

**When the Earthquake Comes: Spiritual Journeys of the Grieving**  
Hope and Help for the Holidays and Beyond Grief Seminar  
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## Why “Faith” Matters

- ▶ Finding Community & Connection
- ▶ Having a Life Purpose
- ▶ Structure for life & history
- ▶ Rituals to make Life Transitions matter
- ▶ Coping with struggles
- ▶ Finding Strength & Hope
- ▶ Confidence in self & others
- ▶ Finding Meaning
- ▶ Making Sense of “Mess” in World
- ▶ Understand and Reduce suffering
- ▶ Making world better place
- ▶ Faith/Trust that all will be OK
- ▶ Feeling Alive & finding Peace
- ▶ Finding Happiness
- ▶ “Rock” / Foundation in sea of impermanence
- ▶ Connecting with Divine
- ▶ Afterlife and Unknown
- ▶ Something bigger than “I”
- ▶ Mystery, Awe, Wonder



## **C.S. Lewis' struggle with God after loss of his wife...**

“... Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be — or so it feels — welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become. There are no lights in the windows. It might be an empty house. Was it ever inhabited? It seemed so once. And that seeming was as strong as this. What can this mean? Why is He so present a commander in our time of prosperity and so very absent a help in time of trouble?”

*Read more here:* <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/questionofgod/ownwords/grief.html>

## **Psalm 13: A psalm of David.**

<sup>1</sup> How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?  
<sup>2</sup> How long must I wrestle with my thoughts  
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?  
How long will my enemy triumph over me?  
<sup>3</sup> Look on me and answer, LORD my God.  
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,  
<sup>4</sup> and my enemy will say, “I have overcome him,”  
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

## **Megan Divine: “How to Help a Grieving Friend?” (and yourself...) (video)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2zLCCRT-nE>

“In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer. And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there’s something stronger – something better, pushing right back.”

