

CHRISTMAS!



We are actually in the Christmas season signaling the season when Christ was born and the ending of another year. The Secularists have been preparing for this "holiday" right after the last Christmas holiday because it is mostly seen in terms of dollars and cents; that's why the Christmas season is over for them in a few days. For us Christians who commemorate the real reason for Christmas, the season has never left us because we celebrate the birth of Christ with every moment of our lives.

We symbolically acknowledge that He was born, but not that He was born December 25th. While the stores and other business places may celebrate Christmas as if it were about money, presents and parties, Christians know that it's all about Christ. It is because of Him, we have potential for true love, true peace and true joy; and this is something for which to be JOYFUL. I am of the opinion that we expect too much of Christmas Day and so we try to crowd into it the arrears of kindness and humanity of the whole year.

We defend ourselves by compensating for the things we have neglected to do during the year and try to make up for it before the year ends. According to the experts on **Defense Mechanisms Compensation** is a defense mechanism in which people overachieve in one area to compensate for failures in another.

Interestingly, it is a phrase often used by people to suggest that persons are indulging in excesses in one area of their lives in order to hide insecurities about other aspects of their lives or to make up for some things that they neglected to do in the past. This is NOT what Christmas is all about but our 'humanness' oftentimes takes us down this road when most times it just simply means that we become "naked and not ashamed", confess/apologize if we have to and set ourselves **free**.

The Reason for the Season

2 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that the entire world should be taxed.² (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)³ And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)⁵ To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.⁶ And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.⁸ And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.⁹ And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.¹⁰ And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.¹² And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,¹⁴ **Glory to God in the highest**, and on earth peace, good will toward men.¹⁵

Luke 2:1-20 (KJV)



CHRISTMAS: HAPPINESS & PEACE versus STRESSFUL & DEPRESSING PERIOD:

I felt the urge once again to repeat this article from last year's Newsletter because I have discovered that this is an area that all people of God, more so Pastors and Minister need to be conscious of because of the impact of the season on many Christians including yourselves.

For most of us it is a time of joy, happiness and peace but for many it is a stressful and depressing period. Some of the causes of Stress and Depression during Christmas are attributed to: the absence of a beloved person, family misunderstandings, economic difficulties, physical tiredness, loneliness and seasonal emotional disturbance.

I would like to place some emphasis on two reasons mentioned above namely - *Loneliness and Seasonal Emotional Disturbance* because they are more 'real' during the Christmas season and seem to have a greater impact on humans.

Loneliness vs. 'Aloneness'

It is a fact that Pastors/Ministers do get lonely; notice I did not say *Alone*. Loneliness is a feeling of emptiness inside -- a feeling of need to be with others. Being *alone* is merely not being with other people. Just because one is not with other people however, doesn't mean one is feeling empty. Many people actually prefer to be alone and aren't lonely when they are by themselves.

On the other hand, if you are with people but you desperately miss someone who is not with you, then you are not alone but you are lonely. Being alone is then associated with a positive state of mind where you are contented, blissful and happy being with just himself.

Contented in His Presence

Now, amidst the Joy that I still possess, I have a growing appreciation for the peace that comes from knowing I am His child. I am His—even when I feel like a mess, even when I am embarrassed to openly discuss my frailties and flaws, for His Grace is sufficient for me.

I Thank Him for the peace He has given to every believer who matures into a trust-filled relationship with Jesus Christ. My initial surgery may be completed, but daily I remain under His intensive care as He monitors my progressions and occasional depressions. I wouldn't trust my future with anybody but Him. What about you?

**T.D. Jakes (1995).
Naked & Not Ashamed**

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Being alone is when you can be truly alone and not consider it as a threat, instead see it as an opportunity to catch up with how you have been feeling lately and evaluate your feelings. The alone time is often used to reaffirm emotions, deal with issues and to have an inner conversation. The alone time is said to be the time to truly get to know yourself and what you want. Being alone should leave the individual/person in a calm state of mind.

and Ministers it is important to note that for many people (especially the elderly), that loneliness is a real issue during the holidays. They may not have someone to sit with them at the dinner table; they may not even have a festive table or even people to speak to. Many old people also have no friends, either because they are ill or because they are no longer seen as interested in life. **Younger people**, who rely only on friends, can also be found alone, and without invitation during the holidays which can make them perfect candidates for depression.

