



45 Days to Go,
45 Questions to Ask!

Tips for De-stressing Your Life
during the Holiday Season

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45 Days to Go, 45 Questions to Answer!

Are You Ready?! If not - Are You Ready to Get Ready!!!
Making a List & Checking It Twice is not enough!!!
Why not Make a List and Check it off Once!!



Here are a few questions to help you get a jumpstart on the planning and decision-making process. You'll probably think of more that apply to your own personal situation.

45 Questions:

Location & Date Plans

1. Do you have concrete plans for the holiday season (Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa)?
2. Will you be traveling?
3. How will you get there?
4. Where will you stay?
5. Do you need to book a hotel?
6. Are guests coming to you?
7. Will they be staying with you?
8. Do you have hotels to recommend?
9. Do these plans involve getting your home ready for guests?
10. Will you decorate your home?
11. Will you decorate your yard and exterior?
12. Have you considered who you will decorate for? (yourself, your immediate family, roommates, guests coming, or neighbors and community)

Food

13. Is the menu planned?
14. Who's bringing what?
15. Who's doing the cooking?
16. Where will the main meal be served? (your house, theirs, or dining out)
17. What décor is needed for the meal? (dishes, centerpiece, special table enhancements, holiday linens, napkins, etc.)
18. What assistance will you have (if hosting)?
19. What assistance will you give (if visiting host)?

Gifts

20. Will any be required or expected?
21. Do you have a list of who you need gifts for?
22. Do you have ideas of gifts they'd like?
23. Do you have wrapping materials or will you have to purchase them?
24. What additional people will you need to get gifts for before the actual holiday?
25. What additional events are there where you'll need other gifts prior to Christmas Day (or other holiday)?

Wardrobe

26. Are there any special holiday parties or events you need to plan wardrobe around?
27. Will you need new outfits?

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28. Do you have outfits planned for Christmas Day?
29. If you are traveling, do you have a list (or ideas) for what to pack?
30. Will you be attending any New Year's events?
31. Can you recycle any of your other outfits for New Years parties?

Money

32. Do you have extra money saved away especially for the holiday season's extra expenses?
33. Do you have a budget in mind for gifts - generally and/or per person?
34. Have you determined the budget needed for transportation & miscellaneous travel expenses?
35. Have you planned how and when you will pay for the costs of trip & your stay?
36. Have you allocated money for special charitable gifts you desire to give this time of year?
37. Have you planned a way to earn, save, or allocate the additional funds needed to finance all the additional expenses over this season?

Time

38. Have you set a date(s) for Christmas shopping?
39. Do you have a plan of attack to accomplish this? (stores, time needed)
40. Have you planned when you will wrap them and how long that will take?
41. Have you put the special seasonal concerts, pageants, plays, or other special events on your calendar you plan to attend - and got your tickets - and put them in a safe place you'll remember?
42. Have you allowed enough preparation time - both the day of guests arrival (or your travel day) and ahead of time to take care of all the details leading up to the special day? (This may include decorating and other seasonal prep work.)
43. What about self-care time to regenerate and feed your soul? Have you planned some grace in your schedule just for you - so you'll have something of quality left to give to others - a little more Christmas spirit?!
44. Have you set aside some quiet time for spiritual connection - to remember the reason for the season?
45. Have you planned the time to thank others for their friendship, and to thank God for them and this special time of year?

Whew!! I know I've probably missed a lot more decisions that have to be made, plans and things that have to be thought out this time of year. But this is just a tool to help you see the big picture and make quick decisions.

Then you can move forward and conquer the details more easily!

Take care of the big things as soon as you can. The other little things you can slide into your daily schedule. That way your whole holiday season will be brighter!



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Plan Your Fun and Enjoy Doing Your Plan!

After you've answered the "45 Questions" - what then?!

Probably the decision-making process is the biggest drain on our spirits, emotions, and mental health this time of year!

My purpose in all this is to help you realize that when everything seems overwhelming at times, just remember that you have made an incredible number of plans and decisions, and carried out a whole lot of them already successfully in the past!

And if you're still worried, just count up the number of holiday seasons you've already survived till now. This should be old hat to you by now.

So what are you stressing out about anyway?! You know how this will end. You'll do all you can whenever you can until it's too late or not important enough to do by Christmas Day!

You may as well plan and do all you can as soon as you can in small bites. That way you'll have time to spare at the end, so you can relax and enjoy the season more, instead of running around at the last minute like a chicken (or should I say turkey?!) with its head cut off.

Planning is involved and decisions are based on your values & reality of time, money, love and passion.

Remember why you are doing all this. Write down the "why" beside the answers to your biggest challenges.



Deposit your worries into an "Energy Box." This is something you can make up with any size box, gift-wrapped, but with a slit in the top. As you become aware of them, you can write your "Worries" down on pieces of paper and deposit them in the box.

On Christmas Day (or maybe the day after), open the Energy Box. As you open the box, remind yourself of all the worries you had that were wasted energy, where you worried needlessly. Most of the things you worry about never happen anyway! Then enjoy using and celebrating with the extra energy you have from less worrying and more getting things done through planning better!

This is your gift to yourself - and to others as well. You'll have more energy to savor the special times with loved ones as you invest your life into others. You'll be surprised by the gifts you receive back from this act!

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It's all about them and Him - not you! That's the Christmas spirit that you can hopefully take throughout the year with you!

Holidays Approaching! Challenge or Opportunity?

With thoughts of the impending holidays uppermost on mine and everyone else's mind this month, I started thinking about all the upcoming things that need to be negotiated around or through.

Your attitude and how you approach things, can determine to a great extent how your holiday time over the next couple of months in particular will turn out. Whether it will be a challenge or an opportunity - whether you will be blessed and a blessing - or otherwise - is all up to you!

Whether you host festive gatherings in your home or travel to someone else's home, there are several things that can arise as a challenge or opportunity. They are: Time (scheduling, events, food), Gifts & gift-giving, Money (saving, budgeting, planning) and People (personalities, tendencies and relationships).

Here are some tips, systems, and experiences that have helped me in my approach to the challenges and opportunities on the horizon.

1. Time: How to get everything done in time to be able to relax and enjoy yourself during the holidays - and hopefully not get too stressed out while preparing!

- Make a list - and check it off once!
- Give time values to every task and deadlines.
- Plan backward from the deadline date.
- Write a list of the tasks to complete.
- Mark out the tasks on a calendar or incorporate them into your planner.
- See how much you can accomplish by sprinkling tasks with small time bites throughout your normal routine.
- Plan to accomplish your most important tasks first if possible.
- Block out the best times to take care of the jobs with the largest block of time needed at once.
- Use the Time & Task Worksheet to block in the To-Do's and the Time Values (how long you think each task will take).
- Review the Time Tips at the website below for further ideas.



2. Gifts: this can be a major challenge. Hopefully, you've gone through the 45 Questions and have an idea as to who and why you're giving gifts. You may also

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want to remember special people who service you - mailman, butcher, baker, candlestick maker, etc., as well as babysitters, neighbors, pastor, church friends, teachers, boss, co-workers, & people who do special things for you...

Ways to simplify your gift-giving:

- Shop throughout the year.
- Purchase gifts on trips and vacations.
- Make things yourself.
- Consider food and wine or gourmet gifts.
- Order from catalogs or from the internet.
- Consider re-gifting! This is giving away a gift you thought someone else would like more than you. (Make sure you don't give it back to the person who gave it to you initially!)
- Give gift cards.
- Give a catalog for choosing gifts in a price range you prepay.
- Give a gift certificate - for in-store purchase or online gift.
- Buy extra generic gifts and keep them on hand for giving as needed.
- Pick a day to accomplish your shopping goals - before the malls are too crazy!
- Break your shopping trips into two or three shorter time periods.
- Shop on the off hours or off days when stores are less busy, if possible.
- Can you cut down on gifts in the family? Some just give to the kids. Or one gift for the whole family.
- Some draw names and each has only one person to give a gift to.
- All can agree on a price range or set value for gifts, if need be.
- Consider meeting the family in a vacation place for the holiday. You can then agree to gift time and fun with each other as your present.
- If you can take advantage of after-Christmas sales, do so to get a jump on next year's gift-giving - or even gifts needed throughout the year.



Be sensitive to those going through challenging financial times - relieve them of their pressure, but tactfully - to save face. Offer different suggestions or don't have gift exchanges.

3. Money: so many extra expenses can come your way in this season. How will you plan for it and let it flow seamlessly into creating a stress-less holiday season with joyful giving?

- List all anticipated expenses.
- Plan a budget.
- Set spending limits ahead of time.
- Save a little extra all year so you'll have the money you need.
- Use a Christmas Club account for saving or other special account.

