

5 Ways to Handle Grief, Loneliness at Christmas

“This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word revives me” (Ps. 119:50, MEV).

Christmas isn't a joyful season for everybody. Grief—whether from loss, loneliness or both—crescendos around this time of year for many, and the deep, emotional pain can seem like almost too much to bear.

Isaiah 53:4 states, “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.” Jesus carries as much of the burden as we let Him. But in addition to falling into our Savior's loving arms, here are five suggestions to ease your personal Christmas blues or empower you to help someone else dealing with grief and loneliness:

1. Be kind to yourself. Billy Graham likens the death of a loved one to major surgery. But that can also be true regarding the death of a relationship, say a divorce. Healing from any medical operation takes time, and so does finding a new way of life after losing someone close. Leave the decorations in the attic this year if you need to. Find another family member to host Christmas dinner. Most importantly, perhaps, allow yourself to cry—or even scream—out to God as you process. David did in Psalm 61:2. Jesus wept when his friend Lazarus died (John 11:1-44). Your tears aren't a sign of faithlessness. They're a natural and necessary response to your loss. Let God heal you (Matthew 11:28).

- Why am I having such a hard time with grief? Billy Graham answers.
- I know my husband is in heaven, but how can I get over the pain of his death? Billy Graham answers.
- Audio: Hear Billy Graham talk about “the rest that

endures.”

2. Adjust your expectations. Anticipate Christmas will be different without your loved one and be proactive about your emotional health. Don't live in fear of your emotions, but take stock of your heart, especially before logging onto Facebook or other social media. Feelings of loneliness have a way of intensifying when you're bombarded by social media posts of your friends apparently having a grand time. Sign off for now if you need to.

If you find yourself in the comforter role this Christmas, keep your words washed in love and extend grace. Whether Uncle John has been gone for seven days, seven months or seven years, your aunt still misses him. Don't wonder (especially aloud) how she can still be sad after all these years. “How are you holding up?” is typically a safe question when talking with someone who has experienced loss. Check out the Sharing Hope in Crisis course from the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team if you're interested in in-depth training for these sensitive situations.

- Is it a sin to feel like Christmas will be different this year without my loved one? Billy Graham answers.
- Billy Graham's Answer: Offer compassion, not judgment to those grieving

3. Reach out. Sometimes the best way to lift your spirit is by helping someone else. Isolation turns your focus inward. Instead, volunteer with a local church, serve dinner to the homeless or walk your elderly neighbor's dog. Do something to serve. Additionally, if you're aching to have Christmas dinner with others, ask to join a family member, friend or someone in your church. Remember, it's never a bad idea to offer to bring a dish, supplies or help with cleanup. Alternatively, if you know someone dealing with grief or loneliness, do your part. Give the gift of your time (Galatians 6:2).

- Billy Graham's Answer to fighting loneliness at Christmastime.
- Why are people so thoughtless at Christmastime? Billy Graham answers.
- How can I help my friend who is facing divorce? Billy Graham answers.
- How should I pray for a dying friend? Billy Graham answers.

4. Say something. Memories linger in your loved ones' absence. Remember the funny stories. Share them. Laugh and cry with your family members and friends as you reminisce. Or don't. If there aren't good memories or it's just too soon, consider finding new traditions and ways to focus forward. If you're on the outside looking in, don't feel compelled to change the subject if someone mourning brings up good memories about the deceased. Operate cautiously and with sensitivity but above all else be a good listener and don't mind the tears. Memories are precious gifts from God, and they are one of the few ways a loved one's legacy lives on.

- Watch: Value of a Soul

5. Cling to the promises of God. Especially when you don't feel like it. Consider John 14:18, which says: "No, I will not abandon you or leave you as orphans in the storm—I will come to you." You might feel forgotten by people, but you aren't forgotten by our heavenly Father. God is here. He sees you grieving. He wants to comfort you. Remind others of that truth. If you aren't familiar with His promises, start by finding peace with God.

- Why would God care about us when the universe is so big? Billy Graham answers.
- Why won't God just go ahead and take me to heaven? Billy Graham answers.

