



# Thriving in the holiday season (even if you don't feel like celebrating)

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## Triggers and disappointments

Holidays can be a challenging time for many of us. Bright lights, festive decorations and joyous celebrations can feel like a harsh juxtaposition to our hearts if we are dealing with grief and loss. Having empty arms as holidays circle back around for the first, fourth or tenth time without the children we had hoped and prayed to have “this time next year” can feel pretty depressing.

You may feel a conflict in your heart as you yearn to renew the traditions that brought you joy as a child but mourn the fact you have no children to pass them on to. You may be desperately wishing for the joy and refreshment that come with holiday celebrations and decorating your home, while at the same time feeling that those traditions ring empty and hollow when your deepest dreams and long-held prayers have yet to be granted. Maybe holiday gatherings bring about triggers of seeing others with babies and children. Perhaps it's just been a rough 6 or 12 months and it's hard to muster up the energy of body, mind and heart to be present to the celebrations of the seasons.

Wherever you find yourself this season, if you are finding it hard to celebrate this year, we hope this resource can help you find ways to recenter and thrive this holiday season.

## 6 steps to thriving during the holiday season

### ★ 1. Identify and validate your current state of being

How are you feeling right now? What are the current levels of your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual resources? Validate any rough patches you are going through right now. If any of your levels are low, what is causing that? Identify 1 action that would help replenish your resources in each low area.

### ★ 2. Select a focus or theme for your holiday season

While it may be tempting for you to skip over a holiday all together, keep in mind that God created us for seasonal living. Even if you don't celebrate the holiday like everyone else, having a new focus for the season can be refreshing and lifegiving. Do you want to focus on the holiday itself (ie: Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving)? If so, then go for it, and find ways to adapt holiday celebrations and traditions so they are gentle on your heart and its triggers. If you're not up for a holiday-specific theme, consider adapting a more seasonal focus (ie: winter, spring, fall), liturgical focus, or even a feeling focus (ie: cozy, bright, joy, peace, gratitude).

★ **3. Identify your list of “yes”, “no” and “grow”**

- **Yes:** what are some family traditions that are important for you to keep?
- **No:** what did you do last year that was not lifegiving for you and your spouse? What drained you or became an unmanageable trigger? Consider skipping these items altogether, amending them to fit your current “window of tolerance”, or create a management plan (ie: following draining activities with a date or self care time, filling out our [“Preparing your heart for social gatherings” resource](#))
- **Grow:** special activities with your spouse to look forward to and create memories that match the theme or focus you have chosen. In addition, select 1 home decoration, 1 food and at least 1 activity (books, outings, movies, etc) that contribute to your theme

★ **4. Turn off social media**

Don't do it to yourself. You know as soon as you sign in to Facebook or Instagram you will be bombarded with images that will fill you with jealousy or envy and there's a good likelihood of becoming irritable or upset. Exercise the greatest act of self-care you can and SIGN OFF FOR THE SEASON. Have on hand an activity you can substitute whenever you would normally scroll, (an uplifting book, a relaxing magazine, a passion project at home, or other short fun/relaxing activities) and you will likely find yourself feeling better instead of worse. Bonus points if your substitute activity fits your chosen theme!

★ **5. Make time for grieving**

You know those tears and triggers are coming, so make sure to prepare. It's important to set aside a bit of time each day, even if it's just ten to fifteen minutes, to allow yourself to grieve and process your feelings. Having a certain time of day set aside for grieving will hopefully allow you to release and validate your tough emotions without them taking over your entire day. Your grief time could include reading a book on how to grieve well, writing a letter to your longed-for children about how you wish you could be celebrating the holiday with them, jotting down all your feelings and triggers or even making a collage that reflects how you are feeling. Whether you journal in a notebook, app, laptop or sketchbook, find what works best for you.

★ **6. Strengthen yourself spiritually**

Often the holiday season can leave us vulnerable to some major spiritual battles. Strengthen yourself by creating and sticking to a good spiritual routine, making sure you are continuing to turn to the Lord in your heartache and needs, and that you are filling your mind with His goodness and truth.

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### Example

**Holiday**      *Christmas*

#### How I'm feeling

Level of anxiety is (1 2 **3** 4) because *Anxious about seeing Kids at parties and church*

Level of depression is (1 2 **3** 4) because *I have no Kids to celebrate with*

The best word to describe my current mood/feelings about this season is *sad* because *celebrating just us is not how I wanted this season to look.*

#### Identify your "inner resources" (1 is low, 5 is high)

Physical resources (energy levels, health)      1 2 **3** 4 5    *no extra energy* \_\_\_\_\_

Emotional resources (mood, state of mind)      1 **2** 3 4 5    *low mood, depressed* \_\_\_\_\_

Spiritual resources (desolation/consolation)      1 **2** 3 4 5    *desolation* \_\_\_\_\_

#### Actions to replenish

For each inner resource listed above that is at a level of 3 or below, list 1 action you can take this season that would help replenish your levels to feeling more full.

