



## ADVENT RESOURCES FOR CORPS OFFICERS

Advent is a time of expectation and waiting, but also a time of busyness for corps officers and most Americans caught in the hustle and bustle of the holidays. In this packet, you will find materials for ministry with women—whether it's sharing things that can be done at home with the family, women's-only programs or intergenerational events.

- Advent Wreath-Making, Bible Studies, and Reading Plans
- Games and Crafts for Children and Adults
- Reviews of Advent Devotionals



*women's ministries*  
USA SOUTHERN TERRITORY



## COMMUNITY EVENT

### ADVENT WREATH-MAKING

Women may be particularly stressed in December, as the “double shifts” of at-home and out-of-the-house work can feel more intense with the additional activities and expenses that come this time of year. But that doesn’t mean women can’t enjoy the Christmas season or be encouraged in practices that will help them experience God’s peace during Advent.

An event to make Advent wreaths or candle arrangements together provides the chance to a) reaffirm spiritual focus or begin to consider it, b) to do something practically useful while enjoying fellowship and c) promote connection between generations and groups.

This is an activity that women are likely to enjoy, but it can easily include teens, children and men. Some men may like to take the lead with the children’s activities, music and food.)

While adults and teens make Advent wreaths or candle arrangements, the leader can share about their purpose and how to use them. The same focus could be shared with children as they make their craft.

This year, the best times for an inclusive corps event would likely be a Saturday morning or afternoon (December 2<sup>nd</sup>) or the first Sunday of Advent, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, either following the service or in the evening.

Use either a round-robin, workshop rotational model approach or an activity flow in accord with the number of people who have pre-registered and pre-paid.

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*For families, Advent is a terrific time to introduce family devotions, if it isn’t a practice yet.*

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#### CREATE SPACE TO EXPECT

**Commit to a time** of intentionally preparing for the Christ child and Christ come again. The Advent wreath is a tool for cultivating expectancy. Typically, an individual or family lights the candle or candles (as the weeks go on) once a day through Christmas Eve.

**Engage the senses** through lighting candles: the sight of the candles light increasing as the weeks go on, the warmth of the fire and the scent of candles are additional signs of expectation.

**Read** Advent-relevant Bible passages and devotionals.

### **Three Stations Option**

1. **Opening:** Advent/Christmas songs and a Devotional (20 minutes)
2. **Craft:** Adults and teens make the Advent candle wreaths/arrangements and have a discussion about how to use them in mixed-generation, single-generation and single-individual households and children do a simple craft that can be replicated in most homes: snowflakes, Christmas cards, Advent chains, etc. (30-40 minutes)
3. **Games:** Nativity Bingo, Charades or Pictionary approach to guessing Christmas carols, creative gift making competition, etc. (30 minutes)
4. **Baking:** Make gingerbread and sugar cookies. (30 minutes)
5. **Conclusion:** Encourage, invite, thank, sing, enjoy fellowship (20 minutes +)

*For a large crowd, rotate groups through activities two, three and four, but start and finish together.*

### **Shared Meal Option**

1. **Opening:** Advent/Christmas songs, games, etc. for all participants (15 minutes)
2. **Craft Stations** (choose one): (40 minutes)
  - Wreath/candle arrangement and discussion about its use (teens and adults)
  - Baking cookies (children, teens and adults)
  - Simple craft (children)
3. **Practice over a Meal** (45-55 minutes)
  - Pre-assign families to sit together, joined by individuals, couples and other families. If possible, use round tables not to exceed eight. Set the tables with matches and an Advent devotional tool.
  - Tables will start with placing one of the completed Advent arrangements in the center of the table, lighting the first candle, reading the passages/devotions and praying. Each table will do this independently.
  - As tables finish, direct the tables one-by-one to get in line for the buffet. If some tables have finished, it's ok to tap them to go without announcing it – and distracting those who are still in process.
4. **Conclusion:** Share some final words of encouragement about expecting Christ and the practice of devotional time, invite participants to specific opportunities to celebrate and serve, and finish with a song. (maximum 10 minutes)

### **BUT WHEN?????**

LIGHT THE CANDLE.  
READ. PRAY. LEAVE  
CANDLES ON WHILE  
YOU EAT.

