



## Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

### Making peace with the holidays

One January years ago, I was having coffee with some moms when the conversation turned to Christmas — and how differently women and men handle the holiday.

A story that one mom shared summed up the gender gap that tends to appear this time of year.

It was a busy Saturday, and as she ran circles around the house, her mind racing with things to do (buy a tree! decorate it! decorate the house! bake! buy gifts! wrap gifts! prepare Christmas cards!), her husband was kicked back watching football. Every time she passed him in the den, her irritation rose. With a drink in hand and a crackling fire, he looked completely and annoyingly at *peace*.

Her husband was too relaxed to notice how busy she was, much less offer to help. With her hard work going unappreciated, a fire of another kind started inside her.

Around her fourth or fifth trip, this mom stopped moving. She looked at her husband and, with three simple words, shared her frustration.

*“Quit enjoying yourself!”* she told him.

Every mom having coffee that day burst into laughter at the story’s punch line and nodded emphatically. It was one of those, “Right on, sister. I know *exactly* what you’re talking about!” moments we all related to.

Because honestly, that scenario could have played out in any of our homes. What this mom did was enable us to laugh at ourselves for getting too busy, too stressed out and too worked up over Christmas.

Even when we know better.

Even when we vow to do things *differently* than we have in the past.

Even when we understand Christmas as a time to worship and welcome *Jesus* — not get sidetracked by shopping, parties, decorating, entertaining and creating magical memories.

Women always carry a heavy load, but in December, the demands multiply. And while I agree with the often shared advice to scale back, simplify and lower expectations of what Christmas should look like, there are some things we have no control over simplifying (like the costume our child needs for the holiday program, or the gift required for the ornament swap). Add several kids to the mix, and the demands add up.

On top of this, somebody has to pull Christmas together for the family. Somebody has to be the magic fairy who helps prepare the home and hearts inside it for a meaningful celebration.

Nine times out of 10, that somebody is Mom. If Mom doesn’t do it, it probably won’t happen.

And that’s why women have a hard time relaxing this time of year. That’s why we feel the weight of Christmas on our shoulders and get irritated when our husbands can enjoy

themselves and we can’t. Somehow the fear of Christmas not coming together doesn’t bother them. “What needs to get done will get done,” they’ll say, to which we’ll reply, “Of course it will, because I’m working my tail off!”

It’s comical in hindsight, but in moments of stress, the humor gets lost. It’s hard to laugh at ourselves when we’re overwhelmed. It’s hard to admit we’re overreacting when we’re frustrated yet also envious of how our husbands can take a break and rest.

So how do women make peace with the holidays? How do we delight in welcoming Jesus when December gets demanding? I think one explanation can be found in the Biblical story of Mary and Martha, two sisters whose differences became more readily apparent when Jesus came to visit.

While Martha, the practical and efficient sister, was busy preparing for the Lord, Martha wanted to sit at Jesus’ feet. Martha resented her sister for not working. She asked Jesus to tell Mary to help her. That’s when Jesus said:

*“Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:38-42)*

Being productive is a good trait. Our world needs productive people to build God’s kingdom. But when productivity interferes with what’s more important — like resting at the feet of Jesus — it stops being good. It hinders our ability to love Him.

The message to take away, for me as much as anyone, is to make time at Jesus’ feet. To let *Him* calm down our anxious souls. To know when to work — and when to stop. To understand that even when we’re strung-out, God loves us. He doesn’t want us carrying the weight of Christmas on our shoulders because the joy of Jesus’ birth is as much for us as it is for the children anxiously counting down the days.

This holiday season, let’s ease up a little. Let’s give ourselves permission to take breaks and relax on the couch with our husband. Most of all, let’s remember where Christmas began: humbly in a stable, in a manger padded with hay, among animals. It was all about the baby then, and it’s all about the baby now. And in this Prince of Peace we find the peace we need, the calm within the chaos that keeps us centered, sane, and deeply satisfied.

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