

The background of the cover features several gingerbread cookies decorated with white icing. Some are shaped like Christmas trees with white dots for ornaments, while others are shaped like houses with window patterns. A small pine branch is also visible on the right side. The overall aesthetic is warm and festive.

Holiday Survival Guide

by  FamilyLife®
A Cru Ministry



CONTENTS

We get it. The holidays can be a weird combination of “It’s the Most Wonderful Time of the Year!” and “You’re a Mean One, Mr. Grinch.”

But before your heart becomes two sizes too small? We’re stepping into your chaos with our Holiday Survival Guide.

Inside, you’ll find:

- **Pre-Holiday Self-Evaluation.** This guided journaling exercise helps you prayerfully think through your holidays, taking time to make sure you leave room for Him.
- **3 Scripture Art Printables** to frame or post on the fridge, to help you fix your thoughts on the King of Christmas.
- **A Prayer Guide for Weird Family Relationships.** ‘Nuff said.
- Practical, wise insights on **Handling Conflict With Extended Family (When You’re Tempted to Smack Somebody)**
- **22 Ideas to Bond With Your Son- or Daughter-in-Law ... Without Meddling**
- **Quick-Tips Holiday Survival Guide for Awkward Family Situations**
- **A Christmas Blessing** ... Sort of. (For all of us whose families may argue in the car en route to the Christmas performance, where your daughter will spill hot chocolate on her cream-colored dress—the one she lifted up on stage.)
- **And more.**

This season, may your mess—like a barn-turned-delivery-room—be made suddenly beautiful and pulsing with love.

PRE-HOLIDAY

SELF-EVALUATION

Use this page to help you prayerfully think through your priorities, hopes, and concerns for the holidays—as well as how God might have you respond to them.

As you prepare your home, first take time to prepare Him room.

Take time to pray about these priorities, asking God for His favor on them. Confess those you hold onto particularly tightly.

Ask God to help you approach the holidays with trust in His plan for them—and for open hands.

A. What are the five most important things about this holiday season for me?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

These priorities are precious. They can even tempt us to demand rather than just desire—and sacrifice others for the sake of our plan.



B. What are God's priorities for the holidays He is reminding me about?



C. What are 3-5 practical ways I could keep His priorities at the top of my list in all the chaos?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



D. When it comes to my family, what am I grateful for?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

E. What memories am I grateful for from past holidays?

F. What are three concerns I have about this holiday season?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



What are three dynamics I'd like to change about our holidays or the way our family interacts during them?

1.

2.

3.



Are there possible solutions God is bringing to mind for my concerns this holiday? What are they?



Jesus speaks of inviting the poor, crippled, lame, and blind to our banquets (Luke 14:13-23). What practical ideas do I have to extend our holidays to those who might be outcast or powerless?

Take time to acknowledge your concerns to God, and ask for His wisdom and discernment about how to create change without manipulating or controlling family members.

Be Strong &
COURAGEOUS.
Do Not fear or be
in dread of them,
for it is the LORD
your God who goes
with you. HE will not leave
you or forsake you.

DEUTERONOMY 31:6

Peace I leave with you;
My peace I give to you.
Not as the World gives
do I give to you.
Let Not your Hearts Be
Troubled, Neither let
them Be afraid.

JOHN 14:27

but they who
wait for The LORD
shall Renew their strength;

they shall mount up
with Wings like Eagles;

they shall Run and
not Be weary; they shall
walk and not Faint

ISAIAH 40:31

Not So Picture Perfect

CHRISTMAS BINGO

Mark off the minor disasters as they happen—and choose gratitude for something instead. When you cross off an entire line, console yourself with a small reward. #ChristmasIRL

