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CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

JOY AT CHRISTMAS

The meanings behind
beloved traditions

THE ETERNAL CHAIN OF LOVE

It's up to us to keep it going

WHO WILL TAKE THE SON?

The greatest bargain
of all time



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PERSONALLY SPEAKING

Another Christmas is almost here, and if you're like most people, you're probably so busy with all that goes into Christmas that you haven't yet found much time to stop and think about "the reason for the season." Well, here's your chance! This issue of *Activated* is all about putting the meaning and joy back into Christmas.

To get us started, I'm including here excerpts of a piece written nearly 100 years ago by the U.S. poet and theologian Henry Van Dyke (1852–1933), called "Keeping Christmas." In it he asks some provocative questions that are just as relevant today as they were then.

There is a better thing than the *observance* of Christmas Day, and that is *keeping* Christmas.

Are you willing to forget what you have done for other people and to remember what other people have done for you?

To ignore what the world owes you, and to think what you owe the world?

Are you willing to stoop down and consider the needs and desires of little children?

To remember the weakness and loneliness of people who are growing old?

To stop asking how much your friends like you, and ask yourself whether you love them enough?

To make a grave for your ugly thoughts and a garden for your kindly feelings, with the gate open?

Are you willing to do these things even for a day?

Then you can keep Christmas.

Are you willing to believe that love is the strongest thing in the world—stronger than hate, stronger than death—and that the blessed Life which began in Bethlehem many years ago is the image and brightness of eternal love?

Then you can keep Christmas.

From all of us at *Activated*, may God bless you and yours with His love and deep abiding joy this Christmas season and always.

Keith Phillips

Keith Phillips
For the *Activated* family

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THE BIRTHDAY GETAWAY

BY SHANNON RICHARDS


A NEWLYWED COUPLE IS TAKING A WEEKEND OFF TO CELEBRATE the husband's birthday. They have looked forward to this for months. It's their first vacation together since their honeymoon. The wife wants it to be perfect.

As soon as they're situated in their cozy cabin hideaway, the wife takes off to town. She spends hours and spares no expense, scouring the shops for her beloved's favorite foods, drinks, desserts, and lovely knickknacks to decorate the cabin just the way she knows he will like it. She looks high and low until she finds the right gift. Actually, she's not quite sure it's the right gift, but she thinks it's beautiful and hopes he will too.




















By the time she returns to the cabin, the sun is setting. As she walks in the door, her husband greets her warmly but receives only a quick embrace. The wife hurries into the kitchen and continues the preparations.

The husband sits and watches as she races from room to room, stirring a pot, lighting a candle, preparing the salad, turning on some romantic music. Finally everything else is ready and she retreats to the bedroom to make herself pretty.

As she comes out, she expects to be met with praise and appreciation for all her efforts to get everything right. Instead, a tear trickles down her husband's face—a tear that says, "I would rather have had that time with *you*."

Christmas is Jesus' birthday. What would He want most from us—our service or our love? 


CHRISTMAS COMMITMENTS

This Christmas, I will...  mend a quarrel  dismiss suspicion  seek out an old friend  write a love letter  be kind  give a soft answer  listen  apologize if I've been wrong  share some treasure  be gentle  be patient and understanding  reexamine my demands on others  think first of others  encourage someone  laugh more  express gratitude  show appreciation  welcome a stranger  gladden the heart of a child.

Finding the purpose of Christmas

WHY IS THE OCCASION that is meant to celebrate God's love in sending Jesus to brighten our lives and lighten our loads one of the most stressful and taxing times of the year for so many? Is it because we forget the true meaning of Christmas? Sometimes we lose it in the baubles and lights, the presents and the parties. When we forget the purpose of Christmas, we lose the happiness that comes with it. Preparations crowd out the reason for it all—showing thankfulness and appreciation for what God gave mankind on this night.

