



CHRISTMAS
Hope



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Jesus' "To-Do" List for You!

FROM COLOSSIANS 3

With all the rushing around we do during the Christmas season, it is important to continue to share the love of Christ with others.

As you set out in your day, take these eight reminders from Colossians 3 with you. You will be glad you did!

JESUS' "TO-DO" LIST FOR YOU! FROM COLOSSIANS 3

- 1.** Set your mind on the things above (verse 2).
- 2.** Clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience (verse 12).
- 3.** Make allowances for one another's faults (verse 13).
- 4.** Put on love (verse 14).
- 5.** Let the peace of Christ rule your heart (verse 15).
- 6.** Be thankful (verse 15).
- 7.** Let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you (verse 16).
- 8.** Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of Jesus (verse 17).

Practical Strategies for a Simpler Christmas

“You are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed...”

—Luke 10:41–42 NKJV

- **Remember that time spent with loved ones is more valuable than the need for the “perfect” setting.**

(Jesus’ birth did not depend on fancy decorations, cleanliness of the house, or gourmet goodies).

- **Don’t cram in too many organized activities.**

(Setting aside time to relax and unwind will help you cope with those busy times).

- **Don’t overdo it on crafts and baking during the Christmas season.**

(It’s okay to be creative and to use your skills, but too much will put you in a stressful position and keeps you from enjoying the season.)

- **Leave the home remodeling or refurbishing projects for next year.**

(The potential rewards of a new look aren’t worth the time crunch, decision-making, expenses, or stress at an already busy time of the year.)



- **Focus on making simpler meals and prepare enough for leftovers.**

(When time is at a premium, having leftovers on hand makes meal preparation easier.)

- **Try shortening your Christmas card list by only sending cards to the people you do not see regularly.**

(Another idea would be to send cards to half your list this year and to the other half next year).

And Last but Not Least...

- **Begin each day in prayer, offering the day back to the One who gave us the greatest gift.**

(Having and keeping the right perspective of whose day it is can alter our attitudes and conduct).

We don't have to let the busyness of the season rule our hearts. We can be less like Martha and more like Mary, who relaxed in the Lord's presence. Ultimately, only one thing is essential to our Christmas celebration: Jesus!



Christmas Prayer Guide

Imagine this. You're settling down to Christmas dinner with your extended family or friends. Suddenly, everyone is looking at you. They want you to pray for the meal.

Leading a group in prayer before Christmas or any formal dinner can be intimidating. Maybe you're the only believer in the group and the others want the "religious one" to pray. Or perhaps no one wants to pray, and you feel like someone should. Even praying in front of a group of Christians can be daunting.

It doesn't have to be a burden. You have been given an opportunity to bless people, whether they're fellow Christians or nonbelievers. Here are some things to keep in mind as you prepare to pray:



DON'T TRY TO DO TOO MUCH.

Everyone at the table might be listening to you, but this is not the time to launch into a mini-sermon with an altar call. You also don't want to make it any longer than necessary, or else your guests will get upset that you're keeping them from eating.

KEEP IT SIMPLE AND GENUINE.

Be heartfelt in your words and don't use 50-cent words or religious jargon. Just like when you pray every day, you're having a conversation with God. Talk to Him the same way you would among your friends.

MAKE HIM KNOWN.

Don't be afraid to speak the name of Jesus Christ. You're not preaching to your guests, but you don't want to hide Jesus either.

DON'T UNDO YOUR PRAYER.

Even if you've given the best prayer you've ever prayed, you can unravel it with an action or a misspoken word. Remember that you are an ambassador of Christ at that table and act accordingly.

Don't forget to use the model Jesus gave us for how we should pray in Matthew 6:9-13.





Introduction



So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. . . . From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another.

- John 1:14, 16 NLT

The picture of Christmas for many of us today is this: We string our lights, we decorate our tree, and we run around buying gifts for those we love (and more gifts for those we don't love) because we feel pressured to do so. We go to countless events and run around like crazy people. But then we have to ask ourselves the question: Has God's only begotten Son become God's only *forgotten* Son? Have we lost God at Christmas? Is that possible?

Yes, it certainly is, and many of us have experienced such a loss.

We can lose God in the holiday season. But here is something to consider. If you feel far from God, guess who moved? God hasn't gone anywhere . . . but maybe you have. And in the busyness of the season and in the so-called celebration of the birth of Christ, we can forget all about Him.

