



## Michael Dawson MA, LPC

1001 Cross Timbers Rd. #2350 Flower Mound Tx. 75028  
9741 Preston Rd. #208 Frisco Tx. 75034  
972.310.4484

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### *The Holiday Hustle: Stress vs. Peace!*

Holiday hopes and holiday realities seemed to be utterly opposed to each other. Our general expectations for the holiday season are excitement, a time of peace and celebration, to enjoy food, friends and family and maybe take some much needed vacation. But this part of the year is a time of highs and lows; many are filled with mixed emotions and the season can be a source of stress, and even depression. “When we think about the holidays, we dwell on the past and what went wrong, or we romanticize it and make it impossible to re-create.”<sup>1</sup>

The holiday realities are many and varied. The demands are great: there is too much to do, too little time and way too many expectations. The pressures of family can be overwhelming: an expectation to spend time with family members with whom we have had strained or even abusive relationships or having to choose which family members to be with and who will be missed and left out. The holidays can be a heartbreaking remembrance of lost loved ones causing deep loneliness and a feeling of emptiness. For many, the indulgences available during the holidays to eat, drink, have fun or spend money, lead to temptations and impulsiveness that goes unrestrained leading to unhealthy consequences.

By putting some *practical* actions into place, we can minimize the overwhelmed, exhausted and stressed out feelings that often accompany the holidays. The holidays may become more enjoyable and peaceful than we might believe they ever could be. Set priorities! First, lower your expectations regarding how much you can accomplish and who you think you must please. Next, overestimate, rather than underestimate, the time you need to run errands, shop, cook, and generally make yourself available for events-even ones you want and love to attend. Of course, plan a budget! The opportunities to overspend and dig a deep financial hole are endless during the holidays. Managing your money will help you think through your motivation for spending and to give more meaningful gifts. And, taking care of yourself will assist you in doing more of what you want in order to enjoy friends, family and events. Get the right amount of sleep, and don't forget to exercise.

Taking the above actions can help with the practical aspects of the holidays-time, money and demand pressures. But what should the *focus* of the holidays be then? How do we handle the expectations, emotions relationships and past memories that may be difficult to deal with and to get through during this season? Focus on the Truths of God! *You can be certain God wants to do something in your life this holiday season!* Ecclesiastes 3:13 tells us that enjoying life and finding satisfaction is *a gift from God*. It does not come from any other source. We can set our mind on things above; things that are true, lovely, noble, excellent, admirable, and not get caught up in the material and external things of the season (Phil 4:8). We can attempt to mend past hurts by reconciling and forgiving others. We can take our cares, concerns, anxiety and worries to God, and let Him deal with those things, and with our own heart (1Pet 5:7; Phil 4:6, 7; Matt 11:28-30).

This holiday season we can choose to do something different and take practical action. We can also focus on the things that will bring us real joy and real satisfaction. We can present our requests to God and His peace will guard our hearts and our minds. “*You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is fixed on you, because he trusts in you.*” Isa 26:3

**Mike**

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Nathan, PhD