

10 Tips to Help You Get Ready for the Holidays

by Jim Burns, Ph.D.

For many of us, the holiday season is a time that is anticipated with both joy and anxiety. Sure, we love the celebrations, the family traditions, and we cherish the memories of holidays gone by; but along with them, we add the stresses of preparation, expectations and the fear of letdowns, or family squabbles that we have experienced in the past. Here are ten tips that I've found to be helpful in getting ready for an enjoyable, meaningful holiday season.

1. Set manageable expectations. Spend some time now setting realistic and manageable expectations for your holiday season. Understand that you can't do everything! Be realistic about what you can do. Make a priority list of your most important events and activities for you and your family. Then, pace yourself. Organize your time. Keep in mind that it's the holiday "season" (not "day") and spread out your activities to lessen stress and increase enjoyment.

2. Remember the holiday season does not eliminate sadness or loneliness. Problems and difficulties arise even during the holiday season. And, for some, the holiday season evokes painful memories of events or the loss of loved ones in the past. Give room for yourself and your family to experience these feelings. Try not to let them become a consuming focus. Make an effort to work through present challenges and conflicts.

3. Acknowledge the past, but look toward the future. Life brings changes. Each season of life is different. Determine to enjoy this holiday season for what it is. Acknowledging the past, whether it was good or bad, is appropriate. But, if you find that this year has been a rough one and you don't anticipate having the best holiday season ever, try not to set yourself up by comparing today with the "good old days." Take advantage of the joys the present holiday season has to offer.

4. Develop and encourage a life of gratitude. Gratitude is an attribute that transcends circumstances. No matter what your circumstances, I believe there is reason to be thankful in them. Your circumstances may never change, but your attitude toward them can change...and this can make all the difference. Christians have a special reason to adopt the attitude of gratitude, because we know that whatever comes, our times are in God's hands. It was Jesus who said, in effect, "So don't be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrow, too." (See Matthew 6:34.)

If you want to help your kids develop an attitude of gratitude, I encourage you to try an experiment that might radically influence your family. It's called "Thank Therapy." Thank Therapy is simply focusing on the many things in your life for which you can be

thankful. Get started by having each family member create individual lists, of “Twenty Reasons Why I’m Thankful.” Thank Therapy is simply an act of the will to concentrate on the good and not the bad.

5. Do something for someone else. One of the ways we can demonstrate that we are grateful to God for His many blessings is to help others. To get more out of this holiday season, try getting involved in serving others. For some great ideas, read HomeWord’s free online article, “Helping Others at the Holiday Season.”

6. Enjoy activities that are cheap or free. There are many good holiday-related activities that will add to your family’s enjoyment, such as driving around to look at holiday decorations, baking Christmas cookies, going window-shopping, and playing in the snow.

7. Enjoy a family holiday tradition. Traditions provide opportunities to keep your family’s legacy going. They create meaningful memories. So, from the silly to the sentimental, if your family has some holiday traditions, if possible, be sure to include them in your holiday activity plans.

8. Try something new. Celebrate the holidays in a new way. You may just create a new tradition that will keep going for generations!

9. Spend money responsibly. The holiday season brings with it a big temptation to spend money beyond your means and to rack up significant credit card debt, especially when it comes to purchasing Christmas presents for your family. Just say no! While your family may be thrilled by your gifts on Christmas Day, don’t forget that come springtime, your kids may well have laid aside or forgotten those gifts, even while you’re struggling to make the payments. Decide now to be financially responsible this holiday season!

10. Carve out some time for yourself! Don’t take on all of the responsibilities of your family’s holiday celebrations by yourself. Share the load. Create some space during the holidays for you to recharge your own batteries.