

Family Discussion Guide

WATCHING AND WAITING

A FAMILY CHRISTMAS MOVIE GUIDE



Advent

WELCOME

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*For a child has been born for us, a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.*

- Isaiah 9:6

The Advent season is one of preparation. We often find ourselves busy with tasks to complete, gifts to buy, cookies to bake, and holiday parties to attend. Sometimes in our busyness, we fail to pause to prepare for Jesus' birth. Each Advent, God beckons us to draw near to the manger to witness this magnificent birth. Watching and Waiting is all about finding a few moments to pause as a family and redirect your attention to the inbreaking of God's new day.

This guide is designed to help your family have discussions about Christian faith and themes found in some of our favorite Christmas movies. Inside, you'll find discussion guides for four popular Christmas movies: *The Polar Express*; *The Grinch (2018)*; *Elf*; and *A Muppet Christmas Carol*.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Each guide includes a section with questions appropriate for the entire family that are broad and are designed to encourage discussion. This is followed by a section with age specific questions, designed to help your youth dive deeper into the themes of the movie. Following the age-based questions, you'll find a small section called, "Diving Deeper." This section contains questions related to scripture to help your family continue the conversation. You'll find some questions connected to the scripture text. At the end of the "Diving Deeper" section, you'll find some suggestions on tangible steps your family can take to spread hope, peace, joy, and love this season.

KEY FOR AGE BASED QUESTIONS

Each section of questions have been designed with particular age groups in mind. Don't feel limited by these suggestions, feel free to use any questions with any age!

For Young Children - Age 3 through Grade 1

For Elementary Age - Grade 2 through 5

For Older Youth - Grade 6 and above

THE POLAR EXPRESS

Where to watch: Available to rent (or purchase) on all major platforms (Prime Video, Apple, YouTube, Google Play) for \$3.99

Run time: 1 hour 21 minutes without credits
(1 hour 40 minutes with credits)

Movie Rating: G; *The Polar Express* has wonderful messages about the importance of believing, the value of friendship, respect for leadership and courage, and the beauty of being kind to others. But it's also an adventure, with lots of roller-coaster thrills and some scary characters that might be too intense and frightening for the youngest kids. The Express roars, speeds, and skids on its perilous journey to the North Pole. Sometimes out of control, sometimes racing against dangers and obstacles in its path, it's the center of a tale that's suspenseful throughout. The child heroes are frequently in danger – from falls, getting lost, being left alone on a careening train, and navigating dark, shadowy places facing characters who may wish them harm.

Synopsis: On Christmas Eve, a young boy embarks on a magical adventure to the North Pole on the Polar Express. Along the way, he learns about friendship, bravery, and the spirit of Christmas.

THE POLAR EXPRESS

FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

- ▶ In the movie we see that some children are hesitant to get on the train. If you had the opportunity to ride the Polar Express, would you hop aboard? Why?
- ▶ What do you think the difference is between “seeing is believing” and “believing is seeing”? Can you think of an example?
- ▶ If you rode the Polar Express, what word would be punched in your ticket?
- ▶ The girl saves a hot chocolate for the shy boy in a simple but very kind act. What simple things can we do to help others and show kindness this holiday season?
- ▶ The conductor says, “The most real things in the world are the things we can’t see.” What do you think?

FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

- ▶ Which character reminded you the most of yourself? Did anyone else in the movie remind you of someone else in your family?
- ▶ Were you ever scared for any of the characters? Did you think something bad might happen to them? Who do you turn to when you are scared? Have you ever turned to God when you are afraid?
- ▶ In the movie the conductor helps guide the boy in his journey to finding belief in Santa. Who are the people in your life that help guide you to faith in Jesus? What are some of the helpful things they do?

FOR ELEMENTARY AGE

- ▶ What does it mean to believe in yourself? What helps you believe in yourself? What can you do to help others believe in themselves?
- ▶ Billy was the boy who sat away from everyone else. If you were on the Polar Express, what are somethings you could do to help encourage Billy?
- ▶ If your faith was the journey of the Polar Express, where would you be? Hesitating to get on the train, the caboose, the trek across the frozen river, lost in Santa's workshop, or sitting next to Santa in the sleigh?

