

How You Can Reduce Stress During This Wonderful Time of Year

Why is Christmas so stressful if it's the most wonderful time of the year? Even if the activities are fun, there is often a great deal of stress caused by the the volume of activity, the unexpected guests and the expense they bring.

All of this doesn't account for those who already are depressed or lonely, or who are away from family and friends whom they would love to be with during the holiday season.

This was the subject of my Strang Report podcast (you can subscribe [here](#)) today with Dr. Stephen Galloza, a clinical psychologist also ordained with the Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches. He and I spoke about how stressful the holidays are for many. He said the suicide rate is second highest on Christmas (after Thanksgiving) for people who may already be depressed. Of course that is a very small percentage of the population, but I believe it drives home the point that for many the holiday period between Thanksgiving and New Year's is very challenging on a daily basis.

Dr. Galloza gave some pointers on how to handle such stress. If even one idea helps you cope and reduces stress, then it's well worth the time to read this article. If something clicks for you, be sure to pass it along:

- Acknowledge your feelings. It's normal to be sad if you're away from family and friends. It's normal to feel overwhelmed with all the activities. If you process your feelings, then you can take it to the Lord as it says in Psalms 94:19: "When there is a multitude of worries within me, Your comforts delight my soul." (MEV).

- Reach out to connect with someone. This is always good if you're sad. But if you're feeling lonely, be sure to share your feelings with a friend. That will help you cope with the stress.
- Reach out to someone less fortunate or maybe someone else who is also lonely. After being alone one Christmas when I was in college, I have made it a point to be sensitive to those who may be alone on Christmas Day. It makes you feel good when you're doing something nice for someone else – let alone that we should do to others as we would want them to do for us!
- Sometimes tension arises when family members gather, causing stress. Learn to set aside those differences. Forgive others or humble yourself if necessary to maintain peace. Life is short and, sometimes, this is the last Christmas you might have with others. Make it a point to make it happy. Besides, it lessens stress!
- Understand that, no matter what happens, the Lord “works” all things together for good to those who are called according to His purpose. No matter what stress arises, know God will “work” them out for our good. (See Romans 8:28).
- Dr. Galloza gives a tip that helps reduce stress any time of year, but especially at Christmastime: Learn to say “no.” When people are pulling on you in many directions, you can simplify life and reduce stress simply by saying “no.”

On a personal note, while I have been busy, this has been a very happy time for me and our family. We have certain traditions including decorating our yard with huge lighted figures showing the nativity. It's my way to make a statement that this is a Christian holiday, and several neighbors always speak up to say they like what we do.

At the office we have a great Christmas party, which is always a highlight for me. This year was no different. Then as a family, we go see the Singing Christmas Tree at First Baptist Orlando, which gets better every year. There are other concerts we attend and, of course, we enjoy eating out. One favorite place is Celebration, Florida, where they have “fake” snow (it’s really soap suds) and ice skating on a huge piece of plastic in the street. It’s how we cope in Florida with the fact Christmas is usually warm. This year is warmer than normal and, on Christmas, it’s predicted to be 86 degrees!

Since most of our Christmas traditions and stereotypes come from Northern Europe, most are associated with snow and cold. But as Christians know, that’s not the real meaning of Christmas. Celebrating Christmas is a reminder that Christ became incarnate to save the world from sin and to give eternal life. This is the topic of my next Strang Report on Christmas Day.