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3 THREE WORD LESSONS

HOW TO ENJOY YOUR CHRISTMAS

DAN WILT

25 Great Ideas To Help Your Family Make The Most Of The Holiday Season

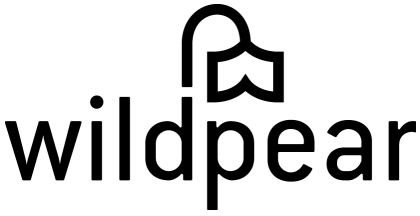
3 Word Lessons:
How To Enjoy Your Christmas

25 Great Ideas
To Help Your Family Make The Most Of
The Holiday Season

Dan Wilt

Dedicated To Every Family
Working Hard To Make Love Work.

Two Facts:
1) Love Always Wins, and
2) You Can Do It.



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WHAT IS THIS LITTLE BOOK ALL ABOUT?

3 Word Lessons is a series of ebooks, written by author Dan Wilt, and designed specifically to help families be all that they can be.

Each of our *3 Word Lessons* ebooks is written with one purpose in mind – to get short, helpful ideas into your thinking – and into your family arsenal – as quickly as possible.

Life is hard on families – we want to help you win. We don't always have time to read long books, but we do have time for a quick, *3 Word Lesson*.

With a single, big idea on one page (3 words in length, of course), and then a brief paragraph unpacking the idea on the next page, each ebook is designed to add fuel your own ideas, and to explode those ideas into actions that will strengthen your family life.

The author has 3 children that he and his wife have parented from baby-dom to young adulthood (let's briefly pause to remember the challenge of the teenage years). For that reason, there will be no *3 Word Lesson* you read that hasn't *actually been field-tested in the lab of life*, and been found to have some merit in building your family.

At Wild Pear Creative, the creator of the *3 Word Lessons* series, we believe that every family has the potential to succeed – to succeed in life, in love, in care, and in calling. For that reason this little book has been written for you.

How To Enjoy Your Christmas aims our *3 Word Lessons* at "the most wonderful time of the year." Every idea of the 25 offered here has been road-tested by the author's family, and has proven itself to yield some of the most talked about family memories of a lifetime.

Space surrounds each idea for your own notes and brainstorming; notes that might make the idea work even better for you. Christmas is too magical a time of year for it to be lost on shopping, planning, and stressful family interactions.

Take a leap, and try at least one of these ideas this Christmas. Then, begin to plan for more of the ideas to find their way into your holidays for the next year!

Finally, if this little book means something to you, would you do us the kindness of telling a few friends to download it? Our goal is not to make money, but to champion the family in the most challenging task that has ever faced humanity – the task of learning to love.

Just email us at threewordlessons@gmail.com to tell us how the ebook impacted you, and to find out how we are continuing to serve families like yours.

Thanks for buying this ebook, and happy reading. Oh, and Merry Christmas to your and yours. May this year be your best holiday season ever.

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1. Tell The Story.

Tell the real deal behind the holiday.

We may as well start off with a bang. Christmas is based on a story that is deeper than magic, and more interesting than mega-dinners with pumpkin pie. Christmas is based on an epic story – a Story of God reaching into the world, acting in Love by sending His Son Jesus to restore people to God, and making Him loving Lord of the human race. For people of faith, it is the most important event in human history, and Christmas is the holiday for it.

Take the time to read through the Christmas story on Christmas Eve night, around a meal table or around the Christmas tree. Let the kids each take a paragraph as you go, or act out the story with a Nativity set according to their age.

It will orient them to why presents, meals, and special gift-giving are happening. Teenagers can read out loud, too. Give everyone a little part in the story.

You can read in this order (choose a contemporary translation, like the New International Version or the Living Bible) – Luke 1:26-38 (the angel visits Mary); Matthew 1:18-25 (the engagement, Joseph's dream); Luke 2:8-20 (the shepherds and the angelic host); and Matthew 2:1-12 (the magi come from the east).

2. Stretch The Fun.

Make Christmas a month long party.

The fun of the Christmas holidays doesn't all need to aim at just one big unwrapping party and food-day frenzy! Decide before the holidays begin that the entire month of December is one big party.

Begin to give gifts, once a week, leading up toward Christmas. Let the kids wake up to something new every Monday morning, to take the edge off of school.

