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Homeschooling Through the Holidays

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Dear Friends,

The holiday season is upon us, and we are grateful for the blessed gift of a Savior who bears our burdens and offers us new life. This month as you add to your homeschooling day time to bake cookies, enjoy visits from friends and families, and make memories with your children, there may be moments when energy runs low and spirits sag. Homeschooling does not happen in a vacuum—it happens in the midst of life! Whether Christmas or another religious holiday is celebrated in your home, prepare for such times by making adjustments to your homeschooling schedule. Then you will be able to meet the extra demands in a better frame of mind.

Make Changes in Your Daily School Routine

As former homeschool moms, we remember how December was usually full of activities that competed with school time. Church play rehearsals, Christmas concerts, get-togethers with relatives, crafting special gifts, and other events eat up time. Don't feel guilty about cutting back on course assignments by eliminating 3-5 problems from each math lesson, scaling back on composition writing, or skimming over a chapter in history. Also, look for academic content in the holiday activities in which your teens participate. For example, count that concert attendance as part of a music course, incorporate family seasonal reading time into the literature class, and log the hours your teen spends Christmas caroling as part of her community service. You'll see that these activities then become a part of your schooling for December instead of being perceived as distractions from school.

We also recommend that you take extra care to maintain control over your calendar during the holidays. Be purposeful in scheduling time of relaxation for you and your teens. Plan some evenings when everyone will be at home together and you can enjoy hot chocolate and a Christmas movie classic or enjoy reading Scripture or singing Handel's "Messiah!" The many wonderful opportunities available during the holidays will require deliberate restraint to guard against exhaustion. Taking a hard look at the calendar before it becomes overloaded will reap good fruit.

Hold Expectations Lightly

Did you know studies show that discouragement and despair are heightened during the holiday season? The majority of us have experienced this firsthand. The main reason tends to be unmet expectations. We envision and expect a perfect holiday with no personal conflicts, no financial concerns, and no lack of cooperation from teens. When this scenario fails to present itself, we are disappointed.

In order to refocus your thoughts, make an honest assessment of your expectations for the holidays and ask the Lord for wisdom in knowing which ones He would have you release to Him. If relations with extended family are strained, consider spending quiet time in prayer for these relatives asking the Lord to give you grace to cope with them.

If your teen's lack of cooperation is more evident during the holidays, take great care not to respond in anger but to ask the Lord for an opportunity each day to encourage your teen or to tell him that you love him. The Lord may use these kindnesses to change his heart.

If money for gift giving is non-existent, focus on giving gifts of time and abilities. For example, have each family member make a coupon book for others in the family. A teen might present a coupon to a sibling that offers to make his bed for a month. A mom

can give out coupons to each child for a batch of homemade cookies. Other coupons could provide time for a hike or walk in the park or making a special meal. Another suggestion came from a mom whose son had very little money to spend on gifts, so she asked him to memorize a poem from "Valley of Vision" (a collection of Puritan prayers). When he recited it to her from memory, it was music to her ears; and it represented a love gift of time from her son. Perhaps there is a passage or chapter in Scripture that your teen could memorize for you--it doesn't cost a penny, but it is a heartfelt gesture.

Here are some additional ideas to fend off low spirits and melancholy you may feel during December. Make a priority of staying in the Word of God--no matter how busy you are! You can't be refreshed if you aren't drinking in and meditating on truth. Perhaps you'll want to purchase a special Christmas devotional for the month to do with your teens or perhaps schedule time to read over the Christmas story as a family. During your homeschool day, play Christmas carols as background music. These songs are rich in lyrics, beautiful in melody, and they will set a wonderful atmosphere in your home.

You and your teens may enjoy planning a simple way to bless someone less fortunate. It may be purchasing gifts for Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree ministry <http://www.hslida.org/elink.asp?id=7291> or for a family in your neighborhood or church who is experiencing difficult times this season. Other ideas include baking cookies and delivering them to volunteer fire departments, visiting the elderly in nursing homes as your teen uses his or her musical talents to brighten the residents' day, or setting aside a few extra minutes during each school day to pray for specific servicemen and women who will be spending Christmas far away from friends and family.

Taking Time to Grieve

The holidays accentuate heartaches. If you are in the midst of a particularly painful time, we extend our sympathies to you. We offer you the hope that the Lord is your provider, redeemer, and restorer. He carries you on His heart because He is the healer of broken hearts. Whatever your situation, you are not alone. The Lord promises to give you comfort, so cry out to Him and seek His face.

If you are fortunate not to be experiencing grief this holiday season, ask the Lord for awareness of those in the homeschooling community who may desire help, solace, or comfort. Your involvement may be to open your home for some needed fellowship, to open your wallet to meet a particular financial necessity, or to open the Word of God and share an encouragement verse by way of a personal note.

If you don't know of anyone needing help and feel so led, consider making a donation to the Home School Foundation, an affiliate of the Home School Legal Defense Association that channels donations to homeschooling families in want.

Final Thought

We encourage you to pray diligently during December so that exhaustion, discouragement, and disappointment will not be the hallmarks of your holiday season! May the Lord give you an abundance of joy and peace as you celebrate His birthday. He is the perfect gift coming down from the Father of lights.

Until next month, when we share some resource suggestions for parenting teens, we pray that you and your families are blessed with much energy, encouragement, and edification this holiday season.

Merry Christmas,
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