



Anchor Points Newsletter SURVIVING THE HOLIDAYS

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A Solid Rock
Counseling
Publication

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The Most Wonderful Time of the Year??

As the old standard by Eddie Pola and George Wylie goes:

**"It's the most wonderful time of the year -
With the kids jingle belling
And everyone telling you
"Be of good cheer"
It's the most wonderful time of the year!"**

And it may be the "most wonderful time of the of the year", but for a great many folks, it's also the most stressful time of the year. There are many reasons for that: there's a lot to do and not much time to do it, money is short and gift lists are long, there are high expectations of family peace and harmony that don't seem to turn out quite like expected, we may

be far from loved ones (or, CLOSE to loved ones...), we may be reminded of those we have loved and lost. With so many high expectations and tasks on our plate, the holidays are pre-arranged to be stressful and somewhat of a let-down if you aren't careful. And sometimes, even if you are.

There are many things to treasure during the Christmas season, not the least of which is that it is a reminder that God sent His Son to this earth to save us from our sins. The point isn't whether or not Jesus was actually born on Dec 25—we can thank God for the fact that He WAS born!

The purpose of this edition of *Anchor Points* is to help you maneuver through the stressful parts of the holidays. Help you keep your priorities on top and your expectations—of yourself as well as others—realistic. This edition is a bit longer than most, because, well, I have a lot to share on this topic!

The secret to a joyful and less stressful December is to know WHY you do what you do, do some planning, and keep the focus on what is important. Read on for help in doing just that.

Until next time—

Rebecca

"Climbing Lessons" to Return in 2012

Back by popular demand! Rebecca will again be presenting "Climbing Lessons" starting in the first quarter of 2012.

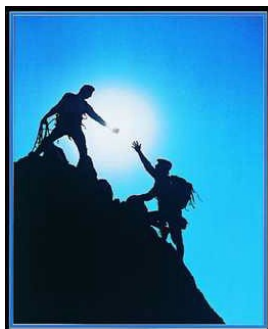
A Climbing Lesson is simply a short (usually 1 1/2 to 2 hour) mini-seminar on a particular topic of interest. Why are they called "Climbing Lessons"? These sessions used to be called Brown Bag Sessions, but when Rebecca named her practice "Solid Rock Counseling", she decided to rename the Brown Bag Sessions as well. Since dealing with life's challenges can be as intimidating as scaling mountains, and we seem to spend a good bit of time wandering in the valley as well, "Climbing Lessons" seemed to be a very appropriate title.

Some topics that have been presented in the

past have included Managing Anger, Dealing with Depression, ADHD, Understanding Bipolar Disorder, Love Languages, Steps to Better Communication, How to Set and Keep Boundaries, Dealing with Conflict, and Dealing with Stress.

These sessions are held at the Bellevue Church of Christ, are FREE, and are open to church members and non-members alike. It's a great outreach to your friends and neighbors. You'll gain a wealth of information, have an opportunity to ask questions, do some laughing, and receive some valuable take-home information from each session.

Watch for a detailed schedule to be published in January!



Holiday Expectations

In just about every aspect of our lives, and especially during the holidays, it's our expectations that get us in trouble. We expect the turkey to come out perfectly, even though it's been dry and a bit flavorless every year. We expect the kids to behave and not run around like banshees who have no idea how civilized people act, even though they're running on 3 hours of sleep, a pound of chocolate and 4 cans of olives, and they are surrounded by cousins they haven't seen since last year. We expect Mom and Aunt Nancy to get along and be nice, even though they spent all year arguing and complaining about each other. You expect your husband to give you that incredible day spa gift package that you hinted about back in June.



We greet the holidays with visions of Kodak Moments and childhood ideals dancing in our heads. Visions of Christmas cards all mailed, gifts purchased, cookies baked, and concerts attended. Thoughts of cheery "Merry Christmas" wishes to strangers, extra time spent with our children, spouses, friends and relatives, and some self-indulgence for ourselves warm our hearts. And we are well-rested and laughing in these pictures in our heads.

