

## Dear Reader,

You have my deepest sympathy on the death of your spouse. Whether this death was expected or sudden, painful or “easy,” whether it came after a long life or much too soon, your loss is weighty, and your grief is important to God. God wants to heal your heart of whatever burdens you are carrying. I hope this collection of reflections and prayers assists in that process.

Each entry offers an opportunity for you to reflect and to rest in God’s presence. Each ends with a short psalm verse that you may remember throughout your day. For, as St. Ambrose of Milan wrote, “A psalm softens wrath, relieves care, and lightens sorrow” (Ambrose, *Explanatio Psalmi 1*, CSEL 64.7).

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## TEARS

**Y**ou're supposed to have strong feelings when your spouse dies. In the first few days or weeks you may have been worn out with sadness and weeping. But what if sometimes you don't feel anything? There may be times when you don't miss your spouse. Does it mean you didn't love each other as much as you should have? Do you have some guilt about what you feel or don't feel?

My husband died suddenly in an accident. For the first few days I just felt numb. I *knew* I was supposed to be overwhelmed with sorrow. I'm not sure if I was in shock, but the tears wouldn't come. It was a bit embarrassing. Everyone was crying except me. It made me doubt my love for him. Had I just been pretending all those years?

There is no correct manner or sequence for mourning, no recipe for cooking up tears. You may start crying when you least expect it. Tears may be released by a scent, a piece of music, a walk, an embrace, or by talking about your spouse. Your tears may bubble up at inopportune moments. Let

them flow. Or they may hide beneath the surface. Either way, you have permission.

*At a time when you can be alone, give yourself the gift of quietude. Sit up straight yet comfortably and relax. Close your eyes if you like. Allow God to uncover and see how you are feeling at this moment.*

*When you are ready, you may conclude with:*

**O LORD, FEELINGS WASH OVER ME IN THE WAKE OF (my spouse's) DEATH.** There are so many that I can't capture, let alone name or understand them. I give all those feelings to you—numbness, heartbreak, helplessness, confusion, anger, relief, and all the rest, both “good” and “bad.” Help me to accept each emotion as it passes through me. Open my heart to whatever mourning brings my way. I ask this in the name of Jesus, my brother in suffering. *Amen.*

*Into your hands I commend my spirit;  
you will redeem me, LORD, God of truth.*

PSALM 31:5

## CONDOLENCES

Condolence wishes can truly bring us comfort. They communicate that others share our grief. The word “condolence” comes from the Latin word meaning “to feel pain.” But others cannot truly feel how deeply we are suffering. They cannot know the conflicted feelings within us. Their expressions of sympathy can only go so far in easing our grief. And yet, their wishes do serve to remind us that we are not alone in our sorrow, that others also cared for and will miss our deceased spouse.

When my husband of forty-five years died suddenly, I received many such expressions of sympathy, letting me know how much he would be missed. Condolences were expressed during his visitation and funeral, in phone calls and in cards. Many of the condolences were from people who had known him from his work or hobbies or service activities—people I didn’t even know. Each time I heard from someone, I felt God easing my sorrow.

Of course, there is one person who truly knows the pain you feel, someone who suffered everything that you can possibly suffer and wants to walk with you and share the burden of your grief.

*Enter into a time of silence, opening yourself to God.*

*In your mind, picture Jesus, looking into your eyes and reaching out to you. Rest under his loving gaze.*

*When ready you may conclude your quiet time with:*

**DEAR JESUS, THANK YOU FOR YOUR LOVE.**

You alone can see into my heart and know what I am going through. You endured all the pain that I am suffering and more. But the death of (*my spouse*) has left me feeling weak and alone. I ask that you stay by my side. Open my heart to others who reach out to me along the way. Hold me in your love and guide me. Lord Jesus, be my savior and my friend. *Amen.*

*The LORD is close to the brokenhearted,  
saves those whose spirit is crushed.*

PSALM 34:19

## PRAYERS

People have probably told you they are praying for you. This can be a great consolation. It means that you are not in this alone. Others are lifting you up in prayer and asking God to ease your pain. After the death of my husband, someone in my parish went one step further. She said to me, “It may be hard for you to pray right now, but don’t worry, we’ll pray *for* you.”

How did she know that I was finding it difficult to pray? Words had failed me. After all, what do you say to a God who has allowed your spouse to be taken from you, perhaps after great suffering? It gave me hope to know that the faith and prayers of the community would make up for whatever was lacking in my prayer life.

It’s all right to continue to mouth the words and participate in the rituals, all the while leaning on the faith-filled prayers of friends and family, your parish community, and all the saints and angels. Like meals that people bring and chores that neighbors do without being asked, it’s okay to allow the

prayers of your faith community to sustain you in times when you can't find it in your heart to pray.



*Let yourself be quiet for a while.*

*Let your chair hold you up, let go of any agenda or thoughts, let all the voices inside you fade away, and listen to the silence.*

*When you are ready, you may conclude your quiet time with:*

**O GOD, IT'S HARD TO TRUST YOU RIGHT NOW.** I don't know what to say to you. I feel empty and angry, and I just want it all to go away. I go through the motions of prayer, but my heart isn't in it. Is it okay if I just listen to other people pray for a while? I do believe; Lord, help my unbelief. *Amen.*

*Have pity on me,  
LORD, for I am weak.*

PSALM 6:3A