

Special Issue

MOTIVATED

THE MAGAZINE THAT MOVES YOU!



The Man Who Missed Christmas

Gift Ideas for Hard Times
How to give more while spending less

10 Tips for Making Resolutions Realities

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Seize the day!

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For millions of people, this Christmas and New Year's season will be unlike any we've ever had. Those who haven't felt the full impact of the global economic downturn themselves are surrounded by people who have, or those who worry they may be next.

Manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers whose annual bottom lines depend on seasonal sales are bracing for the lowest volume of sales in many years. Charities that count on seasonal 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 gifts at all. Not since World War II has so much of the world's population been so severely affected by the same crisis.

Yes, for many things may be different this year's holiday season, 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 the season. 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. It's an opportunity to change our focus from the commercialism that has taken over the season to true, enduring values. 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 as 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 *Motivated*, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! May it turn out to be the best holiday season that you and yours have ever had!

Christina Lane
For *Motivated*

The Perfect Gift

By Gabe Rucker

I received the perfect gift last Christmas—the love of a little child.

On Christmas night, when it seemed that all of the gift giving and festivities were over, I was tucking four-year-old Jade into bed for the night when out of the blue she said, “Daddy, I love you more than all my toys and things!” My heart skipped a beat.

A few nights later, we were visiting relatives when I needed to check my email. I found a place to hook up to their network, but there wasn’t a chair handy. No problem. This would just take a minute, I told myself as I sat on the floor and started up my laptop computer. Just then, Jade came running through the room, tripped, and fell right onto the computer, sending a million coloured lines across the screen.

As each person present assessed the damage, I heard comments like, “That’s going to be expensive to fix!” and “Too bad it’s no longer under warranty!”

When Jade realized what she had done, she started crying. I picked her up and hugged her. “Don’t worry, Baby,” I whispered in her ear. “I love you more than all of my things!”

No matter what happens this year, whatever things may come and go, let’s remember that love is the most important thing. 📺

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

Christmas in the Air

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

—**Ruth Carter Stapleton**

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

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**

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. Pahren**

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**

Let us remember that the Christmas heart is a giving heart, a wide-open heart that thinks of others first. The birth of the baby Jesus ... meant the pouring into

a sick world of the healing medicine of love, which has transformed all manner of hearts for almost two thousand years. Underneath all the bulging bundles is this beating Christmas heart.

—**George Matthew Adams (1878–1962)**

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 a big heart and an imagination. —**Linda King**

A Christmas Prayer

Loving God, help us to remember the birth of Christ 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 that Christ brings. May our minds be filled with grateful thoughts and our hearts with forgiveness.

—**Robert Louis Stevenson**

Christmas Is a Time for Sharing

By Glen D. Kittler, adapted

The noise was enough to make Mr. Bonaventure almost regret having given this party. *The wild Indians are certainly running true to form*, he thought.

The children were indeed Indians—members of the Papago [Tohono O’odham] tribe, and they had gone wild with joy. This was their first Christmas party given for them at the Reservation’s school south of Tucson, Arizona.

A party? He smiled to himself. *It’s more like an uprising.* The children came from poor families who labored on farms that never produced enough to buy proper food and clothes. *Let the kids have their fun*, he concluded, clenching his fists to control his impatience.

Games were being played with prizes for the winners, but now he began to receive reports that Luis Pablo, just going on eight, was trying to take away prizes from boys who had won them. Time and again he had to force Luis to return a pencil or a scarf, or a book.

“Luis!” he said severely, “why can’t you behave?”

“I want to win something.”

“Then win something, don’t steal it.”

But the boy had no luck at all. Whatever the game, he lost. Mr. Bonaventure watched him sadly. It was a shame, for these defeats had driven Luis to the brink of violence. He was both puzzled and angry.

At the end of the party, the children

formed a line and to each he presented a bag of hard candy—the only gift their school could afford in bulk. When Luis’ turn came he asked, “Can I have three bags?”

“You cannot,” he said sternly. “One bag each.”

“But I mean empty bags.”

“Oh! Well, why not?” He gave Luis three empty bags and the boy left.

Later, alone in his office, he glanced out the window and saw Luis sitting on the school steps.

