

Live Within Your Means

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The challenge is here! The time of year in which we are bombarded with the emotional, heartwarming ads, tugging at our hearts strings to spend our hard earned money at their place of business. Although commonly thought of as relating to our financial situation, the phrase “live within your means” may also describe someone who tends to “overspend” emotionally, socially, and physically. Many of the suggestions below are common, yet, necessary to pay attention to as we move into the holiday season. The last thing any of us truly long for is end up exhausted, irritable and less than Christ-like people.

Acknowledge what you are feeling. There is no shame in admitting how our emotions may be different this time of year. The holidays have a way of triggering unresolved conflicts and losses. If someone close to you has recently died, you can't be with or don't want to be with loved ones, realize that it's normal to feel sadness and grief. It's OK to take time to cry or express your feelings. Ask the Lord to journey with you in and out of these emotions. He is willing and able to provide His pacing and comfort in facing these difficult emotions.

Reach out. If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out social events in your community or church. These activities can offer support and companionship. Let's admit what is real...it is not the same as being with those you love yet, sharing some simple celebrations through these avenues is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships. Keep it simple. Remember, doing one or two small things for someone else is often all that is needed, for them and for you.

Be realistic. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change. Choose a few you wish to hold on to, and be open to creating new ones. Be realistic in what time you have to spend as well. This is tough in that it requires you to monitor your energy level and risk saying no. Becoming exhausted physically and emotionally will not make the holidays memorable.

Saying yes when you should say no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. Friends will understand if you can't participate in every project or activity. If they don't understand, I question their friendship. If it's not possible to say no, try to remove something else from your agenda to keep your schedule and pace realistic.

Plan ahead. As much as is possible, set aside specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends and other activities. If you are planning a party, make sure to line up help for prep and clean-up. Including others is a great way to provide time for conversation and creating a memory. Besides, it's more fun when you are doing the festivities together.

Don't abandon healthy habits. Oh my! This is a tough one. All the delightful cookies and mouth watering candies make overindulgence easy. The resulting guilt only adds to your stress. It takes work but is well worth it to get plenty of sleep and physical activity. Drinking 6-8 glasses of water doesn't hurt either.

Take a breather. Make some time for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle the tasks before you. Take a walk at night listening to the silence. Allow soothing music to wash over you or read a favorite devotional. Use this time to pour your heart out to your Savior. Ask Him to feel your stress, take it and replace it with the truth of His love for you.

Seek professional help if you need it. Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, unable to sleep, irritable and overwhelmed. If these feelings last for a while, please contact your medical doctor or mental health professional.

The above ideas are not all inclusive but I trust that as each of you look to the Savior, you will indeed find the plan, pace, and purpose He has for you this Christmas season. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV)

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