

The Journal



A SHEPHERDESS INTERNATIONAL RESOURCE FOR MINISTRY SPOUSES

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Thanksgiving

If you woke up this morning with more health than illness . . .
you are more blessed than the million who will not survive this week.

If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment,
the agony of torture or the pangs of starvation . . .
you are ahead of 500 million people in the world.

If you can attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death . . .
you are more blessed than three billion people in the world.

If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep . . .
you are richer than 75% of this world.

If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish someplace . . .
you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy.

If you hold up your head with a smile on your face and are truly thankful . . .
you are blessed because the majority can, but most do not.

If you can hold someone's hand, hug them or even touch them on the shoulder . . .
you are blessed because you can offer the healing touch.

If you can read this message, you just received a double blessing in that someone was thinking of you,
and furthermore, you are more blessed than over two billion people in the world that cannot read at all.

Have a great day, count your blessings, and pass this along to remind everyone else how blessed we all are.

I hope that you have a great week and a Happy Thanksgiving!

The Journal

- 3 The Brat Next Door
- 6 Coming Home for Christmas
- 8 The Magi's Faith Trek
- 10 To Shepherdess Friends
- 11 Gold, Common Sense, and Fur
- 12 Change Your Expectations
- 14 What Can You Give This Christmas?
- 16 A Few Bars in the Key of G
- 19 A Song in the Night
- 20 Holy Bread
- 22 Christmas Help Wanted

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Editor's Musings

All of us are busy. Most of us barely manage to keep up with the daily grind of our work responsibilities and when unexpected emergencies arise—whether it is the washing machine breaking down or a major medical crisis—we go into overdrive trying to manage more. Just when we think we can't squeeze in another thing, the holidays arrive.

I love Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years. Ideally, they are special days that are supposed to bring families closer together. In my fantasy mind there are pictures of relaxed family fellowship, good home-made food, and expressions of love and appreciation to those we care about. This is all framed in drifting white snow viewed from a chair by my warm fireplace. In my reality mind I know this season means hours of cooking and washing dishes, hectic trips to find appropriate gifts, and shoveling snow from the driveway while my feet freeze.

As we prepare for the holidays, we all need a little mini-retreat from the hustle-bustle of the crowds, the congregation and the constant barrage of interruptions. We have made it a tradition here at Shepherdess International to prepare an issue each year at this time dedicated to giving you inspirational stories that will de-stress your life for a brief period. This year I am pleased to share with you some of the best.

So, block out a portion of time, make a nice cup of hot tea, sit down in your favorite chair with your feet up in your most comfortable slippers and be blessed. You might also want a box of tissues!

May each of you have a Holiday Season that will leave you "Too Blessed To Be Stressed."



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The Brat Next Door

Elizabeth Rice
Handford

A Christmas Story

Elizabeth Handford (Libby) has made family one of the top priorities in her life. She and her husband, Dr. Walter Handford, have retired in South Carolina where they work in the ministry of encouragement, especially to men and women in ministry. Libby has edited the magazine *Joyful Woman* and is now consulting editor. She has also authored several books. Libby enjoys flying and earned her pilot's license after the age of 50.



GINNINNY surveyed the littered living room, wrapping paper piled high, empty boxes crushed, tinsel dripping from the furniture. It was Christmas morning, and there was no doubt that she and Brad had chosen the right gifts for their children. Katie, ten years old, had the volume turned all the way up on her new electronic keyboard. The atmosphere thumped with the built-in "demo" music score, and Katie's little fingers danced across the keyboard as if she were really playing. Andy, twelve years old, hunched over his new computer, carefully following the instructions for logging onto the internet.

Ginny smiled up at her husband, tears trembling in her eyes. "I think we scored a ten today. The kids are so happy! Now I've got to ready for the last competition!"

"Competition?"

"Yep. One more competition. I made it through the Christmas program Sunday night. I think I earned a three on that—it wasn't quite the thing for the angel to throw up on the shepherds."

"Oh, honey, the church family loved it—all of it. I'll give you a ten on the Christmas program. But what 'competition,' as you call it, is still ahead?"

"Christmas dinner."

"No problem, Ginny. The kids and I will help you . . . You aren't

worrying because Mom and Dad are coming, are you?"

"Well, yes, I am. I want to prove to them that I can be a good hostess."

"Ginny, they're just coming for dinner. You don't have to *prove* anything."

"You don't understand, Brad. All that time you were in seminary, when we had so little money, I was always so ashamed. Your folks were always generous with us, but I felt like your mother thought you'd married beneath yourself. And now that you're pastoring a church and we have a comfortable house, I want to show her I do know how to do things nicely."

"You're wrong, Ginny. Mother respects you very much. But, hey, the kids and I will help you serve a meal fit even for Tiny Tim and Scrooge." He looked at his watch. "They should get here about one o'clock if they don't run into too much traffic in Atlanta. That gives us three hours to do everything you need to get done. Andy! Katie! Play time's over. Come and help your mother."

"Mom," Andy said, "before we start working, could I please show Eddie my computer?"

"No, Son, we have too much to do."

"But, Mom, I told him I was praying for a computer, and I got it, so he needs to know God answered my prayer. I'll work extra fast if you'll let him come just for a little bit."

"Andy, you know I don't like your spending time with Eddie. He's a bad influence on you."

"But I'm a good influence on him."

"Like the bad words he uses and you pick up?"

Andy flushed. "I didn't know they were bad words. When you told me what they meant, I told him, so he's trying not to use them anymore."

