

*from the mall*  
**TO THE MANGER**



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Christmas Devotional & Planner

*by*

**DANNA DEMETRE**



FROM THE MALL TO THE MANGER

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*Every good thing given and every  
perfect gift is from above, coming  
down from the Father of lights,  
with whom there is no variation  
or shifting shadow.*

*James 1:17*





*“for unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. And of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.”*

*~Isaiah 9:6-7*

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## *A note from Danna*

Christmas...could it be here again already? For some of you, the days leading up to December 25th are full of excitement, fun and laughter. Banquet halls are booked, gowns are bought and Christmas gifts are being purchased. For others... you're breaking into a sweat right about now just thinking about the crowded shopping malls and overflowing parking lots. Some see their depleted bank accounts and overcharged credit cards and become sick with worry anticipating even greater debt. And still others will find the days leading up to Christmas the most difficult moments of the whole year as they wrestle with loneliness and depression.

In a culture that focuses on the commercial and worldly aspects of Christmas, we desperately need a refreshed perspective... a view of this "holy-day" from heaven's vantage point. After all, Christmas celebrates the birth of the King of Kings! Let's try to purposefully alter our expectations with this in mind and then, perhaps the hectic, sometimes emotional days leading up to Christmas can become ones of excited anticipation and joy. The purpose of this book is to help you do exactly that.

For those who have put their faith and trust in Christ Jesus, the weeks prior to December 25th can be an exciting time of preparation. This period of time is often referred to as "Advent," which merely means "coming." This book contains Scriptures that chronicle the conception, announcement, arrival, and purposeful ministry of Jesus as He walked this earth. It also includes thoughtful reflections on how to help you personally appreciate the fact that He came specifically for you. Won't you make a commitment to spend a few minutes each day reading these verses, and give Him this season... one day at a time?

My prayer is that this Christmas might be different than any you've ever experienced as you focus on Christ's purpose for coming to this earth over two thousand years ago. As importantly, I pray you will look ahead expectantly at the

promise of His Second Advent...yes, that day when He returns  
for those who have chosen to put their faith and trust in Him!

May the devotions inspire you and the planner simplify your life  
as you prepare your heart and mind for this holy celebration.

Amazed by His grace,

*Danna*





# *Christmas Devotional*



## *Introduction*

*“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. And of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.”*

*~Isaiah 9:6-7*

In this world of tragedy and injustice, we are hungry for peace, hungry for justice and hungry to find purpose in our lives. Even as Christians we can become almost arrogant believing we have more control over our lives than we really do. We scurry about the planet making plans and living as if we were in charge. What we forget is that God is the only One truly in charge. He knows our weaknesses, our fears and our failings. He knows our impure hearts and loves us anyway! He alone can supply all our needs.

More than 700 years before Christ’s birth, the prophet Isaiah wrote the words “Unto us a child is born.” That birth was the most pivotal moment in all of history. Over 2,000 years later, it is the most prominent date on our calendar.

“Unto us a Son is given.” He is the ultimate Sacrifice, the original Gift, the Cure for the terminal cancer of the human soul. “And the government will be upon His shoulders.” Yes, even in this world filled with terrorism, natural disasters, and other calamities, He is in control. “And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase in His government and peace, there will be no end.” Jesus will ultimately rule in complete peace and authority. Imagine that: we already know the outcome of all history. Christ is King!

Jesus is the only Gift we truly need. Through His death on the cross, we have been excused from death and given eternal life. Talk about the ultimate Gift—His precious blood covers all of our transgressions and transforms us from sinners to saints... simply by trusting in Him. While we can never repay Him for this incredible gift, there is a gift we can give Him that is unlike any other. We can give Him our “right” to ourselves. As we look at Christ’s life, may we grow in the power and glory of His mighty love. As we ponder the miracle of His coming, death and resurrection, may He be glorified as we renew our commitment to Him.



*Women  
of Purpose*

## *December 1*

*"Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming in, he said to her, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.'"*

*~Luke 1:26-28*

Try to put yourself in Mary's shoes for a moment. Can you imagine what it would be like to hear that introduction by the angel? In the times we live in, many of us think we have seen it all. Powerful telescopes allow us to view planets beyond our earth. Hollywood special effects morph men into machines. And cutting-edge technology takes us places and shows us things beyond our wildest dreams. But just imagine the reality of such an event as the one Mary truly experienced that night. Does your faith let you go there? Wouldn't it be overwhelming to hear a message from God saying "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you!" Those who already know Jesus must remember that we are "highly favored" and the Lord is with us!



*Father, this holiday season I pray that my faith will be increased so that I can experience in my spirit that which occurred two thousand years ago. Help me to fully realize that You are the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. May I know in my heart that I am highly favored and that You are always with me. Amen.*

## December 2

*"But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.'" Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"*

*~Luke 1:29-34*

"How can this be?" Such an innocent and naïve question asked by a teenaged girl. What thoughts must have danced across her mind that night as she tried to absorb what the angel had said. Perhaps "why me?" As the initial seconds passed and the enormity of the message began to sink in, she may have further queried "What will become of me? And just what am I going to tell my family... my Joseph?" In an instant, Mary's life was changed forever. She came face to face with God's sovereign will and the realization that she was not in charge of her destiny. Do we realize that in this modern age God's sovereign will still exists? Do you struggle with giving in fully to God's divine plan?



*Lord, help me to trust in Your sovereign will for my life. May I have the innocence of Mary to ask only "how?" and not "why?" I pray that You will teach me how to release my fears and face the future with awesome anticipation of how I can glorify You in my daily walk. Amen.*



## December 3

*"The angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God.'"*

*~Luke 1:35-37*

"For nothing is impossible with God." Do really you believe it? So often we face a challenge that seems insurmountable. We tell ourselves that we lack the skills, money or time to meet it and throw up our hands in frustration or despair. Yet, our faith in God and His ability to fulfill all His plans and promises is so beautifully expressed when we read about old, barren Elizabeth who became pregnant, and about the Savior of the world Who was growing in Mary's womb. The angel told her that "the power of the Most High will overshadow you" and she chose to believe in the impossible. What impossible obstacle do you need to give back to the Lord? What promises do you need to trust God to fulfill in your life?



*God, You are awesome! If you can use a young girl to bring forth the Christ, I know you can use me to Your glory. Help me to "bring forth" Jesus in my life as I celebrate His birth this Christmas season. May my heart and mind be riveted on the miracle of His birth, death and resurrection. Amen.*

## December 4

*"And Mary said, 'Behold the bonds slave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her."*

*~Luke 1:38*

Wow, talk about faith. After asking only one question, Mary's concerns were relieved and she relinquished her own will with complete abandon to the Father. What prepares one for that kind of response? She must have developed a deep and profound love for God during her short life in order to trust in Him so completely. We too can have a faith like Mary's. And when it wavers, we need only to ask Him to help us rediscover deep, abiding faith that carries us through life's greatest difficulties and darkest hours. And like Mary, we can love God with all of our hearts if we know Him intimately. That will happen only if we spend consistent, undistracted time in worship, prayer and reading His Word. The price to fall in love with God is so small... the reward, overwhelming.



*Heavenly Father, I desire to know You and love You with all of my heart, all of my mind, and all of my strength. Please help me to hunger and thirst for You above all things this world has to offer. Amen.*

## December 5

*"When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she cried out with a loud voice and said, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord.'"*

*~Luke 1:41-45*

"Blessed is she who has believed!" Mary's cousin did not know beforehand that Mary was pregnant. The exciting news was revealed to Elizabeth by the Holy Spirit as Mary approached. Though Joseph had also been visited by the angel, this must have been a profound confirmation for Mary that Elizabeth knew she was divinely carrying the Savior of the world in her womb. The Holy Spirit of God was working in powerful ways then, and He still is today. Be blessed as well as you believe all the promises that Christ fulfills for you as you trust in Him.



