

7 Strategies to Survive the Holidays

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Have you ever wondered why traditional holidays are so stressful? Instead of being called the 'most wonderful time of the year,' it seems that we should rename it to be more accurately called the 'most difficult time of the year'. I believe you can break the pattern of stressful holidays by realistically changing your perspective to directly deal with predictable daily pressures and then by using strategic coping skills to steer around or even better steer away from the bigger problems that tend to 'pop up' this time of year.

Face it

There are as many factors to cause our stress levels to build to an explosive level as there are people on the planet. Everyone has complexities and challenges different from others, yet there are some universal pressures everyone has to address no matter their age, gender or marital status. Stress tends to go up as we age because there are more factors to consider, more people to deal with and more responsibilities. The older you get, the more you are forced to change and deal with issues directly, or get stuck in the habit of repeating the same problems over and over again until you die. Yuck!

Is this bad news for everyone? No, because I believe that God designed you to have a healthy and balanced lifestyle, and that He will always provide you a way to move past daily pressures to live out your real purpose. You control the choices needed to change and improve your life more than you realize. Understanding the pressures, (counseling insight), and then using a strategic approach to achieve greater results, (coaching application), will position you to break out of the unhealthy patterns of the past to have a balanced and better future.

Here are the four most common factors that steal joy away from the holidays followed by **seven strategic ways to finish the year healthy and strong**. Use these insights to move from barely surviving the holidays to really thriving in the New Year as you enjoy the blessings of living out a lifestyle of lasting success.

#1- Loneliness-

Holidays are designed as a time to be with friends and family making positive memories. Not so for the person who wounded by dysfunctional relationships or dealing with rejection from divorce while trying to rebuild their life alone. The continual holiday music, movies and television specials aren't comforting to people feeling detached, rather they are hurtful because they serve as continual reminders of what's missing in their life. (Keep in mind that writers and artists tend to create entertainment material that reflects the world as they would like to see it and not as it really is to maintain some level of perspective about the many people who struggle with loneliness during the holidays).

#2- Unfulfilled-

The end of the year is a relief for some and a time of reflection for others. Wisdom says to evaluate your progress this year in light of your overall mission, purpose and core

values to see if you are on track for a lifetime. Worldly culture pushes people toward being too busy so that they virtually ignore all of that journaling to live for the moment hoping that everything will just mysteriously work out “happily ever after” like the ending of a Children's story book. Many people get caught up in the busy events of the holidays to avoid having to look at the real issues in their life. Remember, the more you ignore the important and fulfilling things in your life, the more you will try to fill the emptiness with meaningless activities and materialistic stuff. Stuff can never fill the 'black hole' of being unfulfilled without purpose, but the clutter does allow people to have a logical excuse to avoid actually dealing with being responsible to spend your life doing what you were born to do.

#3- Stressed-

Everyone has stress to deal with from the cradle to the grave, its part of life. Learn to view each activity or action as either causing stress, or relieving it for you and the people around you. Now, think about many of the activities and actions that fill up our Franklin Planners from November to January. Things like, waiting in line to buy a gift, then waiting in another line to have that gift wrapped; or sending out hundreds of cards to people at the last minute, who may not even have time to open it and see who it's from during the midst of their own holiday stress; or sampling a little bit of every type of food at holiday parties and still expecting to not gain weight; or spending an extra thirty hours putting up decorations and still getting enough sleep. Stress is emotional pressure from things feeling out of control, and it's easy to get out of balance when so many things are being thrown at you this time of the year.

#4- Tired-

If you aren't already exhausted from trying to squeeze more and more seasonal events and decorations into less and less available time, just wait five minutes and you will be. Everyone has a certain amount of these very limited resources to manage...energy, money and time. While the amounts of each may vary during different stages of life, it's usually just from a trade of one for another. (Example- If you work more hours, you make more money, but give up more energy to get it. If you are carefree and have all the time in the world, you probably had to give up financial stability to get it. Kids are allowed to sleep late, but they don't have to make the mortgage payment at the end of the month). Fatigue isn't limited only to a loss of physical energy it can overlap into emotional burnout or spiritual emptiness, which then negatively affects our personal and professional relationships as well. The more tired we are, the more we tend to have a negative outlook, experience low morale, feel moody and un-motivated to change.

