



# **NAILING CHRISTMAS**

**A FAMILY WORKBOOK**

**HOW TO DO**

## **CHRISTMAS ON PURPOSE**

**WITH YOUR FAMILY  
EACH YEAR**

## ABOUT THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook is a template for family discipleship. Specifically discipleship during the Christmas season. It is designed to help you "Nail Christmas" year after year.

The concepts in this workbook have provided my family with many memorable and Christ-centered Christmas seasons. I pray it will do the same for you.

### Nailing Christmas Kids Activities:

To make it easier for parents to plan a Christmas theme together, we have provided several kid-safe, parent-approved activities to keep your kids busy.

Just scan this QR code.



Point your phone's camera at the code and it will take you to the associated activity.

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# CHRISTMAS MANIA



Christmas is coming!

That announcement is bound to evoke strong feelings. For some it brings joy and nostalgia and excitement! For some it brings stress and guilt and dread. Many are stuck somewhere between the extreme highs and lows.

If Christmas is supposed to be "the most wonderful time of the year" why do so many people have a hard time getting into the Christmas spirit?

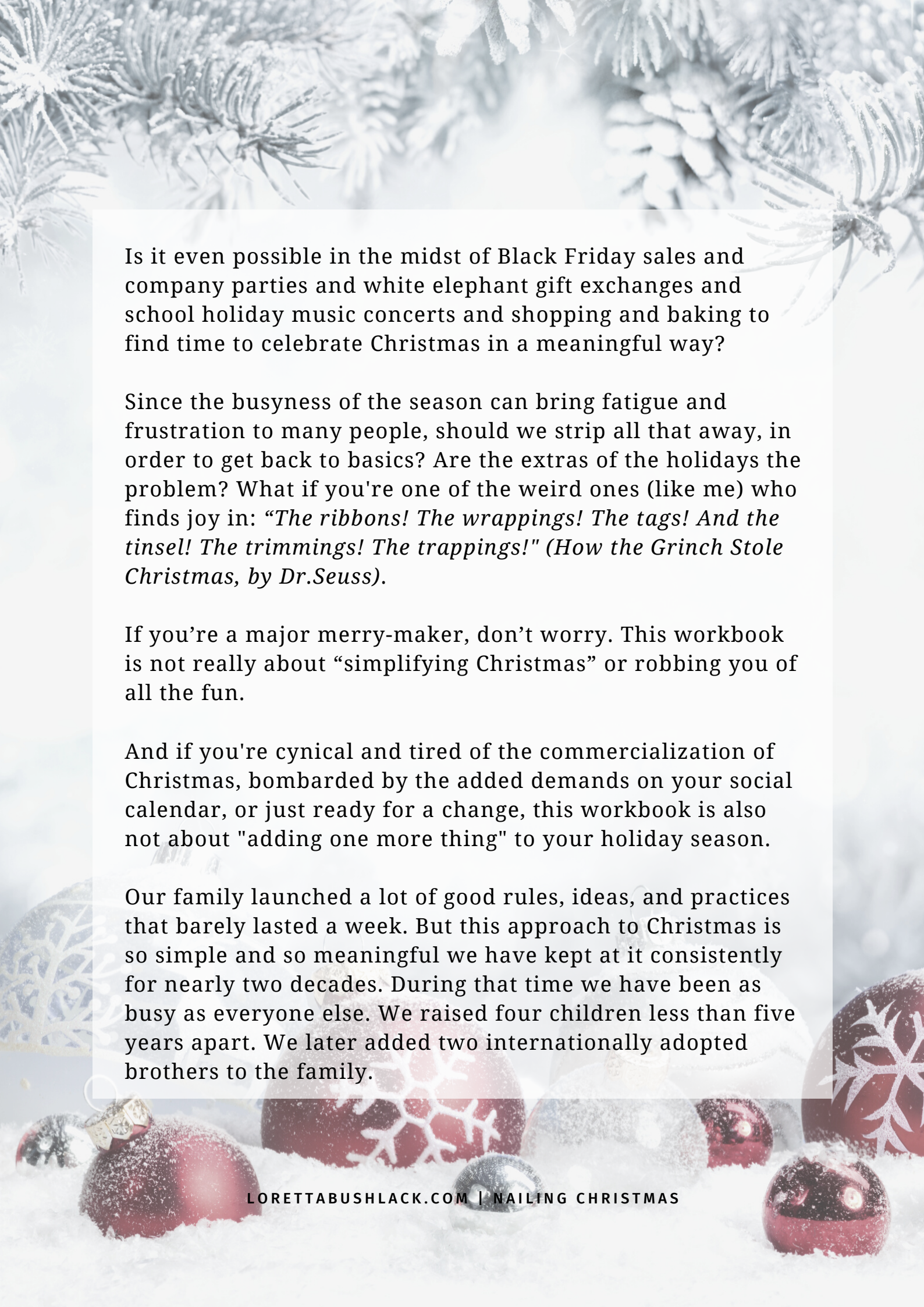
And for those who do have a holly, jolly Christmas, why does Jesus often feel like an afterthought?



