

Special Issue

# MOTIVATED

THE MAGAZINE THAT MOVES YOU!

## JOY TO THE WORLD!

### **You Never Lose by Giving**

How much have you given lately?

### **New Year's Commitments**



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## from the editor

This Christmas and New Year's season the world aches, it heaves, and it groans from the losses and tragedies of the year. Many lives have been broken and many dreams have been shattered. Now more than ever the world needs to see the light of love that came down on that very first Christmas to brighten their lives, about which one of the prophets wrote, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined."

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

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

"What's the use of that?" you ask. "That does not change much!" It may seem that the difference would be too small to be noticed and too small to matter, but you'd be surprised. Even one candle can be seen a mile away when it's dark.

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

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

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

Christina Lane  
For *Motivated*

It was Christmastime in the early 1970s and my wife Maria and I were in London, England, living on a shoestring budget, 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!"

"I wish I had enough money to give these dear people what I know they need," I said. "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.

"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," I mused aloud.

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

"Yes, I will!" I nearly shouted.

"Will what, honey?" Maria asked.

"It's Christmastime, after all, and God's Word says, 'Give, and it will be given to you'. I know she needs it. I'd like to give her five pounds!"

You see, God's financial plan works the opposite

# YOU NEVER LOSE BY Giving

*Adapted from the writings of David Fontaine*

of ours. We say, "When I've got my million, then I'll start giving." But God's plan says, "Start giving what you've got now, and He will give you all you need and more." God likes to see us trust Him by giving 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 received a raise in income. When I started doubling my giving to others, God 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? As we let God give through us, we will soon find it will come back to us. ■



# Joy to the World

**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.



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



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



In China, artificial trees are built—called “trees of light”—and decorated with paper chains, flowers, lanterns, and other ornaments.



In Iran, believers begin fasting from animal products on December 1. This is called “Little Fast.” After a church service on December 25th, they enjoy Christmas dinner which they call “Little Feast.” A traditional dish is a

chicken stew called harasa. Gifts are generally not exchanged, but children get new clothes which they wear proudly on Christmas Day.



In Iraq, Christian families gather together on Christmas Eve. One of the children reads about the birth of Jesus while other family members hold lighted candles. After the reading, a bonfire of thorn bushes is lit and everyone sings. If the thorns burn to ashes, good luck will be granted for the coming year. When the fire dies, each person jumps over the ashes three times and makes a wish. On Christmas Day another bonfire is lit in the churchyard. The bishop, carrying a figure of the Baby Jesus leads the service. Afterwards he blesses one person with a touch. That person touches the person next to him or her and the touch is passed around until all present have felt the “touch of peace.”



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 Egypt, everyone is supposed to go out and buy some new clothes that have never been worn before Christmas.

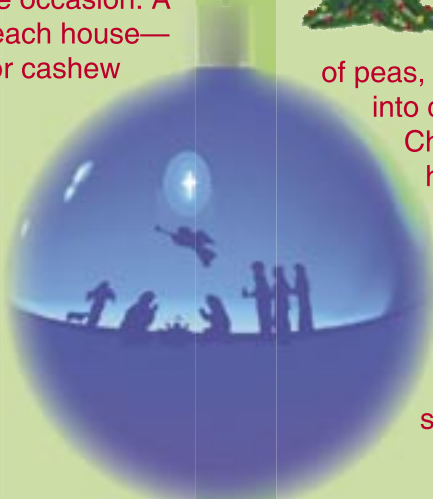
They are to wear them to a church service on Christmas Eve that lasts until the church bells ring at midnight. Then everyone heads home for a special Christmas dinner that consists of bread, rice, garlic, and boiled meat.



In Syria, on Christmas day, believers carry lighted candles while the family prepares a bonfire in the courtyard. The youngest son reads the Gospel story of the Nativity and the father lights the fire. All gather around to observe the particular way that the fire spreads through the wood as it will determine the luck of the household for the coming year. The family sings songs while the bonfire rages and, when it finally dies down, they make wishes while they take turns jumping over the embers.



In Lebanon the preparations for Christmas begin about two weeks before Christmas when the Lebanese plant seeds of peas, beans, wheat, and lentils into cotton-wool balls. At Christmas the seedlings have grown to a height of about 15 centimeters. The Lebanese decorate mangers mostly made out of brown paper with these seedlings. A star is fixed above the biblical scene.





