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We should acknowledge that it's not always easy to feel thankful at the holidays | Opinion

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Published 4:02 a.m. ET Nov. 20, 2022

It's not always easy to feel thankful. We all face personal challenges. We all cope with daily pressures, struggles and heartbreaks. And now, more than ever, we all live our lives against the backdrop of a world seemingly gone mad — a world increasingly endangered by a toxic mix of natural and man-made destruction.

Indeed, every day, we learn of new turmoil somewhere in our world — turmoil born of intolerance, injustice or even violence. And often, we see, hear and feel it in our own lives, too.

Without question, life is hard for many folks.

Personally, I am one of the lucky ones. Mine has been a relatively privileged life — one full of great opportunities and experiences, one spared the misfortunes and tragedies faced by others. Yet, even for me, it is sometimes difficult to feel thankful. In my case, the cross to bear is coping with loss at home as well as through my work.

This has meant coming to terms with the devastating loss of people in my life — people I have known, loved and shared life with. This includes my parents, who have both passed. This includes my sister, Patti, who died at the age of 54 after living a life full of hardships brought on by her disabilities. This includes my brother, Bob, whose own disabilities landed him in a Florida nursing home, where he contracted the coronavirus and died this summer — five years to the day after our sister passed from this earth.

Professionally, my experience with loss is rooted in the lives of the people for whom I work — individuals and families with disabilities — and expresses itself in the compelling stories they share. Our office supports people who often need assistance with very difficult, very troubling situations that involve the emotional or physical loss of something significant — the loss of

childhood experiences, the loss of jobs and careers, the loss of vital supports and services, the loss of dreams and life plans. Sometimes, they also involve the loss of loved ones, including their children.

Processing this loss. Finding our way through it all. This is the struggle that so many of us experience.

Yet, despite our grief, it is important for us to realize a powerful and undeniable truth: While it is not always easy to feel thankful, it is always possible and always preferable. It is something all of us can and should do.

In fact, regardless of the reason for someone's sorrow, there is always reason to be grateful, too. It may not always be obvious. It may not always be enough. But it is there, and we owe it to ourselves to acknowledge it, embrace it, and celebrate it.

Moreover, it is in our darkest moments — when we are blinded by despair or pain or some seemingly overwhelming mix of the two — that it is most necessary for us to find ways to look beyond the turmoil and remind ourselves about all that is good and right in our lives. The wonderful people, past and present. The simple joys and life-affirming moments. And all the other things, including faith, that give us meaning and purpose.

So, as we approach another holiday season — with family, with friends or even alone — we should not only reflect on all that is good in our lives; we should also take notice of others, who may not be able to see with such clarity and who may need our help doing so. If nothing else, it will give them a reason to feel thankful, too.

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