Some quotes from Billy Graham on grief:

- “With Christ as your Savior and constant Companion, you, although alone, need never be lonely.”
- When we grieve over someone who has died in Christ, we are sorrowing not for them but for ourselves. Our grief isn’t a sign of weak faith, but of great love.”
- “It is our Lazarus tomb dark and foreboding and drenched with bitter tears, but it is there that we meet our Lord who brings life from death and gladness from the very tomb of bereavement. Christ can give rest in the midst of sorrow.”
- “If there is something we need more than anything else during grief, it is a friend who stands with us, who doesn’t leave us. Jesus is that friend.”

For the original article, visit .

How to Keep Your Pets Safe From Holiday Health Hazards

Wrapping paper, tinsel, and ribbons are all part of the winter holidays. But these items—and other household hazards—can pose serious choking and poisoning risks to dogs, cats, and other pets this time of year.

To keep your animals safe, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has issued an advisory on holiday-related pet hazards. Here’s a roundup.

Tinsel, wrapping, and ribbons: Christmas tree adornments, gift wrapping paper, and ribbons—like string and dental floss—pose significant hazards to cats that ingest them, says FDA veterinarian Carmela Stamper. Keep them away from pets at all costs.

“Your cat may find these decorations irresistible because they look like easy-to-catch, sparkly, and wiggly prey,” Stamper says, noting they can cause serious stomach and intestinal damage.

Holiday plants: Holiday plants such as poinsettias, holly and mistletoe can be poisonous to animals that nibble on them.

Poinsettias have a milky white, latex sap that can irritate your animal’s mouth and stomach and may cause vomiting and diarrhea. “If your cat has snacked on poinsettia leaves, you can help him by picking up his food and water dishes for a couple of hours to let his stomach settle,” Stamper advises.

The National Animal Poison Control Center says the major toxic chemicals in mistletoe are lectins and phoratoxins, which can affect the heart by causing low blood pressure and slowed heart rate.

Holly isn’t as harmful, but in dogs and cats alike, the plant’s toxins can cause drooling, vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite, and decreased activity.

Pet treats: Don’t allow your dog to overdo it on pet treats over the holidays. According to Stamper, if your dog eats the treats whole, or too many at once, he or she may not be able to digest them. Unchewed pet treats can get stuck in the trachea (windpipe) or gastrointestinal tract (esophagus, stomach, and intestines).

If you’re worried your pet is suffering from distress from too many treats, consult your veterinarian.

“When in doubt, contact your veterinarian, who may need to take x-rays or use an endoscope to see what and where the problem is,” Stamper says. Your dog may even need surgery to remove blockages in the intestines.

Table scraps: Don’t give your pet table scraps that are high

in fat, such as fat trimmed from meat or skin from your roasted turkey or chicken.

“In addition to the typical gastrointestinal upset, rich, fatty foods can cause a potentially life-threatening and painful disease called pancreatitis,” Stamper says. The most common symptoms of pancreatitis in dogs include vomiting, stomach pain, restlessness, shaking, diarrhea, fever, and weakness. In cats, the symptoms are less clear and harder to notice, such as decreased appetite and weight loss.

And be careful what you put in the trash can, where dogs may help themselves to turkey or steak bones disposed of there.

“Don’t forget, once dinner is done, dispose of the leftovers and bones somewhere where your pets can’t get to them,” Stamper says.

Human treats: Chocolate can be dangerous to your dog or cat. After eating chocolate, some pets develop life-threatening liver failure and bleeding disorders.

Even mints can cause life-threatening problems for your dog if they contain xylitol, also found in food items such as candy, gum, some peanut butters, and baked goods, and personal hygiene products, such as toothpaste and mouthwash.

Symptoms occur quickly after dogs eat xylitol-containing items, and include vomiting, low blood sugar (hypoglycemia), decreased activity, weakness, staggering, incoordination, collapse, and seizures.

Alcohol is also toxic to pets, who can suffer vomiting, diarrhea, incoordination, weakness, decreased activity, difficulty breathing, and shaking. In severe cases, coma and death from respiratory failure can occur.

“Don’t accidentally leave your eggnog on the coffee table,” Stamper says.

