

Christmas Helps for Single Parents



Written by: Linda Ranson Jacobs

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HLP4 is a website created by Linda Ranson Jacobs where you can find help for creating healthy loving partnerships for the children in our world. Whether you are a single mom, dad, grandparent parenting again, children's pastor or you work with children in any capacity you'll find helpful tips and tools. HLP4 can be found at <http://hlp4.com>.

Divorce Ministry 4 Kids exists to honor God by standing up for the child of divorce (including children whose parents were never married and are no longer together) by; 1. Teaching people about the effects of divorce on children; 2. Equipping those who work with children to serve these kids more effectively; 3. Calling the church to serve, support and minister to these children and their families; and 4. Serving children of divorce and their families as the hands and feet of Jesus Christ. You can find more information at <http://divorceministry4kids.com>.



Divorce Care 4 Kids is a program developed and sold by Church Initiative. It is a 13 week program designed to help kids aged 5 to 12 to heal from their parents divorce. You can find more information about the program at <http://dc4k.org>.

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Advent Devotion on Peace

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end." Isaiah 9: 6-7 (NIV)

When this baby, the Prince of Peace, was born he was placed in a manger. Imagine the prickly hay and the coldness of the environment. And yet to those of us who know the story, this placing our Savior in a manger, elicits such warm joy and peacefulness.

Through the many Christmas pageants and the Christmas carols we transport our minds back to that moment the baby was placed in a manger. From the minute the baby was born, our world changed. That tiny baby brought a peace that knows no end.

Our little children sing "Away In the Manger" and we smile and nod our heads at their cuteness and their sweet little voices. Little children may not understand the true meaning of Christmas but as they grow and mature they too will come to understand the importance of the baby in the manger.

Today our world is changing. The knowledge base is expanding rapidly. It seems our form of communication is revolutionized almost every minute.

Wars and rumors of wars abound. Our morality is decaying literally before our eyes on TV and the Internet. But the true meaning of Christmas, of the baby being born and placed in a manger, is still alive. It still abides in the hearts of His people.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for this son that brought an everlasting peace that even in a hectic fast paced world we can stop and know that we know Jesus Christ can bring peace into our lives.



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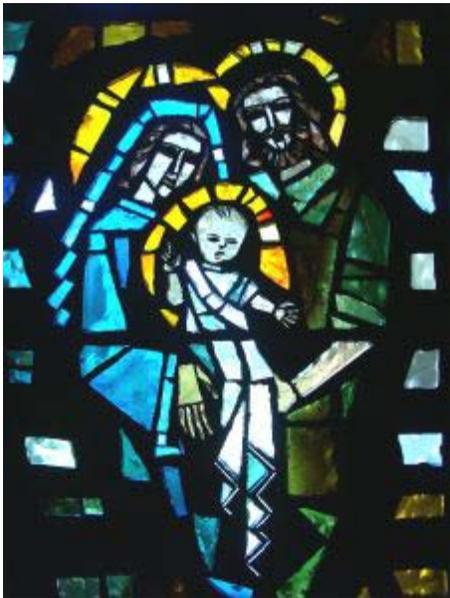
Before the Birth of Christ, Before Christmas

"And Mary said: 'My soul glorifies the Lord...His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.'" (Luke 1:46 & 50, NIV)

This is part of the song that Mary sang as she was visiting Elizabeth before the birth of Jesus. Imagine all that was going through a young girl's mind when she came to the realization that this tiny baby growing inside her was indeed the "holy one". In her praising the Father she makes the statement that His mercy be extended for generations, "from generation to generation".

Probably for the first time since the birth of Christ, the fear of the Lord is being negated by society's lifestyle and the break down of the intact family. Depravation and sinful behaviors unheard of in the last century are becoming the norm and accepted. Divorce is cycle. Abuse is horrendous. Unless there is intervention, for the most part children are going to do what the parents do.

How can the mercy of the Lord be extended to those who don't fear Him; to those who don't know Him and to those who purposely turn away? The tenderness and the true meaning of Christmas may very well be lost for future generations but it doesn't have to be that way. As a single parent you can step up and bring the true meaning of Christmas to the children the Lord has placed in your family.



Take time out of your busy holiday schedule to think on the birth of Christ. Start by reading the story of the birth of Christ in Luke 2:1-40. Read it to your children starting several days before Christmas. Don't get caught up in the hustle and the rush to buy presents. Savor the moment of Mary learning of her pregnancy. Stretch the days before Christmas by reading His word and spending time in prayer.

Train your children now while they are young to appreciate and enjoy a joyful Christmas. Many adult children of divorce turn away from the Lord and from organized religions. Christmas gets lost as they get older. Take your children to church and to Christmas programs that depicts God's glory and His Sovereignty.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." Luke 2:14 (NIV)

Celebrating Christmas in Single Parent Homes

All too often we Christians get caught up in our own life and forget the people around us who are dreading the season of Christmas. This article will spark your imagination and hopefully touch your heart as to what your role is in your own single parent home and in the lives of many of your single parent friends and their children.



"Merry Christmas!" exclaim many Christians during this time of the year. Just thinking of Christmas can bring warm feelings and memories to the mind and heart. Unless, that is, you are a struggling single parent. Many of you have been there and know what it's like to really struggle through the Christmas season. And for some of you, well, that is where you find yourself right now, struggling and merely surviving the holidays.

For some of your divorcing and single parent friends, the words "Merry Christmas" equate to the words in the second book of James:

"Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed."

Now while that certainly sounds like a reasonable farewell, the text goes on to say that if a person says that to another, but does nothing about his physical needs,

"what good is it?"

James 2:16 (NIV) *How can the person keep warm and have a full tummy if he or she has no resources?*

The Christmas holidays can become an entire season to be endured for many single parents. So I ask you, when you say, "Merry Christmas" what good is it if that is all you do? How is that bringing our Savior's love to the hurting? Is that why Jesus left heaven, came to earth as a humble little baby and slept in a straw manger? Just so we could say "Merry Christmas"? Or so we could barely survive the holidays?

As a tiny little baby with tender skin, He couldn't have been comfortable in that little manger. Can't the rest of us be a little uncomfortable today to help each other get through the holidays? More than likely if you stopped to think about people who need support during the holidays, friends, acquaintances or coworkers will come to mind. In the least there are other single parent families in your community.

In one church, the leaders of a DivorceCare for Kids¹ group helped the children give their single parent a Christmas present. As one young mom was leaving the class, the leader said,

"Now put that under your tree and don't open it until Christmas."

To which the mom responded,

"Don't worry. It will probably be the only present under the tree for me."

Many of you have lived that scenario. I know I did when my children were younger.

Tips to help you survive Christmas

Since budgets are tight in many single parent homes encourage your friends to send e-cards for Christmas. You can start this process by sending e-cards to the divorced and single parents you know. Encourage ministers and other church leaders to do the same. Here are a few sites to get you started:

- www.crosscards.com/cardsholidayschristmas
- <http://www.bluemountain.com/ecards/holidays>

Help newly formed families develop new Christmas traditions and rituals

Invite them into your home to see how you celebrate Christmas. When my children were in elementary school, a friend gave me a great idea. We used this until my children were grown. Each year for Christmas I gave them their very own 2-liter bottle of soda or punch along with their very own favorite bag of chips. They didn't have to share these items and could take them to their rooms if they wanted. This became an important tradition for my children, and they looked forward to their special treat each year.