 Child picks nose during photos	 Christmas plans canceled	 Family member wardrobe malfunction	 Burned or otherwise destroyed holiday food	 Stinky attitude at holiday event
 Entire family gets sick	 Discover weird family secret	 Weather leads to personal or property injury	 Have trouble coordinating schedule for family photos	 Ex-spouse buys your kid the same gift
 Give or receive unwanted gift	 Too late to go to the store	FREE SPACE: name your own mishap	 Holiday dinner turns to political conversation	 Regift a present
 Child says something embarrassing at family gathering	 Tangled or dead holiday lights	 Appliance or other needed machine malfunctions	 Dumb conflict with spouse	 Arguing on the way to a holiday event/church service
 The other parent asks to change the holiday schedule	 Never mailed Christmas cards	 Child says, "I already have this!" after opening gift	 Miscommunication about gift or event	 Child (or adult) meltdown

10 WAYS

to Pray for Weird

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

BY JANEL BREITENSTEIN

- 01 Pray that God will ground your interactions with your family members in peace. That He will help you trust in Him and build your identity on the Rock, rather than being blown around by your family's relational storms, their approval, their priorities, misunderstandings. **(See Matthew 7:24-27.)**
- 02 Pray that God will reveal your contribution to the weirdness/unhealthy dynamics. **(See Matthew 7:3-5.)**
- 03 Pray for the power and willingness to return a blessing for an insult. **(See 1 Peter 3:9.)**
- 04 Pray for the ability to love your family unconditionally, and to see the image of God in them.
- 05 Pray to show them Jesus.
- 06 Pray for discernment to know what to say, and when and how to say it. **(See Ephesians 4:29.)**
- 07 Pray for meaningful conversations, quality time, funny moments, and positive memories that help you appreciate each other.
- 08 Pray for understanding about their story, their needs, and how they see the world. Ask God to give you "eyes that see and ears that hear" to know how to love and even delight in them. **(See Matthew 25:34-40 & Proverbs 20:12.)**
- 09 Pray for the ability to handle conflict in a healthy way.
- 10 Pray for the areas of pain and anger they incite in you—and for insight into why this matters. Ask God to help you to surrender your longings to Him **(See James 4:1.)**



HOW YOU CAN

Handle Conflict with Extended Family

(When You're Tempted to Slap Someone)

BY JANEL BREITENSTEIN

There's a reason why so many of us suck in a deep breath before we press the doorbell for the big family get-together at Grandma's. Or hope somehow a sudden snowstorm (even if we happen to live in Florida) would keep us from that big road trip for the holidays. As it's been said, "Where two or more are gathered, there is conflict."

Maybe someone keeps scheduling family activities during naptime so that your kids melt down around dinner time—at which

point everyone wonders aloud why you can't get your parenting act together. Or maybe your spouse's ex is manipulative, or your brother gets passive-aggressive. Or perhaps your father-in-law keeps throwing out sexist comments that drive you insane.

Regardless of its origin, family conflict is inevitable for all of us. How can you deal? We've wrangled some concepts from Peacemaker Ministries that may result in peace on earth this Christmas after all.

THE “WHY”

Conflict happens when differing values collide. We want our kids to stay on schedule so they don't get cranky; the fam wants to go mini-golfing before the course gets crowded and starts bottlenecking at the windmill feature.

As James 4:1 puts it, “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?” Our goals are thwarted. Obviously those conflicts can be unspoken or overt, tangible or intangible, quiet or quite loud. They can involve clashes within ourselves, with others, with the world at large, and with God Himself.

Conflicts with extended family can be tricky because the way we go about handling them is heavily influenced by family culture. Whether we (or the other party) are used to glossing over, gossiping, lashing out, storming away, or having a family meeting, our personal experience has dictated “acceptable” responses to conflict.

We all fall on a spectrum, right?

- **ESCAPING:** There are the classic “stuffers,” who prefer a false peace. They're escaping conflict by outright denial, internalizing responses to conflict, perhaps denying or stonewalling, etc.