*Albert Camus*

## **John O’Donohue’s “On the Death of the Beloved”**

<https://www.jackie.org/john-odonohue-poem-on-the-death-of-the-beloved/>

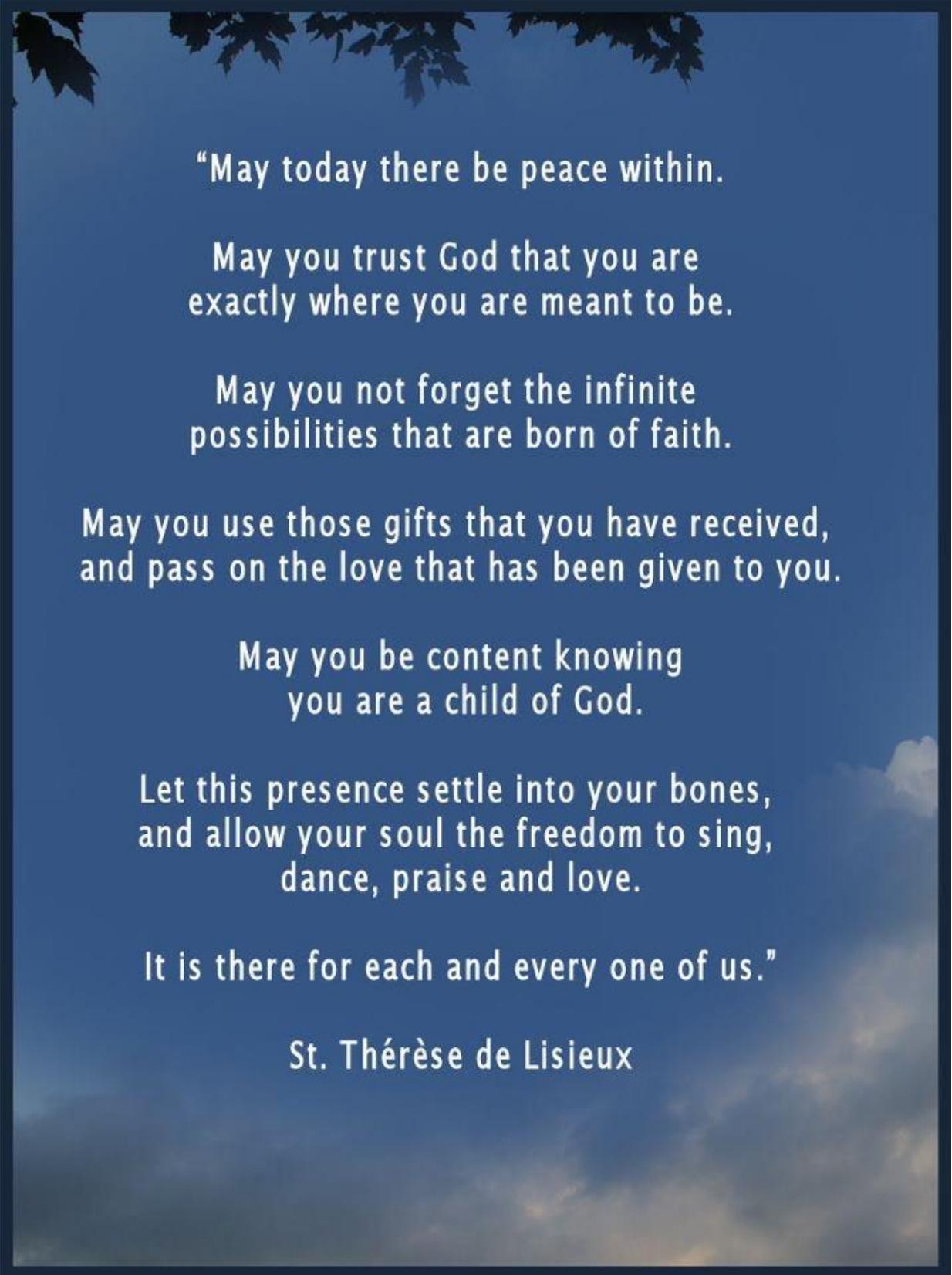
***“Kindness”*** by Naomi Shihab Nye

Before you know what kindness really is  
you must lose things,  
feel the future dissolve in a moment  
like salt in a weakened broth.  
What you held in your hand,  
what you counted and carefully saved,  
all this must go so you know  
how desolate the landscape can be  
between the regions of kindness.  
How you ride and ride  
thinking the bus will never stop,  
the passengers eating maize and chicken  
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness  
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho  
lies dead by the side of the road.  
You must see how this could be you,  
how he too was someone  
who journeyed through the night with plans  
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,  
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.  
You must wake up with sorrow.  
You must speak to it till your voice  
catches the thread of all sorrows  
and you see the size of the cloth.  
Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,  
only kindness that ties your shoes  
and sends you out into the day to gaze at bread,  
only kindness that raises its head  
from the crowd of the world to say  
It is I you have been looking for,  
and then goes with you everywhere  
like a shadow or a friend.

From *Words Under the Words: Selected Poems*.



“May today there be peace within.

May you trust God that you are  
exactly where you are meant to be.

May you not forget the infinite  
possibilities that are born of faith.

May you use those gifts that you have received,  
and pass on the love that has been given to you.

May you be content knowing  
you are a child of God.

Let this presence settle into your bones,  
and allow your soul the freedom to sing,  
dance, praise and love.

It is there for each and every one of us.”

St. Thérèse de Lisieux

## The Abyss of Grief

Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM - <https://cac.org/the-abyss-of-grief-2018-11-19/>

*My friend and brilliant translator of many mystics, Mirabai Starr, who lives nearby in Taos, New Mexico, has encountered numerous deaths and losses, each cultivating in her a deeper spiritual practice and longing for God. But the death of her fourteen-year-old daughter, Jenny, in a car crash was “an avalanche,” Starr writes, “annihilating everything in its path”:*

Suddenly, the sacred fire I have been chasing all my life engulfed me. I was plunged into the abyss, instantaneously dropped into the vast stillness and pulsing silence at which all my favorite mystics hint. So shattered I could not see my own hand in front of my face, I was suspended in the invisible arms of a Love I had only dreamed of. Immolated, I found myself resting in fire. Drowning, I surrendered, and discovered I could breathe under water.

So this was the state of profound suchness I had been searching for during all those years of contemplative practice. This was the holy longing the saints had been talking about in poems that had broken my heart again and again. This was the sacred emptiness that put that small smile on the face of the great sages. And I hated it. I didn't want vastness of being. I wanted my baby back.

But I discovered that there was nowhere to hide when radical sorrow unraveled the fabric of my life. I could rage against the terrible unknown—and I did, for I am human and have this vulnerable body, passionate heart, and complicated mind—or I could turn toward the cup, bow to the Cupbearer, and say, “Yes.”

I didn't do it right away, nor was I able to sustain it when I did manage a breath of surrender. But gradually I learned to soften into the pain and yield to my suffering. In the process, compassion for all suffering beings began unexpectedly to swell in my heart. I became acutely aware of my connectedness to mothers everywhere who had lost children, who were, at this very moment, hearing the impossible news that their child had died. . . .

Grief strips us. According to the mystics, this is good news. Because it is only when we are naked that we can have union with the Beloved. We can cultivate spiritual disciplines designed to dismantle our identity so that we have hope of merging with the Divine. Or someone we love very much may die, and we may find ourselves catapulted into the emptiness we had been striving for. Even as we cry out in the anguish of loss, the boundless love of the Holy One comes pouring into the shattered container of our hearts. This replenishing of our emptiness is a mystery, it is grace, and it is built into the human condition.

Few among us would ever opt for the narrow gate of grief, even if it were guaranteed to lead us to God. But if our most profound losses—the death of a loved one, the ending of a marriage or a career, catastrophic disease or alienation from community—bring us to our knees before that threshold, we might as well enter. The Beloved might be waiting in the next room.

### **Reference:**

Mirabai Starr, *God of Love: A Guide to the Heart of Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Monkfish Book Publishing Company: 2012), 63-65.

## References and Recommended Readings

Stephen Arterburn and Jack Felton, Toxic Faith: Experiencing Healing From Painful Spiritual Abuse

Kate Bowler, Everything Happens for a Reason (and Other Lies I Have Loved)

Pema Chodron, When Things Fall Apart

Terri Daniel, Grief and God: When Religion Does More Harm Than Healing

Martha Whitmore Hickman, Healing After Loss: Daily Meditation for Working Through Grief

Kristin Neff, Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself

Sharon Salzberg; Faith: Trusting Your Own Deepest Experience

Alan Wolfelt: Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart