

Week One, Day One - Welcome

Hello, and welcome to Giving Your Family The Gift Of Stress Free Holidays! We're so excited that you've joined us, and hope that we can make this holiday season the best yet.

Everything that we are going to do in this course is designed to work every year, making sure that your holidays are easy and stress free from now on. Each week, we will tackle a small part of your holiday planning, to make sure that everything is done in time for the holidays.

We celebrate three holidays here on the farm, so those three - Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day - are the ones that we're covering. If your family celebrates other holidays, all of these lessons can be applied to any holiday.

For Week One, Planning Week, it looks like we'll be covering quite a lot, but it's not that difficult and doesn't take more than an hour or two, so don't worry. This week is the foundation of your holiday plans, and you'll refer back to these lists often, and can edit them over the next few weeks, so don't worry about making them perfect.

We'll be sending out more emails throughout the week going into more detail about each of these lists, but if you want to get a head start, you can start jotting them down now, or find some handy templates that we've made available for you here. If you are technologically savvy, you can save these templates to your own Google Drive and use them digitally, which can save you some time later on, but if you aren't, then print them off and use a hard copy to make things easier.

As you go through this week, think about how you and your family can spend your time intentionally this holiday season, investing your holiday time and money to make memories that are meaningful as opposed to things that you won't remember in a few months, much less in a few years. Taking the time to be intentional now can make the holidays more meaningful and less stressful.

We look forward to having you join us on this journey! If you have any questions, feel free to email us or join us in the private Facebook group that we made for this course. We'd love to see you there and have everyone sharing inspiration.

PJ and Brett

Tools You'll Need:

- A notebook or folder (we recommend a 3 ring binder).
- Sheet protectors (if you're using a 3 ring binder).
- Paper
- Pens/pencils
- Your calendar

Week One Activities:

- Make list of important traditions
- Make list of gift recipients
- Make list of gifts for each recipient
- Make list of Christmas card recipients
- Make email list for Christmas letter
- Assemble Kids' wish Lists
- Make list of things to sew or craft
- Make list of supplies to buy
- Make list of stocking stuffers
- Make list of people to invite to party and dates
- Make list of 25 holiday activities
- Make list of Operation Christmas Child Shoebox items
- Update calendar with all events
 - 25 activity events
 - Day to purchase tree
 - Day to decorate tree
 - Any parties
 - Shoe box packing party
 - Travel plans
 - Day of family photo
 - Days to visit people

Week One, Day Two

Hello, and welcome to Week One of Giving Your Family The Gift Of Stress Free Holidays!

Today we're going to cover creating your Master Binder. This binder will be your best friend over the next three months, and will see a lot of use, so we highly recommend using a 3 ring binder and sheet protectors. A regular notebook can work, but it's easy to rip or damage a page. But if you don't have one on hand or can't run to your local store, don't worry! You can get started in a regular notebook and transfer those pages into sheet protectors when you get the chance.

If you want to be fancy with your Master Binder, you can also add page separators or sheets of colored card stock or construction paper to create separate categories in your binder. We recommend the following categories: Holiday Lists, Holiday Menus, and Holiday To Do Lists. You may choose to add or change the categories as you create your binder over the next two to three weeks, but this will be a good start.

First, get your binder or notebook and a bunch of sheet protectors, a stack of paper, and your writing utensil of choice. If you'd like, you can print out the templates that we've started for you instead of using blank paper. You can also upgrade your binder by purchasing a pen holder to keep in it, so you'll always have your writing utensils.

Starting with the "Lists" category (if you're using categories to break up the pages in your binder), title each page with the following titles:

- Important Traditions
- Holiday Parties
- Holiday Schedules
- Childrens' Wish Lists
- Holiday Gifts
- Christmas Card Recipients
- Gifts To Buy
- Supplies To Buy
- Stocking Stuffers To Buy
- Things To Sew or Craft
- Charitable Giving
- Holiday Activities

If none of these seem applicable to you, then feel free to skip them for now, you can come back to them later.

And that's it - you're done for the day. We'll be back tomorrow with the first set of lists to work on. You'll need your family's input for these ones, so schedule a time tomorrow to meet with everyone in your household and discover what's important to them when it comes to the holidays.

If you have any questions, feel free to email us, or leave a comment in the Facebook group!

We'll see you tomorrow!

PJ and Brett

Week One, Day Three

Now that we have your binder ready, we're going to start by focusing on the lists that require input from your family.

One of the biggest things we can do to decrease stress during the holidays is to do less.

Yes, you read that correctly.

Do less.

If stringing lights on your house every year doesn't bring you joy, why are you doing it? If making a huge ham with all of the sides makes your heart sink every time you remember that it's something you "have to do", why are you doing it?

