



Savoring Grace

*Christmas Tea
Outline*






Savoring Grace

Would you like to share the grace and peace of Jesus in a special way with the women in your church and community this Christmas season? Consider hosting a Christmas Tea. By using coordinated Christmas resources and gifts from CTA, you will save lots of time while still providing a fun and meaningful event for attendees.

The ideas that follow will help you plan, promote, and host a two-hour Christmas Tea with an optional cookie exchange.

With this event guide, your preparation time during this busy Christmas season will be minimal, but you can be sure your event will flow smoothly as you share the grace and peace of Jesus—the newborn King—with the women at your event.



What You'll Need

You'll need volunteers to help you organize and execute this event. The number of volunteers needed will depend on the size of your event. You may rely on a few talented people to take on more than one role or you may wish to assign each person one area of responsibility. The volunteer categories needed for this event include the following:

- Publicity
- Decorations
- Food
- Program
- Cleanup
- Follow-Up

Scheduling Your Event

This Christmas Tea will last approximately two hours. Many people find that Christmas Teas on Saturday or Sunday work best in the afternoon, perhaps from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. On the other hand, if you schedule your event during the week, an early evening slot would probably work best (7:00 p.m.), depending on the schedules of commuters in your area.

You may want to plan time to incorporate a cookie exchange into your Christmas Tea. If so, invite guests to bring a few batches of cookies with them when they come, along with the recipe for each cookie written out on a note card. Be sure to order the *Savoring Grace* recipe cards (Item #SVG19RCD12P) so that attendees can copy the cookie recipes they'd like to take home with them.



As you advertise your event, make it clear that guests who do not want to participate in the cookie exchange are welcome to come just to the Tea.

Inviting People to Your Event

Church

Within your church family, begin your publicity blitz earlier than you think you should and keep repeating the invitation. Four or five weeks ahead of time is not too soon to start! You may want to include “early bird” announcements in your church’s monthly newsletter and on your website two or even three months in advance. Remember, people’s calendars fill up quickly in November and December!

The Sunday after Thanksgiving, hand out the *Savoring Grace* devotion book (Item #SVG19SC) and an invitation to your Christmas Tea to each woman in church. Encourage the women to begin reading their way through the devotion book, which includes a devotion for each day of the Christmas season beginning with December 1. This will give your women a preview of *Savoring Grace* and guide them to experience the true grace and peace of Jesus, even amidst the busiest time of the year.



If your church has social media pages, don't forget to include the event there as well. You can find a list of social media ideas in the *Savoring Grace* Resource Pack you downloaded. In addition, if your church is affiliated with a school, don't miss the opportunity to send home an invitation for school parents.

Community

To invite the community to your Christmas Tea, you might make posters to display in local stores. Or buy ads in your local newspaper; these may be available to your church at a fairly low cost. Also be sure to check both radio and television stations for possibilities. Some broadcast radio and TV outlets and local access cable channels will announce community events at no charge. And don't forget to leverage publicity opportunities through Facebook, Twitter, and other social media.

In your publicity, make the details of the cookie exchange clear—assuming you are planning for this to be part of your event. But again, make sure potential guests know they do not have to participate in the cookie exchange to be welcome at the Tea.

Neighborhood

To invite people within your immediate neighborhood, you might want to deliver door hangers or flyers door-to-door. Save time! Customize the publicity materials provided in the digital resource pack you downloaded.

An Organizing Idea

Consider forming a “Tea Team” that includes women willing to help invite, decorate, and act as table hostesses. Each hostess will be responsible for one table of 6–8 guests. Each hostess will . . .

- decorate her table. She could choose to do an elegant and traditional Christmas theme or to go with a more creative focus. Make sure each woman uses a tablecloth, plates, utensils, teacups, and a centerpiece. Every table will be different, but that's fine! In fact, it is part of the entertainment; guests who arrive early can visit and admire each decorated table. You may even wish to have a contest and award a prize for “Best Table.”
- invite guests to join her at her table. It's a good idea if each hostess aims for a good mix of church and community members, about half and half. That makes it more likely that every woman in your church will be invited personally, perhaps more than once. By aiming for a mix of members and friends from the community, you can help ensure that guests from the community will be introduced to church members who can graciously welcome them and get acquainted on a personal level. It's a great way to reach out informally and in a friendly way with those who may not have a church home.

- provide dessert for the 6–8 guests at her table. Again, every table will enjoy a unique treat, and that’s fine! In fact, part of the energy of your event will come from anticipating what “my table’s” dessert will be and comparing notes about that delicious dessert afterward.
- clean up her table and place settings after the event ends. Many hands make light work, as the saying goes.
- follow up with table guests after the event, sending out a thank-you postcard to each guest. A customizable postcard is part of the Resource Pack you downloaded.

