When Holidays Hurt

Holidays aren't happy for everyone. It's normal to feel sad when any of these are true:

DEATH of loved ones. They're not here to celebrate.

If this is your situation, please intentionally recall good memories of times with them, and when you pleased them. Be thankful that they were in your life.

Think of some way to honor them. What would they like to see you doing? Is there something you'd have done for them this holiday that you could treat someone else to, and bring them joy? (Focusing on others can lessen our pain. Even if they don't respond as hoped, know that God is with you, loves you, and sees your hopeful, generous spirit.)

DIVORCE with its loss of that former dream and activity.

Commercials often show families celebrating holidays together. It can hurt as we see ourselves outside that setting. Focus on creating a new dream and new relationships; consider reading the short leaflet, *Combating Loneliness.**

If separated from your kids or other loved ones on the specific holiday, plan beforehand when you'll get together and spend some time during the holiday preparing for that event. Don't watch TV for hours; do something productive towards tomorrow when the holiday will be past.

DISTANT from those we want to be with.



If so, schedule to talk/facetime that day; it's great that technology enables communication. Maybe ship a package or card, asking the recipient beforehand to open it when you'll be online, to share the experience together.
Then, plan a get-together with someone who is nearby, who may also be missing family or friends. Maybe a charity needs helpers for a holiday event such as to feed others or visit those in a nursing home. *Sign up early* as there are many others who are alone, wanting to help on holidays.

DISEASE or DEPRESSION keeps you home.

If unable to physically be with others, listen to encouraging, positive music and programs, like KLove (97.9FM), Air-1 (94.3FM) or Moody (90.1FM).

Avoid negative news stations. Daily, read positive messages like *Our Daily Bread* (at www.odb.org).
Watch comedies!

Say aloud to yourself, often, "*God is here with me, and loves me"* because it's true!
Pray, asking God to help you to get through today – one day at a time.

Phone someone who you know has some struggle, to encourage him or her, and reduce your self-focus.
Read the leaflet, *Beating Depression.**

DEBT restricts what you'd like to do.

With enough money, we can travel and buy gifts, but perhaps insufficient funds make such things beyond reach. Then, it's wise to forego them, rather than go into debt, to regret later. Instead of costly activities or gifts, seek free and low-cost options like free museum days, libraries' free movies; winter drives to view holiday lights, church, and school free concerts, etc. Such events are often listed on community websites.

Use some time to plan what you'll do differently in the months ahead to improve finances: read the *Handle Money Wisely* flyer*, and check out these sites: https://faithfinance.net and www.christiancreditcounselors.org.

DUTY keeps you at work.

Thank you for serving – every day, and especially on holidays. You're needed by many for your service, training, knowledge, and dedication. Inmates, visitors, volunteers, and your teammates are grateful when you serve on a holiday, even if they don't express it. Perhaps you could thank those you work with, for also showing up!

Don't hesitate to go to an event even if you must leave early or arrive late -- enjoy what *is* possible!

If despondent that you must work, focus on the fact that the shift *will* end. Get together with others after you've decompressed from your shift. Even if you can attend a holiday celebration, you may think about teammates who can't, or be missing a deceased officer, or feel concerned about his or her family.

With any of the above and all that you deal with daily, can you feel joy and peace?

Below are more suggestions.

1. Don't compare.

If you find yourself comparing your holiday with others' more extensive plans, focus on what matters to you and what you *do* have – like health, work, eyesight, mobility, friends, the future – all of which are significant and valuable.

2. Create realistic boundaries.

Holiday hype makes us feel we should ramp up our energy, our home décor, our time with others, even our level of happiness. Instead, keep actions in line with the reality of your life, skills, preferences, and energy. If financially stressed, don't worsen the situation by giving large gifts; instead, give of yourself. Rather than provide a big meal for others, plan an assigned potluck, so others share in its prep and expense. You'll be more comfortable, long-term, by living with wise limits.

This approach, shared with others, also helps them to avoid excessive spending. You can all have enjoyable times without going overboard, financially.

3. Deal with regrets.

If there's something in your life you wish was different and you have ability to change it, start working on it. If you need to apologize to someone, do so sincerely.

If you need to forgive someone, do it for your own sense of peace, then move on, to become free of baggage and anxiety. Bitterness hurts you; forgiving another, frees you from destructive bitterness.

If you can't change or resolve something, take steps to begin to let go of it. Read these three flyers: *Forgiving Myself,** *Good & Bad Guilt,** and *Forgiving Others.**

4. Replace disappointment with *action*.

Life is often hard. It's okay to admit that things aren't what we'd hope; we all feel this way, sometime. Be productive. Get outside for a walk. Clean your home.

Look for someone to help; shovel a neighbor's sidewalk or take their kids or dog to the park to give tired parents a break. Focusing on others is a great distraction and encourages your spirit of confidence, productivity, and worth.

5. Set goals.

Maybe this wasn't your best year or even a good one. Identify what you'd like to change in your life, then draft a realistic timeline and steps to achieve your goals. Tackle the most important first, then, the next one. Who might you involve? Visualize all you can accomplish by this time next year; you can do it!

6. Reach out.

Talking about the difficulties of life is a healthy, positive action. If the holiday – or any time of your life – is weighing you down, don't deny it. Share what's going on in your heart and mind with your chaplain, faith leader, Peer Support, or EAP counselor. They want to offer a listening heart, and assistance.

7. If suicidal thoughts come,

call Suicide Prevention at 988; where caring people will help you.
It's not weakness to seek help; it takes courage to admit you want help. We all need help at some time. God designed us to need others. You're in a demanding profession and are strong enough to seek help, so please do it.
Read the two leaflets, *Pushing Suicidal thoughts Away,** and *Suicide Prevention Contacts.**

Each holiday, like life, is what we make it.

It's not what others say it should be, or how your holiday compares to others. Celebrate each one for reasons you choose, in ways that fit you and your life, priorities, and values. Make the very best of what you *do* have.

Most of all, know that God loves you. Our time on this Earth is short compared to eternity. So, if you have a correct view of eternity, and have planned for it, it puts this life's disappointments into perspective.

Read *Eternity & Life** for details; basically, it's sincerely telling God that you accept Jesus's payment for 100% of your sin – and not believing that you can be "good enough" to earn entry into heaven.

*Read these leaflets online at Cook County's *SheriffNet – Empower – Spirit*, or on the American Jail Association website: *AJA.org – Publications – Wellness leaflets*, or email chaplain Linda.Ahrens@ccsheriff.org for any.

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Partially excerpted from a November 2019 article in www.CorrectionsOne.com by Amy Morgan of *Academy Hour*, offering mental health courses to law enforcement. Morgan is a certified Tactical Combat /Care/Law Enforcement First Responder. Additional source: *The Bible*.

Cook County Sheriff's Office
Volunteer Chaplain *solely* for Staff
Linda.Ahrens@ccsheriff.org