*Holy Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me this very day. May I, with Mary, be blessed through my faith. Help me to never get in the way of all You have planned to accomplish in my life. I commit this season again to You, Lord. In all the traditions and activities of these weeks, I pray You and You alone will be honored. Amen.*

## December 6

*"And Mary said: 'My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. For the Mighty One has done great things for me; And holy is His name. And His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him.'"*

*~Luke 1:46-50*

Mary broke out in spontaneous praise upon hearing Elizabeth's exclamation. She didn't become anxious, wondering what would become of her. She trusted God. Perhaps Mary had heard about the prophecies foretelling the Messiah would be born of a virgin...and she was that virgin! She realized her position; even though she was getting ready to give birth to the Son of God. This mother of the King of Kings knew that she too needed a personal Savior! In fact, every human being that has ever lived needs Him as their personal Savior as well. His mercy is falling upon our generation even today...onto those who truly fear Him. What an awesome and profound truth. His blood covers the sin of all mankind from creation into eternity.



*Thank You, Lord, for extending Your mercy out more than 2,000 years and giving me the same gift You gave Mary so many Christmases ago. Please help me to fully appreciate the magnificence of Your love and sacrifice. In each gift I buy, let me remember the ultimate gift of Jesus. Amen.*

## December 7

*"And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."*

~Luke 2:7

We've all read this story so many times. But have you ever imagined, even for just a moment, that you were Mary delivering your first child in a cold, dark stable? Alone with Joseph and the dirty animals, Mary would go into labor and delivery without the security of skilled nurses, the safety of medical technology or the comfort of an epidural. Joseph would have to cut the cord and wipe Jesus' body dry before wrapping Him up to place Him in his mother's exhausted but expectant arms. God didn't have to come to us this way, but He did. Even from conception, He shared our human experience. As told to us in Philippians 2:5-8, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."



*Lord, how comforting it is to know that you understand all my life experiences. Thank you for choosing to come to us in human form; a dependent newborn babe. May the miracle of Your birth and the sacrifice You made become clearer to me each day of this special season. Amen.*



## December 8

*"In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'"*

~Luke 2:8-12

On the next starry night, take a moment to look up and just soak in the awesomeness of the night. Completely focus on this historical truth and simply "be in the moment". Eliminate all mental and visual distractions and meditate on today's verses. Imagine a bright light and the voice of an angel speaking directly to you. Perhaps like the shepherds you will be surprised and even confused that your Savior would choose to come in the form of a baby. Yet the brightness of the light and the glory of the Lord confirms this truth in your heart... and you are calmed.



*Lord, I am filled with joy that You sent Jesus for all people. I am thankful that I know Him personally. The people in my life that don't know Jesus, don't know what they are missing. They may receive wonderful and extravagant gifts this Christmas. Yet those gifts are like rubble compared to what You have given us. Please give me the boldness to share the miracle of Your love with them. Amen.*

## December 9

*“And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.’ When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, ‘Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.’ So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds.”*

*~Luke 2:13-18*

Once again, you’re looking up at the sky. It is filled with angels and the thunder of their voices in praise. You are overwhelmed with the experience and immediately begin to feel a pull toward your Savior. And when you meet Him, you can’t keep quiet. It is exactly as the angels said it would be and your heart becomes filled with expectation. You have just personally encountered the Savior of the world! You can have intimate connection with Him every single moment of your life. We no longer need to wait for His miraculous appearance. For those who know Him as Savior, He lives in us and through us. We experience a daily miracle...a miracle we need to share with anyone who will listen.



*My Savior, I have not seen You with my eyes, but I have experienced You through the eyes of my heart. Help me to have the same passion and excitement for sharing the Good News as the shepherd did that very first night. Oh, just try to contain me! Amen.*

## December 10

*"But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart."*

*~Luke 2:19*

A pregnant, teenage virgin delivers the Savior of the world. Shepherds are drawn to Him. Magi will visit Him with exquisite gifts. Yet He is so small, so innocent. With His hands curled around her fingers, do you think Mary fully realized that she was holding the Creator of the universe in her arms? As she looked into His eyes, she remembered what she had been told by the angel about the magnitude of Who He was and what He would become. But how much do you think she really understood in those first days and weeks? Do you think she knew that He would heal the blind and the lame? Do you think she knew He would feed the masses? Could she possibly understand that He had come to die for all mankind? Somehow, through the Spirit's power, she treasured all that was unfolding in her life and pondered these things deeply. If we slow down, we too will be transformed profoundly. How can we not, when we know the rest of the story? And it's so much more than a "story". It is the ultimate truth that gives everything its meaning.



*The season is in full tilt, Lord. Help me avoid getting swept up in all the frenzy of activity. I don't want to lose sight of Who You are. Please help me to slow down and take the time to treasure up all these things I've been reading and ponder them in my heart. Amen.*

## *December 11*

*“And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.”*

*~Luke 2:21*

Expectant parents often spend hours talking about special names for their child. They carefully select one that has sentimental value, a special meaning, evokes a unique image, or one that simply has a nice “ring” to it. Mary and Joseph had no such conversation. There were no other names of ancestors or loved ones that they were considering for their baby boy. The angel had told them to give Him the name “Jesus” because He would “save His people from their sins.” So once again in obedience, they sacrificed their own will to God’s. The rest of their lives were sold out to the raising and nurturing of their son, according to God’s will. God gives us liberty to make many choices throughout our lives. Yet what He wants is our willingness to give up our desires to fall into line with His. Perhaps the humble hearts of Mary and Joseph can spur and inspire us to release our wills to the Father.



*My Father and my God, I am in awe of how You used two humble, but willing people when You brought Your Son into this fallen world. Forgive me for often selfishly clinging to my own desires and agendas. I choose to submit my will to Yours. Amen*

## December 12

*"And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, 'Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, according to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.' And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him."*

*~Luke 2:25-33*

Again and again, God confirmed His plan. Joseph and Mary marveled as they watched history unfold. When you have a crisis of faith, don't ever forget that God is consistent. His character is unchanging. Go to His word to find Him if you've lost sight of His face. In the midst of a miracle, God continued to confirm His plan to Mary and Joseph through many messages and experiences. He will confirm His promises to you also, if you just keep your eyes on His face and in his Word.



*Abba Father, I pray that as I read Your Word, my mind will not be distracted from Your face. I pray that You will help me understand the blessing of the new promise of grace You pour out on those of us who trust in You. Help me to go to Your Word first when I am feeling fear, doubt or loneliness. Thank You for Your unfailing love. Amen*



## December 13

*“And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, ‘Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed—and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.’”*

*~Luke 2:34-35*

“Yes, a sword will pierce even your own soul.” A new mother couldn’t possibly bear to know in an instant all the pain she will experience throughout her child’s lifetime. Fortunately, God only expects us to live in the present. Yet in this one moment, God allowed Simeon to give Mary a painful glimpse into the future. Perhaps his words prompted her to search the scriptures and prepare for the difficult path that lay ahead. Even Mary would have the thoughts of her own heart revealed. She would need a Savior willing to die for her... yes, even her own son. Knowing Christ is not always easy and the road is narrow and difficult at times. Yet, it is the only path to complete freedom. Are we willing to allow our “souls to be pierced” as we walk with Him, and trust that the destination will result in pure, unbridled joy?