For the original article, visit .

Let Earth Receive Her King!

A miracle has happened ... heaven has invaded earth ... God has become one of us ... His presence has brought the healing power of heaven to earth's sickened condition. What a miracle it is.

Where there once was depression and grief ... now there is now the possibility of joy.

Where there once was confusion and stormy circumstances ... there is now the possibility of peace.

Where sin once ruled the condition of mankind ... now forgiveness has the final word.

His birth has changed everything for every generation in every century on every continent.

Jesus has come. Let the earth receive her King!

One cannot contemplate the glory of this season without pondering the music that accompanies this most triumphant time of year.

The lyrics of the hymns of Christmas proclaim, perhaps, the greatest truths of Christian theology other than the Word of God itself. Within the hallowed words of the sacred carols, humanity is reminded that God came as a Baby and that nothing would ever be the same again.

Consider these lyrics from the majestic and centuries old carol, "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing!":

"Hail! The heaven-born Prince of Peace; Hail the son of

Righteousness

Light and life to all He brings, risen with healing in His wings

Mild He lays His glory by, born that man, no more may die

Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth!"

The One Who has been given authority in the realm of peace now belongs to earth. This Baby left the glory of heaven so that you and I would never experience the pain of death. We are born again because He was born to us.

Don't those lyrics just ring into the depths of your earthly soul?

The words of "Oh Come All Ye Faithful!" penned by John Reading stir the most wretched among us to open our mouths in heartfelt adoration:

"Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning!

Jesus to Thee be all glory given.

Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing!"

Christmas didn't begin in Bethlehem ... Christmas began at creation! Think about that for a minute or two this Christmas season! The beloved words found in the gospel of John confirm the truth of the lyrics written by Mr. Reading in 1751:

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God ... and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." – John 1:1, 2 & 14.

The Word of the Father appeared in the flesh and His Name was Jesus!

The words of my favorite Christmas hymn never fail to elicit

tears as I silently and reverently sing the achingly beautiful lyrics. The sacredness and glory of Christmas is captured in the simple message that rings through the ages in the masterpiece entitled, "Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne":

Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown,

When Thou camest to earth for me;

But in Bethlehem's home was there found no room

For Thy holy nativity.

O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,

There is room in my heart for Thee.

The foxes found rest, and the birds their nest

In the shade of the forest tree;

But Thy couch was the sod, O Thou Son of God,

In the deserts of Galilee.

O come to my heart, Lord Jesus!

There is room in my heart for Thee.

Thou camest, O Lord, with the living Word,

That should set Thy people free;

But with mocking scorn and with crown of thorn,

They bore Thee to Calvary.

O Come to my heart, Lord Jesus!

There is room in my heart for Thee.

And once again, this Christmas, I declare with the saints of yesteryear that there is indeed room in my heart for Jesus,

the Babe in the manger. {eoa}

Carol McLeod is an author and popular speaker at women's conferences and retreats, where she teaches the Word of God with great joy and enthusiasm. Carol encourages and empowers women with passionate and practical biblical messages mixed with her own special brand of hope and humor. She has written five books, including *No More Ordinary*, *Holy Estrogen!*, *The Rooms of a Woman's Heart* and *Defiant Joy!* Her most recent book, *Refined: Finding Joy in the Midst of the Fire*, was released on Aug. 1. Her teaching DVD *The Rooms of a Woman's Heart* won the Telly Award, a prestigious industry award for excellence in religious programming. You can also listen to Carol's "A Jolt of Joy" program daily on the Charisma Podcast Network.

How You Can Defeat the Giant of Fear and Negativity

David's victory over Goliath took force. The soldiers and even King Saul had fear flowing so strongly around them that it kept them frozen in place. They sincerely wanted to defeat Goliath and the Philistines but failed to engage in the battle.

King Saul desperately needed this win for his own political career and personal psyche. He had the internal motivation, but it just wasn't enough to overcome the flow of fear. The soldiers wanted the win because that's what they'd signed up for—to advance their nation and overcome oppressive forces—but the experience or flow of fear around them was just too much.

