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CHRISTMAS STRESS BUSTERS

How to survive the holidays



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Can you imagine being given a Christmas gift and not opening it for 20 years? Well, that's exactly what I did. Year after year I unwrapped all of my other gifts and enjoyed them for a few minutes or a few months. I don't know why I never got around to opening that one gift. When I was small, my other gifts all looked more fun, I suppose, and as I grew older, I thought I knew what was inside and wasn't interested. Some years I didn't even notice it.

Then one July evening I bumped into an old friend on the street and he handed me, of all things, that Christmas gift I'd ignored all those years. I opened it mostly to please my friend, who was clearly quite excited about it and seemed convinced that it was just what I needed. And to my astonishment, he was right! Suddenly the other Christmas gifts of 20 years paled by comparison. This gift was unlike anything I'd ever experienced. It was intangible, yet more real than the ground I was standing on. I can only describe it as *love*—overwhelming and boundless love. And it was mine! Definitely mine! For a moment I felt foolish for having waited so long to open it, but then I realized that no longer mattered. It was mine!

And it gets better. This gift is for *everybody*. If you haven't unwrapped yours yet, let this be the Christmas you do. It's the one that bears this note: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

From all of us at *Activated*, may you and yours experience the wonderful reality of a love-filled, Christ-filled Christmas.

KEITH PHILLIPS

FOR THE ACTIVATED FAMILY

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the Christmas GLOW

By Chloe West

IN HIS STORY, “REPAINTING THE ANGEL,” Wilfred Peterson tells of the restoration of a figurine.

The statuette of an angel holding the hand of a little boy had been placed on a neglected back shelf in an antique shop. It was covered with soot and dust, lost amidst the clutter of jars, dishes, and ornaments. A man browsing through the shop discovered the figurine and took it in his hands.



He had an inspiration: He would rescue it from oblivion, restore it, and give it a place of honor among his Christmas decorations.

At home in his basement workshop, the man covered the angel and the child with glistening white paint. Then he painted the wings of the angel and the hair of the little boy with sparkling gold. Each brush stroke worked magic. The old, grime-covered statuette vanished, and a shining, new one appeared. The statuette was transformed before his eyes into a thing of radiant beauty.

As the man painted, he thought, *Isn't this what happens to people at Christmas? They come to the end of the year dust-covered from the struggle. And then Christmas inspires them to repaint their nature with love and joy and peace.*

The art of repainting the angel! This is man's lifelong task: to never stay down in the dust and the dirt, but, heroically, to rise again after each fall.

Repainting the angel! A man need never lose his ideals, dreams, and purposes. He can always make them gleam again with the glory of renewed hope.

This story reminds me how life takes on a special glow at Christmas. It starts with the wonder of a little baby who came carrying a message of love and hope. For those in families, it continues with the happiness and camaraderie of celebrating together with loved ones. For anyone, alone or with others, it is completed when we contemplate what Jesus has done for us and thank Him for the blessings He has given.

Christmas is special because we enjoy not only what God has done for the whole world, but also for us personally. He has “repainted” us with new qualities that we couldn't have given ourselves. He has put His love inside us. He has given us peace, as the angels promised. He has forgiven all our sins and failures, and now He accepts us as His children—brothers and sisters with Jesus. He lets us feel the joy that knowing Him brings. We are transformed by Christmas. ★

CHLOE WEST IS AN ACTIVATED CONTRIBUTING EDITOR.

The wonder of Christmas

By Michael Roy

What is Christmas to you? To many people it's the biggest holiday of the year—a time when they don't have to go to work or school and are able to take a vacation. Of course, to many others the Christmas season is also a lot of *work*—a hectic time for shoppers and shopkeepers alike, as people frantically try to find the right gifts for relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Christmas is also a sentimental time when people tend to reminisce about past holidays spent with loved ones.

Late on a sleepy, star-spangled night, angels peeled back the sky just like you would tear open a sparkling Christmas present. Then, with light and joy pouring out of Heaven like water through a broken dam, they began to shout and sing the message that baby Jesus had been born. The world had a Savior! The angels called it “Good News,” and it was.