Start having special meals and treats (in moderation) as you move toward Christmas, and get those decorations and music out for as long as possible without jamming up Thanksgiving.

Find a weekly rhythm (ex. Every Sunday morning is special – have a small card waiting for the kids at the breakfast table telling them how much you love them).

3. Snack Before Gifts.

We're all nicer if good food is in our stomach.

Getting nutrients into the blood stream has a miraculous effect on people. Parents gain energy. Children shift moods. Family scraps take a break. It's an amazing thing, what some munching can do!

Before the Christmas gifts get unwrapped on Christmas morning, give everyone a snack of healthy food – protein (little sausages), fruit (sliced apples, bananas, or oranges), accompanied by (maybe) a light sweet bread.

Avoid giving kids (and parents) fruit juice, cookies, cinnamon buns, pop tarts or sugary treats right before an extended time of stimulus overload such as the Great Gift Unveiling. Their bellies will be full, but the stress will rise very quickly as the high of the sugar and fructose kicks in fast.

Take the time to make a healthy snack to get the day started well.

4. See That Concert.

Find a musical experience and set a date.

Every year in our home, we are scouring the local event sites and emails for a relatively inexpensive Christmas concert in our area. Some years, it's been the Nutcracker on the big stage; other years it's been a symphony playing Celtic versions of favorite Christmas carols.

If you have reluctant teenagers, add a big pre-event meal out or some special "post-concert" treat to help make it intriguing. Kindly request that phones are powered down (yes, Dad and Mom, that means you, too), and that people be present to one another.

Make the concert "just family" if you can – it's important that even when children are older and have friends, or special friends, that they learn to focus in on their immediate family. Other people change the group dynamic. Make it a family tradition where your focus is one another for a night.

5. Kill The Electronics.

Even a Smart Phone can take a vacation.

Early on in your child's life, declare to them and to the world that mobile phones and the non-present people attached to them are not as important as those people with whom one is face-to-face in that moment.

From Christmas day, through to New Year's Day, declare an "electronics vacation." Texting, phones, video games, perhaps even the television (woah; you have to learn to love board games to pull that one off), can be a distraction from conversation and storytelling.

When older folks like grandparents are present, hundreds of stories, over a lifetime, never get told because kids are texting when they should be asking Grandma "What was your favorite Christmas growing up?"

Susie down the street can wait – kill the electronics and make some memories with the treasured people in the room.

6. Wear Those Pajamas.

A pajama day can score big time with the family.

A family tradition in our home is that every year, on December 26, we have what we call a “Jammy Day.” On Jammy Day, we remain in our pajamas all day long.

Meeting at breakfast in the morning, we assign each person in the family a one-hour block that day. During each person’s block, that person may decide what they would like the *entire family* to do with them for fun (within reason).

Imagine Mom playing the NFL Football video game, Dad playing with dolls, or all the kids sitting in one room with the parents, reading a favorite book. In our case, even a winter family walk is taken (usually Mom’s choice) with everyone’s pajamas on under their winter gear. Don’t break the rule – pajamas must remain on!

Then, order in dinner (Chinese food is our winner), and top off the day with a game night. You have hours to kill – play a few games that everyone loves. Grandparents can join the Jammy Fun too, and just think – you can make fun of what they wear *all day long*.

7. Start With Advent.

Advent provides a rhythm leading up to Christmas.

Advent is a season of the Christian worship year that includes the 4 Sundays before Christmas. Each Sunday means something different, and has a theme that is intended to help each individual prepare for the celebration of Christmas.

A few ideas can help here. First, consider buying a Family Advent Calendar. Our favorite Advent Calendar is three-dimensional – it stands up, is in the shape of a Christmas tree, and has 25 little drawers that pull out. In each drawer is a Scripture verse, and we put a little chocolate bar in each to build anticipation. Each evening at dinner, a different child gets to open the drawer, read the little verse aloud to the family, and snag the chocolate.

Even teenagers appreciate the rhythm, especially if younger ones are involved. We still do it with 20 year olds, who continue to love the pattern!

There are great resources on the web for Advent Devotionals, Advent Wreaths, and more. Write to us at threewordlessons@gmail.com if you need some resources and are interested in experiencing Advent.

8. Insert Sacred Moments.

Any parent can make a moment sacred.

Every day holds moments that could become very special with just a little extra effort.

