


Nine Gifts from God

To Thrive Rather than Survive During the Holidays



1 Corinthians 13 Parenting



*With faith, hope & love,
1 Corinthians 13 Parenting Team*

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9 Precious Gifts from God to Us

Contained within the verses in Luke 10 and in John 12 we discover nine special presents just waiting to be unwrapped. Join us as we peel back the paper and take peek into the life of Jesus and his special friendship with Lazarus, Martha, and Mary.

Have a Mary Christmas!

With faith, hope, and love,

Lori Wildenberg & Becky Danielson
and the 1 Corinthians 13 Parenting Team

With special thanks to team members:

David and Claudia Arp, Sherri Crandall, Jim Dempsey,
Tonja Engen, Jenna Hallock, Misty Honnold, Pete Larson,
J.L. Martin, Cindi McMenamin, Dale Skram, and Kirk Weaver

At the Home of Martha and Mary
Luke 10:38-42

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

The Gift of Gathering

Misty Honnold, Sherri Crandall

**Jesus spent time with his friends.
Share the joy of the season by gathering together.**

The Gift of Hospitality

Jenna Hallock, Tonja Engen

**Jesus knew he was always welcome at Martha's home.
An open door starts with a loving heart.**

The Gift of Worship

Jim Dempsey, Misty Honnold

**Like Mary, stay close to Jesus.
Worship the Lord in all you do.**

The Gift of Presence

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**Extra fussing does not add value to the experience.
But time together engaging is priceless.**

The Gift of Peace

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**Jesus lets us know less is best.
Fewer things on our plates, reduces stress.**

The Gift of Priorities

Cindi McMenamin, Dale Skram

**Sitting at Jesus' feet was Mary's top priority.
Make spending time with Jesus a priority.**

Jesus Anointed at Bethany
John 12:1-3

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

The Gift of Uniqueness

Pete Larson, Lori Wildenberg

Lazarus, Martha, and Mary were siblings with unique personalities but shared a love for Jesus. Celebrate uniqueness in your family while looking like Jesus.

The Gift of Serving

Becky Danielson, J.L. Martin

Martha honored the Lord by serving him while spending time with him. We can honor our family in the same way.

The Gift of Giving

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Mary was blessed when she blessed Jesus with her generosity. Be blessed and be a blessing.

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The Gift of Gathering

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. Luke 10:38

Jesus spent time with his friends. Share the joy of the season by gathering together.

I was chatting with Jesus a few weeks ago and in my conversations with Him, I like to pause and listen. As I was finishing up my listening time I sensed Him say, “*I have given you people to enjoy.*” I thought “*That is weird...must be my late night snack speaking.*” However as the day progressed I thought about it and indeed I enjoy PEOPLE more than anything. I enjoy their stories, expressions, and just their presence. People are indeed a present to me from the Father, much like others enjoy a beautiful sunset; I enjoy seeing the SON through another’s eyes. So the Gift of Gathering is of the utmost importance to me and I have had the joy of raising my children with a great appreciation for others too.

For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst. Matthew 18:20

There is no greater gift than the presence of Jesus in our midst and He informs us that when we gather together, even two or three, He is with us. And there is no greater GIFT than that of gathering with family and friends. How can we as busy families create an environment where family and friends want to gather? How do we establish an environment to come together, create memories and celebrate one another? KNOW what is important to YOU!

Depending on the season of life, our gatherings have included everything from:

- Drawing my little ones (and big ones) close to read holiday books,
- A steaming cup of hot cocoa with a favorite Christmas movie,
- Friends gathering to decorate cookies for a competition,
- Various families gathered to cook together,
- Inviting friends to scour over the black Friday ads and plan early morning shopping.

You can make a family or friend gathering around ANYTHING you enjoy. SIMPLE... Keep it simple! The joy of these times of gathering with family and friends is powerful because it creates memories. When difficult times come, as they have raged upon our family in the past, these times of gatherings have helped us through the holidays, the memories that we have created have inspired my children to do the same as they begin their families.

