

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

69. Is This Really the Season to Be Jolly?

You are listening to episode 69 of the Encouragement for Real Life Podcast. This week's is, "Is This Really the Season to Be Jolly?" I'm so glad you're here. Thank you for joining me today. Whether we love the holidays or tolerate them, the fact is Christmas is less than four weeks away. I'm not quite sure how that happened, but here we are. In today's episode we pause to ponder this season and we ask the question, "Is this really the season to be jolly?" Because in past years, maybe it hasn't been. In past years maybe it's been anything but jolly. But this year can be different. If you're looking for some hope and encouragement in this season, well, this episode is for you. Hang out with me here for the next short while, and I believe we'll look at this season with hopeful expectation and a little more jolly. Let's get to it.

Here we are. Can you even believe it? The holiday season has arrived. It seems as if Black Friday kicks the season off, and the world goes into full-blown Christmas mode. The first Sunday of Advent was two days ago. (Advent is the period of preparation in the Church for the celebration of the birth of Jesus at Christmas and also of anticipation of His Second Coming.) Christmas songs are playing on the radio, and many homes are fully decorated for the season.

I'll let you in on a little secret:

Christmas is my favorite.

By far, hands down, it's my favorite holiday. I still get all giddy and excited for Christmas. Everything about it permeates my heart with joy. And the season leading up to it fills me with anticipation and wonder. Goodness, I love Christmas!

Yet, sadly, I've been known to miss Christmas altogether. Oh, I was physically present, but some years distractions snatched my attention away from what was important, and I missed the significance of the season happening in front of me. Other years I hustled and bustled to the point I ended up sick on Christmas. And last year we were all sick and stuck at home with that virus going around. I can't forget about the years I was preoccupied with the preparation, planning, and producing, that Christmas seemed empty and hollow. And the year my mom died ten days before Christmas was heartbreaking. Needless to say, it was difficult to celebrate that year.

But through all these experiences, I learned many lessons. One is this:

I never want to miss Christmas again.

I assume you don't want to miss it, either.

And maybe you're like me. You've missed your fair share of Christmases, and you know how it feels. And you never want to feel that way again. Maybe you understand how easily distractions pull you away, or how quickly a hectic schedule overtakes you, or how sickness and grief can snatch your joy in an instant.

Quite possibly you get how stressed and lonely and overwhelming this season can feel. Some years it's difficult to have a happy holiday. Correct?

But the thing is, Christmas was never meant to be a holiday to stress us out. It wasn't designed to distract us. And it certainly wasn't supposed to increase our loneliness or sadness.

Just for context, Dictionary.com defines Christmas as: *the annual festival of the Christian church commemorating the birth of Jesus: celebrated on December 25 and now generally observed as a legal holiday and, for many, an occasion for exchanging gifts.*

That doesn't sound so stressful, does it?

So, let's take a peek at the birth of Jesus, and why we celebrate Christmas in the first place. In Luke 2:6-7, in the VOICE translation (because sometimes it helps us to read a passage we're familiar with in another translation), it says, "While in Bethlehem, she went into labor and gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped the baby in a blanket and laid Him in a feeding trough because the inn had no room for them."

No distractions. No loneliness. And no sadness. Just a mom, a dad, and a baby in a feeding trough.

And in the next few verses it gives us a glimpse of the joy that accompanied this baby's birth. An angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds in the field, saying a Savior, the Messiah, was born. And a heavenly choir of angels joined him as they praised God and proclaimed, "peace to those on whom his favor rests."

Jesus, the Savior of the world, was born! Hallelujah!

It was a joyous moment. A jubilant moment. I'll even go as far to say a jolly moment.

Because isn't this the season to be jolly?

The famous Christmas carol, Deck the Halls, says it is. Fa la la la la la la la. We hear the words, we may even sing them, but do we live them out? We sometimes replace the "season to be jolly" with other words.

Such as, 'Tis the season to be:

- stressed
- broke
- tired
- sad
- exhausted
- overwhelmed
- weary
- lonely
- miserable
- empty
- filled with grief
- depressed

What happened to the jolly? When was the last time you described your Christmas or the season as jolly? What happened to the happiness, the hope, the heartwarming reality of the holiday?

Because in all reality, hope, not hopelessness, was born on Christmas Day.