Christmas is ultimately a celebration of God's love for each of us. The best way we can celebrate Christmas is by giving gifts to Jesus—gifts of love and thankfulness. It is a time when we can stop and remember those who are often forgotten. We can reach out to help those in need.

These are the things that not only make God happy, but also help us find deep satisfaction. 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. 

JOY AT CHRISTMAS

By Curtis Peter Van Gorder

CHRISTMAS IS A TIME OF JOY AND CELEBRATION. Many countries have unique customs and traditions that help make this a happy season.

In Mexico, starting nine days before Christmas Day, children go through their neighborhoods reenacting Joseph and Mary's search for lodgings. Two children carrying figures of Joseph and Mary lead a procession to a particular house singing Christmas carols as they go. They knock on the door and ask for a room. At first they are refused, but then they are allowed in. A feast and celebration follow. Blindfolded children enjoy using a stick to try to break the *piñata*, a large brightly decorated paper figure hung from the ceiling and containing candy or small gifts.

In Ireland, a candle is lit and put in the window on Christmas Eve to welcome any weary travelers.

In Scotland, on the night after Christmas, boxes of food are wrapped and given to the poor.

In Russia, some Orthodox Christians fast during a period before Christmas. Then, at the sight of the first star in the sky on Christmas Eve, a 12-course supper begins.

In Greece, children go from house to house on Christmas Eve, knocking on doors and singing songs that herald the arrival of the Christ Child.

In Ghana, West Africa, the houses are decorated with bright paper

ornaments made by the families for the occasion. A tree in the courtyard of each house—often a mango, guava, or cashew tree—is also decorated.

In Ethiopia, members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church celebrate Christmas on January 6, following the ancient Roman calendar.

In southern India, Christians decorate their houses with clay lamps at night.

In the Philippines, Christmas carols start filling the airwaves as early as September.

In China, Christians build artificial trees—called “trees of light”—and decorate them with paper chains, flowers, lanterns, and other ornaments.

Americans decorate their houses with brightly colored lights. In some parts of the country they also line the streets with candles.

In many countries, nativity scenes are displayed to remind everyone of the birth of Jesus. In Italy, the family prays as the mother puts the figure of the Christ Child (*Bambino*) in the manger.

Around the world, bells are rung on joyous occasions. What more joyous occasion could there be than that of celebrating God's love gift to the world, His only Son? Throughout Norway, people ring in Christmas by ringing bells at 5 PM on Christmas Eve.

And there is the Christmas tree, of course. There is considerable speculation as to how and when





the evergreen became a symbol of Christmas, but many believe it can be traced to medieval Germany, where the *Paradeisbaum*, or Paradise tree, a type of evergreen, was decorated with red apples and used in a popular play about Adam and Eve that was put on at Christmastime, which ended with the promise of the coming Savior. The fact that the tree is always green symbolizes the eternal life that Jesus promises those that believe in Him. Just as the evergreen thrives even in winter, so Christ was triumphant over death.

Christians in times past decorated their homes with the holly tree at Christmastime. They called it the “holy tree,” as the prickly leaves reminded them of the crown of thorns that Jesus wore when He was crucified, and the red berries reminded them of the blood He shed for the forgiveness of our sins.

Perhaps the most widespread of all Christmas traditions—the giving of gifts to loved ones—has its roots in the gifts the wise men from the East presented to Jesus. They had seen a sign in the heavens that signaled the Messiah’s birth, and they went to worship Him. In those days, travel was not easy. It probably took the wise men about two years of preparation and travel before they arrived in Judea and were able to give their presents to Jesus. “The star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and

stood over where the young Child was” (Matthew 2:9).

The gifts the wise men gave were gold, frankincense, and myrrh—the best their kingdoms had to offer the Messiah. The gift of gold signified His royalty. It was also no doubt a great help to Joseph and Mary when they soon had to flee to Egypt to save Jesus from Herod’s assassination attempt, and to live there as foreigners until it was safe to return to Judea. The gift of frankincense signified His divinity. It was an aromatic resin from which incense and perfume fit for kings were made. Myrrh, the third gift, was another aromatic resin from which perfume was made to embalm the dead. This signified Jesus’ humanity and that He would die for us. Jesus’ birth, suffering, death, and glory were all revealed in the wise men’s gifts.