Seasonal Emotional Disturbance:

Seasonal Emotional Disturbance is a real psychological problem, which coincides with the period of holidays but unfortunately is not so easily recognized (seasonal emotional disorder). It creates a source of anxiety and worry at a time when the general expectation is that everybody should be joyful. Although it is a mild form of depression it is annoying and affects the person who is suffering from it.

The good thing with the stress of the holidays is that it is predictable. Unlike other types of stress that we encounter in everyday life, we most times know when it will start and when it will finish! Therefore, we can organize ourselves in order to avoid it or at least control it. I will hasten to say that Ministers are not exempt from this experience but they know how to 'plea the blood' and allow the Holy Spirit to take control. The added challenge for Pastors and Ministers is that they need to do all in their power to ensure that the membership is made aware and conscious of these issues and devise strategies to address some as far as possible. **[Please see page 6 some useful suggestions from different church leaders]**

The experience of the true saints of God must be to recognize and be concerned for all, not just the poorest and neediest but the most emotionally vulnerable at this time of year. This recognition assures us that if we journey with faithfulness in this life, we will-- as the psalmist sings '-- be filled with the presence and radiance of God.

According to one Minister – At Christmas Time

My family reads the Christmas story throughout December, and sends messages to our loved ones who are far away from us. We exchange a gift, more than one if you are a child under 16, and donate to those who do not have money for food, shelter, or clothing, and to those who spread the Gospel in inhospitable places.



NEW YEAR!

End the year faithfully - FOCUS ON 2016

We are in the Christmas season, ending of one year and the approaching of a new one, how can you end the year faithfully? Rev. Ronnie Floyd who has been a pastor for over thirty-seven (37) years would like to challenge you personally and professionally:

Personally, he invites you to:

1. *Evaluate where you are with God:* draw aside to ensure all is right with God. Deal with yourself. Talk to God about your challenges honestly, practice repentance and seek fresh empowerment from the Holy Spirit.
2. *Examine your relationship with others:* In church culture, relationships often have get messy and mis-understood, use this season to examine all relationships again; do not underestimate the influence of a personal call, email, text message, visit, or even a hand-written personal note. The holiday season is that time of year when many of our people are hurting and need a special touch. So pull your troops in closer to you and let them know you need them with you to launch the New Year.
 - 3 *Elevate your walk with Christ.* Use this season of the year to elevate your walk with Christ. Read more of God's Word and spend additional time with Him in prayer. Use your personal time with God to begin to pray about what He will place before you in the New Year, personally and professionally. Spend extra time with God to concentrate on your personal walk with Christ. Be ready personally to launch into the New Year in a powerful way. Professionally, he invites you to consider how you will end the year and get the church and members sharpened for the New Year:

1. Consider the status of your church spiritually. Just as you would have your vital signs checked at your annual physical, stop long enough to check the vital signs of your church. *Pastor, honestly before God, how is your church doing?* Is your church healthy? If it is healthy, how do you know? If your church is not healthy, what will you do about it? Determine to end the year faithfully.

2. Sharpen your leadership for the future. As a Pastor, once you have considered the status of your church, you should know more about how to lead it. Where will you lead it? What will you lead the church to do? Consider having a demographic study done on your community to understand how to better reach people. Five years interval is usually a good time to repeat the assessment)(If you have already done this, is it time for another study? Are you leading strategically to minister to your community compassionately, all for the purpose of making disciples of all the nations? Sharpen your leadership skills for the future. If you will do this, you will lead faithfully.