As Christians, Christmas is no ordinary holiday. For us, it is a Holy Season: celebrating the coming of our Savior. Because Santa and snowmen and sugar plums seem to have crowded him out of the spotlight, we've come up with pithy sayings to remind us:

- "Jesus is the reason for the season"
- "Keep Christ in Christmas"
- "Wise Men still seek Him"
- "It's not about the presents—it's about His Presence"

We see these reminders on our social media feeds, on quaint rustic home decor and on bumper stickers in the church parking lot. For those living in the tension between the holiday highs and lows these words accuse us that we aren't doing Christmas right. We know it's supposed to be all about Jesus. He really is the reason for the season. It really is our responsibility as parents to make Christmas less about the presents and more about His presence... but there are just so many forces at work to distract us from what really matters. The spirit may be willing, but...still.



Is it even possible in the midst of Black Friday sales and company parties and white elephant gift exchanges and school holiday music concerts and shopping and baking to find time to celebrate Christmas in a meaningful way?

Since the busyness of the season can bring fatigue and frustration to many people, should we strip all that away, in order to get back to basics? Are the extras of the holidays the problem? What if you're one of the weird ones (like me) who finds joy in: *"The ribbons! The wrappings! The tags! And the tinsel! The trimmings! The trappings!" (How the Grinch Stole Christmas, by Dr. Seuss).*

If you're a major merry-maker, don't worry. This workbook is not really about "simplifying Christmas" or robbing you of all the fun.

And if you're cynical and tired of the commercialization of Christmas, bombarded by the added demands on your social calendar, or just ready for a change, this workbook is also not about "adding one more thing" to your holiday season.

Our family launched a lot of good rules, ideas, and practices that barely lasted a week. But this approach to Christmas is so simple and so meaningful we have kept at it consistently for nearly two decades. During that time we have been as busy as everyone else. We raised four children less than five years apart. We later added two internationally adopted brothers to the family.



Yet this one simple tradition easily fit our lives even during the many years of elementary school parties, church pageants, holiday travel, basketball seasons, high school show choir extravaganzas and now the college years.

This workbook is about being purposeful. It is written to help you to intentionally push past the distractions that fuel the highs and lows of the season and instead lead your family to be completely devoted worshipers of Christ.

This has been the answer we found in our family to end the Christmas mania and find balance between the glitter and the glory.

I hope that the concepts and exercises in this workbook will prevent you from another December 26 where the season slipped through your fingers and you feel like you failed Christmas. Here's to a December 26 where your family is closer to God, closer to each other and in some sweet way you feel like you nailed Christmas.

# FAMILY DISCIPLINESHIP @ CHRISTMAS



You know you're responsible for the spiritual leadership of your family. It's a daunting task in a busy household.

It's especially daunting with all the heightened expectations of Christmas.

Be encouraged: It's not too late to start. And, there's no right way or wrong way.

If you're looking for a fresh plan, following the steps outlined here can help your family build a Christmas tradition that could last for generations.

Let's see how it's done.






The beauty of this tradition is that it is:

- **Simple:** The basic framework is simply a series of family meetings. You can keep it as simple as is manageable for your household.
- **Customizable:** no matter your family's age or stage, you can customize this plan to fit your unique goals and spiritual needs.
- **Enduring:** Because you are in control of the content, every year can be different and fresh.

The four steps of Nailing Christmas are these: 1. Nail down a theme. 2. Add supporting verses. 3. Imagine creative teaching. 4. Lead the lessons.

Every year, we choose a theme and use it as the framework for that year's Christmas celebration. We always begin with Jesus as our foundation but we create a new theme each year. We then lead one "Christmas Family Meeting" each week for four weeks leading up to Christmas.



Traditionally, the season of looking forward to Christmas, called Advent, is a four-week celebration. We had four kids so it worked well for us to have four meetings during the four weeks of Advent.

Four is not a magic number, it just worked for us. You could do this for two weeks or three weeks or ten weeks (okay I wouldn't recommend that!).

Discipleship (teaching someone how to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus) is an overwhelming idea at first. It never feels like you are ready to do the teaching. But by concentrating on one central Christmas theme, it has made our practice of family discipleship during Advent clear and focused.

This was a simple framework to have conversations about spiritual truths any time, any place.

So here's how we did these lessons, what some of our theme ideas were throughout the years, and ultimately what this has meant to our kids now that they are grown.



*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates”  
(Deuteronomy 6:5-9).*

# **FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP**

In light of Deuteronomy 6:5-9, who should teach your children spiritual things?

How should you teach them?

Where are the best places and opportunities for discipleship and spiritual conversations in your family?