Many families celebrate with an Advent calendar. Children will learn about Christmas around the world with this Advent countdown.

- <http://kidscorner.net/offer/>

Help children obtain gifts for the single parent

Do you have any idea how hard it must be for a child to try and figure out how to get mom or dad a present? There is no other parent to take the child shopping. As a child, you don't want to ask your parent for money to buy the parent's own present. Many children can't ask the other parent for money or a ride. They know this may set off the equivalent to a major war.

¹ [www.DivorceCare for Kids.org](http://www.DivorceCareforKids.org)

Think about your own children. What do they do for your present? Would it be possible for you to go to your church and ask them to set up a day where children from single parent homes can make their parents a present for Christmas? Tell your church leaders to not forget that there are two different parents living in two different houses, so one bag of cookies or one Christmas ornament won't work.

Ask if the church could ask various members of your church to donate supplies. After the children make their gifts, possibly you, as a single parent, could take charge and set up an evening or a Saturday and invite other children from single parent homes to come and wrap their presents.

Single Parents Alone on Christmas

Another suggestion is to keep your eyes and ears open to find single parents who will spend Christmas day alone. I have been in this situation, and it is so lonely to be completely by yourself. I couldn't force myself to ask others if I could spend the day with them. It would have been nice just to know I was invited to spend time with a family in my church.

Perhaps you will be the one spending the day alone. If you look around, you might find others just like you. While it won't be the traditional Christmas you may be accustomed to, it will still be a celebration of our Savior's birth. Take the initiative and invite other single parents or single adults to your home on Christmas Day.

Even if your children are with you on Christmas Day, go ahead and invite other single parent families to be with you. If you don't want to invite them for a big meal, at least invite another family over for dessert or even just a cup of hot chocolate late in the day. This will give that single parent, with or without children, something to look forward to.

Economical Christmas Celebrations

Here are some good Christmas websites that offer economical ways to celebrate with decorations, gifts, etc. Share these sites with other single parent families.

- <http://www.allfreecrafts.com/christmas/index.shtml>
- <http://allrecipes.com/Recipes/Holidays-and-Events/Christmas/Main.aspx>

I hope this will get you started thinking about Christmas in your own single parent family and also how you can reach out during this time to help other single parents. Don't just wish them well, but give to them what you would like given to you.

"And give them joy in my house of prayer" Isaiah 56:7 (NIV)

This article first appeared on www.dc4k.org, © 2010 by the author

Give It All to Jesus

This devotion provides help for surviving a crisis during the holidays.

Many times in life when things get really tough, we tend to dwell on the adversity of the situation. God wants us to give every burden, trial and all of our circumstances to Him. While it sounds like a reasonable request from our Father, it is, however, not an easy thing to do, especially for me. In fact it's one of the hardest parts of living through crisis, giving it all to Jesus.

My mind tends to fill up with "mind chatter." It gets so full of chatter that sometimes I can't even fall asleep. This happened when my children's father left and we went through the divorce. Later I remarried and my second husband was diagnosed with cancer.

When he was dying, I learned to still the chatter by creating a mental picture in which I envisioned giving it all to Jesus. When I can see myself literally giving the crisis to Jesus, it helps. Since it was right before Christmas when we received the news that the cancer was terminal, the scene in this mental picture centers on Christmas.

Give It All to Him

Christmas is a time of celebrating Jesus and His birthday. When I close my eyes, I envision a beautiful staircase. At the top of this staircase is a most exquisite Christmas tree, and sitting next to the Christmas tree is an elegant throne.

I carefully wrap a present. I gently carry this present to the staircase, and I begin my climb. It's a long climb, and I am very careful with this special present. When I get to the top, I can sense such a serene peace. I think, "Ah yes, this is the right decision. This present belongs with Jesus." I place this most special present under the tree.

I turn and start my descent down. About halfway down I look back, and I envision Jesus sitting on His throne surrounded by angels. The scene is so calm and reassuring to me. I continue going down and turning back to see Jesus. I can't take my eyes off the beauty.

I see Jesus bend down and pick up my box. He tenderly opens the box and takes out my husband. Jesus cradles him in His arms. There are no words to describe the scene that unfolds before me. I know through all my tears that I



have no choice; I have to give this man I love to Jesus.

I continue down the stairs. I am almost to the bottom and part of me wants to run back and get my present, but then I look back and I see my husband's face. He is in awe, but most of all he looks so peaceful.

At times he is animated and excited; at other times Jesus is just cradling him in His arms and the angels are ministering in song. Again I know that I can't take him back; this is where I need to leave him, with Jesus.

Create a Mental Picture

Whatever your circumstances, problems with children, family, job or just surviving being a single parent, you too can give it all to Jesus. Create your own mental picture or just place yourself and your situation in the scene above.

When you can't sleep, focus on your mental picture and keep the mind chatter quiet.

When you can't think, stop take a deep gulp of air and think about your mental picture.

Ask God to provide peace, rest and comfort to you during the crisis.

See I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands. Isaiah 49:16 (NIV)

This was originally written for the family members of my husband who was dying of cancer. It was my hope that it would assist his loved ones to accept his impending death.

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Glory to God in the Highest

This devotion will help you examine how you think about Christmas this year.

"...whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." 1 Corinthians 10:31 (NIV)

Many times when we think about Christmas we think in earthly terms – decorating a tree; purchasing presents for loved ones; hosting Christmas dinners; attending Christmas parties and church services. We know that Christmas is about the birth of our Savior but still it is easy to get caught up in holiday celebrations and not in the real purpose of Christmas.

This year I want to challenge you to think seriously about the verse, *"..whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."* As a single parent when you celebrate Christmas with your children are you doing everything for the glory of God?

Maybe you just buy into all the hype about the holidays. Or are you in competition with the other parent and grandparents? It is easy to get caught up in competing for your children's admiration and or attention. We want our children to think the best of us and sometimes that means we try to give them the best and biggest present or celebration. That is not glorifying God but putting attention on what we can do.

As you enter this year's Christmas season take a few minutes to read the account of the birth of Christ in the second chapter of Luke.

After the angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds to make the announcement of the birth of Christ,

"Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." Luke 2:13-14 (NIV)

While you are not an angel that appears to your children to announce the birth of Christ, you are their parent who should be bringing the good news about the importance of the birth of Christ. That means you have a responsibility to project the spiritual emphasis of Christmas to your children.

In your family you will need to decide what this means. Pray and ask God what and how you should do this. It might mean reading the Christmas story out of the Bible on Christmas Eve. Maybe it means getting together with loved ones. Perhaps it means providing Christmas to a family less fortunate than yours. Possibly it might mean fewer presents under the tree for your children. However and *"...whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."*

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Helping Children of Divorce Through the Holidays

In a DivorceCare Surviving the Holidays interview, Linda Ranson Jacobs shares wise and practical advice on how to help your children through the holidays.

Q: Why is the interruption of routines so difficult for a child?

