

4 Ways for You and Your Family to Slow Down This Christmas

Hustle, bustle! Hurry, scurry! Isn't that what life is all about? Or, at least what we seem destined to—schedules we can no longer control?

My wife and I should probably start planning our Christmas activities in October if we want to perfectly manage what feels like our annual game of “event Tetris.” With five kids, extended family, work and church activities, the calendar fills up fast.

Christmas is a season that is meant to help us slow down, celebrate Christ and be with family. How has it turned into a never-ending story of stress, traffic, long lines and unachievable event attendance?

God commands us in Psalm 46:10a, “Be still and know that I am God.” Jesus consistently left the crowds and the busy activities of ministry, saying no to others, and spent time quietly with God and His disciples. If the Son of God could refrain from over-committing and being too busy, we should do the same.

I know, I know ... easier said than done, right? Every year, it seems to get more difficult to protect our calendars. When was the last time you had a peaceful family dinner around the table? Do your mornings involve time to connect with your kids on the way to school, or just a frantic race to get them to school or the bus stop before you rush off to an appointment?

I have learned over the years that nobody really cares about my busyness and my overcrowded calendar. I must intentionally fight for space, for margin, for free time. If I don't, my

calendar is crammed with things I have planned or others have planned for me. And I know I'm not the only one with this problem.

While I am not an expert, I'd like to share four tips on slowing down your holidays and everyday life that have been very helpful for me:

1. Learn what works best for you. Are you a night person? A morning person? Somewhere in between? Are you an extrovert or an introvert? What weekly activities are essential for you? My essential activities include time for personal growth and development, dating my wife, quality time with our kids and serving at church.

2. Identify required responsibilities. Now that you have identified your essentials, consider what responsibilities you have due to work or school. Many of these activities are not optional, so it's important to plan for them in advance.

3. Learn to say no. Just because you're invited to the housewarming party of your best friend's sister's cousin doesn't mean you have to attend. Protect your time and your family. Protect your sanity by only saying yes to the best things, not to everything. Saying no to our devices is important, too. Smartphones, tablets, computers and other electronic devices have become a huge drain on our free time. They cause us to feel we might be missing out if we don't obsessively refresh. Saying no to the digital cry for attention can make a big difference.

4. Build margins. Do this in every area of life possible. Plan 15 minutes of travel time when you only need five. Schedule downtime throughout your day so you can recharge. Grouping errands and appointments in the same area and time frame can help minimize your need to make many trips.

Remember: God calls us to an abundant life, not a hectic one. Busyness will creep in wherever we don't stand strong. Feel

free to say no and learn to enjoy some downtime; there is no need to feel guilty for protecting your sanity. I'm on the journey with you, still learning to guard my calendar and daily feeling the pull to engage with the hustle and bustle. I'd love to hear how you are slowing down and being intentional this season. {eoa}

Mike Dobes has been in pastoral ministry since 1997 and is the Manager of Church Relations for Joni and Friends. He is also the cofounder and content manager for the Irresistible Church blog. Mike writes monthly leadership posts at Irresistible Church and also blogs about life and leadership at .