Do you see the potential for a problem here? With these images forming our vision of what our holidays will be like, we greet the season with high hopes. Unfortunately, the reality of our lives often follows a different script. Many of the things we expect are things we have absolutely no control over. Many of the things we expect to happen, have never ever happened before, yet we expect THIS year to be different.



The best laid plans get overturned by a child who finally remembers he needs to take twelve dozen cookies to school in the morning along with the Christmas play costume he sort of forgot to ask you to make. Friends all choose the same night for get-togethers, and the choice becomes whose feelings to hurt. The checkbook shows empty way too soon. The work load intensifies in a rush to get too many projects done before the end of the year, and the hours slip away in a blur. It's December 23 and you still have 84 Christmas cards to finish.

Warm feelings toward fellow shoppers quickly shift from well wishing to just wishing they would go away as we battle for parking spaces and places in line. The anticipation of holiday cheer with friends and family is replaced by angry tension. And we end up disappointed and angry and frustrated and fed up and wondering what's wrong with all these crazy people. Once again, our expectations of a perfect holiday set us up to be disappointed. What to do? Here are some ideas:

TAKE A BREAK FROM SUPERHUMAN SYNDROME. Many of us believe we can do it all and please everyone. We take on the full responsibility for making the holidays perfect for everyone, and we believe we can control life enough to make it happen. We think that if we can be the best of all things to all people, then we will be loved and accepted. And when we fail, we believe it is our own fault for just not being good enough. The truth is that there is only so much we can do. Another truth is that it really doesn't matter as much as we think it does to the people who love us. The people who love and accept us will continue to love us no matter how much we get done or how perfect we make the holidays. And the ones who don't accept us, well, either way they still won't. So we might as well give ourselves a break from those ridiculous expectations.



DELEGATE. There's a big difference between "I'll do it myself" and "It'll get done". Which is more important to you? You might want to be able to "do it all", but that is probably an impossible goal that only serves to frazzle and stress you out. So let others help you with holiday tasks. Include your family - yes, even the kids - in holiday preparations. Have them make decorations or cards and let them help you bake or make special treats. Let them be in charge of wrapping the gifts. They love doing this, and it will take that task off of your list.

CUT CORNERS. You really don't have to make everything from scratch and chop everything by hand. Prepared cranberry sauce, pre-packaged shredded lettuce, and mashed potatoes from a box (gasp!) really will do fine and taste great.

CONSIDER HAVING A CLEANING SERVICE COME IN at least once during the next month. Imagine the extra time (and lowered stress) you would have if someone else cleaned your bathroom and kitchen, washed your floors, and dusted your furniture. What a nice gift to give yourself!

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SAY “NO”. Just because you’ve ALWAYS done something, doesn’t mean you have to keep doing it. Believe it or not, people really will understand if you are unavailable for certain events or activities. It’s perfectly ok to turn down invitations, particularly from friends and family who create stressful environments for you.

YOU DON’T HAVE TO KEEP UP WITH THE JONES. Who are The Jones anyway? Remember, just because “everybody” is getting a humongous TV or a new car this Christmas doesn’t mean you have to too. **Stop comparing yourself to other people.** This will kill any chance you have for holiday serenity. Think about what’s important to YOU for the holidays, how you want to feel and what you want to do, then work towards making that happen .



BUT MOM WAS PERFECT. Just because your mom seemed to be able to keep up with all the holiday demands and never run out of time, doesn’t mean that your reality will be like hers. Maybe she stayed home and you work outside the home. Maybe she LOVED all the holiday preparations and you don’t enjoy them so much. Maybe when you were a child you just didn’t realize how stressed and rushed and frazzled your mom felt – do your kids fully understand how YOU feel this time of year? Times change, and people are different, and you don’t have to be like your mother.