You may be just like that. On a scale from 1 to 5, your

deepest desire at a level 5 is to stand strong against the negative flows against your life. As a man seeking to live close to God in this culture, there are many things that push against your life. Yet, you know from your own experiences that scoring a 5 on the “want to” scale doesn’t always produce your desired outcome. Sure, a strong desire is a must and sincerity is critical, but there’s more to the equation of dropping a giant in his tracks than just “want to.”

All of those present on the hillside the day David brought down Goliath had the same emotional experiences that David was having. David could feel what was taking place in the atmosphere.

Like it was for David, so it is for you today. A constant flow of experiences is taking place around you and not all of those are positive, life giving, or feel-good. Yet even negative experiences contain positive and godly possibilities.

The flow of fear or negative intimidation may be very real and present, but rather than passively backing away from those moments, we can simply muster our courage by remembering David’s story. David knew that no matter the circumstances or negative forces aligned against him that only one thing mattered—God was on his side.

Don’t make the wrong assumption that when circumstances are negative and fear is creeping in that God has abandoned you. Fear and discouragement is always based on wrong assumptions. Instead, stand strong in the truth that God will never leave you or forsake you (Deuteronomy 31:6).

Real giants are between you and the adventures God has destined for your life. The threats around you are real and the flows of negativity may be very strong, but passivity is not the answer.

A passive response in a negative situation breeds more negativity! But the proper application of force during a

negative experience is the very place victories start.

How You Can Defeat the Giant of Fear and Negativity

- Know that negative experiences flow against your life and are normal.
- Bad situations are not a sign God is mad at you.
- Giants that threaten your spiritual life are an invitation to deepen your dependence upon God.
- David was both a warrior and a worshipper. In times of battle take the time to worship God and thank Him for victory.

Don't waste time trying to change the flow of negativity. Instead, FACE IT and know that God promises to be with you!

Passivity is not the answer. It won't help to pretend Goliath is not right in front of you if you can smell his breath.

Use the proper application of force and face giants head on, coming against them in the name of the Lord.

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For the original article, visit .

Maintenance: How Faith and

Fitness Compare and Contrast

I was recently intrigued by an Instagram picture posted by one of the many inspiring fit females I follow, one who's also a very busy mom, to boot.

Though the post showcased her impressive physique, it wasn't the rock-hard abs or defined quads that got my attention, but the caption. In it, she gave her stats: her height and weight, how she eats, what supplements she takes, whether she has "cheat meals" and so on. She ended the post by sharing her current fitness goal: **"Maintain."**

Since I was introduced to weightlifting and healthy eating when I was 16, I've drawn many parallels between our physical and spiritual journeys. For example, when my trainer explained to me that in order for muscles to grow, they must first be broken down through *resistance* training, a lightbulb flashed in my head. (You already see where I'm going with this, don't you?)

It's like that with our faith; in order to grow stronger spiritually, we must undergo—and *persevere through*—periods of **resistance**. We can't take shortcuts and expect stronger muscles or more solid faith. We must consider each "training session," if you will, "*an opportunity for great joy*," because it is through these tough times of pain, diligence, and testing that we're made "*perfect and complete, needing nothing*."

Another example of a faith/fitness analogy is that of stretching. (Again, it doesn't take much imagination to see where my train of thought is headed.) If you've ever taken a Yoga class or simply stretched for five minutes for the first time in decades, then you know stretching can often feel more strenuous than an hour-long weights or cardio routine. Why? Because too many of us have sedentary jobs or we neglect to

tack on stretching to the end of our workouts, so naturally our muscles are very, very tight.

Our aversion to stretching is understandable. After all, holding unnatural poses for any length of time is unpleasant and time consuming! *But* ... it's incredibly beneficial. Stretching minimizes the risk of injury, relaxes fatigued muscles, increases flexibility and range of motion during lifts, just to name a few.

Needless to say, it's also important that we allow ourselves to be "stretched" in the spiritual sense. If we resist the Holy Spirit nudging us out of our comfort zones, not only do we become stiff, dried-out pieces of clay, we miss out on many of the blessings the Potter had in store for us had we let Him bend, stretch and shape us as He saw fit.

