



give

Christmas: 12 delightful recipes for the best family time

ONE CUP FUN, ONE CUP GENEROSITY,
ONE CUP GRACE, AND A PINCH OF ADVENTURE

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HAVE FUN, DO GOOD: HOW TO MAKE ADVENT CREATIVE



BY HEIDI KEMPSTON



Cook up some fun with this simple Advent idea designed to get your family thinking of others. Think of it like a mini-Christmas party in a jar ... every day during the 25 days leading up to Christmas! Tailor it for your family, small group, or Sunday School class. Simply pick a new activity out of the jar to do every day up until the big day!

I have been working in children's ministry at our church for a long time, and before that I was a preschool teacher. I also have two busy boys (5 and 8) and a baby girl on the way. So I'm always on the lookout for ideas where fun and creativity meet Jesus.

Every Christmas I find myself looking for ways our family can help others and

focus on Jesus. This year I landed on creating our own Advent activity "grab bag" jar to bring everyone in the family closer.

To start off, get a jar and decorate it (there's a cool template you can get if you download this Advent guide). Then fill it with Advent ideas on craft sticks or colored paper.

Each day, have the designated special person pull an Advent idea out of the jar, and do the activity together. Activities can range from simple service ideas and conversation starters to ones that are a little more involved. What I love about this is that it's as much of a commitment as you want it to be.

Here are just a few I thought up with my husband, but you'll want to come up

with a bunch on your own. That's half the fun! Tailor your ideas to best suit the ages of everyone involved.



Heidi Kempston
Children's ministry worker, mom of three



Every Christmas I find myself looking for ways our family can help others and focus on Jesus.

“RECIPE” #1:
HAVE FUN, DO GOOD: HOW TO MAKE
ADVENT CREATIVE

Time: Low **Medium** High | Budget: \$ \$\$ \$\$\$

the key ingredient:
SPONTANEITY

WHAT YOU NEED:

- A fun jar
- A dash of spontaneity
- Wooden craft sticks (of the ice pop variety) or colored strips of paper
- Glue, if needed
- A handful of coloring pens

DIRECTIONS:

1. Pick out a jar.
2. Decorate the jar with your kids or download this Advent guide to get an Advent Jar template.
3. Brainstorm activities you want to do. Talk about why it feels good to be generous.
4. Figure out how many days of activities you want to do and get that many wooden craft sticks or strips of colored paper.
5. Write the Advent ideas on the sticks, print the words out and glue them on, or write them on your paper strips. Decorate them!
6. Each day (or week) choose one special helper to pick a stick out of the jar.
7. Do the activity together!



Here are just a few I thought up with my husband, but you'll want to come up with a bunch on your own. That's half the fun! Tailor your ideas to best suit the ages of everyone involved.

Bake and deliver a treat for a neighbor you haven't met yet

Buy a gift for a family or kid in need

Offer to untangle your neighbors Christmas lights

Make Christmas cards and spend time passing them out a local nursing home

Go through toys and clothes to donate

Take items from your pantry to the local food bank

Deliver some Starbucks hot chocolate to your local fire station or homeless shelter

Pay for another family's meal when you go out to eat

Everyone name the best/worst Christmas gift they've received

Everyone share their favorite Christmas memory

Read Luke 2:1-20 together

Read Matthew 2:1-12 together

Cutout this label and attach it to the Christmas Jar:



Now, create some of your own:

[Blank yellow bar for creating a new idea]

[Blank yellow bar for creating a new idea]

[Blank yellow bar for creating a new idea]

[Blank yellow bar for creating a new idea]

[Blank light green bar for creating a new idea]

[Blank light green bar for creating a new idea]

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[Blank light green bar for creating a new idea]

THE GRATITUDE GAME: HILARIOUS OLD PHOTOS OPTIONAL



BY NINA TOMARO



When my five siblings and I were younger, Christmas was about sharing stories and how much we appreciated each other. After we grew up, I realized that even though we were together at Christmas, we were no longer “present.” So I started the Gratitude Game to rekindle our quality time together.

I smile when I think about my childhood. I grew up in a large family with six kids. We had our quarrels (as most children do), but what stands out most are our backyard adventures and exploring the sea on family vacations. Then there was Christmas morning when we shared stories and our appreciation for one another. For our family, quality time together was the epitome of love.

I moved across the country right after college in 2011. So the holidays, especially Christmas, became the time I anxiously awaited to spend with my family. But I noticed something during that first Christmas I was back. Our family was together, but not really “together.” Some siblings were lost in video games, some were lost in TV land, and there was zero real connection. We’d lost the focus around what Christmas truly represents to me: love for one another.

So I started the Gratitude Game. I went upstairs and searched for individual photos of my siblings and my parents in their younger years. I grabbed a pack of notecards and called everyone to the kitchen table, the place we spent many nights as a family. I wrote down each

person’s name on a notecard. Everyone drew a name, then on a separate card wrote three things that they were grateful for about this person. After that, one person at a time read the three things on their card (without revealing the name). Then the rest of the family put the card next to the photo of the person they believed the card was about.

The result? Smiles, hugs, laughter, and a refocus on what Christmas is really about: love. We’ve now made it a tradition every Christmas to play the Gratitude Game, and I know we’ll keep this tradition going for years to come.



Nina Tomaro

Passionate writer, content strategist,
speaker, mid-westerner,
and entrepreneur



But I noticed something during that first Christmas I was back. Our family was together, but not really “together.”

“RECIPE #2”:
THE GRATITUDE GAME: HILARIOUS OLD
PHOTOS OPTIONAL

Time: Low **Medium** High | Budget: \$ \$\$ \$\$\$



The key ingredient:
MEMORIES

WHAT YOU NEED:

- A bunch of family members
- A photo of each family member (throwbacks are best)
- Pack of notecards
- Something to write with

DIRECTIONS:

1. Gather everyone in your family around a table.
2. Place each person's photo on the table where everyone can see.
3. Pass out one notecard to each person.
4. On separate notecards, write down each person's name, shuffle, and place in a bowl. Then have each person draw someone's name. Make sure that if they get themselves they redraw.
5. On the blank notecards, have everyone write three things they are grateful for about the person they drew.
6. Pick someone to read their card out loud. Then have the rest of the family guess who the card is about.
8. Smile and remember to focus on love, not only during Christmas but each and every day.

THE GIVING TREE: HOW TO WRAP UP GENEROSITY THIS CHRISTMAS



BY DEBBIE MACOMBER



Generosity doesn't come naturally. It's a recipe we learn from others. My parents passed it on to me, and now I am striving to pass it onto my children and grandchildren. That's why I love to take them shopping ... for others!

One of the highlights for me at Christmastime is baking cookies with the grandkids and making those once-a-year candies, because what's Christmas without fudge and divinity? More importantly, what's Christmas without Jesus? It's void. Pointless. That's one reason why I am determined as a woman of faith to make sure Christ is the focal point of our family Christmas.

So one of the fun things I do with the grandkids each Christmas is taking

them shopping ... for others. We collect names off of a giving tree and shop for the person we've picked. We also make sure that each one of them receives something from my husband and me from the World Vision Gift Catalog. It's important that children learn the joy of giving, and these are small ways that I've helped instill that in them.

You see, generosity isn't something that comes naturally. It's taught by example.

My parents weren't wealthy people. Having lived through the Depression era, they were keenly aware of how fortunate they were to live and work in a free society. They never forgot those who had less. I learned generosity from them and am now striving to open my children's and grandchildren's hearts and minds to those who have far less.

And what do I get out of it? I am humbled by the thoughtfulness of my grandkids. The way they search out the best buys. The way they stretch those dollars as far as they can. These are memories that are dear to my heart and encouraging to my faith!



You see, generosity isn't something that comes naturally. It's taught by example.

Debbie Macomber
#1 New York Times bestselling author
debbiemacomber.com

“RECIPE” #3:
THE GIVING TREE: HOW TO WRAP UP
GENEROSITY THIS CHRISTMAS

Time: **Low** Medium High | Budget: \$ **\$\$** \$\$\$

key ingredient:
GENEROSITY

WHAT YOU NEED:

- A willingness to share
- Grandkids, kids, nephews, nieces, or kids of family friends
- A giving tree (find one at your church or local mall)
- The World Vision Gift Catalog (<http://www.worldvision.org/giftcatalog>)

DIRECTIONS:

1. Visit a giving tree at your local mall or church and pick names off of the tree.
2. Give your kids a budget.
3. Set them loose in a local store to let them shop for the name they picked.
4. If needed, take your purchases home and wrap them and return the gifts to the tree.
5. Consider giving your kids or grandkids items from the World Vision Gift Catalog. It's a great way to talk to them about the great needs of the world today.