"But his daddy's a drunk and his mother's a—", Ginny paused when she saw Brad shake his head briefly. "Oh, O.K. Eddie can come for fifteen minutes, and then he's got to go."

When Eddie came, Ginny looked at him critically. He was the same age as Andy, but he was several inches shorter, and thin, almost emaciated. He had a hang-dog kind of look that Ginny despised—he seemed to be just waiting for someone to hurt his feelings.

Andy showed his friend all the things his computer could do. But he also watched the clock, and when the fifteen minutes were up, he said, "Eddie, I promised Mom I'd help her now. Thanks for coming."

Ginny smiled her approval. "We'll need a couple of chairs from the breakfast table, Brad. Then you can bring in a load of wood for the fireplace. Katie, be careful with Mother's china. I couldn't afford to replace a piece if you broke it."

Katie frowned with concentration, placing the beautiful plates just so on the table, and arranging the silverware. She found candlesticks in the cabinet, and pretty Christmas candle rings. Ginny went back to the kitchen to finish grinding the cranberries and celery for her gelatin salad. Brad was sharpening the carving knife, sniffing at the wonderful fragrance of roast turkey coming from the oven.

Ginny glanced up, to see Eddie furtively peering around the door, watching her work at the kitchen sink. His eyes were dark with longing.

"Time to go home, Eddie. Your mother will be waiting for you."

"Naw, she's sleeping."

"Well, you need to run along anyway. We're busy now."

But he stood motionless, clutching the door.

Andy silently motioned his mother into the dining room. "Mom," he whispered conspiratorially, "Why don't we ask Eddie to stay for dinner?"

She shook her head. "Can't do it, Andy. We've room for only six place settings of Mother's china."

"I could squeeze in by Katie, and I'd eat off an every-day plate."

"No, Andy. It would ruin the beautiful table setting. Just tell Eddie to go home."

"But, Mom . . ."

Vehemence shook Ginny's voice. "Andy, read my lips: there's no room at this table for Eddie Greene. Understand?"

But her mind echoed. *No room! No room in the inn! But this isn't about Jesus, Ginny said to herself. This is only Eddie Greene, the brat from next door.*

Andy shrugged. "O.K., Mom."

Ginny watched as Andy talked with Eddie. Sure enough, Eddie's shoulders sagged. An expression of deep hurt crossed his face. Ginny was surprised at how much satisfaction she felt at his pain. *Why doesn't he know he isn't wanted?*

It was nearly noon when the phone rang. Ginny put down the cranberry salad she was unmolding. Brad was already slicing the turkey. The yeast bread had risen, and Katie was now making little balls of dough to put in the oven for the dinner rolls. Andy was mixing lemonade.

"Ginny? Dad here. We've had car trouble in Atlanta. We finally found a shop open, and they are working on it. But it will be four o'clock or so before we get there. Don't wait on us."

Ginny burst into tears. "Brad," she wailed, "they've had car trouble.

They won't make it for dinner."

Andy ran up to his mother. "Don't cry, Mom. We can still have company for Christmas. Let's ask Eddie."

Ginny looked at Brad. He nodded encouragingly.

Ginny bit her lip thoughtfully, struggling with twinges of guilt over her previous outburst about Eddie.

"O.K., go ask Eddie," she said. "Tell him we'll be eating in thirty minutes."

"Whoopee! We're having company," Brad yelled as he charged out the door.

"Whoopee! We're having company," she imitated dryly. "While you're at it, why not invite everybody else in the neighborhood?"

He was back in minutes. "They're all coming!"

Shocked, Ginny asked, "Who's all coming?"

"The Greenses. You said to invite them. I heard you. You said why not just invite everybody. So I did."

Ginny hugged her son closely. It's a good thing you don't understand sarcasm when you hear it, she thought.

"Mrs. Greene said Mr. Greene's been sick, but she's making him some strong coffee and says he'll be better in time to come and eat."

Ginny looked at the exquisite table settings. *Drunk! Eating off my beautiful dishes. What if they break one?* she wondered. *Maybe I should use the everyday dishes.* Then slowly, deliberately, she relinquished the ownership of those lovely pieces. *Jesus, they're yours. Use them to bless my neighbors today.*

Ginny's conjectures as to the nature of Mr. Greene's "sickness" were confirmed as she watched the three of them walk up the sidewalk. Eddie had his father's arm across his own thin shoulders, trying to hold him up whenever his father staggered. Mrs. Greene minced alongside them in high, spiked heels and a bright floral jersey dress that sagged at the neckline and fluttered

about her thighs. Her lipstick was smeared, her eyelashes clotted with mascara, and her hair frowsy except for a little hairpiece of babydoll curls.

She put out her hand to Ginny. "So pleased to meet you," she said, with a touch of the grand duchess.

"Welcome, dear neighbors," said Ginny. Seeing the depth of their need, Ginny prayed silently, *They are dear—they're dear to you, Lord. Thank you, Lord, for not giving up on me when I'm selfish and uncaring, and for giving me this opportunity to show your love.*

The meal wasn't exactly hilarious, good-humored, Cleaver family kind of celebration. Brad and Ginny had to struggle to find things to talk about. Eddie accepted politely whatever Ginny offered him, but he never lost that wary, trapped-animal look, and answered in monosyllables.

Eddie's father, drunk, had been difficult to talk to, but as the alcohol wore off, he became loquacious and tearful. Eddie's mother kept her veneer of gentility, which meant it was very hard to talk about heart-to-heart things. Ginny served her pumpkin pie with dollops of vanilla ice cream, then cleared the table, and eventually excused herself to put away the food. The afternoon wore on, and still their guests did not leave. It was as if they had been mesmerized by the food, by the warmth of their hosts, by the charm of the day, and they could not tear themselves away.