Misty Honnold,



Life wasn’t meant to do alone. Recently, I spoke to a group of women and shared with them ways to encourage one another and we explored how to design a community where no one expected perfection and where it felt safe to ask for help. At the end of my talk three ladies came up to me crying and promising that night they were going to be that community for each other. A short time later I talked with one of them and with excitement she shared about their supper club, their car pool schedule, and their baby-sitting co-op. The burden of mothering that they had felt was now erased by a strong community where they accepted each other’s flaws and gladly asked for help and lovingly gave help to each other. Here are five ways we can do life in community: Take a good (realistic) inventory of where you need help, then have a candid conversation with your friends and actually ask for help, create systems to help each other (ex: everyone cooks together and then you each go home with fresh meals for your family and to stock the freezer, swap babysitting so you can have dates nights, volunteer or go get your hair cut), be real with each other by sharing fears and failures, finally encourage each other. Life is more enjoyable when you share it with others.

Sherri Crandall

The Gift of Hospitality

Martha opened her home... Luke 10:38

Jesus knew he was always welcome at Martha's home. An open door starts with a loving heart.

I'd like to start with what the Gift of Hospitality is NOT. Hospitality is not a magazine worthy home. It is not lavish food and drink. Hospitality is not crammed into an already busy schedule, nor is it reserved only for when you think you have time. The Gift of Hospitality says, "Let me share with you what I have." The Gift of Hospitality welcomes both the closest of friends and the neediest strangers.

At Christmas, the Gift of Hospitality can look like fancy dinners, cookie exchange parties, and crafts around the kitchen table. But it also looks like shoe box gifts, inviting a family in need to dinner at a restaurant (which may be a rare opportunity!) or accepting an unexpected drop-by visit from a neighbor.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" John 13:34-35. LOVE is at the center of hospitality. In the rush of this season, here are a few things to remember: Your home doesn't need to be spotless. Paper plates are OK! Hospitality doesn't have to be in your home...it's in your heart. Being stressed before, during or after is not a gift to you, your family, your guests, or to God.

Hospitality is indeed a gift. It's a gift you've received from God. It's a gift to those you share it with. And, it's a gift to God as you share his love with others.

Jenna Hallock



Earlier on in our marriage I used to get a "wee bit" stressed over the holidays with the thought of entertaining. A) I really didn't know how to cook, and B) we lived in a teeny tiny starter home with only 3 light switches and a used dining room table from my in-laws. I thought I had to impress with fancy dishes and fancy linens. I mean why did we get all this china for our wedding if we weren't going to use it?

What I learned after hosting holidays throughout the years is that your guests aren't looking for fancy. They aren't looking for five-course meals. As Shauna Niequist so eloquently wrote in her book *Bread and Wine*, "What people are craving isn't perfection. People aren't longing to be impressed; they're longing to feel like they're home." Amen to that. Holidays filled with laughter and love not fancy linens are the best kind.

The real privilege when hosting is to serve others. Jesus is the greatest example of that during The Last Supper. He provides us with a very important principle for living a Christian life: the greatest are those who serve others, not those who expect to be served. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" Colossians 3:23-24.

Bayfield Eggs

1 1/2 lb. sausage
12 eggs
3/4 lb. cheddar cheese
1/2 lg. onion, minced
3/4 c. green pepper
2 c. mushrooms
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. pepper
1/2 pt. whole cream

This make-ahead egg bake will happily feed your houseful of guests.

All you need to do is pop it in the oven when you wake.

Fry sausage and drain well. Grease 9 x 13 pan. Break eggs into pan and poke the yolks. Top the eggs with the sausage, 1/2 the cheese, onion, green pepper, and mushrooms. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Cover all with cream and the rest of the cheese. Refrigerate overnight. Bake 1 hour at 350 degrees.

Tonja Engen

The Gift of Worship

She (Martha) had a sister Mary who sat at the Lord's feet. Luke 10:39

Like Mary, stay close to Jesus. Worship the Lord in all you do.

Worship is a gift, but it's not the way you think it is. You may be thinking that our worship is a gift we give to God, but it's not. It's the other way around. Worship is a gift He gives us! Consider this:

We would never understand the concept of worship if God did not create us. Because we have the gift of life, we have a capacity to worship.

