

FORTNER

Simply Christmas



Simply Christmas



A BUSY MOM'S
GUIDE TO
RECLAIMING
THE PEACE
OF THE
HOLIDAYS



Ink &
Willow

SNEAK
PEEK

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TAMA FORTNER

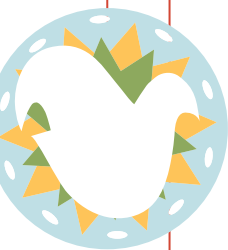
Simply Christmas

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THE PEACE OF THE HOLIDAYS



TAMA FORTNER





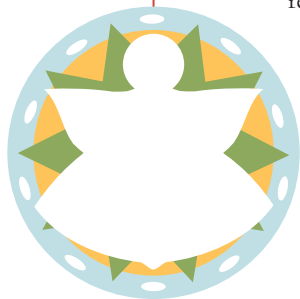
Dear Mama,

I'VE BEEN THERE. I know what you're up against. The pressure to create the perfect Christmas celebration for those we love. To bake the perfect cookies, host the perfect party, find the perfect gifts. And then there are trees to decorate, stockings to hang, parties to plan, cards to create, and, and, and . . .

We rush and scurry from one event and obligation to the next, until all-too-soon, it's December 26, and we're staring at a pile of empty boxes and crumpled wrapping paper, wondering how we missed the joy.

It doesn't have to be that way.

This book isn't going to give you any quick-fix, one-size-fits-all answers. Nor do I have the ultimate checklist that will solve all your problems in a blinding whirlwind of organization. What I do have are some thoughts about that long-ago first Christmas, along with a few practical tips for simplifying the season and staying mindful of the true reasons we celebrate it.



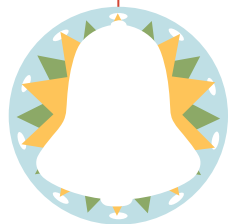


To use this book, simply read one devotion each day. These thirty-one devotions are not dated, so you're welcome to begin reading on December 1, December 15, the day after Thanksgiving, or the middle of July—without even a smidgen of guilt or shame. Pray the prayer, meditate on the “Remember” thought and try out the “Reclaiming Christmas” tip—if you want to. No pressure. Use the tips that work for you, and simply skip the rest. Seriously. Just skip ’em. And if you miss a day, don't worry. After all, Christ isn't just for Christmas, and He's worth celebrating every day of the year.

Simply Christmas is your invitation to slow down and savor this time with the Savior. And it's your permission to kick the pressures of perfection to the curb.

This year, let's choose to pause and to ponder as Mary did, to get lost in the wonder of Immanuel, of God with us. This year, let it be simply Christmas.

—*Tama*



DAY

1



The Word gave life to everything
that was created, and his life
brought light to everyone.

JOHN 1:4, NLT

The Christmas season is filled with lights—on the trees, on our homes, and in the eyes of little ones glittering with excitement. Even the Christmas story itself is filled with light. The heaven-bright angels that lit up the shepherds' dark skies, the shining star that the wise men followed, and most radiant of all, the light of God's own Son born into the world and so gently laid in that Bethlehem manger.

That light still shines.

But do we see it? Or have we allowed it to be dimmed by the endless onslaught of tasks and to-dos?

Maybe the questions you're asking right now are, *How do I see that light? How can I get it to shine in my life and chase away the darkness?* Because you—like me, like each and every one of us courageous enough, or perhaps desperate enough, to admit it—need that light. How do we find it?

In a world where so few answers are simple, this one is: *the Word*. It is the good news Jesus came to give. It is the light to guide our path and chase away the darkness.



***Mighty God, Wonderful Counselor, guide me—
this day and every day—by the light
of Your holy Word. Amen.***



Remember

Open up the Light
of Christmas and
let it shine.

RECLAIMING CHRISTMAS



Take a moment to ponder what you really want out of this Christmas season. What is most important to you? What feelings and experiences do you want to be sure are included, both for yourself and your family? And what would you rather live without? Be honest—no one else has to see this list! Let these answers help guide your yeses and nos as you seek His Light in the coming days of celebration and chaos.

