

## Blessed? Or Stressed??

It's the most wonderful time of the year, or so the song says, the happiest season of all. Norman Rockwell images dance in our heads, or across the TV anyway. And a ball in the pit of our stomach starts to grow like a snowball careening down a mountain.

The birth of our Savior occurred in the humblest surroundings, but you'd never know it by the way our society honors the event. Fantastical Christmas decorations adorn the stores for a few weeks already, and it's not Thanksgiving yet. The pressure mounts to buy gifts, decorate homes, entertain, send cards, bake and cook, on and on it goes.

Stress comes both from "outside in" and well as "inside out." Family issues, work demands, depression, distractions, and overall busy-ness create anxiety that leaves us feeling stressed rather than blessed. We can control some of the "outside in" stressors, but not all. There are things that are simply out of our control. But we *can* control ALL of the "inside out" stress. We alone can determine our RE-actions to the demands of our day.

There are countless articles, books, posts to help us "survive the holidays." But why just "survive" when we can thrive and enjoy the glory of the greatest gift ever given. It boils down to the choices we make. Big choices, and little moment-by-moment choices.

But how? Here's my Top Ten list of stress-busting choices:

1. **Get into the Word.** Read the Christmas story as if you never heard it before. Look for character qualities in the people you read about. Seek promises that are nestled in the familiar words. Look for something new. I found Luke 1:45 that way, and it grew my faith. *Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!* said Elizabeth to Mary, a beautiful verse nestled between Elizabeth's baby leaping and Mary's song.
2. **Replace anxious thoughts with thanksgiving.** Worry is meditation about the wrong things. A friend once told me, "A grateful heart is rarely discontent." Phil. 4:6-9 teaches us how to hold our thoughts captive. When we replace anxiety with thanksgiving, the peace of God (v.7) and the God of peace (v. 9) will be bookends surrounding our thought life.
3. **Give yourself permission to change the definition of "perfect."** Your Christmas table will look just as lovely with pretty paper plates as with china. Gifts inside dollar store gift bags are just as appreciated as those that are hand-wrapped. When time doesn't allow for home-made, store bought goodies are appreciated.
4. **Seek alternatives.** Our family has observed the [Advent Conspiracy](#) model of gift-giving. AC has 4 themes. Worship Fully. Spend Less. Give More. Love All. Our gift

giving is more about relationship-building and helping others than about adding more items to our overstuffed closets. We “shop” for gifts in catalogs by [World Vision](#) (or [IJM](#)).

5. **Stop - Look - Listen.** Take a breather. Pretend for a moment you’re in the peaceful eye of a hurricane. The activity swirls around you, but you can sense the calming presence of God enveloping you. Catch the words of those God-honoring Christmas carols wafting through the store’s Muzak, and offer up a “popcorn prayer” of thanksgiving. “God and sinner reconciled.” “Come and behold Him.” “All is calm, all is bright.”
6. **Resist the attraction to distraction.** I confess to having the attention span of a gnat. I’m like a tumbleweed, drifting from room to room, activity to activity. To focus, I need to create a plan and carry a to-do list on a pad or in my phone. Accomplishing the major tasks provides me freedom to enjoy some unexpected delights.
7. **Lighten up.** Some of you are more task-oriented, it comes so naturally that you need to loosen up sometimes or you become like a gear wound too tight. Being so focused on tasks, it’s easy to miss the sweet joys that are all around. Like Martha who Jesus said was “distracted” by her many tasks, you need to release the need to “do” and embrace the opportunity to just “be,” to sit in His presence.
8. **Set priorities.** In addition to God’s Word, I live by 2 quotes. “There are enough hours in the day to do what God wants you to do. And no more.” ~AW Tozer AND “Good is the enemy of best.” ~Oswald Chambers  
If I’m too busy, the question that begs to be answered is, “What am I doing that God doesn’t want me to do?” Many of these things are good things, but they aren’t the best things for me, at least for right now. Applying these two quotes enable me to prioritize and just say “no” without guilt. [Michael Hyatt](#), shared a principle of how to schedule time to put [First Things First](#).
9. **Make the choice to forgive.** If you’re alive and breathing, chances are at some point in your life, you’ve been hurt. Holding onto resentment and bitterness is like swallowing poison and waiting for the other person to die. Making the choice to forgive frees you from that poison. The offender may not deserve to be forgiven, but doing it anyway is not for them. It’s for you. At this time of year, there’s a greater chance of encountering the offenders, whether in family gatherings or office parties or other activities. Forgiving cuts the tether that holds you to that person who hurt you. And most importantly, forgiving is an opportunity to develop Christ-likeness as one of His final statements was asking the Father to forgive those who hurt Him.
10. **Memorize the Word.** This list begins and ends with the Word of God. It’s our sustenance, our food, our lifeline. And when we aren’t in arm’s length of our Bible, God can bring relevant Scriptures to mind like withdrawing a deposit we

made at the bank. When tempted to get angry, upset, depressed, frustrated, go to the Word. Write appropriate verses out on index cards and keep them by your kitchen sink, in the car, in your purse, etc. Try to commit them to memory.

1 Cor. 10:13 *“You will not be tempted beyond what you are able to bear, but with the temptation, God will provide a way of escape.”*

James 1:2-4 *“Consider it joy when you suffer trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything”*  
Phillips: *“Welcome your trials as friends”*

Philippians 4:13 *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”*

And, though not Scripture, a worthy saying:

Serenity Prayer God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
To change the things I can,  
And the wisdom to know the difference.

All in all, throughout the season, make the choice to follow my dear friend’s advice:  
“Keep the main thing, the main thing.”

