



So, here we go again! Christmas is fast approaching and life doesn't seem to slow down. It's the season that is always full of shopping lists, parties and get togethers. But hopefully it will also be a time of worship and service opportunities as well. It can be so hard to stay focused on the real meaning of Christmas, the birth of Jesus, the Savior of the world. I think we have to be intentional in how we live our busy lives and on how can we focus our hearts in a deeper way to feel God's presence in our lives. I suppose we have to ask ourselves, how can we stay close to God when everything around us is demanding our attention? How do we stay close to Jesus especially during this holiday season?

I would suggest that we start with scripture and I know that's the obvious answer but it can be very hard to read the Word regularly. Look, it makes sense that when you start your day in the Bible, your heart and mind are better prepared to respond to God's presence throughout the rest of the day. It's like tying up your shoelaces before going out the door—it's much easier to keep from slipping as I walk through the day. You can follow a reading plan or an audio version of the Bible on your phone or in the car. Just get creative and find what is the best way for you to get into the Word of God. We live in a world that is so self-

centered and that can be multiply ten-fold during the Christmas season. It's easy to get caught up in the mentality of focusing on ourselves, what we want and what we wish you could have. Then throw into the mix the thought of how much we have to do and God is nowhere to be seen. So how do we escape this merry go round and think of others? Well, the Christmas season has so many ways for us to serve. When we take time to serve others through our church and community, we are fulfilling a central call of the Gospel. Think about who in our church community needs some care and love this year. I have discovered that some of the most meaningful chances to serve come by loving the people right in front of me. Just giving them your time, your energy and your attention can make a huge difference. Perhaps you could offer to do some Christmas shopping for an older person, friend or neighbor and be a real blessing to them. Start to think what you could do.

I know that so many people feel overwhelmed during this time of year and there is a real need for us to pause, take a deep breath and pray. Talking with God can calm our souls and bring us close to Him as we share our worries and concerns. Although this is a busy season, God is never too busy to hear from you, He is always there. Take time to turn to God and listen to His words of comfort, love and peace. Also, don't feel the need to say yes to everything or you will reach Christmas Day exhausted. Try setting aside even 15 minutes to make God a priority and this will help you to find peace in the midst of all the chaos life brings. Take time to thank God for all that He has already given you and prepare your heart during Advent for the birth of the Son of God. Leave space to be quiet and reflective, for prayer and praise—and make it your goal to seek a closeness with Jesus, which as you know is the greatest gift of all. During Advent our theme each week will be encouraging you to "Stay awhile with Jesus," because He is what Christmas is all about.

“At this Christmas when Christ comes, will He find a warm heart? Mark the season of Advent by loving and serving the others with God's own love and concern.”

Mother Teresa