

7 Suggestions to Enjoy Delightful—Instead of Depressing—Holiday Gatherings

Let's be honest, your upcoming holiday get-togethers have potential for wonderful memory-making or some weird occurrences that'll make you wonder how you ever got into such a mess! God may have some surprises ahead like a cantankerous uncle, curmudgeonly senior or an unexpected boy/girlfriend with uber-liberal political views gleaned from Michael Moore or Rachel Maddow.

Scripture tells us, "A prudent man foresees the evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished" (). Pressure reveals the person so this may be your providential "heads up" so you're prepared.

My earliest memories as a child of our extended family gatherings during the holidays remain indelibly etched on the photographic plates of my heart. The annual celebrations with my grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins were the highlight of the year! It was not just the opportunity to receive gifts and partake of sumptuous delights but I loved the festive atmosphere and joyful interaction with our extended family.

In more recent decades, I must admit I have some recollections that my wife and I wish we could erase. Unexpected conflict that arose was most unwelcome but enables me to share some insights learned as we transition to this holiday season.

God's will is that we experience happiness and unity in our times together. Our unseen adversary plots to undermine this goal. Here are some time-tested tips that can help you and yours enjoy this "most wonderful time of the year."

Having Holiday Harmony

The Bible instructs us, “Be sober and watchful, because your adversary the devil walks around as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”(1 Pet. 2:7). Let’s not give too much credit to the enemy of our soul, but let’s face the fact that he has clever schemes ready to undermine God’s beautiful plans.

To be forewarned is to be for forearmed.

1. Start with prayer

This may seem obvious, but it’s often overlooked. Prior to the upcoming family get-together, pray for God’s favor and discernment so He can “deliver you from the evil one” when you come together.

2. Serve

Be intentional to embrace the heart of a servant rather than a spectator and mere consumer. When Jesus gathered for His Last Supper with His friends, He washed their feet and reminded us, “I have given you an example” and “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (John 13:15, 17). Invest in those present by possibly helping with the dishes, clean up or engaging a fussy, hyperactive child.

3. Ask Questions

Scripture teaches that “Counsel in the heart of a man is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out” (Prov. 20:5). Accept people as they are and take a genuine interest in their lives. Imitate Jesus, who would be in the temple among teachers “listening to them and asking them questions”(Luke 2:46).

4. Be Comfortable with Silence

No need to keep the motor running when there are pauses in conversations. “Even a fool, when he holds his peace, is counted wise; and he who shuts his lips is esteemed a man of

understanding" (Prov. 17:28).

When I ministered in South Korea, a senior leader chided me politely during our opening leader's meal that their custom was to refrain from talking continually during dinner but focus on the food!

5. Avoid Arguments

"The servant of the Lord must not quarrel, but must be gentle towards all people" (2 Tim. 2:24a). Stimulating conversations can quickly take a wrong turn necessitating someone to skillfully redirect the flow. "The beginning of strife is as when one lets out water; therefore abandon contention before a quarrel starts" (Prov. 17:14).

"Kaepernick and those NFL players are ..." "Hefner was a great guy and a real pioneer ..." "Hillary was robbed and Trump is a ..." "Ha! That Joel Osteen guy ..." Buckle your seatbelt. An opinionated guy may be headed your way!

6. Reach Out

In getting ready for our bountiful feasts, do we do as Jesus instructed? When a man prepared a supper and invited guests didn't come, Jesus said he should include the less fortunate and "bring in the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind" (Luke 14:21).

Watching the seventh game of the World Series recently, I invited a grieving man whose wife died a year ago. On a somewhat regular basis, we've reached out to invite people who would be alone by themselves for holiday events. These can also be wonderful opportunities for evangelism.

7. Show Understanding

For those of us who are used to simply plopping down for lavish gourmet offerings during the holidays, we may not be aware of how much time and effort goes into the culinary

spread. Moms can literally invest days in planning and preparation for the special occasion.

It sure doesn't honor mom or help her maintain composure when hungry participants add stress with annoying inquiries or failure to come when called due to a "Two-Minute Warning" elongated to 20!

Think how much tension can be eradicated by following God's wisdom: "Let nothing be done out of strife or conceit, but in humility let each esteem the other better than himself. Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4).

Ninety-nine percent of our stress-inducers can vanish by putting this verse into practice. Be proactive and meditate upon this verse before you attend.

Our Lord Jesus, the centerpiece of our upcoming holiday events, proclaimed, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matt.5:9a). Let's all embrace this high calling in our upcoming holiday events.