

How to Survive this Christmas

Sometimes we preppers get a little too serious, focusing on the problems around us and the potential problems to come.

Or perhaps I should say that we get too focused. Not that we should stop anything we're doing to prepare for disasters, but sometimes we need to take a step back from the big stuff and concentrate on surviving today. For a lot of people, today is hard enough to make it through.

There's a whole realm of day-to-day survival that we rarely talk about as if that isn't important. Yet I have found that many of the skills and attitudes I've developed through my time as a survivalist help me on a daily basis.

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Take the EDC for example. Everyone in the world has an EDC of some sort, even if it's nothing more than their wallet, keys, and phone. As preppers and survivalists, we tend to add to that, carrying things like a pistol and a knife. In other words, we take our prepping into every day, applying lessons learned from our desire to survive the day-to-day. If we can do it there, we can surely do it in other parts of our lives.

Sadly, for many people, the holiday season is more about survival than enjoying the times. There can be many reasons for this, ranging from the loss of a loved one to the stress of buying Christmas presents. Whatever it is, the same sorts of attitudes and actions we train on, to help us survive a disaster, will also help us survive the Christmas season.

Survival Attitude



One of the most important lessons about survival is developing a survival mindset or attitude. While that isn't included in the "rule of 3s," our mental attitude is so important, that it is included as the first area of discussion in every military manual on survival. If we can't maintain a positive mental attitude, we won't make it.

I'm known as a guy who laughs at life, but I wasn't always that way. I had to learn how to do it. When I was a teen, I was so serious that my dad took me to the psych ward at our local hospital. He asked me why those people were in there, to which I'm sure I had some sort of flippant answer. But what he said after that has changed my life. He said, "They're in here, because they take everything too seriously, just like you." Ouch! I had to learn how to laugh at life, in order to survive.

Look, you've got a choice, you can either laugh at life or you'll end up crying about it. There's plenty of bad in this world and plenty that wants to get us down. But that doesn't mean we need to let it get us down. We can choose to overcome those problems, or we can allow ourselves to overcome them. Isn't that what we teach as a survival mindset?

This world offers us plenty of negative things to focus on; but as long as we focus on those negatives, that's all we'll see. We'll never see the things to laugh at, the things that bring us joy, the things that we can enjoy. It's all up to us; whether we chose to focus on the bad or focus on the good.

Focusing on the bad is easy. That's why so many people do it so well. But it takes a bit more work to focus on the good than the hard. Yet it is in focusing on the good, where we can find what we need to have, in order to survive. That goes for making it through the holidays as well. Remind yourself of that, when that annoying family member comes over and you can't get them to quit talking or when the Christmas cookies burn because you forgot they were in the oven.

Managing the Cost of Christmas



One of the most depressing things about Christmas for a lot of people is the debt they incur, trying to buy gifts for everyone on their list. That can become overwhelming, especially for those who have large families. Even trying to buy small gifts for everyone can become an expensive undertaking.

The first part of controlling Christmas spending is creating a budget; deciding what you can afford to spend on Christmas. If we do this for building our prepping stockpile, then we can do

it for gift buying too. Of course, that means breaking down the total budget into how much you can afford to spend on each person who is on your list.

Let me warn you now, as soon as you do that, you'll probably think that you have to increase your overall budget because you just don't have enough money budgeted for nice gifts. Watch out for that pitfall, it traps many innocent gift-givers, trying to turn them into guilty givers.

I've long since solved this problem in my own life by making a lot of my Christmas gifts. While I still buy some gifts, my wife, kids, and now grandkids also receive gifts that I've made. That allows me to buy smaller, less expensive gifts, as they are also receiving a handmade ones.

There's just something special about a handmade gift anyway, especially when you compare it to some of the less personal gifts that you can find stacked up in the aisles of any store, with signs telling you how perfect they are for that person you don't know what to buy for.

When it comes to extended family and friends, people who I feel I should give something to, but really don't want to spend a lot of money on, I give home-baked goodies. With fewer and fewer people baking Christmas cookies, fruitcake, making fudge, and other good things these days, giving home-baked goods is always appreciated.

One precaution in making home-baked Christmas goodies as gifts is to make sure you know which of your friends and family members has dietary restrictions, especially the diabetics amongst us. You can still give them Christmas goodies; you just need to make them differently. I make a mean sugar free fudge and fruitcake that any diabetic can eat.