You know how it is. . .on Wednesday there's a "white elephant" party at the office. Then on Thursday, there's that special Christmas movie you wanted to see with the family. And the weekend? Yikes! You haven't sent Christmas cards yet. . .and there's so much shopping. . .how will you ever get it all done?

And somewhere in it all, we lose track of our Lord.

I'm reminded of the words of Jesus to the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2 when He says,

"I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.

Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent." (Rev. 2:2-5 NKJV)

To read this account, it sounds as though the First Church of Ephesus was a busy, active, productive church. They wouldn't tolerate false teaching, and they seemed to have all their doctrinal ducks in a row. But somehow, in all that activity, work, and study, they had lost sight of Jesus.

And the Lord Himself has to say to them, "You have left your first love."

Work had taken the place of worship. Perspiration had taken the place of inspiration. So the Great Physician, our Lord Himself, writes them a prescription for renewal or revival. The first step is to remember.

Remember Him. Remember from where you have fallen.

Have you lost sight of Jesus?

Let's make a real effort to remember Him by taking time for the Word of God. And by that, I mean to carve out time for Bible study. Don't just try to work it into your busy schedule. Change your busy schedule and make time for God's Word.

Let's remember Him by taking time each and every day for prayer—a time to spend in the presence of God, listening to His voice as well as baring your heart to Him and bringing your petitions to Him.

Let's remember Him by our involvement in church with His people. Not just working it in when you can find time, but understanding that there is a priority in gathering with God's people for worship and prayer. Church is not just a place where we take in. It is also a place where we give out. It is a place to use the gifts that God has given to us, seek spiritual accountability, and listen to the advice that others can give to us. It is a place to invest our finances and share in what God is doing.

Remember Him also as you look for opportunities to share your faith with others. The Christmas season is such a natural time to speak about Jesus and to tell others about the One who has been born and crucified and has risen again from the dead. Share the gift He has given you.

The real gift of Christmas isn't something we put on a wish list or under the tree. I'm not talking about Christmas presents here, but rather Christmas presence. His presence. The presence of God in our lives. Immanuel, God with us.

It boggles the mind to think how God could have been a baby. I'm reminded of my sons and grandchildren when they were newborns. They needed constant care. They needed to be nursed, changed, and cared for. And when I think of Almighty God, the Creator of the universe, as a tiny, helpless little baby, it fills me with wonder.

C.H. Spurgeon, the great British preacher, put it this way: "Infinite yet an infant, eternal yet born of a woman, supporting a universe yet needing to be carried in a mother's arms. Heir of all things and yet the carpenter's son."

It can all be summed up beautifully in 2 Corinthians 8:9, where Paul writes, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."

The promise of Christmas is so tantalizing, so appealing. It promises fulfillment and cheer and brotherly love. And sometimes it delivers. We hear those familiar songs that we remember from our childhood, and it gives us a good feeling. But then there is the reality when you go to the mall, and people are literally fighting over that one empty parking space. Then you get those gifts under the tree, and maybe you didn't receive what you were hoping for. You left hints for your parents. You left detailed maps to the store. But somehow, they missed it, got you something else, and you're disappointed.

Christmas promises so much, but it just can't deliver. It just can't be what you hope it will be, because at best, it is a promise of something else—a promise nothing on this earth can fulfill or satisfy.

C.S. Lewis put it this way, "All the things that ever deeply possessed your soul have been but hints of Heaven. Tantalizing glimpses. Promises never quite fulfilled. Echoes that died away just as they caught your ear. . .if I find in myself the desire, which no explanation is that I was made for another world. Earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy. But to arouse, to suggest the real thing."

The "real thing" Lewis was speaking of is Heaven. When it's all said and done when the food has been consumed, the parties are over, and the tree goes out on the curb for the garbage truck, it's not about the Christmas presents.

It is about His Christmas presence in our life. Christmas is not about giving a gift as much as it is about receiving a gift. The Bible says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23 NLT). It goes on to say, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" (2 Cor. 9:15).

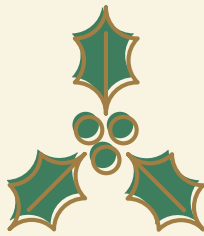
When someone offers you a gift, all you need to do is take it, open it, and appreciate it. His wonderful presence can be yours right now and forever.