BE REALISTIC ABOUT RELATIVES

- ❑ **Lower Your Expectations.** Don’t expect those Normal Rockwell pictures of the holidays to bear much resemblance to your own family gatherings. This may be the only time of year when people who live far away from each other are able to be together. We want to make every precious moment count, and as a result, there’s incredible pressure to cram all this emotion and bonding and intimacy and fun into a very hectic few days. Expect some irritations and imperfections, then relax and have a good time in spite of them.
- ❑ **Rehearse your lines.** Don’t expect people to change from last year. If your aunt always criticizes your food, this year won’t be different, so be prepared to deflate her comments. Try something that protects you without attacking her like, “Maybe we can all chip in next year and hire a caterer.”
- ❑ **Set your differences aside** and don’t try to solve all the problems today. This is not the time to bring up every little irritation. Be understanding if others get upset or distressed when something goes wrong — chances are, they’re feeling the strain of the season, too.



YOUR KIDS ARE GONNA ACT LIKE KIDS

- ❑ Don’t expect your kids to behave perfectly. They’re tired and stressed and excited too. Plus they’re KIDS, not short adults. Keep your own expectations of them set at a reasonable level, and don’t demand a maturity leap in the next few weeks that they aren’t capable of giving you.
- ❑ Make sure you **prepare your children** for special outings or events by telling them who will be there and what kind of behavior is expected. Also, give them some advance warning if they will have to dress up. That way they’re less likely to resist when it’s time to put on the fancy clothes!

BUT I DON’T FEEL JOYFUL

Remember the holiday season does not automatically eliminate reasons for feeling lonely or sad. **Acknowledge your feelings.** If a loved one has recently died, you’re suffering from depression, you’ve just lost a job you loved, or you aren’t able to be near family and you want to be, realize that it’s normal to feel sadness and grief. Don’t tell yourself that you have to be happy just because it’s the holiday season

Unrealistic expectations set us up for a stressful holiday that isn’t as enjoyable as we’d like it to be.

But if you’ll take a look at the expectations you carry into the holidays and revise the ones that aren’t realistic, you’ll notice you’re able to relax and enjoy things a whole lot more. Keep in mind that not everyone will think as you do, believe what you do, or experience the holidays as you do - but that doesn’t have to ruin your enjoyment. So don’t expect absolute harmony. There will be some imperfection and disagreement. Find the enjoyable moments and stop focusing on what went wrong, because there will ALWAYS be something that goes wrong. Find the humor in those situations, and don’t be so hard on yourself and everyone else. Decide to enjoy the moment, no matter what. Your attitude makes all the difference!

All I Need to Know about Life I Learned From a Snowman

(by Mary Campbell)

It's okay if you're a little bottom heavy.
Hold your ground, even when the heat is on.
Wearing white is always appropriate.
Winter is the best of the four seasons.
It takes a few extra rolls to make a good midsection.



There's nothing better than a foul weather friend.
The key to life is to be a jolly, happy soul.
It's not the size of the carrot, but the placement that counts.
We're all made up of mostly water.

You know you've made it when they write a song about you.

Accessorize! Accessorize! Accessorize!

Avoid yellow snow. Don't get too much sun.

It's embarrassing when you can't look down and see your feet.

It's fun to hang out in your front yard.

Always put your best foot forward.

There's no stopping you once you're on a roll.



HOLIDAY STRESS BUSTERS !!

1. **Plan Ahead.**
2. **Don't Try to Do it All**
3. **LAUGH often!**
4. **Cry if you need to**
5. **Get enough sleep**
6. **Exercise**
7. **Hug Someone**
8. **Don't overindulge—with food, drink, or money**
9. **Be realistic about relatives**
10. **Remember—it doesn't have to be PERFECT!**
11. **Set a budget and stick with it**
12. **Shop on Weekdays — less crowded = less stressful**
13. **Enjoy the journey, not just the destination**
14. **Start a Countdown until January—the holidays don't last forever. You CAN make it through!**

12 Tips to Prevent Holiday Stress and Depression

(excerpted from Stress, depression and the holidays: 12 tips for coping, <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stress/MH00030>)

When stress is at its peak, it's hard to stop and regroup. Try to prevent stress and depression in the first place, especially if you know the holidays have taken an emotional toll in previous years.

Tips you can try to head off holiday stress and depression:

1. **Acknowledge your feelings.** If a loved one has recently died or you aren't able to be with your loved ones, realize that it's normal to feel sadness or grief. It's OK now and then to take time just to cry or express your feelings. You can't force yourself to be happy just because it's the holiday season.
2. **Seek support.** If you feel isolated or down, seek out family members and friends, or community, religious or social services. They can offer support and companionship. Consider volunteering at a community or religious function. Getting involved and helping others can lift your spirits and broaden your friendships. Also, enlist support for organizing holiday gatherings, as well as meal preparation and clean-up. You don't have to go it alone. Don't be a martyr.
3. **Be realistic.** As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Hold on to those you can and want to. But accept that you may have to let go of others. For example, if your adult children and grandchildren can't all gather at your house as usual, find new ways to celebrate together from afar, such as sharing pictures, e-mails or videos.
4. **Set differences aside.** Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to all your expectations. Practice forgiveness. Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion. With stress and activity levels high, the holidays might not be conducive to making quality time for relationships. And be understanding if others get upset or distressed when something goes awry. Chances are they're feeling the effects of holiday stress and depression, too.
5. **Stick to a budget.** Before you go shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend on gifts and other items. Then be sure to stick to your budget. If you don't, you could feel anxious and tense for months afterward as you struggle to pay the bills. Don't try to buy happiness with an avalanche of gifts. Donate to a charity in someone's name, give homemade gifts or start a family gift exchange.
6. **Plan ahead.** Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends and other activities. Plan your menus and then make one big food-shopping trip. That'll help prevent a last-minute scramble to buy forgotten ingredients — and you'll have time to make another pie, if the first one's a flop. Expect travel delays, especially if you're flying.



Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion.

7. **Learn to say no.** Believe it or not, people will understand if you can't do certain projects or activities. If you say yes only to what you really want to do, you'll avoid feeling resentful, bitter and overwhelmed. If it's really not possible to say no when your boss asks you to work overtime, try to remove something else from your agenda to make up for the lost time.

8. **Don't abandon healthy habits.** Don't let the holidays become a dietary free-for-all. Some indulgence is OK, but overindulgence only adds to your stress and guilt. Have a

healthy snack before holiday parties so that you don't go overboard on sweets, cheese or drinks. Continue to get plenty of sleep and schedule time for physical activity.

9. **Take a breather.** Make some time for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do. Steal away to a quiet place, even if it's to the bathroom for a few moments of solitude. Take a walk at night and stargaze. Listen to soothing music. Find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing and restoring inner calm.

10. **Rethink resolutions.** Resolutions can set you up for failure if they're unrealistic. Don't resolve to change your whole life to make up for past excess. Instead, try to return to basic, healthy lifestyle routines. Set smaller, more specific goals with a reasonable time frame. Choose only those resolutions that help you feel valuable and that provide more than only fleeting moments of happiness.

11. **Forget about perfection.** Holiday TV specials are filled with happy endings. But in real life, people don't usually resolve problems within an hour or two. Something always comes up. You may get stuck late at the office and miss your daughter's school play, your sister may dredge up an old argument, your partner may burn the cookies, and your mother may criticize how you're raising the kids. All in the same day. Accept imperfections in yourself and in others.

12. **Seek professional help if you need it.** Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless, and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for several weeks, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional. You may have depression.



Hints for Making Resolutions that Stick

BE REALISTIC - Resolving to stop all unhealthy habits at once is likely to fail.

BE SPECIFIC - Don't just say, "I resolve to lose weight"; say "I will lose 15 pounds this year".

KEEP YOUR ACTIVE LIST OF RESOLUTIONS SMALL - Start with 2 or 3 of the most important things you want to change. After a period of a few months, review your resolutions, and if you've achieved those, then start on the next ones.