We would never have someone to worship if God did not reveal Himself to us. He could have left us in the dark about His existence, but He didn't.

We would never possess the desire to worship if God did not give us a new spirit. Jesus said true worshippers must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24).

We would never have the words for worship if God had not made us in His likeness. God is a God of communication, and He made us with that same ability. Language is an amazing gift to humanity.

We would never have the emotions of worship if God had not given us joy, and peace, and awe. There is even a kind of worship that rides the dark emotions of sadness and grief. I've been there, and worshipped God just as Job did when he said "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away.

Blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21)

We would never have the songs to worship with if God had not made sound and music and rhythm, and given us an aptitude to make and appreciate music. Think what gifts these are!

As you worship in front of your child, remember that worship is God's gift to you. As you show the proper heart of thankfulness to God, your children will learn that true worship is our privilege, and not simply our duty.

Jim Dempsey



During the holiday season we enjoy singing about our precious Savior. We gather in churches, homes, and schools to hear and sing of adoration to our King Jesus who was born in a manger.

We are created to worship. This is a gift from the Heavenly Father to us. He created His sons and daughters to worship. Worship literally means "worth"-ship. It is giving glory to something of value or worth.

We will worship something because God put it in our DNA to bow down in worship. Unfortunately our worship can get focused on other things; especially during the holidays. We sing and talk about the wise men who came from the east to worship the newborn King. We sing about the angelic host who filled the sky worshipping the Savior of the world who was born in a manger and love to hear the story of how the shepherds left their sheep in the field to find the babe born in a manger.

On that special night so long ago, those with eyes to see and ears to hear realized the value of this baby. In our culture, taking time to worship King Jesus is often lost in the hustle and bustle of life; much like it was in Bethlehem on the night Jesus was born. Notice the angels did not appear to the people of the city; but to the lowly shepherds out in the field. The innkeeper was so busy taking care of business that he missed the visitation of Jesus in his home.

As we prepare our homes for the holidays, let's create a place of worship. Let's build an altar to the Lord and remember His goodness. Hanging the lights can be an act of worship as we share with our children who The Light of the World is. Baking cookies can be an act of worship as we remember the 'sweetness' of our Savior. Yes, even cleaning the dirty dishes after that big dinner can be an act of worship unto the Lord as we remember that He has washed us and cleansed us from all unrighteousness. Throughout the day, in the hustle and bustle of the season...come, let us ADORE HIM.

Misty Honnold



Maybe you haven't considered where to sit as all that important when you go into your church's worship service. But actually, it's critical. We even have a Bible story that tells us this strategic truth. You'll find it in Luke Chapter 10.

Jesus visited the house of two sisters, Mary and Martha, and Martha was occupied with making the house and dinner perfect for her guests. She was likely scurrying around the house, in and out of the kitchen. But Mary sat "at the Lord's feet, listening to His word." (Luke 10:39)

Martha complained to Jesus "It's not fair!" Ever hear that from one of your kids? Martha learned a very important hostess tip: Don't worry about the house or the meal when you need to be concerned about where to sit.

Mary knew where to sit for worship: At the feet of the One worthy of worship.

The word worship has at its root the word 'worth.' When we worship, we are assigning worth to the object of our worship. So the question becomes, "What or Whom is worth our time and attention?"

At Christmas, we sing a version of 'O Come All Ye Faithful' that ends with 'For He alone is worthy.' That is so true. There's really only One worthy of our worship.

So the very best place to sit when you're worshipping is at the feet of Jesus.

The next time you gather your kids to worship, let them know you are sitting at Jesus's feet. He's there, in your private or public worship, but you need to set aside the business of life's details and set your hearts on Him.

He's giving you the Gift of Worship by giving you His presence. Sit close. Jim Dempsey



The Gift of Presence

Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. Luke 10:40

Extra fussing does not add value to the experience. But time together engaging is priceless.

Here's a quick Christmas quiz.

What were your favorite parts of last year's Christmas celebrations?

Do you remember what you purchased for each person on your shopping list?

What was the best thing you cooked during the Christmas season last year?

