

What Do You Want out of This Christmas Season?

Special memories?
Less stress?
Laughter ?
Closer family ties?
A new appreciation for the Savior?

None of these happens by accident. Many of us hope for a Christmas like this, as seen in the movies (at least the old ones). The likelihood of experiencing a Christmas full of joy, pleasant memories and spiritual meaning is directly related to our level of planning for it.

What kinds of memories do you want to create? Is it the joy on your kids faces when they help you make the Christmas cookies, when they see a certain present, or when they give a certain gift? Is it the smells of the season, such as cooking your favorite treats? Is it spending time with extended family? In order to create pleasant memories, we have to guard against the anxieties that can take away from the joy of those events. Those may include overloading your schedule with holiday events, worrying about spending too much money, over committing your time, or family hostilities. You, however, have the power to keep those things from undermining your Christmas experience. You can do this through planning, prioritizing your time, saying “no” when opportunities come up that do not reflect your Christmas priorities, and, mostly, by maintaining your own positive attitude.

If you want a more spiritually meaningful Christmas experience, plan for it. Are you focused on nurturing this kind of experience through your Bible study, church attendance, prayer time, family devotions? If not, you will find that the time quickly sneaks up on you, Christmas has come and gone and you have missed another opportunity to achieve goals which reflect your values. Begin now by working a daily plan that will produce spiritual meaning for you and your children. Otherwise, you will simply survive the holidays with nothing meaningful to show for it.

If you want closer ties with extended family, you can make arrangements to spend your time with them more purposely. Perhaps that means arriving earlier for family gatherings. It may mean buying some of your Christmas dinner items already prepared and spending less time cooking. You may want to use this time to re-create old memories or to share aspects of your family heritage with your children. If there are unresolved issues with certain family members, determine not to allow that to detract from the Christmas experience for you and your family.

You can also begin new traditions that make the season memorable. Memories can be created and solidified during the holiday time off by getting out old photos and retelling

old family stories. This creates memories in itself, as well as helping to establish a sense of belonging and identity in your children. Their sense of cultural appreciation can be enhanced as they hear stories about their family, where it came from and how it became what it is today. These are gifts no one can take away from them.

Larry Deavers is Executive Director of Family Counseling Service.

© *Family Counseling Service 2010.*