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One Pastor is admonishing his fellow Pastors and Ministers to become HEROES today! According to him *“we need someone to believe in and look up to; someone who has accomplished something to give us courage to believe in the invisible and feel the intangible. We need role models and men whose shadows we may stand in, men who provide a cool refreshing place of safety away from despair of our Oppressive*

society. It’s just that all the supermen in the church seem to have somehow gotten ‘zapped’.....either they or their reputations have wilted into the abyss of human failure”. (J.D Jakes, 1995) The question is “what are we going to do as we face this generation?”

3. Commit yourself to teach the Word of God faithfully.

As the Pastor-Teacher, your highest call is to bring glory to God by teaching and preaching the Word of God accurately and faithfully. This means you have to draw aside to consider what you are going to preach in the year ahead and how you are going to preach it. Will you teach through a book of the Bible, or several books of the Bible? Are you going to deal with subjects like marriage, family, finances, the future, and do it driven by the text of Scripture, leading people to walk in the depths of God’s riches? Or will you do a combination of the above? Whatever you do, commit yourself to teach the Word of God more faithfully than ever before in your ministry

4. Challenge your church to finish the year with Financial Faithfulness.

Discussions with a number of Pastors have demonstrated *that financial faithfulness is weak.* This therefore means that Pastors and Ministers need to challenge the people of God to finish the year and beyond with the highest level of financial faithfulness to God.

It is incumbent upon you to do so, not just for the people themselves, but also for the work of the church. *Persons cannot say they are walking in faithfulness to Jesus without practicing biblical stewardship.* challenge God’s people to:

- Honor the Lord with the first ten percent (10%) of all God has entrusted to them throughout this year
- Honor the Lord with gifts of generosity above the first ten percent, giving to Missions/faith promise, church vision specific offerings or benevolence.

If we want God’s people to walk with Jesus faithfully, we need to challenge them to be faithful financially. As the Pastor of your fellowship you are encouraged to plan now to finish the year both personally and professionally, with the highest level of faithfulness.

*A Book
for Pastors & Ministers*

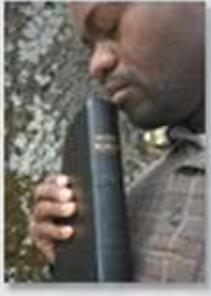
**Life Overflowing-The
spiritual Walk of the believer
(6 Pillars from Ephesians)
by:**

TD Jakes

The book of Ephesians brings to us the majesty, and the beauty of the Church. We are created to live so God could demonstrate His power through us .However, many of us turn to our own limited resources when dealing with people and situations.

**Book available at
Pentab High Business Centre,
16 North St./ entrance on
Wildman Street**

SUGGESTIONS TO OVERCOME EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCES AT CHRISTMAS TIME:



Accept feelings

Though you may feel like you are *supposed* to be merry, don't force it. "You just can't be where you're not." "So if you feel down," he continues, "feel down." "When we acknowledge that we are down, it helps us." We ought to give others space to feel whatever they are feeling as well. "Be in touch with your own anxiety that may surface when you are in the presence of someone who appears to be in distress, so that you are not trying to 'fix' them in order to ease your own distress."

Manage expectations

There can be a lot of pressure to make Christmas perfect. But one minister reminds us to, "try to let go of how things have always been or are supposed to be and allow this holiday to reflect your current reality." If you are feeling blue, the goal of perfection can lead to stress or disappointment. Keep expectations realistic, and receive the season as it comes to you. When supporting a friend through a difficult period, help keep the pressure low. Don't push the "holiday spirit" upon your loved one. Give space and permission for them to cancel a day of shopping, or to initiate a deep conversation on a day you had planned for celebration.

Be selectively social

While everything in you may want to be alone, fight that urge sometimes. Retired Chaplain, of the United States Air Force, encourages those who are struggling to "get with other people." When serving those deployed far from family during the holidays, "Chaplains work very hard to provide fellowship opportunities for the troops whenever and wherever they happen to be," he reminded the troops not to feel obligated to attend every Christmas event, but to ensure they make time to be with other people.

