

Peace and Goodwill Towards Men

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The holidays...a magical time of year depicted in movies, television specials, store displays, and stored impeccably in our earliest memories. Regrettably, reality, and our visions of how Christmas should be, are often two very different things. For some families, getting together results not in warm and fuzzy feelings, but rather emotions of anger, hurt, frustration or loneliness. Why is this?

Four possible reasons include high expectations, increased stress, together time, and family dynamics.

1. **The first**, high expectations, concerns our beliefs regarding how Christmas “should” be. This could include the media’s portrayal as well as past influences.
2. **The second**, increased stress, involves additional financial, shopping, and social obligations which can result in lack of self-care.
3. **The third**, families gathered together, suggests that being together brings out relationship problems that were always present, but avoided through separation.
4. **Fourth**, and lastly, family dynamics means finding oneself returning to old roles, and expecting others not to repeat old patterns or behaviors.

Changing our expectations and self-care can go a long way to helping us cope with holiday stress. However, they are not sufficient to manage actual family interactions. For this, I turn to guidance from the scriptures. In Romans 12:9-21, **the Apostle Paul suggests ways for Christians to act:**

- See the inherent value of all people.
- Detest harmful behaviors and actions.
- Use our God-given gifts and recognize others’ strengths.
- Allow all our experiences to serve God.
- Never give up.
- Allow hope to bring you joy.
- Be patient when life is difficult.
- See the good that can come from your suffering.
- Focus on your relationship with God.
- Pray always!
- Pray for those who mistreat you.
- Wish good things for others and do not seek revenge.
- Be respectful at all times.
- Know that God is the keeper of justice.
- Be sensitive to others’ moods.
- Work to understand.
- Be friendly and considerate.
- Treat others with equal regard.

- Try to be at peace with others as much as possible.
- Defeat evil with good.

Using the scriptures' guidance, try to apply the above ideas to your next holiday gathering. It might be helpful to print out the following recommendations and check them off throughout the day.

- Observe how family members have grown and notice their good qualities.
- Assert yourself when others are being truly harmed.
- Use your talents and strengths to prepare for the probable conflict.
- Rehearse how you could respond in ways that are respectful and protective.
- Be aware of old roles that you may be playing (enabler, peacemaker, caregiver, agitator, referee, etc.) and choose more effective positions.
- Seek a different perspective on what you are experiencing. What good can come from this interaction?
- Pray for strength, guidance, patience, and forgiveness, instead of yielding to resentment.
- Pray before, during, and after the family gathering.
- Do not retaliate when others mistreat you.
- Make choices that honor yourself and others.
- Show concern for others' feelings even in the midst of conflict.
- Do not allow others to steal your joy, and give glory to the newborn king!
- Do not try to change others.
- Remember that we all have weakness and character failings.
- Focus on your reactions. When others are causing harm, respond with love. Ask yourself "are my behaviors making things worse...or better?"

In closing, Christmas harmony begins with peace with our Lord, self, and others. This is accomplished by being right with God, and through goodwill, which means an attitude of kindness, and self-control. The goal is not to get other people to act better, but to work on reactions that value us and others. This season, I wish you peace, cooperation, compassion, understanding and forgiveness in all of your relationships!

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