In Bethlehem, Palestine, the little town where Jesus was born, is the site of the Church of the Nativity, which is ablaze

with flags and decorations every Christmas. On Christmas Eve natives and visitors alike crowd the church's doorways and stand on the roof to watch for the dramatic annual procession. Galloping horsemen and police mounted on Arabian horses lead the parade. They are followed by a solitary horseman carrying a cross and sitting astride a coal-black steed. Then come the churchmen and government officials. The procession solemnly enters the doors and places an ancient effigy of the Holy Child in the church. Deep winding stairs lead to a grotto where visitors find a silver star marking the site of the Christ child's birth.



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 bambino in the manger.



Around the world, bells are rung on joyous occasions. Throughout Norway, people ring in Christmas by tolling 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. The fact that the tree is always green symbolizes the eternal life that God promises to those that believe in Him.



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 Mesopotamia, present day Iraq, presented to Jesus. They had seen a sign in the heavens that signaled His birth, and they went to honor 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 Palestine and were able to give their gifts. The gifts the wise men gave were gold, frankincense, and myrrh—the best their kingdoms had to offer.



But why all these traditions?

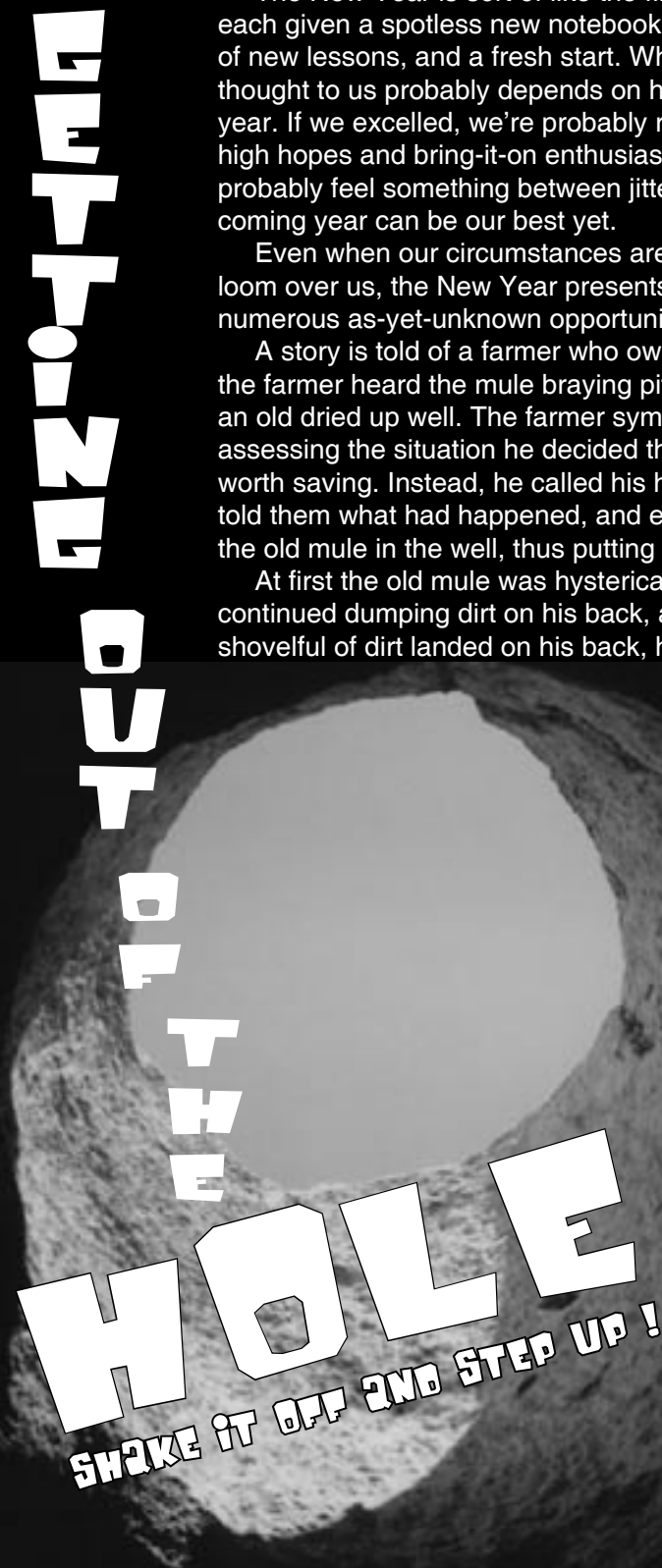
Let's travel back to the first Christmas Eve, where some shepherds are taking care of their flocks on a hillside near Bethlehem. A bright light bursts forth and angels announce the birth of Jesus in song. The shepherds are so excited that they run and tell everyone they can about what just happened. Imagine the joy that Mary and Joseph experience when they hold the baby in their arms!



No matter what Christmas traditions we hold dear, that same unspeakable joy found in the love God sent to the world that very first Christmas, can still be felt today by all those who open their hearts to it. With that love and joy in our hearts we can truly celebrate Christmas. ■

—By Curtis Peter Van Gorder





# GETTING OUT OF THE HOLE SHAKE IT OFF AND STEP UP!

The New Year is sort of like the first day of school. It's as though we're each given a spotless new notebook, sharp new pencils, new textbooks full of new lessons, and a fresh start. Whether or not that comes as a happy thought to us probably depends on how well we did in the last grade, last year. If we excelled, we're probably ready to greet the New Year with high hopes and bring-it-on enthusiasm. If we just barely squeaked by, we probably feel something between jitters and trepidation. Either way this coming year can be our best yet.

Even when our circumstances are less than positive, and problems loom over us, the New Year presents us with a hopeful new start, and numerous as-yet-unknown opportunities for us to discover.

A story is told of a farmer who owned an old, decrepit mule. One day the farmer heard the mule braying pitifully and found that it had fallen into an old dried up well. The farmer sympathized with the poor mule, but after assessing the situation he decided that neither the mule nor the well was worth saving. Instead, he called his hired hands and neighbors together, told them what had happened, and enlisted their help to haul dirt and bury the old mule in the well, thus putting him out of his misery.

At first the old mule was hysterical. But as the farmer and the others continued dumping dirt on his back, a thought struck him. Every time a shovelful of dirt landed on his back, he could shake it off and step up. This he did, blow after blow.

Shake it off and step up. Shake it off and step up. Shake it off and step up! No matter how close together or painful the blows or how distressing the situation seemed, the mule fought against panic and just kept right on shaking it off and stepping up. It wasn't long before the old mule, battered and exhausted, stepped triumphantly out of the well.

Whatever our circumstances or outlook may be at the onset of the New Year, if we keep shaking things off and stepping up, with God's help we might just look back at the end of the year and see that indeed, He helped us through it, and made it one of our best years ever! ■

— Retold by Lilia Potters

# ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS



**Q:** *I would like to make this coming holiday season more meaningful for my family and me than in the past, but I don't know where to start. Any suggestions?*

**A:** *There's nothing more inspiring than seeing the miracle-working power of love at work firsthand, and what better time to see people's hearts being touched with love than during the Christmas and holiday season?*

*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, you can work together with someone or join a community volunteer activity.*



# ...SHARING THE JOY OF THE SEASON!

## VISIT INSTITUTIONS:

Visit the lonely and needy in hospitals, orphanages, old folks' homes, refugee camps, and other institutions. Bring some gifts if you can—they need not be expensive or elaborate to convey love. Talk with people about their needs—and help find solutions to their problems if possible. A little bit of love goes a long, long way!

## 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 the season.

Put everyone's name in a hat or bowl and draw names. Then each person becomes a "Guardian Angel" for the person whose name they drew by doing secret deeds of kindness for their "mortal" for a week or however long you decide. You can leave anonymous notes of appreciation for admirable qualities, do anonymous favors, or leave simple but thoughtful gifts. Give some thought to the good qualities of that person whose angel you are, and see if you can't come up with something special to do for him or her.

## REACH OUT TO COWORKERS AND NEIGHBORS:

Remember those people you run into 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 season to get to know them. Find out 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 dinner, a holiday event, or to participate in one of your Christmas or New Year's activities.

## BABY-SIT FOR PRESSURED PARENTS:

During the holiday season, parents with young children often struggle to find time for holiday shopping or other preparations. 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 cards or cookies, or crafting simple gifts for their parents.