So let's not lose Jesus this Christmas. Don't forget about Him in all the parties and celebrations—and even church services. Find those quiet moments in quiet places where you can draw near to Him, speak to Him, and hear His voice.

It is my prayer for you that this resource will help you and your family keep your focus on Jesus throughout the busyness of the season.

In Him,





WEEK 1

Before Bethlehem

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth,
before Abraham was even born, I AM!"

-John 8:58 (NLT)

It's all so beautiful—the sights, sounds, festivities, and traditions of Christmas.

And in many ways, the first Christmas was beautiful.

But we might forget that the beautiful Baby born in the manger at Bethlehem came with a distinct purpose. That mission was planned before the world was made—before Adam and Eve, or a garden called Eden. There never was a time when Christ did not exist.

Jesus—co-equal, co-eternal, one in essence and purpose with the Father—is without beginning or end.

Yes, there is wonder and beauty in what God accomplished on that first Christmas two thousand-plus years ago, and we're right to be in awe of it. But Heaven already knew the plan, the reason why Jesus came to earth and was born as a human baby. It wasn't just to teach everyone to be good and love his or her neighbor; He came to suffer an agonizing death to ransom us from an eternal death sentence.

He came as a Redeemer to rescue us from sin and make us all His sons and daughters. The shadow of the cross lay over the beauty of that first Christmas night.

Jesus left the safety of Heaven and stepped into time and space as a human being. He breathed our air, shared our pain, walked in our shoes, lived our life, and died our death. That is what we celebrate at Christmas.

This is the message we see from Genesis to Revelation. Jesus Christ has always been there. Theologians have a word for this. It is a theophany, which means an appearance of God. We might also use the word Christophany, which means an appearance of Christ before Bethlehem. When God makes an appearance in the Old Testament, we can assume that it was Jesus, the Son of God. How do we know He did this? Consider this exchange between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, who were all for holding onto Abraham but rejecting Jesus. The Lord speaks first here:

Our father Abraham rejoiced as he looked forward to my coming. He saw it and was glad." The people said, "You aren't even fifty years old. How can you say you have seen Abraham?" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I AM!" (John 8:56-58 NLT)

We know He came to Abraham at the moment of supreme crisis (Genesis 22:1-14).

He came to Jacob when the weight of the world was on his shoulders (Genesis 32:7-12).

He came to Samson's parents, who had imagined their situation to be hopeless (Judges 13:2-8).

He came to the three young Hebrew men in the midst of the flames, and they walked through that fire without even getting their robes singed (Daniel 3:8-28).

Jesus is the great I AM! And we can be confident He is with us too—right here, active, and working in the lives of His children.

In the fullness of time, according to the eternal plan of God, Jesus came to earth as a human being; a little Baby, placed in a manger of hay. He grew up, clear-eyed and strong, knowing all along that there was a cross in His future and He would lay down His life for our sins.

Rising from the dead, He is now with us always. He says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" in Hebrews 13:5 (ESV). And in Matthew 28:20, He says, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (NIV).

Reading Plan

READ ONE PASSAGE EACH DAY THIS WEEK

DAY 1: John 1:1–5

DAY 2: Luke 24:23–27

DAY 3: John 17:5

DAY 4: Isaiah 43:2–3

DAY 5: Revelation 4:1–8

Do the following with each passage:

- **ASK** God to connect with you here. In prayer, invite God to be present and show you what He has for you today.
- **READ** the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that stand out to you.
- **REFLECT** on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?
- **RESPOND** to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.

Reflection Questions

1. How would you describe your experiences of Christmas growing up?

2. If someone asked you who Jesus is, what essential characteristics would you include in your answer?

3. How might your life be different this week if you truly live as though Jesus is with you in every moment? What are some ways you can seek to experience His presence in your life?

4. What promises do you need to be reminded of this Christmas?

5. How does knowing God's rescue was always the plan from eternity past give you perspective on what is happening in your life today? How does this give you confident hope for the future?



WEEK 2

A Twisted Family Tree

He came to his own people, and even they
rejected him. But to all who believed
him and accepted him, he gave
the right to become children of God.

—John 1:11–12 NLT

The song says, “Oh, there’s no place like home for the holidays.”

Many of us would rather be home with our families at Christmas than anywhere else in the world. But “home for Christmas” also can mean getting together with extended family—relatives you don’t see (or have to deal with) very often. And that can be just a little bit stressful.

