***Keeping the Holidays Holy*** *by Karen Weber*

**A FEW PRACTICAL POINTS – Handling My Family and Feelings (Lesson 3)**

*\*Disclaimer: These points are presented with the assumption that abuse is not present among family members. Physical and/or verbal abuse is not acceptable.*

**HANDLING MY FAMILY**

**Identify What You Dread**

* Unhappy memories.
* Toxic relatives.
* Changes to the family dynamic (divorce, death, children that no longer live at home); these may be more obvious during the holidays.
* Monotony: same faces, same food, same jokes, etc.
* Lowered defenses: stress, cold and flu season, gets dark earlier, eating worse, sleeping less, etc.
* Obligations/Expectations: eat food you don’t like, go to someone’s house that you wouldn’t otherwise visit, etc.

**Let Things Go for the Time Being**

* Forgotten birthday, unpaid debt, longstanding feuds.
* Forgive (or at least smile and focus on other things).

**Be an Adult**

* Don’t revert to your childhood self: whine at Mom, pick on siblings, argue with Dad.
* Don’t say things that aren’t nice.
* If everyone waited two seconds before emitting toxic emotions into the environment, we might have world peace. We must *think* and *pause* before speaking when emotions are high.
* Be fair to both sides of the family.
* Recognize that elders may have wisdom that will benefit you.

**Worry About Your Own Actions – Be Your Best Self!**

* Don’t try to change people (only God can do that).
* Not everything is about you (some people act out because of their own issues).

**Decide Ahead of Time How to Deal With…**

* Uncomfortable questions (have an answer ready, “I’m not comfortable discussing that,” then change the subject).
* Uncomfortable comments (ignoring things does help).
* Uncomfortable situations (take a walk, help with chores).

**If You Are the Host**

* Make sure food is respectful of people’s dietary needs.
* Set up play area for kids.
* Keep the mood light.
* Organize activities (puzzles, board games, etc.).

**Go with The Flow – Relax, Breathe and Laugh!**

* Terri Orbuch, relationship expert and sociology professor at Oakland University, has said, “The events themselves aren’t inherently stressful – it’s our perception of them that stresses us out.”
* Sometimes we react to situations in ways that escalate the stress. To prevent this, we must ask ourselves, “Could I possibly be making things worse by my actions?”

**See the Bigger Picture**

* Give thanks.
* Think on good things (even good occasions can be soured in your mind, if you maintain a critical mind).
* Don’t take things for granted (a lot can change before the next Christmas).
* Focus on what is going right.
* Practice gratitude
* Remember and practice the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering/patience, gentleness/kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance/self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

**HANDLING MY FEELINGS**

**Risk Factors of Depression**

* Unrealistic expectations.
* Comparing your reality to someone else’s perceived perfection (social media is escalating this).
* Not taking care of yourself.
* Winter blues (changes in season, increased darkness, staying inside more often).
* Thyroid disease.
* Poor sleep habits.
* Facebook overload. According to a 2014 article in *Healthy Living,* increased amounts of social media cause difficulty with real-life human interaction, a lack of companionship, and an unrealistic view of the world.
* Certain medications.

*Gregoire, Carolyn. “Why We Get Depressed At The Holiday, And How To Deal.” Healthy Living, 17 Dec. 2014, huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/17/holiday-depression\_n\_6326906.html. Accessed 27 /Dec. 2016.*

**Remember These Are Holy-Days**

* Lean on and into Jesus as an anchor.
* Find a devotion book to study the month of December.
* Keep spiritual practices of prayer and worship that bring you strength.

**Think of Others**

* Instead of wallowing in loneliness, reach out and help others.
* Volunteer, serve, bring cheer to someone else.

**Make New Memories and Start Traditions**

* One day, they will be the “good old days.”
* In times of bereavement, celebrate the one you lost: Bake their favorite food; Buy yourself something they would have given you; Create a new ritual that honors them (special ornaments, etc.)

**Keep Moving Forward**

* Get help from professionals if moving forward seems impossible (Grief counselors, divorce counselors, and/or support groups).
* Just because someone has been lost doesn’t mean there aren’t others to love or receive love from.