As a parent, decide that you'll read a short prayer at Christmas dinner, or hold hands in front of the Christmas tree and have everyone offer one thing for which they are thankful.

Making moments sacred is not so hard; choose to find teachable moments and invest them with spiritual meaning. Pray together as a family, and use prayers you've written out beforehand to remind your children that spiritual growth doesn't just happen to us – we make choices to invest our lives with meaning every day.

9. Attend Special Services.

Ride the wave of holiday services and music.

In many churches, the Advent and Christmas season are, simply put, a big deal. Choirs are rehearsing, altars are being decorated, cookies are being baked, and candlelight services are being planned.

Find a special service that you'll attend this year, such as a Christmas Eve candlelight carol service at a church near you, that works for your family.

Dressing up, singing with a larger group, and enjoying a beautiful environment together will not only enhance the seasonal worship experience for you, but it will also give your children a dearly treasured memory.

10. Leverage One Gift.

One gift in a bedroom can mean more sleep for you.

From the time our children were young, we would take one gift and leverage it to help our Christmas morning go smoothly. After the kids went to bed on Christmas Eve (see if you can outlast them), we put one special gift in their bedroom.

When they woke up in the morning, the deal was simple. They found the gift at the foot of their bed, opened it, and played with it until 8 am. Then, and only then, could they pounce on our bed to wake us up.

Every year, it helped us gather at the tree at a godly hour, with no one getting impatient with greed. In fact, we found that our kids really focused on that one present, and it became something more special to them because they had extra time with it.

11. Open Presents Slowly.

12 days of Christmas might be your best friend.

What if, on Christmas morning, the kids only opened presents from other people, and just *one* present from you?

Then, every day following Christmas, for 12 days, they open a few gifts to stretch out the experience. When we tried this, we found something truly miraculous had occurred. Instead of being quick to move on to another gift on Christmas morning, our kids began to appreciate each gift more deeply.

Why? We were giving them time to appreciate the gifts, thank those who gave them, and anticipate the next day. You can imagine how much fun you can have both giving and receiving – and using anticipation to keep the excitement fresh.

Try it; you might like it!

12. Design Your Trip.

As you travel, make the journey the destination.

For many families, traveling to visit parents, in-laws, children, or friends can add stress to the holiday experience.

Instead of always making the destination the point of those trips, design your trip based on input from the group. Our children love to sing (yes, it's rare, but we have that gene). At some point during the trip, I will begin to sing carols from the driver's seat, and it's understood that I need backup harmony. Sometimes we tell each other our favorite Christmas memories.

Plan that big trip meal at Cracker Barrel, or that stop for hot chocolate. Design the trip around shared experiences, as well as private needs (like a parents need for silence). Turn off all electronics for one hour on long trips, and just talk. We call this a Silent Time, where for one hour, nobody speaks (the gestures alone put us in stitches). Eyes begin to stare out the windows, and much needed reflection time begins to occur.

Then, of course, we forget to tell the kids they may turn their electronics back on.

13. Sing Those Carols.

Music can make the meaning come alive.

Consider hosting an old-fashioned Caroling Party. Each year, we invite our friends and neighbors to meet us at a pre-determined location, dressed and ready for winter walking.

Then, we go to a neighborhood (either our own or another's) and begin to sing Christmas Carols door to door. We print our lyric sheets for beloved carols, and each person has one. We work on harmonies, and then do the deed.

Have one of the children knock on a door, and have the group snuggled up in a cluster a few feet back (so you don't scare anyone). Then, as the people are coming to open the door, begin singing one favorite carol. Let those harmonies ring. The closer you are grouped together, the better the sound and the more rewarding the experience.

When one or two verses of the carol are over, sing the first line of *We Wish You A Merry Christmas*, and have everyone randomly wish the family to whom you just sang a Merry Christmas.

Older people, especially, love when carolers come to their door. Some even get treats and bring them out to the group. And if people don't get it, just smile and wave. Smile and wave.

14. Serve The Poor.

Find a food distribution center, and get involved.

Some of our best memories as a family are when we would be involved in making Christmas breakfast, or Christmas dinner, for the homeless and vulnerable in our city.

There are many great social organizations that provide meals for those in need in your community, or put together gift baskets for delivery in lower income neighborhoods.