- Get to bed by 10pm nightly*
- Plan something to look forward to*
- Get a recommendation for a good spiritual book or podcast*

#### Common triggers for me during this season + plan of attack

Common trigger	Thought/feeling	Plan of attack (try)
<i>Putting up holiday decorations</i>	<i>Sadness because I wish I were decorating for little ones to enjoy + get excited</i>	<i>-Some grown-up decorations I will enjoy - send a little gift or decoration for my niece and godchildren to enjoy</i>
<i>Holiday gatherings: Kids present, triggering questions and comments, feeling left out</i>	<i>Left out, jealous, misunderstood</i>	<i>Fill out "Preparing your heart for Social Gatherings" resource from The Fruitful Hollow</i>
<i>Christmas cards/FB photos</i>	<i>Jealousy, envy seeing people's family photos</i>	<i>-Sign off of FB during advent -have husband open/recycle cards from families that usually trigger me</i>

**My theme** (check off the type of theme you'd like to try and fill in the blank)

- Holiday-focused (ie: Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter) \_\_\_\_\_
- Seasonal-focused (ie: fall, winter, spring) \_\_\_\_\_ *winter* \_\_\_\_\_
- Feeling-focused (ie: cozy, bright, joy, peace, cheerful, gratitude) \_\_\_\_\_ *bright* \_\_\_\_\_
- Liturgical (ie: faith-centered Christmas, Easter, Advent, feast days) \_\_\_\_\_

<b>My theme</b>	<i>bright winter</i>
Special activity with spouse:	<i>Go on a winter hike with hot chocolate!</i>
Treat/food	<i>Pizzelles (for the snowflake shape!) and hot chocolate!</i>
Decor	<i>Leaf garland twinkle lights, eucalyptus wreath, Christmas star print</i>
Activity	<i>Paper snowflakes :) <u>Wintering: the Power of Rest and Retreat in Difficult Seasons</u> by Katherine May</i>

**My lists of “yes” and “no”**

Yes please - It's important to me to continue setting aside a day for celebrating Christmas alone with my husband and a day for celebrating Christmas with my family. Traditions that are important for me to keep are Christmas stockings, Christmas movie and eating lasagna for dinner.

No thanks - Doing Christmas shopping during Advent was exhausting. Will try to finish during November. House felt too cluttered with decorations last year. Focus on more clear surfaces and more winter-themed decor. Christmas party with friends ended up being draining with so many children. This year attend only for first hour and special date with hubby after, or skip party and invite friends for adults New Year's gathering.

**Social media substitute activity**

*Pick up a holiday/seasonal book and magazine from library to enjoy*

**Grieving plan: time and activity**

*Journaling, 15 mins with some tea before breakfast*

**Spiritual strengthening plan**

*Weekly adoration. Read or listen to Come Lord Jesus: Meditations on the Art of Waiting by Mary Francis. Go to confession before Christmas day.*

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### Your turn

**Holiday**\_\_\_\_\_

#### How I'm feeling

Level of anxiety is (1 2 3 4 ) because: \_\_\_\_\_

Level of depression is (1 2 3 4 ) because:\_\_\_\_\_

The best word to describe my current mood/feelings about this season is\_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_

#### Identify your "inner resources" (1 is low, 5 is high)

Physical resources (energy levels, health)            1 2 3 4 5 \_\_\_\_\_

Emotional resources (mood, state of mind)            1 2 3 4 5 \_\_\_\_\_

Spiritual resources (desolation/consolation)        1 2 3 4 5 \_\_\_\_\_

#### Actions to replenish

For each inner resource listed above that is at a level of 3 or below, list 1 action you can take this season that would help replenish your levels to feeling more full.

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#### Common triggers for me during this season + plan of attack

Common trigger	Thought/feeling	Plan of attack (try)

**My theme** (check off the type of theme you'd like to try and fill in the blank)

- Holiday-focused (ie: Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter)\_\_\_\_\_
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- Liturgical (ie: faith-centered Christmas, Easter, Advent, feast days) \_\_\_\_\_

<b>My theme</b>	
Special activity with spouse:	
Treat/food	
Decor	
Activity	

**My lists of “yes” and “no”**

Yes please -

No thanks -

**Social media substitute activity**

**Grieving plan: time and activity**

**Spiritual strengthening plan**