

# ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

## **18. 7 Helpful Ways to Enjoy a Stress-Free Season**

You are listening to episode 18 of the Encouragement for Real Life podcast. Welcome back and Merry Christmas! These weeks leading up to Christmas we are switching gears a bit as I offer a few Christmas-themed episodes, focusing on keeping Christmas simple and special this year. May these help us find the encouragement we are looking for in our real lives in this season, because this may be the season we could use some real life encouragement the most! So, let's take a few moments together today in the midst of the hustle and bustle to ponder some ways we can enjoy a stress-free season. Let's get into this week's episode.

Is the stress rising? Can you feel it? Wow, Christmas 2021 is just 2-1/2 weeks away from the airing of this episode. If you can already feel the stress of this season, let me tell you, you are likely in good company because I think many of us are. On a side note, in last week's episode, episode 17, we discussed the idea of keeping Christmas simple this year, and why that matters, and how to go about doing that. If you haven't listened to it yet, I invite you to do so. It's not necessary to listen to that one before this one, but it may help lay the foundation for what we're discussing today.

So, how are we doing in this moment, right now?

Are you and I calm or are we stressed? Are we feeling free or frazzled? This is about the time in the Christmas season I begin to analyze how much I have yet to do before Christmas arrives, and I take an inventory of sorts. That making a list and checking it twice thing is real in my life these days? Is it for you, too?

We might have presents to purchase and wrap.

Maybe we still have decorating to do.

If we're hosting Christmas gatherings or having house guests, we might have a home to get ready for company.

We might have meals to plan, groceries to buy, and goodies to bake.

We might have work to accomplish before the end of the year in our jobs or other commitments regarding work or ministry.

Let alone the Christmas activities we plan to attend.

As my list grows, it's not uncommon for it to grow fangs and turn into a beast I want to run from. Do you know what I'm talking about? I'm guessing you do if you're a list person like me. You know, lists are good, but when they get monstrous, they paralyze me. Do they do that to you, too? And that's when I wonder if making my list and checking it twice is a good thing. Sometimes my list stresses me out!

This is when I must return to what we discussed last week.

A simple, uncomplicated, unartificial, unfussy Christmas.

*So, let's take a big, deep breath here.*

And choose to release the stress. To let it go. This season doesn't have to be stressful. It doesn't. This Christmas season can be different than those in the past in regard to stress. We don't have to give into the feelings or the temptations of letting the season and all we have to do (get to do) overwhelm us. We can choose to slow our pace, savor the special moments, and allow ourselves to experience all this season as to offer. You and I can be less stressed and can experience a stress-free season.

Because we do not want to miss Christmas this year.

Ever had a year when you missed Christmas? Oh, you were there physically, but not really present. You were distracted from all the other stuff that took your attention. And the stress of it all made you weary and worn out. How do I know? Because I've lived what I'm describing here. I know what it's like to miss Christmas. I know how it feels to be so stressed and so overwhelmed that you can't relax and enjoy the holiday.

But that's not going to happen to you and me this year. No way. You and I are not going to miss Christmas this year. Because we're keeping it simple, and in doing so, keeping it special.

And I come back to this thought. Living stressed during this season (or any season for that matter) is not God's best for us. He doesn't desire for us to be stressed or overwhelmed. He doesn't.

Philippians 4:6-7 VOICE says this: Don't be anxious about things; instead, pray. Pray about everything. He longs to hear your requests, so talk to God about your needs and be thankful for what has come. And know that the peace of God (a peace that is beyond any and all of our human understanding) will stand watch over your hearts and minds in Jesus, the Anointed One.

God desires us to live in His peace, so much so it says here His peace will stand watch over our hearts and minds. That's a beautiful promise, isn't it?? I'm hanging on to that today.

So, how do we experience a stress-free season? It sounds great, but can it be done? Because we can easily get caught up in the moment when we realize all that's left to do on our lists, and we have little time to do it. Stress shows up when we find our plate is overflowing, and we can't catch it all. We've been there, we've done that, and we fully know stress isn't healthy for any of us. Do a search to find how stress affects our health, and that alone should want us to avoid it at all costs.

I believe we can experience a stress-free Christmas season.

Here are seven ways that may help.

## **7 Helpful Ways to Enjoy A Stress-Free Season**

### **1 - Pray.**

What if we began each day talking with God? What if, as soon as we woke in the morning, we said good morning to God and thanked Him for the day, right out of the gate? And what if we asked God each day to help us live in His peace and not live stressed? Do you think it would make a difference? I do. Because

we can't have a stress-free season on our own. It won't happen in our own strength. We need help, God's help. Because if we look again at the verse I just read, Philippians 4:6-7, it says His peace will stand watch over our hearts and minds. A stress-free season is possible because of the peace He gives us. So, let's begin each day, simply thanking God and asking Him to help us live stress-free today as we trust in His perfect plans for our lives.