1. **Traditionally, Dinnertime.**
2. **Breakfast.** Slow down the start of the day and ensure that at least one meal is eaten as a family (or roommates).
3. **After-school snacks?** If there is no such thing as a “good morning” in your worldview, but evenings are tricky, do you pick up the kids from school and day care? Could you carve a transition from school-to-home with Advent readings and snacks?
4. **Your traditional quiet time.** Perhaps you spend your quiet time before eating breakfast, during a coffee break or another time. What about taking a break from routine to mark Advent?
5. **Bedtime.** Instead of a bedtime story or “just one more” Netflix episode, pray and light the Advent wreath, spend some time reflecting on the day, and read an Advent Scripture or devotional.



## OTHER ADVENT ACTIVITIES



Whether you are at home with your own children, watching somebody else's or leading a program, finding simple, fun activities that reinforce spiritual truths is always helpful. Bingo, Rip-Art and simple countdown activities could work for your children's craft at an intergenerational event. Senior women might like them too!

**Nativity Bingo** and **Advent Wreath Rip-Art** are very basic activities to lead. Free printables to make it easy are found at [www.sarajcreations.com](http://www.sarajcreations.com).

On a non-school night, moms, grandmoms and aunts looking to create some extra special memories might consider *waking the kids up after they've gone to bed, handing them hot cocoa and getting them in a car for a* **Christmas Lights**

**Scavenger Hunt**. Kim Torquist provides a list of items to look for and a verse to reflect on after the experience is over (John 8:12) in her free printables [www.notconsumed.com](http://www.notconsumed.com). If you have a vehicle (or a friend with a vehicle who is game), then this is a pretty inexpensive way to do something unique to highlight how worthy of anticipation and celebration Christmas is.

**Seasonal service** might include full days at the warehouse or on kettles, but could also be a couple of hours after work bringing hot cocoa to those at kettles, doing some kettle relief, a short shift at the warehouse or caroling. Surprising those who rarely get visits or are engaged in hard work with carols can be a lovely encouragement.

## BIBLE STUDY OPPORTUNITIES

Advent is a time of year when the world both tries to bury the Christ child in a commercialism and provides an opportunity to turn our eyes to Him again. This is a time of year when people who normally are not part of a faith community are open to the gospel message. Unfortunately, it's also a time of year when we can feel most pressed for time. Using good materials developed by others or simple, solid Bible study techniques during Advent is a good way to make sure we are attentive to the reason for the season.

*The Women of Christmas: Experience the Season Afresh with Elizabeth, Mary and Anna* by Liz Curtis Higgs. \$12 new at Amazon

This eight-chapter devotional book is suited for individual reading and group sharing. The author named her writing style—"girlfriend theology". I take it to mean it reads like you're listening to a girlfriend, who has been reading the Bible a long time, talk. Using casual language, Higgs shares historical context, compares translations and suggests practical applications.

Each chapter will take an average reader about 20 minutes to complete. The study of this group could be limited to Advent (three sessions) or get started in November, using a series of four to eight studies. Requiring paid pre-registration for participants to cover the book's costs may reduce headaches for the leader. Some leaders might opt to use the book as the main helper to their teaching and discussion-leading, without expecting participants to read it.

### *Lectio Divina*

Using a different approach to Bible Study will keep things fresh during the holiday season, but it does not have to involve more work. Lectio Divina ("divine reading") is an ancient way to approach Scripture reading that involves re-reading the same passage multiple times with a slightly different focus each time. It was first practiced formally in Benedictine monasteries in the 6th century. Embraced by Calvin, Zwingli and Wesley, Lectio is beneficial individually and in groups. A leader can guide a group through the process for three or four gatherings during Advent, and encourage participants to practice it at home during their personal quiet times.

During Advent, sections from gospels like Luke 1-2:5, Matthew 1:18-24, John 1:1-14 will be helpful. Particularly for participants new to Lectio Divina or personal study of the Bible, focusing on the Advent narratives will help them to re-see familiar stories or to hear new-for-them texts in a deeper way.

A leader wishing to emphasize the weekly themes of Advent and the foreshadowing of Christ may prefer to use texts from Isaiah:

- Peace - Isaiah 2:1-5
- Hope - Isaiah 11:1-10
- Joy - Isaiah 35:1-10
- Promise - Isaiah 7:10-16

\* Suggestions for implementing an Advent Bible Study using *The Women of Christmas* and *Lectio Divina* are provided in the following pages.