One thing that makes the holidays difficult for children is the interruption of routines and rituals. Routines lend themselves to a sense of security, and everyone knows that routines go out the window during the holiday times. Please try to keep the routines the same as before, as much as you can. When things have to change, let your child know: "Things are going to be a little bit different today. We're going to do such and such." Routines, rituals and traditions are very important to children.

Q: Why is it important to keep some of the same routines for kids during the holidays?

Many times during the holidays as parents we want to protect our children, so we try to make everything different, and sometimes that's a mistake. Sometimes it's okay to keep things the same. Children feel security in routines and traditions, so sit down, talk to the children and ask them what they want to change, but let them know you still want to keep some things the same. Go with the flow of what your children want to do. And any change you make, you need to feel comfortable with, too, because if you don't feel comfortable, that's going to impact the children.

Q: Why are Thanksgiving and Christmas so stressful to children of divorce?

With all the rushing around at the holidays—parties, church, concerts, plays, shopping—you still have to work, and you get stressed out. Think of the child. They feel the stress both in your family and in your ex's family. They have double whammies of stress. Children do get very stressed out during the holidays.

Think about this: say Thanksgiving Day comes and your children are with you. You are celebrating Thanksgiving at your parent's home, and all the little cousins are there. Just about the time the children are really involved in the games, somebody packs them up and now they've got to go to another house. So the children enter another scene: this scene is already taking place. These little cousins are already playing games, so your children have to navigate into the structure of the cousins already playing. Just about the time they feel comfortable, whoops, they've got to go to another home. Over and over. Some children are going to eat two, three and even four large meals on Thanksgiving Day. Thanksgiving Day is not a fun day for many children of divorce.

Q: Why do children struggle with anger during the holiday season?

During the holiday season many children will experience a tremendous amount of anger due to the divorce. The child may be thinking, "How come Dad didn't think of me before he left? He just wants to be over there in that apartment by himself. Well, he deserves to be all alone at Christmastime. I don't care." When the child really does care. There is a lot of anger that floats around for the child of divorce.

Q: Why do children struggle with guilt during the holiday season?

Most children of divorce secretly feel the divorce is their fault, and this feeling goes on for a long time. When children feel the divorce is their fault, it causes a lot of guilt feelings in them. This is particularly true if they see Mom crying or if Dad gets mad and tries to smash his fist into the wall. The children take on tremendous amounts of guilt for what they think is their fault.

Q: What can parents do to keep a child from feeling guilty during the holidays?

Telling children of divorce not to feel guilty or that it's not their fault doesn't work. Let's say Dad told the child to empty the trash, and the child didn't do it, and the next day Dad moves out. The child may feel like because he or she didn't empty the trash, Dad moved out. As a parent, try to determine before you ever get to the holidays what the child is thinking. You can do this by observing and listening to your children's conversations when talking to their friends and to each other. When you discover something, sit down and listen to the child and say, "Dad didn't leave because you didn't take out the trash. Dad left because Dad wanted to leave. It has nothing to do with you and the fact you didn't take out the trash. Divorce is an adult problem."

Q: What other thoughts and feelings may go through a child of divorce at Christmas?

Holidays bring up for children what used to be happy memories. They may wonder, "Are we ever going to have another happy Christmas?" This is particularly true if one of the parents has moved on. Then the children have to deal with stepfamilies. They may think, "Does Mom love that family, her new family, more than she loves me?" Sometimes in blended families, the children from one side may receive nice, expensive gifts from their grandparents, but the other children do not get those types of gifts. That brings up a lot of anger in children too.

Q: How do you keep the dialogue going throughout the holidays with your child?

Keep the dialogue going all during the holidays. Be sure to have a lot of connections at meal times. Concentrate on helping the children label their feelings. You might say at dinner, "Whoa, I had a rough day today. I got to

thinking about last year when your mom was here. I was thinking I wanted her to be here this year, but that just wouldn't work. If your mom were here, she wouldn't be happy, and then we'd all be miserable. So I decided to try to think about something to cheer myself up, and I started thinking about Jesus laying in that little manger and all the animals around—the cows and the sheep. And that made me feel more peaceful."

Q: What are people's motives for getting together with an ex over the holidays?

Be really honest with yourself about why you want to get together with the ex. You may be saying it's for your children, but really investigate your motives. Is it because secretly you hope the memories of a happier time will bring your ex home? Or maybe you're so proud of the way your life is going and you want to flaunt that in front of your ex; you want to bring your ex in to show him or her your new house or your new apartment. Think about what your motives are because if your motives are not pure and about the children, the children will feel it. They'll know it's not about them. It's still all about you. Your children will suffer tremendously. It'll just make them feel like pawns in a game, and it will diminish the children.

Q: How does celebrating Christmas with an ex keep children from accepting the reality of the divorce?

Many times when parents decide to celebrate Christmas together for the children, they think it will make the holidays better for the children. But most children secretly wish their parents would get back together again, so you're giving them false hope. Even though both parents may say, "We're not getting back together; we're just going to do this for Christmas," the children are secretly sure this is going to work out, that Dad or Mom is going to come home, that everything is going to be wonderful. For many children it's not wise to have Christmas together. You just have to know your children and your own situation.

Q: What if a parent is involved in a new relationship over the holidays?

Concentrate on the children and how you can make the holidays the best they can be for them. This is not about you. You may be involved in a new romantic relationship. You may be excited and have all these feelings bubbling up. Put that aside for the holidays. The holidays are for your children. What can you do to make your holidays better? Many experts say it takes children three to five years just to get back to a sense of being normal again after a divorce. If you interrupt that process by bringing a new person on the scene too early, you will hinder the healing and it will take the children even longer to heal from the divorce.

Q: Sometimes parents inadvertently say things to the children that make the children feel guilty. How can parents keep from making their children feel guilty during the holidays?

As you make plans for celebrating Christmas or being alone, share those plans with your children, but be careful how you share them. Do it in an uplifting manner; for instance, "While you guys are over at your Dad's/Mom's, this is going to be a great time for me to be alone and celebrate Christmas. I'm going to have a joyful time, and I'm going to be praying for you. We'll connect on Christmas Eve by phone, and remember that I want you kids to have a great time because I'm going to have a great time by myself. I might even take a bubble bath that day."

This article first appeared in the DC4K ParentZone and then in the DivorceCare Surviving the Holiday articles.

www.dc4k.org/parentzone/library/434

www.divorcecare.org/holidays/articles/helpingchildren

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Holidays Can Bring Feelings of Guilt for Children of Divorce

Some children will feel guilty during the holidays for a variety of reasons. Learn from this article why and how to help your children.

Many children feel like the divorce is their fault. So when the holidays come around, this feeling of being responsible for the breakup of the family creates a lot of guilt. Seeing Mom cry or Dad smash his fist into a wall will deepen the struggle with feeling guilty.

Some children might feel because of the divorce, they shouldn't be happy or display any excitement toward the holidays, especially if they are witnessing sad or angry parents. They may even feel guilty for not being sad twenty-four hours a day.

As a single parent, what can you do to keep a child from feeling guilty during the holidays when you yourself may be experiencing some guilt feelings? First, let's address your guilt feelings. A dad might question:

"Is Jimmy going to miss me on Christmas morning when he gets up and sees all the gifts under the tree? Is he going to wonder if I can come over and help him play his new computer game?"

