

Surviving the Christmas Season

Being a survivor means more than just surviving major disasters, it means surviving the daily aggravations of life as well. Most of the disasters that any of us will face are personal disasters, like a major illness, injury or the loss of a job. Yes, natural disasters will come along and there's always the possibility of a major disaster or TEOTWAWKI event; but the more common disasters that we face all the time are the personal ones. Those can come at any time, meaning that people can suffer them yearly or even more frequently.

Even things which aren't supposed to be disasters can turn into disasters given the right... or wrong circumstances. Take Christmastime. There are many thousands of people who suffer depression at Christmas, due to being alone, missing loved ones who have passed away or struggling with the financial pressures that the holidays bring. An awful lot of people do Christmas shopping on the credit card and spend the next year paying it off.

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I spent years living with someone who was depressed every Christmas. Rather than being happy for the family that she had, she focused on the family that was gone. That not only made Christmas difficult for her, but ruined it for the rest of the family too.

It's funny that a time of year that's supposed to be so joyous can end up being such a problem. Surviving through the Christmas season, with your emotions and mental stability

intact shouldn't be something that we have to concern ourselves with; but it is. Knowing that and preparing ourselves for it, can make the holiday season much more enjoyable, without the problems that are prone to come in the aftermath.

Start with a Plan

It may seem early to be talking about the holidays; but then, we're preppers. We talk about things before they happen, so that we can get ready for them. So, before the holidays get here, it's a good idea to come up with a plan for how we're going to tackle them.

What do I mean by that? Let's start with time. Just how much time are we going to take away from family and normal activities for special Holiday ones? Granted, we all like the special events that come up during the holiday season; but trying to make it to all of them can be nerve-wracking. Better to just pick out the ones which are important to you, and let the rest pass by the wayside.

Then there's money. We'll talk more about that later; but it's a good idea to come up with a budget before you start spending money. Gift giving can get extremely expensive, leaving us in debt for the year to come. Do we really need to spend all that? Just who are we trying to impress? Is it worth suffering the stress associated with spending the money to impress them?

Finally, come up with a plan for who you are going to spend the holidays with. This becomes a major problem for a lot of people, as every family ends up being a joining together of two families. Deciding which family to spend the holidays with can be stressful at best and an outright disaster at worst. The most common possibility is one holiday with one family and the other with the other. Another good idea is to create a family holiday with one family, which ensures that everyone is able to get together, even if they can't on Thanksgiving and

Christmas. That's what we've done and it works extremely well.

Protect Your Mental Stability

Anyone can crumble under too much stress and the holidays can certainly cause that stress. More than anything, it's too many activities that wear us out. But money can be a big cause of stress as well. Make sure you take some time out for your own mental health, doing things that you enjoy.

When it comes to gift giving, come up with a reasonably plan, talking it over with other family members. Leaving the money out of it, shopping for all those gifts can become stressful, even for those who love to shop. All those people in the stores, many of whom don't act with anything close to brotherly love, can turn an otherwise enjoyable shopping expedition into a nightmare. Online shopping helps with this; but as we all know, some things you've just got to see in person.

Save Money on Presents

Probably the biggest source of holiday stress for most people, is dealing with the high cost of gift giving. Long gone are the days when any of us could get our Christmas shopping done on the cheap. Nowadays, it seems more like we've got to take out a second mortgage on our lives, just to buy a few gifts.

That's not the way things are supposed to be. Showing friends and family members that we love them shouldn't cost so much that we can't enjoy life. On top of that, many of those gifts will be returned, in some cases just so that the recipient can pay the bills.

Scale Back

There's a real place for scaling back gift giving and not

giving so much. Some families have taken to drawing names that they'll buy gifts for or just buying gifts for the kids and not the adults. Another effective option is to put a price limit on gifts. We do that for office "secret Santa gifts" why can't we with friends and family? There are a lot of different ways that we can scale back our gift giving expense, without having to give up on giving gifts altogether.

Some people would prefer receiving something of practical help to them, especially if they are struggling financially. Paying their water or electric bill may not seem like an exciting gift; but I guarantee you, they'll be excited by it. There are countless practical things we can give one another, which ultimately mean more than something that's just going to sit on a shelf in the closet.

Hand-made Gifts

I turned to homemade gifts years ago, making a large percentage of the gifts I give. That includes jewelry for my wife and daughters, baked goods for friends we don't want to forget, and a host of items I make out of wood in my workshop. Not only does this end up saving me money, but I am leaving my kids legacy gifts, that they will pass on to their kids, telling them "Pawpaw made this."

I even make hand-made gifts for friends that we need to give something to, but don't want to spend a lot of money on. The thing is, the "low cost" gifts we used to give like that aren't low cost anymore. On the other hand, I can make a variety of different things out of wood, which would sell in the stores for ten times what I've got into them.

There's always something special about a hand-made gift, especially when it is well executed. People prize those gifts, even if it isn't something they'd normally use. The idea that you would take the time to make something nice for them, is rare enough that they can't help but notice.

Gift Something You Have

My wife and I collect antiques. Not expensive antiques, but whatever old things we can find, which are old enough to be called antiques. I like collecting old machinery, like typewriters, telephones and cameras; and she likes glass and pottery. These things give us a window into the lives of people who have come before us. We don't spend a lot on any of it, only buying things we can find at a bargain.

There have been a few times when a friend or family member has expressed admiration for one of our finds, giving us the opportunity to pass it on to them as an incredible Christmas gift, which really didn't cost us all that much.



Give Yourself

We can all use a little help sometimes; and I'm not talking about money here. I'm talking about using two hands to get things done, which need to get done. Giving someone homemade "coupons" to wash their car, clean their garage, mow the lawn, make a repair or do other chores can be a gift that's really appreciated, especially by busy parents with newborns to take care of or the elderly who have trouble doing some of these things themselves.

Spread Out the Shopping

Finally, I realize it is a bit late to be talking about this, but one of the best gifts you can give yourself is to spread out your gift shopping through the year, so that you don't

have the big financial pill to swallow in December. We start our Christmas shopping during the after-Christmas sales, buying things for the next year's gift giving. Mostly these are small things, like stocking stuffers; but those can add up to big dollars when you're trying to do stockings for everyone in the family. The more you can buy early, especially when you can buy it on sale, the better. You'll find yourself able to give nicer gifts and to do so without so much stress. That makes it worthwhile, even if nobody else you know is doing it.