HOW TO PUT ON A FAMILY CHRISTMAS PLAY (REAL “BABY JESUS” OPTIONAL)

BY TIM AND DARCY KIMMEL

Isn't it ironic that so many of the components of Christmas keep us from focusing on Christ whose birthday we celebrate? What's cool is that it doesn't have to be "either or" when it comes to the Christ of Christmas and all the other stuff. That's why we can't wait to share our family Christmas play script with you!

As in our daily life, Christ lives in us, around us, and through us. In our own family, we enjoy all the trimmings of the season. But we have one tradition that makes sure the true meaning of Christmas comes through loud and clear. For the past 35 years, we have finished our traditional Christmas Eve meal with family and friends and then assembled upstairs for our annual Christmas play. What started with four rosy-cheeked

toddlers now involves more than 30 kids, including those of our Jewish neighbors. Those first cast members are now the parents of the current cast of characters. (And if we ever suggest giving up this family tradition, it's the adults who grew up with it who protest the most).

Some years, including this one, we have a real baby to play Jesus. On other years, a Cabbage Patch doll has sufficed. If we run out of kids before we fill all the parts, we enlist the help of any willing soul. We've had Josephs who were half as tall as Mary and wise men who sported a 5 o'clock shadow. For such a simple tradition, this play packs a huge wallop when it comes to keeping Christ in Christmas, and it reminds us of the greatest Gift ever given.

As three generations finish our Christmas Eve celebration this year, with kids snuggled in parents' and grandparents' laps, we'll join together to sing a few favorite Christmas carols and also take some time to reflect on our blessings of family, friends, and faith.



For the past 35 years, we have finished our traditional Christmas Eve meal with family and friends and then assembled upstairs for our annual Christmas play.

Authors: Tim and Darcy Kimmel
Founders of Family Matters, a ministry dedicated to "equipping families for every age and stage of life"
www.familymatters.net

“RECIPE” #4:
HOW TO PUT ON A FAMILY CHRISTMAS PLAY:
REAL “BABY JESUS” NOT INCLUDED

Time: Low **Medium** High | Budget: \$ \$\$ \$\$\$

key ingredient:
IMAGINATION

WHAT YOU NEED:

- Kids of all ages
- Costumes from the linen closet or kitchen drawer
- Camera (a cell phone will work too!)

DIRECTIONS:

1. Download our Christmas play script here: www.familymatters.net/christmasplay.pdf
2. Assign cast members.
3. Assemble costumes and props (baby, blanket, manger, gifts for wise men, etc.).
4. Proceed with the greatest story ever told!
5. Capture sweet moments on camera.



ADVENT CONSPIRACY: 4 LIFE-CHANGING NEW TRADITIONS

BY GREG HOLDER

What if there was a winsome, straightforward way to invite people back into the real story of Christmas? Could we conspire against all the other messages and pressures that push on us during this season? Yes and YES! Here are four simple ingredients to consider.

A few years ago, a handful of pastors and I began talking about Advent. Like many of you, we began to lament how our friends, families, churches, and in some ways, we ourselves were getting sucked into the craziness. Folks would get to the end of the season worn out, in debt, overweight (I know, now I'm getting personal), and with this weird and depressing sense that they'd missed the point of Christmas.

Here's what we came up with in response: What if we invited our churches to celebrate Christmas differently? We offered up these four ideas:

1. Make time to worship our great and glorious King!
2. Don't get sucked into the lie that spending more money is how we celebrate Christmas.
3. Give more of ourselves to friends and family with thoughtful, creative expressions of love.
4. Show the world God's grace in an outrageously unselfish way: Love people we don't know and whose names we may never know.

This would be the start of a little counter-cultural movement now known

as Advent Conspiracy. It's grown to include thousands of churches, youth groups, and Christ followers in more than 20 countries on every continent!

Pray about what that looks like for you and your family. God will lead you. I'll just say this much: It's worth it.

The kind of life with God that gets involved — that notices the less fortunate, that feels the pain of a friend, that knows sarcasm is a cheap substitute for joy, that forgives freely and laughs deeply and cries openly, that truly gives to others this Christmas — this kind of life with God is fuller and freer and, well, it's worth it.

So let's conspire together!



By Greg Holder
Lead pastor at The Crossing Church in
Chesterfield, Missouri
adventconspiracy.org



The kind of life with God that gets involved — that notices the less fortunate, that feels the pain of a friend, that knows sarcasm is a cheap substitute for joy, that forgives freely and laughs deeply and cries openly, that truly gives to others this Christmas — this kind of life with God is fuller and freer and, well, it's worth it.

“RECIPE” #5: ADVENT CONSPIRACY: 4 LIFE-CHANGING NEW TRADITIONS

Time: Low Medium **High** | Budget: \$ \$\$ \$\$\$

The Key ingredient:
FAITH

WHAT YOU NEED:

- Prayer
- Relationships
- Sense of adventure
- The Bible
- Thoughtful ideas
- You
- Someone in need

DIRECTIONS:

1. Worship fully. Let’s make no apologies about the point of the Christmas story. We celebrate the birth of Jesus — God incarnate — the One sent to redeem us, to rescue us, to restore us.

2. Spend less. Let’s not push ourselves deeper into debt so the pile of presents around the tree can be three feet high. It’s okay to buy presents for people you love. However, remember there’s no connection between the story of Jesus and stopping by the mall to mindlessly buy a gift that someone doesn’t need with money you don’t have.

3. Give more. Wait. That sounds like a contradiction, doesn’t it? Maybe not. What if we gave relational gifts? These may require more thought and more of us. Like when a young man gave a bag of coffee beans to his dad. Huh? The note on the gift said it all: “Dad you are only allowed to drink the coffee from these beans with me. And in the days that it takes us to enjoy this coffee, I just want to hear your voice. I miss you and this is just for us.” That gift just became relational.

4. Love all. What if we took some of the money we saved from not buying Uncle Murray that sweater he was never going to wear anyway? What if we took some of that money and we gave it to those in need, those who are overlooked, those whom Jesus referred to as “the least of these?”

BEST GIFT IDEAS: THE SECRET INGREDIENT THIS CHRISTMAS

BY ED CYZEWSKI

When I only had \$10 to spend on a gift for each person at Christmastime, I had to ask myself very different questions. The most important: “What would this person never buy for himself/herself?” It’s led me on quite the journey, even as my family’s budget got bigger.

Years of being blessed with a low checking account balance forced me to rethink my approach to Christmas. Those were not easy years as I tried to tell myself that Christmas isn’t all about the presents, while fearing that my family would consider me cheap or inconsiderate. This led to a series of time-consuming projects, such as homemade applesauce,

unique jams, hot sauce, and framed photographs. I tailored everything to the specific needs of each person, and in most cases, kept us within our budget. In a happy case of irony, my focus on gift giving led me back to a better conception of Christmas. The more I’ve

thought about my gift-giving strategy, the more I’ve been drawn away from focusing on giving gifts. Because isn’t Christmas all about the power of God to do for us what we could never do for ourselves?



Ed Czewski
Author of *A Christian Survival Guide* and
The Contemplative Writer

“ In a happy case of irony, my focus on gift giving led me back to a better conception of Christmas.

“RECIPE” #6: BEST GIFT IDEAS: THE SECRET INGREDIENT THIS CHRISTMAS

Time: Low Medium **High** | Budget: \$ \$\$ \$\$\$

Key ingredient:
THOUGHTFULNESS

WHAT YOU NEED:

- Good insight
- Time
- Limitations (creativity actually thrives with limitations)
- A willingness to learn something new
- A taste for art or cooking or creating (or a friend with one)

DIRECTIONS:

1. Realize that homemade gifts are not just okay. They are fantastic! The first time I gave my grandmother a jar of homemade applesauce, she opened it right away and burst into tears at the first taste. She hadn't eaten homemade applesauce since the last time her mother made it. And my mom guards her jar of blueberry jam, while my in-laws don't miss a meal without their hot sauce.
2. Keep spending under control by joining together with family members to buy one large gift that someone would never buy on his or her own. As my family has reached greater financial security, we've been able to spend more money on gifts. But our question remains the same: "What would this person never buy for himself/herself?" For a big-ticket example, we all went in on a computer for my wife before she entered graduate school.
3. Revel in the incredible joy of giving someone a gift that they could never get on their own. In fact, meeting a real need is the best kind of gift giving. God knew that when He overshadowed Mary with His power and sent us a Savior as the greatest gift — doing something for us we could never do on our own.



