



*the* **BEST**  
*Christmas!*  
**EVER!**

A FRESH APPROACH TO ADVENT

WHAT IF THIS YEAR  
YOU REALLY  
SHOOK THINGS UP?

BY ALAN DANIELSON AND DARREN CURRIN



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**A TRIPLE-THREAT PUBLICATION**

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# Meet THE AUTHORS

Alan Danielson and Darren Currin have been friends since 2005. They got to know one another at LifeChurch.tv where Alan oversaw the small group ministry and Darren wrote all of the adult discipleship material. Darren and Alan are close friends and have a real chemistry when working together on materials that encourage and inspire people to follow Jesus fully.

Alan is a Christian, husband, father of three boys and a pastor. Alan has been in vocational ministry since 1990. Alan wants to dedicate his entire life to serving Christ's lovely bride: The Church. He's also something of a Star Wars fanatic.

Darren is a Christian, husband, father of one precious girl and a writer. Darren feels a special calling by God to write material that makes people fall more in love with Jesus. He is also a lover of comic books, science fiction and the Dallas Cowboys.

For this project, Alan has written the introduction and the chapter intros for each week's topic. Darren has written the content for the daily devotionals.



# Acknowledgments

## **Darren's Acknowledgments:**

Thanks to each of you who are using this book. It is a privilege for Alan and me to use our gifts to minister to you. I truly hope this book helps you draw closer to God during this special time of year.

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Finally, thank you to my co-author Alan whom I'm blessed to call friend. I am forever grateful to him for helping me realize and live out my purpose in life.

## **Alan's acknowledgements:**

First, I want to thank my wife for putting up with me while I'm writing. She is patient and Christ-like. I married waaaaay up!

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I want to thank my parents for being models of Jesus. The way they celebrated Christmas taught me the timeless value of keeping Jesus at the center of it all. My dad is one of the best editors in the world too. Thanks for helping proof my work, Dad!

Next, I am thankful for my co-author, Darren. He is the most loyal friend a guy could ask for. I'm humbled to call him one of my closest friends.

Most importantly, I'm thankful to Jesus for loving me and saving me. I'm thankful that He came on Christmas and accomplished his mission on Easter. I love you, Lord!



## INTRODUCTION

You know what the Bible never commands us to do? Celebrate Christmas. We were commanded by Jesus to remember his death, burial and resurrection, but not his birth.

So it's fascinating to me that Christmas is the most celebrated holiday. As Christians, shouldn't Easter be a much bigger deal? Don't get me wrong because I love Christmas. It's by far my favorite time of year, but I'm forced to wonder if we as a culture aren't playing right into Satan's hands where Christmas is concerned. After all, Satan would much rather we focus on a cute little baby Jesus wrapped in cloth and lying in a manger than a battered, bloody, and naked Jesus hanging on a cross. He'd much rather that we focus on a stable full of animals, shepherds and wise men than have us focus on the empty tomb. The reason I mention this is because Easter is the why behind the what. Easter is the why behind Christmas. Easter is the reason Christmas came about in the first place.

Again, by no means do I think it's bad that we celebrate Christmas. I just believe we need to intentionally think about WHY we are celebrating it. If we're honest, we spend a lot of time each year focusing on HOW we are going to decorate, HOW we

are going to entertain and HOW we buy gifts. We spend a lot focusing on WHO we are going to get gifts for, WHO we are going to invite and even WHO we wish to avoid. We spend a lot of time focusing on WHAT to buy, WHAT to cook, and WHAT to wear. We focus a lot on WHEN to go shopping, WHEN to attend the party and WHEN to put up the tree. We spend a lot of time focusing on WHERE to find the best deals, WHERE to look at the best lights and WHERE to place the Christmas tree.

But how much time, by comparison, do we spend thinking about WHY we celebrate?

To explore this idea more, let's do a mental exercise. Using the list below, estimate the time you spend on each of these Christmas activities. Add any of your family's activities that are not on the list.

<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>TIME SPENT</b>
Shopping for gifts	_____
Wrapping gifts	_____
Going to parties	_____
Cooking	_____
Writing Christmas cards	_____
Decorating the house	_____
Family advent devotionals	_____
Looking at Christmas lights	_____
Christmas family gathering	_____
Going to Church	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
<b>TOTAL TIME SPENT ON CHRISTMAS</b>	_____

Now consider the way you spend that time. What percentage of that total time is spent on the WHY of Christmas? What percentage is spent focusing on the how, what, where and who of Christmas?

So if God intended for us to celebrate this holiday at all, would He want us to do it the way we've been doing it? I think it's safe to say, His desire is to capture your hearts at Christmas as you consider, with deep intensity, the WHY behind the holiday. And if that's the case, it's probably going to be necessary to rearrange your schedule and priorities a bit.

So you may be wondering why you'd want to make these changes. The benefits are simple: more meaning and less stress. If you use this book this year, Christmas will contain deeper joys and fewer stresses. If you use this book, you'll create a little margin for yourself and you'll focus more intently on your Creator.