Or a mom might worry about the teen daughter,

"Is Susie wondering how I'm doing all alone while she is at her dad's new girlfriend's house?"

"Is Champ going to cry when he goes to sleep tonight because I wasn't there to read him the Christmas story out of the Bible?"

As parents you will need to be careful not to let your feelings of guilt flow over to your children. It's not fair for them to take on your guilt. One of the first things you can do is turn your guilt feelings over to the Lord. Ask our Father to protect you from feeling guilty and to protect your children.

Next, if possible allow the children to experience happy times with the other parent and the other parent's extended family. You can model for your children healthy emotions. It's okay for them to know that you also miss how things used to be. You might try making brief matter-of-fact comments during the holidays. Maybe you come home from a church



service or a Christmas cantata and you are singing or humming the music. At that point, in front of your children, you can say something like:

"I loved that song they sang. You know the one that said, 'He knows my name. He knows my every thought ...' It reminded me so much of how your grandmother, your dad's mother, would always start singing around Christmas-time. I love remembering how sweet her voice sounded. I sure hope you get to spend some time with her this year. "

And keep right on humming or singing. This will say to the child, "It is okay to be happy. It is okay to remember the happy times."

Telling children not to feel guilty doesn't work. Before you ever get to the holidays, try to determine what the child is thinking. Maybe a son thinks the divorce is his fault because his dad told him to take out the trash and he didn't. The next day dad moves out. The child is sure it's his fault Dad left because he didn't take out the trash. A wise parent can sit the child down and say,

"Dad left because divorce is an adult thing. He didn't leave because you didn't take out the trash."

Keep the dialogue going all during the holidays. Concentrate on helping the children label how they are feeling. Label your own feelings in front of your child. An example that includes something about the other parent might go something like this:

"Whoa, today was kind of a hard day for me. I got to thinking about last Christmas when your mom was here. For a few minutes I felt really sad and wished she would come home for Christmas. But I know she wouldn't be happy here, and then we would all be miserable. I decided to cheer myself up by thinking about Jesus laying in that tiny little manger and the donkeys and cattle all around him. Do you think maybe the animals wanted to nibble on that hay in the manger?"

Some children may feel guilty if they spend the actual holiday with one parent, knowing the other parent is alone. Or if they have a good time, they may feel guilty upon returning home again. Assure your children that you are fine while they are gone.

Make plans ahead of time and share with them a little about your plans. If you are choosing to stay home alone, make it sound okay to the kids and that this is a choice you made.

One child shared that she got an expensive gift from her dad. She really enjoyed and liked the gift, but she felt guilty about the gift and also about wanting to talk about the gift to her best friend. She knew her mom couldn't afford such a nice gift. Take delight in what your children receive from others. Be excited your child has been blessed.

The issue of gifts can bring up a lot of guilt for the children. This is especially true if the parents try to outdo each other. Or even if the grandparents and other extended family get involved in the gift giving. The child becomes a pawn in the game of

"Let's see who can out-give the other parent." Children feel guilty about the amount of money spent. They feel guilty that they are getting nice things when what they really want is attention and love, or for their parents to get back together.

One young teen was taken to the dad's girlfriend's parents' house on Christmas Day. The parents had planned ahead and had many presents under the tree for the young lady. However, no one had told her there were going to be presents, and she shared later that she felt guilty at receiving so many presents when she had nothing to give in return.

This bothered the young lady for many weeks after Christmas. Children of divorce deserve respect for their feelings and even for who they are. This dad should have planned in advance. He could have taken a small candle or something the child could have given to these gracious people.

Christmas can be a joyous occasion with true moments of awe mixed in. Think about the shepherds out in the field in the middle of the night and an angel appearing before them. Suddenly a host of angels are praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." Luke 2:14 (NIV)

Just thinking about moments like that can bring humbleness of heart and a sense of awe!

As a single parent it is up to each of us to minister to our children during the holidays. Don't let them miss out on the splendor of this time. Don't allow the guilt to become the overriding factor. Do allow them to feel and sense the peace that the angels praised God for when the shepherds were out in the fields.

This article first appeared in the DivorceCare for Kids <http://www.dc4k.org/>

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Is Bitterness Ruining Your Holidays?

It can be hard to have a joyful Christmas when you have experienced a life crisis but it is possible.

"Stop running through the house and quit bothering that tree. I put that up for Christmas and I don't want you touching it. Now go get ready for your dad to pick you up. Goodness knows if you're not ready to go I'm the one that will get blamed" the mom yelled from the kitchen.

Later that day this mom was complaining about what her ex had done to her when her friend made an excuse and abruptly walked away.

"Just like everyone else in my life" she thought, "They walk away. So what's new?"

Everything in this mom's life seemed to upset her. Even Christmas was upsetting. It hadn't always been like that. She remembered when she was small how much Christmas had meant. Her mom had worked hard every year just so her and her siblings could have a happy and special Christmas. Now she dreaded Christmas.



Later that night as this single mom sat alone in her house she began to wonder what had happened? Along the way her excitement toward the birth of our Savior had turned into nothing more than a nuisance. Her ex husband had left her almost five years ago and it was right after the holidays when he had walked out. It seemed like every year Christmas got harder and harder to endure. She wondered if she would ever have another holly-jolly Christmas.

What this mom doesn't realize is her level of joy at Christmas depends a lot on her expectations and on her attitude. She is allowing her disappointment in her circumstances to grow into bitterness. It might be hard to have a joyful Christmas when you have experienced a crisis in your life.

Some people do experience a joyful Christmas even though they have experienced a life crisis such as the death of a loved one, a divorce or the loss of all their possession and financial assets. How do they keep from dwelling on the situation and turning what has happened to them into bitterness?

The mom in the above situation has already developed a hardening of the heart. This hardening of the heart is preventing her from finding joy in the birth of Christ. Without realizing it she is allowing bitterness to become the central theme of her life. Not only does she not have joy at Christmas, her bitterness is affecting her entire life all year long. If she doesn't overcome the resentment she carries for her ex husband and her circumstances, eventually she will push everyone away even her children.

This mom could learn from Hannah in the first chapter of 1st Samuel. It says that Hannah had become upset about not having a child of her own.

"In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord." 1 Samuel 1:10 (NIV)

She asked the Lord to look upon her misery and to remember her and give her a son. Hannah believed in God and she believed in the power of prayer. Hannah also trusted God to do what was best.

Mary didn't ask for a son but found herself with child.

"But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.'" Luke 1:30-31 (NIV)

Mary could have gotten bitter and resentful that she was going to have a baby when she had no husband. But she too believed in the power of God. And she trusted God.

God knows what bitterness can do to our heart and that's why in Ephesians 4:31 he says,

"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice." (NIV)

God knows that bitterness will drive a wedge in our soul between Him and us. That's why He gave us His son on Christmas, to save our souls. He wants us to be joyful in Him. We can weep, mourn or wail but at some point we need to turn to Him. Psalm 30:5

"Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning." (ESV)

So we go back to the question the single mom asked,

"Am I ever going to have another jolly-holly Christmas?"