DON'T EXPECT PERFECTION - Realize that there will be times when you do not keep your resolution perfectly. Simply acknowledge that you didn't keep it, and recommit yourself to trying harder.

BE SURE IT'S UNDER YOUR CONTROL - Don't make a resolution whose success is based on factors that are out of your control. For example, you can't spend more time with your best friend unless she/he agrees to do the same.

PUT IT IN WRITING - Putting your commitments down in writing gives them legitimacy and makes you take them more seriously.

GIVE YOURSELF A DEADLINE - Adds a sense of urgency and immediately puts you into action.

Seasonal Affective Disorder

SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder) is a type of seasonal depression that affects an estimated half a million people every Winter between September and April, in particular during December, January and February.

It is caused by a biochemical imbalance in the hypothalamus due to the shortening of daylight hours and the lack of sunlight in winter.

For many people SAD is a seriously disabling illness, preventing them from functioning normally without continuous medical treatment. For others, it is a mild but debilitating condition causing discomfort but not severe suffering.

Symptoms

The symptoms of SAD usually recur regularly each Winter, starting between September and November and continuing until March or April. A diagnosis can be made after three or more consecutive Winters of symptoms, which include a number of the following:

- * Sleep problems
- * Lethargy
- * Overeating
- * Depression
- * Social Problems
- * Anxiety



- * Loss of Libido
- * Mood Changes

Most sufferers show signs of a weakened immune system during the Winter, and are more vulnerable to infections and other illnesses.

SAD symptoms disappear in Spring, either suddenly with a short period (e.g., four weeks) of hypomania or hyperactivity, or gradually, depending on the intensity of sunlight in the Spring and early Summer.

SAD may begin at any age but the main age of onset is between 18 and 30 years.

Treating SAD

SAD is treatable! Common treatments include special light therapy, antidepressant medication, and psychotherapy. See your doctor if you think you might be suffering from Seasonal Affective Disorder.



New Year Brings a New Beginning for Establishing Christian Priorities

by Bailey McBride From the January 2007 print edition of the Christian Chronicle

New beginnings have a charm that invigorates the spirit. I am fortunate to have spent my life as a teacher. New semesters occur regularly and provide the opportunity to start over, a fresh beginning. The whole world looks at a new year as a new beginning, a fresh start to change things about life or start new projects or activities.

From childhood I learned to make New Year's resolutions. I usually start thinking about them as soon as the Christmas tree goes up. Some resolutions appear year after year — losing weight, exercising, eating right, a schedule for Bible reading, a plan for reading new books, cleaning my desk and files, etc. Those maintenance resolutions are still the hardest to keep faithfully.

Life gets busy and it seems impossible to go to the fitness center. It gets a little busier and the Bible reading schedule slides out of view. As I write this, my desk looks like a tornado has hit. So why make resolutions if they are just going to be empty plans to organize and order the activities of life? Most adults say that they don't make resolutions anymore because they can't keep them.

So it may be that instead of resolutions, mature Christians should be establishing priorities to enhance the qualities of their lives. We should be praying for God to guide us in seeing what he wants us to do with the bright, shining new year we are about to celebrate. How does God want us to use the stretch of time ahead? Who are the people we should be embracing and drawing closer to God? What are those voids in our spiritual world that we should seek to fill through prayer and faith?

One year, I realized that I was almost

totally ignorant of Jeremiah. I had read it several times in those one-year sprints to read the Bible, but I really knew only the most superficial part of the book. On my list of resolutions was "Master the message of Jeremiah." I admit I dawdled with that lengthy and troubling book for several months until



I realized that I could not casually approach Jeremiah: My study had to be intense and engaging. I began praying for God to help me see why I had such an urge to know this book.

I began a serious study of place names, nations and images found in the book. I began to see the work of God with Jeremiah and God's people, and from that I developed a fuller appreciation of my God and his working in the lives of an individual and a community.

