

Christmas: Physically, Emotionally, Mentally, Spiritually

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It's Christmas, a very unusual time of year. Think with me, please, about the many ways that your life during the weeks preceding Christmas is different from the rest of the year.

Let's take a look at all four dimensions in which you live. Consider that your life is a complex interrelationship of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual perspectives, all at the same time! I've chosen to list them in decreasing order of visibility to others.

Physical. We experience our physical dimension in terms of our five senses: sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste. When you meet people for the first time, their physical features are the most prominent. You notice their height and size, and you hear their voice. If you shake hands, you can feel if they squeeze like a crushing vice or a limp fish.

Take a drive through any residential neighborhood in the weeks before Christmas. You'll see decorations and lighting that would seem very out of place any other time of year. Trees are taken inside the house, covered with tinsel and garlands, and surrounded by gaily colored packages.

Many of us eat and drink too much and exercise too little! On the news, the question is whether families will spend more or less than last year. And there are plenty of enticements to spend your money. You can't escape the seduction--on television, in the malls, in magazines. Sights and sounds surround!

Emotional. Although emotions are not as visible as physical characteristics, we can sometimes see feelings expressed in body language and facial expression. Professional actors are superb at making us understand when they are amused, angry, discouraged, or embarrassed.

The days before and after Christmas often exaggerate our emotions. The hustle of traffic and the hassles of shopping can frazzle our nerves, causing us to strike out in anger or break into tears unexpectedly. We're encouraged to be joyful; and many of us are--and kinder, and more loving. However, painful memories, loneliness, and multiple anxieties make Christmas a difficult time for some.

Hallmark estimates that almost 2 billion Christmas cards are sent to friends and loved ones. That's a lot of reaching out to folks, many more favorable expressions of affection than at any other time of year.

Mental. It's very difficult to ever know what a person is thinking. That's probably good--for everyone involved! We all have thoughts that we certainly would not want blatantly displayed for the world to see! At Christmas, some people think selfish thoughts; many, however, become more generous.

Still, when you are about to purchase a particular gift for a friend, don't you wonder what that person will think when he or she removes the wrapping paper? Don't you want the person to enjoy your gift? (And don't you want him or her to think favorably of the giver?)

Our thoughts are powerful. Every behavior begins with a thought. In fact, every emotion begins with a thought. So, if you tend to be more emotional at Christmas, that's likely because thoughts that don't exist for you the rest of the year (or thoughts that you suppress) come bubbling to the surface!

Spiritual. We are reminded that "Jesus is the reason for the season." Why is that? The celebration of the birth of Jesus (and His presence in human form) has been heavily commercialized. "Glitz" can make Christmas more of a physical and emotional experience than the spiritual experience it deserves to be.

Additionally, not everyone believes that Jesus is our Savior. Some claim we need no Savior. The American commitment to freedom of worship raises the argument anew each year over the preferred salutation for the season: "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Holidays"?

Though your spiritual standards are only as visible to others as you make them, they are likely the foundation for your values. Whatever your spiritual beliefs may be, let me urge you to consciously elevate them during this season. Pausing to reflect and affirm your convictions will make your decisions easier throughout the year!

Human beings are complex. We rarely consider, and certainly don't understand, how these four dimensions affect each of the others. But we know they are definitely interrelated. At this special time of year, give thanks that you are wonderfully made, and be in awe of the One who created you!