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 HOLIDAY SEASON, YOU'LL FIND THE WELLSPRING OF JOY AND HAPPINESS THAT IS CHRISTMAS AT ITS BEST!

# When Life Seems Difficult

*A life changed forever*



I hurried into the local department store to grab some last minute Christmas gifts. I looked at all the people and grumbled to myself. I would be in here forever and I just had so much to do. The Christmas celebrations were becoming such a burden. I kind of wished that I could just sleep through the holidays. But I hurried the best I could through all the people to the toy department.

Once again I kind of mumbled to myself at the prices of all these toys, and wondered if the grandkids would even play with them. I found myself in the doll aisle. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a little boy holding a lovely doll. He kept touching her hair and he held her so gently. I could not seem to help myself. I just kept looking over at the little boy and wondered who the doll was for. I watched him turn to a woman. He called his aunt by name and said, "Are you sure I don't have enough money?" She replied a bit impatiently, "You know that you don't have enough money for it." The aunt told the little boy not to go anywhere,

that she had to go get some other things and would be back in a minute, and then left the aisle.

The boy continued to hold the doll. After a bit I asked the boy who the doll was for. He said, "It is the doll my sister wanted so badly for Christmas. She wanted Santa to bring it". I told him that maybe Santa was going to bring it. He said, "No, Santa can't go where my sister is... I have to give the doll to my Mama to take to her". I asked him where his sister was. He looked at me with the saddest eyes and said, "She has gone to heaven. My Daddy says that my Mommy is going to have to go be with her." My heart nearly stopped beating. The boy looked at me again and said, "I told my Daddy to tell Mama not to go yet. I told him to tell her to wait till I got back from the store."

Then he asked me if I wanted to see his picture. I told him I would love to. He pulled out some pictures he'd taken at the front of the store and said, "I want my Mama to take this with her so she won't ever forget me. I love my Mama so very much and I wish

she did not have to leave me. But Daddy says she will need to go be with my sister.” The little boy lowered his head and grew very quiet.

While he was not looking I reached into my purse and pulled out a handful of bills. I asked the little boy, “Shall we count the money one more time?” He grew excited and said, “Yes, I just know it has to be enough.” So I slipped my money in with his and we began to count it. Of course it was plenty for the doll. He softly said, “Thank you God for giving me enough money.”

Then the boy said, “I just asked God to give me enough money to buy this doll so Mama can take it with her to give to my sister, and He heard my prayer. I also wanted to ask him for enough to buy my Mama a white rose, but I forgot. But He gave me enough to buy the doll and a rose for my Mama. She loves white roses so very, very much.”

A few minutes later the aunt came back and I wheeled my cart away. I could not stop thinking about the little boy as I finished shopping in a totally different spirit than when I had started.

I kept remembering a story I had seen in the news several days earlier about a drunk driver hitting a car and killing a little girl, with her mother in serious condition. Now surely this little boy did not belong with that story?

Two days later I read in the paper that the family had disconnected the life support and the young woman had died. I could not forget the boy and kept wondering if the two were somehow connected. Later that day, I could not help myself. I went out and bought some white roses and took them to the funeral home. —And there she was holding a lovely white rose, the beautiful doll, and the picture of the little boy in the store.

I left there in tears, my life changed forever. ■

—Author Unknown

# NEW YEAR'S COMMITMENTS

*This year, I will...*

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

# DON'T QUIT...

*When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,  
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,  
When the funds are low and the debts are high,  
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,  
When care is pressing you down a bit,  
Rest, if you must—but don't you quit.*

*Life is queer with its twists and turns,  
As every one of us sometimes learns,  
And many a failure turns about  
When he might have won had he stuck it out;  
Don't give up, though the pace seems slow—  
You might succeed with another blow.*

*Often the goal is nearer than  
It seems to a faint and faltering man,  
Often the struggler has given up  
When he might have captured the victor's cup.  
And he learned too late, when the night slipped down,  
How close he was to the golden crown.*

*Success is failure turned inside out—  
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt—  
And you never can tell how close you are,  
It may be near when it seems afar;  
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit—  
It's when things seem worst that you mustn't quit.*

— Frank Stanton