Perhaps this mom needs to change her perception and ask God to give her peace and comfort first. This is a peace that comes from a personal relationship with God. It is a peace that dispels bitterness and resentment. It is the peace that the angels promised to the shepherds that night out in the fields,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." Luke 2:14 (NIV)

When you turn your focus from the awful things that have happened to you to the glory of God; to the peace He provides; to the gift of His Son, our Savior, and let go of the bitterness, then you can begin to enjoy Christmas. You can appreciate from your heart this wonderful gift of Christmas.

Through prayer and a personal relationship with God you can let go of the bitterness and resentment that have been slowly closing off your heart. That wedge lodged in your soul between you and God, can be pulled out.

If the single mom that we started with would allow her hurts to be soothed and her heart to be healed this is what might take place:

"Kids I know you are excited about Christmas but please walk inside the house. Be careful around the tree. It looks so nice this year. We did a good job decorating it, didn't we? And hurry up and get ready to go to your dad's. We don't want to keep him waiting. Oh, and be sure to wish him a Merry Christmas when you get in the car."

Later that day Miss Single Mom met with a close friend. They had the best conversation and so much fun. She realized how blessed she was to have friends surrounding her on the holidays. That night as she sat alone looking at the tree she thanked God for His son. She praised God for the beauty of Christmas and for the many blessings He had bestowed upon her this year.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." Luke 2:14 (NIV)

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Lonely? Or Alone During The Christmas Holidays

How do you get through the holidays when your children are not going to be with you?

Recently on FaceBook a long time friend posted:

"Fluffing/Decorating my Christmas Tree & Listening to Classical Music all by myself!!! This is NOT going to be easy!!!!!!!!!!!"



My friend is spending the first Christmas alone after her divorce. It is a very trying time for her and for many single parents. What do you do when your kids are not going to be with you around the holidays? How do you manage after a break up with the parent of your children? How do you get through the holidays?

After my dad passed away my mom made a profound statement. At the time I didn't fully comprehend her words but they came flooding back to me the first year after my divorce and I was alone throughout the holidays. She said,

"I've learned that Christmas is not just a holiday – it's an entire season. And it's longer than spring, summer, winter or fall!"

It can be a very long and lonely season or you can choose to make it different. Think about the difference between being lonely and being alone. My friend is right when she posted,

"This is NOT going to be easy!!!!"

But it is possible. My friend has a good start because she is going ahead with her life and setting up the Christmas tree.

When I realized I was going to be without the kids on Christmas, the first thing I did was to go to the Bible and read about Mary. These are strictly my thoughts and what the Lord revealed to me. I'm not saying they are theologically correct or by any means profound but it's what I feel the Lord revealed to me to help me through a trying time.

I read in Luke 2:4-7

“So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.” (NIV)

Mary was not yet married to Joseph and she was probably very young. More than likely she was close to her due date when they had to travel to Bethlehem. It was at least a three day trip and Mary either walked or road on a donkey up hill the entire distance. Imagine how lonely Mary must have felt? Here she was young, pregnant, not married and traveling quite a long distance. I can't begin to imagine what thoughts must have been going through her mind.

Is Joseph going to divorce me once this baby is born?

Is he going to just leave me in Bethlehem after the baby is born?

What if he dumps me in an inn where I know no one and leaves me alone to have this baby?

How will I manage when I have no money, family or friends close by?

Talk about feeling lonely!

Imagine how confused and maybe even lonely Joseph was? He was trying to do the right thing by Mary. But come on, she was pregnant and he was not the father. Was he trying to figure out how to handle things once they were registered for the census in Bethlehem?

Two people who were traveling together but each one was more than likely very lonely and lost in their own thoughts. After I had read this and reflected on it, my little world didn't seem so lonely after all. Christmas is supposed to be the celebration of the birth of our Savior. I came to realize it should be about Him. I needed to concentrate on how to make this season about Him and His birth.

I began to prepare for my very first Christmas alone.

- I found some Christmas music to play.
- I decided to go a bakery and purchase a big piece of cake for me – the kind that I liked.
- I made plans to order a pizza Christmas Eve afternoon and have it delivered. It wasn't the traditional Christmas Eve meal. It was different and that's what I needed – something that was different and special.

- I purchased a gift for myself too. It was a book that I had wanted to read and never had the time. And I made sure it was a big thick book so I could read all weekend long.

On Christmas Eve I walked around my house looking at the many nativity scenes that I had collected over the years. My mind continually wandered back to the real Christmas story. I shook the snow globes; turned on the Christmas lights; turned the overhead lights down; lit Christmas smelling candles.

I wasn't lonely and I wasn't alone either. How could I be alone when shepherds, the wise men, baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph and maybe even a host of heavenly angles praising God in the highest surrounded me?

The first Christmas was one of many that I spent without my children. Other Christmases I got together with other single parents. One Christmas after my kids were teenagers I took a little five year old boy to see the Christmas lights at Rhema in Broken Arrow, OK. Rhema is an organization that lights up over a million Christmas lights every year. It was a frosty foggy Saturday before Christmas and as we walked around he kept saying,

"It is like a fairy land!"

I forever will remember the excitement and the twinkle in his eyes that night.

One Christmas I was part of a group that took Christmas presents and a meal to a family where the mom and kids had come out of an abusive situation. Last year in North Carolina I went with a couple of other people and we delivered Christmas to a single mom with four kids.

When you think about it Christmas is just a date on the calendar. It's not the real date Christ was born. You can set up a birthday date that fits you and your children's schedule. The main thing is not to let the holidays get you down. Plan ahead. Get creative. And when you are able, do unto others. Maybe this year you are hurting and if that's the case then take time to heal. It is okay!

Wherever you are, whatever situation you are in, allow His grace to be sufficient for you this Christmas. Lean into Him for when you are weak you will find strength in Him and in the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

"And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." (KJV)

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The Prince of Peace and Christmas

With our ever-changing world we all need the prince of peace and Christmas.

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end." Isaiah 9:6-7 (NIV)

When this baby, the Prince of Peace, was born he was placed in a manger. Imagine the prickly hay and the coldness of the environment. And yet to those of us who know the story, this placing our Savior in a manger, elicits such warm joy and peacefulness.

Through the many Christmas pageants and the Christmas carols we transport our minds back to that moment the baby was placed in a manger. From the minute the baby was born, our world changed. That tiny baby brought a peace that knows no end. Even in our world today the baby at Christmas time still brings an everlasting peace.

Today our world is changing. The knowledge base is expanding rapidly. It seems our form of communication is revolutionized almost every minute. Wars and rumors of wars abound. Our morality is decaying literally before our eyes on TV and the Internet. But the true meaning of Christmas, of the baby being born and placed in a manger, is still alive. It still abides in the hearts of His people.



Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for this son that brought an everlasting peace that even in a hectic fast paced world we can stop and know that we are assured that Jesus Christ can bring peace into our lives.

This Advent Devotion first appeared in the Rolesville Baptist Church Advent Booklet, December 2009, Rolesville, NC

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Reasons Why Children Get Angry During the Holidays

This article explains ways children may express their anger over the holidays and how you can help.

