

How to Find Peace This Christmas

The holiday season has emerged from the mundane redundancy of the past 12 months, ushering in a seemingly magical transformation of the social atmosphere. New colors explode in the dark of night as countless houses across the nation are adorned with festive lights.

The excitement of children as they await the arrival of one, Santa Claus, permeates the air. Choruses celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ fill small towns as the local church bell provides the all-too-familiar melodies of *Silent Night* and *Away in a Manger*. Celebration is the theme of the season, and real life, with all its blemishes and pains, is brushed away into the dark corners of silence.

However, if one chooses to peek into the shadows, he or she will see the harsh realities that exist and are even magnified during the Christmas season. The desired “peace on earth” is disrupted by intrusive circumstances such as difficult family members, the death of a loved one, financial strain, isolation and loneliness. To ignore those visited by such unwelcome strangers is to fail in living out the very spirit of this sacred season.

This Christmas, be aware that all may not be bright, and that some could actually benefit from the love of the one whose life and birth we joyously celebrate at this time of year. When dealing with others or personally experiencing difficulty, consider the following, taken from the wisdom of Jeremy Lelek, president of the Association of Biblical Counselors:

- **Difficult Family Members:** Remember the sobering words of Jesus Christ who said, “But I say to you who hear,

love your enemies, do good to those who hate you ... For if you love those who love you, what thanks do you receive? For even sinners love those who love them" (Luke 6:27, 32). Seek to live for the higher, more glorious purpose for which you were created. Do not fixate on how irritating or frustrating your family members may be or how they may need to change. Instead, recognize their character as a powerful context in which you can (and are called to) change in order that you may more accurately reflect Him (Romans 8:28-29). What is your primary agenda? That others suit you or that you suit the call of God?

- **First Christmas Without Him or Her:** Christians are exhorted in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, "But I would not have you ignorant, brothers, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others who have no hope." Believers in Jesus Christ will grieve, but their grieving should take on a different shape than the grief of nonbelievers. There is no silver-bullet to relieve the pain of loss; however, keeping Christ at the center of grief can make all the difference. Three recommendations: First, recall the precious gift of the beloved Redeemer in his giving of his own life so that death would be eternally destroyed, then offer thanks for this amazing sacrifice. Second, use the intensity of your own loss to relieve the pain of another through kind words, showing interest or offering a loving gesture in order to "love God" and "love neighbor" (Matt. 22:37-39). Third, thank God for the good times and the precious memories.
- **Financial Strain:** Be a good steward of the resources God has given you. Resist seasonal and cultural pressures to overspend simply for the sake of pleasing others. Use this year to contemplate the wisdom of Paul who said, "I know both how to face humble circumstances and how to have abundance. Everywhere and in all things I have learned the secret, both to be full and to be hungry,

both to abound and to suffer need" (Phil. 4:12). Interpret this year as a season in which God's hand of mercy is sparing you and your family from the vanity of commercialization, and count yourself blessed that you may peer into the deeper meaning of Christmas.

- **Isolation and Loneliness:** If the holidays find you spending more time alone than that to which you are accustomed, consider the following: Purpose in your heart to be focused on loving God and others this Christmas season (Matt. 22:37-39). Plan to be a blessing by doing something kind for a friend, family member or neighbor rather than anticipating the dread of how miserable you are going to be this Christmas. Refuse to wallow in self-pity. Schedule a time to visit a museum or take a walk in the park. Be reminded of the Creator and his eternal presence as you gaze upon the beauty of his artistry (Rom. 1:19-20). When alone, be comforted by His love and presence. Take time to open the Bible and read the glorious story of redemption He has freely offered you. Worship Him!

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