

## 4 Powerful questions to ask between Thanksgiving and New Year's

By Will Mancini



For too many people the joy of the holiday is as hollow as your neighbor's snowman lawn inflatable. Take your pick of the holiday stress increasers:

- Less time to get more done
- Increased expenses and financial pressure
- Awkward family gatherings at uncle Fred's place
- Having to get that "just right" gift
- Reminders of painful loss

If you're in ministry leadership, add the demands of special events and extra Christmas Eve services (that remind you how much people don't show up the other 50 weeks of the year.)

Are you a little tired of singing "peace on earth, good will to men" while navigating the commercialized whirlwind of Christmas? Are you dreading the holiday bulge that will come with more access to food and drink, while logging extra time on the couch?

***What if this holiday season could bring something dramatically different?***

***What if, instead of letting the holiday "happen to you," you reinvent it?***

***What if the holiday was the perfect onramp to a renewed living next year?***

Whether you want a more meaningful holiday or you're just feeling stuck right now—like a job problem or a relationship issue—I want to share some powerful questions and a simple exercise in this two-part series. Specifically, in part one, I will share four "what if" questions to refocus your holiday planning. Here are four questions to reinvent your holiday:

**Question #1: What if this holiday was about *reflecting more not eating more*?**

The stress of holiday is revealed by the extra pounds that come so easily between Thanksgiving and New Year's. It's hard to stop it: Grandma's apple pie, neighborhood spirits, and a culture of permission that encourages celebration with food. Any tendency to worry is relieved not by a continual attitude of prayer, but by an ever-present plate of sugar cookies.

But what if we turn our appetite for food into an appetite for good questions and thoughtful reflection? I know it sounds strange. But what if the holiday could be a time to feed your mind? Thanksgiving is a great time to pause, rest and reflect. Take a look at your calendar now through the end of the year. How many extra parties and get-togethers do you see? Why not add a few windows of time for personal evaluation?

**Question #2: What if this holiday was about *spending time not spending money*?**

Surveys show that most people feel financial stress during the holiday. What if you declare war against consumerism this year and instead, invest time with people? Relationship is the point of gift giving anyway, right?

Have fun with the challenge to spend less money on gifts and more time with the ones you love. If you do buy a gift, invest in an experience together, like a half-day excursion or an unexpected show. Buy a gift that naturally enhances time together.

Last summer, my daughter Abby and I discovered the game Bananagrams on a family vacation. With a seventeen-year old girl, it's not a stage of life where Dad and daughter naturally relish time together (from her point of view, of course). So it was special to find a game that we both really enjoyed, leading to hours of laughs together. Several weeks ago for my birthday, she gave me an updated version of the game. As you might imagine, the gift meant way more to me than any extravagant purchase.

**Question #3: What if this holiday was about *social freedom not social pressure*?**

Sometimes the expectations of others pushes us into patterns and habits. These routines aren't necessarily bad, as much as they are unexamined and unproductive. What do you do by default during the holidays that you really don't want to?

This powerful question creates some tension. On the one hand, as followers of Jesus, our instinct to love will take us to family events that we anticipate as much as the dentist's office. We will always embrace sacrificial acts of service that are not "fun." On the other hand, we might be allowing events and unrealistic expectations reign over our holiday schedule. How many times have you graciously said "no" to protect your most important values during the advent season? Who is in charge of your holiday: a parent or spouse, a boss or colleague, or a repeating set of unchallenged routines or outdated traditions?

**Question #4: What if this holiday was about *looking forward not looking back*?**

The final question for reinventing your holiday has to do with the possibility of painful memories. It's a natural time for grief, loss and broken relationships that refresh our emotions and bring deep sadness. This difficulty is especially true if the loss is recent.

But for some, the hurtful emotions of the holidays reflect missed opportunities to heal and move forward. Why not leverage the themes of the next six weeks to regain your optimism and refuel your faith: from giving thanks, to celebrating the birth of our Savior, to ushering in a new year.

Does that sound too good to be true? Think of these questions as a way of spending time with God and gaining a panoramic view of His work in your life story.