Some single parents face the holidays with excitement and a resolve to make this holiday season the best ever for their children. However, if this is the first year you have faced the holidays as a single parent, then you may be approaching the holidays with trepidation. You are not sure how your children are going to react to the coming holidays.

This article explains a few ways that children may express their anger during the holidays. Also included are tips on what you can do to help children deal with anger, how you can reduce a child's frustrations during the holidays and what you can teach your children about situations they get angry about.

How Children May Express Anger During the Holidays

For the child of divorce, many times the holidays bring up feelings of tremendous anger. Thoughts like,

"If my dad hadn't been so selfish, he wouldn't have gotten a divorce. He wasn't even thinking about me. He was only thinking about what he wanted. What about me? I want him here for Christmas. I'm GLAD he's going to be alone on Christmas Day. He doesn't deserve to have a merry Christmas."

Many times, shortly after the angry "I'm glad he is alone" thoughts, come the conflicting thoughts:

"I'm glad we get to go to Dad's for Thanksgiving dinner. But what about Mom—will she be alone that day? Will she miss me at dinner? We always play that game with the turkey and dressing, seeing who can eat the most. Whom will she talk to if I'm at Dad's house?"

Also, children may long for acceptance from both parents. Because of this, they may vacillate back and forth with their feelings of anger, resentment and guilt for wanting to enjoy the holidays with both parents.

Here's one of the key reasons children can get so angry during the holidays: Everything has changed. Life has changed. The family unit has changed.

Even though Thanksgiving and Christmas still come around, the celebrations will be different. As holiday routines are interrupted, the loss of security may become over-whelming to some children. Why? Routines bring a sense of security in knowing what's expected of each person. When routines are interrupted, children become angry and unsure of what is happening. They

don't know what is expected of them or how they are supposed to act. Some children will have full-blown angry outbursts while others will remain crabby and out of sorts for days.

How You Can Help a Child Deal with Anger

As a parent or friend of the family, there are several things you can do to help smooth the holidays for children of divorce. Here are a few ideas:

1. Encourage reminiscing

It's okay to reminisce about past holidays. Let the children know it's okay to talk about these things. Pull out the pictures from past holidays. Pore over them and talk about what fun everyone had. If your child gets angry when remembering past holidays, then talk about what you can do as a single parent family to make things different this year.

2. Allow children to help plan holiday celebrations

Ask the children what they think would be a good plan to help them get through these times. Ask the children what traditions from the past they want to keep. Don't make them wonder about how they'll spend the holidays. Keep the lines of communication open.

3. Keep your routines

Do your best to keep routines the same so children can depend on some things staying the same. If you do have to interrupt the normal routine, make sure your children know in advance what is taking place.

4. Do something new

Even though children thrive with routines, change—when introduced and handled well—can be good too. This is especially true if a past tradition is too painful to continue. For example, maybe your family has always gone to pick out a tree together. But doing it without Dad may seem overwhelming to your child. Talk about still doing this, but with a variation. Possibly you could go with another family or plan on going with just one parent.

5. Revisit the Christmas story

This activity helps children see that they're not alone in their anger. It also reminds them of the reason we celebrate Christmas. Read and discuss the Christmas story from the Bible. Let them imagine what it must have been like for Mary and Joseph to find out that all of the places to sleep in Bethlehem were taken.

Ask your children if perhaps Mary or Joseph might have experienced a little anger. Gradually bring the conversation around to some of the new ideas and things you will do this year. Make a plan to create at least one new tradition this year. Maybe it's to read the Christmas story out of the Bible while sitting in front of the tree sipping hot chocolate. If your children won't be with you on Christmas Day, then do it a couple of days after Christmas.

Teaching Your Children about Frustrating Situations

As you heal and your children mature, bring up the concept that God can bring good out of every situation. Sometimes things might not make sense, but we need to teach our children that even in those times, God is still in control of our lives. Show your children through your actions that everyone gets angry, but it's how we handle our anger that's important. And in those times when things get stressful during the holidays, and when you fail as a parent and in your example for your children, then stop and, in front of your children, ask God to forgive you.

Don't get down on yourself if you struggle with anger. And don't feel like you're a bad parent if you end up repeatedly asking God to forgive you. Remember, if you're a Christian, God accepts you because of what Christ has done for you. God's acceptance of you has NEVER been based upon your day-to-day behavior.

So go to God confidently, asking for help, knowing that He accepts you and that He is eager to give you forgiveness, mercy and the help you need. Your children will learn a great deal about God's character if you approach God in that manner. Far more than if you were to pretend that you didn't have a problem with anger.

Be prepared, because with the excitement and merriment all around your kids at Christmas, you can count on them getting a little angry. And yes they will probably experience anger several times.

Children have a right to be angry at the situation this year; however, this anger should not be an excuse for angry tirades or angry behavior that affects others. You may also experience anger over and over again this year.

Prepare for it and then deal with it. Think ahead and you may be able to diffuse various situations. Stay close the Word and keep forefront in your mind what Thanksgiving and Christmas are really all about.

This article first appeared on the DivorceCare for Kids website (www.dc4k.org) under the ParentZone Holiday articles.

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Thinking About Celebrating the Holidays with Your Ex?

Learn how celebrating the holidays with your ex can keep your children from accepting the reality of the divorce.

Many divorced parents will attempt to celebrate the holidays like one big happy family. Sometimes this is a great idea, but more than likely you will be among the many families where this rarely works out. Before you contact your ex to make the suggestion to spend the holidays together, let's take some time to explore this idea.

First, what is the real reason you want to spend the holidays with the person who is no longer a part of your daily life? I can hear many of you saying,

"Well, I think it's best for the children."

Because of the divorce, the family unit, as the children have known it, has been changed forever. Your children have been adjusting to this situation. They have had to learn to live in two different households, yours and their other parent's. Even though you may tell your children you are not getting back together, in some children's minds spending the holidays together may indicate something different.



For many children, the coming together as one big happy family will only serve to build hope in the child's mind that maybe, just maybe, my parents will get back together again. One mother overheard her elementary age child talking to his sister,

"Hey sis, isn't it great that Dad's coming over for Christmas? We need to try and be really good so that him and Mom will remember how happy we used to be. Then maybe he'll come back home again."

Kid's Dreams

Keep in mind that most kids feel like the divorce is somehow their fault. Their grandiose dreaming during the holidays is to get the parents back together. To add to the problem during the holidays, we encourage children to dream about their wishes for gifts. Grandparents and other family and friends make promises of getting the children what they want for Christmas.

Secretly, many children wish for the gift of waking up on Christmas morning with their parents back together. If you do decide to spend Christmas with the

other spouse, make sure you sit down with your children in advance and explain that this is only going to happen because of the holidays. Otherwise you may be setting your children up for a huge crash after the holidays.

Kids Worry

On the other hand, some children are going to be very stressed thinking about their two parents being in one house for an extended period of time. They may think,

"What happens if Mom and Dad start fighting and arguing?"

Or,

Oh great, Mom and Dad in the same room. Yippee, I can feel the awkwardness already.

If one of the parents has decided to start dating, then the children may wonder if the significant other is also going to show up. If so, then they agonize how the other parent is going to handle this.

