

# Prayer While Grieving

By **Becky Eldredge**

Praying during a season of loss can be hard. When I think of my own seasons of loss or of listening to others' prayer during their seasons of grief, I can think of multiple descriptions of prayer that sounded something like:

- *I cannot even sit down to pray, because my mind races everywhere when I try to pray.*
- *Being still is hard, because so much hits me at once that I don't know where to start.*
- *I am not even sure if God is there or hearing me in my pain.*
- *Prayer feels dry and empty.*
- *I cannot be still or even sit still.*

As with most things, it's always easier for me to reflect back on these seasons and remember what worked than to figure it out when I am in the middle of living a season of loss and trying to continue to grow in my prayer life. Here are three things that I try to remember myself and also offer to others who are in this season.

## 1. Pray as you can, not as you can't.

These eight words spoken by a priest friend to me many years ago bring me much comfort in many seasons of life, but especially when there is a loss in my life. How I used to be able to pray might not work right now. I can remember one season of my prayer life when I could not sit down and be still, my go-to prayer method, because I was overwhelmed with a loss. My spiritual director at the time invited me not to beat myself for not praying the way I always had and suggested trying something new, such as **walking during my prayer time**. While the stillness of prayer did not work for me, physically moving and talking to God or just being in nature and walking did.

## 2. Try puttering prayer.

**Puttering prayer** is a prayer method shared with me by a friend and colleague. She gave herself permission to "putter," and when she felt called,

she would turn her attention to God in the moment and then carry on with her day. I find this way of praying very helpful when grief has a hold of me and I cannot sit down to a long prayer period.

### 3. Talk to God openly and honestly, even if in short spurts.

Our tendency sometimes is to stop prayer all together when it no longer feels the same or our prayer life changes. This can spin us into desolation when we stop praying all together. When facing a loss, I find it is helpful simply to talk to God often in heartfelt, honest conversation. Upon hearing a friend died, I held on to this type of prayer for weeks after her death. I would go about my day and remember her and then talk to God briefly about what was on my mind. Maybe it was a prayer of thanksgiving for a memory or the gift of her friendship. Other times, I might feel angry she was gone. Sometimes, I would simply weep and talk to God about how much I missed her. All our conversations were short but honest.

Eventually, the rawness of a new loss subsides a bit, and as it does, we can return to a season of prayer in which we can sit still longer, and we can face the silence again. Until that time comes, though, we can continue on in our prayer lives as gently as possible, trusting that God will welcome us back every time we come.