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Holding Two Truths

Balancing grief and gratitude in metastatic disease

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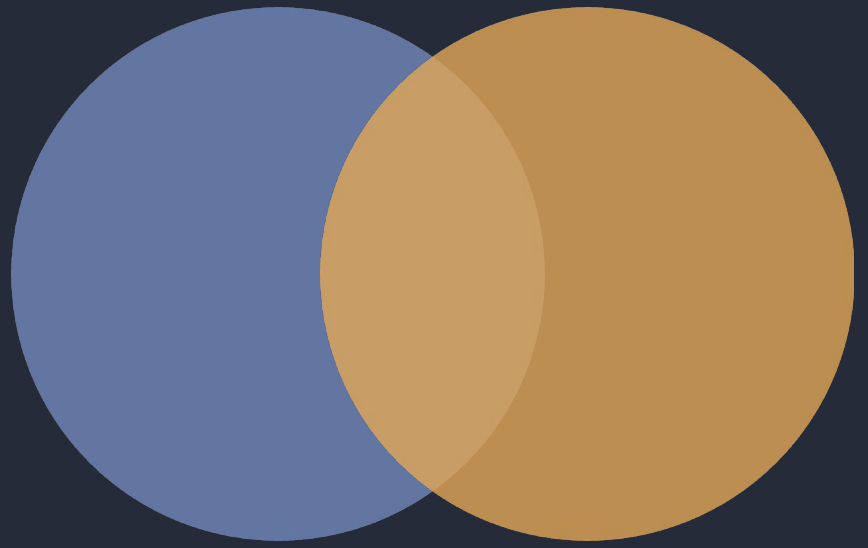


BEFORE WE BEGIN

A space where nothing needs to be fixed

No fixing

You don’t have to resolve anything.

No forced positivity

Hard days count here. No silver lining required.

Take what helps

Use what fits. Leave the rest.

Step out anytime

Take a breath or leave the room. No explanation needed.

TWO TRUTHS

Grief and gratitude can live in the same day, the same hour, even the same breath.

You don’t have to choose between them.

TRUTH ONE

Grief in metastatic disease

Losses in our community

Grief when friends in the metastatic community die.

Survivor’s guilt

Wondering why you are still here when others are not.

Changes in your own life

Grief for lost plans, abilities, roles, and routines.

Facing mortality

Living with an incurable illness and the reality of your own death.

TRUTH TWO

Gratitude, on your own terms

Meaningful moments

A good cup of coffee, a quiet morning, a day that went well.

Relationships

The people who show up, and the ones you have come to love.

Life itself

Another birthday, another season, an ordinary Tuesday.

Permission to skip it

Gratitude is a feeling that arrives. It is not a duty to perform.

BOTH AND

Both can be true at once

GRIEF SAYS

“I miss her so much.”

“I’m scared of what’s ahead.”

“This isn’t the life I planned.”

and

GRATITUDE SAYS

“I’m so glad I knew her.”

“I’m thankful for this good morning.”

“I love the people beside me.”

A HARD PLACE

Survivor’s guilt

“Why them, and not me?”

Many people living with metastatic cancer feel this.

It can be a sign of how deeply you connected.

It doesn’t need an answer to be real. It needs company.

HANDLE WITH CARE

When “stay positive” isn’t helpful

What we often hear	What might help instead
“Stay positive.”	“That sounds really hard. I’m here.”
“At least it’s not worse.”	“Tell me what today is like.”
“You’re so strong.”	“You don’t have to be strong with me.”
“Everything happens for a reason.”	“I don’t have the words, and I’m not going anywhere.”

These lines usually come from love. We can still say what we need.

ROOM FOR ALL OF IT

Other feelings join in

Grief · Gratitude · Fear · Meaning · Connection · Joy

None of these cancels out the others.

Joy doesn’t erase grief. Fear doesn’t erase meaning. They take turns, overlap, and sometimes arrive together.

PRACTICAL WAYS

Five ways to hold both

Small, doable practices. Try the one that fits and skip the rest.

PRACTICE 1 OF 5

Name both, out loud

Swap “but” for “and.” Saying both lets each feeling count without canceling the other out.

TRY THIS

“Right now I feel ____ and ____.”

Say it to someone, write it down, or whisper it to yourself.

PRACTICE 2 OF 5

Give grief a place

Grief needs somewhere to go. A small ritual gives it room without letting it take over the whole day.

TRY THIS

- Light a candle for someone you miss.
- Say their name or write them a note.
- Pick a time for grief, then let the day move on.

PRACTICE 3 OF 5

Let gratitude be small

Gratitude doesn’t have to be big or constant. Noticing one specific good thing is enough, and skipping it on a hard day is allowed.

TRY THIS

- Each evening, name one specific thing: a person, a taste, a moment.
- If nothing comes, that’s okay. Try again tomorrow.

PRACTICE 4 OF 5

Find your people

Some feelings are easiest to say to people who already understand. You also get to tell the people who love you what actually helps.

TRY THIS

- Join a metastatic support group, in person or online.
- Choose one person who can hear the unfiltered version.
- Tell people what you need: “Just listen” or “Help me plan.”

PRACTICE 5 OF 5

Ask what matters most

Facing mortality is easier with a sense of purpose. Your care team can help with these questions, and palliative care can be added alongside cancer treatment at any stage.

ASK YOURSELF

- What do I want more of in the days ahead? Less of?
- Who do I want near me, and what do I want them to know?
- What would a good day look like?

TO TAKE WITH YOU

Try one this week

Name it
Say both feelings with an “and.”

Honor it
Give grief a small ritual.

Notice it
Spot one good thing, however small.

Share it
Talk with someone who gets it.

Choose it
Ask what matters most.

Pick one. Small is enough.

OPEN CONVERSATION

Questions and reflections

Ask anything, share what's on your mind, or simply listen. There are no wrong questions here, and silence is welcome too.

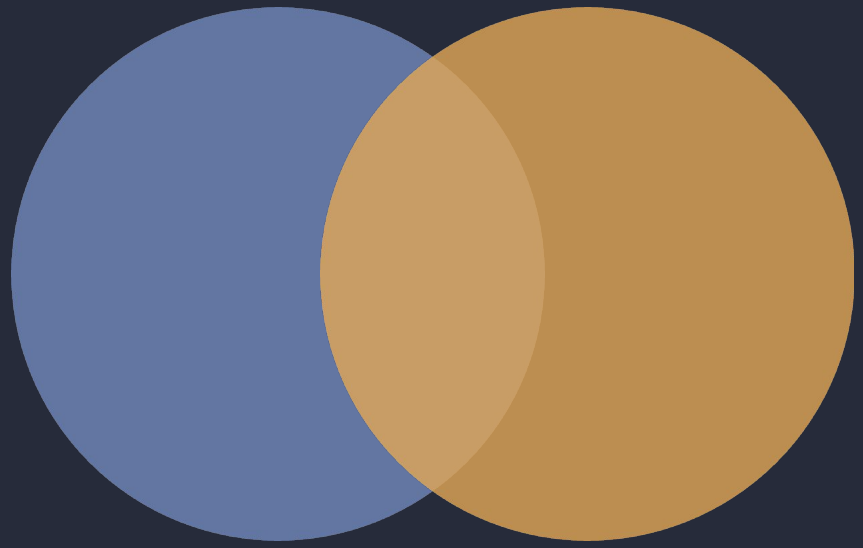
TO GET US STARTED

- Which of these feels closest to your life right now?
- What has helped you hold both?
- What do you wish the people around you knew?

THANK YOU

Both are true.

You don’t have to resolve it. You get to hold it, and you don’t have to hold it alone.



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