



GRIEF SURVIVORS  
*Preparing for  
the Holidays*

For those who have suffered the loss of a loved one,  
the upcoming holidays can be very difficult.

“Come to me, all you who  
are weary & burdened,  
& I will give you rest.”

Matthew 11:28

The holiday season can be a very challenging time for all of us, especially when we have experienced the loss of a loved one. We struggle to find the “new normal,” and holiday dynamics with families and friends can be overwhelming at times. Different emotions and responses to situations can appear in a variety of ways and occur when we least expect them. They can surprise and confuse us, but they are normal and healthy ways for our bodies and minds to respond.

Our clergy and our Grief Support Ministry Team have prepared this booklet especially for you. We have done so from the perspective of being grief survivors who have struggled with preparing for the holidays – whether it is the first time without our loved one or if it is several years on our journey. We have assembled materials that we have found to be useful, and our prayer is that this will be helpful for you.

Please let us know if we can be of help to you in any way. Our clergy members are available to meet or talk with you, so please contact us when we can help:

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For more information about upcoming Grief Support Meetings or information for our Grief Support Ministry, please contact Cathie Amos at (205) 908-2731 or [cathamos@bellsouth.net](mailto:cathamos@bellsouth.net) or Butch Williams (205) 769-0102 or [bwilliams@vhumc.org](mailto:bwilliams@vhumc.org)).

We continue to surround you and your family with our prayers, and we stand ready to share in this journey with you whenever needed. May God bless, keep, and comfort you always!

# from *The Season of Light*

by Darcie Sims, Ph.D., CHT, CT, GMS

Seattle, Washington

## **Be Patient with Yourself**

Know that hardly anyone is as happy as you think they might be. We all have our hurts to bear. Do what you can this season and let it be enough.

## **Be Realistic**

It will hurt, but don't try to block bad moments. Be ready for them. Lay in a supply of tissues (a roll of toilet paper is even more efficient!). Let those hurting moments come, deal with them and let them go.

## **Be Kind And Gentle To Yourself**

Figure out what you should do, balance it with what you are capable of doing and then compromise. Forgive yourself for living.

## **Plan Ahead**

Grieving people often experience a lack of concentration. Make lists. Prioritize everything. Decide what is really important to you.

## **Listen To Yourself**

As you become aware of your needs, tell family members and friends.

## **Ask For Help When You Need It**

## **Take Care Of Yourself Physically**

Eat right. Exercise (or at least watch someone else). Gift wrap some broccoli. If nothing else, jog your memory!

## **Change Something**

Everything has already changed, so don't be afraid to change some traditions. Try whatever pops into your head. You can always stop it if it doesn't feel quite right or doesn't work! But don't toss out everything this year. Keep some traditions. You choose which ones.

## **Leave The Word "Ought" Out Of This Holiday Season**

## **Hold On To Your Wallet And Charge Cards**

You can't buy away grief, but you might be tempted to try.

## **Understanding ...**

That heartache will be unpacked as you sift through the decorations; but so, too, are the warm loving memories of each piece. Don't deny yourself the gift of healing tears.

## **Share Your Holidays**

With someone, anyone! Visit a soup kitchen or nursing home, or spend an evening at the bus station. There are lots of lonely people who could use your love and caring.

### **Work At Lifting Depression**

Take responsibility for yourself. We cannot wait for someone else to wrap up some joy and give it to us. We have to do that for ourselves. Think of things you enjoy and give yourself a treat (Cookies are often therapeutic!).

### **Hang The Stockings**

Place a wreath on the grave. Do whatever feels right for you and your family.

### **Light A Special Candle**

Not in memory of a death, but in celebration of a life and a love shared.

### **Learn To Look For Joy In The Moment**

Get a pair of rose colored glasses and change the way you look at things. Joy happens when we look for it!

### **Find The Gifts Of Your Loved One's Life**

Think of all the "gifts" that your loved one gave to you - joy, safety, laughter, companionship, etc. List these "gifts" on strips of paper and keep them somewhere close to you. Some may put them in a gift box while others may decide to place them in the stocking. Some may decorate the tree with them or simply keep them in a memory book or in a secret place. But, wherever you place them, know these small strips of paper hold treasures far beyond our capacity to understand. They hold tangible evidence that someone lived. It is a reminder that we did exchange gifts and that we still have those gifts, even if the giver has gone.

