

Larry Tomczak: 10 Tips to Reduce Stress and Really Enjoy Your Holidays

Read Time: 4 Minutes 2 Seconds

"We've got to do better next year."

How many of us said these words after the holidays last year? Overdoing it with too much food, family, friends and festivities we once again found ourselves facing the brutal reality that we didn't plan effectively or discipline ourselves the way we should've.

Isn't it time that we make a quality decision to prepare ourselves to minimize stress and avert burnout, sickness and feelings of failure once again?

From 50 years of ministry experience and lessons I've learned from my own missteps, let me share some practical steps to help us navigate this "most wonderful time of the year" that's meant to be filled with faith and fun! Deliberate decisions versus good intentions pave the way so this year let's be proactive and intentional so we'll reap the rewards.

10 Tips

As we survey the suggestions, stay flexible and seek the ideal yet face the real. Don't get bound by busyness and perfection. Be like Mary who "chose the good part" (Luke 10:42) by first spending time with Jesus while her sister Martha was anxious about many things (Luke 10:38-42). Which leads us to point #1.

1. Keep communion with God uppermost. Having found peace with God we maintain the peace of God by spending regular time in His presence. As Jesus awoke in the morning and went to a solitary place to pray (Mark 1:3-5) let's resist the "tyranny

of the urgent” and follow in His footsteps. Taking time for worship, reflection and Scripture keeps our relationship with Him fresh so we stay on the right track for a peaceful and productive day.

2. Stay in sync with sleep. Falling prey to a pattern of staying up late shooting the breeze and snacking takes its toll. Anxiety adversely affects our immune systems and an antidote is regular nights of restorative good sleep. Purpose to keep a clear conscience and claim the promise of Psalm 4:8 “I will both lie down and sleep in peace.” Then pray the God-given blessing of Numbers 6:24-27 (my wife and I do this every night after watching her parents do it) which concludes with a provision for God to “give you peace.”

3. Take time to plan. Fail to plan, plan to fail! With all the activities and demands of the holidays, don’t spontaneously take things “on the fly.” Pray and plan, knowing order and peace come from the same Greek word. You don’t lose track of your keys when you put them in the same place!

Sit down with your spouse and put on a master calendar tentative commitments upon which you both agree. Space things out. Allow for the unexpected. Revisit the calendar often to make adjustments. Assign food assignments for extended family gatherings so you’re not doing it all!

4. Set boundaries/learn to say no. Jesus said “Are there not 12 hours in the day?” (John 11:9). We all have the same pie to slice wisely. Don’t be a people pleaser—learn how to decline invitations graciously: “Janice, thanks for your invitation, but we ask your understanding in having to decline at this time after checking out calendar.”

5. Plan spending. It’s important to set a budget and stick to it! It’s commendable to want to bless everyone but not at the expense of drifting into debt. God wants us to be generous and good stewards at the same time for which we’ll one day give an

account.

6. Cultivate calm surroundings. Jesus is the “Prince of peace” and we shouldn’t surrender the peaceful Presence of God to circumstances. Be proactive in nurturing an atmosphere at home of tranquility while minimizing tension. See strife as an enemy so resolve conflict quickly, stopping the “little foxes that spoil the vine” (Song 2:15).

Turn on relaxing worship music or Christmas carols and light candles (with little ones get battery-operated ones!). Calming background music and the scent of candles help foster an environment to soothe the soul.

7. Maintain healthy habits. Holidays are notorious for interrupting workouts, walking and wellness routines. Interruptions occur but it can be a time for creative alternatives like taking Christmas lights walking tours or strolling the mall. The Bible highlights times for feasting so celebrate the season but curb your appetite by drinking a glass of water and enjoying some fresh fruit before dinner parties.

8. Avoid antagonism. “Let everyone be swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger” (James 1:19). Commit to civility before any social gatherings; and steer clear of controversial issues. Remember: “The beginning of strife is as when one let’s out water; therefore, abandon contention before a quarrel starts” (Prov. 17:14).

9. Lighten up and laugh. In turbulent times, remember: “A merry heart does good like a medicine” (Prov. 17:22). Daily thank God for blessings. Read an inspiring book. Take a nap. Watch an uplifting movie like “The Chosen,” “It’s a Wonderful Life,” “Elf” or reruns of situation comedies like “I Love Lucy” or “Leave it to Beaver” with Eddie Haskell!

10. Prioritize people. Limit your time on the internet! Give yourself to meaningful interaction with family, friends and

fellow human beings by shutting off the social media and staring at your screens. Sit down and connect with others in person or on the phone. Listen. Inquire. Empathize. Learn. Reminisce. Commiserate. Pray for each other and maybe even lead someone to the Lord!

Here's the Deal: During turbulent times remember we're in this together for the glory of God and the advancement of His glorious gospel. Let's position ourselves for peace and prosperous days ahead. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! {eoa}

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