How many hours did you spend wrapping gifts? Decorating the house?

On December 26, how do you remember feeling? (Relieved? Disappointed?)

This isn't your typical multiple-choice quiz. It's designed to force us to reflect. Do we remember the details of the Christmas season? Do we remember all of those things that we fretted about, over-spent for, or lost sleep to accomplish? More importantly, did all of these things keep us from enjoying the people we claim to do this for? Looking back... Did I give *presents* or did I give PRESENCE?

The Gift of Presence is what our family and friends will remember long after December. The Gift of joyful, hopeful, generous, beautiful Presence is what makes memories for a lifetime. Think about question #1. Do you remember events and people? My guess is, "Yes."

Jesus is always about relationship before material things. He enjoyed food, but *it was never about the food*. When Jesus celebrated, it was about the people *not what they were wearing*. And since Christmas is about Jesus, shouldn't we celebrate like He would? "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" 1 John 1:7. Jesus is the light of the world! He is the greatest gift! Pray that He would help you to give the Gift of Presence and Be the Light this Christmas season.

Jenna Hallock



At Christmastime, we tend to think of presents as the gifts we give to each other. But, our true gift to others and to God-is our *presence*-our ability to be in the moment with friends and family, not distracted by all the things we think we need to do.

When Jesus stopped in at the home of Mary and Martha, His presence in their home was worth their attention. But Luke 10:40 tells us, "Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made." While she scampered about the kitchen preparing the food, the Bread of Life was already in her living room. Jesus wanted Martha to see that a once-in-a-lifetime situation was happening right there in her home—and she was missing it.

God would rather have us be *with* Him than do a bunch of things *for* Him. I think our family members feel the same. I remember being so busy one Christmas day, cooking a ham and making sure the table was just perfect. Suddenly it occurred to me that I was missing the moment. My daughter was only three months old and I was missing all my parents were saying and observing as they held her for the first time. My husband was entertaining the guests in the living room while I was focused on the food and the fuss, rather than my family. Like Martha, I was missing the moment. I put everything aside, joined my family, and have a memory that I now cherish. And the meal still happened, without my continued fuss.

What are you missing because you're too busy scampering about this holiday season? Your child's cry for attention? The sound of the bells jingling from the Salvation Army volunteer? The discussion at the dinner table that you should be a part of? Don't miss what matters most this holiday season. Give others the gift of your focused, undistracted presence.

Cindi McMenamin

The Gift of Peace

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “You are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one.” Luke 10:41-42a

Jesus lets us know less is best. Fewer things on our plates reduces stress.

If you're feeling stressed this holiday season here's a gift that can be a real stress reliever. Give your spouse a 20-second hug! Why 20 seconds? That's how long it takes to get the love hormone, oxytocin, flowing which will boost positive emotions as it calms your nervous system. Hugs can even lower your blood pressure and also lower the stress hormone, cortisol. Here's another benefit. Studies show that couples who hug and touch more often are happier, healthier, more relaxed, and less likely to divorce.

Touch is a vital part of a loving relationship. We all need to be touched. Newborn babies need it to survive and thrive. Our need to be touched persists all our lives; touch is almost as essential as food. It's a significant means of connection and bonding. And a great way to touch daily with your spouse is by giving and receiving hugs. So when you're feeling stressed, hug for 20 seconds. And think about this, when you give a big hug, you get one in return! Consider what a hug can communicate:

A hug can say, “You're appreciated; you're okay; I care about you!”

A hug can heal old wounds. It's hard to stay angry when you're being hugged!

A hug can sometimes give more comfort than words!

Taking time to touch in tender ways helps us connect and experience more oneness in our marriage. It's biblical. Consider Genesis 2:24 *“For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife, and they shall be one flesh.* And why do hugs feel so good? That's just the way God made us! Along with the psalmist we can say, “I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made” Psalm 139:14. Today, give your spouse with a 20-second hug. (Children can also benefit from hug therapy!)