Decorating and Setup for Your Event

Whether or not you decide to form a “Tea Team,” decorating for your event doesn’t have to be complicated. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- To make an easy centerpiece for every table, use a *Savoring Grace* ceramic mug (#SVG19CMB), filling it with cut flowers or a small poinsettia plant. Place the mug on top of the *Savoring Grace* trivet (#SVG19TV). Complete the table by arranging small wreaths, evergreen garland, pinecones, and holly berries around the centerpiece or along the middle of a long table.



- You may wish to add to the fun of the event by allowing one woman from each table to take home the centerpiece. If the guests’ plates are already at each place setting, mark the bottom of one plate. The woman with the marked plate takes home the centerpiece! If your guests pick up their plates at a dessert table, put a mark on the bottom of one chair at each table.

- To ensure that everyone carries home a reminder of the day, place a gift at each place setting. CTA’s *Savoring Grace* line has several options. Your guests may like a *Savoring Grace* kitchen towel (#SVG19TW) or a *Savoring Grace* spatula (#SVG19UT). Both gifts are beautiful reminders of God’s gift of grace to us through his Son, Jesus.



- Print the program you will follow and include a copy at each place setting. Be sure to include the words for any Christmas carols you want to sing during the devotional time. You can carry the *Savoring Grace* theme throughout your event by using the program cover and other graphical items provided in the digital resource pack you downloaded.

- If you are planning to host a cookie exchange as part of your event, be sure to order a *Savoring Grace* giving plate (#SVG19MM) for each attendee and also have a few boxes of plastic wrap on hand. Participants can place the cookies they wish to take home on the plate and wrap it in plastic wrap to keep the cookies safe on their way home.





The Event Outline

Registration

If you are using the “Tea Team” idea, table hostesses should arrive early and personally welcome the guests invited to sit at their tables. Otherwise, as guests arrive, they should be directed to a registration table. At this table, each guest should sign a registration booklet and provide her address and email address.

Make name tags available for everyone. Even if only church members will attend the Tea, it’s possible that someone will not know others in attendance. If you had your guests preregister, you can make the name tags in advance. If not, simply place several markers and blank name tags at the registration table. Or each hostess can place these at her table.

If you have advertised a cookie exchange as part of your event, designate several people to receive the plates of cookies from arriving guests. Carry these to a separate cookie exchange area. This area should be easily accessible to your guests after the formal program ends.

Seating

“Tea Team” hostesses will greet their guests as everyone arrives. If you have not designated table hostesses, let your guests register and then flow into the room to find seats. In this case, you will want to have several greeters in the area to welcome everyone and to help any guests who are by themselves find a friendly person with whom to sit.

If your guests preregister, you may want to assign seating. In that case, have a seating chart available at the registration table. Note the table number on each prepared name tag, too. This will help each of your guests more easily find her table.

Note: Assigned seating is the most time-consuming way to get everyone through the registration process, so be sure you have sound reasons for doing so before you adopt this approach.

Program

- **Welcome your guests and pray a blessing over your event and the food.** Designate an official Master of Ceremonies (MC) who will announce your program and provide directions for attendees. This person should be comfortable speaking in front of strangers and have a voice that projects well and is easily understood. This person should introduce herself as she begins the festivities.

The MC may lead the opening prayer and the closing devotion. However, if you have many volunteers who can serve in these capacities, then involve as many individuals as possible.

- **Serve tea and desserts.** This can be done buffet style or by having servers bring the tea and desserts to each table individually. (Members of your youth group may find it fun to dress for “high tea” in dark trousers, white shirts, and bow ties—perhaps red and green!)



If you chose to serve buffet style, the MC should give clear directions as to how the guests are to proceed. This person should also dismiss each table as the serving line is ready to handle them.

If you are using “Tea Teams” with table hostesses, the hostesses may serve the dessert to the women seated at their respective tables. In this case, you will want to provide a side table on which each hostess can organize the dessert she has prepared.

Who will serve the tea (or coffee)? Perhaps some of the men or teens in your church would be willing to do this. Or the table hostesses might want to do so too. Be sure to have cream, sugar, and sugar substitutes available at each table.

- **Include music, a brief devotion time, recognition of special guests, and a time to award prizes.**


Could a few men from your church form a small choir to sing Christmas carols before, during, or after dessert? Do you have teens who could play a carol or two on the piano or on a French horn? What other musical options might make your program more festive and involve as many church members as possible in your event?

At the end of this outline you’ll find a devotion titled “Savoring Grace.” The devotional leader (or a designated music leader) may want to lead the group in singing appropriate Christmas carols before, during, or after the devotion. If your fellowship area includes a piano or organ, or if you can provide some other instrument to accompany the singing (for example, a guitar), the singing will work much better. Even for familiar Christmas carols, you will want to provide words for your guests—either on the screen or inside the program you provide. That way everyone can sing along more comfortably.

