

Relieving Christmas Season Stress

Written by Bill Perkins

December is a short month. While it may not have fewer days, it has fewer work days. Less time to get important things done. Many companies and individuals are trying to wrap things up before the holidays. So in essence, we have three weeks to get four weeks of work done. This may cause you to feel like you're going full speed from the moment you climb out of bed in the morning until you fall asleep at night. Days can be spent trying to tie up loose ends at work, buying gifts, and attending parties.

You can plan all you want, but as Christmas gets closer time gets shorter--and so can your patience.

Martha and Mary Felt It Too

I suspect Martha and Mary felt a similar sense of rush as they anticipated a visit to their home by Jesus.

Martha wanted everything to be just right. Motivated by a deep love and a desire to please she began cleaning the house and preparing dinner. Had she lived today she would have decorated the Christmas tree, wrapped the presents, hung the outdoor lights, set the table, and cooked the meal.

And for Martha, cooking the five course meal was a big deal. This was no ordinary guest she was having over, this was Jesus ... and his disciples. Would other guests join them? Like a general directing troops she oversaw the work of her sister. So much to do in so little time.

Suddenly, He Was There

Suddenly, he was there. Everyone was there. But the house and meal weren't ready. Yikes!

Instead of making her guest feel at home, Martha worked faster and harder. Luke noted that Martha was "distracted by all the preparation" (Luke 10: 40). She even went so far as to rebuke Jesus for not caring that she was working alone.

The Lord responded with a reproof of his own. The words of Jesus interrupted the busyness of Martha and reminded her that some things are more important than clean houses and multiple-course meals. Some things are more important than how the house looks and whether or not grandmother's hand-me-down turkey stuffing was prepared according to the recipe. Martha, was drawn away from important activities by urgent ones. Such busyness has a high price.

The High Price of Busyness

To begin with, it creates stress. Stress is the body's way of responding to a perceived threat. It's not a cause but an effect. It isn't an action but a reaction. When our body senses danger it prepares us to engage in combat or run away. The problem is, like Martha, we often experience stress when there is no real threat to our safety. Our heart rate and blood pressure elevate and our muscles increase their tension.

Without a physical outlet for the stress, our bodies find other avenues of escape. Stress may produce headaches, frayed nerves or back pain. Working faster doesn't solve the problem it only intensifies it. At a time of year when we should be enjoying the birth of Christ and the presence of our family, we become irritable and impatient. We become a Christmas Grinch stealing joy with our impatience.

Martha became so annoyed by her sister that she rebuked Jesus for his apparent lack of concern. Impatience can cause us to challenge not only friends and family, but even God. Ironically, impatience is one sin we often tolerate in ourselves but despise in others.

Missing the Moment

Finally, busyness can cause us to miss strategic opportunities. Martha might never again have the opportunity to sit at the feet of Jesus in her home. In the midst of her rushing around Martha seemingly forgot that there would be many opportunities to cook meals and clean house. But Jesus would only be there for a short time.

In the midst of that hectic interaction Jesus calmly noted, "Mary has chosen what is better" (Luke 10: 42). Mary refused to allow the urgent to control her behavior. Instead of being sucked into the current of busyness, Mary "chose" what was more important. She "chose" to sit at the feet of Jesus. She "chose" to take advantage of the strategic opportunity before her.

Tap on the Brakes

This Christmas--tap on the brakes. Slow down. Yes, much needs to be done in a short time. But if it all gets done and in the process you rob everyone of joy, what have you accomplished? Instead, choose to sit with your family at the feet of the baby in the manger. Grab the opportunity to show love to those you love the most.

That is one gift you have to slow down to give. And it's the best gift of all.