

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 10 • Issue 12

CHRISTMAS ANGELS

Help wanted. No experience needed.

Recession Gift Ideas

Give more while spending less

Looking for Christmas

It's not in the presents





PERSONALLY SPEAKING

For many millions of us, this Christmas will be unlike any we've ever had. Those who haven't felt the full impact of the worldwide economic downturn themselves are surrounded by people who have. Manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers whose annual bottom lines depend on Christmas sales are bracing for the lowest volume of sales in many years. Charities that count on Christmas giving to finance their projects for the next year face the prospect of having to scale back those projects, even as the need for them grows. People who have lost their businesses worry about their own families and those of their former employees. Out-of-work parents wonder how they will give their children any Christmas at all. Not since World War II has so much of the world's population been so severely affected by the same crisis.

Yes, this is going to be a different Christmas, but that doesn't mean it can't be a good one. Adversity has a way of bringing out the best in people, and so does Christmas. Put the two together, and we have a special opportunity.

It's an opportunity to sort things out—to separate what really counts from the lesser things that usurp their place in the business-as-usual world, especially at times like Christmas. It's an opportunity to change our focus from the commercialism that has taken over Christmas to the true, enduring reason for the season. It's an opportunity to find new ways to express our love to those dearest to us and to show compassion to others even less fortunate, of which there are always many. We may not be able to give materially like we have in past years, but one thing is almost certain: whatever we give will be appreciated like never before.

From all of us at *Activated*, happy Christmas! May it turn out to be the best one that you and yours have ever had!

Keith Phillips
For *Activated*

Browse our website or contact one of the distributors below to enjoy the inspirational, motivational, and practical help offered in our books and audiovisual material.

www.activated.org

Activated Ministries

PO Box 462805
Escondido, CA 92046-2805
USA
Toll-free: 1-877-862-3228
Email: info@actmin.org
www.activatedonline.com

Activated Europe

Bramingham Pk. Business Ctr.
Enterprise Way
Luton, Beds. LU3 4BU
United Kingdom
+44 (0) 845 838 1384
Email: activatedEurope@activated.org

Activated Africa

P.O. Box 2150
Westville 3630
South Africa
+27 (83) 556 8213
Email: activatedAfrica@activated.org

Activated India

P.O. Box 5215
G.P.O.
Bangalore - 560 001
India
Email: activatedIndia@activated.org

Activated Philippines

P.O. Box 1147
Antipolo City P.O.
1870 Antipolo City
Philippines
Cell: (0922) 8125326
Email: activatedPI@activated.org

Activated Australia

+61 2 80051938
Email: info@activated.org.au
www.activated.org.au

EDITOR Keith Phillips
DESIGN Yoko Matsuoka
PRODUCTION Jessie Richards

© 2009 Aurora Production AG
www.auroraproduction.com

All Rights Reserved

Printed in Taiwan by Ji Yi Co., Ltd.

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



Christmas

IN THE *Air*

Blessed is the season that engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love.
—Hamilton W. Mabie

THE WORLD IS FILLED WITH THE SOUNDS OF CHRISTMAS.

If you listen with your outer ears, you will hear carols, bells, and laughter, and now and then a sob of loneliness. If you listen with the inner ear, you will hear the sound of angels' wings, the hush of inner expectation, and the sacred sound of the deepest silence, the vibrant whisper of the eternal Word.

The world is filled with the sights of Christmas. If you look with your outer eyes, you will see brightly decorated trees, tinsel stars, flaming candles, and a crèche. If you look with the inner eye, you will see the star of Bethlehem in your own heart.

—Adapted from Anna May Nielson

WHAT IS CHRISTMAS? It is tenderness for the past, courage for the present, hope for the future. It is a fervent wish that every cup may overflow with blessings rich and eternal, and that every path may lead to peace.
—Agnes M. Pahro

MANKIND IS A GREAT, AN IMMENSE FAMILY. This is proved by what we feel in our hearts at Christmas.
—Pope John XXIII

IT IS CHRISTMAS in the heart that puts Christmas in the air. —W. T. Ellis

MAY YOU HAVE THE GLADNESS OF CHRISTMAS, WHICH IS HOPE; THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS, WHICH IS PEACE; THE HEART OF CHRISTMAS, WHICH IS LOVE.

