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## Finding the deeper meaning

'Tis the season . . . of midnight wrapping sessions and shopping mall lines that wrap around the building. December stress doesn't know religion, race or creed. And it doesn't discriminate by age; it strikes our young with even greater vigor.

In my family, we celebrate Christmas, where the mantra "He is the reason for the season," hangs in a 5-by-7-inch frame that we put up each year. Sharing that deeper meaning of Christmas with my children, however, is as elusive as finding the one bulb on the tree that just doesn't work. Without it, the whole string of lights remains darkened.

Thankfully, a well-chosen children's book can remind us of what really matters in life. *To Every Thing There Is a Season* (ages 4 to 10), illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon, takes the timeless words from Ecclesiastes and sets them to vivid illustrations. The message of Ecclesiastes—that all people share certain passages in life regardless of differing cultures and beliefs—is represented by pictures from a variety of cultures and time periods. A guide at the back of the book describes the historical era and the medium used for each illustration.

Last year, in an attempt to keep my children's minds off their ever-growing wish lists and on matters of the spirit, I had them gift wrap empty shoe boxes with holes cut in the tops. We agreed that any time they gave of themselves to another person they would write the information on a strip of paper and place it in their wrapped shoe boxes. The idea was to create a birthday present for Jesus that could be unwrapped on Christmas morning. My goal this year is to pull back on the pace of the season so my children have time to make a few more "deposits" into their boxes.

A good book to slow down both parent and child is *God's Quiet Things* (ages 2 to 8), written by Nancy Sweetland and illustrated by Rick Stevens. Lines like

*Listen for God's quiet things,  
like butterflies with velvet wings,  
or raindrops making  
quiet rings on water*

*Open?* (ages 4 to 8). Garin Baker's oil-painted illustrations show a young girl pondering the procedures for prayer. She asks questions like "When I don't know what I should do, is that a time to talk to you?" In the end, the young girl discovers "there's no wrong time or place to pray."


Stories of human kindness and triumph nourish the soul. *Miss Rumphius* (ages 4 to 10) by Barbara Cooney tells

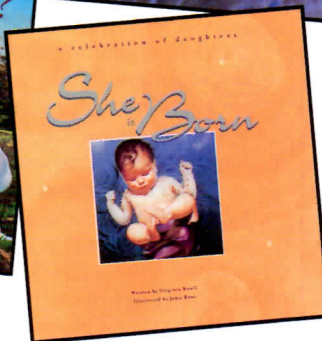
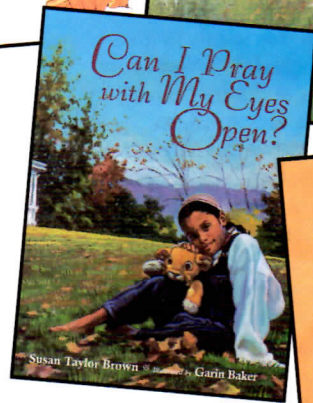
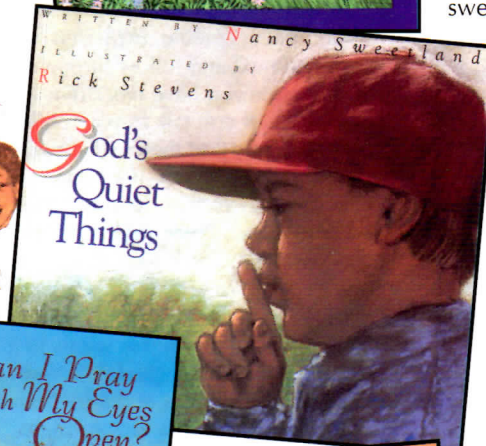
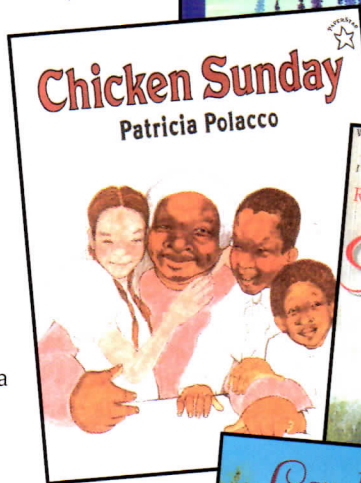
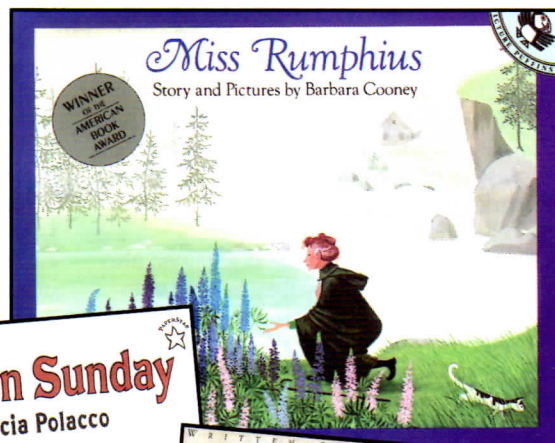
about a young girl named Alice who is charged by her grandfather to "do something to make the world more beautiful."

Years later, after living out her dreams, Grandma Alice spreads lupine seeds across her small town to create a sea of blue and purple beauty for all to see. *Chicken Sunday* (ages 4 to 10) by Patricia Polacco illustrates the caring feelings shared among two young brothers, their friend and their grandmother, Miss Eula. The children decide to make Russian decorated eggs to raise money for a hat for Miss Eula, who has "a voice like slow thunder and sweet rain."

Inspiration can be found in *She Is Born*, written by Virginia Kroll and illustrated by John Rowe (ages 4 to 10). The pages show daughters across the world being welcomed into life. One page shows animal drawings in the sand outside the home of a newborn in Oaxaca, Mexico. Another page features an Israeli family planting a cypress tree in celebration of new life. This new book makes an excellent gift for both newborn and older girls.

My friend, Lynette, recently gave me a much appreciated gift. We work together and she knew I was having a bottom-of-the-barrel bad day. She came over and slid a copy of *Imagine* (ages 4 to 10) across my desk. Written and illustrated by Bart Vivian, *Imagine* uses just a few words and presents dramatic illustrations to convey the message "You can succeed!" In that moment, my soul was fed

and my spirit revived—thanks to my friend and an inspirational children's book that brought me back to what really matters. 



both soothe and center readers young and old. Susan Taylor Brown accomplishes the same goal with *Can I Pray with My Eyes*