

Christmas Talk - The Gift 2024

As you look around at the decorations what do you think is our theme for tonight? Of course.....the Gift. It can sometimes be very confusing to use the word gift when we find ourselves in the midst of our sorrow after the loss of someone so deeply loved and missed.

We, many times, think of gifts in the form of Christmas gifts or birthday gifts, things we bring each other in celebration of life's achievements.

Tonight, we wanted to focus on 3 Gifts that are available to us that flow out of our loss.

If we embrace these gifts over time, when we are able, they walk with us as we learn to live our lives without the physical presence of the person we love.

There is a little verse in the Bible that says Blessed are they that mourn for they will find comfort, so the first gift that comes from grief is the gift of mourning. Most people grieve but not everyone mourns. Grief is what we feel when we lose someone that we love, it's a noun, it's all those internal feelings that fill us up but mourning is a verb, it's an action word it speaks to participating in our grief, to opening ourselves up to all of those feelings and find ways to express them outside of our selves. Mourning is essential to healing in the aftermath of loss. That is why nights like tonight are so important. It's an opportunity for each person to set aside time to honour the person they love in an active meaningful way, it's part of your outward expression of your love and allows you to continue to give and receive love from that person in the memories you have created and ways you have chosen to honour them. Rituals like tonight are important when words are inadequate, they help us express emotions, provide structure and create a safe place for remembrance. Some people create rituals like lighting a candle. Some people prepare special food or visit a place that is attached to the person they have lost or get together to share memories. In fact, any symbolic activity that helps us along with our family and friends that allows us to express our deepest thoughts and feelings can be a powerful experience in our grief journey of healing.



The Second gift that is given to us in grief is the gift of support. When Rachele first died, I thought that I could do this alone. I really fell into that old myth of time heals all wounds so most of my energy went into hanging on long enough to let time do its job. It didn't take long for me to discover that just as love is bigger than me so grief is much bigger than we can ever imagine. After all, grief is the flip side of love. I learned very quickly that you cannot mourn in a vacuum, grief should never be experienced alone and there is a piece of our grief that needs to be expressed in the presence of others. It gives our grief a voice when we speak, and someone listens. In grief we are not ill, we are brokenhearted. Our grief is not anchored in our head but rather in our heart. That is why support is so powerful in our grief journey. Support comes to us in many shapes and forms. People have shared with us how supportive their community has been, how supportive their family has been and how supportive their church has been. Sometimes, however, in our society people are awkward around grieving people and not sure how to support them. One of the central needs in grief is to seek out support. Many of you here have come to the Coping Centre and been part of a support group and found the healing power of a group. You entered the group as strangers but finished the group as soulmates of the heart. You enjoyed a beautiful meal together on the last night, you became part of the Coping family. Many of you continued to support one another long after the group had finished.

I remember the story Dr Steven Fleming told us.

Stephen was the head of the thanatology program at York University. He told us that grieving people are like Martians. When Martians get together, they recognize one another, they understand what each other are saying, they don't judge, they understand all the thoughts and feelings that are being expressed, they feel safe. The problem for the Martians is that they live amongst the earthlings that sometimes just don't get it. The earthlings are well meaning but not always helpful.

Support should be an integral part of our care plan; it is the support we receive that will allow us to build the capacity in our hearts to endure. Tonight is a great example of what support might look like for you. Don't you feel a lot safer here tonight when moving towards your grief amongst a room full of Martians.

The third gift that comes from grief is the gift of memories. These memories are bittersweet initially but as we mourn, we are able to begin to embrace our memories. Stories are gifts. The stories about the person we have lost are priceless gifts. I think that in this room we would agree that none of us had enough memories and some of us very few.

We are intuitively drawn to stories, stories have power, they enchant, touch, teach, recall, inspire, motivate and challenge us. They help us to understand patterns of life not merely in an intellectual way but as a personal heart-felt experience. I came across this children's story and was going to use it on the kid's night but after reading it I thought that this is a story for everyone. It speaks to the power of memories.



