

Practical Advice for Unraveling the Tentacles of Holiday Stress

Let the holidays begin! Let the days of feasting, overspending and over-committing weave their particular tentacles of stress around your life.

Have you ever wondered if there could be a decidedly different way to approach this miraculous and magnificent season?

Perhaps we should consider not submitting to the culture's demands and expectations but instead revamp our approach to the most wonderful time of the year.

I am known as a "Christmas-aholic". I have been a pastor's wife for 40 years, I have raised 5 children and now am delighted with the joy of 7 grandchildren. I have learned a thing or two about Christmas in my journey– and I would like to share my insight with you today. Will you listen to my heart and to my wisdom concerning this momentous occasion?

First of all, buy only the gifts you can afford without using those convenient yet addictive credit cards. Do not go into debt during this season but remind yourself that we have been given the most wonderful gift of all eternity. I am a gift-giver by nature; it is the way I express my love. However, I have had to learn that using that deceptive piece of fake money is not love but bondage.

Be creative in your gift-giving. Give the gift of your time and read the classic literature of childhood to your children and grandchildren. Set aside an afternoon for baking or for doing Christmas crafts. The gift of time well spent is remembered long after the wrapping paper and bows have been put away for another year.

Second, do not overcommit to parties, concerts, events and meetings. Clear your calendar during the month of December and only do that which is necessary and brings joy to your life. Enjoy an evening reading your Bible in front of the fireplace. Invite an elderly couple over from church and listen to their memories of days gone by. Give yourself the gift of peace this year rather than the stress that busyness brings.

The third piece of wisdom I would like to share with you is not to waste the message of Christmas. When you are standing in a long line at the post office, rather than becoming frustrated, instead, why don't you engage the young mother beside you in conversation? You might consider asking her how she celebrates Christmas, where she goes to church, and what her childhood memories are.

Rather than rushing through the grocery store, perhaps it would be a wonderful idea to slow down and smile at people who know nothing of Jesus. Ask the Father to give you divine appointments while you do your holiday errands and make yourself available to strangers who are discouraged or lonely. It is what Christmas is really all about.

Reconnect with a high school friend and share with him or her what the Lord has done in your life.

And finally, remind yourself daily that reindeer that dance, snowmen that sing and gaily wrapped gifts do not communicate the heart of this season. Christmas is about a baby who was delivered to the confusion of planet Earth. He came so that you and I could experience peace, joy and hope! When you celebrate the true heart of Christmas, your heart will be gloriously changed and made new in the celebration! {eo}

Carol McLeod is an author and popular speaker at women's conferences and retreats, where she teaches the Word of God with great joy and enthusiasm. Carol encourages and empowers women with passionate and practical biblical messages mixed

with her own special brand of hope and humor. She has written five books, including No More Ordinary, Holy Estrogen!, The Rooms of a Woman's Heart and Defiant Joy! Her most recent book, Refined: Finding Joy in the Midst of the Fire, was released last August. Her teaching DVD, The Rooms of a Woman's Heart, won the Telly Award, a prestigious industry award for excellence in religious programming. You can also listen to Carol's "Jolt of Joy" program daily on the Charisma Podcast Network. Connect with Carol or inquire about her speaking to your group at .