Claudia & David Arp



November. It's the start of what is arguably the busiest season of the year. I feel like I have the same conversation with myself every November. Maybe you can relate. It goes a little something like this (Usually in my head, but not always. Yes, I'm that kind of crazy.) *“You need a plan. You don't want to get stressed out. You want to ENJOY the season. You need to build in time for getting everything done and still have time to relax. And be sure to make quality, unrushed time for family.”*

Then, without skipping a beat I start my list: Schedule Christmas tree cutting... going to need to get a permit and run the date by the hub. Do I have that Christmas tree preservative or did I run out last year? I need to donate the old Christmas lights before I get any more. Do I need to buy a new tree skirt? Better clip the Hobby Lobby coupon just in case. (And heaven knows that won't be the only thing I buy once I'm at Hobby Lobby!) Did you see what just happened? One thought. One possible “to do.” It just multiplied itself in a matter of minutes in my mind. **Was Christ in it? Did I submit my mind and my desires to Him?**

Let's try this again. “Lord, I trust you that you are in complete control. I feel overwhelmed by the holiday season. But Father, I trust that you have already ordained my steps. Help me to go to you each moment of each day so that I can live in the joy you promise to your people. I know that you love me and that by your Spirit you will give me the time to do all the things that will bring glory to your name. I want to put you first before the shopping, before the baking, before the parties and the decorations. Give me grace to serve you gladly and to honor you in my lifestyle now and in the weeks to come. Amen”

Jenna Hallock

The Gift of Priorities

"Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:42b
Sitting at Jesus' feet was Mary's top priority. Make spending time with Jesus a priority.

God has given us lots of good things to enjoy on this earth. And we have lots of choices – especially during the holidays. But how many times do we say yes to the best?

When Jesus stopped by the home of Mary and Martha in Bethany there were lots of things to do to make His stay a pleasant one – or were there? There was the choice to scamper about the kitchen and try to make everything perfect – which is the choice the eldest sister, Martha, made. And there was the choice to sit at Jesus' feet, keeping a calm heart, and realizing that focusing on Jesus was all that really mattered. That was Mary's choice. And Jesus commended her for it: "Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" Luke 10:41b.

I love the fact that Mary was so immersed in Jesus' teaching that she didn't notice the commotion her absence from the kitchen had caused. Oh to be so wrapped up in Jesus this holiday season that we are oblivious to the self-induced frustrations of every stressed-out person in this world. How can you choose what is better this holiday season? Choose to prioritize people over productivity.

Choose what is eternal over what is temporary.
Choose what will last, not what will quickly fade, break or be spent.
Choose words that heal rather than hurt.
Choose a smile rather than a snide remark.
Choose to be *with* God -- and others -- rather than just do things *for them*.
Choose what is best.

Cindi McMenamin



One of my biggest problems as a parent is working on too many issues at one time because they all seem to need immediate attention. There is no end in sight to the number of issues my children can have. But my greatest successes as a parent have occurred when I focused my time and attention on only ONE issue.

And not per child, but ONE issue, period.

At first I was terrified that my house would spin out of control by letting the other issues slide, but what I discovered was that in addressing the most important issue first, the others could wait. Sometimes they even resolved themselves. Chasing only ONE issue provides the time, energy, and good attitude necessary to really help our children. And not to worry, the other issues will be patiently waiting for you when you are ready to chase them down too. And don't ever forget the most important ONE thing that we can do as parents: Develop our relationship with God.

"Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But *one* thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10: 41-42). Martha had a ton of stuff to do and it was killing her because she missed the *one* thing (taking time to spend with Jesus) that makes *all* things work out just right. This might be something that you want to ask God in your time together, especially during the holidays: Help me to prioritize the *one* issue that needs addressing in my home this week. Provide me the wisdom and understanding to help my child be the person you created them to be. And let me remember the most important *one* thing. "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" Matthew 6:33.

Dale Skram

The Gift of Uniqueness

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³ Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. John 12:1-3

Lazarus, Martha, and Mary were siblings with very unique personalities but had a shared love for Jesus. Celebrate uniqueness in your family while resembling Christ.

Every once in a while a complete stranger will walk up to me and say, "Excuse me, is your last name Larson?" It happened the other night at Chipotle while I was waiting for a burrito.