Let’s face it, we all have weird families. It may be that obnoxious uncle, a strange aunt, those twisted cousins. And Grandpa? Well, let’s admit it. He’s getting just a little bit crazier every year.

At Christmas, we are presented with ideal pictures of perfect families sitting together in cozy living rooms, watching the snow fall outside while they sing carols together. And we feel like we have fallen short because our family just doesn’t look like that. Well, guess what? No one’s does. Few families today even slightly resemble the old movies. But that doesn’t mean we can’t build some good memories.

The fact is, no one has the perfect family. Every family has its share of problems, skeletons, dysfunctions, weird dynamics, and eccentric relatives.

As we begin to delve into the most famous family tree in human history—the family tree of Jesus Christ Himself—we find liars (Abraham), cheats (Jacob), adulterers (David), and prostitutes (Rahab). The Lord’s family tree has some of the most notable sinners ever, so He knows all about having relatives that might embarrass you. Jesus knows all about dysfunctional family situations, and how even those are eligible for redemption. It’s not about perfect parents or perfect parenting. It’s about a perfect Savior.

We will also see something else at work in the family tree of our Lord. Grace—incredible, restoring, wonderful grace—the unmerited favor of God.

Why bring this up? Because we might look at our lives, sigh deeply, shake our heads, and say, “I don’t think God could ever use me. I’ve made too many mistakes, and I don’t see how anything good could come out of the mess I’ve made of my life.”

This story shows, among other things, that this is simply not the case. The grace of God is clearly on display here.

When we tell the Christmas story, we usually cut to the chase. We go straight to the beautiful narratives found in Matthew and Luke, and we revel at the story of the birth of Jesus. We often skip over the details that precede the story. The gospel of Matthew begins with a lengthy list of names—a genealogy.

When you take the time to look into it, you discover there are some pretty amazing names in this lineup. Normally, Jewish genealogies didn't include women. But in this genealogy, there are five. When you find out who some of these people were and what they did, it begins to read like a biblical soap opera. It certainly gives hope to those of us who have experienced disappointing failures in life.

In this genealogy, the prelude to the Christmas story, we see God in His mercy doing for sinners what they never could do for themselves. We see the love and grace of God mending broken lives and gently piecing together shattered hopes.

This is why Jesus came.

We are children of God today because of God's grace. Period. The Bible says,

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8–10 ESV).

Reading Plan

READ ONE PASSAGE EACH DAY THIS WEEK

DAY 1: Matthew 1:1–17

DAY 2: Luke 1:49–55

DAY 3: Luke 1:67–79

DAY 4: John 1:11–14

DAY 5: 1 Corinthians 6:9–11

Do the following with each passage:

- **ASK** God to connect with you here. In prayer, invite God to be present and show you what He has for you today.
- **READ** the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that stand out to you.
- **REFLECT** on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?
- **RESPOND** to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.

Reflection Questions

1. What do you know about your parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents that surprises or disappoints you?

2. How has God's kindness and grace been extended to you and your family?

3. Out of all the people listed in Jesus' genealogy (Matthew 1:1-17), which one(s) do you find more surprising to include? Why? Can you clearly point to how God redeemed their background and story of brokenness?

4. If you have family members who don't know Jesus as Savior, how might God use your story of redemption to tell the bigger story of the gospel (Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and plan for anyone who will receive Him as Savior)?

5. What are some small steps you can take today that could strengthen and set a better pattern of life for your family?

NOTES



WEEK 3

What The Wise Men Knew

And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

-Matthew 2:11 ESV

We know the Christmas card image so well.

Three men wearing turbans, riding on camels, silhouetted against a night sky. A huge, magnificent star blazes on the horizon. Tradition has given them names: Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. They even have their own song to sing (in three-part harmony) as they plod along through the sandy wastes, seeking a newborn king:

*We three kings of Orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain following yonder star.*

The Bible, however, never says there were only three. There is no mention of camels or names.

Let's peel this tradition back and find out who these mysterious men from the East really were—and what they have to teach us about worship.

The Bible calls them Magi. Our English words magic and magician come from this same term. These were men who consulted the stars and were experts in astronomy and astrology. Rulers, kings, and pharaohs sought out their counsel and guidance. In contrast to the seers, prophets, and priests of Scripture, the Magi used sorcery, combining science and mathematics with delving into the occult. Over the years, their religious and political influence grew until they became the most prominent, powerful group of advisors in the Medo-Persian and Babylonian empires.

