

Parents in Pain, You Need to Know This About Celebrating the Holidays

Can you remember when a special event was ruined because of something bad that happened? Maybe it was your birthday, or maybe it was Christmas. For me, it was Thanksgiving Day 1997. We were living in Illinois. The morning was cold and sunny. I was up early to prepare our family's special breakfast before we watched the Macy's Christmas parade. I looked forward to this day all year. Our home was full of cheerful anticipation as pleasing aromas drifted in through the house.

An Unwelcome Surprise

Suddenly, the phone rang around 8 am. *It's really early to get a phone call on Thanksgiving Day.* My world was about to come crashing down.

"Hello?" I answered, expecting to hear the voice of one of our parents wishing us a happy day.

"Dena ... honey," My dad's shaky voice stammered.

My stomach sank. *Uh oh. Something's wrong.*

After an eight-month-long illness, my mom had finally made enough progress to go home. Today was the day! I couldn't wait to talk to her for the first time in months. How wonderful that would be.

"I'm so sorry to have to tell you this, but I just got a call from the nursing facility. It's about your mom ... honey, she passed away early this morning while they were helping her get dressed."

Noooooo!!!! It can't be!

Thanksgiving has never been the same. I caught a flight out the next day. Her visitation was on my birthday. I didn't want to celebrate anything that year. Thanksgiving. My birthday. Christmas. *Who cares?* I didn't.

Have you had a similar experience with one of your children? You've been profoundly hurt, rejected, shocked, disappointed and grief-stricken. You could care less about the holidays. There will be no Norman Rockwell Christmas for you.

Things Will Be Different

When we're in emotional pain, the thought of celebrating sounds awful, even cruel and impossible. The holidays are here. Can a parent in pain celebrate?

Yes, we can. But things will be different.

We need to accept the fact that we won't experience a picture-perfect scene like the one above. Many of us already know this all too well. It's no surprise. We've been on this *different* journey for a long time.

We stopped looking for joy from the gifts we receive years ago.

We quit seeking satisfaction in how much we decorate or shop or bake, although we may still like doing those things. There's not enough tinsel to hang on our tree or colorful lights to fill the emptiness in our hearts. We can't make enough cookies or spend enough money to take away the ache. No credit card has a limit high enough to buy what we need. The peace we long for can't be found under our tree or in a sparkly gift bag.

Focus Here

Twenty years ago, when my heart was broken, I didn't think I could celebrate Christmas, but I discovered a way that I could. How? I focused on the *real* meaning.

What does Christmas mean to you?

For me (like many of you), the real meaning is found in Jesus (Luke 2): in the Son of God, the Prince of Peace and King of kings, who gives me His peace in my pain; in the Wonderful Counselor, who guides and comforts me; in the Lamb of God who came into a messed-up world to die for me because of His unconditional love.

I focused on Jesus back in 1997 when my mom died, and I still choose to focus on Him today. When I do, He gives the grace and strength I need to celebrate His coming no matter what's going on in my life.

Where will you focus this holiday season, on your pain or on the Prince of Peace? On worrying or on worshipping?

If you'd like more information on the true meaning of Christmas, please message me.

These Bible verses offer great comfort:

"for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

"But the angel said to them, 'Listen! Do not fear. For I bring you good news of great joy, which will be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord'" (Luke 2:10-11). {eoa}

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