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The Christmas Project Planner

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Contents **



Elf or Grinch: You Get to Choose	6
Three Steps to Kick Off Your Christmas Right	.0
Why Planning Is Awesome PROJECT 1: Create Your Christmas Plan	4
How to Make a Magic Christmas Box That Will Be Better Than Any Elf PROJECT 2: Create Your Christmas Prep Space	20
Strike a Pose PROJECT 3: Pick Your Christmas Card Picture	22
Support Your Local Post Office! PROJECT 4: Prep Your Christmas Cards	26
Even Santa Has a Strategy PROJECT 5: Schedule Your Time for the Holidays	0
Who's Been Naughty or Nice? PROJECT 6: Get Your Gift List Together	8
Can I Ask Santa to Pay Off My Visa Card? PROJECT 7: Creating a Christmas Budget. 4	4
I Promise, You're Not Behind! PROJECT 8: Help Someone Special Get into the Holiday Spirit	0
Do I Love You Enough to Actually Go to the Post Office? PROJECT 9: Gifts for Out-of-Town Friends and Family	52

Get Santa's Workshop Ready PROJECT 10: Gather Your Elf Supplies
Forget the Christmas List—What's the Christmas Dinner List? PROJECT 11: Get Your Recipes Together. 62
Making Do at Christmas PROJECT 12: Too Much Christmas at the End of the Money
Get Your HGTV On PROJECT 13: Décor Day (with a special appearance by KariAnne Wood)
The Chew Has Nothing on You PROJECT 14: Prep Your Kitchen. 80
On the Twelfth Day of Christmas, My True Love Brought to Me 12 Bottles of Hand Sanitizer PROJECT 15: Get Those Stockings Ready
Refresh Yourself PROJECT 16: Get Some You Time
When Santa Won't Deliver PROJECT 17: Ho! Ho! To the Post Office You Go!
Shopping in Yoga Pants PROJECT 18: Get Online. 96
Take Off Your Apron and Grab Your Pencil PROJECT 19: Spend Some Time in the Kitchen
Tablecloths, Napkins, and Foof, Oh My PROJECT 20: Get Your Table Stuff All Ready
Your Personalized Special Project PROJECT 21: Do That One Extra-Special Thing

ELF OR GRINCH: YOU GET TO CHOOSE



think there are two kinds of Christmas extremists.

First, there's your friend who has a selection of ugly Christmas sweaters to choose from for every party. She's the one, first in line, waiting outside of Target on December 26 to stock

up on all things Christmas themed. She has formal, semiformal, and

casual Christmas dishes. All of her neighbors have come together and submitted footage of the outside of her house for "The Best Christmas Display Ever" on TLC. I am not that woman.

Second, there's your other friend who wants to huddle in the corner where the Christmas tree should have been, rocking back and forth and waiting for the sweet release of January 1 to finally come. I have been that woman.

I pray you fall somewhere in between.

Whether you are filled with magical Christmas wonder or extreme Christmas dread, one thing is for certain: Ready or not, Christmas

is going to happen. And if you're reading this book, my guess is that the thought that Christmas is going to happen fills you with a mixture of delight and dread.

I doubt Christmas is the problem. It's the expectations around Christmas that are killing you slowly.

The shopping, hosting, wrapping, shipping, cooking, designing, decorating, mailing,

entertaining, and baking may all be things you enjoy. But when there's a time limit, a money limit, and, let's be honest, an energy limit, the things you love can start to turn into things you dread.

That's why I'm here to help.

You see, I've been there. I was the woman waiting in line at Target, spending twice my annual income to buy stocking stuffers (that my kids were going to spend exactly 33 seconds unpacking).

I was the woman who stayed up every night until midnight for a week to bake Magical Christmas Cookie Bars for a cookie exchange I never wanted to be a part of. (One woman actually showed up with Hydrox cookies she wanted to exchange for my magical cookies. I may have lost my Christmas joy ever so momentarily...)

I was the woman who had a full-on mental break because I ran out of clear tape on Christmas Eve.

And I didn't want to be that woman anymore. In fact, I really didn't like her much.

So I went through a few years of trying to figure out exactly what I wanted my Christmas (and my family's Christmas) to look like.

I wanted to keep the annual viewing of the neighborhood lights (after driving through Starbucks for a Christmas latte) but ditch the crumbly cookie exchange.

I wanted to read the Christmas story but not feel obligated to tell our story in a Christmas letter every single year.

I wanted to have some time just with my husband to celebrate the holiday instead of making him wait until December 31 to reconnect with his wife.