## **2 – Instead of trying to do more, ask for help and do less.**

You and I aren't designed to be Superwomen and wear capes, and we don't need to do everything ourselves. What if we asked for help? Asking for help can alleviate stress. Whether it's hanging the Christmas lights, cutting out sugar cookies, or wrapping presents. Asking for help gets someone else involved and it blesses him or her. Plus, it's a lot more fun to do these things with the company of another. What's one way you can do less this season? Who can you ask for some help and bless in the process?

## **3 – When you feel stress rising, breathe.**

Do you, like me, sometimes push through the stress and just keep going? Actually, that can often make the stress worse. Next time you feel stress rising, stop and take a deep breath. Count 4 seconds while breathing in, hold your breath for 7 seconds, and exhale for 8 seconds. Then do this again. Then one more time. This kind of breathing sends a message to your brain to calm down and relax. Then your brain sends the message to your body to do the same. This helps relieve our body of the effects of stress. Plus, it helps us focus on something else... the gift of breathing. Breathing helps us have a stress-free season. Who knew??

## **4 – Focus on blessings, not burdens.**

What if we considered everything on our to-do lists and the things we have yet to accomplish before Christmas as blessings instead of burdens? What if we thought of them as gifts we are honored to open? Or instead of thinking these are things we *have* to do, what if we changed our words to *get* to do? Instead of saying, "I have to decorate my tree today," or "I have to go get groceries," we could say, "I get to decorate my tree today," or "I get to go get groceries." See the difference? Changing one word can change our thoughts and perspectives. *Get to do* is much more exciting than *have to do*, right? So, what blessings are on your to-do list? What do you *get to do* today?

## **5 – Take a break.**

Sometimes a change of scenery makes a big difference. Have you noticed that? Maybe right now is a good time to pause and take a break from your routine. Get up from your desk and take a walk. Go relax somewhere that brings you joy... at home, at a coffee shop, at a park. Even if it's just on your lunch break or if it's only for a few minutes. Taking a break and enjoying the moment you and I are in helps us focus our thinking on good things and is a great way to relieve stress in this season.

## **6 – Get moving.**

Exercise is not only good for us, but as most of us already know, it helps relieve stress. Mayo Clinic says exercise pumps up our feel-good neurotransmitters, it helps shed daily tensions, boosts our energy and optimism, and actually relaxes us. Even if it's a brisk walk through the neighborhood, or dancing in the

living room, a little exercise helps us go from stressed to blessed. Literally! How can you incorporate a few moments of exercise into your day today or tomorrow?

## **7 - Do more of what you enjoy.**

And I think that begins when we ask ourselves two questions: 1) What do you enjoy most about Christmas and the season that's upon us? 2) What do you enjoy the least?

What I enjoy most is celebrating the birth of Jesus with my family and friends. We have certain traditions and days I look forward to. Times we are together with friends. Times as an extended family, times we are together as our immediate family, and since Bill and I are now empty nesters, at times it's just him and me. I wait all year long for these special celebrations.

What I enjoy least is the often-unrealistic expectations I tend to put on myself. I have a tendency to add extra stress and strain, thinking I have to have everything "perfect" to make it a perfect Christmas.

If you enjoy baking, then bake to your heart's content. If it's helping at a soup kitchen during the holidays, then do just that. Maybe you enjoy decorating your home in ways your decor could have its own Pinterest board. (Maybe it does!) If so, spend your time doing that. As much as possible, do what you enjoy the most. Do that activity that brings you joy.

Based on my answer, I'll put more time and effort celebrating with my family and friends.

Now, for the flip side. Whatever you enjoy the least, can you let go of it? Can you forget about it or get creative with it this year? If you detest shopping, can you order online or have someone else do it for you? If you don't enjoy cooking the annual Christmas meal, can you order out instead? Or if the many Christmas gatherings are too much for you, can you choose just a couple to attend instead of them all?

When we focus on what we enjoy and do less of what we don't, a stress-free season is possible.

It's a simple concept, but if you're like me, sometimes we fall into the trap we need to do it all. Sometimes we just need to give ourselves permission to let go of what we enjoy least.

I invite you to choose one or two of these 7 ways to enjoy a stress-free season and see what a difference it makes in your life. I believe they will help us experience a more stress-free season, which will be a more joyful season.

You'll find this list in printable form free on my Resource page on my site, [julielefebure.com](http://julielefebure.com). I pray it helps and encourages you this season. Link for this address is in the show notes.

I mention this often, but we are discussing these ideas and more in our Encouragement for Real Life Community Facebook group. There you'll receive extra encouragement from me daily and be able to connect with others just like you who are looking for encouragement and community. The link to this group is in the show notes.

As always, I invite you to please rate and review this episode if you received encouragement so others can find it as well.

In closing, as the days countdown to Christmas, my desire is for us all to draw near to the One whose birth we will be celebrating in a matter of days. And I hope these Christmas-themed episodes are helping you do that. Thank you for tuning in today. God bless you in this season and always.

Julie Lefebvre