

Holiday Letdown or New Year Transformation?

Let the exciting and action-packed countdown to the awe of Christmas morning begin:

10. Halloween candy, and trick-or-treaters.
9. Vibrant fall colors, raking leaves, cooler weather and sweaters.
8. Daylight Savings brings shorter, colder and darker days.
7. Baseball ends with World Series, basketball and hockey start and football intensity heats up.
6. Thanksgiving brings family and self-reflection, and begins the Battle of the Bulging waistline.
5. Black Friday shopping and Christmas music on the radio (for those of us who still listen to a radio).
4. Advent calendars, Christmas trees, traditional baking, Nativity sets and colorful decorations raise our pulse and excitement.
3. Shopping for and hiding the perfect presents while giving hints or lists of what you would like.
2. Parties, celebrations, family and in-law get-togethers, kids coming home from college, and various Christmas traditions, specials, movies, shows and re-enactments.
1. The magic of Christmas Eve with last minute shopping, visiting family, church service, then trying to wind the kids down so you can finish the last wrapping or assembling of presents before Santa arrives.

For some, Christmas has “finally” arrived. Others may be

thinking, *"Oh my, where did the time go this year?"*

It is the most calming and solemn yet excited and hyper time of year celebrating God's love given to us in the form of Jesus Christ. We honor and respond to His wondrous gift with acts of love as we give gifts and share our love with not only special people in our lives but also to total strangers during this magical time of year. Winding down the calendar year, we make plans to infuse this impacting celebration into making ourselves better, more special people as we formulate our New Year's resolutions and turn life's page.

The excitement, celebration, joy and power of the holiday season is invigorating, palpable and uplifting as well as transforming many people. At a time when joy, peace, family harmony, hope and celebration are the expectation and visible everywhere we turn, look or click, there is also unfortunately the fearful reality of the dark side to the holidays for which many brace themselves.

Holiday Struggles

You don't have to live in a cold place to be victimized by the holiday or winter blues, or in medical terms, Seasonal Mood Disorder. If you know someone who struggles during this time of year, they usually fall into one of these two groups of people. The first group enjoys the holiday season but experiences a big letdown afterwards and takes a while to get back on their feet. The second group struggles with the holiday season itself and the aftermath.

If you enjoy the holidays, some of the traps you fall into that can set you up for the post holiday crash are:

- Over-itis (think arthritis, tendonitis, tonsillitis) Syndrome or Unrealistic Expectations
- Over-spending and having big bills due early January.
- Over-eating from poor self-discipline or as a self-medicating coping mechanism leading to some weight

frustrations and guilt.

- Over-drinking alcohol leading to energy and sleep compromise or errors in judgment we would like to hit the 'rewind' button and erase.
- Over-drinking caffeine to get the extra energy but caffeine increases agitation, edginess and decreases our patience, frustration tolerance and sleep quality.
- Over-scheduling, not wanting to miss any tradition or joyous occasion, but wearing yourself thin.
- Over-doing on everything. From baking, cooking, shopping, decorating, assembling, wrapping, advent calendars, nativity scenes, shows, TV specials/movies, tying up work projects, and making sure your loved ones get the perfect Christmas.
- Over-compensating, as we want the holidays to be special for our loved ones, sometimes we jump in and compensate, or pick up the slack, for the shortcomings of others.
- Under-itis Syndrome
- Under-estimating how long every task will take.
- Under-assertiveness with trouble saying "no," which is often the healthiest, loving and most reasonable answer, otherwise you're saddled with Over-itis Syndrome.
- Under-anticipating that life is so busy we can't see the upcoming potholes, obstacles and traps on our holiday journey, so avoidable problems aren't avoided and take their toll on us.
- Charlie Brown Syndrome—Satan desires to distract us from the true meaning of this blessed holiday season and orchestrates a plethora of nice, and not so nice, diversions everywhere we turn. We get caught up in the materialism, the created, and forget the majesty of our Creator. When the holidays are over, we look back with remorse and shame with how, like Peter, we denied Christ when we could have been proclaiming the reason for the season when many are receptive to this life-altering message.

Then, when the holidays are finished and your adrenaline from both the holiday high and the holiday stress wears off, the crash occurs.

