

FACING THE HOLIDAYS TOGETHER

By Brenda Spina, M.S.

Many of us have heard the reasons for stress around the holidays on numerous occasions. Yet...we still find ourselves overwhelmed, sad, resentful, or just plain counting the days off until the season is over. God's faithfulness is real. Finding ways to face the expectations, responsibilities, financial concerns and everything else that comes with this time of year can feel like an endless task. In truth it is, largely due to the fact that we are limited in our humanity. We desire to make things fit into our way of thinking but in reality we cannot. Couples especially face the task of negotiating expectations of their own family but of their own family of origins. So... with this in mind, here are a few thoughts to consider as the season is upon us.

1. Acknowledge openly with one another the expectations you may have regarding how the holidays are going to 'look'. Openly stating what you had hoped would take place is a way of taking the potential for resentment and disappointment out of the equation. This type of discussion allows each person in the relationship to put on the table what they would *prefer* to see take place. Remember expectations are not unhealthy. Insisting on another meeting each expectation moves you into a position of unhealthy relating. The Lord never promised us life would go our way. What we are promised is that He would be with us.
2. Explore and decide together or with someone you trust what parties or special events are realistic given the time and energy you have to spend. This takes a great deal of honesty and awareness of ones emotional and physical availability. Prioritizing together who and what is important to both of you will take time and thought. Honoring the temple God has given you to care for will ensure your availability to others over the long haul rather than burning out in the short term. Honesty in the inwards parts with the Lord first and with one another, delivered with respect is a desire close to your Heavenly Father's heart.
3. Allow the sadness or losses of the past holidays to be what they are. Denying their presence creates increased emotional and, at times, physical stress. Many individuals, couples and families have experienced varied traumas or losses around the holidays or during the year. These events, as you know, are a part of life. Losses both give and take. Our response to them makes all the difference in the world. Holiday times will often bring to the surface past memories and emotions associated with loved ones and events that were painful, especially if we experienced them around the holidays. This is normal and appropriate. Invite Jesus into your pain. Pray with and for one another. Jesus came to heal the

broken hearted. He will not fail you now. Grief is something God is intimately acquainted with.

4. Create rituals around nurturing mercy: with your self and others. The Lord knows the holidays can throw us off our routine better than any other time of the year. In fact, the holidays are a way our culture celebrates not only Christ's coming but also the transition into a new year. In transition people regress. Because of this fact, you and your spouse or loved ones may find yourselves regressing to previous behaviors that you thought were conquered/healed. This is what I like to call "temporary insanity". A small ritual that may help goes something like this:

Am I normal to feel/think _____ this time of year. YES
Have I felt this way before? YES
Did I return to a calmer state of mind or to healthier behaviors? YES
Because the previous statements are true, what is the first thing I need to do in order to get myself back on track?

Remember, regression or, as I suggest, 'getting off track' is not the issue. Never will be. Do not blame others or yourself. What is the issue? The issue is how quickly are you see what is happening, move towards the Lord and healthier behaviors.

5. Last, but not least by any means make it a point to express appreciation and admiration to one another. A simple thank you, a loving touch or expression of high regard can go a long way towards making this time of the year tolerable and maybe even special. Allowing appreciation/admiration to be a part of the season (or any time of the year) develops within the receiver a sense that you see their effort, their uniqueness and create an atmosphere for respect and love to grow.

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P.O. Box 1676, Appleton, WI 54912 (920) 720-8920

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