THE POLAR EXPRESS

FOR OLDER YOUTH

- ▶ Along the journey there is a mysterious hitchhiker that appears on the train and challenges the boy's faith. How would you respond to the hitchhiker?
- ▶ While riding the Polar Express, the boy takes many risks for his friends such as stopping the train and walking on top of the train. The boy did all of these things knowing he might get in trouble. What are things you are willing to do for your friends that can land you in a difficult situation?
- ▶ In the end, the boy chose to believe in Santa before he had the chance to see Santa. What are some things in your life that you believe in without needing to see?

THE POLAR EXPRESS

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 1:46-55

⁴⁶ And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;

⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

THE POLAR EXPRESS

QUESTIONS

- When Mary first learns that she will give birth to Jesus, she is afraid and scared. Over time, she begins to gain trust and hope. In the end, Mary's trust and belief in God results in the birth of Jesus, the greatest hope to ever exist for all of humankind. What are things you believe in? What are some ways your belief can bring hope to others?
- Hope is most needed in places where belief is at its lowest. What areas in your life do you need to find hope?
- As we go through this Christmas season, we are reminded of the story of the birth of Jesus and how he brought (and continues to bring) hope to the world. What are ways you can remind yourself and others of this hope through the season and throughout the year?

Call to Action

THE POLAR EXPRESS

SHARE SOME HOPE

*What is something that brings you
and your family hope throughout the
holiday season?*

*Maybe it's a passage of scripture, an
ornament that goes in a particular
spot, a holiday treat or tradition.
Whatever it is, share it with someone
who might be having a hard time
finding hope this year.*

THE GRINCH (2018)

Where to watch: Netflix; Freeform's 25 Days of Christmas 12/18 at 9:00pm and 12/19 at 6:35pm; available to rent (or purchase) on all major platforms (Prime Video, Apple, YouTube, Google Play) for \$3.99

Run time: 1 hour 18 minutes without credits
(1 hour 25 minutes with credits)

Movie Rating: PG; The movie is appropriate for most younger viewers, with many more scenes of physical comedy and pratfalls than genuine peril (though there is a scene in which it looks like the Grinch will fall over a mountain – but of course, he's saved). Expect lots of falls from heights, catapulting through the air, speeding on sleds, etc. The Grinch ends up in his underwear in a brief scene, and a naked Who is seen behind a cookie that's strategically placed to obscure anything inappropriate.

Synopsis: *The Grinch* (2018) is an animated remake that tells the story of a cynical grump who goes on a mission to steal Christmas, only to have his heart changed by a young girl's generous holiday spirit. Funny, heartwarming, and visually stunning, it's a universal story about the spirit of Christmas and the indomitable power of optimism.

THE GRINCH (2018)

FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

- ▶ Which character do you relate to most? The Grinch? Cindy-Lou Who? Max? Fred the Reindeer? Mr. Bricklebaum? Other? Why?
- ▶ Have you ever felt like a grinch? What helped you to experience the true meaning of Christmas and move past your grinchiness?
- ▶ The Grinch is a story about the Grinch and his change of heart to discover the true meaning of Christmas. As Christians, what do you think is the true meaning of Christmas?
- ▶ Instead of stealing Christmas, if you could give one piece of Christmas to everyone to help them better understand it, what would you give and why?

FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

- ▶ Cindy-Lou Who asks Santa to give her mommy less work and be able to spend more time with her and her brothers. What is something generous/nice/sweet you can do/give to your parents this Christmas season?
- ▶ How should we treat others so that we aren't being a grinch?
- ▶ The Grinch tried to steal Christmas, by stealing toys and decorations. But we know the real meaning of Christmas is Jesus being born and celebrating his birth with the people we love. Do you think the Grinch could steal the real meaning of Christmas?

FOR ELEMENTARY AGE

- ▶ Why does the Grinch hate Christmas? What can we do so that others don't become a Grinch?
- ▶ Cindy-Lou Who invites the Grinch to Christmas dinner even after he tries to steal Christmas. How can we be more like Cindy-Lou Who? Why is it hard sometimes to be like Cindy-Lou Who?
- ▶ Jesus isn't a character in The Grinch; in fact God and the Bible are never mentioned at all. Are there any scenes or characters that remind you of people or stories from the Bible?