Luis had three bags open beside him and carefully, by precise count, was dividing his candy into them. Then Mr. Bonaventure suddenly remembered: At home, Luis had two brothers and a sister; they were all too young to come to the Christmas party. So this was the reason.

He went to the party room and scooped the remaining candy into a large bag. He had intended to give the candy to the teachers, but he knew that they would not object to what he was about to do. He went outside and presented the bag to Luis.

“Here’s your prize,” he said.

“Prize?” Luis asked, astonished. “What for?”

“All during the party I was watching to see which one of you had the true spirit of Christmas,” he said. “You win.”

Then he turned and entered the school quickly because he did not want the boy to see his tears. 🎁



The Man Who Missed Christmas

By J. Edgar Park, courtesy of *The New Guideposts Christmas Treasury*

To love people, to be indispensable somewhere, that is the purpose of life. That is the secret of happiness.

It was Christmas Eve, and, as usual, George Mason was the last one to leave the office. He walked over to a massive safe, spun the dials, and swung the heavy door open. Making sure the door would not close behind him, he stepped inside.

A square of white cardboard was taped just above the topmost row of strongboxes. On the card, a few words were written. George Mason stared at those words, remembering...

Exactly one year ago he had entered this selfsame vault. And then, behind his back, slowly, noiselessly, the ponderous door swung shut! He was trapped—entombed in the sudden and terrifying dark!

He hurled himself at the unyielding door, his hoarse cry sounding like an explosion. No time clock controlled this safe; it would remain locked until it was opened from the outside. Tomorrow morning.

Then the realization hit him. No one would come tomorrow—tomorrow was Christmas!

Once more he flung himself at the door, shouting wildly, until he sank to his knees exhausted. Silence came, high-pitched, singing silence that seemed deafening. More than thirty-six hours would pass before anyone came—thirty-six hours in a steel box three feet wide, eight feet long, seven feet high. Would the oxygen last?

Perspiring and breathing heavily, he felt his way around the floor. Then, in the right-hand corner, just above the floor, he found a small circular opening. Quickly he thrust his finger into it and felt, faintly but unmistakably, a cool current of air.

The tension release was so sudden that he burst into tears. At last he sat up. Surely, he would not have to stay trapped for the full thirty-six hours. Somebody would miss him. But who? He was unmarried and lived alone. The woman who cleaned his apartment was just a servant; he had always treated her as such. He had been invited to spend Christmas Eve with his brother's family, but children got on his nerves and expected presents, so he had declined the invitation.

A friend had asked him to go to a home for elderly people on Christmas Day and play the piano—he was a good musician—but he had made some excuse or other. He had intended to sit at home with a good cigar, listening to some new recordings he was giving himself.

Nobody would come and let him out. Nobody, nobody! Miserably the night passed, the whole of Christmas Day went by, and then the succeeding night.

On the morning after Christmas, the head clerk came into the office at the usual time, opened the safe, and then went into his private office.

No one saw George Mason stagger out into the corridor, run to the water cooler, and drink great gulps of water. No one paid attention to him as he left and took a taxi home.

There he shaved, changed his wrinkled clothes, ate breakfast, and returned to his office where his employees greeted him casually.

That day he met several acquaintances and talked to his own brother. Grimly the truth closed in on him. He had vanished from human society during the great festival of goodwill, yet not one had missed him at all.

Reluctantly, he began to think about the true meaning of Christmas. Was it possible that he had been blind all these years with selfishness, indifference, and pride? Wasn't giving, after all, the essence of Christmas, because it marked the time God gave his message of love to the world?

All through the year that followed, with little deeds of kindness, with small, unnoticed acts of unselfishness, George Mason tried to prepare himself... Now, once more, it was Christmas Eve.

Slowly he backed out of the safe, and closed it. He touched its grim steel face lightly, almost affectionately, and left the office.

There he goes now in his black overcoat and hat, the same George Mason as a year ago. Or is it? He walks a few blocks, and flags a taxi, anxious not to be late. His nephews are expecting him to help them trim the tree. Afterwards, he is taking his brother and his sister-in-law to a Christmas play. Why is he so happy? Why does this jostling against others, laden as he is with packages, exhilarate and delight him?

Perhaps the card has something to do with it, the card he taped inside his office safe last New Year's Day. On the card is written, in George Mason's own hand, "To love people, to be indispensable somewhere, that is the purpose of life. That is the secret of happiness." 🎁

Puzzle Pieces

By Nyx Martinez

When everyone lit fireworks at the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve, did you celebrate in vibrant cheer? Or did the clock's chime bring a kind of melancholy as you silently pondered the future? As the shouts of "Happy New Year" rang out, was it a joyful moment for you? Or was it tinged with anxiety about the future?

Last year, it was all a little hazy to me. We wished each other the best with the usual buzz of a New Year's celebration, but as I tossed in my bed later, I wondered what was in store for me.

I was excited about many future prospects; I knew that change was in the air. I was on a high and a low at the same time, and while on the verge of making decisions, couldn't quite come to any.

The following days of uncertainty stretched into a week, then two. I pondered, procrastinated, and prayed. A lot. To no avail.

Then one day, a package arrived in the mail. Along with clothes and chocolates, my aunt had sent me a child's puzzle. Amused, I laid it aside to give to my little brother.

When four-year-old RJ saw it, he excitedly took the box into another room to open. Soon, though, he was back—and he was in a frenzy.

"The puzzle has no picture!" he exclaimed. "You have to draw the picture!"

"What?"

"The puzzle has no picture!" RJ repeated.

Looking closer, I realized it was one of those do-it-yourself puzzles, and so, at RJ's insistence, I drew a picture on the not-yet-disassembled puzzle. He was overjoyed.

Just when I thought he would leave me alone, RJ said, "Now you have to help me do it!"

He scattered the pieces on the floor, raked them into a pile, spread them out again, and sat there, arms crossed, cheerfully confident that I would do the work for him.

I hesitated, but eventually gave in. "Okay, we'll do it together," I said. "It's easy!"





I had intended for RJ to color the picture before he took the puzzle apart, but he hadn't. The pieces were a mess of black and white lines that didn't seem to fit together. But RJ wouldn't be deterred.

I showed him how to find the corner pieces first, then the edges, and then to hunt for pieces where elements of the picture were recognizable—eye pieces over here with nose pieces, leaf pieces with flower pieces, etc.

Bit by bit, it started to come together.

I watched as RJ slowly found and fitted each puzzle piece into its proper place. He sometimes shook his head in frustration. Other times he threw up his hands in exasperation and said aloud, "Aw, that doesn't go here!"

And each time he was convinced there was something wrong with the puzzle itself. Time and again I had to reassure him that the pieces would indeed all fit together once he had each one in the right place.

"It's all part of the same picture," I would say. "We just need to find where it goes."

It took a half hour before the picture of a cat playing in a garden was completed, but when it finally was, a look of smug satisfaction spread across RJ's face.

I was smiling too, because right then I understood that I was like a little child, trying to sort out the puzzle pieces of my life, getting confused and frustrated, wanting to say I couldn't do it.

All those pieces are part of the same puzzle, whispered a gentle inner voice. We just need to find where they go.

There I was, trying to get rid of parts that didn't seem to make sense, crying out in a fit of frustration that I didn't know what went where, when all the while that inner voice wanted to reassure me that it was going to be okay, that all the pieces would come together. It would take time and I would have to be patient, but when all the pieces would finally fall in place, I too would smile with satisfaction.

And that's just what happened. A few days before I sat down to write this story the pieces all came together.

Today I look at the puzzle of the next year, and I am excited! Things are already beginning to fall into place. I'm sorting the corners and the edges. I'm seeing something unfold before my eyes. I have learned that all the pieces are needed.

And yes, it's going to be a beautiful picture. 🎁

Gift Ideas for Hard Times

How to give more while spending less

-  **Give time.** We would probably be surprised at how many people on our gift list would enjoy an evening of company more than a boxed gift.
-  **Write notes of appreciation.** Instead of commercial greeting cards with generic messages, we can take the time we would normally spend shopping for gifts to write those people personal notes telling them what makes them special to us.
-  **Create custom gift cards.** We can make gift cards promising to do repairs or cleaning jobs, babysit, run errands, teach a skill we have, or perform some other service.
-  **Make or bake.** When we exchange gifts in our office or social circle party, we could suggest that people bring simple baked goods or a homemade gift instead of more expensive retail items.
-  **Share our children.** We can make recordings of our children singing carols, reading stories, or telling about their latest activities for grandparents and other relatives who won't be able to spend the holidays with us, or frame and send them some of our children's best artwork.
-  **Open our house.** If we know a university student who can't afford to go home for the holidays or someone else who doesn't have any family locally, we can invite him or her to spend the holidays with us and our family.
-  **Think local.** By doing our holiday shopping at independently owned local stores that are having an especially tough time competing with large chains, we can in a sense be giving double—once to the recipient and once to the shop owner.
-  **Be neighbourly.** Share the joy of Christmas with those in your neighbourhood by stopping by and bringing some homemade gifts or cookies.
-  **Volunteer at an orphanage or other charity.** We can make others' holidays special by spending our holidays with them. We can volunteer as a family or group of friends, which will also strengthen our ties and create a shared memory.
-  **Give gifts away.** We can skip the family gift exchange and instead give gifts to those in need. Then we can take our children shopping and help them pick out gifts for other needy children. Or we could pool the money we would normally spend on gifts for each other and help alleviate poverty by donating to the needy through a charitable organization. 🎁

10 Tips for Making Resolutions Reality

1 MAKE A LIST OF YOUR GOALS and select the top three to five that are the most important to you.

2 BE REALISTIC. Reaching for a goal should stretch you, but it should also be doable. Decide on a reasonable timeframe for reaching each goal.

3 DON'T TRY TO DO EVERYTHING AT ONCE. Focus on your top goal for a set time. Then move to goal number two, while maintaining the progress made toward reaching the first one, and so on.

4 WORK ON IT. Change involves overcoming past thought and behavioural patterns. This is never easy, but with God's help change for the better is possible.

5 CHART YOUR PROGRESS. Keep track of how far you've come, using a journal or chart. Keeping records and reviewing them periodically can also help you to identify weak spots.

6 GET HELP FROM OTHERS. Share your plan with a friend and ask for his or her help. Being

accountable to someone will give you added incentive to stick to your resolutions even when it's tough.

7 DON'T BE DISCOURAGED BY YOUR MISTAKES. You will have some setbacks and "off" days. Take these lows as a reminder that you can't do it on your own. Tomorrow is a fresh chance to do better!

8 BE IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL. If you are truly serious about making a change, you will be willing to see it through, no matter how long it takes.

9 VISUALIZE VICTORY. Periodically visualize what your life will be like once you reach your goal. Picture the advantages you will gain and how much happier, healthier, or more productive you will be.

10 CELEBRATE EACH TIME YOU REACH A GOAL. The real reward will be the feeling of accomplishment and the benefits you'll experience from the change you've made, but having a treat and celebration attached to a specific goal can make it even more enjoyable. 🎉



Seize the Day!

One of the most tragic things I know about human nature is that all of us tend to put off living. We are all dreaming of some magical rose garden over the horizon instead of enjoying the roses that are blooming outside our windows today.

—Dale Carnegie

What is not started today is never finished tomorrow. —Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

I, not events, have the power to make me happy or unhappy today. I can choose which it shall be. Yesterday is dead, tomorrow hasn't arrived yet. I have just one day, today, and I'm going to be happy in it.

—Groucho Marx

Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. —Albert Einstein

Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending. —Maria Robinson

Today is a most unusual day, because we have never lived it before; we will never live it again; it is the only day we have.

—William A. Ward

You had better live your best, act your best, and think your best today; for today is the sure preparation for tomorrow and all the other tomorrows that follow.

—Harriet Martineau

Never let yesterday use up too much of today. —Will Rogers

I am not afraid of tomorrow, for I have seen yesterday and I love today!

—William Allen White

The only limits to the possibilities in your life tomorrow are the "buts" you use today.

—Les Brown

The best preparation for tomorrow is doing your best today.

—H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

Light tomorrow with today!

—Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Build today, then, strong and sure,
With a firm and ample base;
And ascending and secure
Shall tomorrow find its place.

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Builders"