Ginny's heart lurched when she heard voices at the door. "Brad your folks are here. They must have gotten the automobile fixed sooner that they expected." With dismay she surveyed her once-beautiful Christmas table, now a jumble of food crumbs, jello smears, dried-out chunks of turkey meat, and dirty dishes. She felt like weeping. Fat chance, now, of convincing anybody she was a good homemaker!

But Brad seemed to read her thoughts. "It's O.K., darling. You'll see!"

His mother and father came in and hugged the children. Mr. and Mrs. Greene stood up in confusion, and started for the door.

"First, Mother and Dad, you must meet our neighbors—Mr. and Mrs. Greene and their son Eddie. Since you couldn't be here, they were kind enough to share our Christmas dinner."

*He was one
of the precious souls
whom Jesus came
into the world
to save,
and that was what
Christmas
was all about.*



Sudden tears flowed from Mrs. Greene's eyes, tracking down black smears of mascara on her cheeks. "Kind enough? You are the ones who are kind. We know what we are, but you were kind to us anyway, and we'll never, never forget it."

Ginny watched the three of them shamble down the sidewalk, her heart tumbling with mixed emotion. Her mother-in-law stood by her, her hand on her shoulder. "You know, Ginny, when Brad decided to go into the ministry, I wondered if you could make the adjustment to being a minister's wife. You always kept your home so beautiful, even when you lived in that tiny apartment at seminary. I wondered how you'd survive in the nitty-gritty world of ministry."

Ginny dropped her head, fearing what was to come.

"But today, when I saw your compassion, your gentleness with those people, I knew you were just the wife Brad needs. You are helping him reach people who need the Lord, no matter what their background is."

"She's right, Ginny," Brad said. "That was the most beautiful bit of hostessing I've ever seen you do."

"Oh, you two, it wasn't that big a deal," Ginny said nonchalantly. "We had a lovely time together. Mother and Dad, let the kids show you their new toys while I make some turkey sandwiches. I'll serve them up on my matched set of every-day dishes—matched because they all have chips—and we'll eat in real style."

As she began making up the sandwiches, she looked out the window toward the house next door, the house where Eddie Greene lived. He was no longer that brat who lived next door. He was one of the most precious souls whom Jesus came into the world to save, and that was what Christmas was all about.

How should she score this competition, this competition that she nearly flunked out of?

"Let's drop the score-keeping, Ginny," she heard God's voice within her. "You have a God who doesn't remember our sins and holds no grudges." He knows how to use us in spite of ourselves!





Coming Home For Christmas

Jessie Sandberg

My Christmas routines are so predictable that my children and grandchildren could probably give you my entire holiday schedule with hardly a glitch!

Of course it will begin with a mad rush to have corners of the house clean which I have ignored all year! It is not as though I am trying to impress anyone; my family—our major house guests at Christmas—have seen our house in all stages of life and cleanliness (or lack thereof)! I will dislodge tiny spiders who have taken possession of high corners and I will dust baseboards behind beds and chests that have carried on a life undisturbed by me for many months. It's the Christmas routine!

Then the cooking will begin. I'll bake some Swedish rye and maybe cardamom bread, my traditional family cookies, and inevitably I'll try a new recipe borrowed from a friend. There will be a ham and turkey, rice pudding and chocolate cake to be prepared.

The decorating starts with dragging up boxes from the garage and storage closet, checking last year's lights, and arranging each set of decorations to adorn its own particular room (because Swedish tradition demands that every room be decorated.)

At last I will carefully remove from its plastic protection, my own little

"Brigadoon"—the tiny village that has for many years been the central and probably most enjoyed part of our decorations. The village began long ago as a small group of houses, before "Christmas villages" were popular, and through the years we have added a strange collection of unmatched houses from all over the world. There are little wooden fairytale houses, English cottages, lighted porcelain houses, Dutch townhouses and Austrian houses, pierced brass buildings, painted metal houses, castles, the usual assortment of small china houses (made in—of course—China), churches, schools, shops, a mill, a barn, a tiny lake and a carousel. There is a little toy wooden train and a tiny creche set from Germany that sits in the village square. The minute individuals that people my fantasy village were originally designed to enhance an N-scale train set; the various tiny cars (unromantically called Micro-Machines by the company which designed them for the entertainment of little boys) sit right alongside a small English double-decker bus and a miniature "antique" car.

We know perfectly well that all the people and cars and houses are not in perfect proportion to one another. A fantasy world does not require such distinctions in order to be perfectly satisfying.

Jessie Sandberg and her husband Don have four children and nine grandchildren. They live in Ringgold, Georgia where they have a special ministry to provide hospitality and encouragement to people in crisis, particularly for those in various ministries. Jessie has written several books and also made a number of tapes dealing women's problems.

In some of the quiet moments of Christmas, I gaze longingly at my village and wonder what it would be like to live in such a quiet little place that never seems to be disturbed year after year. Although grandchildren and small grandnieces and nephews do sometimes "drive" a tiny car dangerously up or down its Styrofoam hills, there are no earthquakes or fires or floods or tornadoes to mar the peace. The little plastic people do not change, do not grow old (at least not visibly) and although one or two "people" have disappeared over the years, the imitation life of this imitation world is serene.

Why, do you suppose, are "houses" so important a decorating motif for Christmas? Can it be because we know in our hearts that Christmas is about coming home?

