



MERCY

MERRY MERCY CHRISTMAS

FAMILY GUIDE



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We all desire a truly “merry” Christmas.

Celebrating the birth of Christ with our family, friends, neighbors
and church community means pretty lights,
fun parties, amazing food, Christmas carols, special gifts
and candle-lighting...all the things that have become traditions
in the name of Jesus.

But what if there's more than merry?

What if, in order to truly experience the gift of Christmas,
we need to step out of MERRY and into MERCY.

This 4-week Advent experience walks your family through not
only a meaningful preparation for Christmas, but a memorable
opportunity to discover the purpose and power of mercy...
a gift that can change a life.

HOW TO

Prepare

- ☛ Explore the entire guide before you begin so that you know what to expect.
- ☛ Designate time (15-20 minutes) each week to come together as a family for your “Merry Mercy Christmas Experience”. It’s important to establish and prioritize this time or it may be swallowed up by your busy holiday schedule! (You’ll be glad you did.)
- ☛ You may gather the 5 “gifts” ahead of time, or you may gather them individually each week.
- ☛ Pray for God to direct your family’s time and attention, allowing His purpose to be revealed through this experience.

THE FIVE

Gifts

WEEK 1:



Compact
flashlight
with batteries

WEEK 2:



Resealable
package of adult
body wipes

WEEK 3:



Lasting,
reusable
water bottle

WEEK 4:



2 new pair of socks
(1 men's pair;
1 women's pair)

CHRISTMAS:



Gift card (\$5-10)
to a local fast food
restaurant

Optional: Other items you may choose to include:

Face Mask(s)

Chapstick

Tissues

Granola bar

Small first aid kit

Hair comb

Pen & notepad

BEFORE YOU

Begin

You are about to embark on a potentially life-changing experience.

Your family will no doubt experience deeper revelation about Jesus and His merciful purpose on Earth, making this Christmas all the more meaningful.

But there's more.

You will have the privilege of sharing Jesus with someone you've never met. For a sacred moment, your family will bring Christmas to life.

You'll be compiling items - while exploring Advent - and presenting them to a brother or sister in Christ who is in physical need. He or she will no doubt be blessed with the items, but beyond that, the sharing of relational mercy will take the wonder of Christmas to an entirely new level for all of you.

Your family may have a lot of experience with missional activities and building relationships with folks who are different from you.

Or, this may be new and you're a bit apprehensive.

Either way, here a few helpful hints as you prepare.

THE POWER OF PRAYER

- ☛ Pray that God goes before you, alongside you and after you. Ask Him to bless your family as well as the neighbor you encounter with openness to His promises, purposes and plans.

STAY SAFE

- ☛ Plan to deliver your “Merry Mercy Christmas” project during daytime hours, to someone within public view.
- ☛ Do not disturb someone who is sleeping or interact with someone who appears intoxicated or upset.
- ☛ Familiarize yourself with the homelessness resources in your area so that you can direct/offer support if requested. *(It is not recommended that you give cash in any circumstance.)*
- ☛ Do not provide your last name, address nor any contact information.
- ☛ It is suggested that single parents may wish to pair up with another family for added safety.

PROMOTE DIGNITY

- ☛ Understand, and discuss with your family, that all people in all circumstances deserve the unconditional love of Christ. It is never okay to judge, discriminate against or withhold love from anyone, for any reason.
- ☛ Talk about ways to show compassion and friendship which communicate “I value you just as you are.” *(softly looking someone in the eyes; speaking with a gentle, yet confident tone; learning and using someone’s name; respecting personal space; refraining from using condescending language; etc.)*
- ☛ Spend a few relational minutes with the Christmas delivery. Introduce your family (first names only). Explain the experience you’ve had. Ask a couple friendly questions. Offer a prayer. *(In other words, don’t just “drop and run”!)*
- ☛ Do not take photos of your encounter or share on any social media platform.
- ☛ Thank whomever you encounter for allowing you to share this Christmas experience. Thank him or her for their willingness and time.

ADVENT:

Week 1

FOCUS SCRIPTURE:
JOHN 8:12

*Jesus said, "I am the light of the world.
Whoever follows me will never walk in
darkness, but will have the light of life."*



INSPIRATIONAL OBJECT:
FLASHLIGHT

FAMILY DISCUSSION

Turn off all the lights in the room you gather in.