THE WHITE ELEPHANT GAME: WITH A TWIST



BY JORDAN CROOK



Get ready to thank Uncle Kenny because you've probably never seen this take on a white elephant gift exchange before. And maybe, just maybe, you'll never play it the same way again.

Our family has been doing a Christmas gift exchange in the same room for as long as I can remember. The floor is carpeted with 1960s AstroTurf, and the walls are mostly glass doors out to the patio. The room glows with twinkling lights and 40 to 50 of us squeeze in. A pile of unmarked, wrapped gifts is in the center.

Everyone knows how it works: Pass sets of dice around the circle. When you roll doubles, you grab a gift. Once everyone has one gift, we unwrap. Now the fun begins.

Then we go around the circle playing Vanna White, presenting our item as if it were a new car or expensive vacation. No gifts can be worth more than \$5, so you probably got a bottle of cucumber body wash, but you sell it like it's a full in-home spa experience.

When we've all presented our gifts, Mom sets the timer for 20 minutes. Then things get serious.

The dice go around the circle. Now doubles give you the chance to be king. You get to pick whatever gift you want -- and the person gives it up to you.

The dice keep rolling until the timer goes off and Mom yells "time's up!" at the top of her lungs, setting in motion a wave of cheering and playful arguing.

But one time someone added, "Maybe we need a little less, and maybe someone needs a little more." That comment was the game-changer. [pull quote]

So the game doesn't end with mom. Everyone gives Uncle Kenny \$20. He places the cash into an envelope. He writes each contributor's name down on ballots that go into a plastic salad bowl. He pulls one name from the bowl, and the money goes to a charity that person shares about.

The rest of us learn about a challenge in our community and a program or organization that is taking action to help make our lives better. And in a funny way, we get to learn about each other, too.



But one time someone added, "Maybe we need a little less, and maybe someone needs a little more." That comment was the game-changer.

Jordan Crook

Daughter, sister, writer, project manager

“RECIPE” #7:

THE WHITE ELEPHANT GAME: WITH A TWIST

Time: Low **Medium** High | Budget: \$ \$\$ \$\$\$

key ingredient:
LAUGHTER

WHAT YOU NEED:

- A pair of dice
- Bowls or deep plates to hold the thrown dice
- Cash to donate to the charity (we do \$20 a head, but you can do more or less)

DIRECTIONS:

1. Bring a wrapped white elephant gift that costs \$5 or less.
2. Sit in a circle with the bowls filled with the dice in the middle.
3. Roll the dice when they come to you.
4. If you get doubles, select a white elephant gift. Go until all gifts are unwrapped.
5. Everyone gets a turn hyping their gift like a professional infomercial pitchman.
6. Set a timer for 20 minutes.
7. Send the dice around. If you roll doubles, you can steal anyone's gift. You give them your own in return. They cannot refuse you!
8. Now collect the charity funds from everyone, and write each person's name on a slip of paper.
9. Draw names. The person whose name is drawn picks the charity the money goes to and tells everyone about it!

HOW TO SURVIVE A NO-GIFT CHRISTMAS WITH YOUR KIDS



BY NICOLE WICK



Two years ago, my family decided to skip Christmas gifts. My kids were 11, 12, and 21 at the time. I'd like to say that this was part of some altruistic, do-gooder decision we made as a family, but the truth is we realized our kids had too much stuff. So ... how did it actually go?

The "no-gift Christmas" idea actually started in July. My son's birthday is in the summer, and every time we asked him what he wanted he would shrug his shoulders. It got to where I felt that we were begging him for suggestions. We pressed him until he reluctantly told us to get him some random video game he wasn't really dying to play.

After his birthday passed and the video game was in the drawer, I told my

husband that this was crazy. If the kids truly don't want anything, that's fine. We don't need to buy them anything, right? It felt so strange to even consider not doing gifts.

We tossed that idea around for a few weeks and then proposed it to the kids. What if we didn't do gifts that Christmas and instead focused on spending time together and blessing others? [call out] We thought we'd have

to do some sweet-talking to get all three kids to agree to our plan. But we were surprised that they were actually excited about doing something new.

