

# “Dealing with Holiday Stress”

Pastor Dale Campfield - December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011

## **Intro:**

**Matt 28:19** “Go and make disciples of all nations...”

## **ECC Process of Discipleship: Making an IMPACT...To Love...To Grow...To Serve**

We have 3 priorities – To love...which is expressed in our Sunday morning celebration and connection groups. To grow...which is expressed in our Path to Discipleship. To serve...which is expressed in our daily lives in the places we live, work and play; as well as through the local church. The vision of E.C.C. is to gather together weekly for corporate worship, loving God and each other; then to come together in small Connection Groups for discipleship and fellowship, and are regularly involved in reaching out to others with the love, acceptance, and forgiveness of Jesus Christ through community outreach. To Love...To Grow...To Serve!

## **Title: “Dealing with Holiday Stress”**

Peace in the midst of the Christmas and New Year’s seasonal holidays, and the rest of life for that matter.

He did come to give us peace right?

## **Isaiah 9:6**

*“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And He will be called, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.”*

**Illus Song:** It’s the most wonderful time of the year – not so true for many of us...

Not enough money, having to celebrating with family you don’t get along with, having no family to celebrate with, having lost a loved and they’re not there to celebrate with you, its’ too cold, Campfield keeps praying for snow, sadness and depression, comparing your Christmas to others, light envy, gift envy (you see other people’s gifts under their tree and wish you could do the same), dreading another year, you blew last years New Year’s resolutions in the first month of the year!, etc. etc.

Looking for Peace?

We live in a world that is looking for peace. Most of us are more familiar with tension, stress and anxiety than peace. Lack of peace is the result of our complex, accelerated and stressed-out world. If you can complete these sentences with the appropriate word, you need to learn what resources are offered you by the “God of Peace.”

...I am ready to throw in the... (towel).  
...I am at the end of my...(rope).  
...I am just a bundle of...(nerves).  
...I am at my wits...(end).  
...I feel like resigning from the human...(race).  
...I am in over my...(head).

**Illus:** show the dolphins jumping, making one of them a cow... on the screen...

Below is a picture of two dolphins. If you can see both dolphins, your stress level is within the acceptable range. If you see anything other than two dolphins, your stress level is too high and you need to stay home and rest.

### Greek word for “stress”

diabebaioimai (dee-ab-eb-ahee-o'-om-ahee)

(you can get stressed out just trying to say that...!)

= affirming constantly.

## How to Handle Holiday Stress

### Luke 10:38-10:42

A little boy and a little girl were singing their favorite Christmas carol in church the Sunday before Christmas. The boy concluded “Silent Night” with the words, “sleep in heavenly beans.” His sister elbowed him, and said, “No. Not beans, peas!”

The way many of us feel by the time we are ready for Christmas, the song might just as well end with beans or peas instead of peace. Because sometimes in the frantic rush to get everything done the peace of the season seems to elude us.

I've tried to compile a list of potential things that happen at this time of year which may contribute to increased stress during the holiday season. See if any of these ring a bell, no holiday pun intended.

- Shopping for gifts
- Getting to the necessary holiday parties
- Putting up the decorations
- Cooking a meal
- Wrapping the gifts
- Making enough cookies and breads to give away
- Buying a tree
- Fighting the traffic

- Having enough money to buy gifts
- (If married) Figuring out when to celebrate at both sets of parents without offending either
- All the stores are out of the gift you're looking for
- Three frightening words – Some assembly required
- Having the right clothes for social occasions
- Gaining weight
- Christmas programs for the kids at school and at church
- Untangling the strands of lights
- Sending out Christmas cards
- Hearing “Grandma Got Run Over By a Reindeer” for the 150th time
- Cleaning the house
- Forgetting someone for whom you should have purchased a gift
- Feeling the pressure to make a memory
- Knowing the year is coming to a close and you didn't accomplish what you intended to
- Facing relatives you don't get along with
- All of your work is due on a rapidly approaching December 25 deadline
- Knowing that maybe you'll spend Christmas alone
- Three often overlooked words – batteries not included
- Being a part of a family that celebrates separately because of a divorce
- Christmas lights that won't work
- Arranging travel schedules
- Missing loved ones who have passed away
- Paying off the credit cards
- Weeding through crowded stores
- Members of your family who find where you hid their presents.