—Larry Libby

Ironically, Christmas Day itself gets sort of lost in the days and weeks surrounding it. Many cards and decorations nowadays say “Season’s Greetings,” with no mention of Christmas at all. Christmas trees, lights, presents, snowmen, jingle bells, candy canes, etc., all play their part in defining what most people associate with this festive season, while all but forgetting its true meaning.

There’s much more to Christmas than trees, decorations, Santa Claus, presents, and parties. If these distractions are set aside, then the real beauty and wonder of Christmas can be realized and appreciated. Christmas is the time to celebrate the day that the Creator of the universe sent His greatest gift to the world in the form of a weak and helpless baby. With that baby came a message of love, hope, and salvation for all people everywhere.

This holy child was born to a humble girl, who conceived miraculously, having never made love with any man. And though He was ordained to be a king—in fact the King of kings—He was not born in a plush palace with prestigious members of the court in attendance. There was no honor and praise accorded Him from the establishment of the day. Instead, He was born in a barn, amidst the cattle and asses, and then wrapped in rags and laid to rest in the animals’ feed trough.



**A BRIGHT NEW
STAR CAUGHT
THE ATTENTION
OF CERTAIN
WISE MEN.**

His birth brought no great fanfare or official recognition from the institutions and governments of man. But that night on a nearby hillside, lowly shepherds were awestruck as a brilliant light burst upon them from the starry sky and a multitude of angels filled the night with their heavenly declaration and song: “Glory to God in the highest! Peace on earth to men of good will! For unto you this day is born a Savior, Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11–14).

Far away in the East, another herald appeared in the heavens—a bright new star, which caught the attention of certain wise men. They realized its significance and followed it, crossing vast tracts of land, as it led them to the exact location of the young child in the little town of Bethlehem.

The child’s earthly father was a humble carpenter, with whom He lived and labored. In both childhood and adulthood He conformed to our human

ways of life. This was God’s plan for Jesus, in order for Him to learn to better understand and love us.

When He began His life’s work, He went about everywhere doing good. He not only preached His message, but He *lived* it among the common people, as one of them. He ministered to their spiritual needs, but also spent a great deal of time tending to their physical needs, miraculously healing them when they were sick, feeding them when they were hungry, and sharing His life and His love.

His teachings were so simple that He said you must become as a little child to receive them. He never said we had to attend religious services in elaborate temples or church buildings. In fact, He didn’t preach any complicated ceremonies or difficult religious rules at all. He simply preached love and showed love, as He tried to lead God’s children into the Kingdom of

Heaven and teach them God's two great commandments: to "love God with all your heart" and "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39).

He made Himself of no reputation, but was a friend and companion of drunks, prostitutes, and sinners—the outcasts and downtrodden of society. He even told them that they would enter the Kingdom of God before the so-called "good" people, the self-righteous religionists who rejected Him.

As His message of love spread and His followers multiplied, the jealous leaders of the established religion realized what a threat this formerly unknown carpenter had become to them. They finally had Him arrested on false charges of sedition, and though the Roman governor found Him innocent in the ensuing trial, these religious leaders pressured the governor into executing Him.

Three days after His lifeless body was laid to rest in a stone-cold tomb, He arose from the dead, the victor over death and Hell forever!

This Man, Jesus Christ, is God's Christmas gift to you and me. He is not merely a prophet, philosopher, teacher, rabbi, or guru; He is the Son of God.

The great Creator of the universe, God, is a Spirit and is all-powerful, all-knowing, everywhere, and in everything—far beyond our limited human comprehension. So He sent Jesus, in the form of a man, to show us what He Himself is like and to bring us to Himself. Though many great teachers have spoken and taught about love and about God, Jesus *is* love and He *is* God. He is also the only one who could die for the sins of the world. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man



comes unto the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

Would you like to know beyond a shadow of a doubt if Jesus Christ really is the Son of God, the way of salvation? You can. All you have to do is ask Him to come into your heart. He's real and He loves you—so much so that He suffered and died for your sins so that you wouldn't have to. The Bible says that "God so loved the world [you and me] that He gave His only begotten Son [Jesus], that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

You can receive Jesus, God's gift of love, right now by simply praying this prayer:

Dear Jesus, thank You for this good news of Your love. I want to know You and receive You into my life. Please forgive me for all the wrongs that I've done, come into my heart, and give me Your gift of eternal life. Amen. ★

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SAINT FRANCIS AND THE FIRST CHRISTMAS CRÈCHE

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

As a young man, Francis of Assisi loved material things, especially beautiful clothes from the shop of his wealthy merchant father. One biographer describes the handsome, young, fun-loving Francis as “the very king of frolic.” That changed at the age of about 20, after he went to fight in a skirmish with a rival city. He was taken prisoner, held for over a year, and came home very weak from a serious illness.