### **How This Book Works:**

This book has four chapters that should be read during the four weeks of advent. Advent begins on a different date each year, so here's how to know when Advent begins: Advent starts four Sundays before December 25, which is the Sunday that lands between November 27 and December 3.

Each chapter begins with a segment introducing the theme for that week and five devotional activities for you to use that week. You may use this book on your own, with your small group, Sunday school class or with your family. No matter how you choose to use

this book, it will make you think about your life during the Christmas season and it will help you take steps to make the season more meaningful, healthier, and less stressful.



## A WEEK OF MARGIN

The world is a mess: militant religious terrorists, school shootings, wars, natural disasters, politics, and healthcare problems seem to make up headlines every day. All of these things hit too close to home. Then there are the things that actually do hit us at home: divorce, parent-teen skirmishes, illness, financial pressures, nose neighbors, things that need to be repaired, personality conflicts at work and much more. Top off those things with the added stresses of the Christmas season: work parties, church events, school musicals, shopping, cooking, planning, mailing cards, decorating....Aaaaarrrrrggghhh! Is your heart rate elevated yet?

God said something profound to His people when they were stressed:

*“Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world.”*

~Psalms 46:10 (NLT)

Be still. When life seems out of control, the solution is to be still. Only in stillness are we truly able to take in the sense that God is truly in control. We never feel a

sense of peace in God when we are busy and stressed about everything that's going on.

To make this *The Best Christmas Ever*, take a breath this week. In fact take a few. Find God's peace in the middle of the chaos by being still.

I know what you're thinking, "I have too much to do. I can't even slow down, let alone be still, because there's not enough time!" Breathe for a second and consider that statement: "There's no time." Consider the possibility that the previous statement may simply be untrue.

Each of us has the same amount of time as everyone else. **The difference between those who are "rich in time" and those who are "poor in time" is only a matter of how they choose to spend their time.** Think about it: there's only one thing we can do with time: spend it. We all get an allowance of 24 hours each day and we all spend every one of those hours. How are *you* spending them?

Being still doesn't require *more* time; it requires a conscious decision to spend time *differently*.

So spend some of your time differently this week. Here's a practical idea: Do one less of several things. Go on one *less* shopping trip, attend one *less* party, bake one *less* batch of Christmas cookies, write one *less* Christmas card, etc. As you do fewer things, you'll feel less pressure and you'll suddenly find yourself with time to spend on finding God's peace by *being still*.

But you'll never experience the pressure-relief of God's peace until you take the pressure off of yourself. **YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO IT ALL. YOU CAN'T BE IT ALL. YOU CAN'T HAVE IT ALL.**

Christmas will happen whether your schedule is insanely packed or not. So quit pressuring yourself to be the CEO (chief ELF officer)! Instead, spend your time differently to let the pressure off. Finding peace is nice, but another great thing comes from spending your time differently: finding purpose. A pastor I used to work for named Craig Groeschel would frequently challenge those of us on his staff by saying, "Say 'No' to the good, so you can say 'Yes' to God's best."

By clearing room in your schedule, you'll not only find rest, but you'll be able to hear God more clearly as He tells you how He wants you to live.

Make your list. What are five to seven things you will do one less of this week?

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## Week 1, Day 1: It's Up To You

Rest is a concept grounded within the Bible. God modeled rest from the very beginning; He rested on the seventh day after spending the previous six days creating the world. Jesus also served as a model of rest and how it should benefit us. His example showed us that rest is not just an opportunity to recharge, but also to refocus. Christ knew the only way He and the disciples would remain at the top of their game was to rest. How different do you think this Christmas season would be if you took time to recharge and refocus? **Times of rest will not likely fall into your lap, so it's up to you to create the margin you need to rest.** As you enter into this week focusing on how and where you'll create margin this Christmas season, go back to the source of all things and read what God's word has to say about rest.

**Take Action:** Take time to read each of the following scriptures and allow God to speak to you about rest. Take the passages that speak to you most, write them on a card, and then put them in a place where you'll see it daily during this Christmas season.

**Read:** Genesis 2:1-3, Mark 6:30-32, Matthew 11:28-30, Psalm 46:10, Jeremiah 31:25, and Psalm 23:1-6.

**Pray:** "Help me see my need for rest. Allow the words You wrote in Your Word to speak to me today. Help me find opportunities this Christmas to rest so that I may be recharged and refocused."

## Week 1, Day 2: A New Tradition

There is no better time than the Christmas season to begin living out the following principle: you may need to say “no” to some good things so you will be prepared to say “yes” to God’s best. Our lives can become so busy and hectic that we often miss out on the very best things God has in store for us. It’s strange to think that at sometimes we’ve missed out on God’s *best* because we were too busy doing *good*. This is often true during Christmas where we often find ourselves doing many good things. School musicals, shopping, writing Christmas cards, decorating, caroling, family dinners, and Christmas light tours are all good things, but too many good things can equal a bad thing. In fact, doing too much can make you lose your focus.

