

Lessons Learned from my Graduate

This whole graduating and leaving home thing is really wearing me slick out! I *don't want* my babies to leave! And yes, even at 6'5", he's still and will always be my baby.

On the night he was born, my #2 son was immediately whisked away due to issues with blood incompatibility. Hours went by that seemed like days. I couldn't stand the separation any longer so in the middle of the night, sporting my new fluffy leopard slippers, I scooted to the nursery to try find him. *I had to get my hands on him!* Looking through the window, I spotted my dark haired, chubby little guy. They were poking him with needles and wires were hooked to his chunky chest. I couldn't watch from the other side of the glass any longer.

As I found my way into the room, the nurse turned her head and piped, "I can't believe you were able to walk all the way down here so soon." Eighteen hours of labor and a few stitches couldn't keep me away from him.

That's just what moms do ... we do hard things for our kids. While physically challenging to walk the length of a hospital to be with my newborn son, it's recess compared to the challenge of watching him drive away and letting him go. I've spent the last 18 yrs. adjusting my grip but letting go makes me a little crazy. OK, a lot crazy!

That same irrational, unimaginable, instinctual, instantaneous depth of love that propelled me to walk through physical pain to get to the other side of the glass, now calls me to leave him.

To let him fly.

I've never liked good-byes ... Well-meaning friends tell me,

“It’s not goodbye, it’s only see you later.”

Not true.

I’m saying goodbye to many things: daily doses of silliness and laughter, a willing helper, a best friend to his siblings, my administrator and daily reminder of things like what we’re having for dinner, an amazing finder of where I put my glasses, nightly “good night, mom,” late night chocolate milk marathons with his brothers, the daily interaction and silly conversations between a 6 yr. old and the 18 yr. old brother he strives to be like, and a positive role model for my younger kids – to name a few...



Yes, I’ll absolutely see him again...much sooner than planned most likely ☐ However, I know that when he zooms out of the driveway in a few days in a loaded down vehicle headed to college, it means “good-bye.”

He’s been an easy one to love ... And although I’m the mom, this guy has taught *me* much over the last 18 years:

- ~ When the quiet one speaks, his message is eagerly received.
- ~ Discipline is a lifestyle that brings great reward.
- ~ Humility is very attractive when lived out through the life

of a youth.

~ A forgiving heart speaks volumes to those watching, especially when all agree forgiveness isn't deserved.

~ Minds can be beautiful.

~ It takes courage to admit you have questions and to wrestle out answers to the tough ones.

~ The positive role model of an older brother is invaluable.

~ Humility is attractive.

~ Thinking before speaking is always a good idea.

~ You can be your fiercest competitor.

My sweet, Noah:

- You are a gift from God.
- I will miss you severely.
- I will love you forever.
- I will love you always.
- As long as I'm living
- My baby you'll be.

And I promise I'll *try* to be ok watching from the other side of the glass ...

XO

How to Make Christmas

Meaningful – Beautiful Simplicity (Part 2)

There's 20-ish days until Christmas. I'm hitting the java a little harder, scurrying around like a crazy woman trying to find the perfect decorations, gifts and holiday clothes for the parties. Not to mention, taking my children to all of the perfect events, plays and concerts so they can experience a perfect Christmas. Sound familiar?

The Perfect Christmas

After all, we moms know, it's up to us to pull this whole Christmas thing off for our kids. Right?

We create the perfect back drop ...



to showcase the perfect tree ...



for the perfect family gathering ...



with those we may only see once a year ...



We share a feast ...



and make memories to last for many Christmases to come.



Perfect, right??!!

Just like Clark Griswold, The "Perfect Christmas" monster

consumes me at times. There is no way that *I* can create a perfect Christmas ... for my kids, myself or anyone else. No matter how hard I try, someone will always have more, better, bigger, faster. If I focus on the stuff, I will continue to have the same empty feeling as soon as the wrapping paper and ribbons cover the den floor.

The only perfect Christmas was the first one.

One word comes to mind ... **S.I.M.P.L.E.**

A father,

a mother,

and a baby lying in a feeding trough.

Unfancy. Simple.

The mother, father and the visitors that would arrive within the next months/years had one goal at this time...one focus...this baby born under the stars in obscurity.

The focus and desire of my heart is what matters during this season. If I allow the "Perfect Christmas" monster to reign, then it's meaningless. **If my heart is bent toward remembering the baby and the significance of His birth in my own life and how that spills out of me during this season, then Christmas wins.**

It's simply beautiful...

Our family celebrates Advent which has proved to anchor me during this over-stressed season. You can read about how we do that in this post.

I'd love to hear how you battle the "Perfect Christmas" monster. Leave a comment below ...

Striving for a simple Christmas ~

Becky ☐

How to Make Christmas Meaningful (Part 1) – Celebrate Advent with Your Children

Thanksgiving has passed. There doesn't seem to be a clear line delineating the seasons of thankfulness and Christmas these days. When I wake up from the tryptophan-induced fog of Thanksgiving and realize that Christmas starts moments after I dish up the turkey and jello for the 5-yr.old, I freak out! I love Thanksgiving and we have an unwritten rule around here that we don't really even talk about Christmas until after Thanksgiving. If you haven't read my Thanksgiving post, you can do that here.