Take your important traditions sheet of paper and ask your family. What's really important to them? What's important to you? And more importantly, pay attention to the things that don't get written down. The things that no one mentions, the things that don't mean everything to their holiday joy.

Personally, we stopped stringing lights on our house, along with several other things. And it's okay to stop doing things, because what your family wants most is for you to enjoy the season with them, so you don't have to feel guilty. Think about what is worth investing your time in, because you won't get that time back, and invest it in the memories that you want to have with your loved ones.

So pull out that **Important Traditions** list and start writing things down. You don't have to write down everything they say; if your son's idea of something important is spreading peanut butter on the couches, you can skip that one. Similarly, if there's something they think is important to them, but you know they won't remember it and it will only add more stress for you, it's okay to prioritize your time and energy and minimize your list. While your family's experience and enjoyment of the holidays is important, it's also important for you to retain your sanity.

Remember, we want you to focus on how to invest your holiday time and money wisely to maximize your enjoyment and minimize the stress.

While you're working on this list, you can also write down any traditions that you hope to start with your family in the next coming months. Remember that you can come back to this over the next few weeks if you forget something, so don't stress about this.

Next, pull out the **Holiday Parties** list and work with your family to decide if you're going to be hosting any holiday parties this year. If you are, pull out your calendar and choose a date and time, and a list of people to invite. These lists can be very generic, while specific. For example - "Phil's extended family" or "Cross country team" or "church family" or "Landon's classmates". You don't have to put every single name on there, but you do need to know who you're planning on inviting.

Next, discuss with your family what dates will work best for you to celebrate the holidays with other people. Does Grandma always do her Christmas on Christmas Eve? Does Memaw insist on celebrating on the Sunday closest to Christmas? Take a look at your calendar, put together your availability, and send it to those you celebrate with. Decide when you will celebrate the holidays in your own home, and write them down on your **Holiday Schedules** sheet.

And while your family is all there, don't forget to get the children to put together their wishlists for the holiday season, so that you can later send them to the people who have asked for them. You don't need to send them yet! Get them started, since inevitably something will need to be added or deleted, and get those **Wish Lists** in your binder.

That's all for today, so great job! Getting it all down on paper can make it seem like either too much or too little. If it feels like too much, maybe you should pare down a little more? Looking at your list should make you feel calmer about knowing what exactly is important and needs to be done. If it feels like too little, don't worry. You can always add things later, but often that holiday magic is accomplished with the little things.

As always, send us an email or comment in the Facebook group if you have any questions!

PJ and Brett

Week One, Day Four

Today we'll be focusing on your lists of people that you will be giving gifts to or sending a Christmas card. These lists might take a little while, but remember, you can always come back later this week or next if you forget to add someone, so don't worry about being perfect. Get your thoughts down and out of your head, onto paper, so you don't have to stress about forgetting someone or something.

If your children are buying gifts for people and you would like to help them develop their lists, you can do so, but they don't need to be involved if they aren't.

We're going to start with the **Holiday Gifts** list - a list of everyone that you're going to be giving a present to this year. For some of you, that may be just your immediate family. For others, that list may include everyone from your child's teacher to your mail carrier to your dog's groomer. Whoever your list includes, write down everyone on one side of a sheet of paper (or use the template that we've provided).

Whoever you decide to give gifts to, remember to invest your holiday time and money wisely. Would your mailman love a thoughtful gift? Probably. But he's not going to hate you if you don't give him anything, and if removing him from the list brings some extra time or money into your holiday budget, it's okay to remove some of the people to bring a little extra wiggle room into your holidays.

If there are quite a few people like that on your list, think about an easy batch type of gift. Can you bake a big batch of cookies for everyone that you think you should give a gift to but you're not really sure what to do? Can you give them all a Christmas card with a five dollar bill in it and a nice note?

Once you have your list of everyone you're giving a gift to, you can start filling in the remaining columns - the gift you'll be giving them, where you're getting that gift, and how much your budget is for that gift. You don't have to use all of these columns, but some people find them useful for planning and budgeting purposes. (We created this template in a spreadsheet instead of a document because we've found that it can make sorting things easier later on, but feel free to create your own word document or just jot it down on a piece of paper.) You'll notice there's one more column on the right - you can use that column later to jot down exactly what you spent, if you'd like.

We just want to take a second here to point something out. For most people, they don't care how much money you spend on them, so your gifts don't have to be extravagant. There are hundreds of ways you can show someone that you love them with an inexpensive gift. Put the money towards memories, like a zoo membership, or make a coupon booklet that entitles the

owner to a free back massage, an ice cream date, and other small things. You don't have to spend a lot of money to make your loved ones feel how much you love them. If you're having trouble coming up with ideas, comment in our Facebook group and we'll see if we can help figure out some ideas!

If you haven't come up with the perfect gift for the most important people, you've still got some time, so feel free to skip over them and come back to it. This isn't meant to cause stress. Just start filling in the blanks, and do what you can.