- **ATTACKING:** On the other end of the spectrum are “blowers,” who shoot for a false justice. They might attack with words, physical force, or the withdrawal of privileges.
- **PEACEMAKING:** In the middle of these extremes is the true peace and true justice of godly responses: Talking it out. Finding a mediator. Overlooking an offense. Jesus calls us “blessed” when we are peacemakers: Not peace-fakers. Not peace-breakers.

THE REPLAY

And it's not just because peacemaking is the moral thing to do. It's because when we enter conflict, we have the opportunity to honor God and replay His actions when He was in conflict with us. (Wait. How I handle someone eating all the sprinkle donuts before my kids get up is a chance to exemplify the gospel? Please explain.)



When sin broke our relationship with God, He went the distance to repair that relationship and make peace with us. When we were enemies, God demonstrated the quality and quantity of His love by making a way for peace (see Romans 5:8). And it's a job God has passed on to us.

Second Corinthians 5:18-20 puts it this way:

*Through Christ [God] reconciled us to himself and **gave us the ministry of reconciliation**; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. (emphasis added)

The way we show forgiveness, peace, and justice in our relationships is a show-and-tell about what God did for us through Jesus.

So your response to the sniping of your mother-in-law, or the passivity of your father-in-law, or your stepkids' comments about your subpar mothering? Those are opportunities to honor God and grow more like Him (Will I obey God and trust Him? Will I make my desires, my goals, my "rights," and my agenda serve His will above mine? What is His will?). Conflict also allows us to serve others, and even to grow as it gives us new ways of looking at life.

Does that mean conflict could actually improve our relationships?!

That's exactly what I'm saying.

WHAT NEXT?

When my kids had learned some basic conflict-management skills, I was eager to lay down my referee's jersey and whistle and let them finally work it out on their own: *Sit here. Don't get up till it's resolved. Do not pass "Go." Do not collect \$200.*

Yet even that tended to drag on, sounding like a couple of cats tied up together in a sack. But you know what helped them cut to the chase far quicker?

Asking them to start with the log in their own eye. This comes from Matthew 7:5: "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

Healthy conflict resolution starts with taking 100% responsibility for our contribution—even if we think our contribution is only 5% of the problem.

Here's a tip I heard from author Gary Thomas: We always underestimate the impact our sin has on other people.

Often, our desires have swollen not just from something we want, but into something we must have. So we're willing to pass judgment and mete out punishment in order to achieve that desire



(even in stealthy forms like the silent treatment or emotional withdrawal). We're not trusting God to meet those desires. They have become demands.

As you're able, consider how to embrace humility and confess to the other person (you might be surprised how this gets the ball rolling). Admit specifically what you did, as well as admitting the attitude that was in your heart. And don't forget to acknowledge the hurt you've caused.

THE PAUSE PROCESS

So you've decided you'll intentionally honor God and trust Him with this conflict. You've spent time searching your heart and repenting from your own sin. How can you move to a place where it's not "us against each other" but "us against the problem"? How can this become "Let's work on the issue of my kids being spoiled rotten for a week and a half" rather than "parents vs. grandparents"?

Peacemakers outlines a five-step process to keep in mind:

Prepare

Seek counsel. Pray. Continue to examine your own heart and reactions.

Affirm Relationships

Show value for the relationship and hope for the future. Help them feel secure to address the problem and not worry about protecting themselves.

Understand and Acknowledge Interests

People's positions are motivated by their spoken and unspoken interests: Concerns. Desires. Needs. Limitations. Fears. Values.

It might help to dig below the presenting issue—whose house to go to over the holidays, or where your kids can play without messing up Grandma's stuff, or the snarky way so-and-so keeps addressing you. Look beneath that: What's the desire of each person, and why is it important to them (even if they're expressing those in illegitimate, unjust, or downright rude ways)?

For example, maybe the side of the family you're not visiting for Thanksgiving is afraid the other side is the favorite, or that things will feel incomplete without you or that you're saying something about your lack of value for the relationship.

Maybe Grandma feels like the kids aren't respecting her space and struggles to enjoy the kids because her stuff isn't safe. Maybe she worries whether they're learning obedience and respect of authority and property.

