

POSITIVE PARENTING
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GIVING THE GIFT OF TIME TOGETHER

Our grandchildren are five and two and a half this Christmas season ... and probably won't be reading this column, so I'll share with you three gifts that they will be receiving from their grandparents this Christmas – Advent resources, a membership to the Arboretum, and a new family Bible.

Les and I try to give gifts of experiences, especially ones for the entire family to enjoy together, over and over again.

Advent Resources

Hayden, our five year old grandson will receive *Christmas Baby*, a wonderfully illustrated Christmas storybook, that includes an Advent calendar inside the front cover and a pop-up manger scene inside the back cover. Erica, who will turn three in February, will receive *Lift and Look Nativity*, a darling board book, with foam cutouts that tell the story of how God sent Jesus. Each cutout lifts out to reveal another part of the story. Parents, Jon and Tammie will receive *In My Heart I Carry a Star*, featuring a powerful story devotion, anchored in scripture, and closing in prayer, for each day of Advent. Is there a better way to equip this precious family to tell the story and share the experience of this Advent season? (And I get to shop where I work!)

Memberships

Family memberships or tickets the whole family can experience together have always been important to us as meaningful gifts. In the past, we've given memberships or tickets or passes to the Minnesota Zoo, Children's Museum, Science Museum, Hennepin County Parks, a water park, Children's Theater, swimming lessons, and Light Rail Transit.

Why do we give memberships or tickets or passes? For families with children, it is expensive to pay admittance for a single day. With young children, you can never be sure that they will last long enough to make the one time expenditure seem worth it. A membership or pass takes the pressure off.

It's also a wonderful way for a family to learn together, to expand the world in which they live, to actively engage in new experiences.

What a wonderful way for families to build memories together. At The Institute, we know that one of Four Key faith practices is rituals and traditions. Trust me, these outings quickly become a favorite family tradition.

And this gives the ultimate gift – time together to bond, tell stories, and enjoy one another.

Family Bible

The family Bible we've chosen is *The Jesus Storybook Bible*. My colleague, Linda Staats and her husband, Pastor Dick Staats, live in Phoenix. They introduced The Institute to this Bible, which they have given to every child in their neighborhood, their mail carrier, and Linda's 89 year old mother. Linda's mother remarked, "This is the first Bible I've read to myself. I can't put it down." It is beautifully written and illustrated, a Bible for all the generations to share the Good News that Jesus is at the center of God's great story and of their story, too. This season, as we celebrate Jesus coming as a child, let's invite God's children of all ages to experience this wondrous love.

I wish you God's blessings in your gift giving and in receiving God's best gift this season.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Discuss a family experience you would like to receive.
2. As you think about gifts for others you love, what experiences would they enjoy?
3. Consider giving Advent gifts this year. Avoid the Christmas pressure and really celebrate God's gift this year.
4. After you use a gift membership, pass, or tickets, call and share the highlights of the experience with the gift giver.
5. Take pictures of your family enjoying the gift. Display them on the fridge or in a frame or album. Send one to the gift giver.