At some point during his ordeal, Francis realized that there must be more to life than shallow pleasures, and he came to the conclusion that real satisfaction was to be found in loving God and doing what God wanted him to do—love others. He was disowned by his father for giving away family wealth, surrendered whatever other worldly goods and privileges he had, and wandered the countryside, improvising hymns of praise as he went. Others, drawn by his sincerity, zeal, and joy, joined Francis in his vow of poverty—the beginnings of the Franciscan Order.

Francis loved people, from the rich and powerful in their palaces to the beggars in the streets. He also loved animals and is said to have been able to communicate with them. He also is said to have tamed a fierce wolf that terrified the villagers of Gubbio, Italy, and he petitioned the emperor to pass a law that all birds and beasts, as well as the poor, be

given extra food at Christmas, “so that *all* might have occasion to rejoice in the Lord.”

Francis was always looking for new ways to make God’s truths easily understandable to others. At Christmastime 1223, while visiting the town of Greccio, Italy, he had the idea of showing people what Jesus’ birthplace must have been like. He found a mountain cave near the village and fashioned it into a rough stable. St. Bonaventure (d. 1274), in his *Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, gave this account of what followed:

“Then he prepared a manger and brought hay and an ox and an ass to the place appointed. The brethren were summoned, the people ran together, the forest resounded with their voices, and that venerable night was made glorious by many brilliant lights and sonorous psalms of praise. The man of God [St. Francis] stood before the manger, full of devotion and piety, bathed in tears and radiant with joy. Then he preached to the people around the Nativity of the poor King; and being unable to utter His name for the tenderness of His love, he called Him the Babe of Bethlehem.”

Saint Francis is also considered the “father of the Christmas carol” for having been the first to include carols in Christmas worship services. As a boy, Francis had perhaps learned more in the school of the troubadours— itinerant composers and performers of songs—than from the priests of St. George’s at Assisi, where his father had sent him for an education. It’s not surprising, then, that joyous music became one of Francis’s favorite forms of worship. That joy was contagious, and still is. ★

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A FULL-TIME MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN THE MIDDLE EAST.



My Christmas Gifts

By Josie Clark

THE TREE IS TRIMMED, turkey defrosted, presents wrapped and under the tree. It was a long list, but I think I remembered everything and everyone. Today I promised myself I would stop for a moment and think about the important things. I would put aside the menu plan and leave the cookbook recipes for a moment to think about Christmas and what it means to me. Of course I find myself remembering family and friends and all that has happened during the past busy year. I think back to all the “presents” Jesus has given me.

Last Christmas our house was stuffed with family, friends, grown children, in-laws, and grandchildren. All of our eight children were with us for the first time in five years. Though I have been separated from some of them at times, I am so thankful for the loving bond we have. Just as our heavenly Father’s unconditional love causes us to love Him all the more, so

the difficulties we’ve gone through as a family have drawn us closer. Whenever one of us has needed some extra tender loving care, the others have been there to provide it.

The past year was intensely difficult for my family health-wise—including cancer and a life-threatening aneurysm. Some miracles of healing have already taken place. Others are miracles in progress. We’ve shared many requests for prayer and have seen many answers to prayer. I count high on my list of blessings the faith I was taught as a child—faith that has seen me through the bad times as well as the good.

I think about moments with my 10-year-old granddaughter, Jackie, who had come down with a mysterious virus that left this usually spunky, funny, witty child lying helplessly in a hospital bed, barely able to speak. I remember leaning over her and asking if she wanted me to pray for her, and her mouthing, “Yes, please.” And I remember the answer coming so quickly. Her mom phoned only a few weeks later to tell me that Jackie was playing “The Moonlight Sonata” on the piano again.

