

# Four Seasons Chaplain and Grief Counselor Michael Lee Shares 10 Ways to Cope with Loss During the Holidays

HIGHLANDS, N.C., Nov. 26, 2013 (SEND2PRESS NEWSWIRE) – Individuals who have recently lost a loved one may find Thursday's ritual of Thanksgiving and the onslaught of the holiday season to be constant reminders of their loss. "In order to cope, it's important to meet grief where it is," says expert Michael Lee, a chaplain and grief counselor with the western North Carolina offices of Four Seasons Compassion for Life.

Grief occurs as the natural response to the loss of relationship when a person's hopes for the future are taken away. When something or someone about which one has hopes is taken away, grief results.

"When you have an ongoing practice of thanksgiving, not a one-time ritual, it feeds your soul and gratitude comes," he says.

Lee knows first-hand the power of grief. A former New York stock trader, he watched in disbelief from his vantage point in Battery Park City as the first plane hit tower one on Sept. 11, 2001. In the aftermath, he suffered from post traumatic stress disorder, endured the grief and loss of a primary relationship, and attended seminary instead of working on Wall Street.

What he found is that everything is a trigger: music, commercials, photographs, and more.

"Essentially, you're an open target. When it's new and fresh...you're just vulnerable and it hurts."

Lee recommends the active cultivation of the habit of gratitude in the midst of grief as a way to cope. Here is his personal list of how-to strategies designed to help navigate the holiday season:

1. Seek perspective. The mind may play tricks, so gratitude offers perspective – and an exit from the prison of self-condemnation resulting from wondering if different choices could change the outcome.
2. Allow yourself to move on. "One of the interesting things about grief is that the loss can cause a person to feel numb. Sometimes, they become afraid to move on from grief, from the last intense feeling or connection," he says.
3. Express gratitude for the person you've lost. "Gratefulness or gratitude keeps the relationship alive. You'll no longer have the relationship you did, but gratitude will assuage feelings of guilt or abandonment, help you see them in a new way, and hold them in a place of life-giving emotion – not oppressive emotion."
4. Choose comfort wisely. "Everyone will go to their place of comfort," he

says. An alcoholic, for example, may choose alcohol. "We may need to find new types of comfort."

5. Do nothing. "If you don't want to cook, then don't. If you don't want to celebrate, then don't. If it is your time to sit down or walk and grieve, then it is. Don't do a single thing."

6. Replace remembrance with honoring. "This is powerful because it means you're honoring that relationship consistently. You can only honor a person." Lee honors the memory of his Dad by treating his daughter the way his father treated him. "Honor you have to bring forward," he says. "I'm embodying who he was with me."

7. Keep memories alive. When one remarks upon how much Mom loved the corn pudding or Dad's enjoyment of football, it places their memory and spirit there with you.

8. Seek and lend support. With support, healing occurs and broken hearts mend. "One of the most powerful things is when people dig down deep into their strength to help someone else. It's absolutely beautiful."

9. Find what helps, and ignore what doesn't. "I ask people to notice if they're in a place they don't want to be in their grieving process, and encourage them to find a place that could help them."

10. Ignore harmful advice. "We may have poor, imprisoning or toxic behaviors or philosophies regarding how to engage and reflect on grieving. It is best not to repress emotions," says Lee.

Eventually, the tide of grief will turn, and the days will seem brighter once again.

"Souls at times of grief feel as though they're at the bottom of the ocean where there is no sun, no sound, and a sense of heaviness. If one can shift thanksgiving to a practice, then eventually there will be a day when they will rise above the water," he says.

Michael Lee is a grief counselor and chaplain with the Highlands office of Four Seasons Compassion for Life – <http://www.fourseasonscfl.org/> – Flat Rock, N.C., serving patients in Henderson, Buncombe, Macon, Jackson, Swain and Transylvania counties and surrounding areas.

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