—ADA V. HENDRICKS

I HAVE ALWAYS THOUGHT of Christmas time, when it has come round, as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys.
—Scrooge's nephew in *A Christmas Carol*, by Charles Dickens

WHEN WAS JESUS BORN?

Some theologians argue about the actual date of Jesus' birth, but what difference does it make? All that matters is that He was born, He lived, He died for you and me, and He rose again so we could do the same. Someone centuries ago picked December 25th to celebrate His birthday, and that's fine with me. I don't care when we celebrate it, as long as we do.

—David Brandt Berg

looking for *Christmas*

BY NYX MARTINEZ

IN THE PHILIPPINES, THE YULETIDE SEASON MEANS EVERYTHING—FAMILY REUNIONS, COMMEMORATING CHRIST’S BIRTH, CELEBRATING LOVE.

Combine that with good food, endless parties, and halls “decked with boughs of holly” from September all the way to February, and you’ve got a pretty merry Christmas.

But several years ago, Christmas didn’t bring the same good feelings for me. Maybe that was because I was a 20-year-old single girl who was craving a different kind of love that Christmas. I wanted someone to share it with, someone to love. That didn’t happen. Instead, I faced a string of personal problems and a lot of turmoil. I was spending Christmas near the equator, and my heart felt wintry cold.

My parents were full-time Christian volunteers, so Christmas was also synonymous with volunteer activities. This year, my sisters, brothers, friends, and I had already visited two national prisons, a few orphanages, the city’s main hospital, and a neighborhood in the slums.



Our first stop on Christmas Eve was at a home for the aged. I didn’t feel like going, but having already committed, I threw on a T-shirt, running pants, and sneakers. I slung a baseball cap low over my eyes, hoping no one would read the depression there.

During the chapel service, I sat far in the back pew, half listening as the pastor explained that the volunteers from our organization were going to perform a few dance numbers later, during the small party.

A few of the elderly people sitting near me smiled my way. “Will you also dance, young man?” a wavering voice beside me asked. I turned to see an old woman. Was she asking me?

An old man beside her chuckled and slapped his knee. “That’s a girl!” he said, amused.

An hour later, I was dancing, having forced myself into “stage mode.” For the next half hour we entertained with traditional and original Christmas songs and dance routines. Then it was their turn. We played interactive party games with the old folks, and then had a ballroom dancing competition. It was great fun to see them take their places on the dance floor. Time had not robbed their spirits of youth, as they danced to the music of their day—swing, boogie, cha-cha, and more.

“Thank you for coming,” the same old lady said to me, “and Merry Christmas!” She patted my hand.

Looking into her eyes, her loneliness mirrored my own.

Then came Christmas Day. Kelly, one of my best, wackiest friends, phoned in tears. She had tried to reconcile with her boyfriend the night before, but was rejected—turned away on Christmas Eve. It was the saddest story I had heard in a long time. I tried to comfort her, but my own disappointed hopes were too strong, it seemed. What could I say? Together, we prayed over the phone, committing to God our hearts’ desires and expectations.

As I listened to Kelly thanking God despite her tears, I felt ashamed of my selfishness. Maybe true Christmas love was there all along, and I just hadn't noticed. Had I missed it? I had been looking for happiness in a person—someone to fill my need for love. But instead, I had found so many also looking for something real—they were the lonely, the poor in spirit, the outcast, the forgotten, the dejected. It dawned on me: That's what God's love is really for, isn't it? It loves the unlovely, enters a world of disappointment, and brings hope.

That December taught me that the spirit of Christmas is alive for everyone, and those who don't see it are people like me who look in all the wrong places. Yet some folks look in the right places, with open hearts, and they do find that treasure.

Joseph and Mary were looking for a decent inn; they found an animal stable.

The Wise Men were looking for a king's royal palace; they found a carpenter's simple abode.

The angels were looking for people to spread the glad tidings of the newborn Savior; they found humble shepherds.

God was looking for someone to bring heaven's love to, and He looked in the right place. He found you.

I hope that this time, we will also look in the right place and find those to bring His love to. I hope that each year we will all find Christmas. ✨

That's what
God's love is
really for, isn't it?
It loves the unlovely,
enters a world of
disappointment, and
brings hope.