You will never regret giving your entire family a memory of doing this kind of Christmas giving together, and watching one another act in kindness. It's a much-needed reprieve from the self-focus that can come at holiday times, and can change a child's perspective for a lifetime.

They realize how important it is to be Giver in life, and not a Taker, when we expose them to these life-altering experiences.

15. Host That Party.

Take the plunge and host the party yourself.

Christmas parties can be expensive and time-consuming ordeals for the hosts. But what if you invited everyone else to bring the treats?

Find creative ways to host a Christmas party at your home, and let people know about it at least 2 months in advance. Then, using Evite or another online invitation tool, keep reminders coming to them as you get closer to the event.

To make it easier on yourself, invite a neighbor to co-host the party with you, especially if their gifts are different than yours. Choose the night, ask people to get baby-sitters (if desired), and go from there.

Themed parties such as a Caroling Party, a Unique-Christmas-Albums Party, a Dirty Santa party, or a Beverages-Of-The-Season party can all be big hits during the season.

16. Create Cookie Bags.

Give the neighbors a warm fuzzy.

There is nothing more fun for kids than getting to take something special to a neighbor around Christmas. Bundle them up, get them looking their Christmas-cutest, and send them out with a bag of cookies.

Yes, teenagers can look cute too, but don't force them.

Have the kids join you in baking the cookies, and even doing special decorations for particular people in the neighborhood. Imagine creating a Gingerbread family of each person in someone's home, or hosting a Cookie Exchange with others that loads everyone up with more varieties of cookies than they could make themselves.

17. Start Movie Traditions.

Jimmy Stewart must love us by now.

Every year we find a time to watch two Christmas movies – *It's A Wonderful Life* (Jimmy Stewart) and *White Christmas* (Bing Crosby, Danny Kaye, Rosemary Clooney).

The kids look forward to our family movie time, and when we can, we seek out a larger adventure related to those movies. In our town, the local theater hosted *It's A Wonderful Life* on the big screen awhile back, and we took our entire extended family to the movies.

From the California Raisins to the Snow Miser, find the Christmas movies that are your family favorites, and plan a family night around them. *Nacho Libre* does not count.

18. Read Christmas Fiction.

Reading books aloud can connect you together.

We have a small collection of Christmas fiction books that we leave in a pile on a table in our living room all month long.

Throughout the holidays, I'll occasionally see my wife, one of my children, or a grandparent leafing through one of the books. We try to have a mix of picture books (beautiful art images that intrigue adults as well), children's books (even teens love memories), and short stories.

When a moment unveils itself, we sometimes gather around in the living room, with people knitting, making crafts, or napping, and read a story out loud. Try *A Child's Christmas In Wales*, by Dylan Thomas, or another book you've been interested in reading.

It sometimes takes a little arm-bending, but words like "Can you just do what you're already doing in the living room?" can help significantly. After they put the smart phone away and turn off the X-Box, they'll learn to thank you later.

19. Cut Your Tree.

Take a deep breath in the great outdoors.

Unless you have ethical issues with cutting down evergreens, “getting your tree” together is one of the most under-rated of all Christmas experiences.

If you don’t want to brave the forest, know that exciting moments like our family’s annual Somebody-Is-Crying-Because-They-Got-Hit-In-The-Face-With-A-Snowball Event occurs every year on one of those Christmas tree farms. Often these farms have sleigh rides, hayrides, hot chocolate, and more – as well as saws you can rent to cut down your own tree.

If children can be involved, let them be. Choose a fir tree if you’re unsure where to start, and follow the watering and care directions to a tee. The fragrance in your house over the holidays will displace the challenge of cleaning up pine needles, and bring *Little House On The Prairie* right into your home.

20. Surprise Your Spouse.

Cherishing is done one surprise at a time.

If you're married or engaged, this setup is perfect. A holiday is coming up, that is based entirely on getting a gift, wrapping it to the point where it is completely hidden, and then giving it to a person who will most certainly be surprised when it's opened.

Well, that's the ideal. My wife knows what she wants, and the way she wants it. I get a list, including the exact stores carrying the items, and the sale days I should try to hit. But I don't let that deter me from finding her something that will truly be a welcome surprise.

Go beyond the call of duty with one another. Find just one thing, one gift or special treasure that uniquely speaks to the two of you. Don't miss an opportunity to use the holiday cheer to add the pumpkin spice of surprise to your relationship.