An amazing concept, when you realize that Christmas really began with the strangest and longest journey away from home that God or man could have ever taken! Our limited human insight cannot even fathom that dreadful love-motivated choice that took the Lord of the Universe away from His beloved Father, away from the adoration of angels, away from the beauty and perfection of eternal glory.

We can hardly picture anyone willingly moving from mansions to slums, but the contrast of Jesus Christ coming from the sinlessness of Heaven to share in our humanity and to take the awfulness of our sin upon Himself and to pay the penalty of our sin for us, this boggles the mind.

Did I say Christmas was about *coming home*? It is. For Jesus Christ's journey from human birth to physical death was for one reason alone, in order that you and I could **COME HOME**—to eternal glory, to live with Him forever!

All over the world, at Christmas time, families go to amazing lengths

in order to come home for the holidays. But home is not the house we grew up in, the place where our loved ones are gathered; it is not even the little "nest" we may have made for ourselves in a dorm room, a retirement home, or a breathtaking lake cottage. Many of us have learned by age and experience that one's feelings of "belonging," of being safe or loved or valued may not come even when the stage has been perfectly planned. There has to be something more.

When my friend Kathy was dying of cancer we commented on the beautiful view of Lookout Mountain through the hospital window, and someone murmured that Chattanooga was such a beautiful city in which to live. Kathy smiled and said, "Chattanooga is not important to me anymore." She was already looking toward Heaven; she was getting ready to go Home!

Maybe this is a Christmas when you do not get to go "home" for the holidays. Or perhaps home no longer feels like home because some beloved person will not be there. Our image of what home was supposed to be may have been destroyed by divorce or death or distance.

Well, take heart; we can be "home" for Christmas if we have learned that the One who makes any place home has never left us. When our hearts are at rest in Him, the significance of Christmas is complete.

"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, or angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:38, 39.

Christmas is about coming home!



How To Observe Thanksgiving

- ✿ Count your blessings instead of your crosses;
- ✿ Count your gains instead of your losses.
- ✿ Count your joys instead of your woes;
- ✿ Count your friends instead of your foes.
- ✿ Count your smiles instead of your tears;
- ✿ Count your courage instead of your fears.
- ✿ Count your full years instead of your lean;
- ✿ Count your kind deeds instead of your mean.
- ✿ Count your health instead of your wealth;
- ✿ Count on God instead of yourself.



Not Anything But Everything

"The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Philippians 4:5, 6.

Southern Asia Division Shepherdess Bulletin

The Magi's Faith Trek

J. Grant Swank, Jr.

The magi asked, "Where is the king of the Jews?" They were traveling—by faith. Persian astrologers, they were. And Gentiles at that. Somewhere along the way they had come to study the Jewish scripture scrolls, then acknowledge the Hebrew deity as the true God.

In their studies, they converged their astrological vocation with scriptural research—studying the heavens for the throne of God. In that, God spoke to them of the approaching birth of the Hebrew Messiah Christ. God informed them that if they as Gentiles followed the unique star, they would see for themselves the Jewish Anointed One.

Therefore, these fellows acted out their faith. They traveled with their faith in hand and heart. Over the hot sands, to the west, in search of a baby they had never laid eyes on. It was by simple faith that they made their trek.

So it is in your life and mine. We have never laid eyes on Jesus Christ nor seen His resurrected body nor gone to heaven to witness Him as intercessor at the right hand of the Father. But we have researched the scriptures and believe their account to be true. Therefore, from time to time this invisible deity displays Himself in our visible experiences. We, by faith, then come upon the marvelous sight.

Yet in this faith traveling, there are numerous Herods who would stand in the way, attempting to wreck the faith project. They are bloodthirsty, agents of hell, mean to the pits. Such should never surprise the faith child. Jesus promised as much. That is why He told His own to be as wise as snakes and harmless as doves. Wise as snakes!

How interesting that every time heaven breaks through with some marvelous holy extravaganza of love and mercy, hell gets as angry as angry can be. So it is that while God implanted Himself into human history, Herod became furious with envy. He stalked. He balked. He strung out his nerves to dry.

Then Herod put on the religious face. What a mask he wore. It was with such religious enthusiasm that he approached the magi to inform them that he too wanted to worship the new Hebrew King. If they would only tell him of the infant's whereabouts, Herod himself would bow before this tiny item.

So it was that Herod continued his hypocritical dance of envy by contacting chief priests and teachers of law. He asked the details of their prophetic records. Where? When? How?

In our faith journeys we come upon the outrageous counterfeits. How they wear their masks tightly.

Gary Swank is not only pastor of the New Hope Church but also instructor in fine arts at the Regional Educational Alternative Learning School in south Windham. He works daily with youth at risk.



They know the language, the imagery, the posture. They know the concepts and doctrines. They put on the display of piety. But their hearts are far from God. Again, Jesus warns His genuine grace children to be wary of the snakes.

How sad that the chief priests and teachers of the law could inform Herod of the prophetic piece and yet be so utterly far from its personal truth. It would be these very religious play actors who would some day plot the murder of the infant-grown-adult. So near, so far. How often has that duo played itself out for the ruin of those on stage.

It is then with the gift of discernment that God provides the sincere grace child with the spiritual perception to see through the mask. This spiritual present enables the true believer to continue the faith journey without being detoured by those who would distract to destroy.

So it was that the magi made the trip—following the star. Yet how did they discern in the broad daylight? It was then that they simply trudged forward by faith alone. Yet in the dark of night, they would again catch the gleam.

