



I love Christmas! I love the giving, receiving, singing, shopping, eating, gathering, remembering. It is all so wonderful. But sometimes there are too many choices, too many things to do. Sometimes Christmas can leave our family feeling exhausted, stressed, and disappointed. How can we keep Christmas warm, without growing cold? Below are some suggestions that have helped my family stay connected to each other and to value the season's true meaning. I can sum it up in one word: simplify.

Simplify Decorating

Instead of buying more and more things, use what you have. Decorate porches and doors with classic holiday toys such as old sleds and skates. Use natural things in your yard including pine boughs, holly branches, bird nests, and pine cones. These add warmth, smell great, and they can be used year after year.

Simplify Shopping

Keep track of what you're going to purchase for others in a little notebook. This has been a huge help to me. I start writing down gift ideas as early as possible. When it comes time to shop, my lists are done. This eliminates aimlessly wandering around in stores hoping that the perfect gift will jump out at me. (It never does!) This saves time, energy, and it keeps me on a budget for what I can spend. Shopping for gifts with no list often leads me to overspend, maybe even buying something I'm not real

happy with simply because I didn't have a plan in the first place. Also, my notebook has become a history of sorts for our family. We can look back and remember what was shared. It also includes menus for Christmas dinner which are fun to remember and use as a guide for future dinners.

Simplify Gifts

Gifts are meaningful because of the thought and consideration that go into them, not their cost. I have frequently given things that came from yard sales. Doilies, hat boxes, and old dishes are a few examples. Simple things have meaning. Print out a loved one's favorite verse and frame it. Make a pot of soup. Give homemade cookies in a cute cookie jar. Make a bird feeder out of wood scraps. Pass on heirloom dishes or jewelry. It is so special to receive or give gifts like this, and it truly beats the \$19.95 purchase from the mall.

Simplify Gift Giving

Discuss and set guidelines with extended family. I have a large extended family. Years ago we all decided that once you're married, you no longer receive gifts. We have given special things to our mom and dad, but that's it. This allows us to focus more time and energy on our immediate families. We exchange gifts with Tim's family, but draw names and set a spending limit. This is great fun and greatly appreciated.

Simplify Activities

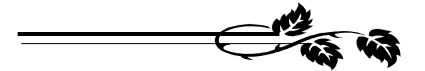
There are always so many choices for events to attend at Christmas

time. Be selective. Choose activities your whole family can enjoy together. Also, be sensitive about creating "one more thing" for others to attend. As a Sunday School teacher, I purposely chose not to plan a party for my class. I knew this would only add one more gift to their parents' list and one more trip to drop off a child at one more event. Instead, we collected hats and gloves they had outgrown and sent them to Bosnia for needy children. This was much more meaningful than a \$3 gift exchange. Protect your home from busyness and extra nights out, and create warm times together. Puzzles are wonderful things. They have a way of sucking people right over to the table. It's a great way to chat with your kids/spouse while doing something fun together. Collect Christmas storybooks and keep them available. I have an old wooden crate that I fill with books; they change with the seasons. At Christmas time it's filled with wonderful stories. *The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey* by Susan Wojciechowski, *Journey into Christmas* by Bess Streeter Aldrich, and *If You're Missing Baby Jesus* by Jean Gietzen are a few of my favorites. Read the Gospels for devotions throughout the month of December.

Simplifying the Season allows us to focus on Christ and to meaningfully focus on others. Live the Christian life by expressing God's love to others through planning, creating, giving, and sharing. This is the reward and meaning of Christmas. May yours be

Jan Ritchie and her husband, Tim, live in Dalton and have three children. Jan enjoys bird watching and gardening.

The Women's LINK is a ministry of Summit Baptist Bible Church.



When Less is More

Last year I turned fifty. I blinked—and my next birthday came and went. The days rumble by, like a run-away locomotive. No matter how much I beg to slow the pace, it doesn't change. I'm stuck, racing clickity-clack down the track of life.

Since the big 5 - 0, I've done some serious thinking as the scenery flies by. What's important? What really matters? What will be of value when my train rolls into the station with eternity just beyond the gate? No longer earthbound, I will leave every possession behind. So how can we manage our material "things" with an eternal perspective? How do we lay up treasures in heaven?