Search for Creative Solutions

There are almost always more than two options. How can you think creatively about a solution to address both of your interests?



Evaluate Options

Which of these speak to both of our interests? Is there a way I need to willingly lay down one of my interests?

“HOW CAN I KNOW IF I’VE REALLY FORGIVEN THEM? I’M STILL HACKED OFF WHEN I THINK ABOUT IT.”

Forgiveness is one of the most challenging tasks we face as human beings. It’s not a natural response, but a supernatural one.

Forgiveness is a choice. It’s a decision modeled after God’s forgiveness of us: a decision not to hold the offense against the offender (if you need a pep talk, check out Matthew 18:21-35). It releases the person from their sin against us, desiring good and blessing for them. And since forgiveness is a choice we make, it doesn’t even depend on the other person. We can forgive whether the person is sorry or not.

But here’s what forgiveness isn’t. It’s not forgetting or excusing, releasing someone from worldly consequences of sin. (This is different from revenge. It’s accountability for their choices. A forgiven criminal should still go to jail. An embezzler should not be given a position as an accountant.) Forgiveness isn’t a feeling, although feeling might be present.

It’s promising the following:

- I will not keep dwelling negatively on this.
- I will not seek to hurt my offender as a result of this; I will seek to bless him or her, even if that means establishing accountability and finding justice.
- I will not gossip about this, speaking to others who are not part of the solution.
- I will continue to pursue a relationship with the offender (unless repentance has not been demonstrated and love dictates that I set boundaries to protect both of us).

In all of this, you might even come to a renewed appreciation of the lengths God has gone to forgive us, and play out the gospel in your own life and for those you love.

(Aren’t you glad you’ll be home for Christmas?)



Quick Tips

Holiday Survival Guide to Awkward FAMILY SITUATIONS

BY JANEL BREITENSTEIN

Holiday gatherings with family can be fraught with frustration, hurt, and old habits—right alongside the pumpkin pie. Here, a few ideas to help you cook up a happier, freer Thanksgiving and beyond.

1. Understand most of us arrive at family gatherings hungry—

for more than green bean casserole. Before you arrive, do a self-check: *Where am I right now?* (Tired. Stressed. Giddy with expectation. Hopeful. Guarded. Sensitive.) *What do I want/hope for?*

This helps you be aware of your expectations, rather than letting them subtly manipulate others. It’s okay to arrive with desires. It’s when those desires become demands—to which we feel entitled—that we get into trouble.

2. You’re not the only one arriving with expectations.

So many of the family members you’ll encounter may have soul-holes of their own they crave to have filled: for significance. Approval. Affection. Comfort. Relaxation. Power. Control. Security.

As a general rule, “don’t feed the idols”: That is, don’t enable destructive patterns. You can be kind without perpetuating dysfunctional behavior patterns (like manipulation).

3. If you have trouble setting boundaries, a few quick thoughts:

- **Sometimes when saying “yes” to someone, we’re saying “no” to someone else**, like our marriage, our children, our rest and ability to be with family wholeheartedly. Say no so that you can say yes to the things that matter most.
- **Care more about what is best for someone** than just what they want. If you’re a stepparent, talk with your spouse about the big picture of parenting your stepchildren and how to connect with them while still establishing healthy boundaries.

- Love enough to have the courage to diligently, studiously **seek out and do what this person needs in the long-term—not just keep the peace.** Your boundaries can protect future casualties of an overpowering personality.
- **Boundaries esteem the image of God** in you and the people you love.
- **Boundaries move you away from feeling out of control—so you can love deeper.** Feeling forced breeds resentment and a bitter helplessness. Rather than feeling like you have no choice, that it's just your role to follow, that you just need to sacrifice and obey, you can choose whether to say yes or no.

4. Go in proactive rather than reactive.

Arrive with a purpose: to love well and to help people see what Jesus looks like.