But *why* all these traditions? Let’s travel back to the first Christmas Eve, where some shepherds are taking care of their flocks on a hillside near Bethlehem. A bright light bursts forth and angels announce the birth of Jesus in song. The shepherds are so excited that they run and tell everyone they can about what just happened. Imagine the joy that Mary and Joseph experience when they hold God’s Son in their arms! That same unspeakable joy can still be felt today by all those who open their hearts to receive God’s love in Jesus. ✠

*“I bring you
good tidings
of great
joy which
will be to
all people.
For there
is born to
you this day
a Savior,
who is Christ
the Lord”*

(Luke 2:10–11).



*I could never
repay what
your son
did for me.*



WHO WILL TAKE THE SON?

A WEALTHY MAN AND HIS SON LOVED TO COLLECT RARE WORKS OF ART. THEY HAD EVERYTHING IN THEIR COLLECTION, FROM PICASSO TO RAPHAEL. THEY WOULD OFTEN SIT TOGETHER AND ADMIRE THE GREAT WORKS OF ART.

WHEN WAR BROKE OUT, THE SON WENT TO FIGHT. HE WAS VERY COURAGEOUS, AND DIED IN BATTLE WHILE RESCUING ANOTHER SOLDIER. THE FATHER WAS NOTIFIED AND GRIEVED DEEPLY FOR HIS ONLY SON.

About a month later, just before Christmas, there was a knock at the father's door. He opened it to find a young man with a large package in his hands.

"Sir, you don't know me," the young man said, "but I am the soldier for whom your son gave his life. He saved many lives that day, and he was carrying me to safety when a bullet struck him in the heart and he died instantly. He often talked about you and your love for art." The young man held out his package. "I know this isn't much. I'm not really a great artist, but I think your son would have wanted you to have this."



The package contained a portrait of the son, painted by the young man. The father stared in awe at the way the soldier had captured his son's personality in the painting. The father was so drawn to the eyes that his own welled up with tears. He thanked the young man and offered to pay him for the picture.

"Oh, no sir. It's a gift, though I know I could never begin to repay what your son did for me."

The father hung the portrait over his mantle, and whenever he had visitors

Finally a voice came from the very back of the room. It was the family's longtime gardener. "I'll give \$10 for the painting." He felt embarrassed offering so little, but it was all the poor gardener could afford.

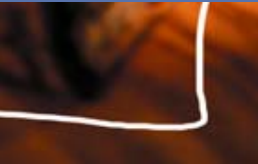
"We have \$10. Who will bid \$20?"

"Give it to him for \$10! Let's see the masters!"

"The bid is at \$10. Won't someone bid \$20?"

The crowd grew more annoyed and restless. They hadn't come for that painting.

//



he showed them the portrait of his son before he showed them any of the masterpieces in his collection.

When the father died, there was an announcement that his art collection was to be auctioned off. Many wealthy and influential people came to the auction, each hoping to go away with one of the great paintings.

On an easel next to the platform was the portrait of the son. The auctioneer pounded his gavel. "We will start the bidding with this picture of the son. Who will bid for this picture?"

Silence. Then a shout came from the back of the room. "We want to see the famous paintings. Skip this one!"

But the auctioneer persisted. "Will someone bid for this painting? Who will start the bidding at \$100?"

Another impatient voice shouted, "We didn't come to see this painting. We came to see the Van Goghs and Rembrandts. Get on with the *real* auction!"

The auctioneer was unmoved. "The son. Who will take the son?"

"Going once, going twice, *sold* for \$10!" The auctioneer pounded his gavel.