In Luke 10 Jesus visited Mary and Martha. Martha was focused on so many good things that she missed the best thing: Jesus. He reminded her that she was so busy with the preparations for His arrival, that she was missing *Him*. **Create a new Christmas tradition by doing one less of something this year.** Then turn this tradition into a habit throughout the upcoming year. Don’t let your busyness keep you from missing out on God’s very best ever again.

**Read:** Luke 10:38-42.

**Take Action:** List some of the things you routinely do that are good, but may keep you from experiencing God’s best.

**Pray:** “God, help see the things I’m doing that may seem good to me, but keep me from Your best.”

## Week 1, Day 3: A New Habit

At Christmas there is a wealth of great activities and events available. The season is full of parties, concerts, school programs, parades and church events. The list can go on and on. There are so many fun activities that it can be hard to figure out which of these things you should let go of in order to focus on the best things. Going to a Christmas parade would be a fun time, but what if you instead took your family to buy gifts for some foster children, or reserve an evening at home to make personalized gifts containing notes of encouragement?

Creating margin in your schedule this Christmas season is an opportunity for you to grow in wisdom. Paul tells us in Ephesians 5 to live like the wise by making the best use of our time. Doing otherwise is foolish. Habits are not born overnight. They take time to become infused in us. **Now is the time to develop a new habit of creating margin so you can rest, refocus, and be alert for God's very best.** As you develop this habit, you will grow in wisdom and find yourself in a better place, mentally, physically, and spiritually.

**Read:** Ephesians 5:15-17.

**Take Action:** Today's activity is focused on spending time with God in prayer. This is your first step towards creating margin.

**Pray:** "Lord, give me the wisdom to see what needs to change in my schedule this Christmas season and throughout every season of the year."

## Week 1, Day 4: A New Path

Hopefully over the past few days you've experimented with creating some margin. You may have already cut something out of your schedule this week or have cut some activities out of your schedule in the coming weeks. If you have done this, ask yourself, "How does it feel?" It might feel a little strange cutting back on activities. But you're also likely to notice a feeling of relief knowing you have less to do. The principle of creating margin is something that shouldn't be reserved just for the Christmas season, but all throughout the year.

Once January rolls around, you will likely be back in your daily routine of balancing work, family, and other interests you may have. Our society entices us into being busy all 12 months of the year. This Christmas is a great opportunity for you and your family to go against the grain of the world. **Now is the time to forge a new path that may seem weird to others, but could alter you and your family forever.** Now is the time to decide if you're going to drown in the ocean of busyness that consumes so many of us, or instead live a life with margin that leads to times of rest and experiencing God's best.

**Read:** Romans 12:1-2.

**Take Action:** Now that you've been experiencing some margin this week, how about building in some margin for the rest of the season? Decide how you'll do this by choosing things you won't do next year.

**Pray:** "God, help me decide what I need to give up next year so I can have a stronger focus on You."

## Week 1, Day 5: A New Response

When it comes to margin, what you do as a result of your margin is just as important as what you *don't* do. While creating times of rest is important, another goal is to free yourself so you can more effectively focus on the most important things in life. Have you ever felt like there's something you should have done during the Christmas season but didn't do it because you didn't have time? Maybe you felt like you should check on a sick neighbor, volunteer at a nonprofit, or help an elderly person. But you didn't.

Creating margin in your life frees you up to do what you sense God wants you to do. **It allows you to stop saying, "I'm busy," and instead say, "I'm ready."** God desires you to respond the way Isaiah did in Isaiah 6. When God asked whom He should send to minister to the people, Isaiah responded, "Here I am! Send me." Starting this Christmas season, make the changes you need in your life so you can say, "Here I am! Send me." Now that you're saying no to some good things, find one or two best things you'll say yes to over the next few weeks.

**Read:** Isaiah 6:8.

**Take Action:** Identify one great thing you can do this Christmas season that you could not have done before creating some margin. Commit to taking action within the next two to seven days.

**Pray:** "Thank you for helping me see the need for margin in my life. God, help me to become more available to you so I can respond, "Here I am!" "



## A WEEK OF NO SHOPPING

NO SHOPPING?!?! Yup. I challenge you to not do any Christmas gift shopping this week. For some of you this is an astounding sacrifice. Some of you are already done with your shopping and the rest of us are jealous. Some of you will finish your shopping in the 24 hour pharmacy at 11:45 pm on Christmas Eve.

Regardless of your Christmas-shopping-tendencies, the point of this exercise is to make us think about the word: “Consume”. We are consumers, so that’s what we do: we consume. We consume food, toiletries, gasoline, paper, time and even entertainment.

In our modern culture, we consume, we use up, we deplete. How does being a consumer affect you spiritually? What if you consume the things of God more than you consume the things of the world?

*Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, now that you have had a taste of the Lord’s kindness.*

~1 Peter 2:2-3 (NLT)

**Imagine how your character might be different if you focused on consuming as much of God as possible.** Do you think you'd be calmer? Do you think you'd worry less? Do you think you'd be kinder? Do you think you'd be more generous? Do you think you'd be less stressed?

