

creative idea

for putting God at the heart of your celebrations and holidays

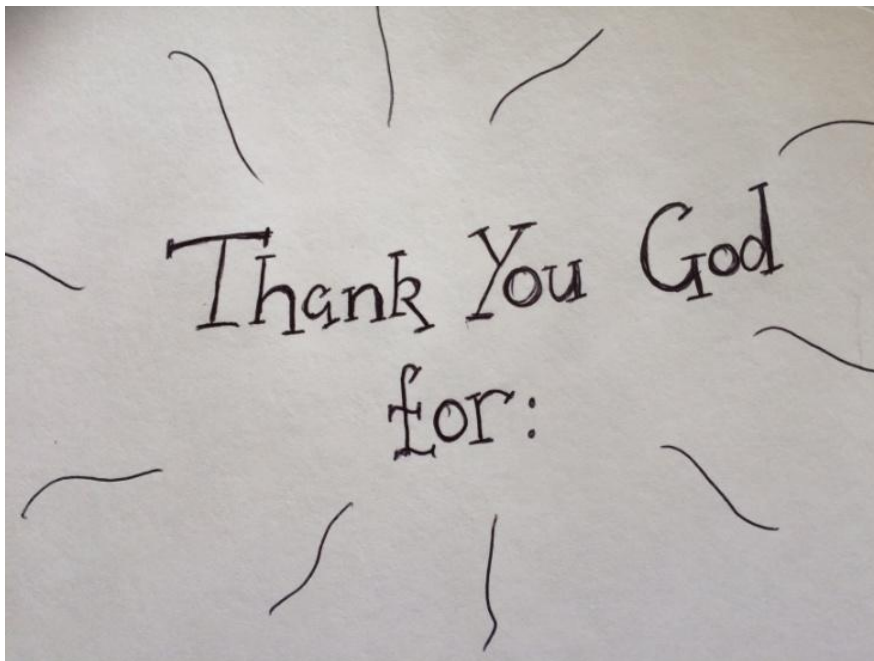
In the abstract, holidays feel like a time when there should be more space to connect with God and the things on his heart. But in reality, many of us find that when we're away from our normal routines, it can be harder – rather than easier – to spend time in worship, prayer or even reflection... especially if we are away with other people.

Busy festival times of celebration – especially Christmas – can be even more like this... Even when the reason for all the activity is Jesus, it can end up negatively impacting on our time with him, or lead us to feel like we have two modes of operation – one clearly connected to our devotion, and one that just feels separate, even if it's really good. In the morning we might read our Bible or an Advent reflection, but later when we're laughing with friends over good food, it can feel like that's unrelated to him.

So we wanted to share this incredibly simple and obvious idea that some of us used on an extended holiday recently, that we found to be so wonderful we're planning to use it every time we enter a period like this, as a way of:

- *consciously doing holidays and celebrations with God*
- *connecting with him together really naturally*
- *giving him all the thanks and praise for all the good gifts we're enjoying, so that they (and we) are always connected to the one who gave them all.*

As well as the joy we experienced from doing this with God, we also ended up making a note of some wonderful moments we might otherwise have forgotten, and getting the chance to savour everything more richly together before moving on to the next thing.



Capturing and thanking God for every good thing...

You will need:

- pens
- one or more of the largest sheets of paper or card you can find (or take) with you
- a few minutes at a consistent point of the day (breakfast or the end of the evening are both really good, depending on whether you and your family/friends are larks or night owls) as they both carry a sense of looking back on the day that's gone before.

- 1.) In the middle of your sheet of paper, write something like 'Thank you God for:' in big letters.
- 2.) Each morning or evening, look back on the day that's just been and think of everything you especially want to celebrate that was good, writing it down on the spider diagram chart as a conscious thank you to God for the gift of experiencing, receiving or consuming that gift...
- 3.) Throughout the time, the chart will grow and grow and grow... a testimony of the richness of all the little details you're enjoying... from an especially good meal or new snack you tried to a beautiful aspect of the culture you're visiting or a hilarious moment.
- 4.) You can just write each thing separately, or group them so you have sub spiders! You could group by place, date, or type of experience or even emotion... for example inspiration, food, beauty, wonder, laughter, rest, provision, lessons from God, interesting new learning etc .
- 5.) You can do this on your own, but it's even better done with friends and/or family members if you're with other people and you and they feel comfortable enough to be vulnerable about precious moments... as that way you'll remind each other of things, savour them together, and probably laugh again together over the funnier things that you enjoyed.
- 6.) The idea of this is to create a special holiday rhythm that naturally and conversationally catches you (and those you're with) up in thanksgiving – it's an act of worship whether you consciously 'pray' together as part of your thanksgiving time or not.
- 7.) And when you go home/finish your celebrations and take it out to look at later, you'll be reminded about – and filled with thanks again for – all the little details that were special within the time the chart related to.

A footnote on holidays and celebrations more generally...

- 1.) We know that holiday and celebration times – especially with family – can throw up negative experiences and emotions as well, and this exercise is absolutely not about denying those. It's really important and healthy to pour out our pain over this to God and the following two resources (the first generally and the second specifically in relation to Christmas) might help a bit with this:
 - http://thesanctuarycentre.org/resources/written_prayers_A_personal_prayer_for_you_to_use_when....pdf
 - Section 3 in particular of <http://thesanctuarycentre.org/resources/be-near-us-lord-jesus-creative-ideas-for-finding-Christ-in-Christmas.pdf>
- 2.) We also have a blog from a few years back that a number of us have come back to repeatedly with some more simple ideas about increasing connection to God during vacations:
 - <http://journey.thesanctuarycentre.org/2011/08/01/rest-in-his-presence/>