*Lord, I pray that my faith will be strengthened so that I can hang in there when the journey becomes difficult. Jesus, transform me on the inside so that when Your light shines into my heart it will reveal Your new creation, fully devoted to You. Amen*

## December 14

*"When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him."*

*~Luke 2:39, 40*

The law required very specific acts and sacrifices. Even the parents of our Savior lived under the old covenant until His purposes were revealed and fulfilled. As Jesus grew in stature, wisdom and grace, did Mary and Joseph understand that His grace would be poured out in blood? Did they realize that the new covenant would completely free them from the law they were following? Do you know that also? God completely loves His children. There is nothing we can accomplish or become that will change His love for us. He simply asks us to believe the "good news" - that through His blood we can experience eternal salvation and intimate relationship with Him. If we truly believe and truly love Him, our behavior will be motivated by a heart of love and gratitude.



*Father, thank You for releasing us from the law. As I celebrate this season, I praise You for coming to earth in the form of a baby, boy Who grew into a perfect man, showing us the way to have a life-saving relationship with You. Please reveal to me those areas of my life where I am still living under someone's rules in my feeble attempt to please You. Help my choices and actions be motivated purely out of my love for You. Amen*

## December 15

*“And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast; and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it... Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.”*

*~Luke 2:42-43; 46-47*

Can you imagine listening to the “wisdom” of a twelve-year-old boy? Here, God’s anointing was finally being expressed in spiritual terms and the people in the temple were amazed! Imagine the kind of things He said and did at home that caused Mary to marvel at this son she was raising. Jesus was ravenous for the Word and as a human, He had to learn it; but in His spirit, He was its very essence. Can we say that we are ravenous for God’s Word? If not, we can whet our appetites by feasting on it daily. Soon, we will come to realize we are malnourished without it.



*Father God, let a ravenous hunger for Your Word dig its way deep into my soul as I read and meditate on Your truth. I pray that I would crave to know You through Your Word more than I crave food or worldly comforts. Let it alone satisfy my heart and mind as I read and ponder. Amen*

## December 16

*“When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, ‘Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You.’ And He said to them, ‘Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?’ But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them.”*

*~Luke 2:48-50*

They did not understand the compelling draw of the Holy Spirit in His life. He was after all, their pre-teen son. He had stepped outside their expectations and human understanding. Sometimes there are people in our lives that don't understand the decisions we make as we walk on God's road. As Oswald Chambers said, "If we are in love with our Lord, obedience doesn't cost us anything, it is a delight. But it costs those who do not love Him a good deal. If we obey God it will mean that other people's plans are upset." Be willing to "upset plans". Linger for awhile in Your Father's house and don't fret about how that may confuse or frustrate others. He is the One who deserves our greatest devotion.



*Lord, I pray that I will put You first each day, no matter what people think or what it may cost me. Please help me to listen to Your voice in the midst of all the activity of the season. May my heart's desire be to glorify You rather than to seek personal gratification. Lord, I love You. Please help me to find sheer delight in doing Your will. Amen*

## December 17

*"Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, 'You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.'"*

*~Luke 3:21,22*

The Bible is silent about Christ's life between the ages of twelve and thirty. The next event that we read about is when He is being baptized. Why would Jesus follow along and do what everyone else was doing instead of blazing His own trail? Throughout His life He demonstrated how to "do life". He never put himself above the crowd. Anything He expected of them, He was willing to do Himself. Above all else, He submitted first and foremost to His Father's will. We don't know what He was up to for those eighteen years, but the next time we see Him, God is verbalizing His pleasure from heaven: "You are my beloved Son, in You, I am well pleased." Christ pleased the Father by maintaining daily contact with Him and by humbly submitting Himself to God. He had to wait many years before starting His public ministry because the culture of the day considered a man mature at age 30. God makes us wait until we are mature or ready as well. Are we willing to let go and watch His perfect will be manifested in His timing and in His order?



*Father, I'm sorry for the times I become impatient as I seek my own way. I am guilty of desiring immediate gratification rather than resting in Your perfect will and timing. Please forgive me. Thank You for your mercy. As I move forward propelled by Your grace, please renew my desire to please only You. Amen.*

## December 18

*“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry.”*

*~Luke 4:1,2*

Although he is a master at it, Satan does not need to entice us to do wrong...we often do that just fine on our own! However, the enemy does divert our attention, tells us lies and tempts us to sin in order to diminish our faith and momentary value to God. When your circumstances shift, pay attention to whether you choose to follow Christ or your own selfish desires instead. As Oswald Chambers reminds us “Many of us suffer simply because we have refused to let God lift us to a higher plane”. Before He began His public ministry, God allowed Jesus to be tempted and in the same way, God allows you to be tempted. Are you equipped to withstand it? During this season when materialism and decadence is the norm, how will you resist caving in to the world’s allure and expectations? Clinging to Christ and following His example is a surefire way to keep your heart and mind on Him.



*Jesus, Your word says that You will not allow me to be tempted beyond what I am able to withstand, but that You will provide the way of escape so that I can endure it. Please help me to discern what the escape is, and then be ready to take it. Help me to keep my focus on You and not this tempting world I live in. Amen.*

## December 19

*“And the devil said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’”*

*~Luke 4:3,4*

“It is written.” When tempted by the evil one, Jesus once again showed us what to do: He went to the Word of God first. Without God’s Word in our minds, we cannot have full power to draw from when we get into trouble or when the enemy tries to tell us we’re worthless. The eighteen years where Scripture is silent about Jesus and his life, He must have been filling Himself with God’s Word. And so when He was tempted, He was fully equipped and ready. Notice that Jesus didn’t respond from His ego. He didn’t need to prove Who He was to Satan. He knew Who He was (God incarnate)...and still, He used the power of the Word. Who are you? Have you bought the lies of the enemy that says you are inferior? Listen to what God says about you when you are His child: You are one with Him in Spirit and a member of Christ’s body. You are a saint. You’ve been bought with a price. You have direct access to God through Jesus Christ. You are forgiven of all your sins. You are loved and complete. Period.



*Father, I don't want to live on bread alone. My appetite for things like approval, material possessions, and status are so very temporary and I know they can't satisfy me in the end. I pray that You will give me an unquenchable appetite for the things of the Spirit. Help me protect myself from the enemy through prayer and Your Word, that I may be equipped for any and all temptations. Amen.*

## December 20

*“And he led Him up and showed Him in all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, ‘I will give you all this domain and its glory, for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore if you worship me, it shall all be yours.’ Jesus answered him, ‘It is written: You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.’”*

*~Luke 4:5-8*

“Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.” Him only. That’s a tall order in a world that demands our attention and worship. Magazine covers are full of famous people whose lives are of great interest to us. Why are we so drawn to their stories? Most of us won’t admit it, but we wonder what it would be like to be beautiful, rich or famous. We may find ourselves “worshipping” their status and fame. We can deny it, but we are affected by the allure. Just bump into a Hollywood star in person and see how you react. Julia Roberts probably won’t meet us for lunch; nor will George Clooney meet us for a latte at the corner Starbucks. Oprah certainly won’t attend our Christmas party, but the God of the Universe sure will. You see, in His eyes, you are already a star. A precious jewel. He only asks that we worship Him...and Him alone.



*Lord, the world is such an alluring place. We have so much, yet we often feel we haven’t done enough...acquired enough...succeeded enough. Please help me to keep a healthy perspective on who I am in Your eyes. Protect me from worshipping idols. I choose to worship and serve You only. Amen.*



## December 21

*“And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.’ And he closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’”*

*~Luke 4:16-21*

Wow! Imagine watching prophecy fulfilled before your very eyes. That is exactly what happened every day of Jesus’ life. Yet despite that fact, most people around Him doubted. We still do today! We stay blind, often losing sight of the actual fact that He came to illuminate a world that is dark. This Christmas, let’s commit ourselves to making sure the light of God’s truth, the power of His plan, and the Good News of His redemption shines brightly through the words and actions of our celebration.