**ACTION STEP / I PLAN TO:**

# FAMILY ASSESSMENT & BRAINSTORM



Before we get started on the specific steps in Nailing Christmas, use the following questions to assess how Christmas is currently going in your household.

Where are you on the mania spectrum? Is your home full of major merry-makers or Grinches? How can you be sensitive to each person?

This small step of preparation will help you be even more intentional in your Christmas focus.

## **FAMILY ASSESSMENT**

Does your family have a Christmas fanatic? You need to get this person's buy in! Is there a Grinch you need to win over?

What is your favorite thing about Christmas? (Build on this.)

Do you have a Christmas non-negotiable? (Don't mess with this.)

What frustrates you about Christmas? (Work on reducing or eliminating this.)

On a scale of 1-10, how comfortable are you with talking to your kids about Jesus? (Do you need improvement?)

On a scale of 1-10, how comfortable are you praying with your family? (Would you like to be stronger?)

## **FAMILY ASSESSMENT, CONTINUED**

As you look back over this year, is there a word or a phrase that comes to mind? As you pray for discernment, can you think of any spiritual need your family might have this year?

As you look ahead to the coming year, are there big milestones or plans your family will be experiencing?

What in the past do you think has kept your family from nailing Christmas? (Be specific.)

What would nailing Christmas this year look like in your family?

## **FAMILY ASSESSMENT, CONTINUED**

Additional space for notes.



# NAIL DOWN A CHRISTMAS THEME



The best way to have a Christmas with purpose is to have a Christmas with focus.

As a wise teacher once told me, "You can't do a million things to the glory of God!" So also, you won't have a meaningful Christmas season if you try to do everything.

Having a Christmas theme for your family gives you the clarity to intentionally focus in one direction and the freedom to not have to focus in all the other directions.

You know your family best. So let's pick out the perfect Christmas theme!



Here are three types of Christmas themes:

### **The Simple Theme**

This can be a single word, a phrase, a Bible character.

With young children, I recommend very simple, tangible, concrete themes. As your kids get older, feel free to choose more abstract concepts. The simplest approach for beginning is to just think about traditional Christmas words, images and themes:

- Lights
- Angels
- Shepherds
- Wise Men
- Stars

Does any idea jump out at you? What do you think would be fun to teach your children? What are your interests?

## **The State Of the Family Theme**

Is there a particular truth your family needs to have reinforced this Christmas?

For example, in 2017, there was a lot of change and relational strife in our household. This was very unusual for us and we felt like it was important for our family to rally around the idea of Peace—not merely the subjective notion of heavenly or spiritual peace—but the most basic peace, as in the absence of war!

What are some ways your family needs to be disciplined this year?

- Peace (we are fighting a lot...or worrying too much)
- Love (we have been just plain selfish or mean lately)
- Waiting (we need to learn how to be patient or focus on praying)
- Generosity (we have been too greedy or discontented)
- Trust (we have been too anxious and fearful lately)



### **The Timely Theme**

Is there something about this year that is particularly unique that you would like to capture? This could be anything from a major family change to a fun new movie you are all eager to see together. There are spiritual truths that can be taught from every good story and from every major life event.

Maybe use your Christmas theme to capture exactly what your family was doing in this particular year.

- Adoption (God adopts us into His family)
- Moving (Several people in the Bible had to pick up and move—including Mary just before delivering Jesus)
- The latest superhero movie (Talk about God's power and spiritual gifts)
- Loss or change of job (Trusting God's sovereignty and provision)
- New baby (duh! Baby Jesus!)

A string of warm white LED string lights is draped across a light-colored wooden surface. The lights are illuminated, casting a soft glow. The string is composed of several grey plastic housings, each containing a small light bulb. The background is a blurred wooden texture.

### **Our Family's First Theme.**

The first year we did a Christmas theme our children were very small (6, 4, 2 & 2). The first theme we chose was:

### **LIGHTS.**

Lights are everywhere at Christmas. And lights for little children are one of the most obvious and most exciting parts of Christmas. Finding times to discuss the theme throughout the week is really easy because pretty lights are everywhere.

Conveniently, light is a constant theme in the Bible as well.

Deciding a Christmas theme does not need to stress you out. The Bible is full of rich teaching on a multitude of topics. Just pick one!

Next you will build on the theme you've chosen.