And I want you to have the kind of Christmas you love.

I want you to have the kind of Christmas where you celebrate the things that are truly important to you: faith, family, friends. (And, for me, throw in a little fun and food, and you've got yourself a truly magical holiday.)

I want you to put aside the expectations of what you "should do" and truly dig into what you want to do this Christmas season.

And let's be clear: This isn't about one day. I don't want you to just get to the day and then

Whether you are filled with magical wonder or dread, one thing is for certain: Ready or not, Christmas is going to happen.



collapse in an utter heap of exhaustion. I want you to have joy, peace, and a plan for the whole holiday season.

I think having an organized Christmas is important. But what I really want for you is to have a Christmas that is clutter-free. Free of emotional, physical, and relational clutter.

So as we together work our way through the 21 projects in this book, I will be giving you tips to keep down the clutter in your Christmas.

I want you to have the kind of Christmas where you celebrate the things that are truly important to you: faith, family, friends.

When I asked my friends what a clutter-free Christmas would look like, here is one of my favorite responses. Fellow author Jill Davis was forced to look at every area of her holiday celebration after her life took a decidedly different direction:

When I got divorced eight years ago and had to make huge changes in life with my four children, I asked them what was most important to them. We chose two traditions—the Advent calendar and sugar cookies, plus their favorite gifts of pajamas and a book on Christmas Eve. So much easier than all the shopping, baking, cleaning, and decorating I used to do. Instead of having a beautifully decorated home, fabulous things to eat, lots of Christmas presents, and a frantic mom, they now have an easygoing, low-key, lightly decorated Christmas with a very present mom. Life is better. Christmas is easier. We are all happier.

A clutter-free Christmas says we are doing only those things that are truly important. We are not getting weighed down by unnecessary expenditures, obligations, or craziness.

A BRIEF WORD ABOUT THE PROJECTS

You may be picking this book up on October 5. Good for you. You have a head start on all the projects.

Or maybe your best friend just pressed this book into your hand on December 9. Okay. Take a deep breath. You can double up on some of the projects and then store this book with your fall decorations so you're ahead of the game for next year.

Whenever you begin (and if you have a choice, I would aim to start around the beginning or middle of November), I promise you'll make it through.

If you're getting a late start, it's even more important to do only the things that truly need to be done. In other words, skip the Christmas letter but save the Christmas fudge. (It's important to have our priorities straight.) There are no gold stars for people who complete all 21 projects. The best reward? Creating the Christmas you and your family actually want.

And no matter when you start, let me be 100 percent absolutely crystal clear: You have my full permission (and blessing) to skip some of the projects.

Please hear me on this.

I do not do all the projects every year—and I literally wrote the book.

One of the most freeing things you can do is go through this planner and figure out all the projects you are *not* going to do.

You'll even find a few catch-up days to do the things that need to get done.

Don't worry. You've got this.



WHY PLANNING IS AWESOME



It is my deepest hope that no one feels like a failure around Christmastime. I've felt that way myself too many times to count, and for you and for me that stops now.

I think of all those times I started dreaming about Christmas in late October or early November and thought everything was possible. I was going to throw the parties, make the meals, send the cards, arrange the cookie exchanges, and generally just

crush Christmas.

But my vague notions of what Christmas should look like rarely translated into the Festival of Awesomeness I'd imagined. Because, sadly, the world doesn't take a break for Christmas. Time to prep and plan? Nobody is getting any time off to plan the perfect Christmas.

So what's a mere mortal to do? Just try your best to have a good Christmas and figure it out as you go?

That usually doesn't work. Instead of engaging in crisis control the entire Christmas season, you can actually go in with a plan—not so much about what you want to do but what you don't need to worry about.

Start planning now, and you will experience a more sacred and sane holiday this year. Promise!

My vague notions of what Christmas should look like rarely translated into the Festival of Awesomeness I'd imagined.

Create Your Christmas Plan

Here's what you will need:

- two or three index cards
- a marker
- My Holiday Mission Statement form (see page 19)

I know, I know. You want to dive in and start checking things off your list because it's going to be a busy few weeks. I get it. But first I want you to spend ten minutes determining this: What do you want your Christmas to look like this year?

Being intentional about how we spend our time and our physical and emotional energy is the key to a more sane and sacred celebration.

If we can go into the holidays being intentional about everything—how we spend our time and our physical and emotional energy—it truly will be the key to a more sane and sacred celebration.

