

PRIORITIES IN THE HOLIDAY SEASON

Just because it's the holiday season *doesn't mean* we have to be stressed, but we do need to be *prepared for the stress* so that it doesn't overcome us and affect our relationships negatively. Of course, stress is a part of life and a part of the holiday season for everyone; however, many have family dynamics that increase their stress above that of normal every-day stress. There are parties and plays, expenditures and money concerns—not to mention the need to make one's own household a priority while others often want you to make their priorities, your priorities. It can easily get to be too much! To help you cope with all the demands, and still have time for your most important relationships, allow me to offer a few suggestions:

- **Know your limits:** During the holidays most want to spend time with all family members, even extended family, as well as friends. However, when trying to please everyone is also a goal, we may be setting ourselves up to be pushed beyond our limits. While wanting everyone to be happy is admirable, when we factor in regular family, blended family, in-laws and out-laws, mom and pop and multiple sets of grandparents and more, we better set some boundaries if we do not want to end up, “nuttier than a Christmas fruitcake” (*no one wants either*). Your kind and giving heart is a strength *when you know your limits*, because you do what you can and you do it well. *It is a weakness when you bypass your boundaries*, try to please everyone, and end up feeling you have not done anything effectively. This can lead to a person being so overwhelmed they cannot or do not spend time enjoying the person closest to them. What good is it if everyone outside your home thinks you're the greatest, if those in the home think you forgot them?
- **Plan early:** If you are working *your* plan, you have more control over what happens than if you have to conform to the plans of others. Something I have learned is that if I schedule everything I need and want to do as a father and husband early on, when requests to do other things come along, I can comfortably say, “Sorry, I already have something scheduled at that time, will another time work?” Thus far, I have never had anyone say, “What do you have scheduled?” Most of the time they respond, “Okay, how about...?” You will enjoy your holidays much more *if you do not feel* you have neglected your own family. So, get your calendar out now, schedule time for you and your spouse and children. Then and only then, schedule everything else.
- **Strategize:** This goes hand-in-hand with planning, but remember the planning was to put those closest to you first. Now we are talking strategy. *Working smarter not harder*. Do you have multiple family gatherings usually taking place on the same weekend or day? Want to do charity work during the holidays? Maybe you want to spend a whole day just decorating the house? Remember, *for every one hour you spend planning, you will save ten hours in implementation*. Consequently, instead of just taking things as they come, develop a strategy. Here is an example: If you are invited to multiple holiday gatherings on one day or one weekend, tell each host ahead of time. This will adjust their expectations and they will not be surprised or offended by your late arrival or early departure. Except for aunt Myrtle, no one can please her. Strategize with family members emphasizing the benefits of everyone working together.
- **Don't overdo it:** Don't plan too much. Sometimes fewer or smaller family activities produce less complicated situations, providing more time to interact with those you love. Focus on your relationships and making memories. Holidays are not a time to dread. Celebrations should not be competitions between family members. We do not have to overdo everything to have “the best holiday ever!” The best holidays are the ones we remember as filled with love.

By simply letting everything become secondary to our spouse, children, and those dearest to us we can enjoy the holidays as we hope. Remember, maintain a realistic and healthy perspective, develop as much of a plan now as possible and have *the best holiday season ever!*