*Oh Father, I pray that I will not lose sight of the incredible miracle of Christ. While our culture may not operate under Christian principles, help me to have the boldness to shine the light of the Gospel in order to illuminate lives with Your hope. Amen.*

## December 22

*"They came to Jesus and woke Him up, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And He got up and rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm. And He said to them, "Where is your faith?" They were fearful and amazed, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?"*

~Luke 8:24-25

The disciples had seen Jesus perform all kinds of amazing miracles; healing scores of suffering people, driving out evil spirits and raising a widow's son from death. Yet when a terrible storm hit, they were amazed at His power. He asked them in response "Where is your faith?" Don't you ask that question of yourself sometimes? We are so accustomed to believing in things we can touch or see. But in Hebrews 11:1 (NIV) we read that "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." It may not be visible, nevertheless it is real, and it comes and grows by feasting on the Word of God. When we consume the Word, God will give us unshakeable faith. Oh, believe it! With Christmas Day fast approaching, let's keep our eyes of faith wide open and choose to see with the eyes of a child. Our Lord is no different today than He was over two thousand years ago when He calmed the winds and the water that scary night. And He will calm the storms in our souls even now. We just need to truly believe He will.



*Jesus, You are able to do far more than I can ever ask or imagine. Forgive me when my faith wavers. Help me to realize deep within my soul that You are as real and powerful in my life today as you were in that storm so many years ago. Amen.*

## December 23

*"But he said to Him, 'Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!' And He said, 'I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me.'"*

*~Luke 22:33,34*

Sometimes we can get so frustrated wondering why it is so hard to consistently follow Christ. We say we are "sold out" for Him, yet we run off pursuing things that ultimately don't matter, rather than the things that give Him the greater glory. But even Peter, a man who knew Jesus personally and had given up everything to follow Him, failed Jesus in His final hours on earth. His failure doesn't justify ours, but helps us realize how easy it is to fall when we take our sights off the one true Source of life and power.

Tomorrow is Christmas Eve. Have you taken your eyes off Him in these recent days and let petty distractions blind you from seeing Him? You can start over right now. Put Him back in the center and move on. Walking with Christ is something that requires a fresh commitment every day. Like Peter, His grace gives us a second chance to serve Him with all our hearts.



*Lord, please forgive me for denying You in how I speak and live some days. I truly want to love and serve You completely. Thank You for Your unconditional grace and constant love despite my sin and failures. I do love You, Lord. Amen.*

## December 24

*“And He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”*

*~Luke 24:46-48*

Jesus came to the earth with one purpose that first Christmas Day... to die for you and me. He entered the world as an innocent baby, lived as an example for us to follow, died as the perfect Sacrifice, and rose from the dead in complete power and authority. Though fully God, He laid aside His privileges (Philippians 2:7) and emptied Himself, being made in the likeness of men and humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death. For this reason alone, we have a hope and a future... if we believe in Him.

Tonight as we celebrate the eve of His birth, let us thank Him for the ultimate sacrifice He made so that we could be absolutely sure about our final destiny...to be with Him in heaven, forever. No more pain, no more worry, no more tears, no more uncertainty. Thank Him and worship Him with all your heart, mind, soul and strength.



*Jesus, thank You for coming to live with us in the flesh over two thousand years ago. Thank You for living a perfect life, dying for my sins, overcoming death, and giving me victory through your blood. This Christmas Eve, I recommit myself to You and praise You for the abundant life found only in You. Amen.*

## December 25

*“The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them.”*

~Isaiah 9:2

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

~John 1:1, 14

By this evening, the physical remnants of our holiday celebration will have lost much of their original appeal. The tree is likely brittle, the cookies are now stale, and all that is left of the beautiful packages is in an overstuffed garbage can. Yet the Light that has been shining in our hearts all season will never dim. We can walk in all its brightness throughout the year. It has been with us since “the beginning” and Jesus Christ—God Incarnate—is truly coming again. Keep the eyes of your heart open, because at the sound of the trumpet, we will meet Him in the sky and our earthly bodies will be transformed to those that are magnificent and perfect. What an incredible gift that will be. See you there!



*Lord Jesus, thank You for being our Light. May the light of Your grace shine upon us today, and throughout the entire year as we celebrate the power of Your love poured out for any and all who believe. This has been a wonderful season to celebrate your birth and life. Help me to celebrate it afresh each and every day. Amen.*

# *Holiday Planner*



## *Holiday Planner*

As wonderful and joyous as we're told Christmas is supposed to be (and it really can be), the reality is that sometimes this season brings its own set of challenges. Whether or not you have children, are single, married, or divorced, often Christmastime is just plain tough. Our calendars show that we only have a couple of weeks to do so much, and often we just don't feel like doing it at all. So we end up getting stressed out and then often deal with guilt, worry, and pain.

Before we dig in to some actual practical tools to help you plan your season effectively, let's discuss some important things that could impact those plans. In fact, for those of you who can't wait to start your lists, the actual planning pages begin on page 59. But first, let's take a few moments to look at some things that are often glossed over or don't even get acknowledged.

### **Christmas... the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly**

Too often the expectations of how we're supposed to act and feel at this time of year, coupled with the frenzy of Christmas activity, can ruin the real joy we so desperately desire. We might find ourselves alone and wish we were not. Or the burden of debt weighs heavy on our shoulders and we don't know how we are going to afford to meet the expectations of those around us. Perhaps this is our first Christmas as a sober person and we're terrified wondering just how we're going to make it through. We might face the season grappling with fear, anger, or regret. Sometimes as we begin to hear Christmas music in the shopping malls, a dark curtain is drawn around our heart and all we want to do is close our eyes and fast forward the season altogether.

At this time of year, most people, especially women, tend to get over-stressed, over-spent, over-committed, over-fed, and over-tired. There has to be a practical and realistic way to let go of the stress and celebrate with thanksgiving. Together, let's

ask God to help us once and for all to walk our way through this Christmas with Him constantly in mind...no matter what. In Philippians 4:6-7, Paul exhorts us to “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” How is that even possible in this busiest of seasons?

I am by no means a model for having a perfectly organized, stress-free Christmas. But one thing I have learned is to let go of some expectations and purposefully celebrate the real joy of this season. So, whatever your joys or heartbreaks might be, it is my prayer that you will discover the authentic joy that transcends stress, anxiety, loneliness, heartbreak or brokenness. It is my heart’s desire to reach you wherever you are today and help turn your eyes back to the one and only Source of fulfillment, wholeness and love...that is Jesus Christ Himself. I pray this simple planner might help shift your perspective back to the stripped-down, simple joys of Christmas...moving you from the busyness of the mall to the serenity of the manger.

### ***Focus, Focus, Focus***

Adrian Rogers tells a story about a little girl who was caught up in the whirlwind of her parents’ pre-Christmas activities in a most negative way. Her daddy was preoccupied and extremely tense most days as the holiday bills mounted. Her mom was trying so hard to get everything done that a few days before Christmas she broke into tears completely unaware of the innocent eyes watching her emotional display. It seemed the little five-year old had been underfoot and with tensions rising daily. She had been yelled at unkindly several times in recent days. As the sweet child knelt to pray one night before bedtime, her tongue clearly betrayed her broken little heart as she petitioned God, “Oh God, forgive us our Christmases as we forgive those who Christmas against us.”



As we look at the activities of Christmas, what things really are most important? What will keep Christ at the forefront of your thoughts and actions? I hope you will find the Christmas devotional found in pages 5 through 32 helpful to this end. The well-being of our families and our health are also important. But in the midst of important family traditions, parties with friends, and the giving of gifts, it takes a conscious decision to make sure these good things do not rob our time and energy for the BEST. Some of our cards may not get sent, we may not be able to attend every party we're invited to, cookies may not get baked and all of our packages may not have that extra little touch...but let's try to ensure that Jesus will be glorified and exalted in each little effort to celebrate the season.