✘ Usually, I feel like the chaotic Christmas season sweeps me along in its current and I hang on for dear life. Not wanting my kids to “miss out,” I shuttle them from one event to the next constantly thinking to myself, “we'll put up our tree tomorrow...we'll bake cookies for our neighbors tomorrow...we'll catch up with our advent reading tomorrow” etc. Tomorrows come and go ... we get so busy “doing” that we forget about the “being” part of Christmas.

One tradition that we have tried to do, some years with more success than others, is to celebrate advent. I wasn't raised with this tradition in my family or in the church we attended when I was a child so I really didn't understand what it was all about until about 10 yrs. ago. Then I became aware of how it could bring more meaning to our over-commercialized holiday by helping us focus on the true meaning of Christmas.

✘ This series of books by Arnold Y'treeid'es has become one of our absolute favorite things we do during the season of

Advent – the days leading up to Christmas. Beginning the Sunday after Thanksgiving, there's a daily reading selection every day through Christmas day ... a short chapter. Each historical fiction book takes the reader on an adventure culminating with the birth of Christ. At the end of each chapter is a short devotional which brings the focus back to Jesus and Christmas. And I'm SO excited because there is a new one this year!

There's no particular order that you must read them ... We actually started with the 2nd book of the series, Bartholomew's Journey. We were hooked! Next we read, Jotham's Journey and then Tabitha's Travels. This year we're reading the new release, Ishtar's Odyssey. We always look forward to the next Advent so that we can read another one. The author's website has additional "special features" for each book which includes maps, photos and more.

Yes, I know, the advent season has officially already begun. It began the first Sunday after Thanksgiving, but don't panic! We've started late many times, sometimes as much as a week to 10 days. I've learned that if I wait until everything is perfect, I never start anything.

So just start where you ARE. Depending on the age and attention span of your kids, you could go back and do a quick overview of the reading to "catch up" but it's not necessary. We've doubled up on the readings each day to catch up as well...the stories are so engaging that this has been easy to do. Even when we're not playing catch up they will beg me to read more!

What are some meaningful ways your family keeps Christ at the center of Christmas? I'd love to hear how you maintain the balance ... leave a comment or reach out to me on Facebook.

Thanks for stopping by ☐

How I Teach My Kids to be Thankful

I. Love. Thanksgiving.

I like it even more than Christmas or any other holiday. It's the "giving" part. Especially for our children, Christmas can be so much about the "getting" that the reason we celebrate gets totally lost.

I love seeing my children perform random acts of giving. Giving puts the focus on the other person instead of themselves.

I must say that before I expect my children to operate on a level of contentment/thankfulness, I must expect nothing less from myself. It starts with me. When they constantly hear me talking about "I wish I had ..." or "I need a new ..." – it doesn't communicate to them that I'm thankful for what I have. I had to be willing to be completely open to changing ME first.

Here's a few things that we've done to help encourage a thankful heart in our children ...

1. ALWAYS say "Thank You!"

This may sound a bit insignificant but training our children from an early age to always give proper thanks to someone is important. It forces them to acknowledge that someone just "gave" them something – maybe it was a nice compliment about new shoes, a piece of gum or the last burger. Someone made a choice to do or say something kind. They realize that they can make the same choices as well.

2. Prayers of thanksgiving

We pray with our kids ... at mealtimes, family time and bedtime ... and teach them that everything we have comes from God. Once our children acknowledge God as the Ultimate Giver, they can understand more clearly why they should be givers also.

We really try to camp out on the “giving thanks” part of our prayers with our kids. When they verbalize how MUCH we have to be thankful, the trivial “wants” seem to fade away...

We’ve been blessed to hear some VERY long prayers at mealtime. One of our sons, at the age of 4 yrs., would pray with one eye open, thus became known as our “One-eyed-Pray-er” ... He’d camp out on the thankful part and whatever his one open eye would land on, he’d name it...toaster, light, refrigerator, broom, wall, dog, etc...and he would go on for.ev.er! At least until a hungry brother nudged him enough times ☐

3. Give

☒ Giving or generosity is a by-product of thankfulness. The more thankful our children are the more they naturally give. Some of our kids are naturally more inclined to give and others need more structured opportunities to practice giving. Recently, we went to volunteer at our Regional Food Bank. This was an awesome way for our kids to realize how a few hours of their time can truly give to others who are in need. The group that we were working with bagged enough frozen vegetables to serve over 2,400 meals in 3 hours! They were pumped! Desired effect accomplished. Giving made them feel good and they’re asking ME when we can do it again. This will be a more regular volunteering opportunity for us. If this sounds like something you’d like to do with your kiddos, you can find your local food bank volunteer opportunities here.

I appreciate you taking the time to read this and I always love hearing from you! Thank you!