But somehow, we've messed it all up. Somehow the world took what was a simple birth of a baby in a manger, and made it into a gift-giving, cookie-making, elaborate-decorating, over-spending, stressed-filled holiday.

Because the world tells us to buy, do, decorate, bake, attend all the things to have a merry Christmas. It tells us to hustle and bustle and run ourselves ragged in order to experience a happy holiday. It tells us it won't be Christmas unless we extend ourselves beyond our means. And it certainly can't be Christmas if everything isn't just perfect. Including you and me.

The truth is this, however: Christmas is Christmas, and it has nothing to do with any of that stuff.

Yet sometimes we get caught up in it all. I know, because as I've already mentioned, I've lived it.

But this year I'm returning to the heart of the holiday now. To the significance of the season. I desire to prepare my heart for Christmas. To celebrate the birth of my Savior, and the hope of His return, all the way down to my soul. It's too important to me not to.

And it may sound silly, but I want the "season to be jolly."

I want to bring back the jolly this year.

What do you think? Are you with me?

Dictionary.com defines jolly as: *in good spirits; lively; merry; cheerfully festive*. Thesaurus.com adds the words: *joyous; happy; lighthearted; enjoyable; carefree; jubilant*.

I don't know about you, but I desire this Christmas season to be all of that. Especially the lighthearted and enjoyable parts. Because truly, when was the last time we experienced a carefree Christmas? Or a jubilant Christmas? Or a cheerfully festive Christmas? It all sounds wonderful, doesn't it??

But before I go any further, if you live close to me, this episode highlights some of what we will be pondering and applying at our Real Encouragement *LIVE!* event on Thursday evening, December 8 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. It's called, "'Tis the season to Be..." and it's designed as a night out full of encouragement and hope for us girls. It's also our Christmas party of sorts, and it's always fun and festive. If you're struggling with finding the jolly this season, I invite you to join us. Bring someone with you who could use a little hope too. There are only 30 spots left. Come prepare your heart for the holiday. The link to the details and tickets are in the show notes.

So, bringing back the jolly in this "season to be jolly" sounds great, right?

But how do we go about doing that? Because we all know that sometimes ideas sound great but aren't so easy to implement. *Right?* And changing what we've always done sometimes takes patience and a whole lot of grace. *True?*

I'll share this in much more detail at our event next week, but here's what I'm doing to bring the jolly back to Christmas in my heart this year:

- Starting my mornings with God in prayer and journaling.
- Reading an Advent devotional.
- Drawing close to Jesus throughout my day.
- Asking myself in all I do, "Does this fill me with God's peace? Does this bring me joy?"
- Scaling back on commitments, on spending, refusing to hustle and bustle.
- Accepting what's imperfect (including myself) and being okay with what's messy.
- Dealing with grief from my past with the help of my Christian therapist.
- Incorporating into my day specific ways to live less distracted and to care for myself during this season.

How about you? What's one way you can bring the jolly back in this season? Give it some thought and begin today.

And if you're experiencing grief and sadness in this season, know you aren't alone. This is so important to me because I know the weight of grief during the holidays. We will discuss at our event next week this very thing and ways to still celebrate Christmas in our grief and sadness. Also, later in the month I will devote an entire episode to this as well.

All week we are discussing this subject of bringing back the jolly and preparing our hearts for Christmas in our Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook. I invite you over to join the conversation. You'll find it an uplifting, encouraging space. The link to this group is in the show notes.

Also, please rate this episode and/or review if from wherever you're tuning in if you found encouragement and hope for your real life. This will help others find this encouragement too. And subscribe to the podcast so you never miss an episode.

You know? Maybe the song is right after all. 'Tis the season to be jolly.

'Tis the season to also be:

- in good spirit
- lively
- merry
- cheerfully festive
- joyous
- happy
- lighthearted
- enjoyable
- carefree
- jubilant

That sounds fantastic, doesn't it?

Maybe this will be the year Christmas will be a little more peaceful, a little less stressed, much less complicated, and a whole lot more joyful. And maybe in this season to be jolly we'll experience a closeness to our Savior we've not quite experienced before. Because isn't that what Christmas is all about? Celebrating the hope we have through Jesus? Let's return our hearts to the reason for the season. Thank you for joining me today, friend. God bless you.

Julie Lefebvre