Rather than focus on what you wish to get, pray about your time together, and for each person there.

Ask God to give you eyes that see; ears that hear. Ask, “Lord, what do you want to do here? How can I love people well and show them You?”

Go in as a giver rather than a taker.

5. Realize the power of old patterns.

Family has a remarkable capacity to suck us back into old, often unhealthy patterns of relating and responding to people. Walk in the door and boom—you’re 16 again. Walk in the door of an ex-spouse, and one of you is suddenly the defensive, wounded version of themselves.

Try to first satisfy your heart in God so that you don’t seek for family to feed old appetites (approval, affirmation, security.) Remind yourself of the truth, particularly in the areas where you’re tempted to find identity: what you have, what you do, or what others say about you.

With those old patterns, you might pray Psalm 25:15: “My eyes are ever toward the LORD, for He will pluck my feet out of the net.” Or Psalm 90:14 puts it, “Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.”



Remind yourself of common “triggers” for your dysfunctional behavior, and be ready for them.

You might even prepare what you’ll say or do in place of your old pattern.

6. For those of you entering unhealthy situations, meditate on verses like Ephesians 6:10-20 (putting on the armor of God) and 2 Peter 1:3-4. Pray:

- for God’s power to return a blessing in the face of every insult (1 Peter 3:9).
- to speak truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).
- to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry (James 1:19).
- to only use words that build up, give grace, and are right for the occasion (Ephesians 4:29).

7. Build mental breaks into your schedule.

If you’re an introvert overwhelmed by crowds, consider taking a walk with one or two people. If a certain dynamic drives you crazy, take a quick drive to the store, get something out of the car (a deep breath and your peace of mind!), or duck into a different room for a few minutes to speak truth to yourself.

8. Remember that our extended families often simply hold different values than we do.

Pick your battles (you might even do it in advance). Perhaps you’ll decide, *One day of video games will not kill my kids, but I’m going to gently ask my mom ahead of time not to bring up my daughter’s weight.*

When you feel the need to confront, a

general rule is to keep it as private as possible for as long as possible—and use your words to give grace rather than shame to gain control or revenge. (Consider Ephesians 4:29 as a guide.)

9. Have preemptive conversations with kids about their behavior and the differing standards of relatives.

Troubleshoot with them about how to respond and behave.

[This article can give you some ideas to steer everyone toward discernment rather than being judgmental.](#)

10. Examine your own expectations.

Are expectations for this relationship, as author Peter Scazzero writes,*

- Conscious?
- Realistic?
- Spoken?
- Agreed upon?

If not, there's a chance you're expecting someone to possess relational ESP: *Please read my mind.* You may need to extend some grace over what you want that isn't happening.

Honestly, sometimes it may mean rewriting your expectations for the relationship

based on what this person is able to give, rather than just what you want. Otherwise, your expectations can steal joy; your gratitude for what is.

11. Get rest.

Late-night games and conversations can be one of the best parts of your time together. But later on in the week, they can also contribute to you offering the stressed version of yourself.

(You're already living out of a bag, had that "fun" roadtrip here, don't have time alone, and are washing 47 people's dishes during the day, right?)

Take breaks to refuel so when conflict arises, you've got margin to respond in a way that heals rather than destroys.



20 Ideas

for Kids Waiting on

THANKSGIVING DINNER

BY JANEL BREITENSTEIN

Wondering how to keep them occupied while you're whipping up Aunt Marge's sweet potato casserole? Set up a small table in an adjacent room, grab a few minimal-mess supplies, and try out a few of these timely strategies.