### **The Power of Traditions**

“Tradition! Tradition!” The Broadway musical “Fiddler On The Roof” found its central character Tevye passionately delivering this exclamation. Traditions are powerful and many are very important. The Oxford American Dictionary describes traditions as “the handing down of beliefs or customs from one generation to another, especially without writing”. What customs do you practice during the Christmas season that may have been passed down from your parents, grandparents or even great grandparents? Special traditions help us form fond memories and meaningful connections. And though many may not have spiritual roots, they can stir important sentimental, nostalgic, and loving feelings in us that accompany this time of year.

Some of my favorite memories are of baking over a dozen different kinds of cookies with my mom each holiday season while our favorite Christmas songs played in the background. Flour and sprinkles were everywhere. Racks of cooling confections sent sweet smells of vanilla, coconut and sweet butter all over the house. My mom was exceptionally generous, creating special plates and tins of goodies for friends, paperboys, mail carriers and teachers.

I kept up this tradition with my two daughters as they were growing up. And even now that they are adults, we try to have at least one day each season where we turn my kitchen upside down baking two or three of our favorite choices. (I just can't handle the pressure and mess of twelve recipes any more!) It is the connection and tradition that is our goal rather than the treats themselves. One year, when my oldest daughter Jamie was in prison, I just couldn't bring myself to make cookies. But her first Christmas home was celebrated with a day of cooking and eating that reminded us all of how important these traditions are in celebrating His life and sacrifice in ways that connect at the heart.

My friend, Sylvia Lange, has a special Christmas tradition that actually begins on Thanksgiving Day. On that day, her mother gives each one of her children an ornament that has something to do with their lives at that point in time. Each year when she pulls down the Christmas boxes from the attic and unpacks the ornaments, she is flooded with tender memories of her mother's thoughtfulness as she hangs the scores of ornaments she gave over the years. Sylvia is reminded how much like her she wants to be as she finds special places for them on the tree.

Another special tradition in the Lange family is played out on the Saturday night just prior to Christmas every year. Siblings, parents, cousins, aunts and uncles who live nearby all look forward to coming together for a mini-family reunion. Along with some special extended friends, they celebrate Christmas together throughout the evening, complete with a "white elephant gift exchange", delicious food and wonderful fellowship. The kids play, everyone laughs, catches up on life, and shares what God has done during the previous year. The best part of the evening is when her sister's husband reads the Christmas story straight from Scripture and her dear ol' dad entreats each person to share what they're most grateful for.

## **Celebrating and building new traditions**

What are the special traditions that warm your heart and connect you in meaningful ways to those you love? Do some of these activities cause you pain because of difficult memories? How can you begin to recreate a fresh perspective? Often, we must choose to take the time to keep important traditions alive and an integral part of our celebration. Otherwise, they get set on a shelf and precious history can eventually be lost.

We can also expand our traditions by including new ways of pointing toward Christ. For example, you might choose to listen to Christmas music that is all about Jesus while you decorate the tree. Or perhaps you can ask your children to share all they know about Him as they are helping to wrap presents. If you are a “type A” personality, it is easy to get so focused on getting things checked off our lists, that we don’t include our family in the activities that truly build memories.

Here are a few ideas that not only build tradition, but that can also help you to keep “the main thing, the main thing” during this busy season:

### ***Create a family advent activity***

Perhaps you will consider reading this daily devotional just before dinner each night, beginning on December 1st. Or if you have young children, you can purchase an advent calendar that has a window for each day of advent with a little picture, scripture and maybe even a little candy as you count down the days until Christ’s birthday.

### ***Reach out***

One of my favorite memories is the year my entire family served a Christmas meal and passed out sweaters, toiletries and gifts at the downtown rescue center. It put a new perspective on celebrating the quality of life we so often take for granted and creating more realistic expectations regarding gift giving.

Caring for or “adopting” a needy family or single mom at Christmas is a powerful way to be the “hands and feet of Jesus”. Keep your eyes open for a neighbor who you see is struggling,

or if you live near a military base, inquire about someone whose spouse is deployed. Ask your pastor for someone he might be aware of who is in need... and then act. They will certainly benefit from your kindness. But it will be you who ultimately is blessed.

You could also consider sponsoring a child from a Third World country through one of the many reputable Christian organizations that exist to take care of children who can't take care of themselves. Did you know that every three seconds, a child dies of hunger or a preventable hunger-related disease? You could be the one God has chosen to quite literally help save a child's life and give them a hopeful future. It typically costs less than the price of a cup of coffee a day.

Taking care of the needy and the poor was a favorite theme of Jesus' when He walked the earth. In Matthew 25:37 and 40, He was asked "When did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You something to drink?" He replied by saying, "Truly, I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me." I can't think of a better way to really give at Christmas than to follow Christ's own example.

*To sponsor a World Vision child right now, visit my website at:  
[www.dannademetre.com/partners](http://www.dannademetre.com/partners)*

## **Choosing the best from all the good**

In a perfect world, our Christmas season would be filled with wonderful smells, joyous music, thoughtful gifts, meaningful connections and fabulous celebrations. Credit card bills, crowded parking lots, loneliness, family tensions and utter exhaustion would not cloud our ideal season. While you cannot control the people in your life or every personal circumstance, you can choose what activities and priorities you will pursue. It's been said that in order to be effective, we should "inspect what we expect". As such, it is helpful to put ink to page when it comes to getting organized, In the pages that follow, I have designed some introspective exercises and tools that will help you choose wisely.

## *Priority Considerations*

The following activities are listed to help you decide how to best invest your time and energy. This list is by no means all inclusive and certainly is not meant to prompt you to increase your expectations. Simply read through the different categories and make notes if something is particularly important to you.

### **Home**

- Decorating** (*tree and indoor decorations, outside lights/decorations*)

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- Baking and Cooking** (*general holiday baking, gifts for neighbors and friends, special event or family cooking*)

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- Special Cleaning** \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Family**

- Family Devotions** \_\_\_\_\_

---

- Family Traditions** \_\_\_\_\_

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- Holiday Travel** \_\_\_\_\_

- Holiday Company** \_\_\_\_\_

## *Priority Considerations*

### **Special Events & Friends**

**Holiday outings** (*special plays/musicals, the Christmas tree lot, a community program*) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**School Programs** (*Dates*) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Church Programs** (*Dates*) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Special time with friends** (*Dates with whom*) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Entertaining at Home** (*Dates*) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Work events & parties** (*Dates*) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Other Considerations**

**Special outfits to buy** \_\_\_\_\_

**Giving back** (*Needy children, local shelter, etc.*) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Other** \_\_\_\_\_

## *Priority Considerations*

### **Cards & Letters**

**Christmas cards and letters**

Quantity: \_\_\_\_\_  Buy stamps by: \_\_\_\_\_

Special stationary or cards to purchase?

**Special photographs**

Quantity: \_\_\_\_\_

Photo selected  Printed by: \_\_\_\_\_

**Mailing deadline** \_\_\_\_\_

*Note: You may want to consider sending Happy New Year cards or even Easter cards this year. While it is certainly wonderful to send and receive cards at Christmas time, they can become more of a burden than a joy during this busy season and often get lost in the shuffle.*

### **Gift Giving**

**Gift List** made (*worksheets on pages 69 and 70*)

**Out of town presents** (*mailing deadline*) \_\_\_\_\_

**Shopping**

**Wrapping**

**Delivering**

## Priority Considerations

### Refining your priorities

Now that you've taken the time to consider some of the common activities of this season, let's take this exercise one step further. Jot down every little (and big) thing that you think "should" be included in your holiday celebration this year. Try not to rate or prioritize these things...yet. If it comes to your mind, simply write it down.

