

Navigating Holiday Emotions

Holidays and emotions seem to go together. There can be great joy in the holiday season as intentional time is made to pause, reflect, and gather as families. Yet for many, the holidays can bring in a new level of anxiety, loneliness, and mixed emotions. Perhaps there has been strain in your family relationships over the years. Perhaps this is the first holiday without someone special in your family circle. Perhaps the holidays become one more acute reminder of a void in your life, a cue to the loneliness you feel. Or perhaps the busyness and stress of the season get the better of you as your expectations for what you were hoping for and what reality is do not measure up. As we approach the holiday season, let's be mindful of three principles from Scripture to help us navigate these varied emotions.

“Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.” (Rom. 12:15) – Many times in our lives our emotions can be very strong and very raw. There are times when we can look around the room and wonder why no one else seems to be feeling the way we are. The holiday season can amplify this disconnect as everything around us seems to emphasize perfect memories and perfect families and the reality of our experience is different. Perhaps the family event did not turn out like we had anticipated or our expectations for this season are not being met like we had hoped they would be. Yet the Scripture calls us to *“rejoice with them that rejoice and weep with them that weep”*. How do we connect with others in their emotions? One of the first steps is to realize the emotions we are feeling are very normal and real, and there are many others most likely experiencing the very same emotions. We do not deny these emotions we are feeling, but prayerfully acknowledge them and turn them over to God. Then, we find ways to enter into the emotions of others and strive to see the work God is doing through the midst of situations. Be willing to rejoice, weep, and share with others the emotions you are feeling while listening and caring for the emotions they are feeling. Engage in the relationships around you in an honest and loving manner.

“In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus...” (1 Th. 5:18) – Experiencing the emotion of thankfulness amid difficult emotions is hard. Yet there are always things we can be thankful for. We are blessed at this time of the year to have a holiday which emphasizes this discipline. But we still need to act upon this knowledge. How do you show thankfulness in your life? How do you instill a thankful spirit into your children? What family activities and daily habits have you created which teach this practice and turn it into a reality? A pattern of thankfulness helps us focus on the many gifts and blessings we have been given and is the first step in grounding ourselves when the difficulties of emotions and relationships are strong. A thankful person does not have to deny that things might not be as they would like them to be, but they also need to acknowledge the blessings that exist. It is a pattern of behavior that is foundational to Scripture. This holiday season begin the practice of a Thankfulness Journal or a Family Sharing time where each member relates a time where God's faithfulness was evident. This will highlight the truth of God's provision for us in so many ways.

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...” (Phil. 2:5) - The final principle to consider is near to the heart of the holiday season. *Philippians 2* encourages us to consider Jesus. We are told of His giving over of Himself to us as He humbly became obedient to entering this life, to living this life, and to dying in this life for us. We are challenged to live humbly and sacrifice for one another in the light of these Truths. We are encouraged to consider others above ourselves as we seek to follow His pattern. As we meditate on His life and our own life, the hope we possess through Him can ground us through difficulties. As we ponder the Gift that He has given to us, our gifts and our preparations and our holiday events begin to take on a new purpose. In His life, we find our life. In this holiday season, may this *“mind of Christ”* be the joy and the encouragement we need to navigate the emotions in and around us.