A CHRISTMAS PRAYER

Loving God, help us to remember the birth of Jesus that we may share in the songs of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and the worship of the wise men. Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world. Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting. Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings. May our minds be filled with grateful thoughts and our hearts with forgiveness, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

—Robert Louis Stevenson

Christmas thoughts for hard times

AN OPEN LETTER BY LILY SRIDHAR

DEAR ONE,

I was thinking of you today and wanting to send some encouragement your way, when my thoughts went back to the very first Christmas. The picture that came to mind wasn't the traditional depiction of the Nativity, though, with Mary looking serene and lovely in a fresh gown, adoring the infant Jesus wrapped in spotless white linen and lying in a manger that looks more like a nice piece of furniture than a feeding trough for farm animals, while a donkey, groomed for the occasion, stands beside tall, strong, unshakable Joseph. No, the picture I saw was probably more true to life.

How difficult it must have been for Mary to make the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem when she was due to give birth any day. The Bible doesn't actually say that Jesus was born the same night she and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem, but a 65-mile trek, whether on foot or the back of a donkey, certainly would have been strenuous enough to bring on labor. Contractions are hard enough to manage in pleasant surroundings. Imagine starting labor on a dusty road with miles to go. What a test that must have been for her. Can't you hear Joseph telling her over and over, "Just hold on a little longer," as they journeyed on?

Or perhaps Joseph was near the end of his rope also, weary and plagued with doubt. Couldn't he have found a better way to travel or made the journey sooner? Perhaps he was tempted to despair when they arrived in Bethlehem and the inn was full. Couldn't he have found a better place for Mary to give birth than a barn?

Mary and Joseph both probably feared at some point that they would fail in the all-important mission they had been chosen for—the mission of bringing the bearer of God's love and light into a world lost in darkness.

Think of the joy they must have felt, though, when they held their newborn and gazed into His beautiful, loving eyes! That moment is one that every new parent treasures, as well as one of life's most rewarding experiences. It must have been even more special for Mary and Joseph, as their little baby shone with God's love like no other newborn ever had. From all accounts, the few others who saw baby Jesus that night each sensed that—strange as it must have seemed—He would be their guiding light and fulfill God's promise of salvation.

But the night of Jesus' birth was also the beginning of a life of trouble, danger, sorrow, and pain for Him and His family. There was the final glorious victory when Jesus rose from the dead, but that victory didn't come easily.

So much depended on Mary and Joseph, who, apart from their unique calling as Jesus' earthly parents, were normal flesh-and-blood people like you and me. How tough it must have been for them at times! Seen in that light, my own trials and struggles, as oversized and overpowering as they seem at times, look more manageable.

It's natural to get discouraged or lose hope when circumstances overwhelm us and we feel nobody cares. I feel that way sometimes, and reflecting on all that you've

gone through this past year, dear friend, I expect you must too. I want to encourage you, though, to keep going no matter what—to “fight the good fight of faith,”¹ as the Bible puts it—knowing that nothing can separate you from God's love² and you are not alone in life's battles.

Hold on, dear friend, and someday we will all celebrate the victory together—Mary, Joseph, Jesus, you, me, and a whole lot of others. Why? Because by God's grace we didn't give up but kept hoping, persevering, and loving to the end.

LILY SRIDHAR IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN INDIA. ✨

¹ Timothy 6:12

² Romans 8:38–39

CHRISTMAS IN BETHLEHEM

By MICHAEL DOOLEY

Winter fires were burning bright,
Travelers journeyed in the night.

A husband led his weary wife
Through the falling snow
To a humble cattle stall,
Nowhere else to go.
Christmas in Bethlehem,
Many years ago.

There was born a baby boy,
Mother's heart was filled with joy,
Shepherds heard the angel voices
Fill the night with song,
Wise men wondered at a star,
With strange celestial glow.
Christmas in Bethlehem,
Many years ago.

And in Bethlehem today
Children fear, yet still they play
While mothers cry and fathers pray
For peace to come again.
And around the weary world
Echoes the refrain:
“Christmas in Bethlehem,
When shall true love reign?”

One day soon the Prince of Love
Will return from skies above
And His power shall overcome
All pain and tears and war.
Then shall songs of joy and praise
Ring out from shore to shore:
“Christmas in Bethlehem,
Peace on earth once more.”