# *The Women of Christmas*

## Outline for a Three-Session Reading Group

### **WEEK ONE: Introductions and Beginnings**

1. Introductions— Use fun icebreakers that help participants get to know each other, ask participants to share what their expectations from the group are, and share about yourself/leader. Provide information about the plan - to read the book individually, but come together to share learning and encouragement in staying focused on Christ during Advent. Pray. (20 minutes)
2. Reading—Have a pre-selected and prepared reader proclaim Luke 1:1-18 (3 minutes). Explain that this is the text about which the author reflects in the first chapter and that we'll listen to that chapter being read by a pre-selected and dynamic reader (possibly the leader) to give us a taste of what we'll be doing at home. Encourage participants to jot down thoughts that occur to them as they listen. Read chapter 1, possibly with cuts (12-15 minutes). (20 minutes)
3. Discussion—In some groups, asking “What were some of the things that stuck out to you ?” will be enough to get good conversation going. Some groups will need discussion-starting questions; suggestions are on the next page. Bring the conversation back to “what can you / we take away from this text?” Encourage considering a collective response as well as an individual one. Give out the Reading Plan: Chapters 2-5 for next week, 6-8 for the final week.
4. Prayer— Spend at least 10 minutes in prayer. Use guided prayer, if helpful. (10 minutes)

### **WEEK TWO: Chapters Two through Five**

1. Greetings — Open with prayer and sharing about the past week. (up to 10 minutes)
2. Reading—Have a pre-selected and prepared reader proclaim Luke 1:19-79 (5 minutes)
3. Reflection—Encourage quiet reflection (5 minutes)
4. Discussion. - Ask, “What were some of the things that stuck out to you as you read chapter 2?” and progress through chapter-by-chapter, using discussion questions, if they are helpful. Encourage application. (40 minutes)
5. Prayer—Provide time for prayer, perhaps in small groups of three. (10 minutes).

### **WEEK THREE: Conclusion**

1. Greetings — Open with prayer and sharing about the past week. (up to 10 minutes)
  2. Reading—Have a pre-selected and prepared reader proclaim Luke 2:1-40 (5 minutes)
  3. Reflection—Encourage quiet reflection (5 minutes)
  4. Discussion. - Ask, “What were some of the things that stuck out to you as you read chapter 6?” and progress through chapter-by-chapter, using discussion questions if they are helpful. Encourage application. (35 minutes)
  5. Process & Prayer—Ask participants to share what they've learned or how they've changed this Advent, as well as how they experienced participating in this group. Pray as a whole group. Conclude with a song. (15 minutes).
- \* Fellowship—Determine if the best time for fellowship is before or after the material. In many cases, it will be afterward, so that it doesn't feel like a “late start”. For the first session, “steal” from this time for the introductions section. Time to fellowship informally helps build relationships!
  - \* In November - Invite people to join, make personal invitations and announcements. Provide opportunities to make book payments.

# The Women of Christmas

## Discussion Questions

**Chapter 1:** What struck you in the Luke passage? In chapter 1 of the book? Did you learn anything new from the reflection, if so what? The angel told Zechariah, “Do not be afraid”. What strikes fear in your heart? Despite the disappointment of having no children, which also had implications for their old age and social standing, Zechariah and Elizabeth were faithful to God. Reflect on trials you have been through.

**Chapter 2:** If you were silent for a day, what could you learn? What do you think and feel when you consider Elizabeth staying at home for the first five months of the pregnancy?

**Chapter 3:** If you think of Mary as a very young and innocent, perhaps naïve, girl and listen to the text of her interaction with Gabriel, how does it sound different? What were the risks Mary faced upon consent to God’s plan? What assurances and promises does she hear? Do any of them stand out for you as promises that you need to claim for yourself? If you felt God’s favor upon you, what would you be brave enough to do?

**Chapter 4:** When you think about the practicalities of Mary’s travel to Elizabeth, what insights or feelings do you experience? Do you have a spiritual friend? Do you have a friend who is older—or younger, who builds up your faith? What could you do to cultivate an intergenerational friendship? How does looking at Mary and Elizabeth’s encounter as a Holy Spirit moment illuminate the meaning of it for you?

