

Sharon and I were seated with our family (all 22 of us) for our Christmas meal. Four children... 12 grandchildren (our first grandchild was married this year)... lots of laughter and conversation... the smell of delicious food. As I made a few comments before our prayer, I felt very emotional... thinking of so many blessings in our lives. Oh, how God has been so very gracious, so kind, so generous to us. His daily blessings are beyond measure!

I enjoy Christmas... a day when we remember, with hearts full of thanksgiving, that **God so loved the world that He GAVE his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have ETERNAL life.** Thank YOU, Lord!

Now, as Sharon and I look forward to this next year of ministry, we again feel overwhelmed with God's goodness. You... yes, YOU in particular... YOU personally are one of the people who has been "God's hand in action" as you have given of your finances to fund ALM's work and service. Additionally, many of you have also supported us in prayer.

It is now over 46 years ago that three of us married children assisted Dad and Mom in founding Abundant Living Ministries. A few years into the life of ALM, my brother Mervin (and his wife Laurel), along with my sister Joann (and her husband Cleber) returned to Brazil where they worked together in planting a church in northeastern Brazil... a church which is flourishing today, under Brazilian leadership.

While Dad went to his eternal reward in 1994, and Mom in 2007, Sharon and I have continued on... assisted by many others... some as counselors, some as prayer partners, many as volunteer helpers, and still others (like you) have provided needed finances. **Thank you very, very much for your part in the ALM ministry!**

We continue on... together!
John Charles (for Sharon and the rest at ALM)

Banishing the Winter Blahs



Question: The excitement of the holidays is past. We recycled our Christmas tree. The children seem to have already lost interest in their gifts. And we've been eating so much candy and nuts, we're all feeling stuffed. Now it's a new year. We should be excited and feeling optimistic but it seems everyone in the family is, instead, feeling sad and even a little depressed. **Any suggestions for restoring some "life" in the middle of these winter months?**

Response: For many people, even many Christians, normal daily routines can seem like dreary chores after the busy-ness of December is over. Actually, it is quite common, at this time of year, for folks to feel tired, unmotivated, and sad.

Sometimes this joylessness is indicative of something named SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder). The American Academy of Family Physicians estimates that 6 of every 100 people in the USA may be affected by this annually. Another 10 – 20 % may experience it in a milder form. It is always a good idea to consult your family doctor or specialist about any changes in mood or behavior. A correct diagnosis can help you get the right treatment sooner.

Although the majority of the population does not suffer from this more severe depression, many folks would admit to feeling a kind of "let-down" after the festivities of Thanksgiving and Christmas, and an overall case of the winter "blahs."

Try some of these strategies to help banish your heavy heart and replace it with joy and cheer!



Give daily doses of encouragement. Consider Proverbs 12:25, *An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up.* Also Proverbs 25:11, *A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.* Pleasant speech not only lifts the spirits of your spouse or child, friend, or neighbor, but it will also help to lighten your own heart.



Memorize and quote Scriptures. *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and*

the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope (Romans 15:4). The Bible repeatedly urges its readers to "Praise the Lord," "Shout for joy!" "Be glad," "Sing to the Lord," etc. Certainly, with so many similar exhortations, God must know that they are well worth heeding.

You may wish to print the following verses: 2 Chronicles 5:13-14, Psalm 68:3, Psalm 100:1 – 5, Psalm 150:6, Romans 12:12, 2 Corinthians 13:11, Philippians 4:4. Carry one of these with you throughout the day.

Whenever you find yourself in the doldrums, reach for your card, read it (out loud if possible), think about its meaning, ask the Lord to fill you with His joy, and then smile and thank Him for doing exactly that! Invite other family members to memorize along with you. Working together as a team will help give you extra motivation.



Count your blessings. Just like the old gospel song says, "Count your blessings; name them one by one. And it will surprise you what the Lord has done." It is easy to focus on what is not right in your corner of the world. On the other hand, it takes determination to focus your thoughts away from negativity, meditating instead on your many blessings. Keep a log of things for which you are thankful.

For the month of January see how many causes for gratitude you can identify. As Psalm 150:2 urges, *Praise Him for his acts of power; praise Him for his surpassing greatness.* Tell a *God story* at meal time. You can help encourage **others** by sharing how the Lord has helped **you** in practical ways.



Get fresh air and sunshine. Ecclesiastes 11:7: *Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun.* Psalm 19:1: *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.* There is something physically, emotionally and spiritually exhilarating about getting outside to drink in the light, beauty, and refreshment of the Lord's universe. Put on your boots, grab a warm coat, and take a walk outdoors. If possible, drag some other family members along. Instead of freezing your body, you may discover it thaws your cold heart.



Set worries aside through prayer. Ecclesiastes 11:10: *So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body.*

Philippians 4:6: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* Prayer is simply talking to the Lord about your concerns, then choosing to thank Him for already working on your behalf to answer those requests. This is a powerful ignition key to fire up joyfulness in your heart.



Help somebody. Proverbs 11:25 promises, *He who refreshes others, will himself be refreshed.*

Depressed people often feel that the world has closed in on them. Their thoughts are consumed with themselves and their unhappiness. When such a person chooses to do even one small act of kindness, they will be surprised by what that does to lift their mood.



Sing. That's right... start belting out tunes! The largest book in the Bible is a collection of songs. Psalm 33:1 tells us to *Sing joyfully to the Lord... praise benefits the upright* (ESV). *By day the Lord directs His love, at night His song is with me* (Psalm 42:8). Music is a powerful weapon to combat physical, emotional, and spiritual melancholy... and also to restore vitality of soul and body.



Talk to Jesus throughout the day. In John 8:12, Jesus said, *I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.* And Psalm 36:9 reminds us that, *in Your light, we see light.* No one stands at the door of a dark room and asks, "How can I get rid of the darkness?" Instead, they ask, "Where is the light switch?" In the natural realm we understand that the only way to get rid of darkness is to introduce light. Likewise, when it comes to the dark moods that sometimes settle over us during the winter months, our best strategy is to introduce LIGHT... JESUS... the Light of the world! The more our minds are filled with thoughts of Him... and the more we converse with Him, the freer we'll be from the winter blahs.

Come to think of it, He's also the best Antidote to spring blues, summer blues, and fall blues! So let the SONshine in... take a heaping dose of Him daily... today, and every day!

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