When you compile a list like this, it's easy to see why Christmas is a major period of increased stress for many people.

Does Christ have anything to say to us in the midst of this season of hurry and rush? I believe he does. After all, it's his birthday party, so what does he think about all of this?

There's a humorous little story in the Gospel of Luke that shows how busyness and stress gets in the way of what matters most. It wasn't his birthday, but it was a party, and Jesus was the honored guest.

### **LUKE 10:38-42**

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” 41 “Martha, Martha,” (sounds like Jan saying Marsha, Marsha, Marsha from the Brady Bunch) the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Understanding what Jesus said to Martha about Mary, it's easy to see that... We will enjoy the season much more when we simply focus on what is "needed."

## I. WHAT IS STRESS?

A. Martha said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" (Luke 10:40)

I think Martha was experiencing some stress.

Rushing around trying to get everything ready – after all Jesus was in her house! "Doesn't anyone care how busy I am?" she thinks. She comes in the room with hors d'oeuvres, "Oh, Mary, dear sister, there you are! Don't bother getting up. And, Jesus, I wish I could stay and chat like SOME people, but you'll all be wanting freshly crushed grape juice soon, so I guess I'll just go back to the kitchen where I'm working ALONE."

B. Stress is your body's alarm system.

1. "No one can live without experiencing some degree of stress. You may think that only serious disease or intensive physical or mental injury can cause stress. This is false. Crossing a busy intersection, exposure to a draft, or even sheer joy are enough to activate the body's stress mechanism to some extent. Stress is not even necessarily bad for you; it is also the spice of life, for any emotion, any activity, causes stress." (Hans Selye, in *The Stress of Life*)

2. Stress can be caused by anything that creates a state of arousal or alarm in our systems - by anything that mobilizes our body's defenses against hostile, threatening or even challenging events in our environment.

Stress can result from anything that:

- Annoys you
- Threatens you
- Prods you
- Excites you
- Scares you
- Worries you
- Hurries you
- Angers you
- Frustrates you
- Challenges you
- Criticizes you
- Or by anything that reduces your self-esteem

It can be caused by almost anything pleasant or unpleasant.

The experts say that getting married is actually more stressful than getting fired from your job. And retirement is more than twice as stressful as moving to a new residence.

Right now we're dealing with our dog Duper as a family. She seems to be winding down in her life, and it's causing stress upon all of us. We may have to make the decision soon as to if we will "put her down" or not; and it's tough! She's been with us for over 15 years. She's a part of our family. Stress comes in many different ways.

**Illus** – Think about this rubber band. If stretched, it will return to its normal, relaxed position when the external force is removed.

The body's stress response is also stretched whenever it is subjected to any emergency or demand. It ought to return to a normal, relaxed state when the demand is removed. If stretched for a long time and held, it loses its elastic properties and will eventually snap.

C. If our bodies are repeatedly held in a state of alarm, they will show damaging consequences.

Some symptoms of stress are:

Frequent headaches

Stiffness in the neck, shoulders, jaw, arms, legs, hands or stomach.

Irregular heartbeats

Getting dizzy or lightheaded

Suffering from colds, flu or hoarseness

Indigestion, nausea or discomfort in the stomach

Difficulty falling or staying asleep.

Waking up feeling tired

Cold hands or cold feet

Excess perspiration

Anger or irritability

The holiday season can be a period of major stress. The rubber-band gets stretched pretty far and held there. Maybe some of you are feeling the effects.

I wouldn't be too surprised this morning to find out that a number of you have exchanged heated words with people you care about in the midst of holiday preparations.

I wouldn't be too surprised if a few of you said you are actually dreading instead of looking forward to the next few weeks.

I wouldn't be too surprised if some of you are mentally arranging your "to-do" list right now while secretly pretending to listen to this message.

It's a difficult time of year.

So we've seen what stress is, but what about its cure?

## II. WHAT IS THE HOLIDAY CURE?

I love this verse...

A. “Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.” (Luke 10:40)

Doesn't that sound like us sometimes?

1. Like Martha, we can get so distracted by all the seemingly necessary things that we miss the point.

2. Peter Drucker in *The Effective Executive* says for most of us the problem is not “priorities” as much as it is “posteriorities.” By this he means what we choose to “leave out.”