MICHAEL DOOLEY IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

THE SONG “CHRISTMAS IN BETHLEHEM” IS AVAILABLE FOR LISTENING AND FREE DOWNLOADING AT [HTTP://NUBEAT.ORG/ABCHROC.T.HTML](http://NUBEAT.ORG/ABCHROC.T.HTML). OR ORDER THE CD *RHYTHM OF CHRISTMAS* FROM ONE OF THE ADDRESSES ON PAGE 2. ✨



Christmas

BY DAVID BRANDT BERG

FOR THE CHRISTIAN, EVERY DAY CAN BE CHRISTMAS! JESUS SHOWERS HIS LOVE DOWN ON US EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR. BUT SAD TO SAY, IT'S NOT THAT WAY FOR SO MANY POOR FOLKS WHO HAVEN'T YET FOUND THE REAL MEANING OF CHRISTMAS.

So many people are lost, lonely, downtrodden, weak, and weary. Some are weak in their bodies, others are weak in their minds, and yet others are weak in body, mind, and spirit.

There are those who are trampled on: the poor, the persecuted, the hungry, victims of war and crime and exploitation; those nobody wants or cares about, those who have so little in the way of worldly goods, those who lack even the basic necessities.

Then there are others who do have material goods and who appear to "have it together" in the eyes of others, but who are lost and lonely prisoners of their own selfish desires. They are weary and heavy laden with problems, stress, fears, and phobias.

There are those who wear a smile, yet ache inside; those who are engulfed in a sea of emptiness; those who suffer from pain, guilt, bitterness, and condemnation; those who feel remorse over the past or fear the future—so many lost and desperate folks in the world today!

It reminds me of the refrain from an old Beatles song, "All the lonely people, where do they all come from?" Well, I'll tell you where they come from—all the lonely people come from selfish living.

All the lonely people, the lost and the forlorn, come from a society where people look to their own needs and not to the needs of others. That's where all the lonely people come from—from a dog-eat-dog society, from a lot of wrongful living. They're products of the Devil's own doctrines of "do your own thing" and "to each his own." That's where all the lonely people come from. All those lonely people are the product of a world that has forgotten its Creator. They're victims, the sad result of what happens when people's lives aren't ruled by love.

DEEPENING DARKNESS

It's getting darker and colder all the time, and many people can feel it. They may not understand it, and they don't always want to admit it, but it's happening. The sun is setting, the darkness is falling, and the world is looking for hope, for some ray of light.



Angels

Event after event has left the nations questioning. “Why this and why that? Why all the pain and strife in the world? Why the slaughter of the innocents? Why troubles and sorrows?” These questions are being raised in people’s hearts and minds, and those whose foundations have been built on the sand, or others who had no foundations to begin with, have no answers. Never has the world been hungrier for true love and real answers than now!

It’s reminiscent of that famous Christmas carol “O Holy Night”: “O holy night, the stars are brightly shining! It is the night of our dear Savior’s birth. Long lay the world in sin and [sorrow] pining. ...”

There’s so much talk about the “advancement” and “betterment” of mankind—advanced medicine, modern technology, new inventions, better governments to make ours a better world to live in—so much talk of progress, when in reality things are regressing all the more. Look around! Today people are lying in sin, sorrowful and pining away on the inside. There’s so much confusion, so many voices saying, “This is the way to go,” so many false claims deceiving the people. The world needs to hear the truth!

ANGELS ARISE!

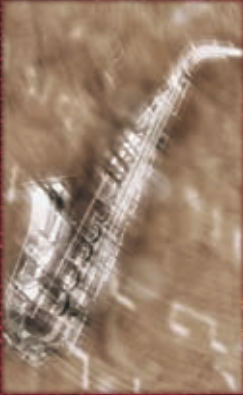
How does the rest of that song go? “A thrill of hope! The weary soul rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!” The world needs that ray of hope! People need to hear about the new and glorious morning that is just around the corner.

The refrain is also very significant: “Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angels’ voices!” Just like the shepherds heard the angels announce the birth of Christ, the Lord wants the people of the world to hear those angels’ voices today.

And I’ve got news for you: You can be one of those angels. You can be one of those Christmas angels sent from Jesus Himself to proclaim the good news to the lost and lonely of the world, to give them the ray of hope they have been waiting for.