Knowing that my memory is not always the greatest my usual response is, "Do I know you?" In most cases I don't know the person, but they happen to know one of my brothers or sisters. They had seen a family resemblance in me that reminded them of one of my siblings.

This started me wondering. Do I also resemble my other family - my heavenly family?

When people see me or talk to me, do they wonder, "Does he belong to the family of Jesus?" Is there a heavenly family resemblance in me that can be recognized? Would a stranger on the street, meeting me for the first time, ever come to the conclusion by the way that I act, speak, or treat others that I was a Christian?

Of our two boys, one looks more like me and the other looks more like my wife. We have no control over these outward physical traits. However, we can impact those inward traits. Through our example, teaching, guidance, and love, we can help our kids resemble Christ. Our deepest desire as Christian parents is that our kids would be like Christ at their core. Hopefully, as we encounter those around us, "They will know that we are Christians by our love."
Pete Larson



Ask any parent of two or more kids and he will tell you each child is different. Just like the three siblings Jesus frequently spent time with: Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. All three very different individuals and Jesus loved each one. Lazarus liked to hang out with Jesus, Martha was gifted in the area of service, and Mary loved to worship.

All valuable and honorable, yet unique qualities.

It is every parent's hope their children will be lifelong friends like Lazarus and his sisters. In order to have a relationship that does last a lifetime sibling rivalry needs to be squelched. To do that we can gift our kids with these things: show appreciation each person's uniqueness, avoid comparing our kids to each other, train them how to resolve conflicts without being disagreeable, encourage empathy in the family, spend time together to build memories, let each person know that he is worthy and precious in God's sight, and he is created on purpose for a purpose. Cement the sibling relationships with unconditional parental love.

Lori Wildenberg

The Gift of Serving

“Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honor. Martha served.” John 12: 2a
Martha honored Jesus by serving him while spending time with him.
We can honor our family in the same way.

Serving others is a gift. Coming to the aid of others doesn’t have to be a big event or an expensive undertaking. There are many easy ways to meet the needs of others around the holidays. Here are a few ideas to get your family started:

- Serve dinner as a family team at a homeless shelter.
- Ring the bell for a Salvation Army Red Kettle.
- Contribute for a toy drive or mitten tree as a family. Shop together.
- Volunteer in the nursery for additional children whose families attend Christmas services.
- Bake and deliver Christmas treats to the elderly in the neighborhood.
- Make and send sympathy cards to those who have lost a loved one during the past year.
- Encourage kids to be on the lookout for ways to help one another at home.

The goal of serving is to share the love of Jesus as a family during this blessed time of year. Look around your neighborhood, church, child’s school, and community. Who could use a little Christmas love? ...*the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve* (Matthew 20:28a). Our children learn to serve others when we provide learning opportunities. Faith comes alive in service. Christmas becomes more about giving than receiving.

Becky Danielson



Spending time with your children is an act of service. When the busyness of the Christmas season begins, take the time to share the real reason for the season with your family members. The gift is an act of love.

I would like to share some of my favorite resources to use with family during Advent. I hope they will be a blessing to you and way to fix your eyes on Jesus during this Advent.

- *The Donkey in the Living Room* by Sarah Cunningham I met Sarah at the D6 Conference in Louisville.

This is a fun tradition that was established in her own home as a child. We used this resource last year as an e-book, but it is available now in Christian bookstores.

- *Adornaments or The 12 Names of Christmas* by Family Life These have been a favorite tradition for our family. This has been edited to include an adult version and child version. However, each of these ornaments uses a name and image of Jesus and includes a brief reading for each Adornment or name of Jesus. The ornaments are great for families with younger kids.

- *The ADVENTure of Christmas* by Lisa Whelchel We used this several years ago in our family. Lisa shares the stories of many of the traditions that we participate in during the Christmas season.

- *What God Wants for Christmas* by Family Life This was a new resource a few years ago. It is another great one for younger children as they get to open a present each day. Short readings and fun make this a great choice as anticipation grows waiting to open the final present.

- *Truth in Tinsel* website has many great ideas and will be appreciated by those who love to spend time on Pinterest.

