

Vital Tips for True Holiday Joy

Cooler weather. Peppermint mochas. Hallmark movies! The holidays. Yes, we're approaching that time of year again.

For many, it's wonderful. For others, this time of year can be quite chaotic.

The pressure of figuring out what to buy. Making travel arrangements. Deciding which family members to spend the holidays with.

Some really not-so-fun feelings can also accompany our holiday journeys. I just lost my grandmother, and Josh's dad went to be with Jesus a year ago this week. The holidays can conjure up feelings of grief, or perhaps the weather itself ushers in the "winter blues."

Josh and I try—and I say, "try"—to talk about the upcoming holidays ahead of time. We pray and think through how we can make the most of it as a family. Having little kids can make it a bit more chaotic for us, but it can also make it a lot more precious too.

What #TeamStraub has found out is that, without a plan, it's too easy to allow the chaos and busyness to rob us from being truly present with those we love most, especially one another.

We love the awe and wonder of the holiday season and want to actually enjoy it, not endure it. Here are some of the principles we follow to help us keep our sanity—and remain present—through the holidays.

the Holiday Season

Eliminate the Chaos: In spite of what everybody else is doing, choose to simplify your life this holiday season. If shopping

is a major stressor for you, do it online this year. We use Amazon Prime for free shipping, no crowds, less headaches and more meaningful family time together.

Choose the activities and events that matter most to your family. Don't waste time standing in long lines trying to wrangle your kids to behave when everything in you feels like misbehaving yourself in these moments. Only endure lines for activities that you and your kids will remember with fondness.

And if you're looking for a great deal, wait until after Christmas to do some of your shopping. There's no better way to save time and money than by putting your family first before Christmas, and shopping after it. You don't have to follow the status quo.

NO! When we say "yes" to one thing, we say "no" to something else. Don't let the people or traditions you love the most be pushed out because you said yes to unnecessary events or out of an unhealthy obligation. Set family boundaries by not packing your schedule full of holiday events or—if you're already overcommitted—events you're in charge of.

Depending on the relational condition of your family, there may be functions this year you need to say no to. If alcoholic or verbally and emotionally abusive people in your family will be present, it may do you—and your kids—well to avoid them.

Juggle Your Relationships Ahead of Time. If you foresee potential conflict with family members during upcoming holiday functions and are still choosing to go, be proactive to engage those family members ahead of time. Call or visit them. Find out what is going on in their lives. Build trust with your family in advance so it's less awkward when everyone is together.

Only Expect What's Given. The greatest predictor of future behavior is past behavior. If you and your dad have a rocky past and have not spoken in six months, don't expect all

wounds to be healed on Thanksgiving Day or Christmas morning. Also, if your family is in turmoil, don't expect to be the "fixer" over the holidays. Unmet expectations lead to the biggest disappointments. Set realistic expectations, and you won't be let down.

You. This is arguably the most important one. Josh and I just released a podcast episode talking about this very topic: "Taking Care of Yourself as a Parent." Take time for you this Christmas. Carve out moments each day to pray, meditate, and soak in the sights, sounds, tastes and smells of the season. If you're not connecting with Jesus, it's hard to celebrate his birth in a meaningful way. Be creative with this time and combine it with exercise, reading or a hot bath. You can't give to your family from an empty tank.

If you have little kids like us, choose to spend less money this year on other things and find a sitter for a few holiday date nights in the month of December. Go to a Christmas parade. Drink peppermint mochas. And by all means, don't feel guilty for spending the money on yourself. As young parents, you sacrifice all year long and deserve the memories.

Invite Others to Help You. If you're the primary cook, host or family coordinator of holiday festivities, invite your spouse, kids, extended family or friends to help you pick up items at the grocery store, decorate and even cook. Delegate responsibilities to your children and help them learn new skills. If cooking is too much, consider a potluck this year. This is a great opportunity to turn mundane and stressful tasks into life-giving family memories.

Nightly Family Devotions. There is no better time to bring your immediate family together to learn about Jesus than the Christmas season. We have a free Advent family experience called the 25 Characters of the Christmas story. Beginning December 1 and leading up to Christmas day, we look at the character traits and life-lessons of these characters to

instill in our children. To join us and 2,000 other families journeying together through these characters, sign up [here](#). Trust us—the activities alone are worth it!

Give Back. We have found, too, that there is no better season to show your kids the beauty of giving your time and money. Some of our greatest Christmas memories are giving to and visiting families in need. Volunteering at your local homeless shelters, singing carols at nursing homes (our favorite) or helping neighbors you know can be more joyful for you than those you are blessing.

And one final thought: Start traditions in your family you want your kids to pass on to their own. For there's no better way—or season—to teach our kids to love God and love others than to model it for them now.

Here's to . *your* holiday season!

Do you have ways you enjoy the holiday season? Share them with us! {[eoa](#)}

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