I remember the joy when one of my sons fell in love and we rejoiced as a wonderful young woman became a part of our family. I remember too the sadness of hearing that she had breast cancer and that their first year together was to be marred by surgery and chemotherapy. But even these difficulties and disappointments have been blessings in disguise by bringing us all closer as we have trusted the Lord together for her complete healing.

I remember the faces of young mothers-to-be whom I was able to help at a pregnancy crisis center where I

volunteer once a week as a counselor. I remember giving them clothing and food, helping them find the resources they need, and teaching them that the Lord has answers to all their questions and supply for all their needs. Some of the young women were at wits' end. Some needed a friend to listen to and cry with them. Some needed a little encouragement. Some needed a first gift for their baby—some small thing that they could hold in their hand to make them feel loved and to help them relate to the new life growing within them.

I remember the horror of Hurricane Katrina as it unfolded before our eyes on TV—the traumatized faces of survivors as they sought refuge in other cities, including ours. I also remember the glimmer of hope in the eyes of evacuees in the shelters where I worked as a volunteer. How thankful they were for a listening ear, a prayer, and a personal word of sympathy and encouragement!

**OUR
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I remember cuddle times with grandkids. I am Mom #2 for a six-year-old grandson who lives with us, along with Mom #1, our daughter. It takes more than one person to raise a child, and for all of us, our special situation has turned out to be another of God's special blessings.

I remember a good change that took place in the homeschooling of my teenage son, for whom studying had been getting more difficult and boring. Who would have thought that inviting other boys from the neighborhood to come for home schooling would make both teaching and learning easier, but that's exactly what happened—another of the Lord's surprises.

It has been a full year with fuller schedules than some years past, but in our "busyness" we have learned to take time for ourselves and extra time with God. I remember learning that quiet walks in our neighborhood helped me in several ways. They provided the exercise I needed, as well as moments of calm in the midst of otherwise chaotic days—moments spent praying for loved ones and drawing peace and assurance from God.

As I look at all the presents beneath my tree this year, I thank Him for all of His gifts of the past year and look forward to all He has for me in the coming year—365 gifts, each handpicked and lovingly wrapped, each containing another treasure from His heart to mine. I nearly always know what I want, and I sometimes think I know what's best, but only He always knows what's *truly* best. I am so very blessed! ★

JOSIE CLARK IS A FULL-TIME
VOLUNTEER WITH THE FAMILY
INTERNATIONAL IN THE U.S.

A CHRISTMAS PRAISE

You are God and man, king and servant. You left Your throne of immortality and encased Yourself in human flesh. You became one of us, so that You could save us. Joy floods my heart when I think of how You quietly and humbly came into our world and changed it forever. Who could have imagined the transformation that would come through a little baby, born to commoners, wrapped in rags, sleeping in a feeding trough?

Whether times are good or bad, even if I don't have anyone else, I will always have You and Your love—love that has stood the test of time, redeeming love, love that saved even me. Thank You for making the choice to experience both the joys and sorrows of our earthly life. Thank You for enduring the tears, pain, frustration, loneliness, exhaustion, and finally death so that You could truly understand us. Never has there been a more perfect love than Yours!

Let it shine



By Lilia Potters

THIS CHRISTMAS SEASON THE WORLD ACHES AND GROANS because of the losses and tragedies of the year. Many lives have been broken, and many dreams have been shattered. People the world over need to see the light of love that came down on that very first Christmas to brighten their lives, about which the prophet Isaiah wrote, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined” (Isaiah 9:2).

Today it may seem that this light has all but disappeared, as the shadows around us deepen. But things that *seem* aren’t necessarily *so*. Darkness can never triumph over light. We have but to flip a light switch or light a candle, and darkness will be driven from the room.

It can be the same in life. We can let the light and love of Jesus into our hearts and then shine it onto those around us by reaching out with kindness and concern. His light will shine brightly against the backdrop of hatred and indifference that permeates much of the world, and it will drive away the darkness from our immediate surroundings.

“What’s the use of that?” you ask. “That does not change much!” It may seem that the difference would be too

small to be noticed and too small to matter, but you’d be surprised. Even one candle can be seen a mile away when it’s very dark.

