

Go There: How You Can Beat the Holiday Blues

In my neighborhood, many families go all-out with Christmas decorations. Thanksgiving leftovers are still in the refrigerator when the blow-up Santas, twinkling multi-colored lights, huge red bows, and evergreen wreaths appear on many of the trees, doors, roofs and lawns.

Tall Christmas trees are visible through living room windows. The only thing missing is the snow.

But I won't be putting up a Christmas tree this year. I'm not sure I'll even be able to hang the wreath on my front door. I'm gluing together the broken pieces of the little wooden creche I've carried around with me for 15 years; that symbolizes more how my heart is doing right about now.

You see, this will be my first holiday season without my beloved husband, Al. He loved Christmas. We loved Christmas together. Last year, we had a really big real tree—and I decorated it while he sat in his chair, too sick to help. We made it out of the house for a Christmas Eve family gathering—barely.

Two months later, he went home to be with the Lord.

So you can see why it's just too painful for me to put up a Christmas tree this year. I'll do good to get the pieces of my little wooden creche glued together.

I don't really hate the holidays. Well, not in every way. Giving gifts is a joy. There are some Christmas carols that open up the deepest places in my heart. I will be spending Christmas Eve with wonderful family. I love celebrating the amazing gift of Jesus as He entered our world as a baby. It's just that the heartache and sadness are so acute during this

season.

Holiday Blues

Are you singing the holiday blues the way I am?

Something about Christmas makes us want everything to turn out like a Hallmark movie. Come December 25, everything will be OK.

But you don't always get a boyfriend for Christmas. Your son or daughter doesn't always make it home for the holidays. Your grief doesn't go away; it probably gets worse. A box of groceries and firewood don't always end up on your back porch. Families don't always reconcile just because of a date on the calendar.

I know other people who are singing the holiday blues too:

- The friend who wishes he could jump from November 15 to January 2 every year
- The single mother who lost her job right before Christmas
- The family man whose wife left him, with their children—on Christmas Eve
- The woman who grew up with an alcoholic father; their Christmas meant more drinking and violence

Memories—the good, the bad and the ugly. Loss and grief that feel even deeper. Expectations that go unmet. Loneliness. Failure. Pain.

Where's all that peace on Earth the angels sang about?

A Baby Changes Everything

Are you a mother who has given birth? Have you perhaps watched your wife give birth? If so, you know that having a baby is anything but pretty. It's messy, bloody and painful.

As an OB-GYN physician, I've been right there in the middle of countless births. I've stood in the middle of the blood and the mess, encouraged mothers to "push through the pain" and prayed as I helped mothers and babies through emergencies where they almost didn't make it. There are easier and harder births, but it's never pretty.

Christmas is really about a birth. The first Christmas wasn't any prettier or less painful than every birth before or since. It was no less bloody or dangerous. In fact, as the Lord of the universe entered this world as a baby, all of hell itself was arrayed against Him, trying to turn Christmas into a tragedy.

And but for God's divine intervention, Satan would have succeeded.

Do you really think the birth of God's purpose for you will be any less bloody, less painful, less risky?

Overcoming the Holiday Blues

What you and I are feeling as we sing the holiday blues is the contrast between the promise of a new life and the pain of the process.

And we're doing this while sitting in the crossfire of the closing battles between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. Satan would love to turn your Christmas into a tragedy just as He tried to do on the very first Christmas. It's one big way he tries to steal your promise from you.

I've learned a lot about healing in the nine months since my husband died. I've learned it doesn't just happen; you have to choose it, seek it and take it into your being. God makes healing available, but you have to go there.

I can't remember one mother I've helped as she brought a baby into the world who didn't feel like holding back at the end of

labor. The urge to push is there, but the pain is so great. Sure, our modern methods of pain control may make it easier, but the natural response is to hold back rather than push into the pain.

If you need to experience healing this holiday season, I want to encourage you to go there. Take God with you, but go there. Don't hide, deny the pain or get frantic. As with delivering a baby, "push through the pain."

- If you need to extend forgiveness to a family member in a broken relationship, go there.
- If you need to face painful memories that take you to the depths of grief and loss, go there.
- If you need to let something or someone go that you can't imagine living without, go there.

A New Baby Is God's Opinion That the World Should Go On

As every mother knows, once you hold that newborn baby in your arms, you almost forget the pain. It was messy and bloody and terrible, but the result is new life.

That's what God wants to do for you this Christmas. This holiday season may be just the opportunity you need to open those hurting places in your soul to the healing He wants to bring. His new life is waiting for you to push through the pain—in His presence—and come out the other side alive in a new way.

Whenever possible, I say to new parents, "A new baby is God's opinion that the world should go on!"

That's God's opinion for you too.

Jesus' birth on the very first Christmas was God's opinion that our whole world should go on—and that He was making a way for that to happen.

The celebration of Jesus' birth again this Christmas is God's

opinion that your world should go on—regardless of the pain or mess right now.

As long as we're here, we are affected by the groaning of creation, the final battles between good and evil and our human propensity to look at our immediate troubles instead of eternity. My own measure of healing does not mean I don't still feel grief at spending the holidays without my husband.

But what Christmas does mean is that you and I can go on. Don't let Satan turn your Christmas into a tragedy. God's purpose in you is not finished.

As Christmas comes this year, I'm going to enjoy my little wooden creche—now mended. I'm going to choose which Christmas carols most minister to my soul and start making some new memories. And I'm going to look for the moments of joy in the new life God is birthing for me.

You can do that too.

Help to Beat the Holiday Blues

If you're singing the holiday blues, I invite you to go through the holidays with me. I've prepared some free resources on beating the holiday blues that I'm making available throughout the month of December.

These free resources provide moments of insight and practical suggestions for making it through the holidays—Beating the Holiday Blues. I hope you'll join me at And remember, it's all free. I'll see you there. {eo}

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