

As a preacher I sometimes dread the arrival of the holiday season. The onslaught of ads, gifts, stories of ideal family reunions, and the abundance of sad stories where everything works out magnificently. We are told repeatedly that the “perfect family” does not exist, but that it is commonplace. We’re told that the perfect friend doesn’t exist, but they are common place. We are told the right gift makes the difference. Millions and millions of dollars are spent to challenge the American society to create and expect the perfect.

Why do I dread the holiday season? I dread it because I seemed powerless as an onslaught of depressed people surrounded me. For many people this is a very depressing time of year. For a family who has experienced the death of a loved one, for a person living in inescapable poverty, for those maltreated in troubled relationships, and for those who have always wanted what many they watch take for granted, this is not a time filled with joy. It is a time filled with reminders of what they do not have and are powerless to change.

So as this holiday season approaches, may I make some suggestions about making this time a tolerable time of the year. First, be grateful. When you take your eyes off of what you do not have and place them on what you do have, it changes your priorities. Second, don’t minimize the anguish of the troubled. Third, encourage those you know who struggle. It is simply amazing how awareness of the struggling, thoughtful statements, and kindheartedness can change perspectives. Fourth, become conscious that we exist in an unjust world. You can’t eliminate all injustice, but you can represent God who cares and is the source of hope. God’s good news of the gospel is not about physical circumstances. It’s about eternal realities. May God bless those who are struggling at this time in their lives and give them the comfort and peace that passes all human understanding.

Just as Christ reached out with compassion and touched the leper, reach out this year and show mercy, compassion, and love to all those you come in contact with. Hebrews 2:17, 18 *“Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.”*

*In Christ,*

*Joe Rhodes*