So it is with our faith journeys. We come into night seasons of confusion and doubt, trouble and depression. Can we go another step? Who would care? Who will lead us? The nighttime clouds cover the star shine. We cannot see it. Have we lost it completely?

No. As we keep true to the journey, the star appears again in the darkest night. Then we know anew that God has not left us; He is still where He has always been—faithful to those children on the trek.

Eventually the magi reached Bethlehem. The Jewish shepherds had preceded them in the cave stall. But now the Gentile astrologers would come upon the Hebrew Christ in a house. No wonder Jesus later told His own that He came to the Jew first and then the Gentile. So it had been since Bethlehem's start. Yet it was for all mankind—"For God who loved the world"—that the Messiah Babe laid in the manger. It was for all that He would die upon the tree.

The Christmas account then happily relates that the magi's hearts were overjoyed with their sight discovery. Their faith had led them to the visible God in the cow's trough. There he was, for certain!

*As we keep true to the journey,
the star appears again in the
darkest night. Then we know
anew that God has not left us;
He is still where He has
always been—faithful to those
children on the trek.*



What if they had given up? What if they had doubted and turned back? What if they had counted the cost and concluded it was fool-hearty? Then they would not have seen. Their faith would have crumbled. They would have paid with the loss of their very destinies.

But they did not renege. They remained true to the close. Their faith yielded its own reward—sight!

And so it is with each of us—we make the journey to the close, then we see. We come upon heaven's own reward—sight!

It was then with such utter ecstasy that these grown men bent their knees before the child. They flung their gold, frankincense, and myrrh—gushing forth with praise and worship. They were beside themselves, no doubt tears streaming down their cheeks. The hot sands were behind them. The babe was before them. They had stayed true to the vision; God had remained true to His promise.

So it is with you and me. We find out that as we make the faith journey, there are days when we wonder what is going on. Can we make it to the close? Will it prove us the utter fools? Yet we proceed. And when we do, we realize one certainty. God never left the very spot where He promised to meet us. God has been there all along.

If the magi had turned back somewhere along the westward trail, Jesus would still have been waiting in the Bethlehem cow stall. But they would have missed Him—totally. If we had turned back, God would still be very much there. If we had forsaken the promise, the journey, the prize, God would still be very much there. God remains, though others falter.

Thank heaven the magi remained constant and so came upon The Constant. No wonder their hearts were pounding for joy abounding! And so it is the same with us, as we remain loyal to the faith, to the close of the journey. 

To Shepherdess Friends

Esmé Ross



The atmosphere in the delivery room was intense. My daughter was, for the second time in her life, experiencing the pangs of childbirth. Chantal's lips were pursed tight as the labor pains reached its peak, a few tears gently spilt over from her eyes and ran down her cheek. The doctor and his assistant had concern written across their faces. Her husband, supportive, encouraging, frightened, stood by her side. And I, her Mom, felt every pain she felt. We puffed together, and we breathed together, and we pushed together. Looking at her swollen belly moving, filled me with awe, wonder, and fear recognizing that although birth was imminent there was also the possibility of something going wrong. And so we pushed, we prayed, we breathed, we puffed. And then it happened. The life that was conceived in secret, came into full being through the miracle of birth.

Esmé Ross was born and raised in South Africa. She and her husband have done mission work in Swaziland and pastoral work in South Africa before serving in Iowa. They have 2 children and 4 grandchildren. She is currently director of a Day Care Center for senior citizens. Esmé enjoys music, conducting seminars and public lectures, walking, reading, healthful living and sharing God's love.

The doctor lifted little Sarah up by her feet and gently shook her, she was blue, and then she began to cry. There was an explosion of emotion, powerful enough to raise the roof of a house. Tears of joy, relief and total wonderment of the miracle flowed from all quarters. Hearts poured forth in praise and thanksgiving. The mission was completed.

There was nobody to help, encourage, or coach Mary while in labor in the stable, except for dear Joseph, filled with anxiety and fear, who was probably more accustomed to helping ewe's give birth rather than a woman, his wife. But unseen angels were there, guiding, encouraging, coaching Mary, guiding the precious head that once wore a golden crown, now moving through the birth canal. And then it happened—the life that was conceived in secret by the Holy Ghost came into full being through the miracle of birth. There was an explosion of joy in the City of God powerful enough not only to set Heaven ablaze, but to pour forth into our solar system and light up the very atmosphere that surrounds our earth. Songs of joy, praise, and thanksgiving flowed from all quarters of the Heavens and the earth as the angels welcomed His birth. The mission was completed.

Surrounding us every day are people, pregnant with the possibilities of new birth into the Kingdom of God. Are we ready to coach them through, push with them, puff with them, pray with them, breathe with them, until the miracle of new birth takes place and they are able to breathe on their own? Because of the miracle of the Greatest Birth that ever took place, you and I have life and have life more abundantly. “. . . I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” John 10:10.

I have had the privilege of being with both my girls, Ruth and Chantal, during their deliveries and words are not adequate to describe the joy of this unique experience. But so much greater is the experience of heaven when a child of the King receives the miracle of new birth.

“. . . there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” Luke 15:10.

The mission is being completed.

As the world remembers the birth of Jesus at this time, may you and I commit ourselves to being part of every new birth that the Holy Spirit brings into our sphere of life. May your hearts and homes be filled with the love of Jesus, and may the peace and joy of a new life shine as lights in this world. 

Gold, Common Sense, and Fur

Linda Stafford



My husband and I had been happily married (most of the time) for five years but hadn't been blessed with a baby. I decided to do some serious praying and promised God if He would give us a child I would be a perfect mother, love it with all my heart, and raise it with His Word as my guide.