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- If absolutely necessary, try to use your lowest or 0% interest credit cards.
- Use your skipped payment money, if loan or credit cards let you skip a month. (Realize that your month's interest still accrues.)
- Find a way to earn extra money for expenses:
 - Work extra hours or take on a part-time or temporary job.
 - Offer your services doing things you enjoy doing.
 - Start a home business in your spare time.
 - Have a garage sale.
 - Sell things on e-Bay.
 - Start an online business.
 - Sell your handcrafted items at craft fairs.
 - Sell your baked goods to local restaurants and stores or gift and gourmet shops.
 - Ask for a raise.
 - Use your bonus money to pay off expenses or credit cards.
- Challenge yourself to eliminate unnecessary spending and reduce the amount you think you need to spend.
- Keep track of your extra expenses so you can stay more in control.
- Know your normal household expenses so you know how much you can afford to spend over the holidays.
- Renegotiate your credit card interest rates by calling up and asking them to lower them. (Ask for their best rate, or for the lowest rate you currently have on other cards.)



Prior planning and tracking expenses helps you reduce impulse buys so you can start off your new year without too much extra debt or too many regrets.

Have fun and be generous, but also be reasonable and practical. Focus on giving the gift of YOU to others, by being present in the moment, enjoying the time you have together. Offer yourself, your heart and love and laughter. You will give the gift they will long cherish and remember.

4. People: this can be a challenge to turn into an opportunity. Relatives, friends, long lost cousins, singles with no place to go or the homeless... Gotta love 'em!

The holidays wouldn't be the holidays without sharing them with people - don't you agree? And hopefully they will be people that you love and care for and enjoy being with!

But what do you do when there's someone less than perfect that you have to share time and space with? You know the kind of situation I'm talking about - where you feel like you're walking on eggshells, just making sure you don't get into an altercation because you looked at them the wrong way!

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Although this is not a crash course in relationships, here are a few insights or tips on what you can do when you anticipate, or stumble upon, a strained relationship.

- If there's something in between you, see if you can forgive them or ask their forgiveness and then move on regardless of their response. You can only do your part and leave the rest to God to do his part in their heart.
- If you start to feel angry, count to ten. You may want to walk away for a bit till you've regained composure and gotten control of your emotions!
- Once you've managed to calm down a bit, try to get yourself and your emotions out of it.
- See if you can figure out why they may have acted like they did.
- If they're just annoying, irritating, or frustrating, take a few deep breaths.
- Realize they probably don't realize their actions are causing a problem. They're probably not trying to be irritating or annoying.
- Try to be quiet and just listen.
- Often letting someone express themselves, just talking something out or venting, can be therapeutic for them.
- If you are in the mindset of being there for them, not for yourself, it changes your perspective.
- Show up with your love tank full and you'll get even more as you have lots to give out.
- I find that when I connect to God and feel his love for me, I have more than enough love to give - along with patience, kindness, joy and other positive emotions.
- If you have to tie your tongue up, bite it, or suck on peanut butter or a candy to keep from saying snide remarks that you know you shouldn't, then just do it!
- Decide you will be a peacemaker just for the day.
- Put your own interests aside and decide to give this gift to others.
- Once you allow others to vent, it may be the best day they've had in a long time! They may finally be able to see things clearly when they get the smoke out of their mind!
- If things get too thick and heavy, you can always take a walk or go to another room or visit the "loo."
- Don't be afraid to set boundaries when others continue to spew their venom on you.
- Perhaps you can help them move on with their life by not letting them dump on you any more.
- If other's attitudes are their own mindset and choice, not caused by anything you or anyone else did, move on and let them reap the choices they're making - not you.



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I'm sure in various settings with different family histories and all the extra stresses of the season there may be more than the usual opportunity for challenges in relationships. But remember there are also equal opportunities for good to come out of the time spent together with family and other loved ones. Hopefully, you will enjoy mostly loving, fun and caring times, giving of yourself and your "joie de vivre" to others. It can be a choice you make. So choose to look for the opportunities and enjoy the season so much more!

Your Challenge and Opportunity Now:

The areas you need to get a handle on involve your time, your money, your gifts, your acts of love and service, and your closest relationships.

I talked about the choice you have to take the challenges of the upcoming holidays and turn them into opportunities. The opportunities will enable you to have a great time, do wonderful loving giving acts for others, and take care of yourself, remaining relatively stress-free throughout the process.

What better gift could you want for your holiday season - or any time of the year?! I hope you will continue this process of choice and empowerment throughout the year and make it a permanent good habit.

*And a
Merry Christmas,
Happy Hanukkah,
or Festive Kwanzaa
to all!*



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*For Tips on Planning & worksheets to help you plan any project or goal,
visit www.Real-Life-Institute.com.
There are also tips on Managing your Time.*

*To help you keep the proper perspective (humorous, creative, or faith-filled),
I invite you to visit my blog: www.DailyFaithLessons.blogspot.com*