If you are in the second group who struggle during and after the holidays, some of the main contributing factors sucking God's love, joy, peace, connection and hope from your holiday season are:

- **Memories of past holiday mayhem** predominate with so many broken homes with conflict, addictions, abuse, chaos, or judgment as the primary themes leading to some hurtful and dark thoughts the holiday music will cue up.
- **Family dysfunction** – At a time when families are supposed to put God and Jesus at the center of their agendas, many have families pursue conflict, antagonism, hold grudges, and look to tear each other down to prioritize their own feelings and needs.
- **Loss** – Being around happy people during the holidays when something very sad has occurred in our life is difficult, especially when sadness is from the death of loved one, loss of job or finances, recent marriage problem, separation or divorce, grown child not coming home, or loss of control or function due to health issue.
- **Guilt and shame** from many reasons eat at us and are magnified during this self-reflective time of year where “transparency” or openness, confession, forgiveness, and healing are encouraged. We might have an addiction, psychological or emotional issue, weight problem, past abuse struggle as a victim or perpetrator, or some recent shortcomings in our marriage, parenting, or workplace, but we worry about who and what to tell, so we bottle it up while weighing our heart down.
- **Spiritual distance from God** is the primary goal or these first four external and internal attacks from Satan who wants us to either be distracted from God, thinking God

doesn't care for us and is distant, God doesn't have power or answers, or we are just lousy Christians and no hope for us. So we forget our spiritual armor and weapons and lose the daily battles.

If we are honest, every one of us falls into one of those two groups, if not both, during some parts of the holiday season. We live in a fallen world, have spiritual warfare all around us, and are subject to specific attacks and temptations from Satan on the outside and our flesh on the inside, so doubt, missteps and wrong turns on our journey happen to all of us.

Holiday Solutions

Thankfully, God is gracious and powerful and as our Designer, He gives us the ultimate instruction manual, the . (Best Instruction Book for Living Every day), to reveal some treatment tips for our holiday blues:

PsychoSpiritual care – I lump these together because psychological skills are how we operationalize, or put into practice, Christian principles and God's divine power. Or stated another way, our spiritual beliefs are the primary guides and determiners for our psychological functioning and decision-making.

Unrealistic expectations fuel the Over-itis Syndrome, so we need to be a more realistic and Godly steward of our body, mind, time, and relationships.

When our wants turn into needs, we develop **misplaced dependencies**, and peace is elusive when those needs are not fulfilled. We need to depend on God, not others, things, or circumstances, and accept His sovereign provision, even when it doesn't match our desired agenda.

Forgiveness is a gift you give yourself, so others no longer have power over you. Harboring resentment and seeking revenge harden your heart and distort your relationships.

Conflict is a given in life, so accepting and addressing it calmly with a positive attitude will turn adversity into opportunity.

Negative emotions are uncomfortable, but are the warning system God designed in us. Don't be afraid of those feelings, but instead, look below them to figure out what you are being warned about. Honest self-reflection and Biblical application to assess and improve the lenses you use to see life through. Knowing we belong to God is the most important cog in applying all these tips. When we feel disconnected, we reach for impostors and substitutes for our loneliness and they bring no peace.

Physical care is vital for our brain to execute Godly decisions and body to carry them out. The exercise for our brain is godly decision making which strengthens brain circuits, or as the BIBLE states, renews our mind. Sleep for the body and brain to get proper rest.

Nutrition and diet – Food not becoming a coping mechanism or idol but being proper building blocks for a healthy mind and body and doesn't clog our arteries or weigh us down. Exercise helps your body physically and causes the release of adrenaline and endorphins to relieve stress and improve mood. Avoid toxins to our brain and body—caffeine, tobacco, alcohol, drugs, heavy carbs/high sweet foods or food binging.

Light therapy – Around 3-5 percent suffer from winter depression partly caused by minimal sunshine, so a light box from your doctor will really help.

Psychiatric medications – God has guided our discovery of many medications to help the human condition. Psych meds never cure anything, but when properly prescribed by a specialist for the right reasons, provide significant symptom management allowing you a better chance to work on the psychospiritual long-term cure. Professional evaluation and coaching are very helpful

for people with a pattern of struggle over the years or those having trouble implementing the PsychoSpiritual tips above.

Christmas Every Day

With the holiday season in full swing, don't let Satan get his swings in at you. God gave us Jesus so we can fight back as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:4-6 (with my paraphrase): You have divinely powerful weapons to block Satan's attacks from the outside and demolish his strongholds in your mind that tempt you to darkness. Your prime weapon is Godly decision-making, that is, owning every thought and aligning it with Christ so your decisions obey God and defeat your enemy. The tips above will help you use the Mind of Christ and not lean on your own understanding.

God's Christmas gift isn't meant for just Dec 25, so don't put all the peace, love, forgiveness, spiritual truths and divine power of the Christmas story in the attic with the rest of the decorations, but interact and use them daily for a renewed mind, aroused heart, and transformed life.

Have a blessed Christmas season!

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