He also recommends others stay connected with those who are feeling blue during the holidays. "I always worry about the person who is alone," he says. "I would stay with that person until relieved by someone close to him or her. I think it's that important." So stick close and remember, not everything you do together needs to be Christmas related. Mundane chores like laundry and grocery shopping can be lonely times. Offer to help.

Care for the body

Physical factors such as fatigue and low blood sugar, can contribute to a sense of sadness. When feeling down, extra attention to your health is helpful. "Take care of yourself. Adequate sleep, exercise, and good nutrition relieve stress, deter depression and improve self-esteem." That doesn't mean you have to avoid *every* Christmas cookie, but take care of your body. Healthy habits are sometimes set aside during the holidays. When supporting one who is struggling, you can help by offering to go for a walk together or by making healthy eating choices. The discipline of diet and exercise always seems a little easier with a friend. Be that friend.

Watch your language

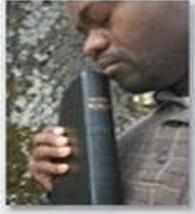
Be mindful of times you talk to yourself in ways you would never speak to another. Thoughts like, "I should be over this by now," or "I'm ruining Christmas for everyone," add guilt, which exacerbates the sadness. Instead, look for things to celebrate. When you get yourself to go to that party, pat yourself on the back. When you turn down that third cup of eggnog, tell yourself how proud you are of your accomplishment. Be your own cheerleader.

Be cognizant of what we say to others. "Avoid these phrases: 'It's Christmas! Catch the spirit!' 'You're just sad because you WANT to be sad!' 'I know just how you feel.' or 'If you really believed in the reason for the season, you wouldn't be sad.'" None of these is helpful. "Giving advice often results in the other person feeling minimized, dismissed, judged, or unheard." ***Focus your attention on listening rather than talking during this time.***

Worship

- *Attending a special worship service can be healing*. While typical Christmas worship services and programs may not be appealing to you, many churches offer special Blue Christmas or Longest

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Night worship gatherings. Churches design these services to offer those in attendance the hope of Christmas even while feeling a sense of sadness.

In some churches special services are planned during the season. These service are planned with time of prayer and fellowship and have been valuable to those participating. Services provide opportunities for people to talking to each to linger and relax."

It is unrealistic to expect you or your loved ones to feel better simply because it is the season to be jolly. Be intentional in addressing the sadness. Although it may not feel like the most wonderful time of the year, the event we are celebrating – “The Word became flesh and made his home among us” (John 1:14) – reminds us that Jesus is near, even when we are feeling down.

Step into the New Year with a Sense of Purpose!

DIVINE DESTINY

- **God has prepared you for Destiny and prepared the Destiny for you!**

Joseph’s story in the Bible is a wonderful illustration of this Principle.

He came out of a bad family situation that occurred both because of the evil of others and his own immaturity.

God had to allow a scenario that would move Joseph out of one situation and into another. While it is painful, Joseph’s journey was necessary, if he was ever going to realize his Destiny.

The problem for most of us is that we don’t like the Detours.

Detours are inconvenient, longer than we would like, uncomfortable and sometimes very painful. BUT, Detours are also necessary.

Joseph is not the only one in scripture to have experienced Detours – Paul, Moses, Abraham and the Nation of Israel also detoured; and you can be encouraged that what looks like a problem can actually be used by God to bring about His perfect plan.

While there are many things about detour you cannot control, there are a few things you can definitely affect. You have the ability to control your perspective by choosing to look at where God is taking you to, not where He’s taking you from. You can also remember that how you respond to the detour can determine how you stay on the Detour.

A bad past does not have to deny you your Destiny. You must look at the things that happened to you in believing faith of God’s divine purposes, even if it is painful. Joseph winds up in a pit – a deep hole in which he couldn’t climb out’ but little did he know that the **PIT was a part of God’s plan.**

Joseph’s story should give HOPE for the New Year because God has a Destiny for you!

Dr Tony Evans.

HAVE A BLESSED CHRISTMAS SEASON & PROSPEROUS WHEN IT COMES

Mavis M. Ferguson