The Gift of Memories by Salim

In a small village on the edge of a forest, a young boy named Asa lived. Asa was an energetic and curious boy who loved exploring every inch of the village and the neighboring forest. He always carried a small stick with him everywhere.

Asa's father was a kind-hearted man who loved his son dearly and often joined him on his little adventures. One day, Asa's father decided to give him a special gift, a beautiful small porcelain teapot.

The teapot came with two small cups and was adorned with bright colors and beautiful patterns. When Asa saw the teapot, his eyes sparkled with happiness.

He loved pouring tea into the cup and serving it to his father. They would spend enjoyable hours together, chatting, laughing and playing games.

As Asa grew up, he continued to use the teapot during moments of happiness. The teapot became a symbol of unity and love between him and his father.

One day, Asa's father fell seriously ill. The doctors were unable to treat him. Although Asa tried his best to support his father, things quickly took a turn for the worse. Asa spent long hours by his father's bedside, holding his hand, telling him stories, and sometimes serving him tea from their beloved teapot. The sight of the teapot would often bring a smile to his father's face, reminding them both of the happier times they had shared.

He wished he could do something to help but felt powerless.

Despite the hardships, Asa's spirit remained unbroken. He continued to care for his father and hoped for better days.

After a long battle, Asa's father succumbed to his illness. Asa was left with beautiful memories and the teapot that was a symbol of their bond.



He mourned deeply, feeling the void left by his father. The teapot, however, provided a sense of connection to his father, reminding him of their shared love and unity.

Asa continued to serve tea from the teapot, now to his own children. He shared stories of his father and the adventures they had together.

Asa's children listened with wide eyes, imagining the grand adventures their father and grandfather had shared. They too fell in love with the teapot and the stories it held.

The teapot remained a symbol of love, unity, and resilience. Even during the toughest times, it served as a beacon of hope and a reminder of happier times.

Asa, now an old man, looked at his children and grandchildren gathered around him, listening to his stories, and he felt a sense of satisfaction.

He knew that his father's memory and their shared love would continue to live on through the teapot, and that gave him immense comfort.

Asa's story is a testament to the enduring power of love and memory. Through the simple act of serving tea, he kept his father's spirit alive, providing comfort and unity for his family.

The teapot, an ordinary object, held an extraordinary bond between a father and son. It was a **GIFT** of memories, a symbol of love, passed from generation to generation.

Asa found solace in the knowledge that his father's love and the lessons he taught would continue to live on, not just in the teapot, but in the hearts of his children and grandchildren.

And so, the teapot remained, an echo of past laughter, shared stories, and a bond that not even time could erase. A testament to a father's love and a son's devotion.

Perhaps over this Christmas season as you hang the gift we will give you can talk about the gift of memories and the linking objects that your loved one has left you.

The End

CLOSING:

Many of you that have attended a Coping Group can perhaps remember the feelings you might have had before, during and after Memory night. Many people have expressed their initial anxiety about bringing pictures, souvenirs, clothing and various linking objects that reflect the relationship that you had with your loved one. It was uncharted water as you embraced those memories and so it was natural for a multitude of emotions to spring up.

But as you took courage to embrace those memories in the presence of others something powerful took place, a warmth filled the room as each of you took a turn to share those memories.

Your loved one was introduced to each group member through your eyes and the stories you told about them.

The container was set for this newfound relationship of memories to wash over you. The night concluded with a sense of gratitude for each person in the room and the person they had lost.

Memories are like deep rooted flowers, grounded in beauty, and embraced in nature.

Just as flowers instinctively grow and flourish so can your memories if you take the time to give voice to them in your grief journey.

All of these elements of grief can bring us peace in our loss. Grief is emotional, physical, mental and spiritual.

We all come to the grief experience with different spiritual beliefs. Part of our search for meaning may involve exploring those beliefs over time.

In our North American culture Christmas is a time for us to celebrate the birth of Christ. The bible says that they should call His name Emanuel. The name Emanuel is Hebrew for God with us.

So, wherever you are on your spiritual journey it is our prayer tonight that you will experience God's presence and peace during this holiday period.

