

HELP FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Right now much of the Western World is decorating itself in tinsel, baking giant birds, and singing about “the hap-happiest season.” But the truth of the matter is that for many people the holidays can be difficult and disappointing. If that’s how you feel, then read on for some ideas for making them brighter.

Be intentional about your priorities. It’s easy to find yourself overwhelmed with all the things you feel you “must” do between Thanksgiving and New Year’s. Most people would probably benefit by scaling back the ways they spend their effort, money and emotional resources, but that means making conscious choices about where you spend them. You don’t have to go to the party just because you were invited. You don’t have to send out cards just because you always have. You don’t have to spend \$100 on office gifts just because others do. Make time for a long walk, a short nap, a good book or lunch with someone you love. You’ll have more Christmas cheer to give away afterward if you do.

Volunteer. One of the things you should really make time for this year is a volunteer opportunity. Pick a homeless shelter, an after-school program or a food pantry and go serve others for an hour or a day. It’s good for you. The holiday blues are exacerbated by our tendency to focus on ourselves and our own circumstances. Getting out of yourself and actively serving others is better than a pumpkin latte for warming your heart.

Make a new tradition. Whether you are struggling with grief or just tired of the same meaningless routine, try starting a new tradition. You could light a silver candle for a loved one or ask friends to donate to your favorite cause. Do one fun thing that you’ve never tried before: make chocolate chip waffles, gather some kids for a showing of *The Muppet Christmas Carol*, check out the Christmas lights in another part of town, attend a holiday music program, or leave for a three-day cruise. If you like it, do it again next year.

Forgive everyone. Maybe December could be the month when you forgive everyone everything. You probably won’t change anyone’s eternal destiny or create world peace, but you just might free your own heart. Forgive yourself for that second piece of pie. Forgive the sales girl who charged you too much. Forgive Aunt Jane for forgetting your birthday. Forgive your first husband for divorcing you. Forgive that person who damaged your heart the most. Consider wrapping those debts in holiday paper and leaving them under the tree for God. If you want to, you can be mad again in January. But I’ll bet you won’t want to.

Remember what it’s really all about. Although the calendar is crammed with celebrations this time of the year, there is one which is different from all the others, and it really doesn’t have anything to do with pine trees, Hallmark cards, enormous fowl or even family ties. Christmas is about the incredible love of a Heavenly Father and His only Son who came – not to deliver us from all our difficulties and disappointments – but to share them. Christ came to suffer humiliation and to die in your place because *you are that valuable* to the King of Everything. He wants to share your shopping frustrations, your secret tears and your off-key carols. He wants to be invited to your office party, your dinner table and your quiet moments of reflection. The Baby in the manger has worlds at His command, but what He really wants for Christmas is you.