

5 Brilliant Ideas to Make Christmas a Rejuvenating Joy, Not a Dreadful Burden

Does the thought of Christmas stress you out? Are you more focused on your to-do list than the true meaning of the season? Do you stay up at night worrying about how you're going to do it all?

I spent many years doing exactly that. The thought of Christmas brought dread, not joy. Then one year I decided to make a change. What was the use of spending hours baking when I was cranky with my family? What was the point of attending tons of holiday events when I didn't have time to celebrate simple holiday traditions? That's when I decided not to let myself get wrapped up with the busyness and instead to focus on what would bring joy to my Christmas. Here are five ways to do that:

1. Focus on three favorite Christmas traditions instead of trying to do everything. Trying to do everything will make you tired and overwhelmed. By choosing your favorite traditions, you can take time to really enjoy them. The three traditions we chose were decorating the Christmas tree together, driving around to look at Christmas lights and decorating sugar cookies. Focusing on a few simple things was more fun for everyone.

2. Lower your expectations. In our minds, we picture our time together as a family reflective of those holiday Hallmark commercials, and we're highly disappointed when we they don't turn out that way. Realize your kids will be messy when making cookies. Know your opinionated aunt will still be opinionated at those holiday gatherings. Try to be realistic when making plans instead of being disappointed in the long run.

3. Put away your wallet and connect with your heart. Instead of spending hours hunting down the perfect gift, spend that time with your kids. Kids love time with their parents playing and laughing. Let them choose the game or activity. Pick a holiday movie to watch together. Get on the floor and build a Santa's workshop with Legos. Dance to your favorite holiday songs.

4. Focus on the true meaning of the season. Too often we get distracted from what Christmas is all about. During the weeks before Christmas, the one thing that settles my soul is centering my thoughts on Jesus. I do this through daily Bible reading and prayer. One great reading plan is free from . I love this plan because it includes Scriptures from the Old and New Testaments.

5. Memorize a Scripture verse. Whenever frantic thoughts try to invade your mind this season, replace them with God's truth. Here's a verse to memorize: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace" (Is. 9:6). Plant God's Word in your heart and pull it up whenever you feel yourself becoming worried or fretful. God's Word reminds us who the true gift of Christmas is. We can remember—no matter what we have or don't have this holiday season—the gift of Jesus is always available, always free and always just what we need to bring us joy.

How about you? What brings you Christmas joy? {eoa}

Tricia Goyer *has written more than 35 books, including both novels that delight and entertain readers and nonfiction titles that offer encouragement and hope. She has also published more than 500 articles in national publications such as Guideposts, Thriving Family, Proverbs 31 and HomeLife Magazine.*