21. Do Something Unusual.

Out of the ordinary is the new extraordinary.

Everyone you know is doing Christmas on some sort of a budget (unless you know the Rockefellers). Doing something unusual, unpredictable, or out of the ordinary can feel as though it's not an option simply due to the cost.

But I encourage you to talk about it, think about it, and look for an event, a vacation, a family trip, or other experience that might be unusual and intriguing for a family Christmas.

One low budget year, we chose to spend Christmas week (December 25th to January 1) with just our little family (unusual), and one high budget year we celebrated Christmas dinner in a hotel room at Disney World.

What event, what trip, what experience would take you out of the usual this year, and welcome you into the joy of the unusual? Being a little off kilter once in a while can bring unexpected delights – and memories – of the season.

22. Pick The Meal.

A new Christmas Eve tradition just might begin.

Christmas Eve is a mealtime that is often overlooked in light of the Christmas Dinner being prepared for the next day. Who can forget the young man in Dicken's *A Christmas Carol*, running to the market to buy the biggest bird in town after Scrooge's great revelation? What inquiring minds want to know is – what did they eat the night before?

Consider taking all the burden off of the cook(s), and begin a tradition of ordering in meal. Your family might want to make the tradition an ethnic one, ordering in Mexican one year, Chinese one year, and Norwegian the next.

From our experience, taking the "who wants what" out of the equation is the best approach. Have one cuisine that is always the default for that evening, and get a variety so everyone can taste something they like. Taking orders just complicates the moment.

Minimize cleanup, and put your energies into other events on Christmas Eve.

23. Decorate With Flair.

Creating the atmosphere is worth it.

Christmas details matter. I discovered this when my wife first decided she wouldn't put out all the decorations she usually did for Christmas. Children began to ask questions like "Where's the elf?" and "Where did the candy jar go?"

We are shaped by the spaces in which we live, and little enhancements to our environment can go a long way to creating a sense of family belonging and stability.

Take the time to choose decorations that will become a tradition for generations – family memory ornaments hung by the children, an heirloom nativity set, sprigs of evergreens giving a fragrance to the home, are all examples of what can be done. Christmas lights, strung in different places in the home, can add to the ambience.

Loving care to décor, early enough in the month to make the experience last (but not all year long so the "specialness" is taken away) can create a kinder, gentler, more hospitable atmosphere in your home.

24. Extend The Season.

There’s enough food here for a month!

If there are enough gifts for a month, and enough food purchased for a month, and enough evenings, and games, and events for a month – then why not make Christmas last a month?

Advent, beginning in late November, is the time that the real Christmas season kicks off. Go with it, and build activities around the Advent theme each Sunday. After Christmas Day, the New Year is coming. Build toward it with special plans, give held-back gifts, and make it part of the experience.

Finally, consider saving one or two gifts for when the children are back at school, and the doldrums of Christmas vacation past have begun to set in. A surprise by their bed on a school morning can mean the world to a child at any age.

Try this pattern on for size: Ramp up to Christmas in November, sparkle up for Christmas in December, and ease up after Christmas into January.

25. Try Christmas Devotions.

Use the rhythm of a week to enhance the holiday.

There are many fantastic Advent and Christmas devotionals available for personal or family reading. Go to Amazon, and begin to search.

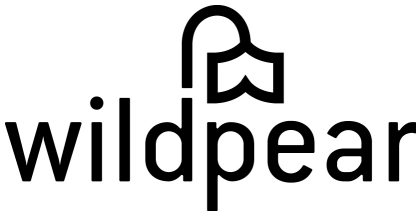
Take the time to do some research, and find one that will work for you personally. It will keep you reflective during the Christmas season, and focused on the reason for the season. A daily devotional is best, but others can work just as well.

As your children see you moving through the holidays with more intention, and focused on spiritual growth as well as parties, it will make for a more meaningful experience for everyone.

Christmas is a time to be enjoyed. Do whatever it takes to combine laughter, planning, preparation, and family smiles to make this the best Christmas ever. If you enjoy the season, so will the rest of your family.

Would you let us know if one idea in this ebook helped you and your family
make a special memory during this holiday season?

Email us at threewordlessons@gmail.com,
and we'll send you a free pack of Christmas Carols with easy chords for guitar or piano.



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