What do you think?

Really, that's the big goal for this week: to THINK. Don't just cruise through the Christmas season with your mind on autopilot. Stop shopping for one week, and THINK instead.

- Think about how God wants you to live.
- Think about who God wants you to serve.
- Think about what you can do to make this Christmas more spiritual.
- Think about when you felt closest to God and do the things that made you feel again.
- Think about why you celebrate Christmas to begin with.

Make this week a week of intentional thought. In doing so, you'll be giving God the gift of your mind and your attention.

*Jesus replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind."*

Matthew 22:37 (NLT)

## Week 2, Day 1: The Materialism Myth

So what's on your Christmas list this year? Don't answer saying you don't want anything, because there is at least one thing you want. Maybe it's some new clothes, a new television, some new appliances, some new tools, or even a new car. While Christmas is a season of giving, most of us also enjoy receiving. Gift giving is a great way to celebrate God's greatest gift to us: His son Jesus. But it's when we begin to believe the "materialism myth" that we begin to lose our focus. The materialism myth says, "Gifts make us happy." This myth isn't prevalent only at Christmas, but it follows us all year. Society, accepting the myth as fact, tells us, "More is better, money is power, and the more things we have, the happier we'll be". The widespread acceptance of the materialism myth has led to the commercialization of Christmas.

The Bible tells us something completely opposite to the materialism myth. Jesus warned often of the dangers of greed and money, and the writer of Hebrews encouraged us to keep our lives free from the love of money and be content with what we have.

**The love of things only leads to frustration, but the love of God leads to true contentment.**

**Read:** Hebrews 13:5, 1 Timothy 6:6-10, and Matthew 6:19-24.

**Take Action:** Do your best not to think about material desires today. Instead focus solely on God. Take additional time to pray and read His word.

**Pray:** "God, help me to stop believing the materialism myth and instead find true contentment with You."

## Week 2, Day 2: The Savings Myth

Do you know any people who love shopping and then say, “Look how much I saved”? How does spending equal saving? Coupons, loyalty programs, and sales help feed the “savings myth.” The savings myth says, “You can save money shopping.”

This is a hard truth, but don’t miss it: you can not save money by spending. Yes, you can get a good deal, but **spending is the opposite of saving**. Being frugal and looking for good deals is wise, but believing the savings myth is dangerous. Why? Because inevitably we wind up buying things we don’t actually need just to “save a few dollars”.

If not kept in check, the savings myth subtly fuels our desire for materialism. Sales are great when you have a need for something. But they can cause you to become unwise when they encourage you to buy things you don’t need or buy more things than you can truly afford. God calls us to be good stewards of our resources; therefore, evaluate whether or not you’ve been sucked into the savings myth, and what changes you might need to make in order to become a better steward of your resources.

**Read:** Luke 16:1-12.

**Take Action:** If you struggle with the savings myth, then talk about it with someone you trust. Have them hold you accountable so that you begin to break free from it.

**Pray:** “God, help me be a better steward of your resources by resisting the savings myth.”

## Week 2, Day 3: The Approval Myth

For most of us, the “approval myth” is probably one of the most common stumbling blocks. This myth says, “I need to please everyone”. The need to please is a root cause behind insecurity and materialism. This myth can be very evident at Christmas, as we focus on finding the “perfect gift”. When we long for compliments, being told how wonderful we are for finding that “perfect gift”, we’ve believed the approval myth.

God’s Word teaches us in 1 Thessalonians that we are not to please people, but instead we are to please God. When we’re focused on pleasing others, we’re becoming slaves to their approval. Instead, we need to learn how we can serve others. *That* is what pleases God. Breaking free from the need to please others won’t happen overnight. It will take time, but there is no better time to start than this week. As you’re turning your attention away from the myths you’ve been believing, turn instead to God.

**Read:** 1 Thessalonians 2:6, Galatians 1:10, and Colossians 3:23-24.

**Take Action:** To stop the need to please others, begin focusing on this truth: **Christmas is about receiving the “perfect gift”, not about buying it.** God already gave us the only perfect gift in His son Jesus. Pointing others to Jesus is better than anything we can buy.

**Pray:** “God, help me break free from the need to please others and focus instead on knowing and pleasing You.”

## Week 2, Day 4: The Economy Myth

In today's world, one of the fastest growing myths is the "economy myth", which says, "It's my *duty* to shop and help the economy." Sadly people are using this myth as a justification for acquiring debt. "It's okay for me to buy this car, TV, computer, video game, smart phone or tablet on store credit because it's good for the economy." What kind of rational is that? How is it good for the economy if you acquire so much debt Christmas shopping that you can't pay the debt next year? Going broke paying your credit cards next April because of the purchases you made this month will NOT help the economy. THINK before you spend.

