, “In times of special need, [God] sent angels, divine messengers, to bless His children, reassure them that heaven was always very close and that His help was always very near.”³ These thoughts gave my heart a feeling of light.

When it came time to make decisions on my own, I felt off balance. My husband and I had always made our decisions as a couple. How could I do it alone? I settled myself in my favorite chair and pictured the two of us sitting together, talking over a problem. I could see his friendly smile as he spoke. I listened to his ideas concerning all points of the issue. I shared my thoughts and soon I had come to a peaceful decision.

I then took it to the Lord: “You must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you” (Doctrine and Covenants 9:8). Peace came to me, and I knew the decision was the one best for me.

Daily Peace Is Part of My Life

My days of overwhelming grief are fewer than they were. I know now this is a path I will walk for the rest of my life. My loneliness has subsided some. I continue immersing myself in the scriptures, memorizing “The Living Christ,” writing my husband’s history, taking care of myself physically, and giving service.

I find myself filled with greater light (see Alma 32:35). My way is more defined. I have nourished the gospel in my life and now partake of the promise given in Alma 32:42: “Ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled.”

The pathway before me is one of light—through the blessings of the gospel and the Atonement of my Savior, Jesus Christ, I find the peace I seek for daily. ■

NOTES

1. “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2000, 2.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Heber J. Grant* (2002), 44.
3. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Ministry of Angels,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 29.