

Holding on to Hope in a Blue-Christmas World

Perhaps you're too young to remember Elvis' *Blue Christmas*, but you may find yourself fighting a serious case of the holiday blues this season. The pictures of families and Thanksgiving feasts on your social media feeds may have left you even more lonely or hurting inside. Your expectations have so often been disappointed—or worse—during past holiday seasons that now you have no idea how to face Christmas without being overwhelmed by the blues.

Failed expectations in the past can certainly give your Christmas a blue color. So can family conflict or drama, painful memories around past holidays, loss of a loved one, and more. Hallmark movies, commercial images of family and decorations and gifts, Christmas lights and music, and even our Christian holiday traditions sometimes paint an unrealistic picture of celebration when our world is so broken.

That doesn't mean we shouldn't celebrate! In fact, the darkness around us makes it even more important that we take time to focus on the birth of a baby and the hope He brings for both our present and our future. But how do you do that when you're struggling with feeling blue?

The First Christmas

We associate Christmas with joy, and we should! But the first Christmas was even more full of drama and tragedy and risk and pain.

- For Jesus, it meant leaving the physical presence of His Father and entering enemy territory as a helpless baby. It meant embarking on a journey where He would be misunderstood, hated and eventually killed.

- For Joseph, it meant the shame or embarrassment of embracing a woman pregnant with a baby who was not his own son, and leaving his hometown for years.
- For Mary, it meant the shame and embarrassment of giving birth while unmarried, the pain of being misunderstood by almost everyone, and the pain any first mother knows in childbirth.

Remember that Jesus voluntarily stepped right into the middle of evil, holding nothing back in the quest to rescue you and me from that very evil. It's shouldn't be surprising when we often experience wounds from the crossfire during the final phases of the conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness.

When I deliver a baby, I often say to the new parents, "A new baby is God's opinion that the world should go on." And as a baby embodies the promise of new life, so the bigger message of Christmas and the birth of the baby hold promise of our new life in an even larger dimension.

Making It Practical

That may sound nice, but what does that mean when you're facing Christmas without the money to celebrate as you would like, or the loving family it seems others have, or the spouse you loved but now is gone? Can you *do* anything about the holiday blues?

The most important thing is to make a conscious choice about how you will respond this holiday season. For example, you cannot change the dysfunctional family you came from, but you can choose how much time you spend with them now. You cannot erase the loss from a loved one who is gone, but you can celebrate old memories and make some meaningful new memories. You always have choices.

Here are several practical suggestions for getting through the holidays without succumbing to the blues.

- **Take care of your body.** Our integrated human nature means our physical well-being affects our emotional and spiritual well-being also. Limit the holiday junk food and drink you take into your body. Get adequate rest most days. You'll feel better as a result.
- **Sometimes, say no.** You don't have to buy a gift for everyone on your list, attend every holiday event you're invited to or decorate every inch of your home. Choose the most important people, events and traditions you want to make part of your Christmas and let the rest go. I promise the New Year will still arrive even if you miss that holiday party.
- **Choose the people you invest in.** There may be people among your family and friends who only add to your frustration, pain or unhappiness; give them an hour if necessary, but not days of your time and energy. Other people lift you up simply by being in their presence; maximize the time and effort you invest in these relationships.
- **Make some new memories.** Painful memories are a huge part of holiday blues. Embrace those memories that are important to you and then move on. You can choose to make some new and meaningful memories. Pick out some new Christmas decorations, learn a new Christmas song or go to a new Christmas program this year.
- **Focus on giving.** There is little that will lift your spirits more than helping someone else. And there's *always* someone in worse need than you. Find that person or people and do something for which they cannot repay you. Truly make it about them, and as a result, you'll find your own spirits lighter.
- **Give God your memories and expectations.** Let Him have your past, your present and your future. Use this holiday season as an opportunity to spend some time in His presence. Talk to Him about finding a new level of the healing He has available and learning a new dimension of the future He has for you.

Make some thoughtful plans now to limit your vulnerability to the holiday blues. In this world we cannot expect any season to provide unmixed joy, but we can choose to focus on and maximize how we celebrate those things that are good.

Yes, “A Baby Changes Everything!” (Click the link to listen and watch the song and story.)

Your Turn: What makes you vulnerable to the holiday blues? What steps are you going to take this Christmas season to keep from falling into the blues? Leave a comment below. {eoa}

Dr. Carol Peters-Tanksley *is both a board-certified OB-GYN physician and an ordained doctor of ministry. As an author and speaker, she loves helping people discover the Fully Alive kind of life that Jesus came to bring us. Visit her website at .*

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