

Bulletin

DECEMBER
2021

A PUBLICATION OF FOCUS ON THE FAMILY®

Jesus Is the Best Gift!

CHRISTMAS PAJAMAS

BY JIM DALY

CHRISTMAS OF 1968 I WAS 7 YEARS OLD, AND I TOLD EVERYONE who would listen the one thing I wanted: a Los Angeles Rams football uniform, complete with pads and a helmet.

When Christmas morning dawned, there was one present for me under the tree. I ripped the lid off the box and almost couldn't contain my excitement when I saw the Rams logo. But something wasn't right. As I sat there in front of our small tree, I realized that I hadn't gotten a Rams uniform. I had gotten . . . Rams pajamas.

I admit, I was disappointed, but I did my best to conceal it. My father had recently abandoned my mother and me and my four siblings. To make ends meet—and barely at that—she worked as a waitress in a diner. I knew that she worked hard and did her best with the little she had. Only a couple of years later, I lost my mother to cancer.

I still reflect on her warm smile every Christmas when my boys open their gifts. And I remember my Christmas pajamas. Even though that's not what I wanted at the time, that simple gift taught me a lesson that has grown richer through the years. A gift's true value isn't found on a price tag. It's found in the heart of the one who gives.

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DECEMBER 21 Bulletin



**Tough
Questions
from Kids**

**Did people
in the
Bible have
Christmas?**



THREE GIFTS FOR YOUR SPOUSE THIS CHRISTMAS

Our first Christmas as a married couple, my husband and I started a tradition of placing a blanket in front of the Christmas tree and spending an evening talking, dreaming and snuggling in front of the sparkly lights.

Six years later was the first year we forgot.

By that point, we had three young children. An already-demanding season only seemed to worsen as Christmas approached. This added up to a lot of stress, and we slipped into survival mode. It wasn't until February that we realized we'd skipped our cherished tradition.

While Christmas is meant to be a loving time of fellowship for families, I realized that if I didn't make my husband a priority, we could go into the new year feeling frazzled and disconnected as a couple. As Christmas quickly approaches, here are three gifts you can give your spouse this year:

THE GIFT OF YOUR PRESENCE

December can be a crazy month full of activities, but my spouse needs me, too. Next to God, my husband is my highest priority. Though I may juggle more activities at the end of the year, I can make time for him and be fully present when we spend time together.

THE GIFT OF INTIMACY

A romantic evening under the Christmas tree may sound like a cheesy newlywed move, but my husband craves intimacy—and so do I. Being intentional to build some “just us” time into the season sends a powerful message about my love and commitment to him.

THE GIFT OF SHOWING GRACE

The busyness of the season tends to amp up my critical spirit. I'm not as tolerant of mistakes and am quick to misunderstand. This can lead to tension in relationships, especially with a spouse. But Proverbs says it's to my glory to overlook an offense (Proverbs 19:11).

I can choose to slow down during this season and give my spouse the benefit of the doubt instead of letting stress take over. When the activity in our lives increases, we must make an effort to work together and not allow our husband or wife to become the enemy.

—Suzanne Gosselin



AGE-APPROPRIATE CHRISTMAS ACTIVITIES

Try these fun-filled, age-appropriate activities that will direct children—and adults—back to the true meaning of the holiday.

AGES 0-3

- To avoid making Christmas a “don’t touch” holiday for little ones, give them fun things they *can* touch.
- Move glass ornaments and lights up to higher branches on the Christmas tree, and help your child make fun decorations for the bottom.
- String pieces of colored tissue paper cut into squares onto shoestrings to hang as garland.
- Get out the glitter and make paper ornaments.
- Mold a nativity scene from dough and display in a prominent place. Tell the story of Christmas while you do this.
- Decorate cookies and build a gingerbread house together as a family.

