

End of the Summer Blues

By Moe Becnel

When you think of the summer, what comes to your mind?

Summertime reminds me of beaches, swimming, water parks, boating, fishing, skiing, picnics, vacations and the like. To many parents and families, summertime represents a time of rest and relaxation --- a time to get away from the race of life and enjoy their family. It is also a time when many families take summer vacations, build great memories and make Kodak-moments.

How does the end of the summer make you feel? If you are a stay-at-home Mom or Dad, or you work out of your home with a house full of children, you probably spell end-of-the-summer "R-E-L-I-E-F" as your children go back to school.

However, if you are a non-domicile parent and summer means you get to see your children more frequently, your outlook of the end of the summer is likely quite different.

Summer is a time when many non-domicile parents get to spend some "extra" time with their children of divorce, as is my case. My former spouse (who is the domicile parent of our children) and I have an agreement to split our children's summer time between the two of us. Over the years, this has afforded Paige and I the opportunity to have some great times with our large blended family during the summer --- and great times we have had!

Summertime Blues

As a result, I have grown to dislike the end of every summer. Over the last several years, it has become a time when I seem to go through "withdrawals" of spending and really enjoying that extra time with my natural children and my blended family.

I recall one particular summer that seemed to hit me the hardest. After bringing my children back to their Mom one Sunday afternoon, I returned home, went to church that night and began weeping. The extra time that I had with them was over, and I was back to my every-other-weekend schedule. I was sensing a significant loss --- I was living the reality of the impact that divorce has on the relationships between parents and their natural children.

God hates divorce --- and I have been reminded why on many occasions, as the difficulties of family life after divorce periodically surface.

Most of our children are grown now and out on their own, with the exception of our youngest daughter who made 16 this month. Since she now has a boyfriend who lives in Baton Rouge, she spent quite a bit of time with us this summer. It was really great to have her around, especially since Paige and I realize she is growing up and will not be around much longer. We made extra effort to spend family time with her before the quick summer came to an end. As I dropped her off last weekend, I began to sense that loss again. I knew I would not be seeing her as frequently --- back to the nine months of "every-other-weekend", which effectively means 4 days each month.

Children feel it, too

Parents are not the only ones who potentially feel an emptiness at the end of a summer. The summer's end can bring an abrupt change in the lives of our children.

First, they may be feeling mixed emotions as they leave their non-domicile parent that they see infrequently, and return to their domicile home which is their security.

{A child of divorce once said that in their life someone is always missing --- either their Mom, or their Dad, or one set of grandparents or the other, or their friends.}

Second, they may begin to experience a time of adjustment to new teachers, new courses, new classmates, and possibly new schools.

Third, their fun-time is over for the next 9 months, at least in their minds.

Overcoming the Blues

As we (and our children) encounter circumstances that create sadness, disappointments, or other negative emotions in our life, we need to respond in a *positive* manner so that the emotions do not take control of our lives and actions.

Proverbs 17:22 says, *A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person's strength.*

There is power in a positive attitude! No matter how disappointing things may be, there is always a bright side. We just have to look for it a little deeper. Circumstances can overwhelm our emotions and defeat our spirit, but belief that God is on your side can turn the table for you!

As you or your children face disappointments, here are a few steps to consider:

1. Accept the situation you are in today. Acceptance of your reality is a must for healthy living. If you cannot change your situation, then accept it and let it go. I know that may sound easy, and I know it is not. But, anything else is detrimental to your well-being.
2. Find the good things in your situation. In my case, I can count the blessings that I was able to spend as much time as I did with my children this summer, and I can look forward to my next visit with my children and begin planning what we will do when they come.
3. Know that God is always in control. Do this quick exercise with me --- close your eyes, take a deep breath, and let it out. Do it again! Those are probably two of the very few conscious breaths you have ever taken. But those two conscious breaths were no more real than every unconscious breath you have ever taken. God is the same way. Though you are *unconscious* of His presence in your life most of the time, He is still there and is still in control of those things that you have no control of.
4. Pray! Pray for your children as they go back to school. Pray for their new teachers, their new classes, and that they will have favor with their new classmates. Pray for their protection and for success in their studies. Let them know you are praying for them.
I have even asked God to increase my time with my children --- remember, what is not in my control is still in God's control.
5. Help your children through the blues. Ask them how they are feeling about the end of the summer, and about starting school again. Give them a positive outlook on their new environment. Give them something to look forward to.

Most importantly, keep the atmosphere positive when your children return for a visit. If they sense you are sad or depressed, they may feel responsible, and the spirit of heaviness may cause them to not want to come back. *Don't let your broken spirit sap your children's strength.*

Make your home a place where your children WANT to be! Build them up! Tell them they are important to you! Post pictures of your summer (or family time) together on your refrigerator to remind them of the good times you shared. Plan fun things to do.

Celebrate the fact that they are with you again.

Psalm 127:3 says, *"Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from Him."*
Count every moment you have with your children as a blessing from God!!!

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