

Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View

Dear Listener:

Thank you for stopping by for a visit at Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View podcast! To make it easy, you will find a transcript of each episode. I hope you enjoy the visit!

Episode 36- Plan for a Simple Christmas

Welcome back to the Porch! I'm Julie, and I teach folks how to live a Simple Life. And our goal this year is to keep our holidays simple as well.

Thanksgiving is over, the dishes are washed, and we have once again survived the food coma that was caused by not being able to resist that one extra sliver of pie.

It's time we turn our focus into keeping our Christmas as simple as possible. We want to be able to do all the things we need to do, but still enjoy the holidays with our family and friends and keep the reason for the season close to our hearts.

To do that, we need to know ahead of time exactly what our priorities for the holidays are. Before you even get out a pen and paper to make your shopping and To do lists, you need to know what you want to do.

Do you want to engage in more fun activities with family and friends? Is your heart calling you to spend time with a soup kitchen? Or do you see yourself playing Secret Santa for a family who may otherwise not be able to have a good Christmas?

These are all things to think about. To make it easier, it may help to have a planning session. Take an hour or so, armed with a notebook, and jot down some notes.

First, determine exactly how you plan to spend Christmas Eve and Day. Are you traveling? Will all the relatives be at your house? Do you have a midnight church service you want to attend? Knowing this information will help you adjust accordingly any plans you want to make.

The next step is to determine your priorities. If one of them is to engage in fun activities with your family, write down some ideas of what those might be. Go ahead and make a long list of anything and everything you think your family would enjoy. Beside each one, write down about how much time you think they would take.

For instance, having a Christmas movie night – complete with popcorn and hot chocolate would take roughly 2 hours, including prep time. Driving around looking at Christmas lights may take longer, as would going to a local Christmas festival.

Some activities may take on double duty. Baking cookies with your children not only gives you something fun to do together but can also allow you to scratch off one item on your Baking To Do list.

And, if being a Secret Santa is something you want to do, add the gift planning and shopping to your list. Make it a fun, seasonal, family ‘secret’.

The next thing is to determine just how much time you have during the next few weeks to take part in these activities. Write this amount of time down at the very top of the page. Once you have completed the list, set it aside. You will get back to it later.

The next list involves what you have to do. This is a general list, that only has a few details. For instance, you have shopping, baking, gift wrapping, and decorating that needs to be done.

Your children may be involved in school or church activities. Your spouse may have a Christmas party for work. You may have been invited to an Ornament Swap or a Christmas luncheon with friends.

All of these things need to be on this list. If you have a specific function coming up, write the date and time beside it.

It is now time to break the list down. Create separate lists for each item. A baking list would include what you plan to bake – from gifts for the neighbors, snacks for Christmas Eve and Day, right down to the main meal you plan to serve. And don’t forget everyday meals – it may be the holidays, but you still have to feed your family.

Your shopping list should be divided into sections. The first one would be who you will be giving gifts to, and what you want to give. The second section is a grocery list. And the third section is for anything else you need to purchase, such as wrapping paper and miscellaneous items.

Now that your lists are done, it’s time to take out your calendar. You want to write in just the activities that are set in stone – such as your spouse’s party at work, and the school and Church activities your child is involved in.

When that is finished, it's time to take your Christmas activities list and the calendar to talk over with your family. Choose activities from the list that everyone wants to do and find time on your calendar to do those things.

Make sure you stay within the time frame you noted at the top. What you don't want to do is overwhelm yourself with activities. There are still other things you need to accomplish. So let your family know they need to pick and choose what is most important to them.

Once your activities have been scheduled, look at what else you have to do, and pencil those things in. If possible, set aside a full day to start baking ahead. Make your casseroles and pies and put them in the freezer. Bake the breads and cookies you plan on giving as gifts. You can either go ahead and deliver them or put them in the freezer until you are ready.

Find time to do your shopping. Combine these trips with others – such as stopping after work at a shop that is along your route home, or if you have another appointment. To save as much time as possible, consider setting aside an hour or so to do some online shopping.

And when you are shopping, I encourage you to support your locally owned businesses as much as possible. These are hard-working men and women who live in your community. Their shops are not only their livelihood, but also support your community through paying taxes and employing the folks who live there.

Now that your plans are made, it's time to get busy. Look at your calendar each morning and get started. Be sure to schedule time each day for some quiet time – you will need it to keep your focus. (And, just so you know, next week we will talk even more about finding quiet time in the middle of the holidays.)

But right now, let me offer you a word or two of advice. Your calendar may be full. The key is to keep it from becoming overloaded. If there is an activity you either don't enjoy or don't have time for, it really is okay to say 'No'. Christmas is a busy time of year, and no one has the time to do everything.

Instead of filling your calendar so full you can't even schedule time to breathe, stick with the priorities you have set for yourself. Don't schedule more than you truly want to do. And be sure to leave enough time to just have a few quiet moments – either by yourself or with your family.

To keep your Christmas simple, it's a matter of paying attention to your priorities. Get organized with lists and a calendar. Stick with the things you truly want and need to do.

By doing this, you will have more time to spend with family and friends and enjoy each moment of the holidays. And you may just discover that a simple Christmas turns out to be the best holiday ever.

If you want to learn more about the topic at hand or get a transcript for this episode, just visit my website at www.thefarmwife.com/podcast. That is the Resource page for this podcast and I have it set up by episodes to make things easier to find. To help you out, this is Episode 36.

If you have questions or just want to stop in for a visit, you can do that through email at thevirtualporch@gmail.com. And be sure to subscribe – you don't want to miss a single conversation. I'll be sitting on the porch every Monday morning waiting for your visit!

Thanks again for stopping in. I will see you next week on Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View. And while you are waiting on the next episode, grab that glass of refreshment, pull up a rocker, and sit back for a while. It's time to

Relax & Enjoy!

julie