

5 Tested Tips to Help Hurting Parents Handle the Holidays

Holidays are the most difficult time of the year for anyone in emotional pain, especially hurting parents.

I've been one. Our hearts are full of pain and sadness over our child's struggles and destructive choices. This pain might be from any number of issues: alcohol, drugs, self-injury, mental illness and more. We're not in a festive mood. All we can think about is the last trauma or what the next one might be. We wonder, *Where is God*, and *how can I survive this so-called happy season?*

How worn out are you? Negative emotions take their toll. Will this ever end? Another Christmas is coming. We're not ready.

Ask yourself: On a scale of 1 to 10—1 is no stress and 10 is super stressful—how hard will this holiday season be for you? Why did you pick the number you did?

God understands.

Here are a few ideas that helped my husband and me lower our stress level during the holidays.

5 Tips for Surviving the Holidays:

1) **Adjust or lower expectations:** This will help you be content no matter what happens. Let go of how you need things to be.

2) **Consider doing things differently:** If your family's traditions will only make you feel sadder or be too difficult, in light of your current situation, consider what changes you could make.

3) **Avoid social media:** Hearing about others happy homecomings and family gatherings can make you feel worse. Why subject

yourself to it? Take a break from social media until January 2nd. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and the rest will still be there waiting for you in 2018.

4) **Focus on others:** Look for a way to help someone else. Opportunities abound. Doing something anonymously is especially fun. This shifts the focus off yourself and brings joy to everyone involved.

5) **Be grateful:** Give thanks no matter how you feel. Start a gratitude journal; record small, everyday things, not just big things. I started a gratitude journal in 2009. Today, my list is over 6,000. This practice has had a huge impact on me. It could do the same for you.

I hope there's something on our list that will help you survive the holidays a little better than you might have. If you have ideas, please share them in comments. The more the better!

Prayer: God who cares, please use something on this list to lighten our heavy burden this holiday season. Even the thought of Christmas intensifies our pain. We feel pressure on our chests, and tears come without warning. Comfort us, Lord. Bathe our wounds with Your love. Help us, we pray. Thank You for how very much You care.

These Scriptures are another source of encouragement:

"Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am isolated and afflicted" (Ps. 25:16).

"The Lord will give strength to His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace" (Ps. 29:11).

What helps you lower stress and survive the holidays? Please share your thoughts in the comments. {eo}

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