OK, two is a sufficient number of examples, I think! Now let's get back to the Instagram post and its final word, "Maintain."

First of all, it made me chuckle as I was reminded of this meme of comedian Jim Gaffigan:



Second, and more seriously, it made me realize that there is at least one way in which faith and fitness are drastically different from one another.

This hardcore fitness woman I follow didn't start off as the picture of health. In fact, her "Before" photos show you're average out-of-shape individual who doesn't place a lot of value on her physical health. Fast-forward a few years—after hours of stretching and resistance training (not to mention eating right!)—I might add, and she no longer has weight loss goals, muscle-building goals, stamina-increasing goals, what have you.

In fact, her only goal is to *maintain* the physique she has

now. She's at the top of the mountain she set out to climb, and now she wants to enjoy the view as long as possible without traversing another valley or weathering another storm. Oh, she'll still have to fend off the predators that might sneak up and try to destroy her serenity, as well as remove any obstacles that could obstruct her view, but all in all, the toughest part of her journey is behind her.

When it comes to physical fitness, there is nothing wrong whatsoever with such maintenance goals. After all, there are only so many muscles one can build (without the use of steroids!) and so much strength one can accumulate (see previous parenthetical). But not so with our spiritual fitness.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul compares our faith to a **race**, the finish line of which will not be crossed until we enter heaven's gates. Read what he wrote to the Philippian church:

"Not that I have already attained or have already been perfected, but I follow after it so that I may lay hold of that for which I was seized by Christ Jesus. Brothers, I do not count myself to have attained, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal to the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12-14).

So we see there is no peak this side of paradise on which we can pitch a tent and camp out, never to scale another mountain again. We are ever running, ever striving, ever enduring because to stop—to *maintain*—is to backpedal toward the starting line.

"Do you not know that all those who run in a race run, but one receives the prize? So run, that you may obtain it" (1 Cor. 9:24).

As 2016 approaches it, I encourage you not only to think about setting goals pertaining to your physical health and outward appearance, but to ponder how the Lord may be leading you to grow in the areas of your spiritual well-being ... and the unseen matters of your *heart*.

As the prophet Isaiah poetically put it, *"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God shall stand forever."* (Is. 40:8). I might add that "muscles shrink and good looks fade, but our spirit lasts eternally."

May we be filled with a thirst for righteousness and a hunger for God's Word every single day of our lives, never thinking we've arrived to a transcendent summit where faith's journey is done. May the footsteps of saints and apostles and believing friends and family who have gone before us spur us onward and upward toward heavenly Mount Zion where we will hear the incomparable words, *"Well done, good and faithful servant."*

"Therefore, since we are encompassed with such a great cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. Let us look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12: 1-2).

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For the original article, visit www.dianataylor.com.

Battling the Enemy: Spiritual Warfare in Weight Loss

Did you know that weight loss and overcoming overeating starts with recognizing that you are in a spiritual battle? Many Christians make the mistake of thinking it is only about eating properly and exercise.

I made that mistake.

I am a registered nurse, so I knew about eating properly and exercise. My problem was that I couldn't make myself do what I knew to do—at least, not for long! I'd soon go back to those habits that made me gain the weight in the first place.

That is why I would lose weight, but I would always gain it back. I needed help. And that is where God came in.

When I had a severe chest pain that I thought was going to kill me, He said to me, "It is not supposed to be this way."

Would I choose to believe Him or not? I decided to believe Him and answer His call.

I believe He is calling you too. As a disciple of Christ, you play a vital role in God's story to save mankind from their sins. You are called to share the gospel with those who don't know Jesus.

That is the big story of life—the baseline of your purpose.

We'll discuss that in more detail later because you must focus on the big story to win the little battles!

However, the enemy wants to trap you in the little story of

life. The little story is focused on you.

The little story is about paying bills, heaping up material things and entertaining ourselves.

Even our eating and weight issues can be part of the little story if we don't approach them with the right perspective.

To live out the big story of life, you must be aware of the spiritual battle you are called to fight:

"For our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12).

