

## A Wounded Heart of Christmas

It is hard to believe that it is the Christmas season. I have caught myself walking through stores and driving by homes with Christmas decorations amazed that in a few weeks Christmas day will be here. Heck, my leaves are just now falling off my trees and except for one short winter blast, it just seems like it is early fall. If you're like me, scheduling a holiday time with our kids and working in a few Christmas parties seems odd. In the midst of all these Christmas activities I am still awestruck at the poverty, loneliness and depression that come along with holidays.

Christmastime can be particularly depressing for the 51% of children in this country who are in fatherless homes. America leads the developed world in having fatherless children. It breaks my heart that children are victimized by poor adult decisions. They are growing up in two homes with two different sets of parents, and they will most likely (statistically speaking) continue the trend with their marriages. As I go through airports during the holidays it is amazing to see moms sending their kids to the dad in another town and vice-versa. You can see the daddy walking down the terminal with a pink suitcase and doll, sending his daughter back home to her mommy and most likely to a step-dad. Heartbreaking. Judging by the trend in divorce statistics, we should expect to see more airports with little boys and girls being shuttled between families. I guess we will get to thinking that is just the way it is.

At some point something went wrong in this country with men and women quitting marriages when it gets rough. When men and women choose to marry and choose to have kids, divorce is the last option. When families are broken and disfigured due to broken vows, and kids witness emotional, verbal and even physical violence in a home, why would we not think we have a messed up generation? Yes, we can say the world we are living in is pretty messed up, but most of the time it is "we" who are saying this and it "us" that are in multi-family relationships. These kids are victims of a messed up world because they are the victims of a messed up family structure.

My point in painting this particular picture is for us to choose to make some right choices and to "buckle up" and turn bad decisions into positive outcomes. I was an absent father emotionally, psychologically and spiritually from my family. Only because I had a wife who would not give up and did not embrace the word "divorce" am I still married. I was violent, abusive and disconnected. There were a lot of Christmas seasons I would love to take back because they were awful. So, I get it. With this disconnected family model, shuttling kids between parents and dealing with some really tense and hostile ex's, what then do we do to make a bad deal feel better this Christmas?

Here are some tips for dad with whole or blended families for this season.

- Remember that Christmas is not about *you*; no matter how hurt you are and no matter how crazy the ex-spouse may act. It is about *your kid*. And, in my way of thinking, it is mostly about them each day.
- Get really acquainted with your kid and don't think a Happy Meal weekend adventure makes anything right.
- Find out what your kid likes: What is his/her favorite singing group, favorite TV show, who their best friend is, and what make them happy or sad. You know? Get to know your child...even the older ones. I find that is the real disconnect time from 13 to 19.
- Spend quality time with them at bedtime or after dinner without a TV program going or a place to go. We, as a society, have forgotten to stay at home and eat at home. Home is the central focal point of relationships, not "staging areas" to come and go.  
Interesting thought, huh? Home.
- If you had some Christmas traditions, make sure they continue. Those may be buying the Christmas tree, brewing hot chocolate, baking cookies (yes, Dad!), hanging stockings and reading that old favorite story, "The Night Before Christmas". It is the little things.
- And dad, help your child pick out that gift for mom.... after all, she is always the mother of your child as you are always the father, no matter what.
- Make this time a warm and intimate time...moments forever in the heart.
- Avoid conflicts of the past; focus on the future, forgetting old wounds of the heart.

Whether it is Christmas or any other day, make every moment count. Our past brings many bruises and wounds of the heart, and we can choose to live in the past and allow old wounds to continue and fester, or we can choose new life. I think you will find in the long run that it really takes more effort to stay in the pain than to deal with the pain.

The wound of the father's heart has to become healed. It is in this healing that you will discover peace and joy, not just for Christmas but also for every day of life.

How do I let go of the hurt and walk into life?

It is through the little child in the manger, who grows into a man, dies for your wounds and your hearts, and becomes savior of the world. It is so easy that we make it hard. Just ask Him to take the pain (but really be ready to give it up)...and He will graciously and tenderly take it and give you the peace you desire. May the peace of the baby Jesus overwhelm you with what only He can offer and what the world can only try to imitate.