After writing everything down, rate each item on a scale from 1 to 10 with 10 being that which is most important to you. Lastly, determine if you actually plan on doing each thing this year and then write "Yes", "No", or a comment of your own in the last column to reflect your decision. I have included a brief example below:

EVERY LITTLE THING	RATING	COMMENTS (Yes/No/Less?)
1. Christmas tree	10	Yes
2. Outdoor lighting	5	No
3. Christmas cards or letter	7	Yes, but shorter list
4. Bake cookies	8	Yes, but less
5. Host a party for friends	2	Not this year
6. Attend work Christmas party	3	Yes, must
7. Volunteer for church program	4	Not this year
8. Gifts for family	10	Immediate family only
9. Gifts for friends	6	Limit to 2-3 max
10. Trip to In-Laws	5	Maybe next year?



Now it's your turn...

EVERY LITTLE THING	RATING	COMMENTS (Yes/No/Less?)
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		
13.		
14.		
15.		
16.		
17.		
18.		
19.		
20.		

## Daily Priority Planner

Now that you have evaluated all the important aspects of your Christmas season activities, I have created another practical planning sheet to help you translate those priorities to a specific date. The objective is to schedule them into your life in advance so that they do not become overwhelming. Remember: You are in control. When you are feeling out of control and overwhelmed, cut your losses. Either move them forward to the next day or week...or eliminate them altogether. After all, what's the worse thing that could happen if you don't do one of the things on your priority list? Seriously consider this. We will still celebrate the birth of our Savior, so just try to keep the right perspective and hang on to your joy.

The Daily Priorities At-A-Glance planning sheets for the month of December can be found beginning on page 60, at the end of the book for easy access. I have included an example below.

### December 1

Priority 1: *Start my Advent Devotional* \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: *Schedule Holiday Photo for Christmas Cards* \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: *Do the "Priority Considerations" exercise in this book* \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: *Finish project at work* \_\_\_\_\_

You may choose to limit items on your list to holiday oriented activities or perhaps include any key things you must focus on for that day. Use this tool to keep your days and weeks more balanced and productive. By focusing on the four most important items and getting those done (or when necessary, moving them to tomorrow) you can let go of the less important and take the time to celebrate in the moment.

## *Giving with Purpose*

Ask yourself these questions: How would you feel if you didn't receive any gifts this year? And on the flip side, how would you feel if you didn't have to buy any gifts for others? I'm not suggesting that there be no gifts exchanged, but it's important to consider your answers to these questions as they may reflect the motives of your heart.

Why do we give gifts at Christmas? This practice originated when the Magi realized that the bright star shining in the north was pointing to the Messiah, Who was foretold centuries before. This Messiah was in fact a newborn baby delivered in a Bethlehem manger. The Magi journeyed an extreme distance to lavish extravagant gifts on this King of Kings. Cultures all over the world who celebrate Christmas have altered this act of adoration and now we give gifts to each other.

Out of His love for us, God gave the ultimate Gift when He sent His Son to die for our redemption. The only gift we can possibly give Him in return is to accept His gift and then, as Matthew 22:37 says to "love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind."

With all this in mind, let's reevaluate why and to whom we give gifts to begin with. Let's take a hard look at our motives and the time and money we spend and make decisions accordingly. Who are we buying for? Why are we buying? Is it truly to benefit or show love to the recipient? Or might the reality be that we're giving the gift out of some misdirected sense of obligation or even pride? Don't get me wrong; I've been guilty of this very thing. However, if we don't stop and ask ourselves these very questions, we will continue to perpetuate this unhealthy practice.

Please take the time to honestly answer these questions for yourself, before you get going on your gift list. I hope it will help you (as it has me) in giving with a refreshed perspective. Pages 69 and 70 will help you get organized and create a gift-giving budget as you plan your shopping for presents, crafts or other Christmas related purchases.



*Have Yourself A  
Healthy Christmas*



## *Releasing Holiday Stress*

As Christmas approaches, do you begin to tense up as you anticipate the pressure associated with this time of year? Does worry and stress override peace and joy? If holiday stress is a major issue for you, I hope you will take a few moments to consider and reflect on this issue.

When the apostle Paul told us to “be anxious for nothing”, he didn’t give us a caveat, “except for money concerns, family disputes and holiday stresses”. So many times in Scripture, we are told to “set our minds” or “fix our eyes” on things above.

There is a powerful command in Romans 12:2 that says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...” Doesn’t that sound like there is something God expects *us* to do in our daily lives to manage the stress and strain of living in this fallen world? To avoid “conforming to this world”, we need to pass all of our expectations, goals and desires through a biblical perspective. If we are stressing out over our gift list, rising expenses and not having all our Christmas cards sent...what’s wrong with this picture? Perhaps we are so distracted by our own self-imposed activities that our ability to embrace life fully is compromised. I have certainly experienced this in my own life and I know that it is a daily and sometimes hourly choice to refocus and “set our minds” on what is truly important.

To be “transformed by the renewing of our mind”, we must replace the lies we believe with truth. The lie is that we *must* complete our list of Christmas expectations in order to have a quality celebration. The lie is that we must conform to everyone’s expectations of what makes Christmas special. What is the *truth* about celebrating Christmas? What truly moves our focus from self to Christ? What truly connects us with others in ways that speak the love, forgiveness and hope...Christ’s perfect gift to us? These are the kinds of truths we must seek and remind ourselves of as we hurry and scurry about.

Our traditions are important and can truly enhance the beauty of this season...IF we keep our expectations in balance. With that in mind, please evaluate what is specifically triggering the stress in your life this time of year, or any time of year for that matter. You may want to add an item or two to the list below if there is something specific challenging you.

### **My Holiday Stressors**

On a scale from 1 to 10 rate the following factors contributing to your stress with 10 being the most stressful.

- |                   |                    |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| ___ Time          | ___ Energy         |
| ___ Work          | ___ Disappointment |
| ___ Relationships | ___ Jealousy       |
| ___ Shopping      | ___ Loneliness     |
| ___ Finances      | ___ Fear           |
| ___ Health        | ___ Other          |

Now that you have identified your greatest stressors, prayerfully consider the most practical way to reinterpret these issues biblically and truly release them to the Lord in prayer. This may sound trite, but the truth is that stress and anxiety all begin in the mind. We've got to be willing to change our perspective to deal effectively with stress.

***The following questions may help you begin to address your stress more effectively:***

1. What is the worst thing that could happen if you don't accomplish any one of your goals?



2. What can you do to decrease your stress in those specific areas?
  
3. What are you willing to cross off your list or modify to diminish this stress?
  
4. What one thing could you do each day that would keep your mind set on truth?

Take a look at the Scriptures below and consider memorizing and repeating them whenever the stress of this season (or life in general) gets a hold on you. Consider putting one or more of these on an index card or Post-It note and keep it close at hand until you have it locked in your mind.

***Scriptures to help you release stress:***

“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. ~*John 14:27*

“For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” ~*Romans 14:17*

“So then, we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.” ~*Romans 14:19*

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” ~*Romans 15:13*

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” ~*Colossians 3:16*

*Maximize your energy...*  
*Minimize your weight!*

Do you have all the energy and vitality you need every day? Few people do...especially during this hectic time of year. In fact, this is the season when we eat the most and exercise the least. However, the excess sugar we tend to consume during the holidays diminishes our immunity. The lack of activity causes our overall energy to plummet and the fewer hours of sleep sets us up for more stress and “fatigue induced” eating binges. While it may not be realistic to train for a marathon during this time of year, it is also not the time to totally put your health and wellness on hold. So, with that in mind, I’ve included some simple, yet effective tips from my book, *Scale Down...A realistic guide to balancing body, soul & spirit*. Try your best to incorporate a few ideas into this season and you will be way ahead of the game on New Year’s Day!

