

“God Rest You Merry”:

Eight Ways Caregivers Can Bring Peace and Cheer at Christmas

The following suggestions have come from men and women who have passed various milestones on their own sacred walks.

From Donna Authers, author of A Sacred Walk: Dispelling the Fear of Death and Caring for the Dying (A&A Publishing, 2008, ISBN: 978-0-6152458-5-0, \$15.95)

“Take care of you.” The patient for whom you are caring loves you, and neglecting yourself adds to his burden. Rest assured that your efforts are appreciated, but your loved one can see how tired and worried you are. Get enough rest and exercise, and eat properly, even if he cannot. His spirit and soul are the things that need nourishment now—not his body. If you take care of yourself, you will be better able to enjoy walking with your loved one as he prepares for his last big adventure.

“Reminisce with me.” Don’t avoid bringing up stories and memories because you are worried they will be too painful to talk about. Your dying loved one will likely want to remember holidays past, and traditions old and new. These memories will reaffirm her sense of being loved and valued.

“As I am able, include me in Christmas preparations.” No, your ill loved one will not be able to participate in Christmas traditions, visits, and celebrations to the extent that he once did. Therefore, make every effort to ensure that he isn’t isolated and that he is a participant in as much as possible, even if it’s just watching *White Christmas* with the family or hanging an ornament or two on the tree.

“Remind me of the reason for the season.” It’s easy for anyone to get caught up in the consumerism that has attached itself to Christmas, but the bottom line is that *it’s not about us, and it never was*. Remind your loved one that birth and death are simply the bookends of life on this earth as we prepare to celebrate the nativity of Christ—and that it’s because of His death and resurrection that we who call ourselves Christians believe that we will live forever.

“Remind me of the source of joy that never runs dry.” As a caregiver, you’re probably already feeling grief at the prospect of losing someone you love. Chances are, your patient feels the same way about leaving you, even though you both know that you will one day meet again on heaven’s shores. Don’t let the prospect of your loved one’s leaving rob you of all your joy. Our joy is found in the Lord, and faith, hope, and love are marvelous reasons to celebrate. Celebrate the love you shared, and the opportunities you had to bear one another’s burdens.

“Share your faith with me.” There is no better gift for a loved one’s last Christmas than the gift of peace. Helping to alleviate any lingering fear of death is a gift of inestimable value. Whether an atheist, agnostic, or a person of faith, not everyone is comfortable initiating conversations about what they believe, so you should keep your antenna up and listen for the subtle openings to share your faith. Losing your health is one thing, but

coming to terms with losing your life is a monumental task. Hebrews 11 says, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Even people with great faith need to be reminded of God’s forgiveness and promises, especially that of eternal life.

“Help me depart without regrets.” Mental health professionals tell us that the number one inhibitor to finding peace is an inability to forgive. Unfortunately, guilt and regret abound in especially large quantities during the holidays. Help your loved one find peace by forgiving her for any unresolved issues, and encourage her to reconcile with others. Forgiveness is a soothing balm to the spirit that releases the hold of the past on the present. The gift of peace is a wonderful one, especially at Christmas.

“Pray with me.” Prayer is another wonderful gift for one’s last Christmas, and there is no greater prayer than “The Prayer of Abandonment” when one realizes that he is no longer in control of his time or of his life. Originally written by Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916) after becoming a hermit monk, it is something that should be kept in every caregiver’s toolkit. There is no better way to find peace than to abandon yourself—or your loved one—into the hands of God.

The Prayer of Abandonment

Father, I abandon myself into your hands.

Do with me what you will.

Whatever you may do, I thank you.

I am ready for all. I accept all.

**Let only Your will be done in me,
and in all your creatures.**

I wish no more than this, O Lord.

Into your hands I commend my soul;

I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,

For I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself,

To surrender myself into your Hands,

**Without reserve, and with boundless confidence,
for you are my Father. Amen.**

Praying this prayer has brought peace to many people—a peace that passes understanding. Philippians 4:7 succinctly conveys the benefit of such peace: “And the peace that passes all understanding will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.”

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