Their clothes would've been a sign of status and high office—and they would not have ridden camels. They probably entered Jerusalem astride magnificent Arabian stallions, followed by a small army for protection. Imagine what a stir this glorious procession made as they rode through the gates of Jerusalem!

The question they asked immediately went viral.

“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet.” (Matthew 2:2–5 ESV)

Although the chief priests and scribes all knew where the Christ was to be born, they never took one step out of their way to go look for Him.

These wise men from the East believed something that Herod and the religious leaders never took the time to discover. This toddler they came to see, born to common working-class parents, would someday rule the world. So they brought gifts befitting a king: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The Magi, though pagan, understood what many people today don't understand. Christmas is about worship. When they finally found the young child, Jesus, they knelt down in worship.

One translation of Matthew 2:11 says, “They entered the house and saw the child in the arms of Mary, His mother. Overcome, they knelt and worshiped Him” (The Message).

In other words, they gave themselves completely to praising and adoring the young King.

This is one activity that will never disappoint. Wholehearted worship of Jesus Christ—giving Him yourself and your best will always fill your soul rather than deplete it.

Reading Plan

READ ONE PASSAGE EACH DAY THIS WEEK

DAY 1: Revelation 5:11–14

DAY 2: Hebrews 13:15–16

DAY 3: 1 Chronicles 16:23–31

DAY 4: 2 Samuel 24:18–25

DAY 5: Luke 17:11–19

Do the following with each passage:

- **ASK** God to connect with you here. In prayer, invite God to be present and show you what He has for you today.
- **READ** the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that stand out to you.
- **REFLECT** on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?
- **RESPOND** to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.

Reflection Questions

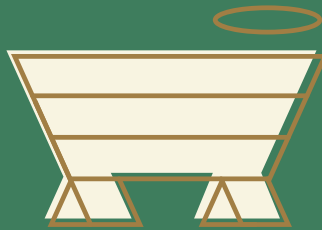
1. What presents are you hoping to get this Christmas? What gifts do you plan to give your loved ones?

2. What comes to mind when you hear the word worship?

3. During this busy season, what might divert you from focusing on Jesus in worship?

4. Worship is more than just the songs you sing in church on Sunday. In what way—particularly at Christmas time—can you and your family make worshipping God a priority?

5. This week, consider what you have to offer to the Lord as an act of worship. What can you do to honor Him in your heart and home?



WEEK 4

Be Ready for His Coming

At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

—Luke 2:25–26 NLT

Christmas is coming and the signs are all around us. The pressure is on to “deck the halls” and empty our wallets in order to celebrate the season!

But when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, most people missed it. No one was hanging brightly colored lights or listening to Christmas music on the radio. No one was circling the downtown market looking for a place to tie their donkey while they shopped for presents. Children didn’t find it hard at all to sleep that night because it was a night like any other. Or so it seemed.

But it is not as though the people of Israel didn’t have signs and signals that something special was in the air. Godly men and women must have sensed that the Messiah’s coming was near. Even after 400 years of silence, there were some in Israel still watching and waiting for the appearance of the Messiah.

Life was difficult under Roman occupation, and it was a spiritually dark time for Israel. No one had seen an angel or heard from a prophet or witnessed a miracle in living memory. But the time was ripe for the arrival of the Messiah—and godly people in the land sensed it and watched for it.

Sadly, however, many in Israel were spiritually asleep when God visited them that first Christmas. The same can be said about our culture today. Yes, we celebrate Christmas, but it is so easy to forget about Christ.

But Jesus Christ, born in the manger in Bethlehem, crucified on the cross of Calvary, risen from the dead, is coming back again!

Jesus was born in Bethlehem when the time was just right (see Galatians 4:4). He wasn’t early, and He wasn’t late. And when He comes back again, it will be at just the right time—the time set by the Father.

For those who are alert and watching, the signs of His soon return are everywhere. Christ’s return is mentioned no less than 318 times in the New Testament. It is a recurring theme in the Bible. Jesus Himself said, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:3 ESV).

As we watch things going from bad to worse in our cities, in our nation, and in our world, we may find ourselves wondering, Lord, are you really paying

attention to planet Earth? Do You realize how bad it has become? The answer is yes, He is fully aware of everything that is happening (and an infinite number of things that we are not aware of).

So what are we to do in light of the fact that Christ is coming again?