Full disclosure: Our youngest daughter took some convincing, but was on board after we reassured her that grandma and grandpa would still bring presents. You can't win them all, I suppose. But here's the recipe for how we did it.



Nicole Wick
Mom, maven, and blogger



What if we didn't do gifts that Christmas and instead focused on spending time together and blessing others?

“RECIPE” #8: HOW TO SURVIVE A NO-GIFT CHRISTMAS WITH YOUR KIDS

Time: Low **Medium** High | Budget: \$ \$\$ \$\$\$

the key ingredient:
LAUGHTER

WHAT YOU NEED:

- A solid plan
- A good giving tool
- An understanding family
- A desire for a lower credit card bill

DIRECTIONS:

1. Come up with a good plan together. As a family, we decided to do two things. First, we moved our annual summer vacation to Christmas week so we could break away from the holiday busyness and just relax and enjoy each other. Second, we decided to spend the money we would otherwise use to buy gifts and shop for others instead. The kids still received gifts from relatives, but our family budget for gifts went instead to our vacation and giving.

2. Get a good teaching and giving tool. I love watching my kids pore over the pages of the World Vision Gift Catalog. It reminds me of the excitement they used to have when they were little kids making their lists for Santa.

In the past, my kids sat at the kitchen table with the catalog and a big red sharpie. They would circle items that they wanted: items that total far less than what we would typically spend on needless toys or games, but will be priceless to those who receive them. It fills my heart to see the catalog full of red circles and dog-eared pages and to hear their conversations about which gifts will be needed most.

3. If you survive (and you will), you might have started a new tradition. This year, we are once again getting ready to celebrate the holidays with no department stores, no wrapping paper, and no standing in long lines with crabby shoppers. Our tree won't have gifts under it, but our kids won't miss them. We've learned that there truly is more joy in giving than receiving.

MIX, BAKE, DRIVE: CHRISTMAS COOKIE CAR



BY ASHLEY TREXLER



Want to encourage your kids to notice others and commit small acts of kindness? Baking and delivering cookies in “The Cookie Car” has become a heart-warming and simple way to remind our family that giving and gratitude is what matters most at Christmas.

My biggest wish for my daughter is that she will always be able to find something to be thankful for — especially around Christmas when our focus strays to wish lists and vacation days.

For me, Christmas is about gratitude, and I find that the smallest acts of kindness remind me to be thankful for all we have.

I started baking Christmas cookies for service workers before I had a family. I wanted to show the people who work hard to keep our community running that I appreciated their under-recognized daily efforts. At first, I baked cookies and left my deliveries on top of trash cans and hanging from mailboxes, being too shy to offer my small gift of thanks in person.

But since then I've found that thanking people in person always means more. And now that my daughter is a bit older, I've improved the tradition by launching “The Cookie Car.” At Christmastime, our car turns into a mobile cookie delivery unit visiting fire stations, grocery stores, schools, and more. We bake, gift wrap, and deliver cookies with joy and gratitude.

I love watching my daughter get into the spirit of giving. But my favorite moments are when she asks to do something nice for someone, “just because.” The cookie delivery helps my family notice others and give thanks. And I see that the more we notice, the more we give.

Our gratitude for others has grown since “The Cookie Car” started. We search our recipients out and express our thanks in person whenever possible. This year, we plan to include friends and family in our delivery efforts and hope to hear some caroling too.



“ For me, Christmas is about gratitude, and I find that the smallest acts of kindness remind me to be thankful for all we have.”

Ashley Trexler
An award-winning blogger
and writer for hire.
liesaboutparenting.com

“RECIPE” #9: MIX, BAKE, DRIVE: CHRISTMAS COOKIE CAR

Time: Low **Medium** High | Budget: \$ \$\$ \$\$\$

key ingredient:
KINDNESS

WHAT YOU NEED:

- Gift bags, ribbons, and tags
- Ingredients for thumbprint thank you cookies (makes about 60 cookies)

DIRECTIONS:

1. Brainstorm a list with your kids of people you can help.
2. Consider decorating your car for your cookie car runs.
3. Make some thumbprint thank you cookies.
4. Deliver cookies in your cookie car!