In this day of hatred and hardness of hearts, of confusion and deception, of scheming and sly words, of false fronts and cover-ups, there is a great need for His love to shine through. As the darkness falls and the cold winds blow, you must hold up the light. You must hold it up steady and firm for all to see.





LOVE IN ACTION

Not only do people need to hear the truth, but they need to see the truth. People not only need to hear about true love, they need to see it. They need to see love put into action!

Jesus said, “By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one toward another” (John 13:35). It’s not good enough to just talk about love. Jesus said you have to have love, you have to live love.

WHAT CAN YOU GIVE HIM?

This Christmas and throughout the coming year, give Jesus the gifts that He’s most pleased with—gifts of love. Give your love. Give of yourself. Shine forth the love and sweetness of Jesus through the light of your eyes, a loving look, kind speech, and kind deeds. Be like Jesus for others. Be the living sample of the message, the living proof that it works.

What better way to live Christmas each and every day of the year than to continually give to those around you, to truly live as He taught us, to show His love in all the little ways throughout the day, to show the world living proof that the love of Jesus works!

Back to the carol: “Truly He taught us to love one another; His law is love, and His Gospel is peace!” He’s entrusted you, His child, with His law, which is love. Now He’s trusting you to follow it, to make it work, and to live in love, that by this all men may know that you are His disciples.

Pray and ask the Lord to help you live Christmas each and every day of the year by helping you follow His great commandment to love your neighbor as yourself. This is the real meaning of Christmas. This is the reason for it all. This is the reason Jesus came down at Christmas in the first place—so we could have life eternal, yes, but also to teach us to love, so we could turn around and share that life with others.

Give of yourself. Give others your love, your prayers, your time, your attention, your care. Love God by loving your neighbor. Expand your love this Christmas! Be an angel! ✨

Christmas is love in
action. Every time we
love, every time we
give, it’s Christmas.

—Dale Evans Rogers



WHY I LOVE CHRISTMAS

BY GABRIELA DeLORENZO

LAST CHRISTMAS my children and I teamed up with another family to spread Christmas cheer to children with physical disabilities. Our program consisted of music, clowns, and lots of personal attention. Because the children's disabilities varied greatly from audience to audience, we never quite knew what to expect.

One show was hosted by an organization that assists disabled children from low-income families. When we arrived, one adorable toddler caught my attention immediately. A closer look revealed a breathing tube coming from his neck. I scanned the room and saw that about half of the other children there were also hooked up to breathing machines. All of the others, it turned out, were their siblings and friends.

Before our program started, the event organizers held a question-and-answer period with the parents, and I listened in. Most of the parents' questions centered on their children's oxygen needs—how much bottled oxygen was available to help get each child through the next couple of weeks, and so on.

After one of our clowns had gotten everyone laughing and our children had sung and danced their hearts out, it was my turn. I donned a clown costume and set out to make a balloon sculpture for each of the children in the audience.

As I worked my way through the room, I was moved by these children and their parents who all go through so much every day. I have three healthy, energetic kids. I don't have to think about carrying enough oxygen whenever I take them out. I don't have to closely monitor their every activity, lest they overdo and wind up gasping for air.

After all the balloon hats, swords, flowers, and dogs had been made, the children moved onto the dance floor, and I sat and watched, silently praying for them

and thanking God for my own blessings. That was when I realized this is why I love Christmas. It's a time for giving of ourselves—our time, our energy, our love—as well as a time for thanking and praising the One who blessed us with life and love and makes all good things possible.

GABRIELA DeLORENZO IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN INDIA. ✨

Christmas is not made special by presents, decorations, and parties, but by what we give to Jesus and to others from our hearts. Giving from our hearts demonstrates true gratitude and appreciation for all God has given us.

—Alex Peterson

recession christmas gift ideas

HOW TO GIVE MORE WHILE SPENDING LESS



Time. You would probably be surprised at how many people on your gift list would enjoy an evening of company more than a boxed gift.

Notes of appreciation. Instead of commercial Christmas cards with generic messages, take the time you would normally spend shopping for gifts to write those people personal notes telling them what makes them special to you.

A thoughtful Christmas gift doesn't have to cost a lot of money or require hours of searching through crowded malls. All that is needed is your big heart and an imagination.—Linda King

Custom gift cards. Make gift cards promising to do repairs or cleaning jobs, babysit, run errands, teach a skill you have, or perform some other service.

