

When You're Headed to a Broken Home for the Holidays

The crackling fire place, the stockings all lined up in a row, the smell of warm cider and a freshly trimmed Christmas tree.

These are the pictures that dance in our minds around the holidays.

Well, it's the picture for some people.

But then there are the rest of us whose picture is much less fanciful. There's some of us on this side of Christmas who don't want to go home.

We're the ones who come from towns we'd rather not talk about or from families we are intentionally vague about when you ask us about our holiday plans. We're the ones whose families have been plagued by divorce, addiction, adultery, lies, deceit, mental illness, fits of anger, abandonment or abuse.

We're the ones whose Christmas picture is broken.

So what if you, like me, are traveling back to a broken home for the holidays? How should you prepare, react and respond?

If you are like me, you've probably developed some poor habits when you go home. Maybe you slip back into old, destructive patterns. Maybe you numb out and coast through the whole experience. Maybe you always blow up at that *one* family member who seems to make you crazy, even when you *swore* you wouldn't react that way this time.

While I know everyone's broken home is different, here's one resounding lesson I've learned that applies to them all:

Your Savior Gets It

One of the crazy-good benefits of being a Christian is that our God is not far off and unfamiliar with our struggles.

Jesus Christ Himself had a hard time when it came to His hometown. Can you remember? Mark 6:1-5 tells us that Nazareth wouldn't take him seriously.

"You mean Joseph and Mary's kid? The carpenter? Yeah right, like he ever turned out to be anything good. Wasn't she pregnant before they got married?"

It's not a newsflash that a lot of people didn't buy the whole "An angel appeared and Mary got pregnant by the Holy Spirit" thing. The people surrounding Jesus' life looked at Him and His family story as though it was a joke, or worse, an abomination. Whispers and judgmental side-glances were probably part of Jesus' entire upbringing.

And He somehow bore all of that *without* sinning.

Do you feel that way this holiday season? Do you always feel as though you're never taken seriously when you go back to that place? Do you feel as though you'll always be seen as that person you were when you were 12? Do you hate going home because you know you'll have to face people who have heard about the scandal that happened in your family?

You're in good company, friend. The company of Christ Himself.

Remember that Jesus' birth story wasn't the only scandal when it comes to His family. In Jewish tradition, you only included the important and swoon-worthy candidates in your genealogy. You made sure to throw in any royal bloodlines or religious heroes. You left out anyone who could bring shame on the family. This was just the way genealogies were written. Only the best are remembered.

But Jesus? His entire genealogy in Matthew 1 was a chock-full mess of adulterers, drunks, murderers, prostitutes and the

like. The fact that a Jewish author would mention any of these types of misfits, especially *women*, was unheard of.

The point?

Jesus knows what it's like to come from a family story you're not proud of.

When it comes to family brokenness, Hebrews 4:15 tells us that our God doesn't just understand what we're dealing with on an intellectual level, but that He actually *dealt* with everything we deal with. He sympathizes because He's *been* there. He *gets* it.

In other words, you serve a God who walked through it too.

Do you know what Isaiah 53:3 tells you?

That God humbled Himself to become a "man of sorrows, acquainted with our deepest grief." Friend, that's not just a nice Bible phrase. That's your hope, your anchor, your power to get through this holiday.

All the kinds of brokenness we see in this life, Jesus has seen and dealt with and become acquainted with. He doesn't just understand our weaknesses as humans, he's lived them *for* us.

But why? Why did Jesus even have to become familiar with our sorrows?

Because He knew we'd respond poorly amid them. We have blown up, said things we shouldn't, thought bad things, responded in anger, hidden from our issues, refused to forgive and so on. There are a *multiplicity* of ways we don't respond well when we go home for the holidays.

Remember that Jesus did all of life in our place—died the death we deserved but also lived the life we couldn't live. We need a righteous record, and that includes the way we respond

to brokenness.

Instead of lashing out, He took the lashes. Instead of defending Himself, He took the ridicule. Instead of returning evil for evil, He returned evil for good.

You know why?

Because you need someone to do that in your place. Because you have responded poorly amid brokenness and hurt, just as I have. I have lashed out. I have returned evil for evil. I have not responded well to being misunderstood.

Jesus not only gets it, He obeyed and responded rightly in my place so I could have a perfect record before the Father.

So here's your good news this Christmas:

Jesus did family brokenness in your place. He responded the ways you should have. He has forgiven in the ways that maybe you haven't yet. He never slipped into a bad pattern with family discussions but instead always replied appropriately.

That's great news. Why? Because if you have Jesus' record in place of your own, God looks at you as though you have responded *perfectly* over all these years!

Let the rich and unfathomable grace roll over you this holiday season—God Himself came from a line of misfits and was even rejected by His hometown yet responded perfectly to it, in my place, for *me*.

Hometowns are hard, my friend, apparently even for God in the flesh.

He gets it and He's already responded well to it on your behalf, even when you didn't deserve it. Now go live in that and love your crazy family and your hard hometown, even if they don't deserve it. For this is the way God loves us. Yes, this is the way of the cross.

The Christmas picture I now cling to has nothing to do with trees or cider. It's a simple picture, but a profound one: **Jesus in my place, even over the holidays.**

Reprinted with permission from . Ashley Marivittori Gorman is an author, photographer and Master's student at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Her passion is to teach and equip women within the Christian faith through the channels of motivational speaking, small-group leadership, personal mentoring and writing. She has served as a women's director in a local college ministry, influencing the campuses of NC State, UNC Chapel Hill and Duke University and has also served as a women's discipleship coordinator within her church campus. She lives in Durham, North Carolina, with her husband, Cole, a photographer and studio owner of Blest Studios, where they serve at their local church, The Summit.