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What your children really need for Christmas

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We often think that an over-scheduled holiday season focused too heavily materialistic things is a modern-day problem and think longingly of the “olden days” when Christmas was simpler. But apparently, more than 100 years ago moms had the same nostalgia for a simpler time and struggled with some of the same busyness and worry over the focus on toys and treats during the holidays that we worry about today.

I recently came across this great quote by Emmaline B. Wells, a writer, champion of women’s suffrage and church leader (originally printed in the December 1901 edition of the Young Woman’s Journal).

“The olden times were the days of comparative seclusion from the outside world, and we had to depend mainly upon our own resources for amusement. . . . In those far-off days, however, the children were as much on tip-toe with expectancy as in the present day when Santa Claus time comes round. Then we had to tell children stories to make up for the things we lacked. Now there is so much to occupy the time that mothers have no moment to spare, evidently, to tell them stories at all. They depend on church and the kindergarten teachers to do all this for them while they, the dear blessed mothers, lose all the sweetest hours life can bring. To sit at evening round the fire and listen to the children’s prattle and sing them the old-fashioned carols and tell them over and over the stories they long to hear, makes one forget care and trouble, and draws the mother and children closer together with ties inseparable that can never be wholly broken apart. The mother, who denies herself this privilege for the sake of some outside engagement, or even to do extra household work, is doing herself as well as the children an injustice. . . .”

“Children do not have too much love not even at Christmas, no, not that, but they very often have too many toys and sweetmeats. How many children there are in the world who long, more earnestly, for real love than they do for aught else? There is no comfort or luxury that will supply its place even in the heart of a little child. There is more happiness because of love than from any other gift. . . .”

“Above all else, mothers, tell the little ones stories at Christmas. . . .”

This quote grabbed my attention big time. I know that my children need to feel my love in extra abundance at Christmas, and I really think Emmaline got it right when she suggested stories and cozy snuggling as a great vehicle for expressing and teaching about love while urging mothers not to miss out on the precious moments to be had during the holiday

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season. And I've certainly been guilty of letting less-important, complicated activities get in the way of storytelling and the protected time required to really enjoy togetherness during the holidays.

One of my favorite Christmas traditions has always been reading stories to my children by the Christmas tree. I've got a great collection of Christmas books that we build by getting a new one each year. Most years, we've fit in a Christmas story before bed most evenings in December. But after reading Emmaline's words, I've realized that I've often let outside engagements rob me of some of the "sweetest hours life can bring."

This year, I've decided to more thoroughly prioritize time to "sit at evening by the fire (by the lighted Christmas tree) and listen to the children's prattle and sing them the old-fashioned carols and tell them the stories they long to hear."

Sure, we've got Christmas concerts and basketball practice and homework and a myriad of other things pulling us all in different directions many nights, but I can carve out 10-15 minutes each night to snuggle on the couch and read Christmas stories by the Christmas tree. If we're running late, we can make it a quick story. We can opt out of engagements that involve more stress and fuss than joy in order to protect our story time and the simple togetherness that is required for love to grow.

Story time and the love and lessons we can emphasize and re-emphasize through story and song truly does "draw the mother and children closer together with ties inseparable that can never be wholly broken apart." My undivided attention and my stories — as well as the love wrapped up in them — will ultimately mean so much more than any other activity or material gift I can offer my dear children at Christmas.

I guess some things (like busyness and the incidence of conflicting priorities) never change — even when you look back 100 years. And some things (like letting the busyness rob us of what is most precious and allowing our priorities to get out whack) must be changed. We CAN protect time for real connections and love at Christmas. We really can.

Thanks, Emmaline. I really needed your message.

P.S. — Our very favorite book this year is a short chapter book called "[The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus](#)," which has been out of print for years and happily is now back in print. It's been so great learning all about how little Nickolas was a sweet and kind orphan boy who overcame great sadness through love and kindness. It tells about how he got his first sleigh, how the first stocking came about, how he got his first red suit and so on. It's all fiction but it's a beautiful story about making the best of hard situations and solving problems with love and my kids have been totally eating it up.

I love reading stories like this that make us all feel like being better people. We're almost done with it. Then we'll be reading "[The Best Christmas Pageant Ever](#)" and "[A Christmas Carol](#)," my other two favorite Christmas chapter books. And we'll read a bunch of our short story books as well. I love having pile of beautiful books available throughout the Christmas season.

I've got all my favorite Christmas books listed in the [Power of Moms Amazon Store](#). Check them out if you'd like.

QUESTION: What are your favorite books to read with your children at Christmas? What are some of your other favorite traditions that help you show your love for your children at Christmas?

CHALLENGE: Think carefully about the traditions and activities you've got going on during this holiday season. Prioritize traditions that foster love and teaching at this time of year even if it means making some sacrifices and opting out of some things.

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