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This Once-A-Day Christmastime devotional booklet takes you from December 1 to 25 with thoughts on the person of Jesus: His involvement at the creation of the world, His life in the Gospel accounts, and who He is today.

THIS TEACHING LETTER BY DR. KEN BOA IS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE GENEROUS DONATIONS OF OUR PARTNERS.

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THE PROMISES OF GOD

WHAT GOD KNOWS

A great divide runs throughout the Bible, separating the human race into two camps. Moses differentiated those who chose “life and prosperity” from those who preferred “death and adversity” (Deut. 30:15–18). Joshua recognized the difference between those who served pagan gods and those who served the God of Israel (Josh. 24:14–15). Jesus called the two groups those who serve money (the things of this world) and those who serve God (Matt. 6:24), while Paul classified people as those who gratify the sinful nature and those who live by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16–25).

Jeremiah’s descriptive terms for the two kinds of people are perhaps the simplest: Those who trust in “man” versus those who trust in the Lord (Jer. 17:5, 7). Jeremiah used this demarcation within the context of the nation of Judah. Modern readers are often as surprised by this as Jeremiah was saddened by it—that some people in God’s covenant community did not truly believe. Some who professed to trust in the Lord really trusted only in themselves. This reality led Jeremiah to write, on the Lord’s behalf, sobering words for any person to consider: “The heart is more deceitful above all else and is desperately sick. Who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9). The issue this raises is a challenging one: How could some in the community of faith in Israel profess to trust in the Lord when in fact they didn’t? In New Testament terms, how could Judas Iscariot have claimed to have been a follower of Jesus when, in reality, he was a follower of earthly things? And finally, how can an individual today sit in church Sunday after Sunday and yet not be inwardly transformed by the truths of God’s Word? The answer in all three cases is that the heart is deceitful.

The ray of light flashing into this darkness comes to us in Jeremiah’s next words: “I, the

Lord, search the heart, I test the mind” (Jer. 17:10). God knows everything, including who truly believes. Nothing escapes His attention.

Do you believe? If your answer is yes, God knows that you do, and you do not need to wonder or worry about whether He knows. If your honest answer is no, God knows that as well. His invitation to you is also to live free from worry, to live in the knowledge that He is waiting for you to cross over the divide to trust in Him.

God’s Promise:

He knows you so that you may have peace in being known.

Reflections Ministries

One Piedmont Center, Suite 130 • Atlanta, GA 30305

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REFLECTIONS

A teaching letter encouraging believers to develop a clear mind and a warm heart

HOLDING FAST TO THE GOSPEL

Lord, You have warned us not to be surprised when we share the sufferings of Christ and encounter fiery ordeals during our sojourn in the present darkness of this world. The forces of this world system are opposed to the gospel of Your kingdom, and when we do not fit in this system because of our commitment to Christ, we know that we can become targets of opposition, ridicule, and other forms of persecution. May we immerse ourselves especially during these times in biblical faith, hope, and love. May we hold fast to the truths of the gospel, to the person and work of Christ, and to the power of the Spirit. May we hope in Your promises that we will not receive in this life by welcoming them from a distance and confessing that we are strangers and exiles on the earth. And may we display the love of Christ to those who oppose us.

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From Nostalgia to Mourning

Coping with Loss During the Holiday Season

BY JENNIE BROWN

It’s that time of year again when grocery stores are stocking up with turkeys, yards are turning into light displays, and wishlists are being exchanged. Such an exciting time of year, and yet the holidays also seem to have a way of amplifying current stressors, loneliness, and longing. As such, most of us will feel some sort of grief this season.

Grief is not limited to mourning the death of a loved one, but includes all the various losses we experience. Some of us, for example, will sense grief in the form of nostalgia, remembering Christmases long ago, how things were back then, back during a particular time in our lives. The sweet rhythms of that period have come and gone. So we feel a yearning mixed with sadness and joy at their recollection.

Others, however, will experience acute grief this season as it will be the first Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s without a loved one. This sorrow weighs heavy, and we cannot escape it. We know we must now navigate old traditions without our loved one and fumble through new traditions forming because of their absence.