Children in general are protective of their parents. They may want to shield and protect you from being hurt again. For this child, the holidays become a very stressful time. They can't enjoy our Savior's birth because of the stress and the anxiety that is building within them.

Parent Issues

Another reason one divorced parent might want to celebrate the holidays with the ex is to secretly show the ex how well they are doing. You may want to flaunt your new life. Don't do it. While you appear to be doing fine and are acting quite happy, your children may still be struggling. This could place a barrier between you and your children.

They question how you, as their parent, can be so happy and yet they are sad, angry and sullen. They need you to be the parent they can trust and count on to notice they are still struggling. Instead of wanting to show your ex how well you are doing, take this time of year to focus on your children.

Concentrate on helping your children label how they are feeling. Many children really don't know how they are feeling. Or their feelings are scattered and they flip from being angry to being sad to being excited, back to feeling sad or lonely, especially during the holidays. Label your own feelings and model this before the child. At the evening meal you might say,

"Today we had our Christmas party at the office. When we were singing the Christmas carols I was so happy about Christmas. But then I remembered last Christmas when we were all together. I felt really sad and wished we could all be together again at your Grandparent's house on Christmas Eve."

If you are the parent who didn't want the marriage to dissolve, then you might possibly have a hidden agenda to try and entice the other parent to reconcile the marriage. You think, If only I could get the other parent to realize how much he/she is missing out on by not being with the kids at Christmas, maybe the other parent will come back. Instead of using the holidays to prod the other parent to return, go to the Lord and lay your petitions before Him. Allow the Lord to work in His time.

Celebrating the Reason for This Season

Right now as you enter the holiday season, put all of your efforts into celebrating our Savior's birth for that very reason—His Birth. Otherwise you may unknowingly allow the holidays to become all about the adults, and when that happens, the kids will feel like pawns in a game. It will diminish them and only serve to add additional stress. Instead, put in your mind how you are going to celebrate the holidays as a new family unit. You are now a single parent. Face the reality that your children live in a single parent family.

Sit down and visit with your children before everyone becomes involved in the holidays. Ask them how they want the holiday celebrations to be this year. You may be thinking,

"But what if they ask me if we can spend the holidays all together again? What do I say to them then?"

Be very matter of fact and tell them you understand how they are feeling. You might even tell them that you have thought about it too, but you realized that it would not serve any purpose but to prolong learning to move forward with your lives. Be empathetic and tender with your explanation, but also take the tone of voice that says, "This is how it's going to be, and we are going to be okay." Then turn the conversation back to the reason we celebrate the holidays. Focus on the Savior's birth.

Get the Bible out and read the Christmas story in the second chapter of Luke. Talk about how you might decorate your home differently this year. Discuss contacting the other set of grandparents and what the kids want to do for their grandparents for Christmas.

Ask the children if they want to make something special for their teachers at school or for their teachers in their church classes or the neighbor next door. Your attitude and concentrating on the children and their ideas will go far in creating a new kind of holiday season this year. You will be allowing everyone to continue on this journey of healing.

Allow your children to call and make plans with the other parent. Encourage them to make cards and gifts for the other parent. If possible, let the children make their plans with the other parent without involvement from you. If the other parent weakens to the children's pleas to spend the holidays together, be

matter of fact and simply tell everyone that it is not possible. Be upbeat and move forward with your plans.

Especially for You

Lastly, for yourself go to the Word. Take time for yourself; read various passages of Scripture. Take comfort and joy in the Christmas story in the Bible. Make this Christmas between you and the Savior. Develop an intimacy with God. When I did this, I found what had been a hidden passage to me before, but all of a sudden it jumped out at me. These two verses became a balm to my hurting heart:

"And Mary said: 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior'" (Luke 1:46–47)

Just as Mary approached the coming birth of her firstborn son, perhaps you can approach the holidays with rejoicing.

- Rejoice over the fact that you have children.
- Rejoice because they love you.
- Rejoice because we have the holiday season.
- Rejoice!

This article first appeared on DivorceCare Surviving the Holidays website.

<http://www.divorcecare.org/holidays>

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The Wind Chime That Changed Christmas

For this single parent family it was the first Christmas without the other parent. How could a wind chime make a difference? Read about how it changed this family's time together.

Our first Christmas as a single parent family was fast approaching. Since my children's father had left last year right after Christmas, we were beginning to get used to being without his presence in our home. However, here were the holidays looming before us, and me with no money.

I thought about just skipping Christmas altogether, but decided that wouldn't be fair to the kids. Then I decided we would continue with Christmas just as before. We would select a night to put up the tree, the lights and all the decorations. I would buy some special snacks, and we would celebrate like we always had. However, my kids were not very enthusiastic about this idea.

On a pre-designated Friday night the kids and I pulled out all of our Christmas decorations. They were mumbling and grumbling about putting up the tree. I heard things like,

"Why do we have to do this? It's not Christmas without Dad here!"

And

"Some Christmas this is going to be because we don't have any money to buy any presents."

I was not to be deterred; no siree! We were going to celebrate Christmas, and they were going to be happy about it! Sure, right.

The Family Wind Chime

We were doing better at the single parent family thing, but getting through the holidays was a different matter. I was trying to be joyful and happy, but my heart really wasn't into it. In the midst of pulling out all of the decorations, my son unwrapped our family wind chime. It was a tradition to hang this wind chime on our front door each Christmas.

Years ago a friend had made us a ceramic door chime with cute little people all decked out in their caroling outfits. Under each character was written the appropriate name. Their father's name was written under the father; my name was under the mother, and children's name was written under the appropriate aged child. This had always been such a special decoration to hang on the front door.

As Brian stood there holding it, we all froze. We must have stood there for several seconds staring at it. Brian finally ventured out with,

"Uh, Mom, what about this? What are we going to do?"

It was certainly a defining moment in our little family. I just stood there with my eyes focused on the name of their now departed father. All of a sudden my daughter ran out of the room yelling,

"Hold on, I've got an idea."

She came running back with the scissors and handed them to me. Immediately I knew what to do. I simply reached up, grabbed the string and snipped that cute little father character right off as I said,

"Well, it's just the three of us now. Might as well make the most of it."

With a dramatic sweep of my arm, I opened the front door and hung up the now very crooked and unbalanced wind chime. As we looked at it, we all began to laugh. Brian said,

"Mom, that looks stupid."

Julie said,

"Nah, it's okay. It adds a little character to it."

All I could do was laugh at how silly it looked. Brian added a few more comments, and we laughed all the more. Julie screeched out another silly comment, and we laughed even more. By the time I could get control of myself, I had tears in my eyes. We couldn't stop laughing.

As I looked at that silly, crooked wind chime, I knew that things were beginning to change. I realized it was okay to make changes and that we couldn't do things the way we always had. I got busy, and we moved the Christmas tree to a different spot. We changed the way we had always put out the nativity scenes. The kids got a little wild with their ideas, but hey, it was their ideas.

We stayed up very late that night. We spent a lot of time in laughter and silliness. We draped the silver tinsel over our shoulders. We put lights in weird places. I hung Christmas bulbs on my ears like big earrings. I remember my son even putting decorations on our dog. Snickers the dog only tolerated our silliness.