Isn't that the real problem? Some of the things that we make priorities aren't really the priorities. By focusing on these things of lesser importance we miss what's most important.

B. The answer is to be like Mary.

Look what Jesus tells Martha...

1. “Only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better...” (Luke 10:42)

2. She realized spending time with Jesus was more important than external preparations.

Martha's choice had not been bad. The things she was working on were all good – it simply wasn't the wisest choice at the moment. Why? Jesus was there!

3. All the Christmas preparations are good, but there is “only one thing” that is “needed.”

And that thing that is needed this Christmas is spending time with Jesus in a personal, intimate love relationship.

4. We must never get so busy with the outward things that we neglect the quiet and peaceful worship of our Lord.

Illus – Lucinda Norman wrote an article in *Lookout* magazine for December 15, 1996 called “An Atmosphere of Calm.” She describes her Christmas shopping experience at a busy mall. People have been pushing, elbowing and cutting in front of her all day. Hardly able to take it anymore, she says, “During a 10-minute special (10% off the already 25% discount), a woman grabbed a lace tablecloth from my hands. I looked her straight in the eye and grunted, “Mine!” and yanked it back. I won. By 4 o'clock in the afternoon, my mood was belligerent.”

At a mall restaurant she met some friends and flagged down a server and said, “I need hot tea, now!” The lady snapped at her and said, “I'm not your server. Wait your turn.”

She said, “Lady, I've been waiting my turn all day, bring me some tea!” But the waitress ignored her.

A few moments later, a friendly young man came to her table smiling and said, “I'm Rob, your waiter.” After he took their order she noticed that Rob stopped to help the rude waitress with her

tray. He greeted the other customers and staff.

In the midst of dozens of hurried shoppers and restaurant staff he conducted himself in a polite, unhurried atmosphere of calm. When he refilled her tea, Lucinda noticed a silver ring on his right hand made of connected letters. After he walked away, she said to the other ladies at the table, "Did you notice that our server is wearing a ring that spells Jesus?"

From that moment her attitude changed. This one young man's example had reminded her of the peace that Christ came to bring. He had apparently spent time with the Lord. For the rest of the day, she enjoyed shopping, opened the door for others, let people in front of her at the check-out-line. In an atmosphere of calm.

So now.... Let's get practical with this thing in dealing with stress. In looking at the story of Mary and Martha what can we learn that we can memorize and take home with us today after Celebration is complete here at Eastgate?

I would propose....

### [In Dealing with Stress You Must...](#)

## **Be Quiet...**

If there is one thing that drives us almost insane, If there is one thing that we cannot stand, If there is one thing that makes us uncomfortable it's...

**Illus:** Standing Quietly before the people...

(The sermon begins with myself standing there, simply standing for a full minute, doing nothing but waiting, seeming to be about to speak but then refraining, sipping on a glass of water, and looking at his watch. Until finally, he speaks...) silence.

Silence.

We live in a culture that does not know what to do with being silent or still. We don't want silence!

I remember working at a radio station in Yakima and what we all dreaded was "dead air"... those times when nothing would be on the radio. Everyone would panic! It was the most dreaded time of the broadcast, when there would be dead air!

### **Habakkuk 2:20**

*"The LORD is in His holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him."*

But silence drives us nuts.

During the holidays, and every day for that matter, when you're dealing with stress, sometimes you just need to be quiet and stop talking. Shut down your mouth for a little while and just listen. You have to deal with people, circumstances, situations that you can't control, so just be quiet for awhile and listen.

### Being quiet so you can...

#### 1. Hear the people around you.

So that you can listen to their hurts, their concerns, their trials of life. It's not all about you – it's supposed to be about them. Often times the stress that comes to you, through them, is because they are hurting in some way. So stop and listen to them a little bit more this season. Listen to your family, the server at the restaurant, your neighbor who is complaining, etc. Just be quiet.

#### 2. Hear the voice of God.

God is trying to speak to you during your times of stress, you have to be willing to be quiet and hear Him speak. If you will listen to Him, He'll give you the direction that you need, thus making the stress levels go down.

### Be Still...

#### **Psalm 37:7**

*"Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him."*

But we can't be still.

