



Bulletin

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A PUBLICATION OF FOCUS ON THE FAMILY®

"Immanuel—God with Us!"

THE MESSAGE OF MERRY CHRISTMAS

BY JIM DALY

THE PHRASE "MERRY CHRISTMAS" FIRST BECAME POPULAR IN DECEMBER OF 1843, the year Charles Dickens's classic novel *A Christmas Carol* was published.

You remember the story. The main character, Ebenezer Scrooge, was a curmudgeon who answered, "Bah! Humbug!" every time his nephew wished him, "Merry Christmas!" Scrooge chastised him, saying, "What right have you to be merry? Every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding."

Later in the story, though, the ghosts of Christmas past, present and future show up. They show Scrooge that his priorities are out of whack, that he cares more about material wealth than about people. Each selfish act has added links to a heavy chain being forged around him, binding him to the past. By the end of the tale, Scrooge discovers that the only way to decrease his burden is by feeling compassion for others.

What you may not know is that *A Christmas Carol* was Dickens's way of convincing his fellow Londoners to give to the less fortunate during the holiday season. He hoped communicating his ideas through a Christmas story would bring his message to life.

I'd say he was right. To this day, you and I spread Dickens's message of hope and love into the world every time we tell each other, "Merry Christmas."

Want to know more? Visit www.focusonthefamily.com.





COORDINATE A BLESSED CHRISTMAS SEASON

Being a little more purposeful in our planning has made all the difference in how my husband and I come out on the other side of Christmas and the holiday season. We choose whether we simply survive the holidays or if we enjoy each other and the rest of our family. When we spend just a little time planning together, each of us has the opportunity to enjoy what is important to us during the season. And that adds to our joy and peace throughout the coming weeks.

As a couple, we get to decide how much time is spent with family and how much time is spent as a couple during the Christmas season. My husband and I have made it a point to plan not just family activities, but also a few couple's activities.

To the rest of the world, doing things like shopping for presents, wrapping gifts and preparing for holiday parties may look like an endless list of chores. But we prefer to think of these activities as dating with a purpose.

Here are some ideas to keep you organized *and* keep you close:

- Set a date to put your Christmas tree up and decorate it.
 - Have a “food and finances” night. Review your Christmas budget, and, because you’ve done a hard thing (talking about money), celebrate by finding an inexpensive restaurant for dinner together.
 - Check out holiday movies online and decide which ones you’d like to watch during December. Make a list and organize your on-demand choices or load up your Netflix queue.
- With a little planning and an intentional goal of being organized, you can also stay connected as a couple as you prepare for the holidays together. Consider making it a goal that you and your spouse will find yourselves closer to each other on December 26 than you were at the start of the month.

—Kathi Lipp

CELEBRATE JESUS



When my son was 3, he said, “Mom! I know why God put a star in the sky at Christmas!”

“Why, buddy?” I asked, brimming with pride.

“Because,” he said, “He wanted to tell everyone that Santa was coming!”

I realized I had some work to do to get the focus of Christmas shifted back to the birth of our Lord. Here are some fun activities that remind us of God’s great love for us in Jesus:

Observe Advent. Make an Advent wreath and light the candles each Sunday evening at dinner. Find directions at focusonthefamily.com/wreath. You also can download a free Advent calendar at focusonthefamily.com/advent.

Read through favorite Christian books. My family likes *One Winter Night* by Ruth Bell Graham and

Jotham’s Journey by Arnold Ytreeide. Few things we’ve done have been more meaningful than our daily ritual of reading Christ-centered books. Then we have a special reading time on Christmas Eve as we go through the Christmas story from the second chapter of Luke.

Give a gift to Jesus. Have everyone in the family contribute money, even if it’s just a small amount. Then decide together where to donate your gift. We remind our kids that Jesus said the way we treat the least of these is the way we are treating Him.

Have a birthday party for Jesus. I found this to be a great way for my toddlers to understand what we are celebrating at Christmas.

—Jessica Smart



LIVE IT CHALLENGE™

ADVENT WITH FOCUS ON THE FAMILY

Did you know that Advent is not only a time of preparation for Jesus' birth, but also a celebration of His Spirit coming to be with us?

Advent is important because it is a time of hope. During Advent, pastors and church leaders can have a profound effect on those who have little or no hope. When we show families and children Advent's profound truths, families receive a higher hope than anything this world can offer.

The word *advent* literally means "coming"! In the context of the Christian faith, it represents our celebration of the first coming of Christ and our anticipation of His second coming.

This coming of Christ can be celebrated in many ways. This month, celebrate the season by exploring how Focus on the Family celebrates Advent.

From fasting to family crafts, daily devotionals to delightful traditions, take a journey through the many ways we like to celebrate the holiday. We're sure you will find one activity you'll like!

Start your Advent adventure by getting a broad understanding of the holiday. Visit Focus on the Family's "Welcome to Advent" page at focusonthefamily.com/parenting/welcome-to-advent-2022/ for a general overview of Advent's meaning, importance and themes!

Then start an Advent adventure—walk through our list of readings and activities and be sure to tell us how it went! Send us a picture of yourself completing the December Live It Challenge, and you may find yourself featured on our Facebook and Instagram pages!

Here's how to contact us:

Direct message us on social media (facebook.com/BringYourBible/, instagram.com/bringyourbible/) or email us at LiveItChallenge@fotf.org.

Sign up for the December Live It Challenge today and find new ways to pursue spiritual growth by glorifying God through the talents He gave you. Discover opportunities to cultivate the Christian community with your gifts. Be sure to encourage your friends and church youth or children's ministries to join you! To sign up or for more information, just use this QR code.



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