I recently read *Lord, Change my Attitude* by James MacDonald. He raises a thought-provoking question (page 55): "Think of how much time and energy you spend sorting, transporting, buying, and maintaining your stuff....Is your stuff getting in the way of what you really want to do with your life?" Hmm.

In this issue of *The Women's LINK*, we want to continue our theme of "margin," the space needed between ourselves and our limits, the leeway in our minds and schedules. Our emphasis includes practical pointers on how to de-clutter our spaces. Beyond that, what drives us to desire and accumulate more and more in the first place? How can we maintain contentment and avoid what Dr. Richard Swenson calls "possession gluttony"? Where's the balance between an eternal focus and living respectably in our society? We hope you'll enjoy a light look at one woman's minimalism taking on her husband's pack-rat tendencies. And we've given a few suggestions on how to simplify the holidays. Perhaps we can use those dreary January days to reassess our material priorities and experience how less can be more.

As the birthdays zip by, I hope our trust reaches beyond amassing material things or achieving man-made simplicity. May we "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). That's what truly matters in the light of eternity!

Sarah L. Phillips

"Do not gather *and* heap up *and* store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust *and* worm consume *and* destroy, and where thieves break through and steal. But gather *and* heap up *and* store for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust *nor* worm consume *and* destroy, and where thieves do not break through and steal; For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Matthew 6:19-21, The Amplified Bible



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- Kathy Niznick
- Jan Ritchie
- Pastor Mark Schmitz

Garage Sale Lessons

Pastor Mark Schmitz

Another season has past. What season, you might ask? Not football, not soccer, not fall. It's garage sale season! It starts in earnest around May and fizzles out sometime in October. You may wonder what garage sales have to do with this *Women's LINK*. Stay with me and I think you will see.

I believe garage sales are a great training ground for life. Our experience really began when we broke up house after Sandi's mom went into a nursing home. As we faced preparing the home for renters, we knew we needed to go through everything, identify what really mattered, and toss or sell the rest. Sorting through someone else's "treasures" is a daunting task. You are making lasting choices about what is worth keeping and what is worth tossing or selling. We identified a lot of things that weren't necessary for a good future. We selected a few things we would keep. In the context of our selection process as a family (our kids were a part), we all began to grasp the fact that we don't really need the stuff of life. The few things that stayed with us honored the memory of Sandi's family. In the end the sale didn't make us wealthy; it was the memories reflected in the simple items we retained that would make us rich.



That initial experience impressed upon us that stuff is not the most important thing in life. We all need a constant reminder of that. Other great lessons have come

in recent years. We all would jump in the wagon around 8 a.m. every Saturday. A wonderful lesson our kids learned is: "You don't have to buy it" or "You can live without it." That came with making an offer being refused and walking away. One of our grown sons just called about a potential car purchase. Our simple counsel, "Don't feel pressured to buy. It's just like a garage sale," connected immediately. He passed it up. The principle learned years ago directed him to the wisest response at the moment. That's the benefit. You learn to be better stewards by walking away and being content. You see, there's always another Saturday.

We have even learned from Sadie our black lab. She knows that every Saturday morning she can look forward to time together searching out the best bargains. She is thrilled just to sit in the back seat with her nose out the window. She is not at all interested in storing up treasures from the sales; she is storing up the treasures of relationship and time with us.

These are just a few of the lessons I would identify. Within these pages we hope to challenge your thinking about getting some margin on the stuff of life, on contentment, on pursuing what lasts. Like the writer of Ecclesiastes, we need to acknowledge that stuff doesn't matter, it doesn't satisfy. Rather it is God and relationships that do. Even Sadie has that last one down.

Now you might conclude we are "garage sale junkies" to which I reply, not so. I'd probably go with "garage sale aficionado." It sounds more upscale and so "Abington-esque," don't you think?

Digging Deeper

Sarah L. Phillips

Picture Jesus, seated on a mountain side with a panoramic view spread below Him. He chose this place to teach His disciples Kingdom truths, calling for a new and better way to think and live. We call these teachings the Sermon on the Mount. Tucked in the midst of His lessons are these words: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal" (Matthew 6:19).

The literal meaning of this verse is "treasure not up treasures." The idea of the word "treasure" is to stash, to place something horizontally. When we stack something, it is not being used, there is no active purpose. The idea here? Don't stockpile.