## **NAIL DOWN A CHRISTMAS THEME**

**The Simple Theme:** List any traditional Christmas words or ideas that would make a good theme for your family.

**The State of the Family Theme:** Do you need any particular spiritual focus?

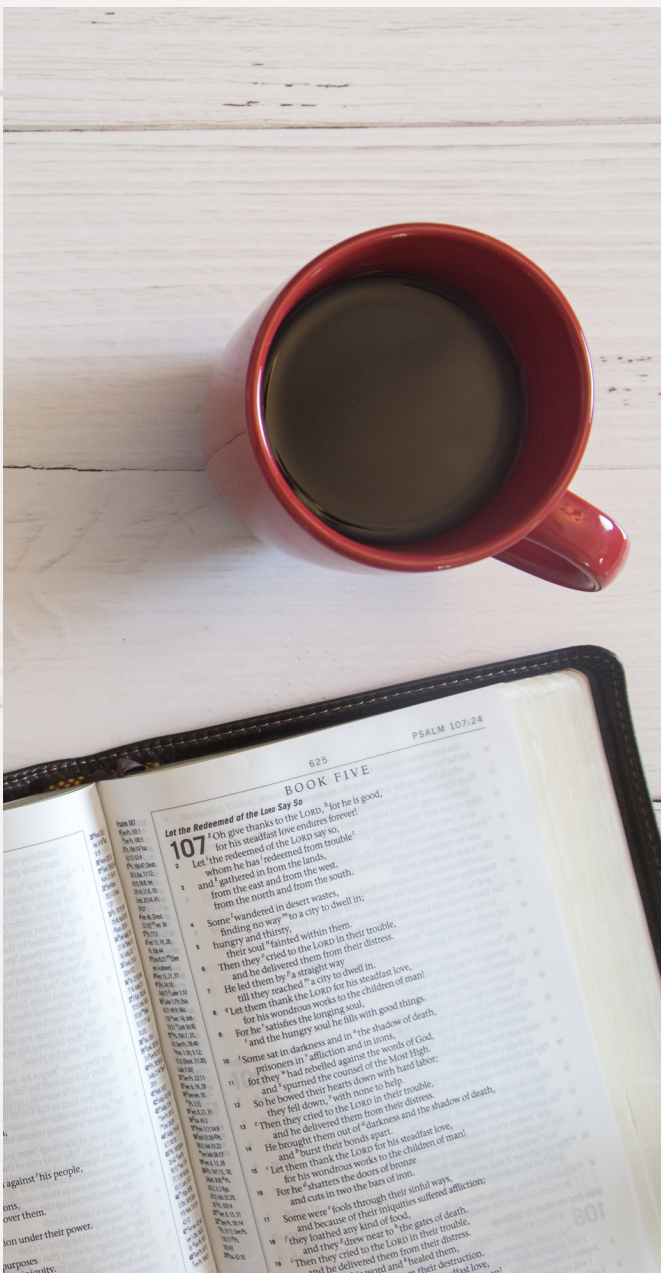
**The Timely Theme:** Consider the current year—what unique circumstances would translate well into a Christmas theme?

**THIS YEAR'S THEME IS:**

# **NAIL DOWN A CHRISTMAS THEME, CONTINUED**

Additional space for notes.

# ADD SUPPORTING VERSES



After you choose a theme you are going to want to add Bible verses to help support your theme.

This is how we make sure we aren't just enjoying a fluffy "Christmas spirit" holiday but one that is grounded in the gospel and focused on Christ.

You don't need to be a theological scholar. Bible apps make it simple to search for verses on a specific topic or theme.

Otherwise simply searching the internet for "Bible verses about..." should provide you with ample material.