1. Craft "I'm thankful for you!" cards. Have an example ready.
2. Collect the most colorful leaves they can find outside, wipe their feet, then string them into a garland with a pre-tied needle and thread.
3. Act as an assistant to elderly relatives.
4. Toss a football.
5. Have children interview family members, then create a paper chain of all the things your family is thankful for.
6. Create placemats or place cards for the feast.
7. Color a "Happy Thanksgiving" banner for display, allowing every family member to write what they're thankful for this year.
8. Act as honorary sous-chefs for a pre-written list of activities: arranging crudités, stirring gravy, spreading whipped cream, loading mashed potatoes into a bowl.
9. Complete easy Thanksgiving activity books. Sweeten the deal with a small reward for completed activity books.
10. Get creative at a small, plastic-covered cookie-decorating table (think icing with decorating tips or in small bowls, with a few sprinkles). Ask a kind teenager or young adult to supervise.



11. Put together their own Thanksgiving skit or play.
12. Construct, with the help of a few examples and sample patterns, Pilgrim/Native American hats from construction paper.
13. Watch a Thanksgiving Day parade, or *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving*.
14. Engage in a friendly tournament of board games.
15. Indulge from a table of kid-friendly nibbles.
16. Serve as waiters: folding napkins, wiping down surfaces, putting together a center piece, setting the table, taking drink orders.
17. Enjoy low-mess activities, like watercolor or playdough.
18. Read Thanksgiving books borrowed from the library or your own collection.
19. Author and illustrate books from stapled sheets of paper on the Thanksgiving story.
20. Look up Bible verses from a written list of references on gratitude, choosing their favorite to read at the meal.



22 Ideas

to Bond with Your

Son- or Daughter-in-Law

(Without Meddling)

BY JANEL BREITENSTEIN

- 1. Send a handwritten note** when you know they're going through something challenging—or when they've had a big win (in a career, with one of the kids, celebrating something meaningful).
- 2. Avoid pitting your family against theirs.** Celebrate their family relationships because you care about what's meaningful to them.
- 3. Invite him or her to make a family recipe with you.** If there's a story behind the recipe, share it.
- 4. Initiate time for just the two of you—** coffee, breakfast, walking through a community festival or art gallery, grabbing groceries.
- 5. When you ask questions about his or her life,** create an environment that conveys, *I fully accept you, even though you're different from me.* (Remember Romans 15:7: "welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you." When you make them feel like they don't have to perform in order to be accepted by you, you display the gospel.)

6. **Mother-in-law, treat your daughter-in-law to a mani-pedi for just the two of you**
Ask good questions.
7. **Keep track of important dates** (birthdays, anniversaries, first day of a new job) and send a card.
8. **Frequently—yet without flattery—verbalize what he or she is doing right.**
Appreciate their strengths and what they bring to the family.
9. **Invite him or her into a hobby you enjoy.** Ask questions about his or her own hobbies.
10. **Offer to watch the grandkids for a date night** (perhaps while you're visiting). It's a chance to communicate, *I recognize my son or daughter is yours. I'm cheering on your marriage, apart from how it affects me.*
11. **If you give a gift,** never refer to it later to remind them of your kindness or to influence them. Make sure they always know any gift is given with no strings attached.
12. **Occasionally remind them,** "We're so glad you're in this family."
13. **Check with your daughter or son about a gift you could give** that your son- or daughter-in-law would truly enjoy, something that says, *I see you. I care about giving you something meaningful.*
14. **Strive to treat your in-law with the same status and level of affection as you treat your son or daughter.** Include her in family texts; throw an arm around him briefly when he walks in the door.
15. **If your in-law has time, tackle a project together:** a garden, woodworking, rebuilding a car, completing a puzzle, sewing, landscaping. If it's possible, make it a project in their area of interest. If it doesn't work, don't let it bother you.
16. **Try something new together** (this works great for the in-law of the same gender): a sport, a class, a Bible study. If they don't have time, don't hold it over their heads.
17. **Invite your in-law** to a service project you're a part of.