DAY

2



***Highly
Favored***

The angel went to her and said,
“Greetings, you who are highly
favored! The Lord is with you.”

LUKE 1:28

To the world, Mary was just a poor girl from a poor village. Young, insignificant, and unimportant. So when the angel appeared and declared her to be “highly favored,” I suspect Mary didn’t feel that way at all. In fact, the very next verse tells us that she was “startled” (NCV), “confused” (NLT), and even “greatly troubled” (NIV) by the angel’s greeting.

We don’t have to dig too deep to understand why, do we? Because though many things have changed between Mary’s time and ours, one thing has not—our simultaneous longing and reluctance to feel *highly favored*. With all its subtle and not-so-subtle competitions and comparisons, Christmas sometimes seems to highlight all our self-perceived shortcomings. It’s so easy to look around at others and feel insignificant, unimportant.

Don’t listen to the doubts. We are—you are, I am—highly favored.

If those words startle, confuse, or trouble, let the angel’s answer to Mary’s fears be the answer to our own: “Don’t be afraid . . . God has shown you his grace” (Luke 1:30, NCV). The “free, spontaneous, absolute favor and loving-kindness” (AMPC) of God’s grace is *ours*. Not because of what we do or don’t do, but simply because of who we are: *His*. We don’t need an angel to tell us that. God Himself has told us. The message is there in the manger. We—you and I—are highly favored because the Lord has chosen to be with us.



***Lord of lords, teach my heart to believe that
I am highly favored by You. Amen.***



Remember

Grace is the
message of
the manger.

RECLAIMING CHRISTMAS



A children's librarian once told our group of young moms gathered in her story hour—with toddlers in our laps, around our necks, and on our backs—that slice-and-bake cookies don't count. And I believed her. For *years*. Why? Because I was trying to live up to everyone else's expectations of who I should be. Because I wanted to be highly favored. I now know the truth: *slice-and-bake cookies count*. So do break-aparts, no-bakes, and made from scratch, roll out, and frost cookies. It's not about the cookies. It's about time spent together.

**Bonus Tip:* Sprinkle those slices of sugar cookie dough with cinnamon and sugar for super-easy, super-yummy snickerdoodles.

DAY

3



“I am the Lord’s servant.”

LUKE 1:38

Can I be honest? *Servant* is not my favorite word. That's because there are days when I feel it describes a bit too much of my life, particularly around the holidays. And to be brutally honest, there are times when I feel completely "served out." Can you relate?

Perhaps that's why I stumble over this one line of Mary's reply: "I am the Lord's servant." Yes, I know she's talking to an angel. But that word, *servant*, still gives me pause.

Yet Mary offered it without hesitation. As a woman of that time (and a poor woman, at that), she surely knew what it was to serve. If something needed doing, it was likely Mary's hands that would be found doing it. Or a mother's, sister's, or cousin's.

Then I remember that her answer wasn't really for the angel; it was for the Lord. The One who sent His Son to Mary's womb, to the manger in Bethlehem, to the Garden of Gethsemane. And that Son, the Servant of servants, came to seek, save, and serve us.

