

# Maximizing Meaning This Holiday Season

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The Holiday Frenzy...we all feel it, often fear it, and try to fight it. Our yearly vow to slow down and appreciate the meaning of the holidays often intersects with our culture's imposition – a demand for us to hurry, buy, bake, perform, decorate, and \_\_\_\_\_ (I'm sure you can fill in the blank here)! In order to fight the frenzy that robs us of holiday joy, remember to do these 3 things this season: *Reflect, Connect and Give Thanks*.

**Reflect** - Prioritize what you value the most this this season. When we miss this opportunity, it is all too simple to be whisked away in a sea of Black Friday ads before we even knew what hit us!

Practical Tips for Reflection:

- Reflect on your experiences over your lifetime of holidays. What memories are most meaningful and significant? What was involved? We can learn from the positive (and also the not-so-positive) experiences about what is most important. Consider making this a family conversation and create this list together.
- Once these values are prioritized, ask yourself, "How is \_\_\_\_\_ cultivating these values?" For example, if togetherness, shared spirituality, and gratitude are important values for you this season, decorating the house on a solo mission may be swapped for choosing one room, doing it as a family with shared conversation, and making a new tradition.
- Ask yourself the honest question, "Is this life-giving?" Am I doing this as a means to cultivate the values I identified, or is this about pleasing, performance, or recognition? If you courageously identify it is about the latter, this may lead you to the next point of reflection...
- What do I need to let go of this year? In making any change, it is important to identify our goals, but equally important to identify barriers that derail our energy towards doing what is good.

**Connect** - Most would agree that part of maximizing meaning during the holidays is by simply being together. We are created for connection, and the holidays are a perfect opportunity to prioritize our most human need.

Practical Tips for Connection:

- Foster opportunities for authentic and vulnerable connection. One easy way to do this is by *DIS*connecting from social media and electronics for a time and simply making yourself available. Traditions become meaningful memories when connections are made.
- Identify those most important in your life and give the gift of time. The holidays can be a difficult time, especially for those who are facing loss, battling depression, or other painful life circumstances. Your love, demonstrated by your presence, care, and time, is a meaningful opportunity for both parties. *You won't regret time spent with your loved ones.*
- On a very practical level, one thing you may consider letting go of is having the house in tip-top entertaining shape. Let your loved ones see the real you, model authenticity and the messy joys of doing life together. You will be surprised to know how this gifts you and them. Haven't you had this experience when you see a pile of dishes overflowing at friend's home? *Oh, thank goodness – I'm not the only one.*
- Overwhelmed by baking, wrapping, or cleaning to-do lists? Consider doing it together. Invite a few loved ones over for a wrapping party, cookie-baking marathon, or form your own cleaning crew and rotate

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houses for a couple hours at a time. Everyone wins – we all cross it off our lists and have memories to boot.

- Serve together. When we serve, it connects us with ourselves, others and the heart of God. Consider asking each family member to choose a serving opportunity that the family will do together.
  - *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms – 1 Peter 4:10*
- Avoid gift-giving perfectionism. There is a tendency in this perfectionism for gift-giving to become more about us than the person we are giving the gift. The best way to have meaningful gift-giving is a gift that keeps giving after the unwrapping. Consider gifts that connect us: tickets for both of you to a play, a sporting event, a night out at their favorite restaurant, a fishing trip, or a girl's weekend. The opportunities are endless once we identify what our loved ones value the most. *Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).*

***Give Thanks*** – Gratitude has always been a cornerstone of faith practice, but its recent attention in the behavioral science field is backing the benefits of how God designed us to praise and worship Him - *Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (1 Thessalonians 5:18)*. It turns out science is reiterating how gratitude helps us to live well. Studies have shown gratitude is positively correlated with subjective experiences of happiness and life satisfaction, better health and stronger connection with others. Gratitude helps us not only make holidays more meaningful, but also to live well 365 days a year. *I came that they may have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10)*.

## **Practical Tips:**

- Either on your own or with loved ones, recall the blessings from the past year for which you can give thanks. Sometimes the good gifts we have received can be quickly forgotten and overshadowed by today's anxiety or worry. Giving thanks *in all circumstances* reminds us that not every good gift seems happy at the moment. Challenge yourself to see the goodness even in difficult times.
- Even better, start a new tradition this year. As you recognize God's provision or blessing, write it down and put in a safe place. This time next year, you can read aloud as a family.
- Spread the gift! Start telling people in your life that you are grateful for them and the little things they do to bless your life. The response may be so great that you will do it on a regular basis.

The holidays will likely still be busy and frenzied at times, but by maximize meaning, the holidays can be life-giving instead of simply draining!