God answered my prayers and blessed us with a son. The next year God blessed us with another son. The following year, He blessed us with yet another son. The year after that we were blessed with a daughter.

My husband thought we'd been blessed right into poverty. We now had four children, and the oldest was only four years old.

I learned never to ask God for anything unless I meant it. As a minister once told me, "If you pray for rain, make sure you carry an umbrella."

I began reading a few verses of the Bible to the children each day as they lay in their cribs. I was off to a good start. God had entrusted me with four children, and I didn't want to disappoint Him.

I tried to be patient the day the children smashed two-dozen eggs on the kitchen floor searching for baby chicks. I tried to be understanding when they started a hotel for homeless frogs in the spare

bedroom, although it took me nearly two hours to catch all 23 frogs.

When my daughter poured ketchup all over herself and rolled up in a blanket to see how it felt to be a hot dog, I tried to see the humor rather than the mess.

In spite of changing over 25,000 diapers, never eating a hot meal, and never sleeping for more than 30 minutes at a time, I still thank God daily for my children.

While I couldn't keep my promise to be a perfect mother—I didn't even come close—I did keep my promise to raise them in the Word of God.

I could tell I wasn't doing well, however, when the Sunday School teacher asked, "Who helped the traveler from Jericho after he'd been beaten and robbed?" and my son answered, "Some American" instead of the Good Samaritan.

I knew I was missing the mark just a little when I told my daughter we were going to worship God, and she wanted to bring a bar of soap along to "wash up" Jesus too.

Something was lost in the translation when I explained that God gave us everlasting life, and my son thought it was generous of God to give us His "last wife."

My proudest moment came during the children's Christmas pageant. My daughter was playing Mary, two of

my sons were shepherds, and my youngest son was a wise man. This was their moment to shine.

My five-year-old shepherd had practiced his line, "We found the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes." But he was nervous and said, "The baby was wrapped in wrinkled clothes."

My four-year-old "Mary" said, "That's not 'wrinkled clothes,' silly. That's dirty, rotten clothes."

A wrestling match broke out between Mary and the shepherd and was stopped by an angel, who bent her halo and lost her left wing.

I slouched a little lower in my seat when Mary dropped the doll representing Baby Jesus, and it bounced down the aisle crying, "Mama-mama." Mary grabbed the doll, wrapped it back up, and held it tightly as the wise men arrived.

My other son stepped forward wearing a bathrobe and paper crown, knelt at the manger and announced, "We are the three wise men, and we are bringing gifts of gold, common sense, and fur."

The congregation dissolved into laughter, and the pageant got a standing ovation. "I've never enjoyed a Christmas program as much as this one," the minister laughed, wiping tears from his eyes. "For the rest of my life, I'll never hear the Christmas story without thinking of gold, common sense, and fur."

"I try," I said, as I dug through my purse for aspirin. "My children really are a blessing!"



Change Your Expectations



Betty J. Johnson

It's the week after Christmas and all through the house not a creature is stirring—I'm exhausted, depressed, disappointed, and feeling like a louse.

Does this describe your attitude last January? What happened to the jolly good times? Where was your sense of good will toward people everywhere? Did the hustle of holiday preparations leave you tearful instead of cheerful?

"I'm glad Christmas is over. Tension hovered in our house yesterday," my friend, Joy, confided last December 26th.

"I really wanted a skateboard, but didn't get one," my neighbor Joey commented.

"I'm so exhausted, I could sleep for a week," Carrie, a young mom, cried.

Is it possible that our after-Christmas attitudes reflect our pre-Christmas expectations?

What tops your wish list for Christmas? Imperfect expectations introduce the unwelcome January companions: exhaustion, depression, and disappointment. However, by prayerfully evaluating our expectations, we can invite joy, peace, and hope to accompany us into the new year. Let's consider changing our expectations.

Perfect earthly relationship

Do you wish for a Norman Rockwell setting—the extended dining room table filled with generations of family, all smiling, chatting, loving their togetherness? Imperfect expectation?

If our perfect Christmas focuses on earthly relationships, what happens if Johnny is in a bad mood or Billy and Bobby snap and poke each other during dinner? Or our table doesn't need extending because we're a family of three?

Sometimes we can't alter our circumstances, but we can change our expectations. What if our top priority is inviting the Christ Child to be born anew within our hearts? Whether our table includes two or twenty-two, the One whose birthday we celebrate prods us to view each person present with thankfulness.

Betty J. Johnson is a wife, mother, writer, and speaker who lives in Parker, Colorado. Her articles and devotions have been published in various magazines and books. She enjoys grandmothing, golfing, biking, leading small groups, and mentoring young mothers.

Receiving the perfect gift

The *Better Homes and Gardens'* tinsel-laden tree surrounded with decorated gifts evokes high expectations. Maybe that tiny box means at long last he'll ask me to marry him. Or maybe the sports car we've always longed for is scheduled for delivery on Christmas Eve. Imperfect expectation!

The jewelry box contains a pair of silver earrings, and the man of our dreams isn't ready for marriage. The company is cutting back, so the sports car stays in the showroom.

Is the perfect Christmas present at the top of our wish list? Do we expect to find it under the tree? The perfect gift arrived one night in Bethlehem over 2,000 years ago. He was not wrapped in gold foil and green bows, but in swaddling clothes. He was not found under a tinsel-laden tree, but lying in a manger. And He came that we may have abundant life (John 10:10). Through the gift of Jesus Christ, God responds to our deepest needs.