The economy myth is contrary to a very important Biblical truth: our primary duty in life is to God. The Bible tells us to not focus on what man wants, but rather we are to walk in God's ways and obey His commandments. We are to love God with all our hearts, *minds*, soul and strength. **Practice loving God with your mind, by thinking before you spend.**

**Read:** Luke 10:27 and 1 John 5:3.

**Take Action:** List some of the purchases you've made in your life that you regret. Decide not to make those mistakes again.

**Pray:** "God, help see where I'm focusing too much on the things of this world and following man instead of you. Help me to see that my first duty is follow, obey, and love You."

## Week 2, Day 5: The “More” Myth

God is generous, but sometimes His love is shown by not giving us things. What if He gave you your first crush as your spouse? Where would you be if He gave you that job you wanted at the company that closed a year later? When you look back on your life, you can see instances where God *didn't* give you what you wanted, and it's a good thing. God's actions are proof that the “more myth” is not true. The more myth says, “The more I give you, the more I love you.” This is an easy trap to fall into during Christmas, as we think. “The more gifts I give, the more others believe I love them.”

To overcome this myth, realize that more gifts do not necessarily equal more love. More gifts could equal greater attempts at manipulation. More gifts could equal more efforts to seek approval. Believing the more myth is often a sign of a much deeper problem: insecurity. Please realize that God is the source of lasting security. Think about this for a moment: the measure of our love to God is not based on what we give Him in terms of our resources. He doesn't want more of your things, He just wants more of *you*. The same is true of your family: **more gifts are great, but more of YOU is greater.** Therefore, this Christmas focus more on how you can show love to others in ways that may not involve gift giving.

**Read:** John 3:16, Romans 8:35-39, and 1 John 4:16.

**Take Action:** Identify at least one way you'll show love to another this Christmas without buying a gift.

**Pray:** “God, help me to become more secure in you so I can be more authentic with You and those I love.”



# Week THREE

## A WEEK OF NO ASKING FOR GIFTS

Ever heard of a “cuss jar”? I knew a man who owned a small game store where lots of teenagers hung out. He had a jar on the counter that was full of quarters. It was his “cuss jar”. He had a rule in his store: any time someone cursed they owed him 25 cents or 25 pushups. Since most of the kids who hung out in his store weren’t athletic, they tended to avoid pushups like the plague. Also, since most of the kids were addicted to games, candy, and soda, most of them didn’t want to hand over their quarters. The result was a nearly cuss-free-environment.

What would your home sound like at Christmas time if you had an “I-want-it-jar?” Every time someone in your home says anything along the lines of “I want \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank) for Christmas”, or “I hope someone gets me \_\_\_\_\_ for Christmas”, they have to put 25 cents into the jar or drop and do 25 pushups. How would the comments and conversations in your home begin to change?

So that’s the challenge this week: Put an “I-want-it-jar” in the house and encourage everyone in your

home to not ask for presents for one week. If someone does, they owe 25 cents or 25 pushups. Oh yeah, if you're a parent, you're not exempt.

If you live alone, this activity might not seem practical, so here are some ways to adjust it for your lifestyle. Put the jar in your car or take it with you to work. Pay attention to your self-talk and to your conversations. Whenever you say or even *think* anything about what you want for Christmas, pay up a quarter or start exercising.

Why am I asking you to do this? Because it will make us very aware of just how self-focused we can be. The point isn't to penalize people but to begin shifting our focus from self to others.

Consider Scripture. "*You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*" (Acts 20:35 NLT)

Do you believe that? Do you really believe that it's better to give than receive?

Say this aloud to yourself: **"I really need to believe it's better to give than to receive."**

Why do you need to believe that? For three reasons: first, so you will focus more on giving. The point of Christmas isn't to get but to give. Christmas is about God *giving* His only son. Second, so you will focus on wanting less. Too much self-focus is a great source of evil in the world. Rage, murder, stealing, deception, manipulation, and even those bad-duck-lipped-selfies on the Internet are the result of uncontrolled selfishness. Third, so you will remember

Christ's example. Jesus modeled the self-less life and there's no better example to follow

*Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.*

~Philippians 2:3-8 (NLT)

So go ahead and try it. Try one week of having your home be one that focuses more on others than on self.

## Week 3, Day 1: It's Not About Me!

If you have children, two of the most common words you hear at Christmas are, "I want." Children are not shy about letting adults know what they want for Christmas. As children grow into adults, their "I want" attitude begins to grow into everyday life. As a result, many of us struggle with selfishness and entitlement.

**The degrees to which we struggle with selfishness are different, but each of us struggles with it.**

We aren't just selfish about things, are we? Sometimes we're selfish in our marriages or dating relationships; we become possessive of others. Sometimes we want everything to revolve around our schedules. Sometimes we are selfish with God as well. God's word is very clear about the dangers of being selfish. In fact, selfishness is directly opposed to what God desires of us. He wants our focus off of ourselves and focused on Him and others. Take some time this Christmas to really evaluate your life and see where your focus is most often. Is it mostly on you, or is it on God and others?