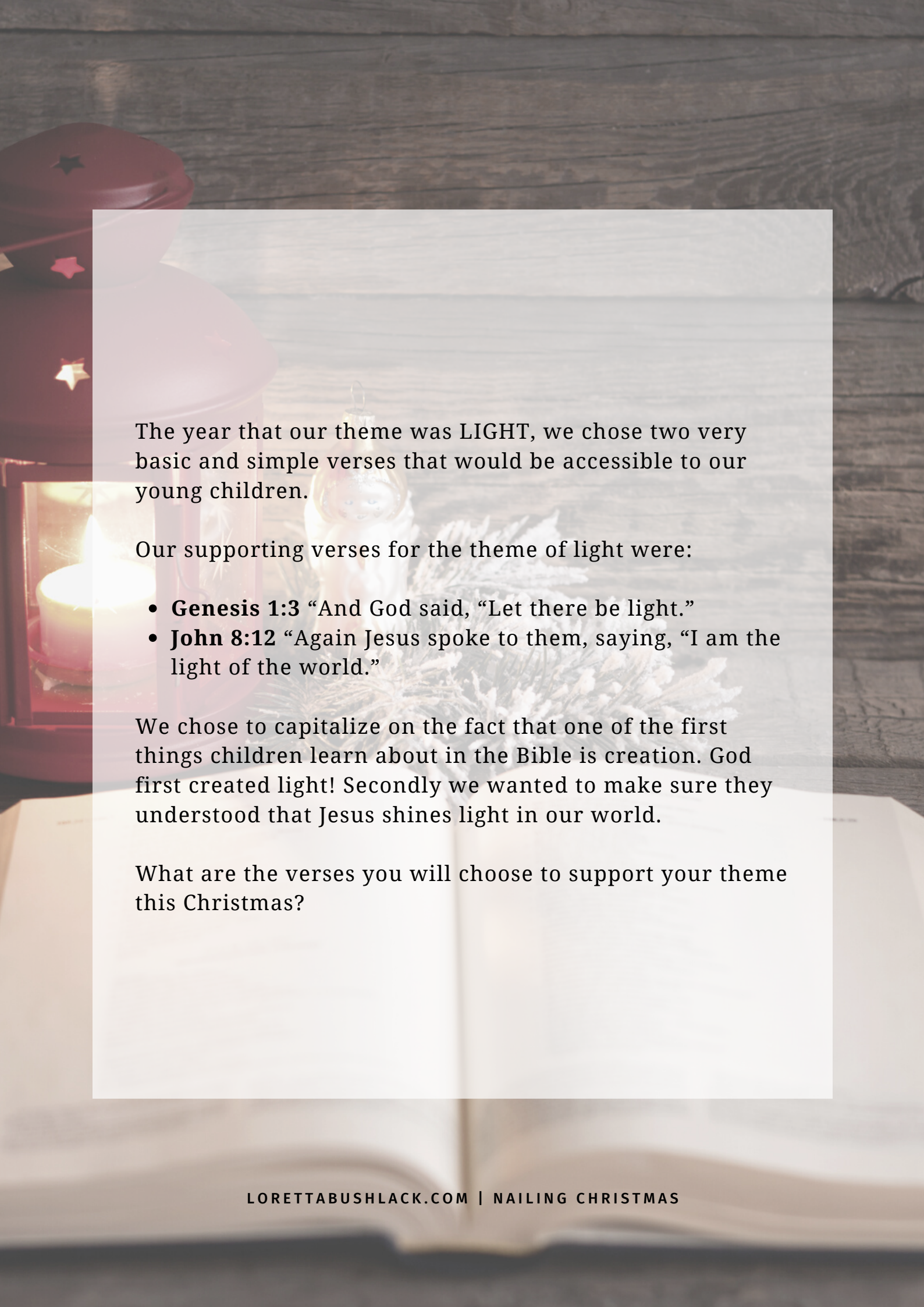


You may want to pick verses you already have memorized or that you would personally like to memorize. You may choose to offer an extra reward if your children memorize the verses. This is a great opportunity to hide more of God's word in the hearts of your family.

**Pro Tip:** Choose a Bible version that is suitable to your child's reading level. Look at the following familiar Christmas verse. Notice the difference in wording between these two popular versions:

- For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord (KJV).
- Today your Savior is born in the city of David. He is Christ the Lord (NET).

Although we all love hearing Linus recite the first, your kids will have an easier time understanding the language of the second.



The year that our theme was LIGHT, we chose two very basic and simple verses that would be accessible to our young children.

Our supporting verses for the theme of light were:

- **Genesis 1:3** “And God said, “Let there be light.”
- **John 8:12** “Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world.”

We chose to capitalize on the fact that one of the first things children learn about in the Bible is creation. God first created light! Secondly we wanted to make sure they understood that Jesus shines light in our world.

What are the verses you will choose to support your theme this Christmas?

## **ADD SUPPORTING VERSES**

List the scriptures you will use in your Christmas theme this year.

Verse #1

Verse #2

Verse #3

Verse #4

**KEY VERSE | MEMORY VERSE**

## **ADD SUPPORTING VERSES, CONTINUED**

Additional space for notes.

# IMAGINE CREATIVE TEACHING



After choosing a theme and some verses, it's time to think up how to make it fun.

Creativity is not everyone's strength. So when I say the next step is to imagine creative ways to teach the theme what I really mean is: **Google.**

Decide on a plan that will work best for your family.

If the thought of a gallon of glitter spilled on your carpet makes your blood pressure soar, then your version of creativity shouldn't include sparkly crafts. On the other hand, a theological treatise on the incarnation of Christ is probably not going to resonate with your 2nd grader.

