MONDAY NOV 9 | FREE HOLIDAY GIFT FOR YOU

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From my heart to yours this holiday season

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Deborah E. Leaner

FREE E-BOOK

A Gift For You

From my heart to yours, this holiday season

Hi Sis,

I know you've been running around, getting the house decorated, pulling all those favorite recipes out, checking off the list of who's coming for dinner. Before you pour that next mug of spiced cider, take 60 seconds for just you and me.

I put this little note together just for you, because I wanted us to talk about something we don't always make time for this time of year: our hearts.

As we show up for all these holiday gatherings, as we hug the people we haven't seen in months, laugh at old stories around the table, and even navigate the conversations that feel a little heavy sometimes — I wanted to remind you that the most important thing you bring to every room isn't the perfect side dish. It's the grace you carry with you.

This little book is all yours. It's full of the things I've been holding close, quiet reflections for your early morning coffee, small simple ways to show up with love for the people around you, and reminders that you don't have to have everything perfect to show up fully.

I'm so glad we get to walk through this holiday season together. You don't have to do it all, you don't have to have it all together. Just bring you, that's more than enough.

With all my love,
Deborah

P.S. Save me a seat at the table. I can't wait to hear how it goes.

Before The Gathering

Make Room for What Everyone Brings

Sis, whenever I get ready to have people over, the very first thing I do is stop and think about what each person *loves to give*. I'm the host, but this isn't my party — it's ours.

- If your cousin Mary lives for decorating, don't stress about getting every little detail perfect. Get the house tidy, put up the basics, then pull her aside quietly and say: *"I absolutely love how you make rooms feel so warm. Would you come add those special finishing touches only you know how to do?"*
- If your dad always leads the sweetest prayer and makes everyone feel seen, pull him aside ahead of time and ask if he'd be willing to kick off the meal asking everyone to share one small thing they're thankful for.

The rule is simple: Tell each person, specifically, what made you think of them for that little part of the day. Everyone wants to feel like their gifts are seen, not just their presence.

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Before The Gathering

A Few Details Before They Come

Let's Talk About The Food

If everyone is bringing a dish and someone asks you to make theirs for them, keep it gentle and clear before you go to the store:
"I would absolutely love to make that for you! The ingredients come out to about $25, can you send that over before I go shopping?"

If you're having the meal catered, lock in the menu and who is covering what costs before you place any order. No one likes awkward money conversations when the table is already set.

Know Before They Come

Send everyone a quick, warm little note a couple days before:

- What time dinner starts
- Parking tips
- If you have cozy socks by the door for people to slip on

And then pull each guest aside privately, just for a second, and ask: *"Is there anything I can do to make this easier for you to relax and enjoy the day?"* It's the smallest question that makes someone feel so welcome.

Do The Word

Invite one person privately to share something they love doing at the gathering. Tell them, specifically, why you thought of *them* for it. We all show up better when we know we're wanted, not just needed.

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Before the gathering

Prepare Your Heart, Too

Life happens, Sis. If Mary can't come, will you feel good about the basic decorations? If you'll feel more at ease with everything finished, invite her a few days early. That gives both of you room if plans change.

Put a massage on your calendar if that helps you unwind. Or sit down, drink some water, and take a quiet moment with God. You get to enjoy this gathering, too.

Three days before • Pray over the gathering

Take a few minutes to bring the names of your guests before God. Remember to pray for yourself, too.

Lord, cover our gathering. Give everyone safe travels and let each person feel welcome when they walk through the door. Help me notice the one who's new, the one who's quiet, and the one who may be carrying more than I know. If plans change, settle my heart and help me respond with grace. Give me the wisdom to ask for help and the peace to sit down and enjoy the people You've brought together. Let there be laughter in this house and kindness at our table. In Jesus' name, amen.

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At the gathering

Make Room for Fellowship

Ask someone who loves to welcome people to greet at the door. That first "Come on in! I'm so glad you're here!" can open a heart. Give first-time guests a little extra attention. Greet them by name, make an introduction, and show them where they can sit.

Give football fans a spot to cheer, set out game supplies at a table, and pull a few chairs together away from the TV so folks can catch up.

Let's play

- **Adults and teens • Guess the letters.** Give each team the initials of a familiar saying and one clue. Or start with a shirt or name tag that says **S.M.A.S.** The clue is something you'd say on your way to dinner. The answer is *Save Me a Seat*. Let the kids make the next one.
- **Kids • Holiday Guess Who.** Put a character's name or picture on a sticky note where the child can't see it. Let them ask yes-or-no questions to figure it out.
- **All ages • Family Charades.** Mix the ages on each team. Try acting out cheering for a touchdown or wrapping a gift with no tape.

