

Simply Christmas



No one yearns for a more complicated holiday season. Simplicity brings freedom, especially in the midst of hectic schedules, high expectations, and other pressures. Our celebrations should be about what matters most to us, but we have to be intentional to make that happen. Instead of going on auto-pilot, consider these eight ideas for a more joyful, faith-filled Christmas.

Stop and Be Intentional

Plan a household gathering—or set time aside for yourself—to decide how you want your holidays to be this year. What might you do differently? Brainstorm creatively, then refine your ideas and reach consensus. Find a checklist on the next page.

Set Good Expectations

Be clear about your holiday intentions early, from children's gifts to how elaborate your parties will be and how you want to spend time together.

Make Room For God

How can we make room for God's gift of Jesus to us this holiday season? Set intentions for personal and family prayer (such as around an Advent wreath).

Make Room For The Needy

We are especially challenged to reach out to those in need during the holiday season. Some choose to set aside a percentage of their holiday giving charitably.

Change Slowly But Surely

Don't try to dramatically change everything this year if that will meet with strong resistance and frustration. Try making a couple meaningful changes each year.



Watch the Work

Are there members in your family who become stressed during the holiday season because they do a disproportional amount of the work (cooking, decorating, shopping)? How can you change that this year?

Give Intentionally

Find creative ways to make gift-giving more fun, personal, practical, sustainable, and joyful. Give quality over quantity. Prioritize presence over presents. Look for ideas on the next page.

Start a New Tradition

Is it time to try a new activity that will bring you closer together with family or friends? Let go of a less life-giving activity to make room for this one.



Ideas for Creative Gifts and More

GIVE THE GIFT OF TIME by creating your own gift card for a service (e.g., babysitting, car wash, petsitting, chores, making dinner, organizing an outing).

GIVE A HANDMADE GIFT like a memoir of cherished memories with that person, a book of family recipes, a collage of pictures and mementos, or a calendar filled with the birthdays and anniversaries of friends and family.

OFFER TO TEACH A SKILL YOU POSSESS (e.g., knitting, photography, computer skills, financial planning, a foreign language, music lessons, cooking).

CONSIDER LESS COMMERCIAL GIFTS for children, such as arts/crafts supplies, books, a magnifying glass, or building blocks.

CREATE A PAPERLESS HOLIDAY LETTER on the computer and email it to friends and family.

HAVE A WHITE ELEPHANT PARTY instead of a traditional gift exchange, where each person brings a wrapped secondhand item in good condition.

DRAW NAMES IN YOUR FAMILY FOR GIFT-GIVING (for extra fun and surprise, make it "Secret Santas"), so that you can put more time and thought into one gift instead of having to give to several people.

INVITE USED ITEMS by telling others that you are happy to receive them. Give used items to those who respond that they welcome them also.

GIVE BACK TO YOUR COMMUNITY by preparing care packages for the homeless, or volunteering at an organization to help those in need during the holiday season.

ADOPT A "LESS IS MORE" ATTITUDE toward holiday decorating. Opt for natural trimmings such as clippings from local evergreens and holly bushes.

SAVE PAPER by wrapping gifts in newspaper comics, old maps, phone book, paper bags decorated with markers, or other reused paper. Kids will enjoy the decorating process.

PREPARE YOUR HOLIDAY MEALS with as many seasonal, locally grown, and/or organic foods as possible.

Ideas provided by the Center for a New American Dream.

A few hundred years ago, the Puritans banned the celebration of Christmas because they thought it was frivolous and that the joyousness was inappropriate to true Christian piety.

That's not where we are. We believe in the joy and laughter and meaning that Christmas can bring. We also believe that despite the pressure from our consumer culture, our celebrations of Christmas should make sense with the values of Christ who was born in simple surroundings.

Doyle Burbank-Williams
Simple Living Works

Planning Checklist

For the items on this list, consider the following questions:

- ✧ **Why** do we do this activity? Personal beliefs? Needs? Tradition? Habit?
- ✧ **How** are we going to do it? The same or differently than before?
- ✧ **Where** will we do it?
- ✧ **Who** will do the work? Can we divide up the tasks differently?
- ✧ **How much** will we spend? Are we willing to spend less on ourselves and give more to the truly needy?
- ✧ **Are the fruits** of this activity worth the effort involved?

Decorations

- Advent wreath
- Manger scene
- Tree/greens
- Outside decorations

Prayer/Worship

- Personal
- Family
- Church

Preparations

- Shopping
- Gift wrapping
- Travel arrangements
- Cards or letters

Gifts

- Close family
- Others
- Donations
- Service providers

Entertaining

- Hosting parties
- Holiday meals

Events

- Attending parties
- Family traditions

For more simple Christmas ideas, check out these great sites:

- ▶ SimplifyHolidays.org (Center for the New American Dream)
- ▶ BuyNothingChristmas.org (started by Canadian Mennonites)