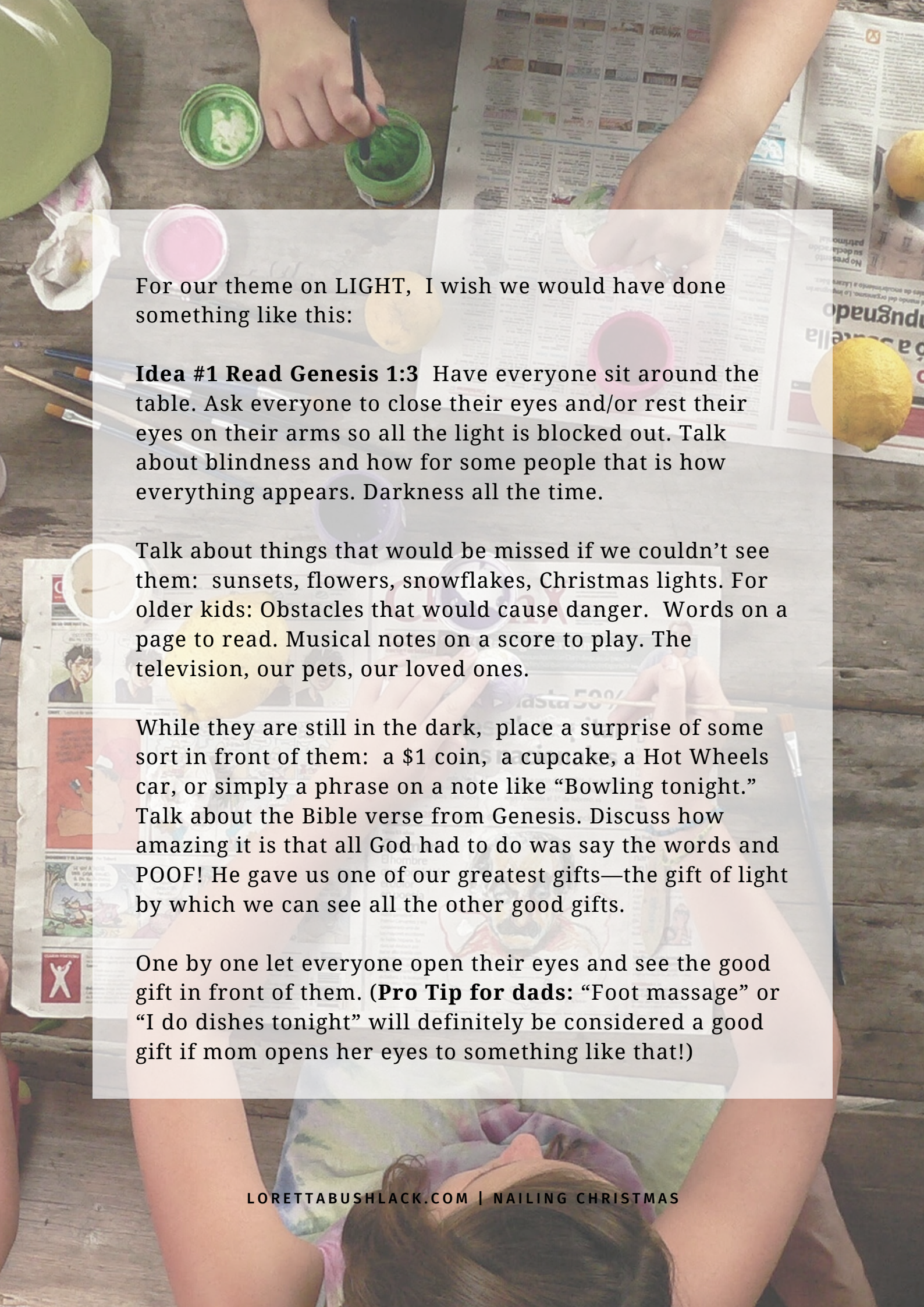


We were not very imaginative at our house. Our family meetings were just talking with no special activity at all. The important thing is that you get your family communicating about spiritual things. But if you can plan ahead to do it in a way that they will be more likely to remember later on—that is a definite plus.

There are so many resources for ideas online to creatively teach lessons to kids of all ages—even teenagers. Use them!

- Sunday School lesson plans
- Homeschool Bible lesson plans
- Crafts
- Science Projects
- Movie Clips
- Family Ministry websites like [Focus on the Family](#)
- Student Ministry websites like [YouthMinistry.com](#)

Or, if you are naturally creative—make something up!



For our theme on LIGHT, I wish we would have done something like this:

**Idea #1 Read Genesis 1:3** Have everyone sit around the table. Ask everyone to close their eyes and/or rest their eyes on their arms so all the light is blocked out. Talk about blindness and how for some people that is how everything appears. Darkness all the time.

Talk about things that would be missed if we couldn't see them: sunsets, flowers, snowflakes, Christmas lights. For older kids: Obstacles that would cause danger. Words on a page to read. Musical notes on a score to play. The television, our pets, our loved ones.

While they are still in the dark, place a surprise of some sort in front of them: a \$1 coin, a cupcake, a Hot Wheels car, or simply a phrase on a note like "Bowling tonight." Talk about the Bible verse from Genesis. Discuss how amazing it is that all God had to do was say the words and POOF! He gave us one of our greatest gifts—the gift of light by which we can see all the other good gifts.

One by one let everyone open their eyes and see the good gift in front of them. (**Pro Tip for dads:** "Foot massage" or "I do dishes tonight" will definitely be considered a good gift if mom opens her eyes to something like that!)

