

Healing for the Holidays: Part One – A Promise

Holidays... They're "supposed" to make us think of words like thankful, merry, and happy. We're "supposed" to associate holidays with a phrase like "Home for the Holidays!"

But... what if a loved one is not coming home this holiday season? What if death, divorce, or distance causes us to associate the holidays with words and feelings like depression, anxiety, and stress?

Holidays can create fresh memories of our loss and a fresh experience of pain and grief. The thought of facing another holiday season causes some people to wish they could sleep from the Wednesday before Thanksgiving until January 2. Loss is always hard, and at the holidays it can seem crushing. The thought of being in a festive mood for two months is just too much to bear when our heart is breaking.

A Note to Those Who Are Happy at the Holidays

Some of you might be thinking, "Bob. Don't be such a downer. I love the holidays!" Awesome. I have no desire to diminish your joy.

However, your experience is not universal. For many of your friends, neighbors, co-workers, and relatives, the holidays are bittersweet. So keep reading...if not for yourself, then for others—so you can empathize with and care for those who need *healing for the holidays*.

A Promise to Those Who Long for Healing for the Holidays

Jesus understands. "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). I include this verse every time I autograph a copy of *God's Healing for Life's Losses* (<http://bit.ly/bKWaP4>).

In this one verse, Jesus gives you permission to grieve and permission to hope. Jesus is real and raw, just like life can be. He is also honest and hope-giving. His words, His life, death, and resurrection, give us healing hope.

The Apostle Paul offers the same message of sorrow mingled with healing. Sharing with Christians who had lost loved ones, Paul speaks of Christian grief—grieving with hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

In this first post in our blog "mini-series" I want to follow the lead of Jesus and Paul by giving you:

- Permission to Grieve: Hurting During the Holidays
- Reason to Hope: Healing for the Holidays

In subsequent posts, I want to journey with you through biblical, practical, relevant ways you can grieve and grow, heal and hope.

Permission to Grieve: Hurting During the Holidays—It's Normal to Hurt

It's normal to hurt. When you see the empty chair during Thanksgiving dinner, it's normal to hurt. When you unwrap the ornament that was your loved one's favorite, it's normal to hurt. When you usher in a new year apart from someone you love dearly, it's normal to hurt.

Loss and separation are intruders. This is not the way it's supposed to be. God designed us for relationship—it is not good to be alone.

Jesus did not just talk about loss and grief, He experienced it. When Jesus saw Mary weeping over the death of her brother Lazarus, he was deeply moved (John 11:33). Coming to Lazarus' tomb, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35).

On the cross, experiencing separation from His Father, Jesus cried out. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

If the perfect, sinless God-man Jesus wept over loss, then it is normal to hurt. If Jesus agonized over separation from His Father, then you have permission to grieve.

Paul did not just talk about loss and grief, he experienced it. Imprisoned and separated from Timothy, his son in the faith, Paul writes, "Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I might be filled with joy" (2 Timothy 1:3-4).

Toward the end of his life, almost totally alone, Paul recalls, "At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me" (2 Timothy 4:16).

Memory is a great blessing—and can be a great curse. The memory of relatives separated from us by death, divorce, or distance is a legitimate source of great pain and a legitimate reason to hurt.

Reason to Hope: Healing for the Holidays—It's Possible to Hope

It's possible to hope. In the midst of Paul's grief over being deserted and betrayed he also said, "But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength" (2 Timothy 4:17).

At another point of candid grief, Paul shared that he "despaired even of life" and "felt the sentence of death" (2 Corinthians 1:8-9). Yet, he also knew, "This happened to us that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead" (2 Corinthians 1:9). With Christ you have reason to hope for healing for the holidays. Loss is not final or fatal. It's possible to hope.

Jesus, forsaken by His Father because of our sin, was raised from the dead by His Father. Even more (if you can say "even more" about the resurrection!) He is now seated at the right hand of the Father! Reunion. Relationship. Oneness.

Separation is not final with Christ. It's possible to hope because our God is the God who raises the dead. He can resurrect your hope.

The Rest of the Story

You may be thinking, "That helps to know that I have permission to grieve, but what do I do with my hurt during the holidays?" And you may be asking, "I'm glad for the promise of healing for the holidays, but how do I find it?" Great questions. We'll journey together in subsequent posts to find God's answers for life's losses.

Join the Conversation

Shakespeare said, "Give sorrow words." What words would you give your sorrow over your hurt during the holidays? What glimmers of hope and healing are you seeing this holiday season?

Help for Your Healing Journey

For additional help on your healing journey, learn more about *God's Healing for Life's Losses: How to Find Hope When You're Hurting* (<http://bit.ly/bKWaP4>). Also, visit *GriefShare* for information on their small group video series *Surviving the Holidays* (www.griefshare.org/holidays).

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