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Mom didn't enjoy her last Christmas with all of her kids (and that's OK)

OPINION By Joshua Rogers | Fox News



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It was Christmas of 1984, and my mother crammed my three older siblings and me into a compact car and took us to Arkansas to celebrate the holiday. I vaguely remember it – my mother, on the other hand, remembers it quite clearly. Apparently, it was pretty rough.

No doubt, putting one adult, two older teenagers and two small boys into a small car for six hours was a recipe for disaster. One of us – I shall not say who – was behaving horribly and Mom couldn't seem to get control of the situation. She was exasperated nearly the entire time.

Nonetheless, anytime I've heard Mom talk about that Christmas trip in the years since then, there's a tinge of regret – but it's not regret over taking the trip. It's regret over not enjoying it. As it turns out,

that was the last time Mom would ever go on a road trip with all four of her kids again. She now wishes she had appreciated it more.

In the midst of all of the strife, it was hard for her to remember that our time as a family had an expiration date. But suddenly life happened and my two oldest siblings grew up and moved out, leaving a couple of boys in the house, and that was it. There weren't any more family road trips.

I have this theory that if Mom could go back in time and do that six-hour road trip all over again, she would be just as miserable as she was the first time. Sure, at first she would get in the car and say, "Okay, Paula – remember: This is your last road trip with all four of your kids, so treasure it. Take a deep breath. Be present to the moment. Yes. Here we go. Thank You, Jesus."

Mom would ride along for about 45 minutes, soaking up the reality and feeling so grateful. But then my oldest brother would pinch me in the back seat and I would start crying. Mom would tell my brother to stop and he would scowl at her.

My youngest brother would pass gas and the tiny car would start to stink. I would get pinched again and start crying again. Mom would raise her voice at all three boys and we would all yell that we didn't do anything. My sister would tell us to shut up and Mom would tell my sister not to talk like that.

So it would go for six hours until we were about two miles away from Paragould, Arkansas, at which point Mom would realize that she failed to appreciate that last, wonderful trip (again). Going back in time and reliving the moment wouldn't make it any easier.

When God allows us to live in a particular moment, He gives us the privilege of experiencing it for what it is. So no matter how many times older parents tell us younger parents to enjoy every moment with our children, we can't make it enjoyable. Changing diapers is stinky and messy, playing Candyland gets old, watching another t-ball game is boring, and combing tangles is difficult and delicate work.

That's why I think it's okay to spend time with kids and feel exasperated – to not even appreciate or enjoy it a lot of the time. Scripture doesn't tell us to be thankful *for* all circumstances – it tells us to "be thankful *in* all circumstances" (1 Thess. 5:18). We're to *give* thanks – not necessarily to *feel* thankful.

The beauty of giving thanks to God during exasperating times with our kids is that it directs us away from the disappointing youngsters around us and turns our attention to Him. Miserable or not, at least we have the peace of knowing we weren't alone in the frustration.

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