You have a real enemy who is out to steal, kill and destroy you (John 10:10). A few months ago, a reader named Teresa wrote to me about this issue. It was around the same time that the Holy Spirit gave me the idea for this spiritual warfare series:

Don't Be Scrooged: Don't Limit Your Miracle to Christmas

Francis Xavier Cross won't go down in history as a great film character. Bill Murray didn't win an Oscar for his version of Ebenezer Scrooge in the movie *Scrooged*.

But the 1988 version is still one of the more popular and watched movies of the Christmas season. And despite some of its obvious crass and crude humor, the film does contain a

great biblical message that even Jesus would hope resonates with contemporary audiences: “Be kind to one another” (Ephesians 4:32, MEV).

Granted we could use a dose of it worldwide, but the art of showing kindness in America—and just plain being nice—has become a foreign concept, even at Christmastime. It’s not difficult to find callousness and insensitivity. It’s all around.

At least Cross saw a little reprieve for society on the day before Christmas in the final scene of *Scrooged*:

“It’s Christmas Eve. It’s the one night of the year when we all act a little nicer. We smile a little easier. We cheer a little more. For a couple of hours out of the year, we are the people we always hoped we would be. It’s a miracle. It happens every Christmas Eve. And if you waste that miracle, you’re going to burn for it. I know what I’m talking about.”

“For a couple of hours out of the year, we are the people we always hoped we would be,” he says. How sad it is that—a couple of hours out of the year? It certainly does not have to be that way, and we all know what the answer is.

As secular as the movie is, Cross may not be specifically referring to Him, but Jesus is the miracle to which he is alluding. Jesus can make that miracle happen for you, and He can change your heart and your focus from yourself and your own problems.

There is still time—before Christmas and after—to show your Christlikeness to the world. Open a door for someone. Bless someone you don’t know at a restaurant by paying for their meal, or pay for someone’s groceries. Spend time with the elderly at an assisted living facility. Remember Hebrews 13:1-2:

“Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain

strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unknowingly” (MEV).

Or how about Colossians 3:12, *“So embrace, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, a spirit of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, and longsuffering” (MEV).*

As Cross says, “There are people that are having trouble making their miracle happen. It’s not just the poor and the hungry; it’s everybody that has to have this miracle. If you believe in this spirit thing, the miracle will happen ... and then you’ll want it to happen again tomorrow. ... You’ve just got to want that feeling. If you like it and you want it, you’ll get greedy for it and you’ll want it every day of your life. It can happen to you.”

God bless us, every one.

A very merry and blessed Christmas to everyone, and thank you so much for reading my newsletter. I am blessed for it.

And as I always like to say, “There is that.”{eo}

How to Escape the Bondage of Anxiety

My freshman year in high school, I ended up with a late lunch period with mostly upperclassmen I didn’t know. I clearly remember walking down into the cafeteria unsure and fearful about where I should sit.

I tried eating with a few freshmen I didn’t know and then with some sophomores I barely knew. In both cases, I felt unwanted, like an intruder. So, for the next few days, I tried another

tactic: I sat by myself at an empty table. It took care of my social anxiety, but now I felt shame at being perceived as a complete misfit, provoking only more anxiety.

So, I made a crucial decision: I quit going to the lunchroom and ate lunch by myself in the locker room. Sure I was lonely, but I wasn't anxious anymore.

This story exemplifies my "modus operandi" with anxiety, something I have struggled with for much of my life. There have been the usual anxious thoughts like most men over money, future, and career. But this anxiety goes deeper.

It's not just worry about this or that; it's anxiety about life itself. I tried to avoid most of it by simply sticking to the few things I was good at. But this tactic cost me dearly. *I was in bondage to anxiety, trapped emotionally, and unable to grow into a man.* This is where so many men also find themselves. Perhaps you find yourself there too. How can Jesus come and save us?

The same way He did it with the disciples during the feeding of the 5,000. There is something so important about this miracle that it is mentioned in all four gospels. It communicates something crucial about Jesus, both His person and the kind of life He is calling us into as men.

And, it is the only miracle where Jesus creates the crisis that *He alone* can solve. Here they are, out in a desolate wilderness, with literally thousands of people flocking to hear Jesus' words. Sounds great for the ministry, but there's only one problem. No food—and no place to get it.