## **5 LIFESTYLE TIPS for a leaner, healthier body**

Wouldn’t it be incredible if every pound you lost and every healthy habit you tried became permanently locked in? It’s easier than you think if you make consistent lifestyle changes. A lifestyle change is something you can truly do most days of your life without too much effort or deprivation. Everything else is just another diet or program.

### ***TIP #1 Change Your Thinking***

Do you really believe you can get and stay lean and healthy for life? If you don’t...you won’t! Get in tune with your self-talk. Discover your lies...and replace them with truth! You believe what you tell yourself most often. So, what do you believe? In the human mind, the most dominant thought wins. If you tell yourself a new truth long enough, your behavior will change. Write down new messages you truly want to believe and read them two to three times each day. Or listen to a healthy self talk CD when your drive, exercise or work around the house. You’ll

be amazed at what can and will happen over time. Within a few months, your new self-talk could reset your “automatic pilot” and lead you down a healthier lifestyle path!

***TIP #2 Change Your Attitude***

Get rid of your old diet mentality and legalize all foods. If you can have any food you want, any time you want it...then you don't need to have it all right now. Give yourself permission to enjoy your favorite foods without feeling guilty. Chances are your cravings will diminish and your will power will increase. And, while you're at it, get rid of your “all or nothing” attitude as well. It's not either a “diet day” or a “blow out day”. Every time you think you've gone a little too far off the path...start fresh right then and there. Don't wait until the first day of the week, the first day of the month or the first day of the year. Restart again and again...right now...even if it is Wednesday afternoon!

***TIP #3 Increase Your Energy***

The higher your energy, the less likely you will be to overeat. There are several important factors that will energize you to the max. Each is important in its own right, so make sure you don't neglect any of these critical factors:

1. ***Eat to stabilize your blood sugar:*** Include a good source of protein and fiber in most meals and snacks, especially at breakfast and lunch. Shoot for at least 30 grams of fiber everyday. Try to avoid highly processed or sugary foods until after lunch. This will help you maintain a more stable blood sugar and that will significantly diminish cravings.
2. ***De-stress your life:*** Stress releases hormones and sugar into your blood stream creating a vicious cycle of fat storage and adrenaline rushes. When the excess sugar released during stress goes unused, (since most of us aren't being chased by a wild animal) it ends up getting stored as fat. The answer: Decrease your stress. Since anxiety starts in our mind, we need to ask ourselves a simple, yet profound question: “What's the worst thing that will happen in this potential scenario?” This will often help put things in perspective and bring stress levels down.

3. ***Sleep until you are rested:*** Well-rested people have higher mental, emotional and physical reserves. The body regenerates at the cellular level only during deep, quality sleep. Most people need a minimum of 7½ hours per night. Try it...you'll be amazed at how well you'll perform in many areas of your life...including your lifestyle. Don't get into an unhealthy cycle during the holidays thinking that the things on your "To Do" list are more important than sleep; as they rarely are. A poor night's sleep every once in a while is not a big deal, but night after night will catch up with you. And, most likely it will catch up to those around you who must deal with your low energy, moodiness or outward tension.
  
4. ***Exercise for maximum energy:*** Don't wait to get up and get moving until you have enough energy to exercise. Get moving purposely every day and you will have more energy. You'll feel better, more focused and have greater self-control if you get regular exercise. Try to get at least 10 minutes of purposeful activity every morning before you jump into the shower. In seven days, you will definitely feel a difference. The ideal is to work toward at least 30 minutes of purposeful activity (a.k.a. "exercise") most days of the week. This is especially important when our schedules are more demanding. A short aerobic workout on a busy day will make up the time invested in a sense of well-being, diminished stress and much higher energy.

#### ***TIP #4 Burn More Calories***

The bottom line to all weight management is simply: Calories in vs. calories out. But most people severely underestimate how many calories they eat and over estimate how many they burn during exercise. If you only eat ten calories more than you burn each day, you'll gain an extra pound of fat every year. It's the small stuff that adds up over time. So, take action and reverse that equation by burning more calories each and every day. Just a little improvement can make a huge difference over time!

The average woman eats over 2,000 calories per day, but she only burns about 1,700. That's the perfect formula to gain

about 30 pounds in a year. And people wonder why Americans are getting fatter every year—it's simple math.

Here are a few ways to burn a pound of FAT off your body each week:

1. Eat 500 less calories every day. (That's about 2/3 of a scone at Starbuck's)
2. Burn 500 calories more every day. (That's about 3 miles of walking or jogging.)
3. Or, do just a little of each: Eat 250 calories less and burn 250 calories more each day. (Now, that's a lifestyle change.)
4. Get motivated to burn more calories with a CALTRAC Activity Monitor. (*For more information, visit my website at dannademetre.com.*) *A great gift idea for yourself!*
5. Build two pounds more muscle and increase your metabolism up to 100 calories a day. You can be ten pounds leaner in a year without changing your diet. We build muscle most effectively by consistent weight training using either machines or free weights.

### ***TIP #5 Creative Ways to Eat Fewer Calories***

1. ***Practice portion control:*** Eat one-third to one-half your normal food portions whenever possible. Leave part of your sandwich on the plate or eat only half of your cookie. You'd be amazed at how this simple technique will work if you practice it consistently. Consider this: If you've been eating an average of 2,400 calories per day, a reduction of only 10% would result in a daily caloric savings of 240 calories. That's about 24 pounds in one short year. One caution: never decrease your fruit or vegetable servings.
2. ***Become a daytime eater:*** Try eating half as much food as you usually do after 6:00 p.m. Most Americans would be much leaner if we simply ate less food in the evenings! We burn most of our calories in the early part of our day and

eat most of our calories just before going to bed. Go figure... no wonder we're getting fatter.

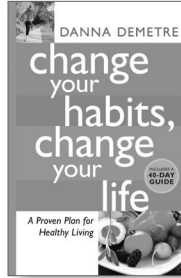
3. ***Go to "Calorie College":*** Buy a good quality "nutritional counts" book and take one month to determine exactly what you are eating most days (not just when you are dieting). Simply knowing what you eat is essential to making wise choices. Once you find out that your favorite scone at Starbuck's is 680 calories and that mocha is 560, you might choose to have them less often. We wouldn't think of neglecting to balance our checkbooks, but most of us don't have a clue how much we are eating or burning.
4. ***Practice substitution:*** Find lower calorie versions (not just lower fat) of your favorite foods whenever possible. There are so many tasty ice cream products that have a lot less calories than Ben & Jerry's. Read labels and try new things. And remember, lower fat does not always mean fewer calories.
5. ***Avoid extremes of hunger and fullness:*** Make a commitment that you will never allow yourself to get too hungry or eat until you are over full. Get tuned into the fact that anytime you have overstuffed your stomach, you will most likely be overstuffing a few fat cells. And anytime you get extremely hungry, you are setting yourself up for a binge.
6. ***Practice the ten-minute delay strategy:*** Whenever you have a craving for something and you're not the least bit hungry, don't tell yourself you can't have it. Simply drink a tall glass of water and wait ten minutes. If you still want it, then have half the amount you usually would. This technique works most of the time...try it!

During this busy time of year, you may think you don't have time to incorporate new lifestyle habits. But, that is a lie. A few new habits *before* the New Year will make a huge difference in the quality of your life. I hope the ideas and tools in this planner have helped shift your perspective toward the true meaning of Christmas—a blessing that lasts far beyond this holiday season.

