

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 chapter 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). 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 Kids* 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 this Christmas season

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:

<http://www.crosscards.com/ecards/>

<http://www.bluemountain.com/category.pd?path=35131>

Help your newly formed family 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 two-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.

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. 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.

Find 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.bhg.com/home/Christmas-Decorations.html>
<http://christmas.allrecipes.com/>

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

*DivorceCare for Kids, DC4K, is a fun-filled program for children whose parents are separated or divorced. DC4K helps a child identify and express his/her feelings, understand what divorce is about and learn coping skills to move forward into a healthy future. DC4K has activities, music, crafts, videos and a variety of other exciting teaching materials that work together to help the children. To find out more about DivorceCare for Kids or to find a DC4K group near you, go to www.dc4k.org.

If you are not part of a DivorceCare divorce recovery support group program, visit www.divorcecare.org or call 800-489-7778 to find a group near you. At DivorceCare, you can find hope, discover help and experience healing in a safe place where others understand the emotions, fears and confusion you may be experiencing this holiday season.

by Linda Ranson Jacobs

To find a DivorceCare for Kids group for your children, visit www.dc4k.org or call 800-489-7778

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