THE GRINCH (2018)

FOR OLDER YOUTH

- ▶ The Grinch goes through a pretty remarkable transformation throughout the movie: from being a miserable Christmas-hater who wants to ruin Christmas for all the Whos, to having his heart grow three sizes and celebrating Christmas with the Whos. Do you think that God can provide opportunities for complete transformation in people like the Grinch, or do you think there are limits to what God can do in people?
- ▶ Cindy-Lou Who asks Santa to help her mother to be less over-worked and asks the Grinch to join her Christmas celebration with her family and friends without hesitation. What can you do to be more like Cindy-Lou Who?
- ▶ Every year during advent, we light candles on the advent wreath that signify peace, joy, hope, and love. Where do we see peace, joy, hope, and love in the movie The Grinch?

THE GRINCH (2018)

SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 2:8-10

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— ⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

QUESTIONS

At the end of the movie, Cindy-Lou Who extends an invitation to the Grinch to join them for Christmas dinner. It is a selfless act, and a perfect example of an extension of God's grace. Grace goes beyond expectations.

- ▶ What does it look like to extend grace and love beyond expectation? Why is this hard sometimes?
- ▶ How can we embody this and extend grace and love beyond expectation to others this holiday season?
- ▶ Who do you know that embodies grace and love beyond expectation? What kind of things does that person do to embody grace and love?

Call to Action

THE GRINCH (2018)

SHARE SOME PEACE WITH A GRINCH

Who's the grinchiest person you know? Do you know why they are a grinch? Take some time to get to know them better. Can you do something to help bring them peace and not be a grinch? How can you help them understand the true meaning of Christmas and bring them some peace, joy, hope, and love at Christmas time?

Helpful Hints

ELF

Where to watch: Available to rent (or purchase) on all major platforms (Prime Video, Apple, YouTube, Google Play) for \$3.99

Run time: 1 hour and 31 minutes without credits
(1 hour and 37 minutes with credits)

Movie Rating: PG; Some themes and scenes in the movie are a little mature for younger children. There's multiple arguments about the real Santa. There's one scene where Jovie is in the shower. Buddy is involved in two scenes involving lingerie where he doesn't understand cultural norms since he's come from the North Pole.

Synopsis: *Elf* tells the story of an elf, named Buddy, who was accidentally transported to the North Pole as a toddler in Santa's bag. Buddy grows up in the North Pole learning the trade of working in Santa's workshop. As Buddy gets older, he can't seem to shake the feeling that he doesn't belong. So, he sets out to find his biological father. He travels to New York City, in full elf costume and finds his father, Walter, a cynical businessman. After Walter meets Buddy and has a DNA test confirm their relation, he starts to build a relationship with Buddy. What ensues is a series of chaotic events.

ELF

FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

- What's one word that comes to mind when you think of Buddy the Elf? Why that word?
- The Code of Elves is:
 1. Treat everyday like Christmas
 2. There's room for everyone on the nice list
 3. The best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear

What would you include in a "Code of Faith?" Could any of the "Code of the Elves" translate to a "Code of Faith?" What parts? Why?

- Christmas spirit grows as everyone sings together. What song(s) remind you of the real meaning of Christmas?
- Buddy the Elf goes on an incredible journey to meet his dad with lots of bumps on the way. How does this relate to your faith journey?

FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

- ▶ Santa's sleigh is powered by Christmas spirit. What do you think Christmas spirit is?
- ▶ Buddy decorates the mall and his dad's house to bring Christmas cheer. How do you get in the Christmas spirit?
- ▶ Buddy loves and is loved by lots of different people. Who loves you? Who are people that you love? How do you show them you love them? How does God show you that you are loved?

FOR ELEMENTARY AGE

- ▶ Before Buddy goes to New York, Santa tells him that his father is on the naughty list. Do you think there's any possible way someone can get off the naughty list? Do you think people can change?
- ▶ Buddy has a lot of Christmas spirit. What's your favorite thing Buddy does in the Christmas spirit? What are some things we, as Christians, can do to spread Christmas spirit?
- ▶ Have you ever felt like you didn't belong? What happened? What made it better? Do you think Jesus ever felt like he didn't belong?

ELF

FOR OLDER YOUTH

- ▶ As Christians, what does it mean to have “Christmas spirit?”
- ▶ Being from the North Pole, Buddy is full of joy, hope, and optimism. What would it look like for you to live with some of that joy, hope, and optimism?
- ▶ Walter tries to change Buddy to fit his expectations of who his son should be. Do you love people exactly as they are or do you try to change them to fit your own expectations of them? How do you think God loves us? How can we show this type of love to others?

