

Family Conflict and the Holidays: God Bless Us, Every One!

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Christmas is supposed to be a time of great joy and celebration, isn't it? Yet, nearly all of us have a relative or two that we may dearly love but the thought of spending another holiday with them gives us a feeling of dread. When you consider the extra stress of the shopping, wrapping, food preparation, traveling, and stretched finances, it is no wonder that family gatherings can be stressful and sometimes downright volatile.

Here are some tips to handle the stress of family and the holidays:

- 1) Ask the Lord if there are any family members that you have offended. If there are, go to the family members and apologize and take full responsibility for the offense without making excuses.
- 2) Ask the Lord if there is anyone you need to forgive. If there is, seek His help in forgiving.

Before a family gathering:

- 3) Purpose in your heart ahead of time to bless and encourage your family members. Avoid a judgmental attitude about family members' decisions, viewpoints and lifestyle choices. This may take some prayer and work ahead of time on your part.
- 4) Take care of yourself and make sure to get enough rest before the family gathering. When we are well rested, it is easier for those harsh comments to roll off and it is easier to be patient with difficult people. When we are tired and stressed, things can seem worse than they really are.
- 5) Avoid unrealistic expectations. We can create some of the stress by expecting our relatives to change or to stop doing the things that annoy us simply because it is the holidays. Some of those annoyances may not be intrinsically wrong. Allow room for differences in opinions and ways of doing things.

At the family gathering:

- 6) Attend the gathering with the thought of serving others. This means offering to help with preparations, clean up, entertaining the children or whatever needs to be done.
- 7) Avoid discussing serious matters. It is neither the time nor the place to bring up past hurts or conflict.
- 8) Recognize that sometimes family members feel free to cross boundaries simply because they are family. Do not be afraid to reinforce your

boundaries. This can be accomplished by standing up for yourself while still honoring others.

- 9) Give yourself permission to say what you think, feel and need in a way that is respectful of others.
- 10) If the family gathering becomes so troublesome or toxic to you or to your children allow yourself the flexibility of leaving. Forcing yourself or your family members to remain at such a troublesome event is not healthy for anyone. You can leave without making a big deal of it.
- 11) Lastly, avoid a judgmental attitude about family members even when their behavior is offensive. When it comes down to it we are no better or worse than anyone. We have redeeming equality in the Lord. We can ask the Lord for help in seeing our family members the way He does.

“And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God Bless Us, Every One!” *Charles Dickens*

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