

9 Steps to an Emotionally Healthy Holiday Season

The Christmas season is full of joyous opportunities to be with our families and friends. Holiday festivities can put us in touch with people that we see on a regular basis and people that we see occasionally. The reality is that the holidays can also be a season of confronting difficult relationships and the unforgiveness we have been carrying in our hearts. Many of us have expectations that these relationships will be different and better than they were last year. When those expectations are not met, unforgiveness and emotional wounds can create a barrier of loneliness around us.

I have always had great expectations for the holidays because my family has always enjoyed getting ready for Christmas. Each year we bought and wrapped gifts; decorated the house; baked meals and desserts for friends and shared our hospitality with guests.

However, we had several family members who were never satisfied with the preparations for Christmas or any other holiday. Their expectations always exceeded what was done for them and with them. Year after year, they would create some kind of chaotic situation during the holiday season, which would spoil the joy and ruin the efforts of most of our family to have a peaceful celebration.

For many years, I saw the same scenario re-enacted year after year. Each year, I would approach the holidays with a positive attitude and the idealistic hope that this year would be different. But it never was. It was always the same feeling of being let down, disappointed and lonely.

As I began to learn more about forgiveness, I decided to step back and ask myself why this continued to happen. I began to

realize that many expectations come from unhealed wounds and unmet needs. The people in my family who were acting out and spoiling the holiday celebrations were both wounded and had needs in their hearts and lives that had not been met.

Many people are not aware that they have any wounds. Other people seem to know, at a surface level, that they have wounds, but they do not know where they came from or how they can be healed. God is willing to reveal your wounds and the roots of your wounds to you. His grace and mercy are always sufficient to heal your wounds and meet your unmet needs. Forgiveness is the healing medicine that holds your wounds together so they can heal.

The steps for wound healing parallel all of the steps in the forgiveness process. The first step is to ask God to show you what your wounds are. What were the repeated offenses that created those wounds?

Second, name the wound and the person who wounded you. Feel the impact of your wound. Stop the bleeding of this wound by allowing yourself to feel the emotions surrounding it.

Third, cleanse it by allowing yourself to grieve over the wound and any losses associated with it. Then release those feelings to God. Many people think this step is not important, and they are uncomfortable with feelings of grief. Many years ago, when my father-in-law died, I was inconsolable. I told God I did not know how I could possibly get through my feelings of grief and mourning. In my spirit, I felt that God was encouraging me to lean into my feelings. I made a decision to feel all the feelings I was experiencing and not to run from them. I was able to go through the grief process without prolonging it.

Fourth, ask God to cut out the damage around the wound. Ask Him to remove all of the injured tissue and repair your wound.

Fifth, apply the medicine that the Lord has provided for you.

Allow grace to bring you to a place of confession as you specifically name your sins that were involved in the wounding process. Ask Him to forgive your sin of unforgiveness and other sins. Then repent of your sins and fall out of agreement with them.

Sixth, suture the wound as you ask God to put your sins to death on the cross (Col. 2:13-14).

Seventh, bandage the wound by asking God to take the unforgiveness out of your heart and replace it with a heart of forgiveness. Then ask Him to meet any unmet needs that that you might have from your childhood, such as the needs for unconditional love, acceptance, security, worth and value, recognition, comfort and nurturing and emotional nourishment.

Eighth, in order to close your wounds, follow God's example and choose not to remember the sin against you (Heb. 8:12).

Ninth, receive your healing by faith and thank God for your answered prayers.

Prepare for the holidays by practicing wound care for the emotional injuries from your past that God reveals to you. As you let go of the past offenses against you by forgiving, you are set free from the binding power of the past. You are free to live in the present and extend the grace of forgiveness to others as you look forward to the future that God has prepared for you.

God wants to heal your wounds and meet your needs. Receive all the gifts He has prepared for you this Christmas season so you can share His forgiveness with others. {eo}

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