There is a story about a man who, as he walked along the beach, picked up stranded starfish and tossed them back into the ocean. A curious passerby asked, “Why do you do that? There are hundreds of those starfish on this beach. What difference does it make?” The man bent down and he picked up another starfish. As he tossed it into the water he replied, “It made a difference to *that* one.”

You can make a difference, too, by letting your light so shine that those whose lives you touch will be encouraged and regain hope for the year ahead. As with the starfish, you may not be able to reach out to everyone, but you can make a difference in the lives you do touch. And it doesn’t stop there, because they, in turn, can make a difference in the lives they touch.

It *can* happen, and it can start now if we will all make this our Christmas prayer:

Dear Jesus, fill our hearts with the light and love of Christmas. Make of us a string of living lights that will conquer the darkness and light the world around us with Your love. Amen. ★

LILIA POTTERS IS A FULL-TIME MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

**EVEN ONE
CANDLE CAN
BE SEEN A
MILE AWAY
WHEN IT'S
DARK.**

Alone at Christmas

By Vivian Patterson



I'D BEEN TRYING NOT TO THINK ABOUT CHRISTMAS, dreading the day, hoping against hope that some angel would come into my life and make everything okay. I even tried pretending that it was just a normal day, nothing special, in hopes that would make the loneliness go away. But I couldn't avoid it.—Christmas was all around me, and I was alone. No one to talk to, no one to laugh with, and no one to wish me a happy Christmas. With each minute that passed I was getting more depressed, and that's what I had dreaded the most!

To cheer myself up, I searched for happy memories to occupy my mind. One that popped up was about my Sunday school teacher. He had been an easygoing, friendly man who spent a lot of time with us kids and had a knack for making things fun. He had said that Jesus was the joy of his life. His words ran through my mind as I thought back to those childhood days: "Just take Jesus with you."

Would that work? I thought about it. I was alone—no one would know the difference. So I decided then and there to make Jesus my friend for the day.

We did everything together—drank hot chocolate by the fire, walked the streets together, talked about how pretty the world was, laughed, and waved at passers-by. I could almost feel His arm around me everywhere I went and hear His voice talking to me. In whispers beyond the realm of audible sound, He told me He loved me—yes, me—and that He would always be my friend. Somehow I knew I would never be alone again.

As I lay down to sleep that Christmas night I felt so happy, so peaceful, so content. It seemed odd, but then again it didn't. I'd spent the day with Jesus, and I just hoped that others had had as happy a Christmas Day as me. ★



to EACH heart

IT WAS MY FIRST CHRISTMAS IN TAIPEI, TAIWAN, WHEN I HEARD THE CHRISTMAS CLASSIC “SILENT NIGHT” SUNG IN CHINESE for the first time. It made a special impression, and I remember thinking that I had to learn the words. The first line was fairly easy—after all, half of it is the song title—but beyond that it got harder.

Even though I could only understand the most basic words in Mandarin Chinese, two friends and I felt we couldn’t let our lack of vocabulary deter us from sharing the Christmas spirit. Before I knew it, we were propelled into a busy schedule of Christmas benefit performances. The ten days leading up to Christmas were packed with carol singing and song and dance performances.

My second Christmas in Taipei, our voices bounced off the slick walls of some of the city’s trendiest malls and rang down the stark corridors of a detention center for delinquent boys. The appreciation we received from the boys was touching—thanks etched on each face for sharing with them the true meaning of Christmas. Patients at the hospitals we performed at that year also thanked us for remembering them.

Our clowns brought smiles to the faces of the orphans we visited.

As I helped pass out donated toys to needy children, it occurred to me that God always has the perfect Christmas gift for everyone—exactly what He knows each one needs most at the time. I recalled homes for the aged, where the hugs from our children soothed hearts that ached for their own absent families. At a shelter for the poor, a load of assorted gifts included baby items that came as an answer to a young mother’s earnest prayers.

Then came my third Christmas in Taipei. By this time I had finally learned “Silent Night” in Chinese, but since I was accompanying our little group on the guitar, I was out of the spotlight during our shows. We went from centers for the handicapped to hospitals and back again. Each time we sang “Silent Night,” I remembered the Christmases before and that little voice telling me to learn the words in Chinese. Now I wondered why I had gone to all the trouble.

