



May Your Days Be Merry and Bright

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Tis the season for love, light, and wonder ... right?

Most years, I am a huge fan of Christmastide. Like many, this enjoyment was formed in my childhood; particularly the year I believed that I saw Santa Claus traveling in his sleigh across the moonlit Ohio sky to deliver presents to good little boys and girls, such as my siblings and me. Truth be told, I'm not sure what I saw on that Christmas Eve night, but until an answer is exposed, it will always be Santa (at least in my seven year old mind)!

When I became a parent, seeing the excitement and wonder of Christmas through the eyes of my children were some the best moments of my life. It renewed my enjoyment.

Sadly, there came a time when Christmas was no longer joyful, but instead a season filled with trauma and remorse. After I separated from my wife, my ex and I would fight over who would spend Christmas with the kids. I often lost, and some of the light of the season dimmed.

Today, my children are adults and my fractured relationship with my ex has been mended. However I can still stumble upon the painful emotions of yesteryear, sometimes triggered by a holiday song, a Christmas program on television, or even the smell of eggnog. When that occurs, I may begin feeling depressed.

Thankfully there are 1-800 hotlines, in-person and online support groups, as well as religious services that cater to folk like me who need the reassurance that others understand our distress, our depression, and our struggles. No one is immune from experiencing a trauma or crisis, a natural disaster or family strain, a death or a difficult change in life circumstances. According to healthline.com, "a distressing event may [cause a person to] feel threatened, anxious, or frightened as a result.

In some cases, they may not know how to respond, or may be in denial about the effect such an event has had. The person will need support and time to recover from the traumatic event and regain emotional and mental stability.”

If this is how you feel (not only but especially during the holidays), and if you do not know who to trust or where to start, contact someone at the National Suicide Prevention Hotline (800-273-8255). I find that the National Alliance on Mental Illness is another great online resource. Additionally, I work alongside colleagues who partner with the United Church of Christ Mental Health Network. Each organization truly understands that every struggle is different, and they speak to people with dignity and respect in attempt to help us find our footing, as well as eventual hope and recovery.

When I took the first step to find support, now many years ago, it was indeed the hardest. It was also a game-changer. It is my hope and prayer that those experiencing loss in this season of light, trauma in this season of love, or depression in this season of wonder might consider reaching out to others who understand. These organizations do not want anyone to feel alone or without support, in this season or at any time. In fact, it is a desire of caregivers that those who are troubled might find that their days become merry and bright, one step at a time.

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