Make or bake. When you exchange gifts in your office or social circle party, you could suggest that people bring simple baked goods or a homemade gift instead of more expensive retail items.

If instead of a gem, or even a flower, we should cast the gift of a loving thought into the heart of a friend, that would be giving as the angels give.

—George MacDonald

Share your children. Make recordings of your children singing Christmas carols, reading stories, or telling about their latest activities for grandparents and other relatives who won't be able to spend Christmas with you, or frame and send them some of your children's best artwork.

Open your house. Know a university student who can't afford to go home for the holidays or someone else who doesn't have any family locally? Invite him or her to spend the holidays with you and your family.

Think local. By doing your Christmas shopping at independently owned local stores that are having an especially tough time competing with large chains in the present economic climate, you can in a sense be giving double—once to the recipient and once to the shop owner.

Volunteer at a shelter or charity. Make others' Christmas special by spending yours with them. Volunteer as a family or group of friends and you will also strengthen your ties and create a shared memory.

Give your gifts away. Skip the family gift exchange and instead give gifts to a poor family in your community. Local charitable organizations can help you find a family in need. Then take your children shopping and help them pick out Christmas gifts for the needy children. Or you can pool the money you would normally spend on gifts for each other and help alleviate poverty in the developing world by donating to the needy through an organization such as Family Care Foundation (www.familycare.org) or other charities operating in poor countries. ❄️

Christmas is most truly Christmas when we celebrate it by giving the light of love to those who need it most.—Ruth Carter Stapleton

FREE AT LAST

BY LI SHUPING SICHROVSKY

ONE BY ONE THE PRISONERS FILED INTO THE SMALL MEETING HALL. Each one wore the same gray outfit and had the same closely trimmed haircut, but their faces showed that each was an individual with his own story of what had brought him to this place.

“I am arranging for the most hardened and dangerous criminals to watch your program,” the warden had told us. “Many of them will never see freedom again. They are the ones who most need to hear what you have to say.”

It was three days before Christmas. After passing through the many gates and checkpoints of this maximum security prison, our children were about to perform and speak to these inmates. One man in particular caught my attention. He was one of the last to enter the hall, and he seemed to be the oldest. His step was halting, his hair turning white. *What is an old man like him doing in here?* I wondered.

“Mom, did you see that old man in the back?” my son asked. “You should try to talk to him.”

“Yes.” *But how?* I wondered. We weren’t supposed to mingle with the prisoners. *Please, Lord, make a way.*

The children did very well in their presentation. It was beautiful to see the sullen faces light up with smiles and the men nod in agreement, reflect on the message of the stories being told, and finally bow their heads in prayer. Many were moved to tears. After final bows, Christmas greetings, and farewells, the long gray line of prisoners started moving again, this time in the other direction.



“God loves you and His love is everlasting. Jesus has already forgiven you and will love you forever and forever.”



I quickly made my way to the back to try to find the old man. I knew I would only have a few moments before he stepped into the line. Our eyes met as if he had been waiting for me. “Your children were wonderful,” he said. “They have so much love, so much joy. When your daughter started singing Psalm 23, I couldn’t help but cry. I’m 68 years old, and I was a Christian myself once. I know that Psalm.” His hoarse voice started to sing in the local dialect, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not...”

His eyes grew red and watery, and he couldn’t finish the line. “I have done something very bad. That’s why I am here,” he whispered. I was close to crying myself.

I took his arm and said, “God loves you and His love is everlasting. Jesus has already forgiven you and will love you forever and forever.” It was all I could think to say in the moment I had with him, but this simple truth had a profound effect. A smile came over his tear-streaked face and he straightened himself, as though a heavy burden had been lifted off his shoulders.

“Thank you for reminding me of that.” Then it was his turn to join the line of prisoners filing out of the meeting hall. He waved as he turned the corner, and then he was gone.

As we were driving home, I thought, *This man had committed a serious crime that no doubt hurt others, but God still wanted to remind him of His love and forgiveness.*

How many people, I wonder, are walking around in the world today just like that man, imprisoned by guilt and remorse over past mistakes and wrongdoing? They feel condemned for things they’ve done, things they said, or the things they should have done but didn’t. Yet all it takes is a simple reminder of God’s unconditional never-ending love, mercy, and forgiveness to bring back hope and light the darkest place of the saddest heart.