On this spectrum of grief between nostalgia and mourning are all sorts of other losses. Perhaps we are not able to celebrate together with loved ones or we are experiencing conflict with family or friends. Some of us may have just received a diagnosis, gone through a divorce, or lost a job. Maybe the loss comes in the form of a longing unfulfilled, such as the desire to have a spouse or child to enjoy the festivities with.

The holiday season, with all its activity and gathering together with others can make us acutely aware of these losses, of what we no longer have or what we never had. How, then, do we hold space for our places of grief when the world around us seems filled with levity, lights, and laughter?

Feel Your Feelings

Wherever you find yourself on the grief spectrum this year, let yourself feel your feelings. So often we may ignore, numb, or try to change our emotions, especially the ones that feel uncomfortable or unpleasant. This, though, can lead to increased irritability, resentment, or a general sense of anxiety. It can also lead to somatic symptoms, such as headaches, backaches, or stomachaches.

Notice your Feelings

So this Thanksgiving and Christmas, take time to listen to your body and hold space for your emotions. Acknowledge if you feel disappointed, angry, down, lonely, stressed. Practice noticing without judgment.

As you pay attention and name your emotional experiences, think of what your feelings are telling you you need. For example, when we feel sad, we need comfort. So if you feel down, lonely, or discouraged, consider engaging in something you find comforting, such as looking through old pictures, taking a walk in the snow, watching a Christmas movie, chatting with friends by the fire, or drinking a caramel hot chocolate. Or if you feel disappointed something has not worked out this season, acknowledge the disappointment. It’s okay you feel that way. What would it have meant to you if things had gone the way you wanted? Or perhaps you’re feeling burdened by family expectations, wishlists, and all the increased activity. What seems calming to you? Where can you create space to slow down for 15 minutes, an hour, an evening? Do you need to set a physical, financial, or time boundary?

Honor Your Feelings

It may also be helpful to think of a way to honor what you are feeling. For example, if you feel down this season, what could you do to honor the sadness? That is, how could you give voice to your sorrow? Or, what would be a way to honor the reality that you lost something of value to you, whether a loved one, a tradition, a home, a relationship, or your health? For example, I remember the first Thanksgiving without my mom. While many traditions changed that year, one tradition I kept was making the cherry cheese pie she had made every year, a dessert my brother and I both love. This little act didn’t take away my pain, but it helped me continue to move through my sorrow. It allowed me to honor her memory and give me a hint of her presence.

Practice “And”

As you notice your various emotions, give yourself the freedom to practice “and”. We can hold space for the difficult parts of the season while at the same time acknowledging and enjoying the peaceful, happy, and exciting moments. Both can be, and often are, true at the same time. We can feel sad about the loss of a loved one and glad to spend time with friends and family members. We can feel angry about a recent diagnosis and grateful for an outing with our spouse to see the Nutcracker. We can feel disappointed a relationship didn’t work out and look forward to Friendsgiving with our community.

Two Advents

Wherever you find yourself on the grief spectrum this holiday season, God is with you. He is present with you through all the family gatherings, all the moments of nostalgia, all the holiday parties, all the lonely moments, all the firsts without your loved one. He is not passively present, but is actively with you, able to comfort you, strengthen you, and sustain you.

Christmastime, after all, is about remembering and celebrating that Immanuel, God with Us, drew near to a broken world heavy with sorrow. As we reflect on the wonder of God coming into the world as a baby, may we here too practice “and”. May we celebrate Christ’s first advent and anticipate His second advent.

In His second advent, He will arrive triumphantly, ushering in His kingdom, renewing the world. It is a day in which He will bring comfort, wiping away all tears (Rev 21:4). No more separation because of death. No more weeping for what was. No more experiences of disappointment, rejection, or loss of any sort. In this glorious second advent, He will bring us into a world in which all our deepest longings for connection, love, meaning, peace, and joy are fulfilled.

So, this holiday season, allow yourself to notice, experience, and honor your feelings. As you do, may the promises of the two advents of Christ, one already fulfilled and one guaranteed, bring you comfort. We all will likely feel some sort of loss this season, but we do so as those with great hope (1 Thess 4:13).

One Piedmont Center, Suite 130 • Atlanta, GA 30305
info@kenboa.org

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