

Holidays: Do You Really Enjoy Them?

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It might surprise you to know that not everyone loves the holidays.

Yes, really.

There are those whose work is severely interrupted and cannot wait for the days to return to normal. Though they may not say, "Bah, humbug," they survive best in the routine of life. Others have religious scruples about holidays, such as the Puritans did so many years ago. They are concerned with connections and origin, as well as commercialization. Yet others are sad during holidays because of losses and loneliness, like the widowed lady without caring children, or the student abroad, or the soldier serving miles away. And some realize that this is the last holiday period they will experience and they wish it were not such a reminder that beloved family and friends will no longer be together.



It is important to ask yourself, "Do I really enjoy the holidays?" And if not, how can I make the best of them?

First, realize that God didn't require the holidays we celebrate. All this is man's concoction. Nowhere in the Bible do we find the words, "Thou shalt celebrate the birth of Christ every December 25th," or, "Beware lest ye fail to commemorate Thanksgiving Day with a well-cooked turkey each fall." So, we don't have to feel that a choice not to celebrate as everyone else does is a failure to love God. It simply isn't so.

Second, if you are a person who loves routine and likes to keep the nose to the grindstone, determine a good goal for your personal growth as a believer and work out a plan to tackle your goal during the holidays. You'll accomplish something and that's important for many of us. For instance, you may wish to read through a book of the Bible several times during the holiday period. Good idea. Or, you could discipline yourself to write email messages of encouragement to several friends you haven't communicated with on that level for some time. Encouragement is good for any season. Don't just bemoan the days; employ them.

Third, determine not to let your absence from loved ones or even your bias against the holiday time to affect your demeanor toward others. Rather, think through how you can do just the opposite. Overcome the dread of this holiday period with a new level of interest in others. It's really not about gifts, but love. The free time during

holiday periods, if you have some, can afford you more opportunity to share that love. Rise above the doldrums. In other words, out of love, don't let your feelings of dismay show up on your mug.

Fourth, simplify. Our family actually decided not to give gifts at Christmas. Can you believe it? We did all that when the children were younger, and we had a great time with it, but now we have refocused and we love it. It was first suggested by our kids who as students really didn't have the money to be buying a lot of gifts. The Christmas experience has lost 400 pounds of stress. We just have a great meal, play some games together, and generally have a beautiful few days of stress-free fun. Who can beat that?

Or, if you are required to do some gift buying, think of ways to make it simple. I know that it is thoughtful to buy "just the right gift," but realize that what you think is just the right often gets taken back to the store or shows up in next year's garage sale. In certain (though not all) situations, cash in the envelope is actually OK. When you think about the time and the gas money and the stress, the amount you might exchange for it adds up. And, don't forget that you can stipulate its use, such as saying that it must be used for a getaway or a meal together with a spouse, or you can even say, "Here's \$50 to give to someone in need," or even, "Here's \$30 that must be used to take grandmother on a date!" This won't always work, but it does sometimes. Or, you might say, "My gift to everyone this year is to take us all to get ice cream at _____." Give an experience. Or, some of you older folks may find giving those family heirlooms away each year is an excellent choice. After all, you want them to go to the family. Or, you might get the store to frame up copies of an early photograph to give out. Well, you get the idea. Simplify and tone down expectations.

Finally, remember that it isn't so much the things you do as it is the person you are that is important. Whether you want to see this holiday period coming, or wish it weren't, you have a special opportunity ahead. This is true if your contacts are reduced only to the person at the fast food counter or that sometimes ungrateful extended family, or just the other lonely guys in the barracks, or the stragglers left at the apartment complex. Leave them a powerful image of a man or woman who loves Christ and overcomes difficulties and who isn't bitter or demanding. That's the best gift in anybody's book.