Jesus was not referring to what we need to live or what we use every day. The Scriptures speak of the legitimacy of meeting our basic needs (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12), taking care of our families (1 Timothy 5:8), helping others (Philippians 4:14-19), preparing for the future (Genesis 41), and making wise investments (Matthew 25:14-30). The danger comes when we pile up more than we can use.

In the Jewish culture of New Testament times,



"treasure" was measured in garments, grain, and precious metals. Jesus addresses each one:

The trouble with garments is that moths eat the fabric, not of clothes worn, but of what is not being used.

Stored grain is eaten ("rust" actually carries the meaning of "eating") by mice, rats, worms, etc.

Gold and other precious metals were often buried in the ground or hidden in a home. Mud diggers were thieves who literally dug up the ground or dug through the wall of a house to steal the treasure.*

The wisest man who ever lived said, "Riches certainly make themselves wings; They fly away like an eagle toward heaven" (Proverbs 23:5).

What characterizes "treasures in heaven"? Matthew 6:20-21; Luke 12:33; Luke 18:18-27; 1 Peter 1:4

According to the following Scriptures, what principles can we glean regarding possessions?

Mark 8:36-37:

Luke 12:15:

Luke 12:16-21:

Philippians 4:10-13:

1 Timothy 6:6-11:

1 Timothy 6:17-19:

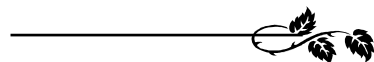
James 1:17:

James 2:2-9, 15-17:

*Taken from *Overcoming Materialism* by John MacArthur, Moody Press Edition, 1986.



Downsizing



Okay, I give up! What's the point of getting all the laundry done at once if our closets and drawers can't even contain it? I was completely irritated with my inability to shove yet another extra-large, extra-tall, long-sleeved dress shirt with a buttoned-down collar into what already looked like a remote warehouse for Casual Male Big and Tall. *Am I being ridiculous?* I wondered. *Making a mountain out of a mole hill?* Well, there was one sure way to find out—start counting!

I became more and more determined to build my case for downsizing as I began to count through the inventory. When I got to twelve, I was on a roll because that were already four times as many dresses as I had hanging up in my nine inches of allotted space for long garments. Twenty-eight—oh, this was going to be good—and I wasn't even including the extra-large, extra-tall, short-sleeved dress shirts with a buttoned-down collar because they were out of season. I was absolutely shaken when I reached a grand total of forty-four! "FORTY-FOUR?" I shouted. "Who in the world has forty-four dress shirts? We could almost dress every guy in the dorm for the spring banquet. We could probably cut up the shirts, use the material to make bedding for a household of giants, and still have enough left over to make a wardrobe of shirts for the average guy.

The initial thing I knew I *had* to do was to temporarily throw out our agreement to stop digging up old

issues when dealing with current situations—something we have taught in our *Marriage Communication* workshops. This was just too juicy. So I got my lineup ready. First I had to revisit that box labeled "pants," which contained khakis in a variety of shades and sizes that hadn't been opened in our nine years of marriage. Then I'd have to once again ask how necessary it was to have a complete ROY-G-BIV selection of the same collared polo shirt when he'd really prefer to wear an extra-large, extra-tall, long-sleeved dress shirt with a buttoned-down collar. And then I would be remiss to ignore the three bottles of cologne my husband has had since he was in high school in the SEVENTIES! Can anyone out there still say *Aramis*? And need I mention his allergy to cologne?

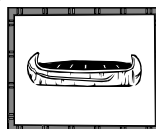
My husband's reaction was not nearly as defensive as I had imagined, particularly after I mentioned the number FORTY-FOUR. What a great relief that was. He gradually narrowed down the number of clothing items in his collection until putting away the laundry became a doable task.

A couple months later my sisters-in-law were visiting. I began telling them how proud I was of beating at least a little of the packrat out of my husband's system. Then I went on to tell them about the box of pants and the cologne, adding that I had only "a few" things that were non-essentials, and those things were all extremely sentimental—like some of my

daughter's baby clothes and my boat from the Peruvian Amazon. All at once, they burst out laughing, and took turns responding to this apparently most absurd thing they had ever heard. "You got a BOAT?" "You sittin' up here talking about my brother with these three little bottles of cologne, and you got a BOAT?" "You know that verse that says first take the BEAM out yo' own eye?" "By the way, where is the WATER?"