Okay, now that you have seen some of the most common reasons we end up feeling so much stress, let's move forward to understand and apply a new approach to achieve a greater result in your personal and professional life. Here are seven strategic and proactive steps you can take to move from feeling holiday stress to experiencing a memorable experience of holiday success for you and those you care about this holiday season.

7 Strategies to Change from Holiday Survival to Holiday Success-

1) Celebrate- laugh, rejoice, giggle, gather, sing and count every blessing as you enjoy all the good things in your life instead of just focusing on the pressures and problems. Then join in with others who are so busy celebrating the wonders of life that they don't have time to stop and criticize the weaknesses and flaws. Like the old saying my mother used to tell me, 'two men looked through prison bars- one saw the mud and the other saw the stars.'

2) Connect- with people instead of being alone. There are more community activities this time of year than you could ever imagine. Visit special programs through churches, or by asking friends and family what they are doing, or where they are going and see if there is an extra seat on the bus going there. We were designed for relationship instead of isolation, so if you aren't plugged into a healthy environment of positive people, use this time of year to 'shop' all the options available to see where you best fit and then plug in to connect with others who are likeminded to enjoy a stronger connection all year long.

3) Care- about people instead of caring about material things. One of the most memorable things you can do is to come alongside to add value to others in need during the holiday season. You might help a needy family, or ask groups like Hospice, or the Salvation Army, or a woman's shelter about a person or family that you might be able to help with special gifts of food, encouragement or time. The memories you make will be greater than any gift-card you have ever received.

4) Choose- to be healthy with your intake of food, sugar, caffeine and alcoholic beverages which are more common during the festivities of the holiday season. You can solve a lot of the 'let down' feelings that are common this time of year by maintaining your regular schedule and daily routines. Especially make the positive choice to get enough sleep and protect your body from wearing out from exhaustion, or getting weaker from sleep deprivation, which makes you more prone to catching the cold or flu this time of year.

5) Cash- instead of credit is a better way to solve a lot of the after holiday stress of opening up statements full of debts staring you in the face. The impulsive purchases you make in December may take years to pay off, so solve this stressor by sitting down to list out your expectations of the holidays and then factor in how much this is going to cost in real dollars. Working from a planned budget will protect you from the huge temptation to buy more things than you intended from stores overflowing with commercial appeals of great deals. If you can't afford it, it's not a gift rather it's just one more impulsive debt to repay.

6) Contact- Use the holidays as a time to reconnect with the people that you may have lost touch with through the year. Use festive postcards, greeting cards, or our family's favorite, a photo greeting card to see a recent picture of how big the kids have grown! Some people take time to write out detailed letters of what happened during their year, which are great to read. (Remember that the letter should be written as to share blessings and praises to bring hope, not full of prideful bragging to somehow using Christmas as a platform to show how much better your kids are than their peers.) The Internet makes it easier than ever to stay connected with others through emails and e-greetings. Use these tools as a strategic way to stay connected in building a stronger relationship and you may develop a deeper friendship that opens the door to enjoying a new friendship long after this year's holiday season is repacked back into storage boxes

for next year.

7) Creator- The holiday season is rooted in rich spiritual traditions. The best strategy to overcome holiday stress is to replace it with the deepest level of meaning that a person can experience in their heart and soul and spirit. I challenge you to allow the holidays to draw you to God in a new way so you might experience what choirs of angels sang over a stable thousands of years ago, "peace on earth and good will to men." Developing a personal relationship with the Christ of Christmas will move you from feeling alone in the world, to being part of something bigger than yourself, and something that will live on forever. When you sense God's presence, you can feel His peace and power every day.

Look at it this way, experiencing **God's presence** will be like **opening a present** every day from someone who loved you so much that He would rather die than live without you. This is the real reason hundreds of millions of people on this planet will stop everything to bow their heads and quietly pray on Christmas Eve. If you already know the true meaning of Christmas, enjoy the season with your family and friends. If you aren't sure what this all means, I challenge you to let God's love come into your life today so that you never have to feel alone again.

Balancing these strategies will speed you on your journey from stress to lasting success which is the best gift you could ever receive because it lasts forever! Once you have mastered these key areas, make sure that you tell others so they can enjoy a better quality of life with you as well.

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