This is going to be one of your more time-intensive lists of this week, but don't worry about forgetting anyone. There's still a week and a half before the week for buying gifts, so you'll have plenty of time to add or change things. (And if that's not enough time, there's still almost three months until Christmas, so you don't need to worry that you'll run out of time before then.)

The last list we're going to work on today is a list of all of your **Christmas Card recipients**, including their address and/or email address, depending on if you're going to do a Christmas card through the mail or an email.

If you're having trouble remembering everyone that you'd like to send this to, scroll through your contacts on your phone, in your email list, or even your Facebook friends. You should be able to find most of these people pretty quickly.

Remember that you don't need to send a Christmas card if it doesn't bring you joy or make you happy. With social media, most of the need for a Christmas card has been eradicated, and while it can still be nice to catch up with everyone, it is not necessary and if it causes you stress, then we're giving you permission to let it go. Go without it for a year, and if you miss it, then you can do it again next year.

That's it for the day! We'll see you tomorrow!

PJ and Brett

Week One, Day Five

Today we're going to put together our lists of everything we need to buy or make for presents in the next couple of weeks. Take your list of gifts that you created yesterday and take a look at it. Everything on that list should be able to break down into one of the following lists:

- Gifts To Buy
- Things To Sew or Craft
- Supplies To Buy
- Stocking Stuffers To Buy

This shouldn't be too difficult, and we've provided templates for you, but if you're not planning on using them, we recommend using the following columns in your lists:

- Where you're planning on purchasing it (store or website)
- What you're planning to purchase
- What you're hoping to spend on it
- What you actually spend on it.

If you're not interested in using these sheets to budget at the same time, you don't have to do the last two columns, but some people find it helpful to put their budgets on the same lists.

You'll be able to take these lists, sort them by the place you're shopping, and bring them with you when it's time to get all of our shopping done in a few weeks.

Good luck, and happy list-making!

PJ and Brett

Week One, Day Six

We're finishing up Week One today, and it should be relatively easy compared to some of the other days.

First, we're going to look at what we're doing to give back during this holiday season. For some, it's volunteering. For others, it's donating their time or money. And for some, all they can do is visit a retirement home and bring smiles to the faces of the folks who live there. No matter what you have the time, energy, or money to do, the holiday season is a wonderful time to give back to others, and if you have children, to show them a little more of the world we live in.

Our family likes to send Operation Christmas Child boxes. These are shoeboxes filled with personal hygiene items, school supplies, toys, and more, that go to children in third world countries. You have to put them together early, because they deliver them to the children on Christmas morning and must make it halfway around the world by then. One of our new favorite things is that they've introduced a tracking feature, and you can find out where your shoebox was delivered.

No matter how you choose to help others in this holiday season, we encourage you to give something of yourself. So pull out your list for **Charitable Giving** and take a few moments to jot down **what** you would like to do, **when** you're going to do it, and what **supplies** you will need.

If you're going to bring hot chocolate to a neighbor, you'll need a date to go over, hot chocolate, a few mugs, and maybe some marshmallows.

If you're going to sing Christmas Carols at a retirement home, you may need nothing other than your phone to pull up lyrics and a song to sing along with.

If you'd like to do the Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes, you'll need quite a list of supplies (which you can find on their website).

Whatever you choose, you can know that it will make a difference in this world and put a smile on someone's face, and that's all that matters. The holiday season is one of joy and happiness, and there's nothing better than sharing our joy with others.

The last list we're going to fill out this week is the **Holiday Activities** list.

For some, this will seem very similar to the Important Traditions list, but it's slightly different. Our family does one thing every day, starting December 1st, through Christmas. These things include making gingerbread houses, painting Christmas ornaments, watching a favorite

Christmas movie, decorating the tree, and more. Each of these items will go on this list, with a date if we'll be doing it on a specific date, and we'll cross them off as we complete them.

You can replace this list with another, if you'd like, or disregard it entirely, but it's an important list for us, so we included it here.

Our last task for the day is to **pull out our calendars** (whether they are paper or electronic) and put in all of the important dates that we've filled in on our lists this week. These can be tasks big and small, whatever you want or need to do on a certain date throughout the holidays.

Some of the things that you might put on your calendar:

- 25 activity events
- Day to purchase tree
- Day to decorate tree
- Any parties
- Shoe box packing party
- Travel plans
- Day of family photo
- Days to visit people
- Christmas at Grandma's
- Thanksgiving at Memaw's

Once your calendar is updated, you did it! You survived Planning Week.

Don't forget to join us in the private Facebook group and share your Master Binder with us. We'd love to see how you're doing and help encourage you as we move on.

Have a great weekend, and we'll see you next week for Menu Week!

PJ and Brett