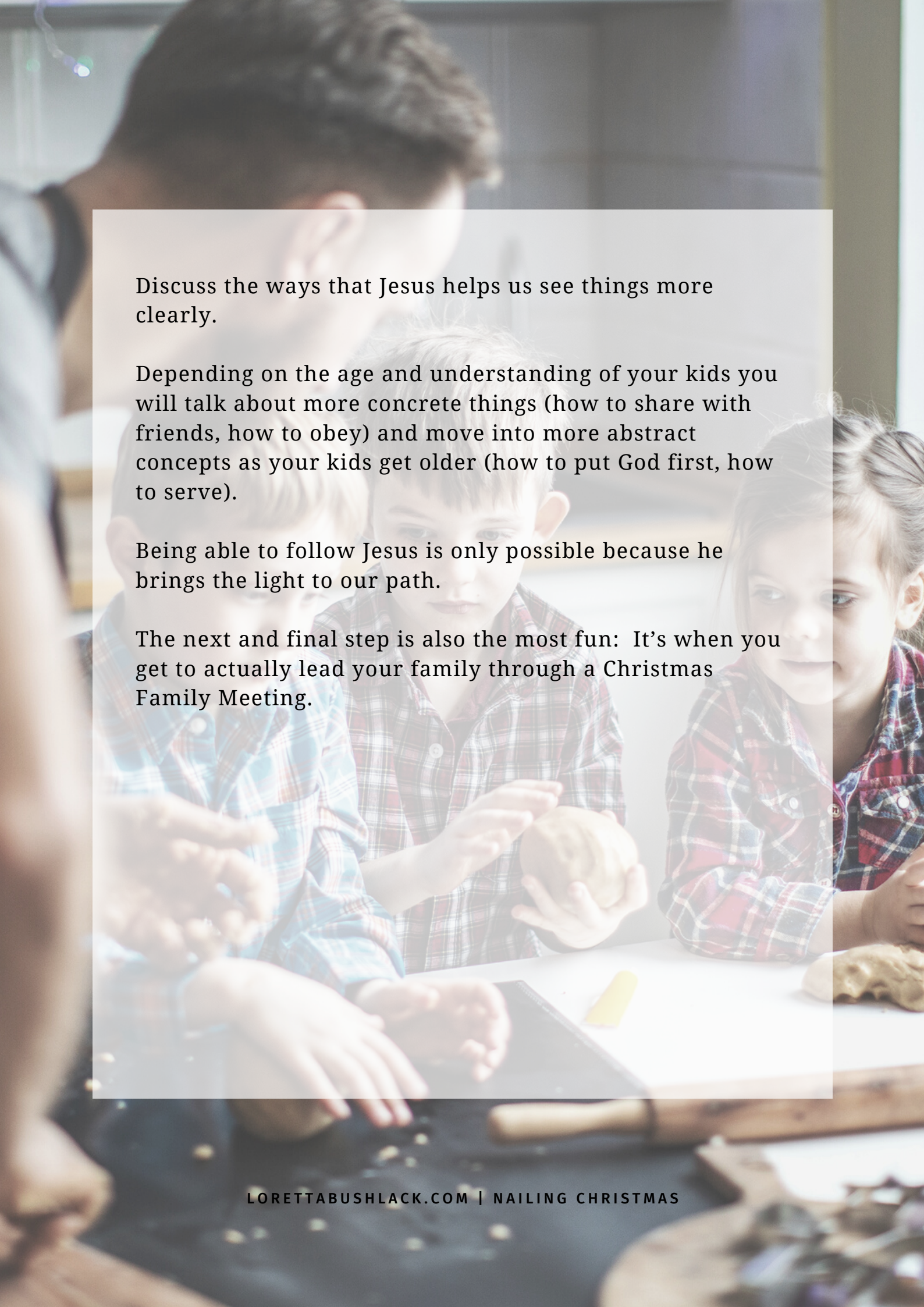


**Idea #2 Read John 8:12** Sit in a dark room (make it as pitch dark as possible.) Gather the kids around you and tell them there are \_\_\_\_\_ number of things hidden in the room (stuffed animals, cans of soda, candy bars, dollar bills, etc.)

Tell them they are free to go looking for them (but make it too difficult even for older kids to find any—maybe they are up too high and wouldn't be found with searching hands). Little kids won't even want to venture far from mom or dad.

Then call everyone back to the couch or table. With the room still dark, give everyone a flashlight. Allow them to search without even moving around and show how it is possible with the light but was impossible without it.





Discuss the ways that Jesus helps us see things more clearly.

Depending on the age and understanding of your kids you will talk about more concrete things (how to share with friends, how to obey) and move into more abstract concepts as your kids get older (how to put God first, how to serve).

Being able to follow Jesus is only possible because he brings the light to our path.

The next and final step is also the most fun: It's when you get to actually lead your family through a Christmas Family Meeting.

## **IMAGINE CREATIVE TEACHING**

Plan the creative and fun elements which will support your Christmas Theme.