**Chapter 5:** Picturing yourself as a neighbor of Zechariah and Elizabeth, what do you think you would have said in your own home after John was born? Considering the fuss around his naming, what do you think the gospel author Luke is trying to tell us? What are some of the important themes for you and your community in Zechariah’s speech? Share some God-praise! What makes Joseph’s obedience remarkable and inspiring?

**Chapter 6:** The gospel of Luke is the only one that addresses the travel of Joseph and Mary for a census, about which scholars have some debate. Higgs emphasizes the spiritual importance of Jesus’ birthplace and birth conditions. What impacts your heart the most when you think about the travel, lodging and birth? Placing yourself in the role of a shepherd, what are some of the feelings and thoughts you might have had the night of Jesus’ birth? What about the morning after? What comes to mind when you think about the sight and sound of an angelic host?

**Chapter 7:** For Mary and Joseph, there is a mix of good and bad news in both the Magis’ visit (Matthew) and Simeon’s blessings. What do you think they were feeling at those times? If you are parent, how have you seen the Holy Spirit in times of grief and joy that have to do with your children?

**Chapter 8:** Anna was a vulnerable person—a widow, and possibly childless, **and** a devoted worshiper. What impressions and inspiration do you take from Anna? Have you had a lonely period that became blessed as an “aloneness with God” time? Have you and your faith community ever pursued a 24/7 prayer commitment? Has fasting been a part of your faith journey? If so, how has it enhanced your spiritual life?

**Conclusion:** Do any of the three women resonate with you more? What makes her special to you? Are there any women who have helped you welcome Jesus into your life? What can you share about that? Even if you don’t normally send Christmas cards, perhaps you can think of a woman or two to thank or encourage with a specific and heartfelt note. What have you learned this Advent? What would you like to take from this season with you into the next?



## Lectio Divina in a Group

Lectio Divina can be practiced in very small groups or large ones, as well as in solitude. A group of more than seven should be considered a “large group”. After a bit of experience, independent small groups can happily practice Lectio. When leading a group, you will want to take your time, so that everyone can take theirs. **Spend about 10 minutes in each of the four middle stages**, recognizing there are temptations to stay longer in the more comfortable stages and rush the challenging ones. You may increase the amount of time (particularly individual time) with later sessions. At home, participants may find that five minutes in each stage is a good start. Like physical exercise, building up stamina in spiritual exercise takes time and practice.

Choosing a short or medium-sized Scripture passage is best. Sometimes you will need to read the section in its larger context before starting lectio. Reading the text **well** and **aloud** is important in a group. Keep explaining the stages **concisely** at each session as this guides the process. A handout with a process description and space for notes is helpful. A Bible or the text is essential.

The six steps of Lectio Divina are:

*Silencio (Prepare)* – Be silent and still. Prepare to receive the text.

*Lectio (Read)* – Note words or phrases that catch my (or our) attention. Dictionaries, concordances and commentaries can be helpful.

*Meditatio (Reflect)* What is this text saying to me about my life or us about our shared life? Where am I (or are we) in this text? Is something addressed specifically to me (or us)?

*Oratio (Respond)* What do I (or we) feel? What is my (or our) response to this text? Tell God the feelings as fully and honestly as I (or we) can.

*Contemplatio (Rest)* Yield to the text. Resting in God’s presence, without analyzing or thinking. Resting and released, listen to God.

*Incarnatio (Live it out.)* What does God call me (or us) to do? An image or verse could be useful to keep in mind, so it can be returned to throughout the day.

