

Beat the Holiday Blues

The months of November through January are known as those when people experience the highest levels of depression. This type of depression has gained the term “holiday blues” because it often occurs during the holiday season. Here are four life-changing strategies, drawing on both clinical insights and biblical wisdom, to help you stay ahead of and overcome the holiday blues.

1. Maintain a routine. I use the term “routine” somewhat loosely because I understand that holidays bring their own slew of hectic schedules: from children being off school to having to go out of town to visit family or host family, which brings on its own type of stress. So often we remain on the defensive side of the holiday season, meaning we just take issues as they come rather than remaining on the offensive, as in, looking ahead on our calendar and saying to ourselves, “OK, regardless of what’s going on over the next month or two, I’m going to make sure that I go to bed within one hour of my usual bedtime.”

While I realize you can’t always go to bed at 10 p.m. if that’s your usual bedtime if you have family over or if you’re up baking or wrapping presents, let me say this. It’s not getting out of routine for one day that may cause a ripple effect of subconscious stress, but rather when you do it on the first day followed by the next day and so on.

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Promise yourself that regardless of what’s going on throughout the holidays, if you and your spouse, for example, have date nights on Thursdays, stick to that commitment as best as you can. If you miss a Thursday, that’s fine, but get back on track the next week. Remember, we are creatures of habit. When

you switch up your routine little by little, if during the winter blues months and the stress of the busy season you give up date nights, then you miss out on your sleep routine, you likely begin to create a domino effect that eventually increases a stress hormone called cortisol, which leads to anxiety and depression.

The best way to defeat the odds of winter blues is to write down three things that will make sure you continue to maintain your routine during the holidays and stick to them. For me, those three things are: First, my time with the Lord. So, if I set my schedule to wake up earlier to spend time with the Lord, then that will force me to maintain a consistent sleep schedule, so, No. 2, I must go to bed within one hour of my usual bedtime no matter how badly I want to finish that movie I started. And No. 3 for me is making sure I hang out with one loved one, whether that's a friend or a family member, during the holiday season just to catch up regardless of how busy I am because of something I normally do throughout the week. What are your three?

2. Set healthy boundaries. I know so many people who say yes impulsively, sign up for extra activities or extra service opportunities out of guilt when their plate is already overflowing. Before Christmas gets here, and before you begin putting things on your calendar for the upcoming year and signing yourself up, committing yourself for the next year, I encourage you to take a step back and commit to praying for three days about whatever decision you need to make. The decision is still going to be there for you to make, but what you won't have to do is sign up, commit yourself, feel overwhelmed for committing yourself or overcommitting yourself, and then feel guilty for having to back out and/or feeling overwhelmed for not backing out.



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So, to skip that whole cycle to start with and overcome your chances of falling into the holiday blues because of overcommitment, take three days and ask the Lord, regardless of how “Christian” the activity or the act may seem, “Lord, is this something you want me to partake in? If so, please give me peace about it. If not, please help me to let it go.” Psalm 32:8 (NIV) says, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.”

Friend, if hosting extended family members at your house will create extra conflict between you and your spouse, then maybe hosting them is not a good idea. If signing up for extra church activities throughout the year will leave you with undue stress, then my question to you is “Are you trying to carry a load that Jesus didn’t ask you to carry?” Matthew 11:30 says: “My yoke is easy and my burden is light.” That’s not to say that the Christian life is easy, but God will never ask you to misplace the priorities He has already given you. As His child, your priorities are: your time with Him, first; your ministry at home, second; and then the rest as He instructs you.

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