AGES 4-7

- Help your little ones focus on others this season by making use of the Christmas cards you receive. Place the cards in a basket, and take turns each night drawing one out. Then pray together for that person or family.
- Start a family tradition by picking out a new holiday picture book to read each Christmas Eve. Some of my favorites are *10 Minutes to Showtime!* by Tricia Goyer, *The Crippled Lamb* by Max Lucado, *The Stable Where Jesus Was Born* by Rhonda Gowler Greene and *The Legend of the Christmas Rose* by William H. Hooks.

AGES 8-12

- Assign a country to each child and ask him or her to research and report on how that country celebrates Christmas. He or she can also prepare a seasonal dish to share or demonstrate a song or folk dance. Then pray for the people of that culture so that they, too, might understand the meaning of God’s love.

AGES 13-18

- Go caroling. During each visit, allow for a few seasonal songs and readings from the Scriptures proclaiming the birth of the newborn King. Besides visiting the neighbors, stop by the local convalescent home, hospital or homeless shelter.

ALL AGES

- Many families choose to celebrate Advent—the days leading up to Christmas Day. There are fun Advent calendars on the market, some with doors that open and play songs, others that hide chocolate candies or other treats. Focus on the Family offers various Advent calendars, some free and some to purchase. To learn more about the free downloads, go to FocusOnTheFamily.com/Advent.

—Lynne Thompson

FAMILY MATTERS

Answers to your questions...

We're newly married and trying so hard to have the best relationship possible. I know there is no perfect marriage, but I don't see the harm in trying very hard to get closer to perfect. My spouse disagrees. Can you help settle this?

ANSWER:

One of the first things to go when people are trying to keep up an appearance of perfection is a sense of humor. People who are trying too hard can't laugh. And they especially can't laugh at themselves. Expressing joy is difficult when you are putting so much effort into maintaining the perception of perfection.

People who know they are not all they're cracked up to be find it easier to

crack up! G. K. Chesterton said that angels can fly because they take themselves lightly. We are free to laugh heartily when we take ourselves lightly.

I confess, I don't expect people to laugh just because I'm funny. I really expect them to laugh because *life* is funny sometimes, and I can't help pointing out its hilarity to others. When they see the goofy things in life that I see, they laugh with me (and sometimes at me)!

My only advantage is that my mind works (or twists) in such a way that I find humor just about everywhere. I believe the Creator of life has a great sense of humor—and I don't have to go much further than

my own stumbling and bumbling to come up with exhibit A.

Someone described humor this way: a gentle way to acknowledge human frailty. I like that definition. It's a way of saying, "I'm not OK; you're not OK; but that's OK!" None of us is OK.

God, the Author of joy, makes it possible for us to deal with our not-OK-ness.

So lighten up. Laugh with your spouse. You'll live longer and enjoy your marriage so much more when you're not striving to achieve perfection.

(Adapted from *Happily Ever Laughter* by Ken Davis)

TOUGH QUESTIONS FROM KIDS

ANSWER:

Many years after Jesus was born, Christians decided to celebrate His birth. They chose December 25 as the day to observe it. December 25 is probably not the exact day Jesus was born, but that's not important. What is important is that we remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus, our Savior.

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FOCUS ON THE FAMILY BULLETIN (ISSN 0897-537X), vol. 34, no. 11, December 2021. Mark Taylor, publisher; James Kraus, editor; Matthew Gillespie, designer. Published monthly by Tyndale House Publishers, 351 Executive Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188 in cooperation with Focus on the Family, Colorado Springs, CO. © 2021 Focus on the Family. All rights reserved. *Focus on the Family* and the accompanying logo and design are federally registered trademarks of Focus on the Family, 8605 Explorer Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80920. Cover image of happy woman with gift © Fizkes | Dreamstime.com. Image of grandmother giving high five to grandson © Lightfieldstudiosprod | Dreamstime.com. Image of family decorating Christmas tree © Evgenyatamanenko | Dreamstime.com. Image of couple snuggling © Rido | Shutterstock.com. Subscription \$16.00 per month per 100 copies. Canada: \$18.00 per month per 100 copies, payable in Canadian funds. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Focus on the Family, Subscription Services, P. O. Box 405, Mt. Morris, IL 61054.

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