- 18.** **In an emotionally warm moment,** let your in-laws know he or she is welcome to approach you if there are ways you could make it easier for them to be in this extended family, or if something isn't going right. If they do so, control your reactions and affirm them. Hear the heart of what they're saying, and do what you can to respond wholeheartedly.
- 19.** **Play a board game or cards together.**
- 20.** **Keep track of his or her (changing) favorites,** and make use of them occasionally: A favorite beverage from Starbucks, a favorite snack to stock, a favorite dish, a favorite band, hobby, or brand of clothing.
- 21.** **Ask, "How can I help?"** If he or she doesn't take you up on your offer, be willing to let it go without protest.
- 22.** **When your in-law is in town,** create time in your schedule for conversation and quality time. Choose to be okay if they don't respond as you planned to whatever you initiate.

A Christmas Blessing

(SORT OF)

JANEL BREITENSTEIN

May all your kids come home, and may they get along with each other. Or at least fake it.

May you have a white Christmas to the point that you feel Christmas-y and can say no to an activity you didn't really want to go to, but don't lose electricity and heat. May everyone wipe their boots.

May your relatives all be healthy, well-behaved, attractive, and making wise choices.

May those who receive your gifts love and exclaim over every one. May those gifts all arrive on time, with no return policy necessary. May the person hardest to buy for truly appreciate your efforts.

May your children pause over each gift and appreciate it, unconsumed by greed. May they somehow avoid a sugar high. May they entertain themselves gloriously and without screens, and after weeks of no cabin fever, may they be delighted to return to school.

May the pastor's sermon be entertaining and just the right length. May the music be the right volume, the singers on key.

May your schedule dovetail beautifully with your extended family and any stepchildren.

May you have just enough time alone, and just enough time with the people you love.

May no one talk too much, and may everyone listen and respond with warm graciousness.

May your mother-in-law be particularly kind and gracious. May your teenager throw his or her arms around your neck and thank you for all you continually invest in his or her life. May your toddler take a nap despite the family noise, and sleep through the night.

May your turkey or ham be unburned and still done in the middle. May your mashed potatoes be perfectly creamy. May your family say "thank you" after the meal, and stick around to chat about something other than partisan politics.

May your spouse say nothing tacky or embarrassing, and may you have time to cuddle without one of you getting too hot. May he or she read your mind about something important which you have yet to know how to ask for.

May you not have a flat tire in an ice storm. May no one argue in the car.

May you have an opportunity to serve that makes you feel wonderful inside and doesn't interfere with your own holiday happiness.

May your child's Christmas program be just long enough that you can get great pictures without his finger in his nose or her pulling up her dress, but short enough to be enjoyable. May everyone you invited show up on time.

May that string of Christmas lights suddenly turn on and remain untangled.

May your soul glow and that one thing you've been waiting for come to pass.

May you snag a nap on Christmas Day, and may everyone help clean up the kitchen. May there be enough hot water for all of your guests. May your wi-fi remain robust and seamless.

but if this doesn't happen:

May you welcome the gifts of patience, perspective, and enduring love. May you and those you love receive the gifts and circumstances God deems best.

May you laugh at all the foibles and mishaps that come from living on this messy planet God chose to inhabit anyway.

May you be eclipsed by peace you can't understand as you trust in the baby who would be hunted by a king, the child forced into sudden exile with his parents. May God's perfect timing reverberate through your life and culminate in heaven.

May you sense affection and intense dedication to those around you, despite their weakness and your own.

May a sense of soul-anchoring joy swallow you even as happiness drifts away.

May simplicity and imperfection galvanize you in unwavering strength and beauty.

May your service to others, even as it demands large chunks of your heart and body and time and resources, be a sweet aroma to God. (In this season, we remember He understands.)

May your mess—like a barn-turned-delivery-room—be made suddenly beautiful and pulsing with overwhelming love.

May you wisely seek Him, even over long distances and rough terrain.

May God-with-us burrow into your loneliness.

May God show Himself in the unexpected and lowly.

May carrying others' grief allow you to walk a little closer to the One who bore our sorrows (Isaiah 53:4).

May a soul-level hope and trust surpass your circumstances. And may it transport you into a sense of God's presence and love, lasting until your next imperfect December 25.