In the dark, talk about how the dark "feels".

Has anyone in your family ever been afraid of the dark?

Imagine what it would be like to exist in a world,
day-to-day, without light.

Does anyone think they could make their way safely,
in the dark, from the room your in, all the way around your house,
and back again?

1. Turn on a flashlight and talk about how Jesus' birth and life offer light to a world that is very "dark" without Him. Share the focus scripture and discuss ways your family can shine like Jesus and share His light.
 - ✓ Follow Jesus in a way that lets others see His light in you. Talk about Him. Sing to Him. Let others know He brings you light!
 - ✓ Take light into darkness. Look for opportunities to be a light for someone who is struggling. Is there someone who needs you to shine? Talk about the specifics of who, and how, God may lead you to help.
 - ✓ As a family, be bright!
 - ✓ Brainstorm how you can share Jesus within your neighborhood and community (*i.e. participate in a clothing drive, visit an elderly friend or take cookies to a new family*).
2. Finally, take turns trying out the flashlight while explaining that it's the first of 5 items you'll be collecting for a very special, light-bringing delivery this Christmas!
3. Show the family your special "Merry Mercy Christmas" gift tags and attach the matching tag to the flashlight as you place it in the bag.



ADVENT:

Week 2

FOCUS SCRIPTURE:

Psalms 51:10

*Create in me a clean heart, O God;
and renew a right spirit within me.*



INSPIRATIONAL OBJECT:

ADULT BODY WIPES

FAMILY DISCUSSION

Put on your favorite Christmas music and tackle a household cleaning/organizing project together (*The family room? Minivan? Entryway?*) in preparation for holiday happenings. Find ways for all ages to contribute.

Afterward, enjoy a special meal, dessert, or hot chocolate and discuss the ups and downs (*attitudes, progress, teamwork, problems*) of this experience.

Talk about the “before” and “after” of the area you worked on.

How does it feel to have a fresher, cleaner,
more organized space?

1. Read the focus scripture together.
 - Compare what a clean heart vs. a dirty heart would look like, or a right spirit vs. a wrong spirit. Acknowledge that Jesus' birth symbolizes a fresh start, a clean slate and a new beginning for believers.
2. Talk about areas in your own lives that need renewal. Pray that God begins that process within each of you.
3. Reveal the second item you've collected for the Christmas delivery. Share how excited you are to be able to, as a family, help someone else feel fresh and clean, both inside and out this Christmas.
4. Attach the matching gift tag and place the wipes inside the bag.



ADVENT:

Week 3

FOCUS SCRIPTURE:

John 4:13

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst."



INSPIRATIONAL OBJECT:

WATER BOTTLE

FAMILY DISCUSSION

Give everyone a glass of ice water.

Let them know how happy you are to enjoy it together so that you'll never need a drink again.

After a few moments of confusion...discuss why this is NOT true!
(the regular intake of water is necessary for our survival;
it regulates our temperature and helps every cell and organ
function properly; it keeps us alert and able to be active)

1. Read this week's focus scripture while holding up your glass of water.
 - How is Jesus' water different than my glass of water?
(Jesus offers LIVING water--continuously provided through the Holy Spirit, not through rituals or remembering--a never-ending source of spiritual refreshment and encouragement.)
2. Present the third item, a quality, refillable water bottle. Talk about the value of offering this item to someone who is thirsty over a simple glass of water. Pray about who you might bless with it, and how it represents the constant source of love that was born as a tiny baby named Jesus many Christmases ago.
3. Place the water bottle in your family's bag after attaching the matching gift tag.



ADVENT:

Week 4

FOCUS SCRIPTURE:
Colossians 3:12

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.



INSPIRATIONAL OBJECT:
SOCKS

1 pair men's; 1 pair women's

FAMILY DISCUSSION

Have a silly sock hop!

Tell each person in your family to remove their socks and hand them over to you. Take the pile of socks into a different room and lay them on the floor in a jumbled pile.