"Master the message of Jeremiah" was not accomplished that year, but I made progress. I studied enough to see the main outlines and get into the work and mind of God as it comes from that book. I found my heart and my life renewed by what I found in this study. I even recognized how much Jesus and the writers of the New Testament knew of Jeremiah and his connection with God.

Deciding on priorities and objectives for a year has another important function. It can cause us to take stock of the gifts and talents God has given us. **Most people spend an inordinate amount of their lives regretting gifts they don't have. But God asks each person to use what he has.**



If you are great in dealing with people who are sick, you should be thinking of how to best use that talent for God. Find your talent and turn it into a ministry for your church family. Help build a house for Habitat for Humanity. Tutor in a school where children need individual help with English.

One thing I have learned about resolutions is that they should not be too ambitious, but they should be idealistic: They should not concentrate on physical life, but they should focus on your spirit and its health. Godly matters are more important than fleshly. And sometimes priorities should focus on the messes in our lives. Wounded relationships, neglected business and family ties may require attention and resolution before you can enjoy the peace and abundance in living God's promises.

I eagerly anticipate the New Year and the fresh start it brings. This year I am not making many resolutions about my care and maintenance. Instead, I am trying to think about ways I can serve the people in my life and the people of my community. Honoring God is far more important than my diet, my weight, my fitness. Openly confessing God is more important than my Bible reading schedule.

I wish you the happiest of New Years. I urge you to join me in taking stock to see how we can best honor God in the months ahead. If we all set priorities to encourage one another, we will be a blessed people whose joy will testify to the world that God is our hope. Let's join together in celebrating a new beginning of our personal spiritual lives in God.

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There once was a czar in Russia whose name was Rudolph the Great. He was standing in his house one day with his wife. He looked out the window and saw something happening. He says to his wife, "Look honey. Its raining." She, being the obstinate type, responded, "I don't think so, dear. I think its snowing." But Rudolph knew better. So he says to his wife, "Let's step outside and we'll find out." Lo and behold, they step outside and discover it was in fact rain. And Rudolph turns to his wife and replies, "I knew it was raining. Rudolph the Red knows rain, dear!"

REASONS RESOLUTIONS AREN'T KEPT

1. We make TOO MANY at one time.
2. The resolutions are TOO VAGUE.
3. We AREN'T SERIOUS about changing.
4. We pick the most DIFFICULT, UNSOLVABLE problems in our lives, or bad habits that have taken years to develop.
5. We make resolutions just to make them.
6. They are only "PIE CRUST PROMISES" ("easily made, easily broken" – Mary Poppins).
7. We treat the resolutions as DREAMS or VAGUE DESIRES – "wouldn't it be nice if that were to come true?".
8. We aren't willing to put out much effort.
9. We are AFRAID of the unknown.
10. We expect PERFECTION.
11. We STOPPED making resolutions because we couldn't keep them!

Top 10 New Year Resolutions

1. Lose Weight
2. Stop smoking
3. Stick to a budget
4. Save or earn more money
5. Find a better job
6. Become more organized
7. Exercise more
8. Be more patient with others
9. Eat better
10. Become a better person

LOOKING FOR SOMEONE TO SPEAK TO YOUR ORGANIZATION on mental health topics, or for retreats and women's events?

Rebecca speaks on a variety of topics—call today for a complete list!

Solid Rock Counseling Counseling Services Include:

- ♦ Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse
- ♦ Crisis and Abuse
- ♦ Anger Management
- ♦ Depression
- ♦ Grief/Loss
- ♦ Boundary Issues
- ♦ Conflict Resolution
- ♦ Communication Problems
- ♦ Premarital Counseling
- ♦ Marriage & Family Therapy
- ♦ Divorce Recovery
- ♦ ADD/AHDH Testing and Counseling
- ♦ OCD — Obsessive/Compulsive Disorder
- ♦ Bipolar/Manic Depression
- ♦ BPD — Borderline Personality Disorder

Counseling available for all emotional and mental health needs, for all ages.
In-person, telephone, and Internet sessions available.

If you need help, there's a way to get it!