### **Live Through The Hurt ...**

So that joy can return to warm your heart! This is the Season of Light - for it is the season when we remember that once we loved and were loved. And that is the greatest light and memory of all!

## *My Memorials*

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# *Love Us As We Are*

(a VHUMC Grief Support prayer)

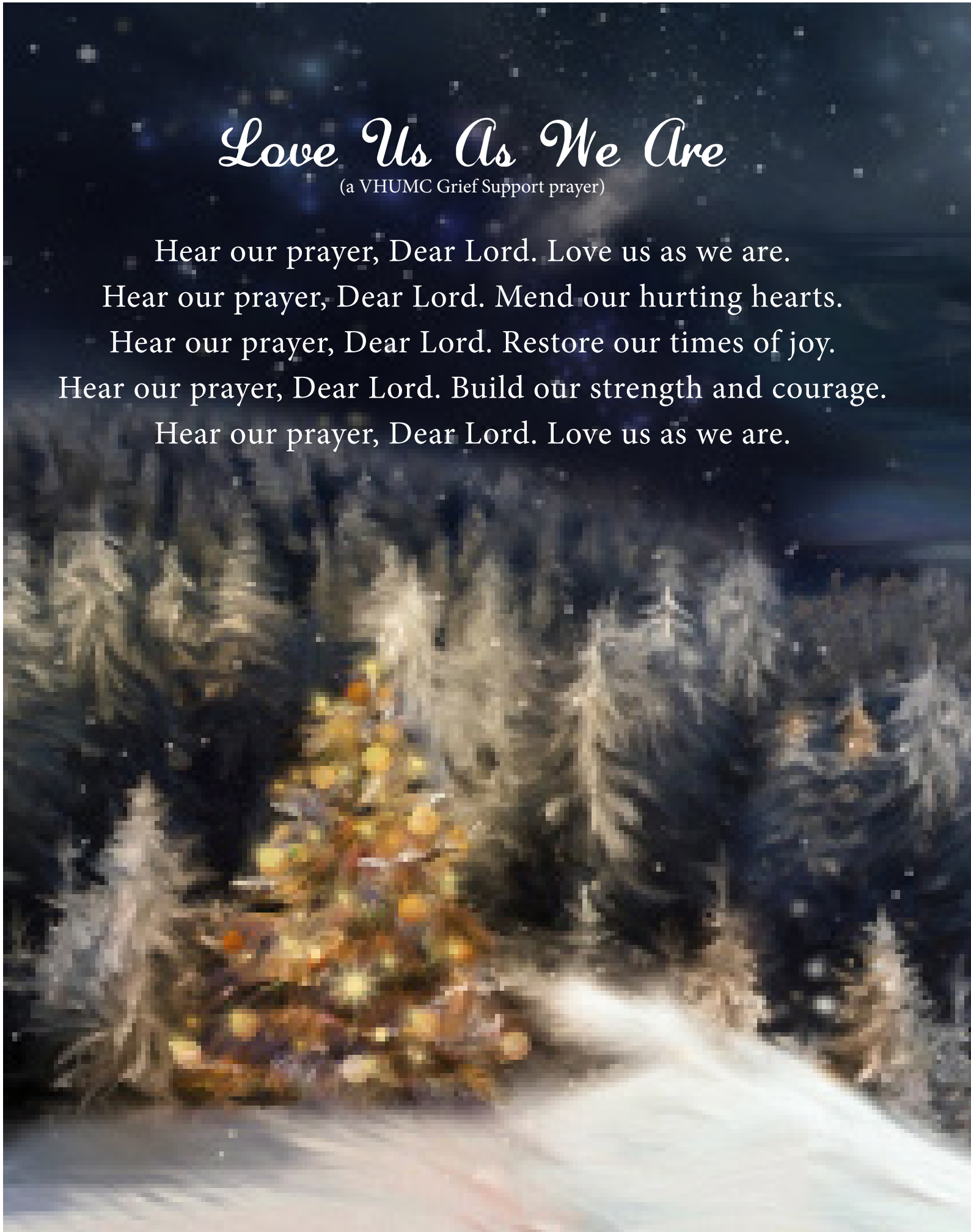
Hear our prayer, Dear Lord. Love us as we are.

