

**What Kind of Luggage are you Carrying?**  
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For some time the tourist industry has urged us to travel “light” and with more convenience in order to save energy, time and general wear and tear.

- We can choose soft-side luggage, “weightless” garment bags that fold, duffels and kits designed for certain items, totes with side pockets and roomy interiors for carry-on or car pack, bags that hang from the shoulders, Velcro and zipper closures, adjustable/removable straps and handles, and plastic bags for layering.
- We can take less clothing by choosing separates that can be mixed or matched for different occasions and materials that are wrinkle-proof and washable.
- We can learn from those who do testing how best to pack our belongings.
- We can also let someone help us carry our bags.

It seems to me there are cues in this for us in our grief journey. After all, we choose what we will carry and for how long. What do you have in your luggage? What choices are there for you?

- **Unresolved grief:** Feelings left from experiences of the past (fears, anger, guilt, rejection). You may decide some are not worth carrying any longer, and others that cannot be discarded may well be given another look.
- **Helplessness and hopelessness:** There are garments that take much space when you start out, but you may be able to fold them more neatly later on.
- **The “why” questions:** Why this? Why mine? They are part and parcel of the trip, but after traveling a distance, you may pick up the “what” question – What am I going to do with my life? – and then the “how” question – How am I going to do it? These last are important – hold on to them.
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- **Expectations:** Some are helpful, some hurtful, and you may not be able to sort them out until you are under way.

If you have a goal or timetable set by someone else, remove it early in your journey and proceed in your own way and at your own pace.

If you expect others to understand and meet your needs, you risk disappointment and resentment that will delay your travel. Try substituting a resolution to tell those near you what you need and how they can help you. Then let them do it.

- **Vulnerability:** You may be afraid to take this with you, but as you acknowledge and come to understand your feelings, the fear will diminish and lighten your load.
- **The “should’s”:** I should have and the “if only’s” – if only I had – are heavy to carry, but you will find they are disposable.
- **A stubborn, positive attitude:** This will come in handy, but you may not put it out to wear at first.
- **Tears:** Have them readily available. Not only is it all right to cry, but to cry as often as you feel the need and on someone’s shoulder. If you hold back, you waste energy.
- **Courage and spirit:** Summon as much as you are able and expect to add more whenever and wherever you can, to make sure you keep on going through the valley to the other side.
- **Time:** Use it for layering, but be sure it is “time” you intend to use.
- **Hugs:** Carry them in your shoulder bag or outer pocket and have them ready several times a day. This is good therapy for the grieving traveler.
- **Patience with yourself and others and real personal forgiveness:** A three-piece suit, one you won’t wear for every day, perhaps, but it looks good on you and there will be occasions, more and more of them as you discover who you are now, when it will be comfortable.
- **Memories and mementos:** Tuck them in the corners and in the spaces between items. They will even the load.
- **An understanding of the enormity of your loss:** Pack this so you can put it on daily for a while and gradually you will become aware of a new feeling – the wonder of living. If you exclude this, you put your grief on hold and it waits for you.
- **A sense of hope:** If you think you might as well leave this behind because you won’t have use for it on this trip, remember: Even Doris Nelson, polio victim who spent thirty-six years in an iron lung, had “an expectancy to something more.”
- **A plan:** I hope you have room so you can add a plan when you run across one. A plan for some activity you may not consider within the realm of possibility for you now. To miss this would be another grief.

May you have a safe and productive trip.