- *A Holy Experience* Ann Voskamp provides this idea for a special tree for Advent. I personally have not used this resource but enjoy Voskamp’s creativity, poetic language, and a way to keep Jesus central during the holidays. Voskamp has published a book this year that incorporates thoughts from this website.

I hope these resources will be a great addition to your Christmas traditions and help keep Jesus in the middle of your celebration and family time. “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” Hebrews 12:2.

J.L. Martin

The Gift of Giving

“Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.” John 12: 3

Mary was blessed when she blessed Jesus with her generosity. Be blessed and be a blessing.

Giving is a learned discipline that leads to immeasurable blessing in the life of the giver! The joy of giving in my life began with the intentional teaching by my parents and was nurtured by other Christian financial advisors along the way. Here are three methods for raising children who enjoy giving:

Model Giving: Talk with your children about the who, what, where, when, why and how of your giving.

Activity idea: Take turns letting your children put the family’s gift into the offering plate at church.

Teach Giving: For teens, I suggest making Crown Ministry or Financial Peace University part of their financial training. If they have a job then they need to understand budgets, balance a checkbook, manage debt and use money to help others.

Activity idea: Teach children to give part of their allowance or money they earn to the church, missionary or other worthy ministry. Focus on the needs of the recipient, not on what the child is giving up.

Experience Giving: Consider sending teens on a church mission trip. Personally deliver meals to friends who are sick, serve food at the homeless shelter or take toys to a residential treatment center for children.

Activity idea: Invite a missionary or someone who has been on a mission’s trip over to your home. Ask them to use pictures and videos to help your children visualize life and needs in other countries.

Giving is important to Jesus. He calls us to be givers. The Bible includes 500 verses on prayer and 500 verses on faith but more than 2,000 verses on money and possessions. When we teach our children to give, we bless them.

Kirk Weaver



I want you to give more this Christmas season, but instead of telling you to work hard to change your attitude and give till it hurts, I am going to challenge you with one point --give more grace. You will discover that as you understand grace and let those truths from God’s Word sink into your hearts, you want to give more.

What is grace? Grace is defined by Paul Zahl as “one way love.”¹

To understand grace, let’s read Romans 5:12-17. We discover in verses 12-14 some very bad news. Sin has entered the world through one man, Adam and has brought death to all people. We also learn about the law that helps us understand our sin. But because of God’s grace, we also receive some good news. Sin and death has entered the world but we have received a gift. This gift is “much more” than the bad news of sin and death. This gift of Jesus does not make things even but overflows to many.

Paul continues by sharing more bad news of judgment and condemnation. However, the gift brings justification. Elyse Fitzpatrick writes, “Justification is just as if we had never sinned and just as if we had always obeyed.”² This justification points us to Jesus Christ. This gift is abundant and brings life. Whatever difficulty you are facing right now, let me encourage that the gift of grace is much greater than anything you are facing. As you grasp the greatness of grace which is given as a gift by Jesus, you will in gratitude and joy want to give more grace to others.

J.L. Martin

1. Zahl, Paul F.M. Grace in Practice: A Theology of Everyday Life: Eerdmans, 2007.

2. Fitzpatrick & Thompson. Give Them Grace: Dazzling Your Kids with the Love of Jesus: Crossway, 2011.

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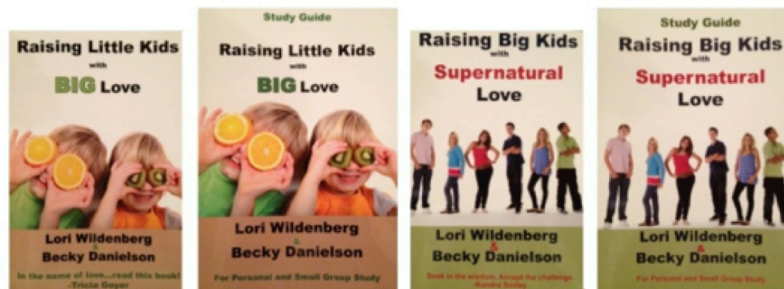
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Personally we relate. Professionally we support.

We hope you and your family have a very *Mary* Christmas!