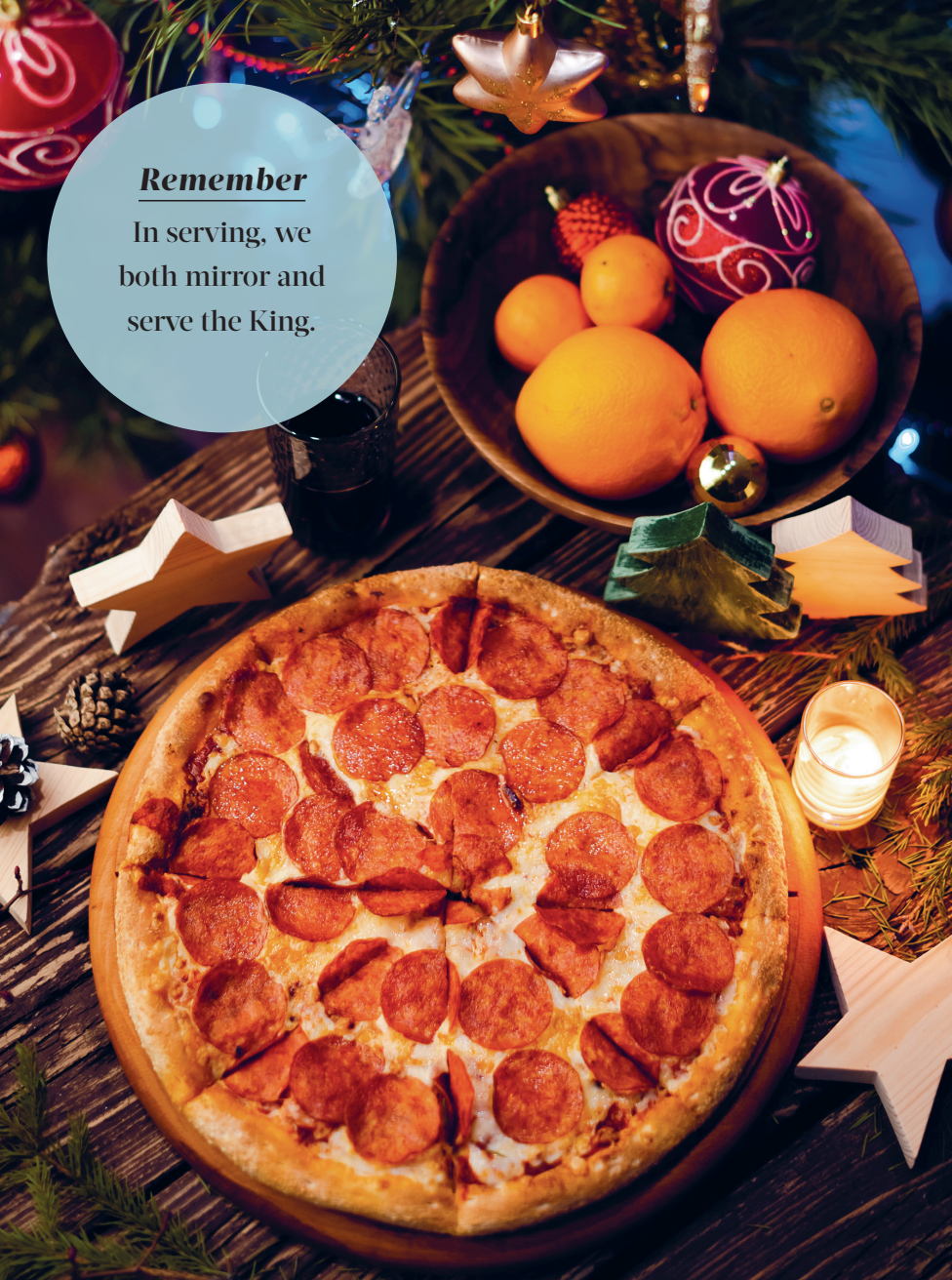
Could it be that *servant* is something far less Cinderella and something far more lovely? For in serving those made in His image, we both mirror and serve the King. So when the next chore on that endless list of must-be-dones beckons, remember the words of the One who was born to serve: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these . . . you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).



*O Holy Lord, when I am tired and frustrated
and feeling "served out," remind me of all that
Jesus did to serve and to save me. Amen.*

Remember

In serving, we
both mirror and
serve the King.



RECLAIMING CHRISTMAS



When the Christmas chaos starts to get the best of you, take a night off from the kitchen and the entertaining of littles and bigs. Corral everyone into the TV room, set up your favorite Christmas movie, and serve up a pizza picnic on the floor. Skip the plates and enjoy the slices right out of the box. Finish off the night with popcorn and snuggles. No, it isn't an escape to a tropical isle, but there's no cooking, and cleanup is a breeze!



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