

THE HOLIDAY SEASON IS HERE—BE PREPARED FOR THE STRESS!

The holiday season *doesn't mean* we have to be prepared *to be* stressed, but we do need to be *prepared for* the stress. Of course stress is a part of life and a part of the holiday season for everyone, however many in the ministry know their stress is often complicated by church or ministry commitments that go beyond the regular church services. There are parties and plays, request for benevolence expenditures and budget concerns—not to mention the need to make one's own family a priority while others often want you to make them and their family or group a priority. It can easily get to be too much! To help you cope with all the demands, allow me to offer a few suggestions:

- **Know your limits:** Ministers and pastors, as well as people who volunteer, often have a real desire to help others and to please people. This can be both a strength and a weakness depending on where you set your boundaries. 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 haven't done anything effectively.
- **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 don't feel* you have neglected your own family.
- **Strategize:** In other words work smarter not harder. Got a project to help or reach out to the community during the holidays? Remember, for every one hour you spend planning, you will save ten hours in implementation. Strategy is every bit as important as vision and mission. Another example: If you're invited to three Christmas parties in one night, tell each host ahead of time about your predicament and that you will only be able to stop by for a little while. Strategize with other staff members so that every staff member doesn't show up at the same events while missing other events altogether.
- **Don't overdo it:** Don't plan too many activities for your church. Special events, like a play or Christmas cantata are great ways to get people to church that rarely come—except at Christmas and Easter. Nevertheless, for many churches, a major production is not always necessary. Sometimes something smaller and more uncomplicated that gives more time to interact with those who come to the event might be best. Want to provide boxes of food for families at Thanksgiving and Christmas? See what needs your church can fill with the money and manpower you have and go for it! A one-hundred member church doesn't have the people or resources of a one-thousand member church. That's okay. It's not a competition.

Overall, just working to maintain a realistic and healthy perspective will help you and me get the most out of the holiday season and maybe, as we minister to others, we might just find the time and opportunity to be ministered to ourselves.

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