A few days before Christmas, I was standing in the lobby of the Yang Ming Hospital, plucking absent-mindedly at my guitar. Our show was over, and some





By Saskia Smith

of the others had gone into the wards to cheer up patients who hadn't been able to come to our performance. Someone had to stay with our equipment, and that happened to be me this time.

Then I saw him—an old man, probably in his late 70s. He smiled, and I smiled back. He motioned for me to sit beside him, and I eased myself onto the bench, letting my guitar slide down to the ground behind me.

“Thank you ... for coming here,” he said slowly. It took a moment for me to realize he was speaking in English. I asked him if he enjoyed the show, and we quickly switched to Mandarin when I realized he had exhausted his English vocabulary.

He was sorry he hadn't seen our show, he said, but had heard about our ongoing work at the hospital and thought it was wonderful that we would come to his country to do all this. He made a wide, sweeping gesture with his hands to accentuate “all.”

Trying to keep the conversation alive, I told him that I had come to the hospital the year before too.

“And you may come the next,” the old man replied in Mandarin, with a twinkle in his eye, “but I won't be here.”

I felt foolish when I realized that he wasn't talking about not being at the hospital. He didn't expect to live to see the next Christmas.

“If you like,” I stammered awkwardly, “I can sing you a song *now*. I'm only one person and I don't know many songs, but...”

A look of satisfaction came across his wrinkled face, and he gave a sigh. “There *is* one song I would like to hear,” he said.

I cringed at the thought of having to meet a specific request. I would hate to disappoint him. And then my eyes fell on the piece of paper he was holding in his hands. It was the gospel tract I had given him when I first sat down. On the front was an illustration of a present wrapped with ribbons and the words “Christmas Gifts for You.” Its author was Jesus.

And then I understood. Through all those toys and other presents, the laughs, the tears, and the encouragement we shared with others along the way, God was bringing to each heart the gift they most needed. I just needed to be willing to be His hands and feet, His eyes, His ears, His mouth. Suddenly I knew it was going to be okay. I smiled bravely, even before he finished his request.

“Please,” he said, “sing ‘Silent Night.’” ★

SASKIA SMITH IS A FULL-TIME VOLUNTEER WITH THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN TAIWAN.

**GOD WAS
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EACH HEART
THE GIFT
THEY MOST
NEEDED.**

CHRISTMAS STRESS BUSTERS

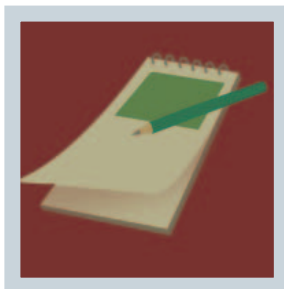
Adapted from D.J. Adams

Christmas is a great time for sharing, for getting together with old friends and new, for rediscovering the importance of family and of spirituality. But Christmas can also be hectic and even frustrating if we don't manage our time and our moods correctly. I know. I run a book and game store that gets tremendously busy during November and December, and yet I, too, have a family that wants me to spend extra time with them, shopping to do, parties to go to, and so on. Since I talk to a lot of frantic people every year around this time, I have some words of advice that hopefully can help you get the best out of this wonderful season, without it getting the best of you.



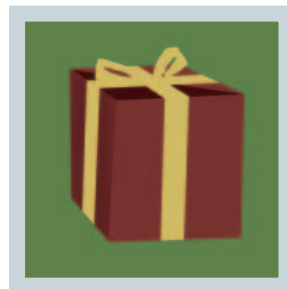
Keep your perspective.

Remember what Christmas is about: a time to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. The concepts of “peace on earth” and “goodwill toward men” (and women!) are universal and worth sharing. It’s sometimes difficult to remember this when you’re battling for a parking space in an overcrowded mall parking lot, but it’s worth the effort.



Plan ahead.

Why are so many of us shocked each year that it’s suddenly almost Christmas and we haven’t done a thing to prepare? Yes, you can wait till the last minute, but how much better and easier to pick up gifts early, wrap them, and put them in a closet? You can even start Christmas craft projects in July! By the time December rolls around, you won’t have much to do except to enjoy yourself—and you’ll be the envy of those of us who wish we’d been as organized!