### GROUP SESSION GUIDE

1. **First Session Introductions and Explanation.** During introductions, share your name, something about yourself and a hope for Advent, then encourage everyone to do the same. Explain the Lectio Divina process. For the first session, break into small groups of three to five. For later sessions, you may have everyone work individually to practice a personal quiet time and bring them back together at the end. (10 minutes)
2. If you opt to use an Advent wreath or candle arrangement, lighting a candle would be a good way to introduce the **Silencio** stage. Keep silence for at least TWO minutes at the first session. You may increase this over time.
3. Explain **Lectio**. Read the text aloud. Instruct people to continue individually. Then have participants share a key verse or phrase, etc., within their small groups. In a first session, give equal time for individual and group process. Later on—you may wish to mix this up. (10 minutes)
4. Explain **Meditatio**. Read the text aloud. Have the groups re-read and reflect individually. During a later session, you may do this in groups or mix group and individual time. You may guide this by suggesting they place themselves in the text, i.e. the star lighting the way or other roles. (10 minutes)
5. Explain **Oratio**. In the first session, have the groups read the text aloud in their groups. You may prefer that they process individually for less time (3 minutes), and share longer as a group (7 minutes) or vice versa the first time. Adapt in ways that will support **and** stretch folks. (10 minutes)
6. Explain **Contemplatio**. Have the text read to the group by a participant who reads well aloud, by the leader again or individually (yes, aloud). Have the groups re-read and reflect individually (10 minutes). This may “go short” the first session.
7. Explain **Incarnatio**. Provide a few minutes of silence for reflection and prayer. You may invite the small groups or whole group to respond. It can be beneficial for a leader to share background, thoughts and a challenge. Conclude with united prayer. (5-10 minutes)

# Reviews of Advent Devotionals

It is not hard to find an Advent devotional, but it may be harder to find one that you like or that you can recommend. Perhaps your corps can author one (next year), if several participants write a short devotional to go with an Advent passage. A homemade or “corpsmade” devotional is likely to be used by families at home.

## ***Good News of Great Joy: Daily Readings for Advent*** **by John Piper**

**FREE Download at** <https://www.desiringgod.org/books/good-news-of-great-joy>

Piper’s devotional presumes an adult reader highly familiar with the Christmas story. The readings are not organized to follow the narrative (and I’m not sure I understand the order chosen). The daily reflections are short, but the vocabulary is sometimes advanced. Each reflection is directly related to the Scriptural passage chosen, although not every day has a clear practical application. There are 25 readings (including Christmas day), so it is not quite on a 2017 calendar—but the reader can adapt and it is *free*.

## ***Sacred Space for Advent and the Christmas Season 2017-18*** **by The Irish Jesuits**

**\$2.95 NEW on Amazon**

This small and thin book provides a daily passage from the Advent and Christmas liturgical readings with strong questions and points to apply in the reader’s daily life. The Advent passages focus on the Jesus’ coming again, as well as His first coming. The readings and questions could be used and adapted for family devotions. Some users may be uncomfortable with the introductions to each week, as they use prayer guidelines and sometimes refer to Roman Catholic figures or holy days with which they may be unfamiliar. There is also a seven-session retreat outline at the end of the book, which walks the reader through contemplation and prayerful meditation. A group might also use them.

## ***God Is in the Manger: Reflections on Advent and Christmas*** **By Jana Riess with Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

**\$9.37 NEW on Amazon**

Jana Riess’ book connects her reflections, excerpts from Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Scripture passages. It is aimed at thinking adult Christians, but is still emotional. The book can be used flexibly as there are seven prepared devotionals for each week of Advent; there are also devotionals through Epiphany. Her four themes for Advent are Waiting, Mystery, Redemption and Incarnation. Generally, Riess’ thoughts, the Bonhoeffer quote and the Scripture passage are related, occasionally the text or quote does not appear to be that connected to Riess’ reflection. Many of her reflections are deep and wonderful, but this reader found a couple difficult to understand.

## ***The Greatest Gift: Unwrapping the Full Love Story of Christmas*** ***The Wonder of the Greatest Gift: An Interactive Family Celebration of Advent*** **By Ann Voskamp**

**\$15.62 NEW, hardcover on Amazon**

**\$23.99 for the family celebration pack at Barnes & Noble**

Recommended by Priscilla Shirer, Max Lucado, Christine Caine, Liz Curtis Higgs and our own Meagan Hoffer, *The Greatest Gift* is a NY Times best-seller. The family celebration pack is new. The devotional provides daily readings from the Old and New Testaments, a reflection by Voskamp, and questions for reflection and application. If you have enjoyed Voskamp’s other books, you are likely to love this one. The family celebration pack includes: 13-inch 3D pop-up tree, booklet with 25 family devotions, 24 ornaments with hangers and a star-shaped tree-topper.

## Advent Reading Plans

Below are two plans for daily Scripture readings during Advent, The first is a traditional outline with texts focusing on themes related to Jesus' coming and coming again from various books of the Bible. The second promotes continuity of the narrative. Both are available as Printables on [www.sawomensministries.org](http://www.sawomensministries.org).