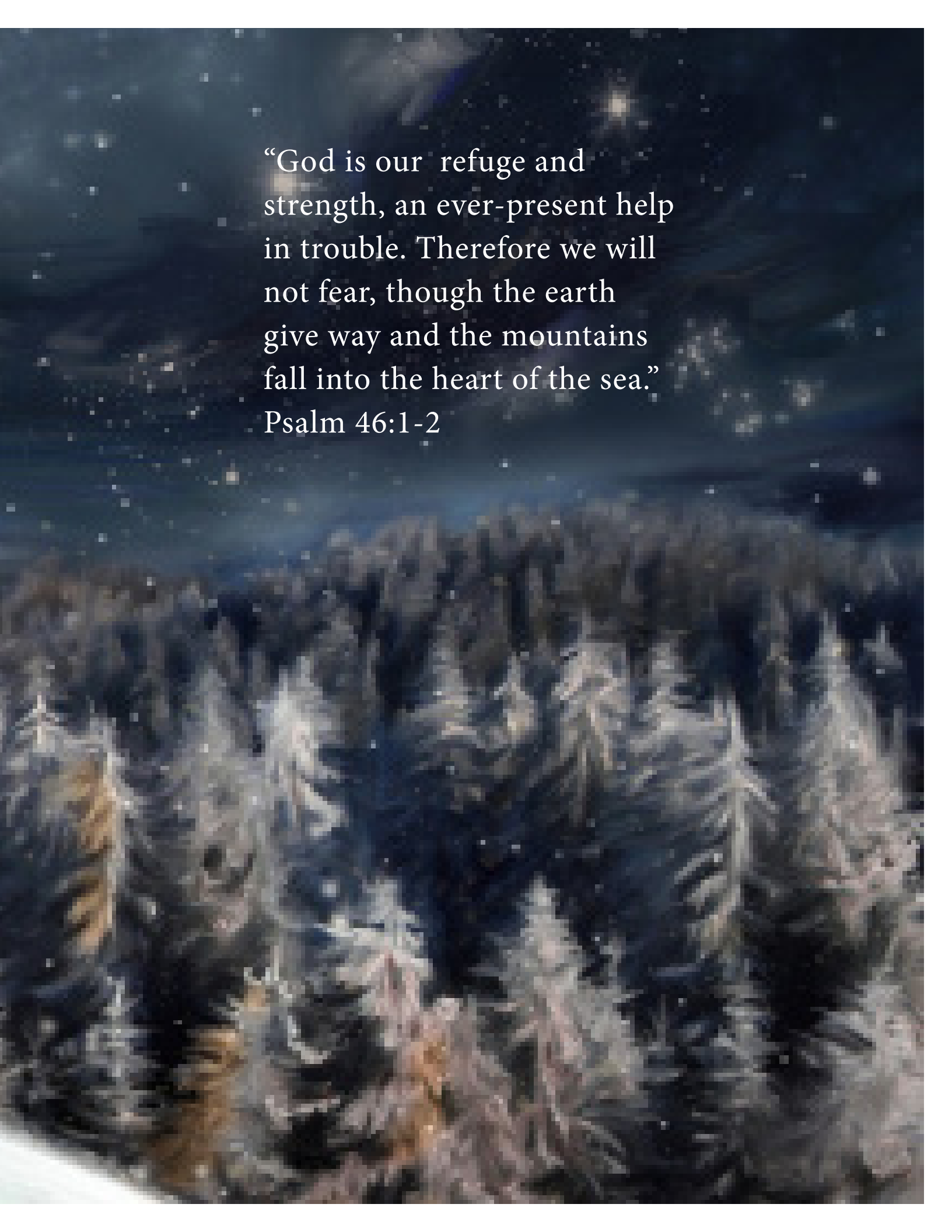
Hear our prayer, Dear Lord. Mend our hurting hearts.

