

## SO, WHAT ARE YOU DOING FOR CHRISTMAS?

It's August, with nary a snowflake in sight, so why would I be thinking about Christmas?

Years ago, I knew that if I wanted my family to still like being related to me on December 26<sup>th</sup>, something had to change. Some things.

I remember, with alarming clarity, wrapping gifts and packing shipping boxes at 4:00am, baking cookies that felt like a miserable forced march, spending too much money, eating too much food, and, worst of all, entertaining people who had invited me because I had invited them because they had invited me... And who paid the biggest price? My family and me.

Most of us find our way to simpler alternatives that reflect our deepest beliefs and values, because we've gotten it so out of balance, because we have made ourselves and others miserable, because this holy season has not been Good News for us.

Let's unpack the most common questions, one at a time.

Are there really alternatives, or the possibility of living simply during the Christmas season? Yes, of course, there are! You make choices every day to do things in the same old way. How is that working for you, when you fall into bed exhausted, when you feel like the Grinch Who Stole Christmas, and wish it was December 26<sup>th</sup>, when you dread your credit card bills in January, when you grit your teeth at the thought of going out to one more gala party, when the children and other beloveds in your life take back seat to those you don't even like that well?

How might I pull that off? Trust me, I am a work in progress; and that is what it takes – perpetual mindfulness. This is the perfect time to sit down with your family and do the Family Activities below. Be intentional. Get the word out now.

What about the expectations of my family and friends? Expect push back; people will often try to force us back to the old familiar patterns, even if they were unpleasant. Enlist the support of others who think as you do, who want to reclaim Christmas as the season of God's gift to us in Jesus Christ. Do it now. (That's the reason for this article in August.) Give them time to adjust. Or be prepared to discover that they, too, aren't happy with the way things have been and are ready for a change!

What price would I pay? Short term, you may be unpopular. Short term, there may be pressure on you to go back to the old way of doing it.

What's in it for me? Joy. Delight. Christmas will be Good News for you this year, consistent with your faith and your values. You will have a lively sense of being in the presence of God, who loved you and the world so much that he sent his only son. This year, you will receive that gift.

## FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Take a careful ... and brutally honest ... look at your checkbook, credit card debt, and your calendar. How much will you spend, in time and money, for Christmas this year? Make a time and money budget NOW!
2. Ask each member of your family, "What one thing do you need to experience this season to make it feel that Christmas has come for you?" Then, focus on those things.
3. Contact those with whom you traditionally celebrate Christmas. Invite them to think about new ways of doing Christmas celebrations. Consider a potluck dinner instead of a formal one; a charitable gift in honor of someone, rather than something they need to exchange; a service project together, rather than expensive tickets to an event.
4. Leave space on your calendar for Sabbath time, being fully present with God and with one another, savoring this holy season.
5. And plan a time to evaluate the changes. What are your new traditions? What still needs some refining? Thank God for all of the gifts of this season.