The perfect, perfect Christmas

Are the Martha Stewart expectations creeping to the top of our wish list? Do we envision perfect decorations placed in the perfect positions? Will we entertain with elegant china, crystal and linen? Do our plans include baking gaily-decorated gingerbread cookies with the children in our lives, and shopping until we find each person the perfect gift? Do we push aside all moments of solitude to play Super Mom, Super Dad, Super Grandma or Grandpa? Imperfect expectation!

What happens when the neighbor next door decorates every tree in his yard, and a friend's house emanates Victorian ambiance, causing ours to look red-and-green gaudy? And we discover five-year-old children sometimes prefer watching *Toy Store 2* to decorating gingerbread cookies?

How do we feel when that perfect gift turns out to be the wrong size, or the wrong color, or the wrong design? And when the after-Christmas clean-up committee consists of the same Super Person who cooked, cleaned, baked, and wrapped it all?

If our Christmas expectations focus on perfect trimmings and tables, gifts and gourmet food, and perfection isn't achieved, disappointment and depression haunt our households. This year, remember that only God is perfect. Enjoy the beauty of your neighbor's decorations, allow your children to be childlike, tuck love and acceptance inside the wrapping of a less-than-perfect gift, and set aside time for waiting on the Lord.

Thousands of years ago, people watched and waited, expecting a Savior and King. A man in Jerusalem

named Simeon expected the Messiah to come soon. When Mary and Joseph arrived, presenting the baby Jesus to the Lord in obedience to the law, Simeon was there and took the child in his arms, praising God. "Lord," he said, "My eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people: a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32).

What are we expecting this Christmas? The King has arrived, and He said if we seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, the things of worth will be added unto us. May we, like Simeon, praise God and proclaim Jesus as our perfect guest, gift, and source of hope for the future.

Can Christmas make a positive difference in our lives? Perhaps it depends on our expectations.

What do you really want for Christmas this year? Joy? Peace? Spiritual renewal? A sense of contentment in the new year? May these suggestions help fulfill your wish list for 2002.

1. *Set priorities* by making conscious choices and plans regarding entertaining, gift-buying, church activities, school programs, and craft and baking projects. After studying calendars and finances, decide which gifts and activities represent your family's priorities. Make decisions and stick with them.
2. *Prepare yourself mentally and spiritually* for Jesus' birth. Through your church or Christian bookstore, get an Advent devotional book and be intentional in your daily study. As a family, make an advent wreath; discover the symbolism of the candles, evergreens, etc.
3. *Create an atmosphere of love—not perfection.* If you have children or grandchildren, involve them in displaying the nativity scene. While decorating the tree, linger over memorable tree ornaments and hand-made decorations. Fill your home with Christmas music and bake a birthday cake for Jesus. Add a candle for each family member plus one in the middle for the Christ Child. On Christmas Day, gather around the table and sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus. 

What Can You Give This Christmas?

Elaine Hardt

Elaine and her husband Don have 2 grown sons and 2 teenage grandchildren. She is retired from 22 years of teaching 3rd grade and has written curriculum and several books on parent-child communication, and spoken to parents' groups. Elaine and her husband live in Prescott Valley, Arizona where they host a Monday night Bible study.



It was just early September but two of my friends were busy with Christmas crafts. Then there was me, a genuine klutz. All thumbs, no imagination.

Georgia, with her eye for pattern color, worked on a beautiful fabric-covered photo album. And Betty was painting ceramic figures for a twenty-one piece nativity scene. I always admired the professional looking gifts these two women turned out so easily. I knew their friends and families would be surprised and delighted with the handmade items.

Their enthusiasm was so contagious I started thinking about Christmas, too. But what could I make?

A few days later the bright ideas came. My excitement could hardly be contained. This year there'd be a special gift under the tree for each member of my family.

No, it wouldn't be a handcraft with loving stitches and lacy ruffles like my nimble-fingered friends created. But it would be something even a klutz could make: *a booklet of favorite Bible verses.*

Now, before you moan and say, "Oh, I could never do that; I can't write," let me tell you how easy the project was. It's a gift that anyone could make.

I envisioned a booklet with one page written by each of us Anderson

kids. It would be fun to find out our favorite verses and the story behind our choices. I figured all I'd have to do was to write my sisters and brother a little note requesting a single typewritten page. And in a few weeks I could type it all up and get it to the quick print shop.

Well, my timetable turned out to be unrealistic—good thing I started before the end of September. But the rest of the plan worked out. It was exciting to see each part of the booklet come together.

While waiting for the other verses to come in the mail I got busy and wrote about my own favorite Scripture. Since becoming born again at the age of twelve I'd read the Bible many times and had a lot of special verses. But the earliest verse I could recall had a special story behind it.

In order for our children to share, too, I decided to ask the older ones to contribute a verse and the younger ones to tell about their favorite Bible story. Under the heading of the "upcoming generation," some more pages took form. From my brother's two-year-old Andy who declared, "Jonah and the Whale" to be his favorite because "the whale spit him out on the ground," to my son Peter, the oldest of the grandchildren, more of the family would be represented in this family memento.

I pictured this booklet as a tribute to our parents who were both deceased, so "Legacy of Love" became the title. And with a border of clip art, the cover design became a simple job. I wrote up a little introduction for the first page of the booklet, explaining my idea for sharing our favorite verses as a gift to each other.

Since Mother and Dad were both gone, we mounted a search for their favorite verses. A couple of verses on a slip of paper written in Mother's handwriting were found in a family Bible. And I put, "God Knows," a poem that Dad had written, on his page.