My sisters-in-law and I had a great time that night, laughing and practically howling until we were all in tears. But they had a great point. Did I have a legitimate concern about my husband's "stuff"? Sure. But to ignore my own growing stashes of sentimentality that surely got in my husband's way from time to time was a glaring and selfish oversight. Seriously, did I really need every adorable outfit that my daughter had ever been photographed in or every paper that Kaki had ever scribbled on? Did keeping all of Kaki's infant toys somehow guarantee that God was going to give me another baby at my age? And then, of course, there is that boat...

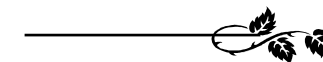
We've given away or thrown out many things in the last few months, and we are both tremendously relieved. There is a happier, lighter feel in our living space. We have found that less is indeed more, and the sentimentality of some things is probably better captured in photos.



Sherry Boykin and her husband, Ted, are parents to Kaki and resident directors in Loescher Hall at BBC.



Tips for Tidying



To de-clutter your closet: Turn hangers the opposite way on the bar. Once you wear something, place the item on the hanger facing its normal direction. At the end of the season, you can easily see what you didn't wear. Remove the unused clothes, and donate them to a favorite charity.

To de-clutter your pantry: Toss items that have expired. Make a list of what's left, then challenge yourself to *not* grocery shop; instead use what's already in your pantry, frig, and freezer. I get creative recipe ideas by visiting www.allrecipes.com. They have a search that allows you to list ingredients you have (or don't have), then searches for recipes that match.

"**Less is more.**" The less you keep out on your countertops, the easier it is to keep your kitchen clean. Not as many knick knacks? The easier it will be for you to keep your living room dusted.

Rotate your children's toys. Divide toys into halves or thirds, keeping one group out and placing the other group(s) into a bin(s). Every two or three weeks, rotate the toys. This cuts down on what's out (and needs to be picked up), and it makes toys seem new.

Keep an empty "yard sale" box in the garage or attic. As you find things you can live without, place them in the box. Once the box is full, start a new one. It's easier to part with things a few at a time than to rush through your house the week of the sale. Make sure you label the boxes "yard sale" so you can easily find them when it's sale time.

Do you have a catch-all corner or room? To de-clutter a space that seems too overwhelming, set a timer for 15 minutes and use that time to put away whatever you can. Once the timer goes off, you are free to walk away. Repeat this step every day (or twice a day if it's really bad) until you get the space under control.

Amy Hannah and her husband, Roddy, have just celebrated their 11th wedding anniversary. Amy applies the above principles to help her stay on top of her home, while caring for her two children and being a dorm mom to the guys of Ketcham Hall at BBC.

Resources

The Messies Manual by Sandra Felton
"We have to be willing to make some changes in the way we think if we are ever going to make permanent changes in our house."

www.messies.com

www.ehow.com/how_4496526_enjoy-more-beautiful-peaceful-home.html

www.christian-homemaking.com

www.flylady.net

For Kids (& Young at Heart)

Clutter Control: Tips and crafts to organize your bedroom, backpack, locker, life by American Girl Publishing, Inc.

For girls, ages 8—12

"This book will show you how to de-clutter any space and keep it that way. Start small and do a little at a time..."

If Only I Had a Green Nose You are Mine by Max Lucado

These are wonderful, warm children's books with a message for every age. "You're special—not because of what you have. You're special because of who you are. You are mine. I love you. Don't forget that, little friend."

Though we cannot necessarily endorse everything in these resources, each has ideas and helps to pursue "less is more."

To Keep or Not to Keep...

When it comes to clutter, we usually take a direct assault approach. If what we have hinders the present, if it's disorganized, if it does not allow our body or mind to rest, then it must be conquered. But what about the times where there is grief associated with the thought of parting with certain possessions? What do we keep of Grandma's after she is gone? How should we go about sorting through what we don't use anymore now that a certain phase of life is over? My husband's sister passed away when he was a teenager; now both of his parents are gone. There is no one to share the memories of that side of the family.

In this journey, I've read and learned some gentle approaches to clutter removal. Philippians 4:5 states, "Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near."



Kathy Niznick is married to John. They have two grown children, one grandson, and another grandchild on the way. Kathy has recently re-entered the nursing profession and enjoys reading, health, and fitness.

