

Preparing for the Holidays

The holiday season is a special opportunity to refocus on the priorities in our lives; our family, our faith, our goals, our future, etc. We can easily miss this special time of the year when we become caught up in the rush of the season. All of the social events, present buying, travel arrangements, family expectations, and commercial pressures can stretch us to the limit. Without setting firm boundaries and planning ahead, this “special” season can become one of anxiety, guilt, stress and dread.

Here are a few suggestions for taking control of your holiday experience so the true meaning of the season is not lost in the fray:

Set Spending Limits. And stick to them! Without a set budget, our spending can go overboard. It is much easier to establish your spending limits before you begin shopping than it is once you’ve started. Often the emotion of finding a treasure that you really cannot afford can overtake your objectiveness if there is no plan or no resolve to stick to it. If you have ever found yourself in March or April still paying for your Christmas expenses, you can understand why this is important.

Be Deliberate. Set aside time to talk to your family about the meaning of Thanksgiving and Christmas – and follow through. Thanksgiving and Christmas are both celebrations of God’s grace. If you don’t take the initiative to rediscover this truth with your family, it’s probably safe to assume no one else will either. At Thanksgiving, discuss what you are thankful for with your family. At Christmas, read the Christmas story with your family and allow the meaning of these holidays to be rekindled in your celebrations. (You can do this even if your family only includes you.)

Allocate Your Time Carefully. Protect your private family time. Don’t lose this unique chance to build family traditions by allowing extended family and social obligations to crowd them out. Set aside specific activities for you and your spouse or children to establish as annual events, such as baking cookies and delivering them to neighbors (whom you may not otherwise know), watching a classic Christmas movie, celebrating the Christmas story, buying gifts for a needy family, or otherwise acknowledging God’s grace to all of us.

Let Go of the Guilt. When setting your boundaries on spending or time and money, you will no doubt experience pressure from those who do not understand. Any change always has its detractors. Even if they do not understand your reasoning, you have to resist the temptation of giving in to the expectations of others when they compromise your priorities for using your time and finances responsibly. After all, in violating your own priorities, who will be stuck with the VISA bill and the lost opportunities for new family traditions in the months to come?

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