“THOUGH YOUR SINS ARE LIKE SCARLET, THEY SHALL BE AS WHITE AS SNOW; THOUGH THEY ARE RED LIKE CRIMSON, THEY SHALL BE AS WOOL.”¹

LI SHUPING SICHROVSKY IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN TAIWAN. ❀

¹Isaiah 1:18



If you haven't yet found the door to eternal life, love, and freedom from guilt and remorse over past mistakes, you can right now by praying this prayer:

Jesus, thank You for coming to my world to lead me back to Yours. I want to experience Your love and forgiveness. I receive You now as my Savior. Amen

THE ANSWER

Can you remember a time when you were a child and you wanted something so badly that it seemed that special something would never come?—And then when it finally did come, it wasn't what you had expected at all, but something far better? That's what our heavenly Father did with Christmas.

Since the beginning of time, people had longed for a special something to make their lives truly happy and complete. Who would have ever thought that all of that would come in the form of a tiny baby born in a barn in some faraway land? But that's exactly what happened.

God looked at every human heart He had created and every heart to come, and He knew just what each one needed. So He took a part of His own heart and fashioned the perfect answer. Then He sent the answer into the world. And He called the answer “Jesus.”—Keith Phillips

On the Eve of 2010

BY ABI F. MAY

The eve of a new year is often a great time to reflect, to rejoice over the progress of the past year while also learning from the setbacks and mistakes. Then it's time to look forward. What would you like to accomplish? What would you like to change?

One key to succeeding in the new year is to plan ahead but not worry ahead. "Don't worry" may seem easier said than done, particularly if you are facing an uncertain future with health, financial, or personal problems. This is why planning alone is not enough. Peace of mind comes from putting your future in God's hands and trusting Him to work things out.

If you not only make plans, but also commit those plans to Him, He promises to help bring your plans to fruition. "Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass."¹ Of course, this is provided your plans are within the scope of what He knows is best for you and others involved, so the first step is to check your plans with Him—or better yet, get your plans from Him. Take a few quiet minutes to open your mind to God, and He will put His thoughts there. He loves you and has your best interests at heart, so ask Him to help you set goals and lay plans, and He will. You just might find that His ideas are far better than your own. He says, "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know."² And with Him, all things are possible.³ Do what you can by asking God for direction as you plan and prepare for the year ahead, and commit your needs to Him in prayer. Then continue to seek His help throughout the year, and watch Him guide, provide, and take care of you!



A PRAYER FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

Dear Jesus,

I don't know what the future holds for me, but I put that future in Your hands. Thank You for the many promises You have given that encourage me to trust You.⁴ Help me to have faith as I begin this new year, to be fully persuaded that what You have promised, You will also perform.⁵ No matter what life has in store, may I stay close to You and draw comfort from the knowledge that nothing can separate me from Your love.⁶ May I walk in truth,⁷ in love,⁸ in wisdom,⁹ and most of all with You. Amen.

¹Psalm 37:5

²Jeremiah 33:3

³Matthew 19:26

⁴Psalm 37:3; 73:28;

Proverbs 29:25

⁵Romans 4:21

⁶Romans 8:38–39

⁷John 4

⁸Ephesians 5:2

⁹Colossians 4:5



My gift to you

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

Love—this is My special gift for you. Love that knows no boundaries. Love that does not judge you by the color of your skin, the way you look, or how you speak. Love that gives. Love that shares. Love that cares. Love that is vibrant, warm, and kind. Love that is unconditional and forever.

Love that is patient in a world of intolerance. Love that is understanding when others fail to see into your heart. Love that is kind and tender when all else around you seems cold and hard. Love that comforts you in your sorrow, that consoles you when you're lonely, that gives you a helping hand when you're down. Love that is full of happiness and laughter. Love that brings peace in the midst of stormy weather. Love that always finds a way.

My love is always there for you—any place, any time, day or night. My love will descend to any depth to save, go any length to rescue. It knows no stopping place, no limit. I give you My love, infinite and true.

My love brings peace of mind when you are confused, rest when you are weary, and strength when you feel you cannot go on. My love will calm your fears and give you courage in the face of despair. My love can heal when your body is broken; it can soothe your heartaches and pain. My love will ease your mind when it is troubled and weary; it will melt away tension, worry, and strain.

My love is My Christmas gift for you.