Then There's the Stress of Shopping

Shopping can be a pretty stressful problem as well. There are those who really enjoy it, but there are probably just about as many people who hate it as well. If you enjoy getting out in the crowds, looking for that perfect gift, that's great; you might want to skip over this section. But if you're like the rest of us, for whom shopping is an unpleasant chore, here are some ideas for you.

Wish Lists

First of all, the biggest stressor about Christmas shopping is figuring out what to get everyone. You want to give something they will like, but you're not really sure what that might be. Do they already have that video game? Will they like that sweater? There's just too much doubt.

The easiest way of solving that problem is to get people to tell you what they want, eliminating the guesswork. You can either ask them outright or be a little more subtle about it. Look for hints they might drop or things they say they would like to have. To make it easier, start a family tradition in which everyone makes and posts a wish list. There's no guarantee that they'll get everything on that list, but at least people can know when they pick something, that it will be something they will like to receive.

I started this, years ago, in my family. My kids would get frustrated because I'm hard to buy for. So I'd make up a list of things I'd seen, keeping their budget in mind, and post it on my office door. Got some of the best gifts I've ever received that way.

Take Personal Time Off Work to Shop

Dealing with the crowd in the mall and the big box stores can be crazy, especially if you don't like crowds. But there are

ways of getting around this. If you need to go to the mall to get some of the things on your list, take a few hours of “personal time” off from work and go during the day. That’s actually best in the morning when the stores first open. There will be fewer shoppers then. So, while the stores will still be somewhat crowded, it won’t be anywhere near as bad as weekends and evenings.

Buy Online



Of course, you can avoid that crowd altogether by shopping online. I think COVID has taught us all how effective it can be to do our shopping online, avoiding people altogether. Besides, it’s a great way to save money, finding the best deal on whatever it is that you’re looking for.

One of the truly nice things about shopping online is that the selection is so great. If you’re looking for the latest kitchen gadget for a budding chef in your family, you can find every brand there is, compare their features and compare their prices. That will allow you to get the best for the best price.

Don’t Wait Till the Last Minute

I’m sure you’ve heard this one before, so I won’t belabor it, but the longer you wait, the worse it is. Shopping early not

only means better selections, but it also means smaller crowds and shorter lines. That makes it worth it.

For the first time ever, I started Christmas shopping in January. Yes, that's right. I know it sounds crazy, but I started looking for stocking stuffers and other small items, buying them early and stashing them away. That not only saved me money, as I could look for good deals, but it spread the cost of Christmas over the year, instead of killing my budget in December. This year, I was pretty much-done shopping in October, except for a few items that had to wait.

Gift Cards are Always Welcome

A lot of hassle can always be avoided by giving gift cards. I have yet to see a person who rejects a gift card or says they can't use it. Just like cash, we can always find a way to use pretty much any gift card we receive.

One caution I'd mention though if you're giving gift cards for restaurants or unusual stores, make sure they've got one in the town where they live. I've received a few cards for major restaurant chains that actually didn't exist in my town. Oops. Oh well, they were useful on vacation.

Give Yourself Some Quiet Time

Perhaps the most important thing you can do, to help you survive the Christmas season, is to make sure that you give yourself some quiet time. Whether that means watching your favorite TV show, catching a movie, or reading a book, make sure you have some "me time" in there somewhere. Don't let yourself get so busy, that you burn yourself out.

A good-sized portion of the stress that we all encounter during the holidays is just because of busyness. It seems like we've hardly got time to stop and catch our breath. But we all need that, so it only makes sense to give it to ourselves.

Keep in mind that not giving yourself that time will make it much harder to deal with those lines in the stores and the annoying relatives you try to avoid. We all have a harder time dealing with things when we're tired and already stressed out. On the other hand, when we've had time to chill out, we can think clearly and our emotions aren't already on the ragged edge. So, when new problems arrive, they're not just going on top of the pre-existing pile, trying to push us over the edge.

Finally

Finally, regardless of what Christmas means to you, don't lose sight of that meaning. Whether it's about the baby in the manger, peace on earth, or family and friends, don't let the commercialism and hustle and bustle make you forget that true meaning. That meaning, whatever it is, is where the true joy of Christmas comes from.



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