

# ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

## **123. How to Cope When the Holidays Are Not Happy**

You are listening to episode 123 of the Encouragement for Real Life Podcast titled, How to Cope When Holidays are Not Happy. Welcome to the podcast today. Thanks for tuning in! It's not news to you that life can be difficult. I fully realize your life, like mine, has not been a bed of roses. Life can be down-right hard some days and in some seasons, right? What if it's difficult in this season--the holiday season? What do we do then? How do we cope? This is the subject of today's episode. I pray it encourages your heart and lightens your load some as we learn how to cope when holidays are not happy. Let's get into this episode.

I walked into Hobby Lobby the other day, and the two Salvation Army bell ringers wished me a "Merry Christmas." I wished them the same back. And for a moment my mind took me back to the holiday season of 2006. That year wasn't a Merry Christmas, and my heart softened right then by the store's doors for each person who won't experience a "Merry Christmas" this year--for whatever reason.

You see, the holiday season of 2006 was a difficult season... maybe the most difficult of my life so far. My mom was ill in the hospital, so I spent most of my days by her side, also juggling my roles as mom and wife, business owner, and preparing what I could for Christmas that year. It was a challenge. But by her side is where I needed to be. Until God called her home on December 16, just nine days before Christmas.

What do you do with that? Christmas was (and still is) my favorite holiday, yet I knew it would never be the same again without Mom. And how in the world could I possibly make it a "Merry Christmas" for our family? My grief was just too ripe and too looming, I couldn't. It was not a Merry Christmas.

### **What do we do when the holidays are not happy?**

How do we cope? When the rest of the world is rocking around the Christmas tree, we're just trying to get through the next minute. When the world shows us images of the "perfect holidays," and we're wondering how we will purchase any sort of gifts for our kids with a lean budget this year. Or when beautiful dreams and hopes we had for the season are crushed into a million pieces and scattered all over the floor. What do we do then?

We can't just tie it all up with a pretty red bow and make it look good. We can't ignore it or wish it away. And we certainly can't rewind back time--even though we wish we could. No. I remember thinking that Christmas, that nothing would make that season better, and I just wanted to bury myself in my bed and come out after it was all over. But no. I had to face it. I had to deal with it, and I had to find a way to make it through.

Those holidays were everything but happy.

And friend, I'm sorry if yours aren't this year. I'm so sorry if you're struggling, if you're hurting, if you're lonely, or if you're grieving. I'm sorry if it's not the season you wanted or expected or if it feels like the difficulty will last forever. I may not know your exact situation, but I know how hard this can be. And it seems to be compounded because it's Christmastime.

### **I pray it may help you to know you are not alone.**

Because first of all, others like me understand. I'm praying for you. And second, I hesitate to say this because I don't want it to sound trite or cliché, but it's the truth so I'll say it. You're not alone because Jesus is with you.

Here's how I know this to be true:

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, **for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go**" (Joshua 1:9 NIV).

"And surely **I am with you always**, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20b NIV).

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "**God with us**"). (Matthew 1:23 NIV).

Did you catch the last one? **God is with us**. Jesus is Immanuel which means God is with us. God, the Creator of the universe, the One who is the author and perfecter of our faith, the One who holds everything together, the One who is in control of all is with us through Jesus. Jesus--Immanuel--God with us came to earth for us. For you and for me. You and I are never alone. Immanuel is with us. Goodness, I pray this truth sinks down to our souls and comforts our hearts today.

Friend, this is our answer.

### **Immanuel is how we cope when the holidays are not happy.**

This is the truth that carried me through Christmas of 2006, when I cried through opening presents with our family that morning. When we sat down at our dining room table for our traditional Christmas meal knowing I would never have another Christmas with Mom ever. The lump that lodged itself in my throat prevented me from eating much that day. And it carried me when I returned Mom's Christmas gifts to the store with bloodshot, tear-filled eyes.

But I trusted Immanuel. I trusted God with us. And it was then I truly understood the true meaning of Christmas. I understood the significance of a baby born in a manger. Because of this birth, I knew someday I would see Mom again. Because Immanuel took her home and will come back to get me some day too--and not just me but all of us who love and follow Him. So even in my grief and heartache, I had hope because of Immanuel.

You have hope because of Immanuel too. Again, your situation may be completely different than mine was, but Immanuel IS our hope. Because when God is with us, we have all we need. It may not look like we want or expect, but Immanuel will bring His best for us...for our growth, for the good of others, and for His glory. He will walk through the hardship and difficulty with us, and we will know that no matter what happens, He isn't going to leave us. He will see us through.

**That's Immanuel. That's God with us.**

The heartache didn't disappear with knowing this truth, but the hope that infused my heart lightened it a little. God's hope does that. Which reminds me of another Bible verse.

Romans 15:13 NIV says, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Even when the holidays are not happy, the God of hope fills us with hope so we can overflow with hope to others.

I'm praying for us all in this today. For Immanuel to meet us in whatever difficulty we are walking through this holiday season, no matter how unhappy these holidays may feel. May we turn to Him in every situation and circumstance and ask Him to infuse our hearts with His hope.

I invite you to join us over in our private Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook. Over there we're discussing this subject this week. Come on over and join in the conversation. The link to this group is in the show notes.

Also, if you are encouraged by this episode today, would consider leaving a rating or review so others can find this encouragement too? Subscribe so you never miss a new episode.

In closing, friend, my heart is with you today. Even if your holidays are not happy this year, I pray God reminds you He is for you, He is with you, and He's not going to leave you. Find your hope and strength in Him. Because of the hope you have, may Christmas mean something a little deeper this year. For God so loved the world. God is with us. Amen! God bless you.

Links:

[Joshua 1:9](#) NIV

[Matthew 28:20b](#) NIV

[Matthew 1:23](#) NIV

[Romans 15:13](#) NIV

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*Julie Lefebvre*