

November 12, 2017  
ONE STEP: Slow Down  
Psalm 146

It feels like just last week I was dressed as a monkey, going trick-er-treating with my children, and now I am buying Christmas presents. What about you? Have the Christmas lists started already?

(2) We are mere weeks away from the holiday craziness...

Gotta clean the house.

Is my turkey big enough?

When do I need to mail the gifts?

Do the kids still have dress shoes that fit for the holiday concert?

Did I remember to pick up that teacher gift?

And when do we need to have the White Gift food donations to the church??

It seems that every year, I have to stop myself in the middle of all the insanity and remind myself that the holidays are about connecting.

Not shopping.

Not wrapping.

Not cleaning.

Not trying to make everything perfect and fit everything in -- just taking time to connect with family and friends.

(3) Next week is Thanksgiving...

In 5 weeks it will be Christmas...

It's so easy to let Thanksgiving become just another day, rather than a celebration of family and, most important, a time to thank God for what He has done in our lives.

And Christmas is not simply a day for exchanging presents and cards. It is not simply a holiday; it is a holy day. Unfortunately, Christmas has become a holiday, more secular than sacred.

How do we take back our holy days? How do we slow down and enjoy the holidays. How do we let God become the focus and not the turkey, presents, or a clean home?

FAMILYLIFE says that it's about "misplaced priorities; we're missing something when we allow a holiday like Thanksgiving to slip away and become just another shopping day.

**(4) Every week we have talked about growing in a discipleship area.** Today our topic and steps revolve around slowing down, including God into our holidays, and remembering what they are truly about. So which step are you on? How can you take ONE STEP?

The steps today are:

Thanksgiving/Christmas is just another day.

I'm too busy/stressed to talk about the holidays right now.

The holidays are important, but I realize I need to slow down to enjoy them.

The holidays are holy days to be with God and family.

I don't know how to save Thanksgiving or Christmas in our culture, but I do know we have the power to save it in our own families. If you want to keep Thanksgiving from becoming a meaningless holiday, it will require a team effort. In order to take ONE STEP we need to be intentional this year.

**(5) Begin by answering these questions together:**

Are we happy with the way we celebrate?

**(6) What can we do to enjoy each other more this year?**

**(7) How can we show more gratitude within and beyond the family?**

**(8) What can we do to focus more on God this year?**

I want to lift up a few ideas.

**(9) 1. Declare a digital holiday.** I don't think I can overstate how much digital technology—especially the smartphone—has changed the way we relate to one another over the last decade. Most of us could tell stories of family gatherings where some individuals spent most of the time looking at their cell phones rather than engaging in conversation.

**(10) 2. Don't make football your highest priority.** I love watching football as much as anyone, and I'm not recommending a football boycott. But consider that there are dozens of games on television each week, but only one opportunity for your family to gather. Ask yourself what's most important.

**(11) 3. Start the day by spending some time with God.** Read through Psalms that talk about giving thanks to God: Psalm 50:14; 69:30; 95:2; 100:4; 146, 147:7. Read Psalm 146:1 "Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long." Then focus on Psalm 9:1, which tells us, "I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds." Write down some of the ways that God has worked in your life and your family.

**(12) 4. Let the people you love know that you're grateful for them.** We get so busy (particularly this time of year) that we forget to stop and appreciate each other. There are few things more encouraging than hearing someone say, "I'm so glad that God has put you in my life." Who needs to hear that today? Your spouse? Your children? Your parents? As Alice Walker has said, "Thank you' is the best prayer that anyone could say." She adds, "I say that one a lot. Thank you expresses extreme gratitude, humility, and understanding."

**(13) 5. Save shopping for another day.** You can shop almost any other day of the year. Why do it on one of the few occasions when you gather family and friends for a special celebration? Go the next day—or anytime during the next month. Stores will continue offering great sales right up to Christmas.

**(14) 6. Many families make a paper chain counting** down the days until Christmas. **Why not create a garland of gratitude instead?** Grab the scissors and

construction paper and cut those strips of paper like old times, only this time get the family involved and write blessings on each strip of paper. When we take the time to count our blessings and reflect upon the goodness of the previous year, we experience true joy.

(15) 7. How many of you send out Thanksgiving or Christmas cards? One tradition is to keep the weeks cards by the dinner table. **With each meal pull one holiday card sent from a friend or family member and include them in your mealttime prayer.** In just a few minutes, you've shown gratitude toward those who matter in your life.

(16) 8. **Warm up the hot cocoa, snuggle by the fire and break out the photo albums and home movies it's time to revisit Christmases past!** Take a special moment to remember those family members who are no longer with you in a positive and celebratory light.

(17) **Saving Thanksgiving and Christmas in your** family will require commitment, teamwork, and discipline. It will require you to think about God and others. It will require that we put effort into our community instead of the perfect meal, present, or house. It will require us all to slow down... focus on what's really important... not try to be perfect... ignore a little dust... But it's worth it. Remember, they are not holidays, they are holy days.

AT BENEDICTION:

I would challenge you to make this Advent a time of family, community, and God. The insert you received has a daily challenge for you. If you do each activity you can make this season more meaningful.