RECIPE FOR 60 COOKIES:

- 3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt (finely ground)
- 1 1/2 cups unsalted butter, softened
- 1 1/3 cups sugar, plus more for rolling
- 2 large eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla bean paste or vanilla extract
- 2/3 cup Christmas jam (can substitute with raspberry, strawberry, or cherry jam)

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees and line four cookie sheets with parchment paper.
2. Combine the flour, baking powder, and salt in a bowl. Set aside.
3. In a mixing bowl, whip the butter and sugar with a mixer until fluffy (about five minutes).
4. Beat in the egg and vanilla until just combined. Slowly add the dry ingredients, mixing until just incorporated.
5. Using a cookie scoop, ice cream scoop, or your hands, roll the dough into one inch balls and roll in the sugar. Place them two inches apart on the cookie sheets.
6. Using your clean thumb, make an indentation in the middle of each cookie. Fill the indent with about 3/4 teaspoon of jam.
7. Bake about 15 minutes or until the cookie edges are golden brown.
8. Cool the cookies on baking sheets. (Cookies can keep for up to five days in a tightly closed container.)



THE BEST CHRISTMAS GIFT IS YOU



BY TERRY BONET



Christmas had become all about what the children got. They had long lists of expensive wants. So one year I announced that we were no longer buying presents. Everything under the tree would be handmade. I expected rebellion! Instead, it brought out amazing creativity that we have all come to love.

I have four girls, and as they grew, the costs of items on their Christmas lists grew with the latest gadgets and clothes. I decided I'd had enough. Christmas is supposed to be about family and sharing joy, not shopping and credit card bills.

When I announced one year that we were no longer buying presents and that everything under the tree would be handmade, I thought they would be

upset. I was surprised that they took the challenge, and their creativity blossomed!

The first year I made them all quilts. My husband wrote a children's book that was all about the girls. They made us photo books and artwork. We all cried that Christmas morning as we snuggled under the quilts and he read it to us. We all have come to appreciate the talents that God has given each of us. We do still buy them jewelry or something special we know they like for their

stockings to open on Christmas Eve, but Christmas Day is all about what we've made for each other.

All but one of my daughters has left home. The time we have together now is precious. We learned through this change at Christmas that it's about the joy of being together and sharing our love and talents with each other. I believe that this is a tradition they will carry with them and share with their own families.



Terry Bonet
Wife and mother of four girls



I thought they would be upset. I was surprised that they took the challenge, and their creativity blossomed!

“RECIPE” #10: THE BEST CHRISTMAS GIFT IS YOU

Time: Low Medium **High** | Budget: \$ \$\$ \$\$\$

key ingredient:
CREATIVITY

WHAT YOU NEED:

- Creativity
- Thinking about what is special to your family members
- Planning ahead (at least a week before Christmas, depending on what you decide to make)

DIRECTIONS:

1. Think about it: Brainstorm with each family member on ideas of what to make; focus on helping kids think proactively about what the person would like, not just what they want to make
2. Create it: Kids may need help in the creation process, depending on their age
3. Give it: Wrap it up for Christmas and celebrate their creativity!



FAITH IN ACTION: ONE EASY WAY TO PRAY THIS CHRISTMAS



BY SHAUN KEMPSTON



Kids' prayers are creative ... and powerful. But what if we could encourage them to grow in their prayer lives even more? It was the words of my youngest son that got our wheels turning about one idea we want to try out this Christmas. What could we, as parents, learn from our children?

My kids make up sayings a lot. "House pants" is my favorite, and stands for the most comfortable pants my 8-year-old son owns. "Double read" is when we read our own books side-by-side before bed. And they say "search it up" instead of "Google it," which makes sense. I'll send texts of what they've said to myself and my wife, then take a picture of the text so I won't ever lose it. It's the prayers our kids make up that have a way of touching us like few other things can.

Here's one from the other night from my almost 6-year-old son: "God we like how you never lie to us. We like how you put blessings in our hearts and our brains. And how you make us grow up from babies to kids to teenagers. Please help the baby in mommy's tummy not to die."

My son goes from the abstract to the concrete really quick. You see, my wife is pregnant, healthy, and in her third trimester right now. The little baby girl is also healthy. We are thankful, but my son remembers back two Christmases ago when my wife suffered a miscarriage. That's why I'm extra thankful for his prayers. He's asking God for things in ways I would never think of, and I'm learning from him in his childlike faith.