- **Give the centerpieces away before guests leave their tables.** Whether you have marked a plate at each table or have placed a mark under a chair at each table, let the guests know what to look for when checking. You may also want to give away door prizes or awards to special guests (for example, the guest who has celebrated the most “Christmases past” or the guest who came the greatest distance).
- **If you have planned on a cookie exchange, schedule this to begin after the devotional time and after the prizes have been given away**—right before everyone is ready to leave. That way, guests who decided not to participate in the cookie swap can leave, and those who will participate can linger as they wish to do so.
- **Before you dismiss the group, thank everyone for coming.** Invite them to participate in the next event of the week, for instance a women’s Bible study or your church’s weekly or midweek worship service. If your church has many upcoming Christmas activities and services, you might create a printed list and give everyone a copy as she registers or as she leaves.
- **Begin the cookie exchange.** After the thank-yous, describe details relating to the cookie swap and move into this activity. Be sure to invite those not participating in the cookie exchange to linger longer over their tea if they would like to do so.



Follow-Up



Use names and addresses from the guest list you collected at the registration table and send a note thanking everyone for coming. Invite guests to visit your church again. You may want to note special upcoming Christmas services. To save time, use the customizable postcard template in the Resource Pack you downloaded.

If table hostesses formed your “Tea Team,” ask them for contact information for any guests from the community. Pass this on to your church office or pastor for follow-up. Table hostesses may be able to send personal thank-you postcards to the guests from their individual tables.

#SVG19DR

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Savoring Grace

Introduction

In a bygone era, elementary school children learned all about safety at railroad crossings. They were taught to “Stop. Look. Listen.” Before crossing railroad tracks on foot or with their bikes and scooters, kids would stop, look, and listen. As we approach the celebration of Christmas, those words can be helpful for us as God’s people, too!

In all the busyness, in all the frenzy, in all the hectic activity that floods into the Christmas season year by year, our Lord invites us to stop. He invites us to look. He invites us to listen. And as we do that, he invites us to savor all his many blessings, particularly those blessings he has graciously given us in Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Getting to the Heart

To savor God’s grace toward us, we first need to stop. We need to pause. We need to take a deep breath. *(Allow time for audience members to do this, encouraging it before you move ahead.)* Then, in the stillness, we remember what God’s grace is all about. We remember the undeserved love of our heavenly Father—the love he has shown to us! To each of us personally! We recall the surprising, the astonishing, the amazing love he poured out on that very first Christmas. Just think of it! *(Read these verses slowly, emphasizing the underlined words.)*

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

1 Timothy 1:15 (emphasis added)

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

1 John 4:10 (emphasis added)

To us a child is born, to us a son is given; and . . . his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6 (emphasis added)

Stop. Allow that peace to seep into your heart. Realize in a fuller way what the grace of God means for you. Savor it! *(Pause for a moment or two, allowing participants to reflect.)*

Now, imagine yourself sitting with the shepherds on the hillside outside Bethlehem on that very first Christmas night. Imagine the skies splitting open and the holy angels descending from heaven! What a sight! Then see yourself a little later, walking through the darkness and into the village to see the wonder those angels had announced. Imagine seeing the soft light flowing out from the stable door. Imagine kneeling in the prickly, yellow straw. Imagine your heart bursting with awe as you see him! As you see the Baby, the

eternal Son of God, your Savior, lying there in the manger! Has there ever, ever been a more glorious, a more wonder-filled sight!? This is the Christmas Gift of all time! This is grace, God's gift of love to you, wrapped in swaddling clothes. Look! Savor it! *(Pause for a moment or two, allowing participants to reflect.)*

We stop, pausing here before the manger. We look, considering what that first Christmas night may have been like. But no matter how hard we try, our ability to understand it all fails us. Our ability to grasp the amazing grace of God fails. Here is a mystery too deep for words. Here is a love beyond all human understanding. Here is a grace we will never fully grasp.

The Christmas angels summed it up for the shepherds—and for us: *(Again, read the words slowly, allowing time for the audience to savor them.)*

Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:10–11 (emphasis added)

A Savior. Christ. The Lord. For you. Savor those words. Savor that grace. It is for you! This Savior came for you! By faith in that Savior, your sin is gone. Your guilt is gone. Your shame is gone. All of it—all of it—dissolved in the light of his manger, the grace of his cross. Savor it! *(For a final time, pause for reflection.)*

Taking It Home

There's a lot to savor at Christmastime. Beautiful packages with glittering bows. Delicious desserts. The love of families and friends. Parties and pageants. The music. The fun. The laughter. Savor it all!

But in all the joys of the season, I pray that most of all you will pause to savor the grace of God toward you in Christ Jesus. May that grace strengthen you, bringing you deep and lasting peace:

Be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

2 Timothy 2:1

Today you are receiving *(name the gift you plan to distribute)*. Let it remind you to stop, look, listen, and most of all, savor the grace of your Savior this Christmas and forever.