

SURVIVING THE HOLIDAYS

By Linda Fentress, M.Ed., Licensed Professional Counselor

For some people, the holidays hold expectations of great cheer and family warmth, and for other people, the holidays are a time of dread. Loss of a loved one, divorce, financial stress, unrealistic expectations, commercialism, busy calendars, and family strife can make us feel like we might be better just taking a long nap and waking up in January after all the "hoopla" is over!

Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more.

Gratitude turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity.

Gratitude can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend.

Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow.

Melody Beattie



Regardless of what might trigger us, considering the holidays through the grid of how we approach relationships can be a way to help us SURVIVE the holidays.

AVOIDERS — (Tend to minimize or be unaware of negative emotions of self and others. Under stress they often detach, withdraw, or shut down).

Learn to feel, like going from black and white.....to color. Jesus came to earth because he feels love and desire. Ask Him to wake you up this holiday season to the importance of relationships. The coming of our Savior wasn't about tasks as much as expressing love. The frozen tundra heart of the avoider waits to be thawed. It stings to thaw a frost bit hand. Ask Jesus to melt the ice until you are free to live in the color of emotion and accept your needs as important and worth meeting.

PLEASERS — (Tend to give and appease to avoid dealing with negative emotions. Under stress pleasers often pursue, try harder, give more, or give in.)

A pleaser's holiday season is about giving, giving and giving. Stop. Quiet. Look. Listen. What you can receive? Ask for help. Sit with people and talk instead of cleaning or doing dishes. The holidays mean we are around relatives who might hurt us with insensitive words. Maybe someone in our own family won't appreciate all the work and effort you have made. Jesus proved hurt and rejection aren't deadly. Slow down and try to balance giving with receiving.

VACILLATORS — (Tend to have idealistic expectations, and are easily disappointed. Under stress Vacillators often express anger and critical blaming of others close to them.)

There is no such thing as an idyllic Christmas. Just real. Jesus birth was messy not ideal. Let the season be both good and bad. It won't be as good as you hope and something will go wrong. So when it does, don't over-react, go into black and white thinking, and suffer. Let it roll off. Let good and bad live close together in the days ahead. Jesus came into our world a broken place and he accepts us as broken. Learn to let yourself and those around you be imperfect and messy.

TRAUMA SURVIVORS — (Often holidays remind us of painful childhood times. We can overly idealize them to make up for all we've suffered, or we can barely tolerate them because of how miserable they were growing up.)

Try to make Christmas something "little" you can enjoy. Remember your anger is a cover for tender feelings. Something will probably upset you so when it does, look for the vulnerable feelings when you feel angry. Jesus tolerated the intolerable on the cross. He understands your pain. Find solace in His love. Find Jesus in the days ahead in His gift of creation. Look, see, hear, touch the wonder. You are His wonder too. He came to this earth for you because you are loveable and worthy.



Happy Holidays!

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