**Week 1 Object Lesson or Activity**

**Week 2 Object Lesson or Activity**

**Week 3 Object Lesson or Activity**

**Week 4 Object Lesson or Activity**

**THE MOST IMPORTANT OUTCOME OF EACH MEETING IS:**

# **IMAGINE CREATIVE TEACHING, CONTINUED**

Additional space for notes.

# LEAD THE MEETINGS



Leading the meetings is where all your hard work pays off.

If you've never done this kind of thing in your family before it might be awkward at first. The goal isn't perfection. The goal is: A closer family, happy memories, spiritual growth.

Make it fun! Include something special: cookies & cocoa; or dad wears a Santa hat; or whoever is speaking in the meeting gets to hold a candy cane (for all you active listening advocates). Whatever will work in your family to make it a special occasion and to help everyone stay engaged.



## SAMPLE MEETING AGENDA:

- Call the family meeting (announce everyone should bring a Bible)
- Begin with prayer. Sincerely ask God to accomplish what you hope to accomplish. But keep it short so little ones don't associate prayer with lectures or boredom.
- Explain you are doing something new. Explain why.
- Announce your Christmas theme for the year.
- Read the scripture. Involve others. Allow them to read it. Ask for input if anyone's version says it differently. Clarify anything people might have questions about. Allow questions but don't allow rabbit trails.
- **Pro Tip:** You don't have to have all the answers. If you don't know or understand something yourself, just admit it. Tell your kids you will ask one of your Bible teachers/pastors/mentors and get back to them.
- Conclude with any of the following optional creative elements.



## OPTIONAL ELEMENTS:

### **Option 1: Creative Object Lesson or Activity**

Lead your family through a fun and memorable craft, story, object lesson, or science project that reinforces your theme.

### **Option 2: Set expectations.**

- **Scripture Memory Goal:** We had kids memorize the verses and recite them to us on Christmas Eve for a special present. If you do this, then provide lots of opportunities to practice so that you set them up for success.
- **Generosity Goal:** To how many neighbors do you want to give cookies? How many gifts do you want to make for teachers/coaches? How much money should we designate for the church offering? How many soldiers overseas do you want to send a card? How many toys do you want to donate to Toys for Tots? etc. If you can think of a way to tie it to your theme—even better.

### **Option 3: Theme Ornaments.**

I bought or made theme ornaments to correspond with each year's theme. Each of the kids received one and I usually got myself one too! These will be lifelong reminders of the heritage of faith from their home.

## **LEAD THE MEETINGS—WEEK ONE**

Plan the content of your weekly lessons here.

**THE MOST IMPORTANT OUTCOME OF THIS MEETING IS:**

## **LEAD THE MEETINGS—WEEK TWO**

Plan the content of your weekly lessons here.

**THE MOST IMPORTANT OUTCOME OF THIS MEETING IS:**



## **LEAD THE MEETINGS—WEEK THREE**

Plan the content of your weekly lessons here.

**THE MOST IMPORTANT OUTCOME OF THIS MEETING IS:**

## **LEAD THE MEETINGS—WEEK FOUR**

Plan the content of your weekly lessons here.

**THE MOST IMPORTANT OUTCOME OF THIS MEETING IS:**

# **LEAD THE MEETINGS CONTINUED**

Additional space for notes.

# **LEAD THE MEETINGS CONTINUED**

Additional space for notes.

# CHRISTMAS LEGACY



Family Meetings have been an integral part of our parenting strategy. Thus, extending them into the Christmas season was natural for us. When I unpack the theme ornaments each year, I see a visible record of our spiritual history.

I remember the year our theme was angels and my mother-in-law impressed upon me that on that first Christmas night the angels were truly the only ones who knew who it was who lay in that manger.

I remember the year we focused on the shepherds and we talked about how God first told the good news of Jesus to the lowliest of all people. This resulted in our whole family being moved with compassion for a local family in need.



I remember the year we hosted two orphans from Ukraine. Our theme that year was Love. We love because God loved us so very much. The next year was Waiting as we waited to adopt them and looked forward to welcoming them into our family.

I am sure I will never forget the year 2020. For so many reasons. But I hope that a significant part of this year's memory will be the Christmas we talked about how Plans Change—but God does not. As tumultuous as the world around us may get, we worship a God who is the same faithful God yesterday, today, and forever.

May your family be blessed with many years of intentional, purposeful, joyful Christmases.

Gloria in Excelsis Deo,

*Loretta*

## **OUR FAMILY CHRISTMAS THEMES**

- 2003** Lights
- 2004** Angels
- 2005** The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe
- 2006** Gifts
- 2007** Stars
- 2008** Songs
- 2009** Shepherds
- 2010** Glory
- 2011** Fear Not
- 2012** Believe—The Impossible
- 2013** Emmanuel—God With Us
- 2014** Love
- 2015** Waiting
- 2016** Wise Men Still Seek Him
- 2017** Peace
- 2018** A Savior, Which Is Christ the Lord
- 2019** Coming Hope
- 2020** Plans Change

