

Embrace the holidays despite your infertility

by Tina Smith

Twinkling lights, wrapped packages and family gatherings can strike more dread than joy in the heart of a woman who's still waiting to be called Mommy. Authors John and Sylvia Van Regenmorter spearhead the Stepping Stones ministry through Bethany Christian Services for couples facing infertility or pregnancy loss and offer the following tips to help keep the holidays happy:

Don't try to please everyone. Give yourself permission not to live up to the expectations of others. Let your family and friends know how YOU would like to celebrate Christmas.

It's OK to cry. The holidays are an emotional time for couples suffering from infertility. You are experiencing one of life's greatest disappointments, and crying is a normal human response.

Maintain your health. A direct correlation has been determined between maintaining physical health and experiencing emotional well-being. Eat healthy foods, work out and take a daily walk.

Spend time with supportive people. If certain people in your circle of relatives or friends drain your energy, try not spending too much time with them. The challenges of infertility are depleting enough. Find people who can energize you and with whom you can share holiday fun and joy.

Let it out. It's healthy to express how you feel with someone who understands – a spouse or a good friend. Don't keep your feelings bottled up on the inside. On the other hand, don't spend the entire season talking about your pain. Some counselors suggest limiting yourself to talking about your struggle for 20 minutes a day to ensure that infertility doesn't dominate the holidays.

Help others. It is more blessed to give than to receive. As you invest yourself in the needs of others – whether baking bread for an elderly neighbor or taking a lonely person out to dinner – you won't be as focused on your own pain.

Find or form a support group. Being part of a support group may be the single most important step you can take in coping with infertility. For those in Chattanooga and surrounding areas, find

out more about Empty Arms at ***EmptyArmsSupport.org*** that meets twice each month. You also can search for support groups on the Stepping Stones website at ***ssministry.net***. To form your own group, call 800.613.3188 to receive the booklet *Starting an Infertility Support Group: Where Two or Three Are Gathered Together*.

Be aware of your limits. The journey through infertility is hard work. It takes an emotional toll – spiritually as well as physically. Some Christmas customs may take too much energy, so feel free to simplify, modify and eliminate as needed.

Engage in activities you really enjoy. Take some time to do the things you like best – cooking a wonderful meal, planning a weekend getaway, lounging around the house with a good book, or splurging on dinner out.

Seek God in the midst of your pain. He is always present to comfort us and to go with us through the difficult circumstances of our lives.

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