If you or someone you live with struggles with deciding what to keep and what to get rid of, ask for help from a friend whom you trust and is empathic, yet objective.

First, collect all like items together. For example, all the gifts/belongings from that loved one or all the mementoes from that phase of life. Removed the obvious throw-aways that are broken, stained, etc. With what is left, the helper holds the items up one by one, preferably across the room from the person deciding. She asks, "Do you use this, is this special to you, or could you let it go?" She may also inquire about the story behind the item—and then listen. The helper should not scold or lecture. Perhaps she needs to give permission to give it away, with a reminder that it is not disrespectful or unthankful to the memory of the person.

As memories and/or heartaches are shared, understanding is deepened and relationships enhanced. This may sound like a long process, but really can go quickly. *Sometimes we need help to separate the memory from the stuff to let it go.* Perhaps taking a photo of an item may help preserve the memory while freeing up space to live in the present.



Remember, only two things on this earth last forever: the Word of God and people. Why not give an experience instead of a tangible gift? For example, when our son was young and interested in airplanes, we took a ride in a little plane in Tunkhannock for his birthday. We still treasure the memory of that day. I know I would rather have good memories of life shared with my parents and grandparents than tangible gifts.

It took time to finish clearing out the stuff of Grandma and Grandpa's life. I decided to devote a spot in the attic to store their things. Every spring and fall I could let go of more and more until what is left are things we really use or want to keep. There comes a time when the grief heals and you can better see what to save and what to let go.

I wish I could say that I don't have clutter in our home, but life keeps changing. I keep finding what we no longer need, and it tends to pile up. But what I have learned is a plan that is gracious and gentle to people and at the same time tough on clutter!

Why not buddy up with a friend and help each other with those hard-to-part-with/what-should-I-do-with belongings? We guarantee the end result will reach far beyond a cleaner house!

Pondering Possessions

Sitting in our quiet home, scanning its contents, our collections, our possessions...



To possess: to have as property, to own. This is much more than the house and acreage itself. This is the contents, all we have accumulated in 32 years of marriage. These are the keepsakes, the antiques, the auction and yard sale bargains that put a smile on our faces and a memory in our hearts. Let's not forget the wardrobe of clothes, overflowing pantry of food, and storage areas full of "things."

My husband and I both take time to occasionally de-clutter our possessions. All I need is a few minutes with a TV program showing someone else's clutter problems, and I am up and cleaning through another shelf or closet. A few moments or hours of time finding items to sell, give away, or burn is time well spent. Yet there are certain possessions we'd choose never to part with because we value them too highly. Why?

As we've grown older and our children have moved on, we have become more choosy in our spending and what we bring into our home. We try to separate our "wants" from our "needs," being cautious that our "possessions" don't turn into "obsessions."

Recently we had the opportunity, in my husband's line of work as an auctioneer, to sell the contents of someone's home. The excitement rises as we see what someone else possessed in their lifetime that we may be able to purchase. As I think about what I just wrote, I confess that sometimes we "want" what we do not "need." We get caught up in the thrill of having "more." That family's belongings, accumulated over a lifetime, walked out the front door of their home with total strangers. Where will our goods be scattered? What will be sold, given away, or burned?

There is one item in our living room that is extra special to us: an anniversary gift my husband purchased at an auction. It is unique, an antique, and a great conversation starter. It's our possession. Our oldest daughter will be married soon. A few years ago she asked if she could have this piece of furniture someday. Our response? "Sure, it's yours when we die." She responded, "How about when I get married?" We countered, "Don't think so!" When she recently became engaged, this conversation tugged at our hearts. Our possession will go to her and our new son-in-law as a surprise wedding gift.

Let's turn to God's Word. Could you, could we, sell our possessions for the good of other believers (Acts 2:44, 45)? Will our treasures last forever (Matthew 6:19-21)? Are we working toward eternal ("gold, silver, and precious stones") or temporary ("wood, hay, and stubble") ends (1 Corinthians 3:10-15)? Are we coveting "things" or content with what we have (Hebrews 13:5, 6)? Do our homes need some de-cluttering? Is it time to part with some possessions?

Sitting in our quiet home, scanning its contents, our collections, our possessions...

Dan and **Lauren Naylor** have been married 32 years and have three children and two grandsons. Dan is an auctioneer, and Lauren is a homemaker who enjoys quilting, working outdoors, antiques, cooking, and baking.