Then, Jesus stuns the disciples by insisting that they provide the food for the massive crowd. Talk about an anxiety-producing situation! Finally, He asks the disciples about their own provisions, which are ridiculously minuscule compared to the need.

So, into this crisis, Jesus comes as the true Shepherd to provide rest, provision, and guidance, the great lesson He wanted to teach those twelve disciples. The people are instructed to sit down in the green grass, which grew in wilderness places after the winter rains.

The picture of resting on green grass evokes images of Psalm 23 (lying in green pastures). And, there is not just sufficiency to fill each stomach, but superabundance. Each disciple went around with his customary basket and filled it with the leftovers.

So, what does all of this have to do with our anxiety as men? I can only tell you how it has worked for me, but I believe He works in similar ways with all of us. Just like the miracle, Jesus created a crisis in my life, asking me to leave behind financial and emotional security and enter the unknowns of starting a ministry.

The crisis engendered an anxiety that I could no longer avoid and one that only He could solve. Into that turbulence, He then showed up repeatedly as the good Shepherd, offering rest, provision, and guidance in stunning ways. In a manner I could have never predicted, it freed me from the bondage of anxiety and allowed me to take on the mantle of manhood. If he can do that for this anxiety-prone heart, He can do it for any man.

Trust me. Just ask Him.

Bill Delvaux is a graduate of Duke University and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and has served as a pastor and a high school Bible teacher. Presently, he leads Landmark Journey Ministries as a speaker, small group coach, and author of *Divided: When the Head and Heart Don't Agree* and *Landmarks: Turning Points on Your Journey Toward God*. Bill and his wife have two grown daughters and reside in Franklin, Tennessee. Follow Bill on Twitter @BillDelvaux.

For the original article, visit .

How to Overcome Anxiety and Depression Naturally This Winter

For many of us, the cooler months are welcome to give us a break from the hot temperatures of the summer. All too often, depression along with anxiety soon reign in on our lives for a variety of reasons.

The days are shorter and the sunlight is lessened which affects the circadian rhythms of the body. More time is spent indoors during this time period of our lives which can also lead to feelings of claustrophobia.

The Creator has provided us with many different fresh foods to help us during this season of change in our lives. He has given us a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables which help the body to *naturally* ward off depression and feelings of anxiety. Many scientists call these foods the “Good Mood” foods.

The Delicious Apple

Apples are rich in antioxidants helping the body to prevent oxidation and they are even great for preventing inflammation. Eating apples provides fiber to the diet and the fare can also help with balancing blood sugar levels in the body.

Anxiety-Prevention Cinnamon

Cinnamon has been used for centuries to treat ailments and it is one of the most popular spices in the world. It is often used for anxiety prevention and it can help to balance blood

sugar levels. Simply adding one teaspoon to the diet provides nearly one-fourth of the day to day needed manganese. One study at the Wheeling Jesuit Univ. found cinnamon to enhance cognitive functions. This was possible by subjects smelling it on a regular basis.

Zinc-Packed Pumpkin Seeds

Pumpkin seeds are great for the body during this time of the year. The seeds are full of zinc which provides one-fourth the daily allowance (in one ounce). Doctor Deans with *Psychology Today* calls this food item as necessary for resiliency. The seeds help prevent depression within the body as well as fight against inflammations.

Immune-Fighting Squash

Squash is another delicious vegetable which provides wonderful nutrients to the body during the cooler months. Simply adding eight ounces of butternut variety will give the individual close to twenty percent of needed manganese and potassium. In giving the immune system a boost, the food serving provides over fifty percent (50 percent) of vitamin C.

Super Power Sweet Potatoes

Sweet Potatoes are *full* of vitamin A which is considered one of the super power antioxidants. One serving of this sweet will provide over fifty percent (50 percent) of vitamin C and manganese. Other vitamins and minerals are present within this God given food item that adds to the “needed nutrients” list for this time of year. In addition, one case study found sweet potatoes to hold strong anti-inflammation properties which can prevent disease processes including cardiovascular issues, cancers, neuro diseases, and even diabetes. Publication was recorded within the *Journal of Biomedicine & Biotechnology*.