1. WE ARE TO BE WATCHING FOR HIM (LUKE 12:37).

This doesn't mean that we are to stand around, staring into the sky. To watch simply means to be alert and aware. All that has happened these past few years is enough to bring even the most inattentive to wonder, "what is going on?"

2. WE ARE TO BE READY TO GO (1 JOHN 3:2).

We need to ask ourselves: Am I ready? You don't want to be engaged in some activity that would make you ashamed if Jesus suddenly returned.

3. WE SHOULD NOT ONLY BE READY FOR HIS RETURN, BUT WE SHOULD ANXIOUSLY AWAIT IT (LUKE 12:36).

Have you ever looked forward to someone's arrival, and before they could even knock, you opened the door? That is how we should be when we think of the return of Jesus: looking forward to that moment with anticipation and joy, not dreading it at all.

4. WE ARE NOT ONLY TO BE WAITING, BUT WE ARE ALSO TO BE WORKING (LUKE 12:43).

If watching is the evidence of faith, then working is the evidence of faith in action. We should be using the days and years of our lives to serve the Lord and to look for every opportunity to tell people about Jesus.

Yes, Christmas is coming, and the signs are all around us. But the fact is that it's just a holiday. Christmas will come and go, whether we are ready for it or not. But when it comes to Jesus Christ returning to earth, being ready couldn't be more important. People may have missed the first Christmas, but we don't want to miss His return. He is coming for those who are watching and waiting.

Watching daily for the Lord's return isn't a miserable way to live; it is a happy, joyful, purposeful way to live. Don't just be ready for Christmas this year—be ready for Christ Himself.

Reading Plan

READ ONE PASSAGE EACH DAY THIS WEEK

DAY 1: 2 Peter 3:1–9

DAY 2: Luke 12:35–40

DAY 3: Habakkuk 2:1–4

DAY 4: 1 John 3:2–3

DAY 5: Isaiah 25:8–9

Do the following with each passage:

- **ASK** God to connect with you here. In prayer, invite God to be present and show you what He has for you today.
- **READ** the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that stand out to you.
- **REFLECT** on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?
- **RESPOND** to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.

Reflection Questions

1. What tangible signs do you see that remind you that Christmas is almost here?

2. What do you see happening in the world that reminds you that Jesus is coming soon?

3. Jesus promised, "I will come again." What are you most looking forward to about the Second Coming of Christ?

4. What changes might you need to make in your life to ensure that you are ready for Christ's second coming?

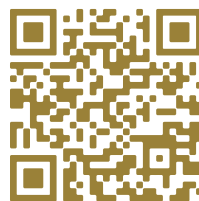
5. What are some practical ways we can encourage each other to live for Christ as we await His return?

Christmas Crafts + Recipes

Holly Gift Tag



This charming little tag is the perfect touch on homemade baked gifts or a simply wrapped package. They also make wonderful place setting markers at your holiday feast! Just tie around the napkins or utensils. No tag will be exactly the same as you use your own trim pieces and write your own Scripture or greeting. Make it fun and let your littles help with the design!



Paper Tree Table Centerpiece



In a pinch to come up with your Christmas table centerpiece? Christmas has completely snuck up on me this year, but that's not going to stop me from creating the perfect tablescape for my guests to enjoy. This is a fun, easy and very practical centerpiece you can create at home with just a few materials. You might already have them in your home right now!



Pom-Pom Garland



Pom-pom garlands are super easy to make for holiday décor, parties, or any event you want to decorate with a homespun touch. You can buy a pom-pom maker in the store, but your good old-fashioned fingers and scissors is just as easy.



Christmas Crafts + Recipes



Maple Glazed Gluten-Free Pumpkin Donuts

What's that delicious aroma coming from your kitchen? These gluten-free pumpkin donuts are moist, tender and easy to make. As a healthy alternative to frying, this donut is baked. Swirl it in a maple glaze to add a subtle sweetness. Perfect for a cozy breakfast or after-school snack!



Minty Snow Cap Cookies

These cookies are sweet and crunchy on the outside, and soft and chewy on the inside. With just the right amount of mint flavor, these cookies are the perfect addition to your holiday cookie platter—a Christmas tradition that your family and friends will look forward to every year!



Simple Holiday Recipes

Spend less time in the kitchen and more time enjoying the season with these quick and easy recipes. Pumpkin spiced latte's, mini apple pies, mini pumpkin pie croissants, spiced cider float, and more!



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