"Now let's get on with the collection!" shouted a man in the second row.

But the auctioneer laid down his gavel. "The auction is ended," he announced.

"What about the paintings?"

"I'm sorry," said the auctioneer, "but the auction is ended. When I was called to conduct this auction, I was told of a secret stipulation in the man's will, which I was not allowed to reveal until this time: Only the painting of the son would be auctioned, and whoever bought that painting would inherit the entire estate, including the other paintings. The man who took the son gets everything!"

God's Son died for us 2,000 years ago. Like the auctioneer, God's question today is, "Who'll take the son?" Because, you see, whoever takes the Son gets everything.

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN

The eternal chain of love



A MESSAGE FROM JESUS



CAME TO EARTH BECAUSE I LOVE YOU. I gave up everything I had—all the power, glory, and splendor of Heaven—to come and make the precious treasures of salvation and eternal life available to you. I had the whole universe in My possession, but I was incomplete without giving you My love and receiving your love. By choosing to come and live and die for you, I knew I could look forward to the most precious of all gifts—your love.

Long, long ago, on that first Christmas, I started an eternal chain of love, which I am depending on you to continue. My gift of salvation is for anyone who will receive it, and I long for every soul on Earth to come to know Me and My love for them. Yet I have chosen to work through other human souls. My message has always been and will always be passed on through the mouths and hands and feet and deeds of those who have chosen to be My friends and followers.

Throughout the ages, hundreds of thousands of My followers have given of themselves to continue this chain of love. Some have given little, some have given much, and some have given all. Yet all gave something, as much as they would, as much as I led them to, and as much as they had the faith and desire to in order to continue this chain of love.

Some spread My message to thousands or millions. Some taught the truth to just one or two. But all were a part, all were needed, and My great worldwide chain of love would not have been complete without each one playing a part.

There have been times when I looked back and thought about how things might have been had I not chosen to come and live and die as one of you, but never once have I looked back with regret or wished I had done anything differently. Even that first night, when I was born in that lowly manger, when the angels sang and the Christmas star beamed its message across the sky, I knew beyond any doubt that it was going to be worth it all.

Winning your love was worth sacrificing everything else. My Father and I could have created you to auto-



***Giving is not merely
an act of love; it is
the essence of love.***

down to Earth, and what I have given to you personally since then—the little things and the big things, the prayers I have answered and the blessings I have bestowed. Take some time to reflect on your life from the perspective of all that you have received from Me.

Now think about what you have given to others. Think of the times you put the happiness and welfare of another before your own. Think of the times you sacrificed and the times you reached out to another, even when it was difficult.

Then think of the rewards I gave you. You may not have always realized how you were rewarded, because the connection isn't always clear. But I think you will see that in each instance your giving was rewarded in some way sooner or later, because I always reward giving.

Now think about the future. Think about My promises to you that haven't yet been fulfilled. You can look forward to their fulfillment with joyful anticipation, knowing that I love to give even more than you love to receive.

Now think about what you will give to others this coming year. Pray about who needs something that is within your power to give. Think of the positive, beautiful, wonderful effects that will come about, not only in the lives of those you give to, but in your own life. Think of how I will smile with joy when I see you doing your part to strengthen the great chain of love.

I don't want My chain of love to simply exist; I want it to grow longer and stronger. I want it to encompass the whole Earth! I want everyone to have a chance to be part of it. I want My Spirit of love to touch every life.

So give, My child, and it will be given to you. Give Me. Give My Words. Give of yourself. Give the touch of My Spirit to everyone you possibly can. Above all, give love. ¹

matically love Me, or to be sinless and perfect so you would be guaranteed a place in Heaven. Yet I knew the deep truth all along that love that is forced and not freely given is no love at all.

Love is all about giving. Giving is not merely an act of love; it is the essence of love. There is no true love without giving. There is no true love without sacrifice. This is what I taught you on the day I came down from Heaven. This is the true spirit of Christmas—giving, caring, sharing.