### Traditional Plan

Week One		Week Two		Week Three	
December 3	Psalm 85	December 10	Psalm 147	December 17	Psalm 103
December 4	Isaiah 2:1-5	December 11	Luke 1: 26-38	December 18	Luke 1: 46-56
December 5	Isaiah 11: 1–10	December 12	Isaiah 40	December 19	Isaiah 61
December 6	Luke 10: 21-24	December 13	Zech 2: 10-13	December 20	Songs 2: 8-17
December 7	Isaiah 25: 6-9	December 14	Luke 1: 39–45	December 21	Luke 1: 57-66
December 8	Luke 1: 5-25	December 15	Revelation 12	December 22	Psalm 25
December 9	Isaiah 30: 18-21	December 16	1 Thes 5: 16-24	December 23	Luke 1: 67-80
				Week Four	
				December 24	Luke 2 :1-5

### Narrative Plan

Week One		Week Two		Week Three	
December 3	Psalm 85	December 10	Luke 1: 57-59	December 17	Isaiah 42: 1-7
	Isaiah 7:14	December 11	Luke 1: 67-80	December 18	Isaiah 61
December 4	Luke 1- 2:1-5	December 12	Luke 2: 1-5	December 19	Luke 4:14-30
December 5	Luke1: 5-22	December 13	Mark 1: 1-8	December 20	John 1: 1-14
December 6	Luke 1: 23-25	December 14	Zech 2: 10-13	December 21	Isaiah 11: 1-10
December 7	Luke 1: 26-38	December 15	Psalm 25	December 22	Matt 1: 1-24
December 8	Luke 1: 39-56	December 16	Psalm 85	December 23	Matt 1: 18-
December 9	Luke 1: 47-55				
				Week Four	
				December 24	Matt 1: 25 Phil 2:5-11

## Prepare Hearts

Creative mom bloggers have made all varieties of Advent Activity Boards or Christmas Countdown activities that seem to require a pretty large amount of time (and some money) each day. Instead of a daily challenge, a once-off could be memorable—and manageable.

A special morning or day of stealth **Random Acts of Christmas Kindness** is something that a group of ladies, a family, an intergenerational team or children's club could enjoy doing.

If you are organizing this, choose in advance your budget (or the budget of participants — and let them know!!!) and pick items accordingly. If you've already got the **free notconsumed.com** printables, they are a great place to start. Corps-specific graphics are great, when feasible.

## CHRISTMAS COUNTDOWNS

**Advent calendars or Christmas Countdowns** are a way to build excitement. You can spend as much time and money on this as you have, but you can also spend less. From a jar with a verse or candy of the day to a framed calendar, an exercise to count down is a fun ritual that builds excitement and can connect to repeating the Christmas message.

**Printable Christmas Tree Countdown**— SIMPLE from *totschooling.net* can be downloaded here: [goo.gl/UJTs3c](http://goo.gl/UJTs3c)

**Paper Chains** are a SIMPLE way to countdown. You can either remove a chain link each day OR add one. Construction paper will do the trick, but whatever paper you use can be blank on the back. Or you could read the day's passage and glue the reference on the inside of the link each day. Just hang the chain in a spot where it has room to grow (if you're counting up) or attach a sign or distinguishing mark at the top if you're counting down. For example, see what this aunt did: [goo.gl/m2g9rs](http://goo.gl/m2g9rs)



**Advent Calendar in a Jar** is a google or Pinterest search that will yield various ideas. A SIMPLE one: [goo.gl/h1wu8B](http://goo.gl/h1wu8B)

**Christmas Tree Countdown**—DIY project from *My Sister's Suitcase* at [goo.gl/VVs7WH](http://goo.gl/VVs7WH)

**Framed Countdowns** using the clothesline concept and pinning the days of Advent up is among the most frequent internet ideas, with candy, Bible verses, fun activities and/or Christmas-related images being placed on the opposite side of the numbers. A basic description that uses a pre-built frame can be found at *huckleberrylove.com* here: [goo.gl/kNj7RE](http://goo.gl/kNj7RE). Come up with your own activities, adapt them from other's lists, use Bible verses from Kim Torquist's materials or purchase Bible Study materials from [christcenteredholidays.com](http://christcenteredholidays.com).