#### **Psalm 46:10**

*"Be still, and know that I am God."*

In our culture we don't like to be still. We always have to be moving. I find myself even moving my foot all of the time when I should be relaxing. My brother Mike use to constantly "rock" back and forth, and he still does sometimes. We're always moving, always busy, never stopping.

### Being still so you can...

#### 1. Know that He is God, and you're not.

When we're trying to "make it happen", He can't. We just need to be still and know that HE is God, that He is in charge, that we don't need to make this thing happen. He's big enough, smart enough, strong enough, wise enough, etc.

## 2. Know that God has The master plan.

God's in charge of your life, He has a master plan, we just need to be still, stop trying to make it happen ourselves and let God do His thing.

We don't like to be quiet. We don't like to be silent. It drives us nuts! We have this feeling that if we are not doing something, saying something, planning something, then we are not being productive and if we are not being productive, then we are wasting our time. Most of us feel like we need to be active every minute of the day.

A generation or two ago, the life of the family was going to be revolutionized by the automatic washing machine. Up until then, cleaning the family's laundry literally took an entire day. People referred to one day of their weekly routine as wash day.

Then technology came through with the washing machine, and you could throw the clothing into a machine, and then leave it and go do something else. What a time saver. So what happened? Did we get more time to relax? To be still? To be quiet? No, we filled our time with other duties.

The computer was the same way. It enables us to do more our work in a lot less time. But do we get off work early? No. We simply do more work. There is something within us that compels us to fill up every moment of our time. Even if we are not talking about work, our families are stretched to the limit with activities as we go from ballet classes to soccer to outings at the lake to concerts to this and to that. It is as if we are afraid of what might happen if we would just be still for a moment. If we would just be ---- still.

And if you think this is a modern problem, think again. Look at Martha and Mary. Jesus comes to their home. Mary is content to be still and silent, and to be with the Lord. Martha can't do that. She has to be busy. In the words of the New Testament lesson, she becomes "distracted and upset at many things."

And so it is with us. Jesus is in the midst of our life. But we become distracted and upset at many things. Our world is so busy, our lives are so full. And we like it that way. We like it because a busy life makes us feel important. How many of you want to be important? We all do. We want to be important. We want to be valuable. We want to be worth something to others. One of the things that attracts us to the Gospel is the Good News that God loves us. We are important to God. The God who made and maintains the entire universe believes we are important enough to pay attention to and to love and to care for. We are important enough to God that he sent his Son Jesus Christ to die for us and for our salvation.

But that is not enough. We need something else to validate our lives – we need a busy schedule. We fall into the trap of believing that if we are busy, then we are important.

We need to know that it is OK for us to let go of our busy-ness, and to be quiet, and still, and not be so busy.

## Behave...

### 1 Cor. 13:5

*“Does not behave itself rudely, seeks not her own, is not easily provoked, keeps no record of evil.”*

Just stop being argumentative, **arnory**, and a know it all and behave. Stop being a jerk and behave. How many times in life are we just controlling, manipulating people and we just need to stop what we're doing and behave? It's time to behave – we're children of God, made in His image – we need to start acting like it.

We can't let our flesh get the better of us when dealing with people and situations. We can't let our flesh get in the way and lash out at those we love or those we don't even know. We've got to behave!

### Behave so you can...

#### 1. Be a proper example of God's love.

When you're constantly being a jerk, being argumentative, etc. etc., you're blowing your example of the Love of God that He has in you and desires to show to the people around you. Sure, you're stressed out, but you've got to behave. It's when the pressure comes, when you are squeezed, that the real you comes out. What's coming out? You need to behave in such a matter that people see the real Jesus inside of you.

If you find yourself “flipping” people off when you're stressed out, you're probably not behaving too wisely. Remember, it's the little things that you need to behave in.

Remember the old song, “They will know we are Christians by our love, by our love...”

#### 2. Be a true Disciple of Christ.

A true follower of Christ will behave in such a manner that will lead people to Jesus. That's your job as a stressed out believer – to be an example of Christ in the midst of your stress, to show that you are truly a disciple of Christ; encouraging others as well. When they see you stressed out, and dealing with it appropriately, this will be an example to them that they too need to turn their life over to God, to be a follower of Christ, and give Him their stressful situations.

#### Conclusion:

If you want to eliminate some of the stress in your holidays, or any day....  
Be quiet.... Be still... And Behave.

And as you do, You watch... you wait... you'll see!