ELF

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 15:11-17

¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. ¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶ You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

QUESTIONS

- What is the true joy of Christmas?
- What similarities do you think Buddy the Elf and Jesus might have? What do you think Buddy would do for his friends (and family)? What do you think Jesus did for all people?
- In a gift of love, God sent Jesus to live among us. How might you share this love with others this Christmas season? Do you believe that you could find joy in sharing love with others?

Call to Action

ELF

SPREAD SOME CHRISTMAS SPIRIT AND JOY TO THOSE AROUND YOU.

Here are some suggestions on how to do that:

- ▶ *Ask your family to go Christmas caroling around your neighborhood.*
- ▶ *Bake some cookies and deliver them to your neighbors.*
- ▶ *Write some cards to older church members who may be feeling lonely or without much joy this holiday season.*
- ▶ *Write a prayer together for those who are feeling lost and lonely this Christmas. Once you've written the prayer, take turns praying it aloud with different family members reading different lines.*

THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL

Where to watch: Disney+; Available to rent (or purchase) on all major platforms (Prime Video, Apple, YouTube, Google Play) for \$3.99

Run time: 1 hour 21 minutes without credits
(1 hour 25 minutes with credits)

Movie Rating: G; Parents need to know that the Ghost of Christmas Future is scarier than the others and may frighten more sensitive children. In one version of the future, Tiny Tim is projected to die. Scrooge has to confront his cruel behavior and learns life lessons because of it.

Synopsis: The Muppet characters tell their version of the classic tale of an old and bitter miser's redemption on Christmas Eve.

THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL

FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

- ▶ A Christmas Carol begins with a large musical number about just how awful a person Scrooge is. If there was a giant musical number about you, what would we learn about you?
- ▶ What are things that cause you to say “bah humbug?” Why do you think that is?
- ▶ Oftentimes we get caught up in the holiday rush, school, and/or work. What are some ways that we can remind ourselves about the true meaning of Christmas?
- ▶ If you were to fall asleep and have the ghosts of past, present, and future visit you, what would that look like? Would it be a pleasant visit? Would you learn something life-changing?

FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

- ▶ In the movie, what is the lesson that Scrooge learns that changes his mind about Christmas? What do you think is so important about Christmas?
- ▶ What about celebrating Christmas makes you feel loved like Tiny Tim? What makes you want to show love like Tiny Tim?
- ▶ What are things we can do as a family that can spread love to the people around us?

FOR ELEMENTARY AGE

- ▶ In the beginning of the movie what made Scrooge unlikeable? What are some things we can do to remind ourselves how we should love each other?
- ▶ Of the three ghosts of Christmas – Past, Present, Future – what lesson do you think was most important or life changing to Scrooge?
- ▶ At the end of the movie, Scrooge says “I will live my life in the past, present, and the future.” What does this mean? How should we live our lives as Christians?

THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL

FOR OLDER YOUTH

- ▶ Scrooge has a tendency of picking work and money over things like happiness, love, and relationships with other people. Does this ever happen to you? What can we do in our everyday lives to remember what is truly important?
- ▶ In the song “It Feels Like Christmas,” they list many things that happen during Christmas time that remind them of love. What things at Christmas time remind you of love?
- ▶ The spirit of Christmas Future shows Scrooge how love can affect the people we know and change the future. What are some ways your love can bring an impactful change?

THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL

SCRIPTURE: 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-7

¹ If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. ⁴ Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

QUESTIONS

- In this passage, Paul describes what love is. If you were to come up with our own definition of what love is, what would it say?
- According to scripture, anything done without love is worthless. What are some ways that you can remind yourself to love others through your actions?
- True love comes from selflessness and giving of yourself beyond what is required. In this season of giving, what reminds you of the selfless love that Jesus showed?

THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL

SPREAD SOME LOVE TO THOSE AROUND YOU

Here are some suggestions on how to do that:

- ▶ *Donate time, money, and/or supplies to those in need by serving at a homeless shelter, food bank, or local charity.*
- ▶ *Invite your neighbors, a lonely church member, or someone you've lost touch with recently over for a meal. Show them the love that Christmas time is all about.*
- ▶ *Gather food, gifts, and decorations and help provide Christmas for a family in need.*



Merry Christmas!

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