**Take Action:** Take time to read each of the following scriptures and allow God to speak to you about your selfishness.

**Read :** Philippians 2:1-11, 2 Corinthians 9:7, 2 Timothy 3:1-5, and Ephesians 4:29-32.

**Pray:** "God, help me see where I am selfish and help me take the focus off me and place it on You."

## Week 3, Day 2: All Year Long

One of the best ways to combat selfishness is to focus on the needs of others. It is easy to be consumed with our own needs because our needs are the most pressing. If you're struggling financially, at work, or with your family, it is easy to become focused only on yourself and forget about others. The truth is we all struggle. God never promised an easy life for us, and while you may be dealing with adversity or have great needs of your own, there are others with even greater needs and problems.

Christmas is the one time of year that people do seem to journey beyond themselves and put the needs of others first. The key, however, is God wants us to have this attitude all year long. **God did not create us to care about others only one month out of the year, but to love and care for others every single day!** Scripture tells us in Philippians to not look to our own interests, but to the interest of others. Jesus also said in Luke 6:38, "Give, and it will be given to you." Take time out of your life to journey beyond yourself and do something about the needs of others.

**Read:** Philippians 2:3-4, Luke 6:38, Hebrews 13:16, 1 John 3:17, and Matthew 25:35-40.

**Take Action:** Make a list of people you know or know of who have pressing needs. How can you help them?

**Pray:** "God, help me journey beyond myself so that I focus less on my needs and more on the needs of others."

### **Week 3, Day 3: A Selfishness Antidote**

As you're spending this week combating selfishness, one of the best things you can do is pray. **Prayer is one of the best antidotes to curing a selfish heart.**

When you find yourself drowning in your own problems and needs, stop and pray. When you find yourself focused too much on your possessions and desires, stop and pray. When someone else confronts you about your selfishness, instead of getting angry, stop and pray.

The reason prayer is so important is this: when you pray, you are immediately taking the focus off you and back on God. It forces you to shut down your thoughts and actions in those moments and focus everything on God. That's why many people close their eyes while praying. That's why they often pray in a quiet place. Prayer helps you shut everything out and focus on God. Once you've regained your focus on God and less on yourself, something even more powerful happens: you begin to pray for others and put the needs of others before your own. When that happens, God often demonstrates how big and powerful He is by not only meeting your needs, but the needs of those you pray for. Fight your selfishness by defining this Christmas with prayer.

**Read:** Job 42:10, 1 Timothy 2:1-6, & James 5:13-18.

**Take Action:** Yesterday, you listed the needs of some people. Now, take time today to pray for those people.

**Pray:** Lord, help me not to focus on my problems or myself. Instead, here are my prayers for others...  
(insert your own prayers for others here).

## Week 3, Day 4: Ugly Selfishness

**Selfishness can get really ugly.** It distracts us from some of life's great opportunities. It can hurt others deeply. It can complicate our lives. And it creates a barrier hampering our relationship with God.

There are many ways our selfishness can manifest itself, and here are five steps to take in overcoming it: **First**, be honest about it and admit it. **Second**, be patient with those who've endured your selfishness. It may take them a while to trust that you are changing. **Third**, do a daily review. At the end of the day, try and recall the instances where you were selfish and the people it affected. **Fourth**, begin to give generously when you least want to. When you want to save that last \$5 bill in your wallet for coffee, spend it on someone else. When you want the last piece of Christmas candy for yourself, give it away. When you want to demand your own way, close your mouth instead. **Fifth**, walk in love. You do that by ingraining 1 Corinthians 13 into your very core.

Selfishness is not easy to overcome. Let's face it, we've all struggled with it most of our lives. But if you'll commit to taking these five steps, you will allow God to transform you.

**Read:** 1 Corinthians 1:1-13 and James 3:14-16.

**Take Action:** Decide on how'll you meet the needs of at least one of the people you've identified this week and been praying for. Make a plan for how you will help them.

**Pray:** God, help me put my trust in you and not things. Transform me to be the kind of loving person you desire me to be.

## Week 3, Day 5: Think, Pray, Act

Now that you've identified your selfish tendencies, prayed about them, given them over to God, and spent time focusing on the needs of others, it's time to act. James 2 tells us that faith without works is dead.

**Thinking about the needs of others and praying for them is not enough.** Focusing and admitting your selfishness is not enough. Having faith that God can and will change you is not enough. You have to act.

God loves working in our lives, but for Him to work He desires us to act. Our actions are the conduit God uses to bring about change in our lives and in the lives of others. Think about all of the great inventors who've ever lived. They were amazing men and women who had brilliant ideas, but until they took action, they were just ideas. That is why James wrote that "faith without works is dead". It's through our actions that our faith comes alive. Taking action is your next step in overcoming your selfishness. You can make this a Christmas to remember as you shed the materialistic lies of the season and focus on what Christmas is all about: God's love shown through the birth of His son, and your response to that act of love by loving Him and others.

**Read:** James 2:14-26.

**Take Action:** Over the past few days you've identified some people in need, prayed for them, and decided what you'll do to help each person meet a need. Now, it's time to act. Commit to taking action and meeting needs.

**Pray:** "God, help my faith to be alive. Give me the courage and strength to take action."



# Week FOUR

## A WEEK OF MAKING PRESENTS

You are creative. Yeah, that's right! YOU are creative! Some of you reading this are thinking, "I *am* creative." Others of you are thinking, "You don't know me very well. I don't have a creative bone in my body." The truth of the matter is that every single person on earth is creative. It's how God made us.

Your creative abilities may be rusty because you haven't used them in a while, but at one point in your life you were super-creative. When was that? When you were a child.

Children are instinctively creative. Using their imaginations, kids create worlds of their own. They make up stories, draw pictures, build with blocks and mold with clay. No one has to teach a child to be creative because they just are. Why? The reason is God made human beings that way.

*So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

~Genesis 1:27 (NLT)

We are created in the image of God. God is creative; therefore, we are creative. So ask yourself, “How am I creative?” Are you creative with numbers, art, carpentry, decorating, writing, cooking, music, gardening, or even Facebooking? Whatever your creative bent, God made you that way!

Have you ever wondered why God gave you the gift of creativity? **God gave you creativity it to test your unselfishness.** You have to choose what you’re going to use your creative gifts for in this life: for yourself or for others.

**One of the most important steps of spiritual growth that each of us must undertake is recognizing the fact that God gave us our creative gifts not for our own benefit, but for the benefit of others.** Your talents are not only for your benefit. Think about your creative ability right now. Maybe you are artistic. Some of you are creative with home repairs or fixing mechanical things. Some of you are creative in business. Maybe you’re great at building excellent spreadsheets. Some of you are creative gardeners, decorators or teachers. Maybe you’re good at writing, music or poetry. Whatever your creative abilities may be, do you think God gave you those abilities just for your enjoyment? He equipped you with abilities so you could help and bless others.

Scripture says in 1 Peter 4:10, *“God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another”* (NLT). Your creative abilities are a test. God gave you talents, and he’s testing you to see if you’ll use them for the benefit of others. So, pass the test!

This chapter of the book is designed to help you do just that. This week, set aside time to create something to bless someone else. There are four caveats to this assignment, however:

**Caveat 1:** Give a gift card. Yes, you read that right. Create a gift card for anyone you want to bless with your creative gift. Gift cards are a HUGE part of the retail business this time of year and we want you to get into the gift card business.

Why? Christmas is just a few days away, and we don't want you to make your last week before Christmas stressful by asking you to spend every waking moment on your creative endeavor. We don't want you to take up your entire margin by making crafts.

**Caveat 2:** Whatever you are going to create, it must be in your "creative wheelhouse." Meaning: if you're creative with spreadsheets, build one for someone who needs help. If you're a good cook, create something yummy and pass it along. If you're a painter, paint something. If you're a creative plumber, give some of your time to help someone with a plumbing issue. If you're a songwriter, write a song. You get the picture.

**Caveat 3:** Make the card redeemable in the first three months of next year. Again, you're probably wondering, "Why?" We don't only want this book to make an impact in your life now, but also in the future. We want you to carry what you have learned beyond the 4 weeks this book encompasses. So by giving a gift card now and delivering the gift later, you will be taking some of what you've learned into the next year.

**Caveat 4:** Follow through! Don't flake out. Don't give a gift card and then not deliver on it. That's not a gift. It's carelessness at best and laziness at worst. So here's your assignment: make gift cards for others this week related to your area of creativity. Here are a few ideas:

- Art – Gift card for one painting or drawing.
- Interior Design – Gift card allowing the recipient(s) to have you decorate their living room.
- Graphic Design – Gift card for one advertisement designed by you.
- Hair – Gift card for a free color and cut.
- Business – Gift card for the recipient to have you design an amazing spreadsheet for them.
- Carpentry – Gift card promising one day of your services to help the recipient build that shed he/she has been wanting.
- Electrical – Gift card offering to help friends update their light fixtures.
- Event planning – Gift card securing your help with planning your niece's sweet-16 birthday party.

The sky is the limit. Think creatively about your gifts and abilities. How can you use them to bless others?

## Week 4, Day 1: His Creativity In You

Consider for a moment how much joy it brings you when you have an opportunity to use your creative gifts. If your gift is singing, it brings you joy when you get to use this gift. If your gift is art, one of the greatest joys you can experience is putting pen to paper or brush to pallet. Even if you're a person who says, "I don't have a creative bone in my body", the reality is that **God has infused His creativity within every bone in your body.**

Since God is the most creative being ever and we are made in His image, God instilled His creativity within us. It's up to us to find and use it. You are among God's most creative creations. He experienced genuine joy when He created you. We experience a similar joy when we exercise our creativity.

As you reflect on today's Bible readings, ask yourself: "In what ways do I see God's creativity reflected in me?"

