

Christmas Made Simple: More Fun, Less Stress

December is busy. There's no way around it. With kids home from school, parties to attend, gifts to buy - its very easy to get so distracted and caught up in the rush that we miss out on what Christmas is really about. Here are some tips to simplify this Christmas season so that you can reflect on God's many gifts to us and appreciate the time shared with friends and family.

Christmas Chore Schedule:

January - October: Complete all Christmas gift buying. *For more on gift giving tips see [Gift Giving: The Easy Way](#).*

1st Week of November: Fill out Christmas cards or write Christmas letters. Put them in their envelopes, seal the envelopes, place stamp and mailing labels on the envelopes. Set aside to mail later.

2nd Week of November: Begin wrapping gifts. You don't necessarily have to wrap all gifts this week, but focus on getting the bulk of your wrapping finished.

3rd Week of November: Plan your calendar. Pencil in family traditions or holiday parties that you don't want to miss.

4th Week of November: Enjoy Thanksgiving worry free.

1st Week of December: Drop Christmas cards in the mail. Decorate your house - including your tree (note: this can be done the weekend after Thanksgiving, allowing you to get a head start on baking).

2nd Week of December: Set aside some time to bake. Cookies can be baked and then frozen (good as new when they thaw) for holiday parties, children's school parties, Christmas gifts, or just a family treat. This week you should also make sure gifts to out of town friends and family get mailed.

Maintain Focus (and Sanity!) During the Holiday Season:

- 1. Perspective** - Christmas isn't really about buying stuff, decorating trees and baking cookies. We enjoy those things and cherish the family traditions and memories that go along with them but we need to maintain a correct perspective on the true meaning of Christmas. Suggestions to help you with perspective: donate food to a shelter or food bank, volunteer at a soup kitchen or other non-profit, help children pick out toys to give away/donate, make extra effort to be kind to those you come in contact with, set aside time for intentional reflection on the birth of Jesus and the many blessings God has given.
- 2. Simplify Decorations** - I love Christmas decor as much as anyone. I would love to walk into a Christmas wonderland each time I walked through the doors of my house. Realistically, I don't have the time or energy for that amount of decoration. Strive to decorate with pieces you love and enjoy. Make an effort to make your home special for your family. But keep in mind that your time and energy are extremely valuable. Time spent with your children is more important than pretty decorations. Donate what you don't use rather than keeping it in storage.
- 3. Share the Work** - Ask guests to bring a dish to share when you invite them to your holiday gathering. Your friends won't mind the little effort it takes to bring one dish and it will greatly lessen your responsibility. If you don't like surprises, you can specify the type of dish each guest brings so you don't end up with four plates of brownies.
- 4. Enjoy Gift Wrapping** - Make a conscious decision to enjoy wrapping gifts. Set aside a couple hours of uninterrupted time. Turn on Christmas music. Make hot chocolate. Dance a little.
- 5. Family Traditions** - Whether you have 17 rituals your family participates in each year or only two, realize the importance of observing those traditions and make sure they don't get lost in the holiday shuffle. If you don't have any family traditions, try to start one this year. Even something as simple as driving around to look at Christmas lights can create lasting memories for your family.

Prepare for Next Year:

1. **Take Note** - Keep track of recipes you enjoyed. Make a note of things that worked (or didn't work). Take pictures of your house once all decorations are up - this way you'll know exactly where things go next year.
2. **Store Decorations Properly** - Make sure your lights, garland, etc. are packed neatly to prevent damage and make unwinding them easy. Wrap breakables to keep them safe. Store ornaments in an ornament box with dividers (don't keep dozens of individual boxes). Label boxes clearly and be mindful of moisture, insects, etc. that may cause damage.
3. **Update Address List** - Make note of any addresses that changed. Remove/add names as needed.
4. **Stock Up** - Take advantage of after Christmas sales to replenish your wrapping supplies, purchase Christmas cards, maybe even a few gifts. *For more on day after Christmas shopping see [Survival Guide: Day After Christmas Shopping](#).*

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