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At the gathering

When the Day Takes a Turn

Even with a plan, dinner can take a turn. Here are a few things you can say in the moment.

When somebody needs to leave early

“James, we’re sitting down at two. If you need to go before then, I’ll fix you a plate to take with you.”

When you need to get back to the kitchen

“Mama, hold that thought for me. I want to hear the rest when I sit down.” If she wants to keep talking, show her and her company where they can get comfortable.

When someone arrives after drinking

Ask someone you trust to help you speak with them privately. “Come sit with me for a minute. Let’s arrange a sober ride home.” Keep your voice kind and the conversation out of the room.

Do the Word

Pick one sentence you might need and say it out loud before the gathering. Give yourself a moment to breathe before you answer.

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Etiquette of the heart

Mama, You Were a Quiet Storm

I used to say nothing excited my mama. Of course it did. She just didn’t know what to do with excitement. She had a pleasing smile that let me know all is well, and then back to the push to next. But I’d hear her on the phone telling other people about me and all my accomplishments.

My father was different. He could sit out back looking at the birds and the sky and be happy. You could give him the smallest thing and sometimes he’d cry, he was so excited.

Mama was ahead of her time. She taught me to have different buckets of money, one not knowing about the other. Now people talk about streams of income. Different name, same concept. I can see what she taught me in the life I’ve built.

Mama, you were a quiet storm. I had no clue what you invested in me, what you gave up for me to be the woman I am today. That’s what I would tell you now.

Quiet Time with God

Read Philippians 1:3. Tell God about someone whose investment in your life you understand differently now.

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Remembering together

Who Do You Miss at the Table?

Sis, if Mama could sit at the table with me this year, I'd tell her I finally understand some of what she was trying to teach me. Who comes to mind for you?

Say their name

Who do you miss at the table? What do you wish the children knew about them? You can say their name, set out a picture, or just listen.

Remember their voice

If they could see your family today, what can you imagine them saying? What would make them laugh or feel proud?

Carry something forward

What did they give your family that you want to keep? Ask the younger ones what new tradition they'd like to start. Try one of their ideas while you're together.

Do the Word

Invite an elder and a young person to record a one-minute family story together, if they'd like to. Then choose one thing to do with that story, like making Mama's recipe together before the next holiday.

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Etiquette of the heart

What I Was Carrying

My dad was an alcoholic. At holiday gatherings, when his drinking got out of hand, I had so many ghost thoughts. Embarrassment. Fear. Shame. That's what I remember carrying.

I've told you how much joy my dad could get from sitting out back and looking at the birds. That was my dad, too. I can remember his joy and still tell you what it felt like to be that girl at the holidays.

If I could sit down beside her today, I'd tell her, "I am not responsible for my father's behavior."

Quiet Time with God

Read 1 Peter 5:7. Tell God how you actually feel. Name what was never yours to carry.

When you're the guest

If all you can manage this year is a short visit, you can say, "I'd love to come for dessert. That's what I have room for this year." And if you need a minute during dinner, give yourself permission to step away and breathe.

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Etiquette of the heart

Your Tone Is Out of Tune

You ever had somebody say, "I'm just playing," and you knew the person they were talking about didn't think it was funny? Sometimes we know a story so well we forget it still belongs to somebody.

Familiarity does not give us permission.

If somebody trusts us enough to say, "That hurt me," can we stay with them long enough to hear why? I can say, "I didn't realize my words affected you that way." Then I can listen.

I've taught women to make their mouths a ministry. There's a place to practice that at the holiday table. It might be saying the good thing directly to the person you've told everybody else about.

Quiet Time with God

Read James 1:19. Ask God to let you hear how your words and your tone might land.

Do the Word

Tell somebody one thing you appreciate about them while you're still together.

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Before everyone goes home

Leave Them With Love

Before people start slipping out, take a minute to thank them. Thank Mary for the touches she added, Popa for the prayer, and the children for the joy they brought.

Choose one thing to carry forward. You might say, “Next Sunday, let’s call somebody who couldn’t be here.” Give it a day so it has a chance to happen.

A blessing to send them home

Lord, thank You for the time we’ve had together. Keep us safe on our way home. Help us remember what we heard today and keep showing up for one another after the holiday is over. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Have a beautiful holiday season, Sis.

Deborah E. Leaner