Hear our prayer, Dear Lord. Restore our times of joy.

Hear our prayer, Dear Lord. Build our strength and courage.

Hear our prayer, Dear Lord. Love us as we are.





“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.”  
Psalm 46:1-2

# Create Your Own Memorials

Following are a few suggestions for the Thanksgiving feast, Yuletide and the New Year. Remember that rituals are part of learning to cope. Most of these suggestions are adaptable for any of the holidays or throughout the entire season. Developing a new ritual takes planning, care and love. The thought you put into it will reap you many benefits in the days ahead.

## **1. Purchase or make a memorial candle.**

Your memorial candle may be lit each morning or evening and extinguished only before bedtime throughout the holiday season. There are also perpetual candles (liquid paraffin in a can placed in a glass container) which may burn for up to a week.

## **2. Toast your loved one.**

Create a special toast to your loved one, using your favorite wine or beverage. This can be done on any of the holidays when the family is gathered together or even when you are alone.

## **3. Your favorite story.**

Reserve some time at the table or around the Christmas tree to tell a favorite story about your loved one. This could accompany the special toast to your memories.

## **4. Place a single flower on the table.**

Choose your favorite flower in honor of the "presence" of your loved one.

## **5. Observe a moment of silence.**

Silence or prayer before the meal or at another time you deem appropriate is a simple and gracious way to honor your love.

## **6. Family album.**

Spend some time together as a family with the family album. Make it a special celebration when the past is discussed, reviewed and relived.

## **7. Buy or create your own Advent Calendar.**

You may want to place a photograph of members of the family or close friends behind each window from December 1 to 25. This tradition anticipates coping slowly, day by day as the season passes.

## **8. Buy a living Christmas tree.**

Most nurseries and Christmas tree vendors now sell live evergreens that are ready to be planted in the yard after the Holiday Season. Planting new life to commemorate the meaning of the life of your loved one can be shared with family and friends, who may also be invited for refreshments or a meal after the planting ceremony.

## **9. Garnish your tree.**

This year you might decorate your tree with fresh flowers and products of nature, or an outside tree with berries, seeds and other kinds of food for the birds and squirrels.





## **10. Create luminaries.**

Line your sidewalk or driveway with luminaries. These are a Mexican tradition and are simple to make, yet lovely as they light up the night in a soft glow. All you need are brown paper sandwich bags, small candles and sand. They signify a warm welcome.

## **11. Buy a Christmas present for/from your loved one.**

A gift for the home which will have a special place or take on special meaning for holidays to come can be the gift to/from your loved one.

## **12. Make a donation/gift to charity.**

An established agency will welcome your gift in memory of your loved one. You might want to help a needy family by providing Christmas dinner for them or buying small gifts for the children.

## **13. Decorate the altar at church.**

Your decoration may be as simple as a flowering plant, or whatever seems appropriate as you share the memory of your loved one with your congregation.

## **14. Discuss the values you share as a family.**

Set aside a time before opening gifts to discuss the values you share as a family and how your loved one contributed to the quality of your life.

## **15. Drink a toast to the future.**

The New Year may bring with it your own resolution toward hope. Drinking a toast to the future does not neglect the past, but gives us the time to look ahead and regain some sense of control over our lives. For the newly bereaved, this opportunity is even greater. There is something about planning a new or renewed direction which is very encouraging.

Our wish for you in the days ahead is to remember that anguish is not forever, that joy is possible even in grief, that time is your friend, and yourself your best companion. Be “in accord” with yourself. PEACE.



# *My Personal Holiday Plan*


I predict the most difficult parts of the holiday season for me will be:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

My support people (those who can hear my grief) are:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

The most difficult people to be with might be:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_
- 




My grief triggers might be:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Words that would be helpful for me to hear would be:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

This year, I want to include the following traditions in my holiday:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_
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We also offer Grief Support Groups periodically throughout the year.  
For more information, please call Butch Williams at (205) 769-0102 or e-mail at  
bwilliams@vhumc.org.



This booklet was put together through the guidance of Robert D. Smith, MA,  
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