Giving always costs, but giving is always richly rewarded. Those who sacrificially give of themselves find the greatest fulfillment—here and now, and in the heavenly realm beyond.

TIME TO REFLECT

This Christmas season I want you to think about giving. I want you to remember what I gave you by coming

WHERE JESUS LIVES

“WHO LIVES IN A STABLE?”

“JESUS! JESUS LIVES IN THE STABLE.”

At first I laughed at the answer
my four-year-old sister gave during my impromptu
lesson on animals and their habitats.

But her answer kept coming back to me. *Jesus lives in the stable.* Was that the only place Jesus was alive for her? Was that the only place she saw Jesus come alive for me, when telling her about the first Christmas?

I rebelled at the thought. *Surely I have taught her better than that! Surely she's seen me pray to Jesus many times. And not long ago, when our brother was sick, hadn't we had prayed together for his healing? Hadn't I, just the other day, read from the Children's Bible with her?*

As I sifted through scenes of me hurrying around, helping my parents care for my younger brothers and sisters, and juggling my own studies, work, and other activities, I tried to think of times when I had actually *explained* Jesus to her. Of course I had told her about His birth, the miracles He performed, and His life and ministry, but had I told her of the role He played as my best Friend?

Did I only bring Him out with the tinsel and the baubles for the Christmas tree? Did I tuck Him away in the pages of her picture Bible when storytime was done? Was I daily celebrating His life in such a way that my little sister *knew* Jesus is alive today, not living in a stable but in my heart and hers? Did she see me turning to Him when things got rough and I was

nearing the end of my strength? Had I shown her how Jesus could be her best Friend too—that if she gave her heart to Him, Jesus would cherish her as though she were the only one and love her like no other could?

I realized then that I had shown her a plastic version of Jesus. I hadn't introduced her to the living Friend whom I relied on every day and trusted with my life. That was where I had gone wrong. How else would she get to know Jesus if not through my example? I felt so ashamed.

Since this revelation, my relationship with Jesus has changed. It took time and effort for me to get back in the habit of talking with Jesus as though He was standing or sitting right next to me, but now I'm enjoying the rewards in my life and seeing that reflected in my little sister's life and others', as well. And that's priceless!

As another Christmas nears and the festivities begin, one thought is firmly fixed in my mind: This year—and not only at Christmas—I will celebrate the meaning of His life by being aware of His life in my own. I will take Jesus out of the stable and invite Him into my life, in everything I do. Then I can say and others will see, “Jesus was born in a stable, but He lives in my heart and home.” 壹



**I hadn't
introduced
her to the
living
Friend
whom
I relied
on every
day and
trusted
with
my life.**

YOU NEVER LOSE BY GIVING

IT WAS CHRISTMASTIME in the early 1970s and my wife Maria and I were in London, England, living on a shoestring budget from gifts from overseas, staying at the cheapest boarding house we could find and spending as little money as possible.

We had gone for a coffee at our favorite neighborhood restaurant, and were chatting with our friendly waitress, an older woman with whom we had become well acquainted.

Hers was a demanding job that required her to be on her feet all day and to work long hours during the Christmas rush. She had taken the job in order to support her family since her husband had become ill. It was hard for her to earn enough for them to live on, but she didn't complain.

"I'm lucky to have this job!" she said, promptly putting an end to that subject. Then adding cheerfully, "I better hurry and clear your table, or I might lose it!"

After thanking her, Maria and I sat for a moment, deep in thought.

"Honey...." I started.

"Look at her hurrying around, trying to keep up with those young waitresses," Maria said. "Poor dear!"

"Lord," I prayed aloud, "I wish I had enough money to give

ADAPTED FROM THE WRITINGS OF DAVID BRANDT BERG

these dear people what I know they need. This poor waitress works so hard and I know she's not making as much as she needs."

"And she's always so sweet to us and waits on us so well," Maria added.

"Well, what do you think? We don't have much money ourselves, but we could tip her a pound."

"Or maybe two," replied Maria.

"Oh, Lord," I prayed aloud, "You know I always wished I was a millionaire so I could really give like I'd like to, especially to poor people like this waitress when I see they have a need."

You don't have to be a millionaire to give what you've got, the Lord spoke to my heart. You've got five pounds, so why not give them all to her? Give what you've got and I will give you more!

"Yes, I will!" I nearly shouted.

"Will what, honey?" Maria asked.

"It's Christmastime, after all, and the Scripture says, 'Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over' (Luke 6:38). I know she needs it. I'd like to give her five pounds!"

You see, the Lord's finances work the opposite of the world's. We say, "When I've got my million, then I'll start giving." But the Lord says, "Start giving what you've got now, and I'll give you all you need and more." He wants to see if He can trust us to give sacrificially from what we already have. When we do, He gives us more.


So I called our special waitress over. "A little tip for you, my dear. You're a wonderful waitress. God bless you!"

"Why, thank you!" she responded sweetly. "I can't thank you enough!"

You know, she didn't have to say anything—I felt great the moment I tipped her extra!

It did me so much good to give her that money that I began giving double tips to the waitresses, the bus drivers, and to the newspaper vendors.

And from that moment we began to receive the benefits of giving. Soon we were receiving more money for our living expenses. When I started doubling my giving to others, the Lord doubled His giving to me—and the more He gives me double, the more I can keep on giving double! You never lose by giving!

How much have you given lately? Let God give through you and you'll soon find He'll give you more. "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). Try it! 

ANSWERS
TO YOUR
QUESTIONS

Share Jesus' Love at

CHRISTMAS

Q: I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE THIS COMING CHRISTMAS MORE MEANINGFUL FOR ME AND MY FAMILY THAN PAST CHRISTMASSES, BUT I DON'T KNOW WHERE TO START. ANY SUGGESTIONS?

a : THERE'S NOTHING MORE INSPIRING THAN SEEING the Lord's love and miracle-working power firsthand, and what better time to see people's hearts being touched by His love than at Christmas?

Here are some ideas of activities that you can do with your family or friends. Most of these require a little organization or preparation, but they're doable. You may want to pick only one or two of these activities the first year so you don't attempt too much and get discouraged or frazzled.

Or if the thought of attempting one of these activities from scratch seems too daunting, contact your nearest community from The Family and offer to help as a volunteer in one of their many Christmas activities.

* GO CHRISTMAS CAROLING

Even if you don't have a great voice, you will have fun going door-to-door in your neighborhood singing Christmas carols. And you'll probably be pleasantly surprised to see how readily people open their doors and hearts to you as you spread Christmas cheer. It's a great way to make new friends and show old ones that you care.

* VISIT INSTITUTIONS

Visit the lonely and bedridden in hospitals, homeless shelters, children's homes, or retirement homes. Bring Christmas gifts if you can—they need not be expensive or elaborate to convey love. Distribute gospel tracts. Pray with people for their needs—healing or solutions to their problems or whatever. Lead people to receive the greatest Christmas gift ever—Jesus. A little bit of love goes a long, long way!

* BABY-SIT FOR PRESSURED PARENTS

During the Christmas season, parents with young children often



struggle to find time for holiday shopping. Offer free babysitting to friends, at your home or theirs. You can make this a fun and meaningful time for the children by having age-appropriate activities prepared for them, such as making Christmas cards or cookies, or crafting simple gifts for their parents.

*** MINISTER TO COWORKERS AND NEIGHBORS**

Remember those people you see in the elevator every day, but don't exchange more than a casual "good morning" with? Or the people you live next door to but hardly know?

Make an effort this Christmas to get to know them. Ask the Lord to show you how you can be a blessing to them by helping them with some problem or special need they may have. Perhaps you could invite them to your Christmas dinner, event, Bible study, or to participate in one of your or The Family's Christmas activities. Let the Lord use you to bring a coworker or neighbor closer to Him this Christmas.

*** EVERYONE'S AN ANGEL**

Here's a group project that you can do with your family, workmates, or friends to usher in the meaning and spirit of Christmas.

Put everyone's name in a hat or bowl and draw names. Then each person becomes a "Christmas angel" for the person whose name they drew by doing secret deeds of kindness, such as praying for their "mortal," leaving anonymous notes of appreciation for admirable qualities, doing anonymous favors, or leaving them simple but thoughtful gifts. Give some thought to how Jesus feels about that person, and see if you don't come up with something special to do for him or her.

Giving from the heart can touch the giver as much as the recipient. As you make it a point to give more of yourself this Christmas, you'll find the wellspring of joy and happiness that is Christmas at its best! 🎁

Our model of perfect giving is Jesus. Someone who followed His example well was Mother Teresa. Working among the poor of Calcutta, she inspired millions with her selfless love.

"I see Jesus in every human being," she said. "I say to myself, 'This is hungry Jesus, I must feed him. This is sick Jesus. I must wash him and tend to him. I serve because I love Jesus.'"



GIVE
“WHAT SHALL I
GIVE
THEE, MASTER?”

WHEN CHRISTMAS COMES, I’M ALREADY THINKING ABOUT MY GOALS FOR THE NEXT YEAR AND REFLECTING ON THE PAST YEAR—WHAT I DIDN’T GET DONE THAT I MEANT TO OR SHOULD HAVE.

It’s like the message of an old song we used to sing:

What shall I give Thee, Master?
Thou Who didst die for me!
How can I give less than give of my best,
When Thou hast given all to me!

What shall I give Thee, Master?
Thou Who didst die for me!
How can I give less than all of my best,
I must give all to Thee!

—HOMER W. GRIMES

We’re talking about the Master’s birthday, and what could we give Him? Jesus said that if we have helped or fed or given a drink of water to someone in need, “to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:40). So whatever you’ve done to help people hasn’t just been for those people; you also did it for the Lord! Whatever you do in word or deed, do all to the glory of God (Colossians 3:17; 1 Corinthians 10:31).

The day came when I decided I should give my all to the Lord because the Lord had done *more* than all for me! How can I give less than all of my best, when Jesus gave all for me?

And I encourage you to do the same. That’s what Jesus did—He gave you all!

Let’s give of our best to the Lord. Let’s give Him gifts that will please Him and show Him how much we love Him. Even our praises are gifts to the Lord. The apostle Paul tells us to “continually offer the sacrifice of praise” (Hebrews 13:15)—“sacrifice” in this case meaning a gift, an offering to the Lord. To praise the Lord and thank Him for all His gifts is giving to the Lord!

Giving the Gospel to those who haven’t heard is giving to the Lord, and giving to the poor is giving to the Lord! Giving people the Lord’s solutions to their problems from the Word is giving to the Lord! There are so many ways we can give back to Him!

Whatever you do for someone else is giving to the Lord, because that’s what He would rather have you do than anything else—help others, give out the Word, get people saved, win new citizens for the Kingdom of God! We’re helping to fill up all that empty space in Heaven! He doesn’t want any vacancies!

So may that be your Christmas present for Jesus! God bless and keep you this Christmas and on into the next year! 🙏

A prayer for *Christmas*

JESUS, YOU ARE GOD AND MAN, KING AND SERVANT OF ALL. You left Your eternal throne in Heaven and took on mortality. You encased Yourself in human flesh and became one of us, so that You could save us. I am overwhelmed with emotion when I think of how You humbly and quietly came into our world and changed it forever.

You humbly and quietly came into our world and changed it forever.

When You were born among us, You brought us the greatest gifts imaginable—salvation, peace, hope, love. Who would ever have thought such things would come in the form of a tiny baby, born to commoners, wrapped in rags, and laid to sleep in a feeding trough?

Thank You that because of Christmas, I'm never alone. Whether or not I am blessed with family and friends, whether I face good times or hard times, I always have You and Your love. Thank You for choosing to experience both the joys and sorrows of Earth. Thank You for enduring the tears, pain, frustration, loneliness, exhaustion, and death so that You could truly say that You understand us. Never has there been a more perfect love than Yours! [✠]

FEEDING READING

GIVING AT ITS BEST

Give cheerfully.

2 Corinthians 9:7
Deuteronomy 15:10a
Exodus 25:2
Exodus 35:21
1 Chronicles 29:9
Hebrews 10:34

Give generously, not just what we can spare.

2 Samuel 24:24
Proverbs 21:26b
Luke 21:4

Give with pure motives.

Matthew 5:24
Matthew 6:1–3
Luke 6:34–35
1 Corinthians 13:3

Give according to ability.

Deuteronomy 16:17
Acts 11:29
1 Corinthians 16:2
2 Corinthians 8:12

Wealthy Christians are especially obligated to give.

Luke 8:3
2 Corinthians 8:14–15
1 Timothy 6:17–19

Even poor believers are encouraged to give.

1 Kings 17:9–16
Mark 12:43–44
2 Corinthians 8:1–4

God repays sacrificial giving.

Proverbs 22:9
Proverbs 28:27a
Ecclesiastes 11:1
2 Corinthians 9:6b

God's Christmas gift—from His heart to ours

JESUS, GOD'S GIFT OF LOVE TO US, is just that—a gift—and we just have to receive Him humbly, knowing that we can't possibly pay enough to buy our way into Heaven, to buy eternal life, to buy the happiness that Jesus brings. "For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). You can't earn a gift or else it wouldn't be a gift! We're saved purely by faith in Jesus, the gift of God, by His grace. And if you've received His gift yourself, then share the real meaning of Christmas with others by giving them the Lord's love! So many need the gospel of salvation. So give them a truly "Merry Christmas" by bringing them the peace and happiness and joy of the love of Jesus Christ!

If you haven't yet received God's great Christmas gift to the world, Jesus, you can right now by praying the following:

Thank You, Jesus, for paying the price for my mistakes and wrongs, so I can be forgiven. I ask You now, dear Jesus, to please come into my heart, forgive me, and give me Your gift of eternal life. Amen. ✠

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

Draw Near

THAT SIMPLE CHRISTMAS CAROL has a message for everyone—girl or boy, man or woman.

“Leave your toys.” Toys can also mean worldly trappings or anything that encumbers your life or distracts you from the true meaning of Christmas.

“Make no noise.” There is a lot of noise in the world today—noise and confusion that threatens to drown out My voice. I want to speak to you, to give you My love, encouragement, counsel, and all the other good things I have for you, but to hear My voice clearly you must get quiet and block out the noise of the world.

“Kneel at His crib and worship Him.” If you love Me, honor Me by kneeling before Me. “Kneeling” is a position of the heart, more than a position of the body. My “crib” is anywhere—wherever you are.

“At Thy shrine...” Don’t necessarily think of “shrine” as a church building or temple, for I am present wherever you are and you can worship Me there.

“Child divine, we are Thine. Our Savior’s here.” Yes, all who have received Me are My children, regardless of who they are or where they are.

“All must draw near.” Have you drawn near? Have you let Me be born anew in your heart? Then you can truly sing, “Hallelujah, now I hear the bells’ joyful ringing! Hallelujah, now I can hear the angels sing! Hallelujah for everything, because my Savior makes everything right!”

Girls and boys,
leave your toys,
make no noise,
Kneel at His crib
and worship Him.

At Thy shrine,
Child divine,
we are Thine.
Our Savior’s here.

“Hallelujah”
the bells do ring,
“Hallelujah”
the angels sing,
“Hallelujah”
for everything,”
All must draw near.