On your "Go!" command, see who can hop into the other room, locate their own socks, put them on and hop back into their original spot. *(If you'd like to make it even more memorable, present them all with a new pair of Christmas socks to put on before you begin.)*

1. Have the sock hop “winner” read (or help read) this week’s focus scripture.
2. Discuss how God’s “chosen” people, those who commit their lives to serving Him, should appear “different” (*like seeing someone dressed for football practice vs dressed for a homecoming dance*) to those they encounter. How can we “show” the qualities of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience?
3. The item for this week, socks, seems very simple and even silly. But for many who aren’t able to afford the clothing they need, socks are extremely valuable for the comfort, warmth and health of their feet. Share that on Christmas, you’ll all get to “clothe yourselves with” and exercise qualities like compassion and kindness by gifting someone with a fresh, comfy pair of socks. AND, this person in return will be able to bless a friend with a new pair as well...shaping this up to truly be a “Very Merry Mercy Christmas” indeed.
4. Attach the matching gift tag and place both pairs of socks in the bag.



ADVENT:

Christmas

FOCUS SCRIPTURE:
2 Corinthians 9:15

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!



INSPIRATIONAL OBJECT:
GIFT CARD

local fast food restaurant

FAMILY DISCUSSION

Prior to gathering, gift wrap a SMALL, EMPTY box. Gather near your family Christmas tree and hold this "gift".

Why do we like to receive gifts?

What is the best gift you've ever received?

Talk about the blessing it is to open gifts on Christmas.
Explain that there is more to Christmas than OUR presents,
there is GOD'S presence.

Have the youngest member of the family open the gift. Share that even though this box appears empty, it's not! It represents the love God has for us. It's a gift that is hard to describe and easy to forget about—especially when we can't see it!

Share that because God chose to send Jesus to us, born at Christmastime, we never have to go a single day without experiencing the gift of His love, grace and peace.

1. Read our final Advent focus scripture together. How would YOU describe the gift God has given us in Jesus?
2. Even if we have a hard time understanding and explaining this gift, we can give it away. For free. We can even gift wrap it.
3. Rewrap the gift together, but this time include the inspirational object, a gift card for a meal at a local restaurant. Talk about how gifts God gives us (both the ones we can see and the ones we can't) inspire us to share His love with others.
4. Sign the final gift tag (with first names only and perhaps a personal note), attach it to the box and place it in the bag.

TIME TO DELIVER

Pack up the "Merry Mercy Christmas" bag with your family and go bless someone with the lessons you've learned over the past 4 weeks. Take time to remember and share all the feelings that were involved during this experience, perhaps over Christmas dinner with family.



ADVENT:

Wrap-Up

EMBRACING MERCY AS A FAMILY LIFESTYLE

If the “Merry Mercy Christmas” was your family’s first encounter with those experiencing homelessness, or if your experience with serving others has been limited up to this point, then **THANK YOU**.

Thanks for taking a risk, trying something new and working together as a family to make someone’s Christmas truly meaningful.

Our guess (and greatest hope!) is that it made your family’s Christmas truly meaningful as well.

Mercy is like that. When extended, it certainly blesses the receiver, but it never fails to bless the giver as well. By embracing mercy this Christmas, you’ve embraced Jesus. Well done.

But don’t stop there.

The world needs you. Be encouraged to seek more opportunities (especially as a family) to bless others no matter the season. Take more risks, make more friends and lead the next generation into a more merciful lifestyle that reflects Jesus’ love at every turn.

Micah 6:8 sums up this challenge well:

“Act justly and love mercy and walk humbly with your God.”

Many blessings as you walk into a lifestyle
of mercy with your family.

Merry Christmas!



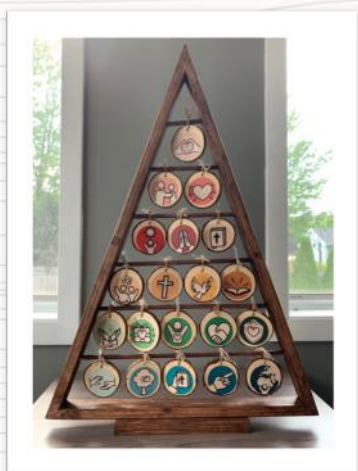


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