On the Holiday Mission Statement, I want you to spend some time thinking about what you want your season of celebration to look like. Here are some words that might spark some thoughts:

time	growth	reflect	restore
energy	tradition	honor	food
priorities	creating	provide	peace
spiritual	patience	creativity	joy
friends	gift giving	love	self-control
family	commitment	cherish	serve
travel	community	activities	together
focus	charity	include	connect
celebrate	church	God	care

Brainstorm about what is important to you. Some years, I'm looking for joy. I want to experience the deep, abiding joy that only comes from God and being with His people.

Several years ago, it was different: I was all about peace. Between chaos in my ministry, chaos in our home lives, chaos in my husband's job, and a triple shot of chaos with my mom's health, I needed the peace that passes understanding. Here is what my mission statement looked like for that year:

I will share God's peace with my family, my friends, and people I meet, and I will be done with my prep by December 20 so that I can experience peace during our celebration. I will read the Christmas story each morning in December.



And yes, God delivered that—even while at the mall. In December.

How did He deliver that?

After some prayer, I felt God had given us permission to take several things off our list. I bought favorite cookies instead of making them. No cards went out that year (but I sure enjoyed the ones I received). We didn't go to a lot of events, and we didn't have peo-

ple over for dinner, but we went out with some dear friends who could let us just be us amid all the chaos.

Also, all the adults agreed that year to not exchange gifts. I did get something for my parents, but my brother and sister-in-law and Roger and I agreed that this was a year to reduce the time, energy, and money it took to buy for one another.

The next year, here is what I wanted my Christmas to look like:

During this Christmas season, I want to throw off old traditions that are just habits and do those things that:

- bring me closer to God
- bring us together as a family
- equip us to serve

With a healthy mom (thank God!) and a restoring of a little bit of normalcy to our lives, we doubled down on creating a Christmas we would all want. Roger was able to serve at church, and I was able to concentrate on having family and friends to our home to connect with and love on.

Once you know what is important to you, you can figure out how you're going to get there. Once you figure out your why, then you can start figuring out your how. And here's where those index cards and marker come in handy. This is what I wrote:

I will ask in advance for help from my family (spouse, parents, sibling, kids). In order to remind myself (and those I love) about this Christmas plan, I'm putting it on an index card in three places:

- on the fridge
- on my computer
- on the visor of my car

(And yes, these are the three places where I need a little more Jesus during the holidays.) I've been doing a Holiday Mission Statement since 2011, and it has made a huge change in how I approach the holidays.

Three years ago, my Holiday Mission Statement was simple. I wanted to experience joy amid sorrow. My dad passed away September 5. We were all still processing the loss and what that looked like to our family.

But there were also some opportunities for joy—sharing memories, eating some of his favorite foods, and loving on each other. We kept the celebration easy (celebrating on December 26, only three gifts for each of our kids, and a Secret Santa gift exchange for our extended family). While it was nothing that HGTV would feature in an *Elegant Extravagance Holiday Special*,

Doing a Holiday
Mission Statement
has made a huge
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holidays.

it was perfect for our family and the place we were in. We gave ourselves a pass on anything that wasn't necessary, and we just loved on each other, played games, went to church, and remembered what was special in our lives.

It was, I daresay, the perfect Christmas.

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN...

It's time to start brainstorming about what your Holiday Mission Statement should look like. It doesn't need to be perfect; it just needs to focus you. Once you've got it down, write it on the form on page 19 so you can refer to it. (And don't forget to copy it to the places where you will need to be reminded about keeping the holiday spirit—on your fridge, next to your computer, and in your wallet are just a few of the places you may need a little reminder.)

Now that you've decided what you want your Christmas to look like, it's important that you don't let all the holiday madness sneak back in. You get to decide exactly how crazy this season is. If you truly want to have an on-purpose Christmas, it starts with how you spend your time, energy, and money. When you stick to your Christmas mission, you are saying the world doesn't get a say in how you celebrate.

- If you're having a hard time coming up with your mission statement, step back for a day and think on it. This idea is not to add stress to your life it's to focus you for the season so you can truly bless others and receive the blessings.
- Still stuck? Maybe you're stuck trying to make it the perfect Holiday Mission Statement. If that's the case, aim for 80 percent. Write your mission statement on page 19 in pencil and then give yourself permission to go back and change about 20 percent later on. It's your mission statement. You get to decide how it goes.

What kind of Christmas do you want—or maybe need—this year? Step back, think about it, and plan for it now.

Holiday Mission Statement



THIS IS WHAT I WANT CHRISTMAS TO LOOK LIKE THIS YEAR:
