

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

My husband left me two months ago and my kids live across the country. I'm not feeling very thankful or happy during this Christmas season. Any suggestions?

-- Beverly

Dear Beverly,

You don't have to have a greeting card holiday with family and friends around the fire to remind you that there are many things to be thankful for even when you are feeling lonely and sad. We can't control all the important things in our lives – like a divorce or the fact that our children live thousands of miles away – but we can and should control the things we can.

Your sadness may be preventing you from seeing other blessings that surround you. Do you have good health? Do you have friends? Do you have a warm house in the cold weather? Do you have money to buy food and pay your bills? Can you believe that there is a brighter future in store for you?

When you reflect on the blessings in your life, you will discover that you have more than enough to be grateful. Remember that joy is not in things, it is in us and in the ways we choose to respond to life's difficult times. Life itself, even in its darkest moments, is a gift. The fourteenth-century Christian mystic Meister Eckhart reminded us of this point when he wrote, "If the only prayer you ever said in your whole life was 'thank you,' that would suffice."

Let yourself grieve for your losses but then begin to focus on all the things that are going right in your life. This is not a rationalization or denial of your very real losses; it is the truth about life. All of us have many heartaches and, yet, we are blessed in so many ways that we take for granted. Changing our way of thinking changes our mood, increases our self-esteem, and helps us to realize that we can change our reality by our thoughts and actions.

You have a choice to spend the holiday alone ruminating about all the things that you don't have or you can take your destiny in your own hands and turn Christmas (and any day) into something good.

How would you feel about creating a different intention for this Christmas? From the tone of your letter, it seems that you are engulfed in sadness and expect this holiday to be lonely and depressing. Change your thinking. Create a plan that will generate a different outcome. How? Invite some friends over for dinner. Lots of people are alone on holidays for any number of reasons. Do you know anyone in the same boat? Are there co-workers or neighbors who will spend this holiday alone and, most likely, feeling many of the same sad feelings that you are?

Volunteer to serve dinner at a homeless shelter or visit a nursing home and spend a little time talking with older people who would welcome your company and your interest in them. Worship with your faith community or spend some time outdoors where you can see your life in a larger, more transcendent perspective. Make phone calls to people you love but who live far away. Call your kids and that cousin you love but

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haven't spoken to for over a year. When we reach out, we most often find others reaching back.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2005 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.