This got me thinking of an idea my wife and I had heard of and plan on doing this Christmas. We want to encourage our kids to grow in their prayer life, but a lot of times we can't think of all the people we need to pray for. So there's this idea where you take a Christmas photo card you've gotten in the mail and pray for the people on the card, either as a family or one-on-one with your kids.

This could be a great way to have my boys pray for not only mom, dad, brother, little sister, grandma, and grandpa, but also for those we leave out. I hope it sparks some good questions and conversations. (But just enough questions, not too many, right? Just kidding). Anyhow, here's to seeing how it goes!



By Shaun Kempston
Writer

“It's the prayers our kids make up that have a way of touching us like few other things can.”

“RECIPE” #11:
FAITH IN ACTION: ONE EASY WAY TO PRAY THIS
CHRISTMAS

Time: **Low** Medium High | Budget: \$ \$\$ \$\$\$

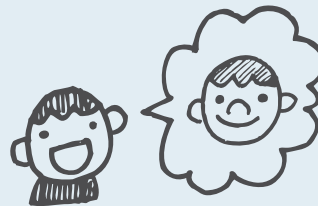
key ingredient:
PRAYER

WHAT YOU NEED:

- Christmas photo cards of friends and family (either old ones from last year or new ones from this year)
- A dash of childlike faith

DIRECTIONS:

1. As a family, choose one Christmas photo card a day.
2. Pray together for the people on the card (at dinner or bedtime).
3. Talk with your kids about why it’s great to pray for your immediate family (mom, dad, sister, brother, grandma, grandpa) and those outside of your immediate family.



A VERY MUSICAL CHRISTMAS (MINIMAL SKILL AND BRAVERY REQUIRED)

BY BEX VANKOOT

You might groan when you hear your first Christmas carol playing over the mall sound system, but there is a reason these songs provoke such a reaction. Share the spirit of the season with those in need through the gift of a song!

I grew up among musical people. My grandfather was a country fiddler who loved the stage. My mother played both guitar and banjo, breaking them out around the fire on a camping trip in summer or around the Christmas tree each winter. I started classical violin lessons at age three and every year after, found myself in the company of family, friends, and neighbors who would listen to us perform. It permeated our home, our church, our festivals, and feasts.

Music, to me, is the soul of Christmas. Even in the dark and cold of winter, we can come together and raise our voices, sing out praises, and believe the light and warmth will come again. Anyone can share a song, and it doesn't cost a dime.



Bex vanKoot
Journalist, content marketer, and author
bexvankoot.com

“ Music, to me, is the soul of Christmas.

“RECIPE” #12:

A VERY MUSICAL CHRISTMAS (MINIMAL SKILL AND BRAVERY REQUIRED)

Time: Low **Medium** High | Budget: \$ \$\$ \$\$\$

key ingredient:
HARMONY

WHAT YOU NEED:

- People with music in their hearts — as many as you can find gathered in one place
- 1 part melody
- 3 parts Christmas cheer
- 2 parts bravery
- 2 parts harmony
- 1 part memory
- 1 part creativity

DIRECTIONS:

1. Decide on your musical talents so everyone in your family has a role. Play an instrument? Love to sing? Can you bang on a drum or shake a rattle? Got a great dance move to show off? What about family friends who might want to join in?

2. Choose your venue. Who do you know who could use a little extra holiday cheer? Check with local elder care facilities, hospices, children’s hospital wards, or take a walk to some local businesses where folks are working hard for the holidays.

3. Pick your set list. What songs are you going to perform? Sit down with your group and list out your favorite Christmas carols and holiday songs. Think about who you will perform for, how long it should be, and what songs they will enjoy.

4. Practice makes perfect. Spend a few days beforehand practicing the songs on your list, figuring out what you want to wear, who stands where, and who gets which part. Make sure everyone is involved. Let those little stars shine!

5. Perform! Sing, play, dance, or act along to your favorite recordings with all the holiday cheer you can muster.



World Vision is a Christian humanitarian organization working with children, families, and their communities in nearly 100 countries worldwide to pull out the roots of poverty and injustice and grow abundance and self-sufficiency. We love people in need because Jesus does, and we serve everyone, regardless of race, religion, or gender.

World Vision is a Christian humanitarian organization dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice.

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