## Start the New Year off right!

Receive 10% off your entire order when you order resources online at [www.dannademetre.com](http://www.dannademetre.com).

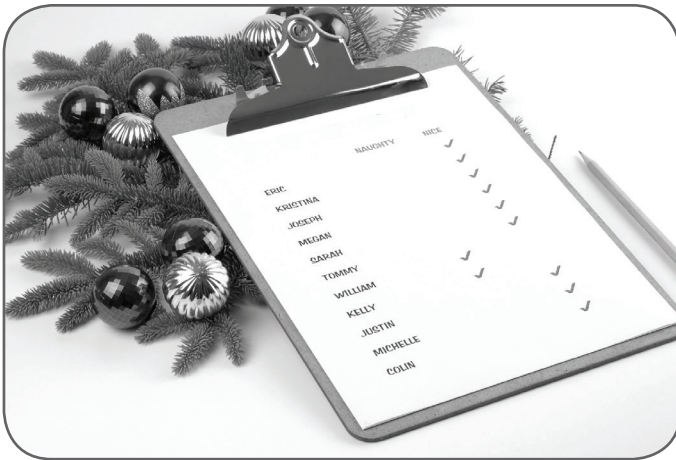
Upon checkout, enter Discount Code: M2M.



Scale Down Resources include:  
book, workbook, seminar on DVD and CD,  
healthy self-talk CD, and leader's guide

Consider Starting a Scale Down Small Group at home or church and you could qualify for a FREE Six-Session DVD of Danna's teaching and a Leader's Guide. For more info contact Danna at: [Danna@DannaDemetre.com](mailto:Danna@DannaDemetre.com).

# My Worksheets





# *Daily Priorities At-A-Glance*

## *December 1*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

## *December 2*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

## *December 3*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

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## *Daily Priorities At-A-Glance*

### *December 4*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

### *December 5*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

### *December 6*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

*Daily Priorities At-A-Glance*

*December 7*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

*December 8*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

*December 9*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

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# *Daily Priorities At-A-Glance*

## *December 10*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

## *December 11*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

## *December 12*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

# *Daily Priorities At-A-Glance*

*December 13*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

*December 14*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

*December 15*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

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## *Daily Priorities At-A-Glance*

*December 16*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

*December 17*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

*December 18*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

## *Daily Priorities At-A-Glance*

*December 19*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

*December 20*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

*December 21*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

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## *Daily Priorities At-A-Glance*

### *December 22*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

### *December 23*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

### *December 24*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_



*Daily Priorities At-A-Glance*

*December 25 - Celebrate Jesus' birth!*

Priority 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Priority 4: \_\_\_\_\_

# My Gift List

## Who is on your list?

- Family   ▪ Friends   ▪ Associates
- Pastor   ▪ Teachers   ▪ Co-Workers
- A needy child or family   ▪ Babysitter   ▪ Other

How much can I realistically spend? \$ \_\_\_\_\_

NAME	GIFT IDEA	AMOUNT
_____	_____	\$ _____
_____	_____	\$ _____
_____	_____	\$ _____
_____	_____	\$ _____
_____	_____	\$ _____
_____	_____	\$ _____
_____	_____	\$ _____
_____	_____	\$ _____
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_____	_____	\$ _____

# *My Gift List*

## Who is on your list?

- Family    ▪ Friends    ▪ Associates
- Pastor    ▪ Teachers    ▪ Co-Workers
- A needy child or family    ▪ Babysitter    ▪ Other

NAME	GIFT IDEA	AMOUNT
_____	_____	\$ _____
_____	_____	\$ _____
_____	_____	\$ _____
_____	_____	\$ _____
_____	_____	\$ _____
_____	_____	\$ _____
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_____	_____	\$ _____
_____	_____	\$ _____

## *About Danna*

*Self-described as a “work in progress”, Danna Demetre has learned how to find deep satisfaction by putting first things first in each area of her life. A survivor of marital infidelity, the heartbreak of rebellious children, the paralysis of unrelenting panic attacks and prolonged bondage to food, she has personally discovered that God’s Word is truly “living and active and more powerful than a two-edged sword.” In fact, that sword is much like a precision surgical knife that when turned on ourselves cuts out the lies we believe and replaces them with truth.*

*Danna has a diverse professional background—a registered nurse specializing in labor and delivery, a corporate marketing manager for a Fortune 100 company, a fitness professional, lifestyle expert and a Christian talk radio host.*

*In the last twenty years, Danna has influenced thousands of women around the globe though her books and speaking. She is the author of several books and a frequent radio and television expert guest on a variety of topics. She currently produces and hosts her Makeover Mentor Podcasts on a variety of subjects to include health, weight loss, relationships, living with balance and spiritual perspectives.*

*Danna and her husband live in San Diego. They have three adult children and live with their 18 year-old adopted grandson, Jesse – a late life gift that has richly blessed them...and kept them young!*

*You can learn more about Danna, her teaching and subscribe to her email and podcasts at:*

[www.DannaDemetre.com](http://www.DannaDemetre.com)

## Danna's Popular Books and Resources

These resources are available online at: [www.DannaDemetre.com/store.htm](http://www.DannaDemetre.com/store.htm). To receive a 10% discount, enter Discount Code at checkout: **M2M**. Discount applies to entire order.

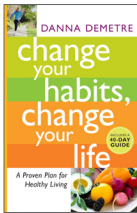


SCALE DOWN...A realistic guide to balancing body, soul & spirit

Scale Down Book & Workbook

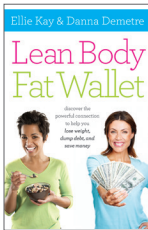
Scale Down 6-Session DVD or CD Series

Healthy Self-Talk for Your Lifestyle CD



CHANGE YOUR HABITS, CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Book & Renew Your Mind Self-Talk CD



LEAN BODY, FAT WALLET

Discover the powerful connection to help you lose weight, dump debt and save money

Co-Authored with Ellie Kay, November 2013



WHAT HAPPENED TO MY LIFE?

Finding new passion, purpose and joy

# *from the mall* **TO THE MANGER**

Christmas Devotional and Planner

## **Have your past Christmas seasons been more stressed than blessed?**

Do you fill your calendar with so much shopping, baking and entertaining that you fail to fully embrace the greatest Gift ever given? If so, this little book will help you simplify your activities, minimize your stress and maximize your worship of Jesus Christ.

## **25 Day Devotional – December 1 to December 25**

Reflecting on key Scripture verses primarily from the book of Luke, Danna's thoughtful perspectives and penetrating questions will lead you through Christ's physical life from conception to death, pointing forward in anticipation of His Second coming. Each day's prayer will reinforce a daily commitment to keep Jesus the center of the season.

## **Simple and Effective Holiday Planner**

Designed to help move you from the mall to the manger by gaining a fresh perspective on what's most important during this meaningful season, the planner will assist you in prioritizing your activities in practical ways. This small book fits easily in your purse to keep you focused and organized all season long.

*"This wonderful little book helped me plan and organize a much more purposeful Christmas. But most of all, it helped me visualize the birth and life of Christ in a fresh way that filled my heart with the true meaning of this special season. I'm going to use it again this year!"*  
~Mary Lou S., San Diego, California



### *About the Author*

Danna Demetre is an international author and speaker best known as "The Makeover Mentor". Her passion is to help women find balance in all the dimensions of their lives by pointing them to the truth of God's Word and encouraging them in practical ways toward a life of greater passion, purpose and joy.

Visit her online at [DannaDemetre.com](http://DannaDemetre.com) and [WomenOfPurpose.org](http://WomenOfPurpose.org).

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