Keep it simple.

Simplicity is a virtue. Holiday celebrations don’t have to be complex, and shouldn’t be. Gift-giving should be about showing someone you care about him or her, not about impressing him or her with how well-off you are. Don’t let yourself get snowed under by volunteering to bake two million cookies for the school Christmas party. Give of yourself, by all means, but don’t offer to give something you don’t have. Your family, your friends, your coworkers, your community, and others all have claims on your time, so budget accordingly.





Be charitable.

Charity begins in the home, but it is not meant to end there. The gifts we often most enjoy giving are ones that go to strangers and near-strangers. Are there families in your area whose children aren't getting much this holiday? Why not buy an extra toy, game, puzzle, or whatnot each time you go Christmas shopping, and give the extras to those folks who don't have extra? Maybe your school or workplace can organize something. If they do and if you can, volunteer. It's very fulfilling, and helping others is one of the best ways to defeat stress in your own life.



Plan some quiet time.

For some, this might mean going to early morning Christmas gatherings with other believers. It's a great way to start the day. For others, it might mean setting time aside each day for quiet reflection on the beauty of Christmas. But one way or another, plan to stop, pray, be thankful, and fill up your heart with God's good things.

Christmas is a wonderful time of year. Enjoy it!

AT CHRISTMAS

By Edgar A. Guest

A man is at his finest
towards the finish of the
year;
He is almost what he should
be when the Christmas
season's here;
Then he's thinking more of
others than he's thought
the months before,
And the laughter of his
children is a joy worth
toiling for.
He is less a selfish creature
than at any other time;
When the Christmas spirit
rules him he comes
close to the sublime.

When it's Christmas man is
bigger and is better in
his part;
He is keener for the service
that is prompted by the
heart.
All the petty thoughts and
narrow seem to vanish
for a while,
And the true reward he's
seeking is the glory of a
smile.
Then for others he is toiling
and somehow it seems
to me
That at Christmas he is
almost what God wanted
him to be.

If I had to paint a picture of
a man I think I'd wait
Till he'd fought his selfish
battles and had put
aside his hate.
I'd not catch him at his
labors when his thoughts
are all of wealth,
On the long days and the
dreary when he's striving
for himself.
I'd not take him when he's
sneering, when he's
scornful or depressed,
But I'd look for him at
Christmas when he's
shining at his best.

Man is ever in a
struggle and he's oft
misunderstood;
There are days the worst
that's in him is the
master of the good.
But at Christmas kindness
rules him and he puts
himself aside,
And his petty hates are
vanquished and his heart
is opened wide.
Oh, I don't know how to say
it, but somehow it seems
to me
That at Christmas man is
almost what God sent
him here to be.

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

A gift that keeps on giving

I have a very special gift for you—one that's different from anything you've ever received from anyone else. It's not for sale in any store because it can't be bought or sold, but I give it freely. It will never get old, never break down or wear out, and you can never outgrow it. No one can take it from you, and it will last forever. You can take it with you wherever you go and enjoy it any time, all the time. It never changes, but will never cease to surprise and amaze you. You can share it all you want, and there will always be plenty to go around. In fact, the more you share it, the more you'll have.

Have you guessed what it is?

My gift to you is the promise of My presence. I want to be nearer and dearer to you than any earthly friend or lover can be, and I have so much to give you—more than enough to fill every day from now through eternity.

I'll start with an extra dose of My love—true, unfailing, unconditional love, the kind of love you've wanted and waited for all your life. I know you're happiest when you feel loved, and because My love is the richest, fullest form of love there is, the happiness it brings is out of this world. It's not the fleeting happiness you sometimes find elsewhere, but deep, abiding happiness in all of its many hues and tones—joy, comfort, contentment, peace, stability, security, positiveness, delight...

And I'll *always* be here, just a heartbeat away, to enjoy the good times with you and help you through the tough ones. I never tire of your company, and I have the answers to all of your questions and problems. You can talk to Me any time, anywhere, and I'll whisper back to your heart or mind just what you need at that moment.

Reach out and accept this special gift, and it's yours!

*I'll always
be here*