**Take Action:** Read each of the following scriptures and allow God to speak to you and help you unlock and live out your creativity.

**Read:** Genesis 1:27, Exodus 35:31-35 and Ephesians 2:10.

**Pray:** "God, help me embrace the creativity you've given me and use it in the ways You intend."

## Week 4, Day 2: Creativity That Pleases God

Christmas is one of the most creative times of the year. From light displays, Christmas programs, Christmas music, and Christmas gifts, there is creativity all around us. The creativity of the season helps make Christmas unique. Just think about all of the amazing Christmas carols and songs, both old and new, that have stood the test of time. Creative songwriters and composers made these timeless songs.

Christmas is a perfect time to exercise your creativity and experience joy in doing so. Expressing your creativity is a great way to give back to God, and thank Him for His gift of Jesus. **God beams when we exercise our gifts for His causes and His desires.** This week, exercise your creativity by making your own Christmas gift certificate(s). Make one for someone in your family, a friend, or a co-worker. If you have children, make this a family project so you can express your creativity together and use it as an opportunity for your family to bond and learn the true meaning of Christmas.

**Read:** Psalm 104:1-35.

**Take Action:** List some ideas related to your inner creativity of gift certificates you could make for your gift.

**Pray:** “Thank you for the creativity you’ve instilled within me and for sending me the greatest gift ever through Your son Jesus.”

## Week 4, Day 3: Lies And Creativity

When it comes to creativity, there are typically three types of people: those who consider themselves creative, those who “sort of” consider themselves creative, and those who don’t feel creative at all. If you fall into one of the later two categories, begin believing that you *are* creative. You only think you aren’t because you have buried your creativity.

There are multiple reasons why your creativity is buried, but frequently it is because of insecurity. You created something once and someone didn’t like it, so you decided, “I’m not creative”. You said that because of insecurity. **When we listen to our insecurities more than God, we believe lies about ourselves.** Insecurity takes hold because we listen to what others say about us instead of what God says. Don’t believe what others say about you, believe what God says. God created you so your creativity would benefit others. God wants you to reflect His essence through you by expressing creativity. Are you a creative salesperson, a creative leader, a creative gardener, a creative school teacher, or maybe a creative electrician? How are you creative?

**Read:** 2 Corinthians 5:17, 1 Peter 2:9, and 1 Corinthians 6:19.

**Take Action:** Spend time today praying over the list you made yesterday.

**Pray:** “Lord, help me to see the creativity You put in me and help me use it to bless others. I am NOT what others say about me. I am what YOU say about me!”

## Week 4, Day 4: Creative Resolution

Ask yourself this question: “What inspires me?” This is an important question in helping understand and unlock your God-given creativity. What is it that gives you a creative spark? Is it certain types of music, looking at art, making something with your hands, building something, spending time in nature, watching a movie, solving problems, throwing parties, cooking, or just being around others? God wired each of us differently, and that’s great because it makes us each unique. As a result, we all do things in our own way.

As this Christmas season is drawing to a close and you enter the New Year, make a resolution: **Commit to grow your creativity and seek out what inspires you.** Seek out ways the God of the universe inspires you.

**Read:** Psalm 8:1-9 and Psalm 19:1-4.

**Take Action:** Decide on which creative gift you’ll make. If you’re still unsure what type of gift certificate to make, here are a few more ideas:

- Do someone’s taxes
- Fix someone’s broken fence
- Cook an amazing dinner
- Create a t-shirt for a friend’s startup company
- Make centerpieces for a birthday or anniversary party

**Pray:** “Inspire me God. Inspire me to not only use my creative gifts, but to become more like You.”

## Week 4, Day 5: The Best Ever...Again

Over the past few weeks, you've looked at Christmas from a fresh perspective. You learned that Christmas doesn't have to be the busiest season of the year and that you can achieve focus on that which is most important.

Second, you confronted the materialistic myths that have become ingrained into Christmas by our society and how you can break free from these myths.

Next, you confronted your selfishness and realized that Christmas is not about you. Christmas is about loving God and loving others in response to God's greatest gift.

Finally, this week you've learned about unlocking your inner creativity and using it to give to others.

As you read the account of Christ's birth today, keep in mind what you've learned make this the best Christmas ever, along with new perspectives on Christmas. Give the gift you made as soon as you can, and share what you've learned.

**The best Christmas ever doesn't have to happen only once.** It can continue into the future. Embrace what you've learned. Ask God to grow you. Commit to taking every Christmas the best Christmas ever!

**Read:** Luke 2:1-21.

**Take Action:** Deliver your creative gift certificate(s) today or set a delivery date.

**Pray:** "Thank you, God, for what I've learned. Help me make every Christmas and every day the best ever!"



A FRESH APPROACH TO ADVENT

Thank you for reading, *The Best Christmas Ever!* It is our prayer that this book helped you experience the holiday differently and that it will inspire you to celebrate Christmas in a richer way every year. May God bless you and give you a tremendous New Year!

Alan Danielson  
and  
Darren Currin