Toward the end of the evening my son was a little concerned about the father figure that had been snipped off the wind chime. I always advocated that my children respect their father. Hmmm, how could I still encourage respect in this situation? I suggested that my son could either keep it himself and hang it in his room, or he could give it to his father.

Making New Traditions

Every Christmas for years that crooked wind chime hung on our front door. Every year when I would look at it, I would smile. We were okay. Another tradition that I started that year was to buy each child a two-liter bottle of his or her favorite soft drink along with a bag of his or her favorite chips.

Our budget was tight, and your own soft drink and your own bag of chips were indeed wonderful. The children could take their drinks and chips to their bedrooms and eat and drink when and as they saw fit. This became a much-treasured item to look forward to. Even after our budget improved, I continued that tradition.

Look at your own situation, and think about ways to begin some new traditions. Keep some of the familiar traditions, but develop some new ones also. Above all, don't forget the reason for the season—Christ's birth.

Think about Jesus' birth and the fact that God knew when His Son was born what His Son was going to have to go through. God, the Father, knew when this little baby was born that in just a few short years He would face the cross. God allowed His Son to face the cross for you and your children. For our sins, Christ paid it all. Give the joy of Christmas to your children this year, as you have never done before.

"And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."
Luke 2:7 (NIV)

This article first appeared on the Association of Marriage and Family Ministry (AMFM) Single Parent's page

http://www.amfmonline.com/single_parent_family_ministry.asp

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Where Are You God?

Have you ever wondered if God was really walking beside you? This article will give you a deep understanding of God's love and concern for every single parent.

"Oh God, if I could just hold her. I want to comfort her and let her know everything is going to be okay. I just want to pull her in close to me and let her feel my skin and feel me close to her. I want her to feel my heart beat against her heart. I want her to know that I have a special love for her. I want to be a special person in her life. Please Lord, allow me to hold little Lexi before I have to return home."

As I stood outside the viewing windows in the hospital, I prayed fervently to the Lord. This was my granddaughter, my son's first child.

As I looked at this little baby, I remembered when my son was born. In a few moments' time his growing up years passed before my eyes, and now here I was looking at his child; only, his daughter was very sick.

The moment she was born she was whisked away to the neo-natal unit at the hospital. And now the doctors were telling us they weren't exactly sure what the problem was. Her lungs were full of fluid. No one could explain why or what was to happen. All we could do was wait.

We couldn't hold her or talk to her. We mostly just stood outside the viewing windows peering through trying to get a glimpse of this precious baby. I felt so helpless as I watched through the windows as my son talked to the nurses. I watched her little tummy rise and fall rapidly with each breath.

I wish I could tell you that in my single parenting journey that I had always waited patiently for the Lord. Believe me I had lofty ideals of always waiting on the Lord. I'd like to impress you by saying that I would righteously read in Lamentations 3:24,

"The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

The image I'd like to present is that I never got discouraged, but the truth is I did get tired of waiting on God. I did get discouraged when it seemed God delayed answering a prayer.

In parenting my two children by myself, I knew that God was all I needed. I knew the Lord was my portion, and in reality I would have to wait for Him. But let me tell you there were times I just didn't want to wait for Him. There were times I wanted to shout,

"Wake up, God. I'm down here waiting on You. Get up and stop rejecting me. Why are you hiding from me? Have you forgotten me? Don't you know about my misery? I'm oppressed God. Look at me, will you?"

Of course, that is my version of the scripture in

Psalm 44:23-24 "Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression?"

I learned down through the years that God's Word is full of people waiting for the Lord. Some did wait patiently. Some turned to God only in times of trouble. Some got discouraged.

Some seemed to exude patience and trust in God. As a single parent I came to love the Psalms. I could relate to the rise and fall of trust, discouragement, hope, crying out to God in anguish and then crying out to Him in adoration.

Another Opportunity to Trust God

As I looked at this beautiful little life lying so still, I thought to myself, "Time to trust God some more."

I discovered a long time ago that as a single parent the only way I was going to survive was to trust God. Trusting God is what life is all about. This provided another opportunity to wait on the Lord and to trust Him. It didn't mean that I wanted to wait on the Lord but it did mean I had to trust the Lord. I had to keep my eyes focused on Him.

In my younger years I thought perhaps waiting on the Lord might get easier as I got more mature and my children got older. Now I discover waiting isn't any easier, but I do better understand the process of waiting, which probably lessens my stress.

As I watched my new granddaughter, I prayed for the Lord to heal her.

I prayed for the doctors and the nurses, and for her mom and dad.

I even prayed for myself. Then I began to pour out my heart and desires to the Lord. I told the Lord again that if I could just hold this little child before I had to fly home, I would be okay. I was only scheduled to stay one week.

As the week passed by ever so quickly, I ached to hold that baby. On Friday night as I was praying to be able to hold Lexi and comfort her, the Lord quickened me in my spirit and I heard,

"Oh my, that's what I have wanted to do so many times when you were struggling as a single parent. I just wanted to hold you and pull you in close to me and tell you everything was going to work out. I wanted you to feel me and sense I was there.

"I have walked along beside you all these years. I was there when you were struggling to understand the why of divorce. I was there when your children were

hurting. I have watched you and provided for you. I parented with you as you parented your children. You were never alone. And this child is not alone. I am with her."

There was such a strong urging and quickening that for days I couldn't get it out of my mind. I kept hearing the Lord's words. At some point I realized that the Lord wanted me to use this story as an encouragement to all single parents. So at the Lord's urging, this is what I have to say to you, Mr. or Ms. Single Parent. You can do this. You can wait on the Lord. Sure you are going to get discouraged. Sure you are going to wonder why you have to do this alone. There might be days when you go to the Word and try and read, but the understanding won't come. Those are the times you need to envision God holding you.

You can raise your children as a single parent. You can survive whatever life has in store for you and your children. Follow God's commands. Read His Word. Turn to God and allow Him to be the other parent in your home. Remember He sent His Son to die on the cross for you. He gave His precious child for you. He loves you. And He loves your children. He is there all the time.

This past Christmas found Lexi a vibrant and active two year old. She had fallen in love with the Christmas tree and the lights on the tree. Every night as her mother would turn off the lights on the tree, she would say, "Night, night tree." This was her signal it was time to go to bed. Life for Lexi was good.

One night after the lights on the tree were turned off, she began to get very agitated and upset. She started off by muttering and then her voice got louder and louder until she was shouting. As I listened to her shouting, I heard, "Wake up tree! Wake up tree! WAKE UP TREEEEEEEE!" In her little mind she equated the tree being awake with the ability for her to stay up later. With the lights off, life for little Lexi was no longer good.

I thought back to the times in my life when I had shouted, "*Wake up, God!*" There had been times when it seemed the lights had been turned off and life wasn't so good.

When those troubled times come for you and you don't think you can go forward one more moment, just think of God saying ever so quietly,

"If I could just hold you."

God will hold you. Let there be no doubt. He will guide you every step of the way. He will light your way. Wait no more. God is there with you.

"The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms"
Deuteronomy 33:27

Linda Ranson Jacobs

Healthy Loving Partnerships 4

www.hlp4.com

Email: Linda@hlp4.com

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