Brain-Protecting Eggplant

Eggplant is known to help protect the brain by preventing damage through free radicals along with nutrients to guard the fats within the membranes of the brain. Eggplants are wonderfully full of fiber, manganese, and copper. Phytonutrients (nasunin) are also found in this nightshade which provide additional benefits.

Depression-Fighting Turmeric

Turmeric is a “strong agent” found to fight depression. This is evident in medical studies found within the *Journal of Affective Disorders* (2014). The information points out curcumin is found within this spice and is shown to strongly influence depressive indications in patients followed during studies. The spice also holds abilities to help the immune system as well as fight inflammation.{eoa}

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For the original article, visit .

10 Healthy Dating Practices

There are plenty of unhealthy ways to date, so I've compiled 10 healthy dating practices that I believe cut to the core of what it means to date with intentionality and maturity.

1. Date with intention. This is going to be for the best of both parties involved. Dating isn't a game, and the last thing you want to do is get in a relationship with someone when your intentions are anything but pure. If you're just looking for fun, I'd recommend you be open and honest about your intentions with anyone you meet or connect with. It's only fair to them and their emotions.

2. Make sure your first date is in a public place. You just never know who you're going to meet. I'd recommend your first date be in a public place in front of lots of people and I'd even recommend you let your friends know where you will be in case something were to happen. You never know who the person you've chatted with on the phone might act in person, and the last thing you want to happen is end up in a private place with someone whose motives are anything but respectful.

3. Try to learn as much as you can before meeting them. Yes, the beauty of social media. If they have public profiles, then make sure to do your due diligence and research as much as you can about the person. It only makes sense to do a little Facebook stalking to see whom you're meeting with. Come on, we've all done it. While someone's online profiles might not always match up with how they act in person, it's always a good idea to see how someone presents themselves online and it may give you the opportunity to end a date before it even starts. Better to be safe than sorry.

4. Value the input of your friends and family. Your friends and family play a valuable role in your dating life, and it's always good to get their opinions when it comes to the person you are dating. Mind you, they might always give the best advice but it's always good to get wisdom from the people who are looking out for your best interest.

5. Continue to stay social with your friends and family. Don't be that person who gets a relationship and then disappears from the face of the planet. We all know that person. Yes, I

know you want to spend time with your new babe, but it's also healthy to continue carving out time for your friends and family members.

6. Have a “define the relationship” every few dates to see how things are going. Nobody likes dating in the dark. I don't mean literally, but emotionally. Not knowing where your relationship stands can be extremely stressful, so I suggest that you and your new girl/guy take time every few weeks to discuss where each other is at with things.

This will give you both clarity, keep the relationship healthy, and keep the relationship from ever going further than it needs to.

7. Be open and honest from the very beginning. Relationships thrive on transparency. Letting people know about you from the very beginning is quite possibly the best thing you can do for your relationship. Everyone's made mistakes, and I'd encourage you to share about the big pieces of your life that have made you who you are today. Don't keep things hidden in fear of rejection. Be open.

8. Don't play with someone's emotions. If it's not working, then end it. Some relationships are kind of like the TV show *American Idol*—they go on way longer than they actually should. Seriously though, don't keep a relationship going just for the heck of it. The best thing you can do is be transparent about how you're feeling. If things aren't working out, then end it with care. Ending the relationship as soon as you realize it's not working out will show you care about the person more than dragging it along. Trust me.

9. Don't have important conversations via text or email. We've all been there. Auto-correct and text interpretation can be a relationship's worst nightmare. Save the important conversations for an actual conversation, not a banter of back and forth emojis and broken English. Plus, waiting to talk in

person will give you time to really think about what you want to say instead of texting out of pure emotion.

10. Don't settle. Simple. Don't settle for a mediocre relationship. You deserve to be with someone who supports you, encourages you, cares for you and loves you for who you are. Don't settle for mediocre when you could have extraordinary.

Jarrid Wilson is a husband to Juli, dad to Finch, pastor, author, blogger and founder of Cause Roast. He's helping people live a better story. For the original article, visit [. For the original article, visit .](#)

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