For the last page of the booklet, I quoted Psalm 112:1-2, "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed." I expressed my belief that God would bless us, our children, our grandchildren, and even the following generations according to His promises.

Then I outlined simply the plan of salvation. I challenged us all to be faithful to the Lord, to diligently pass on our faith, and to pray for each other's families. In closing, I encouraged everyone who might read this little booklet to turn to the timeless pages of the Bible and find God's legacy of love.

Laying out the pages two to an 8 x 14" sheet of paper, the finished size was an attractive 7 x 8". With five sheets, a sturdy card stock cover, and extra charges for collating and stapling, the cost came to under \$2.00 apiece for 50 copies. That gave me enough for my sisters and brother, our children, our aunts, and uncles, our only living grandparent, and some old friends of the family.

At last the printed booklets were in my hands. They looked so "official"! Excitedly, expectantly, I prayed over each one. I claimed

salvation and spiritual victories for everybody who would read them. Finally on December 20 they were mailed.

Christmas came, and God's Word was shared. My little idea had

expanded like a kernel of corn in a hot air popper. Who knows how many will read our testimonies and be blessed! "Legacy of Love" became a special gift to the world from me, a genuine klutz. 

If Tomorrow Never Comes . . .

If I knew it would be the last time that I'd see you fall asleep,
I would tuck you in more tightly and pray the Lord, your soul to keep.

If I knew it would be the last time that I see you walk out the door,
I would give you a hug and kiss and call you back for one more.

If I knew it would be the last time I'd hear your voice lifted up in praise,
I would video tape each action and word, so I could play them back day after day.

If I knew it would be the last time,
I could spare an extra minute or two to stop and say "I love you," instead of assuming you would know I do.

If I knew it would be the last time I would be there to share your day, well
I'm sure you'll have so many more, so I can let just this one slip away.

For surely there's always tomorrow to make up for an oversight, and we always get a second chance to make everything right.

There will always be another day to say our "I love you's"; And certainly there's another chance to say our "Anything I can do's?"

But just in case I might be wrong, and today is all I get, I'd like to say how much I love you and I hope we never forget,

Tomorrow is not promised to anyone, young or old alike, And today may be the last chance you get to hold your loved one tight.

So if you're waiting for tomorrow, why not do it today?
For if tomorrow never comes, you'll surely regret the day,
That you didn't take that extra time for a smile, a hug, or a kiss and you were too busy to grant someone, what turned out to be their one last wish.

So hold your loved ones close today, whisper in their ear, Tell them how much you love them and that you'll always hold them dear,

Take time to say "I'm sorry," "please forgive me," "thank you" or "it's okay".
And if tomorrow never comes, you'll have no regrets about today.

A Few Bars in the Key of G

Author Unknown

*I*t was two o'clock, the time for the third watch of the night herd. These two facts gradually impressed themselves on the consciousness of John Talbort Waring, as he was thumped into wakefulness by the Mexican "horse-wrangler." He, unrolling his slicker which had been serving as a pillow, enveloped himself in its clammy folds and went out into the drizzling rain.

The cattle were unusually quiet, needing little attention and Waring had ample opportunity to reflect on the disadvantages of a cowpuncher's life as he rode slowly along the edge of the black mass of sleeping animals. The rain dripped from the limp brim of his sombrero; the chill wind, sweeping down from the mountains pierced his damp clothes, and made him shiver in the saddle. For the hundredth time within a week, Waring condemned himself for relinquishing the comforts of civilization for the hard life in Colorado.

He recalled his arrival on the range six months before, a "tenderfoot," and the various tribulations he had endured incident to his transformation into a full-fledged cowpuncher. Of the hardships and dangers which come to every rider of the range, he had experienced his share, and faced them bravely,

thereby winning the respect of the rough, lionhearted men among whom he had cast his lot.

But all the weary months had been wasted; he had failed in his object; he could not forget. It even seemed to him that, instead of growing more endurable, with time, the soreness in his heart and the sting of regret increased with every passing day. He wondered if she felt the separation. If she cared. As his thoughts wandered back over the past two years, he recalled every incident of their acquaintance. The day he had first seen her, as she stepped gracefully beside the piano to sing, at a musicale he had attended; the song she had sung:

The hours I spent with thee, dear heart,

Are as a string of pearls to me.

The sweet days that followed—their enjoyment of symphony, oratorio and opera, for both were amateurs of no mean ability. He could see her as she appeared on that wonderful day when he had met her at the altar of Trinity and spoken the words that were to bind them together through life. How beautiful she was, and how proud he had been of her as they walked down the broad aisle. He looked back at their wedding trip as at a beautiful dream. How well he remembered the return to the lovely home he had prepared

for her, and the first dear days within its walls. How happy they had been, and how he had loved her! *Had* he loved her? He *did* love her.

And then the shadow had come over their home. He asked himself bitterly why he had not been more patient with her, and made allowances for her high spirit and quick temper. She was such a child. He could see now that he had been to blame many times in their quarrels. Should he go back to her, and admit that he had been wrong? Never! The words she had spoken in the heat of anger had burned themselves into his soul and could not be forgotten. He wondered now that he had been able to answer her so calmly. He recalled every word he had said:

"Your words convince me that we cannot live together any longer. I will neither forget nor forgive them. I am going away. You are at liberty to sue for a divorce if you care to do so. Three years, I believe is the time required to substantiate a plea of desertion."

That was all, without another word he had left her standing white and motionless, in the center of her dainty chamber, and gone from the beautiful home, to come out here to the wildest spot he could find and plunge into the perilous life he was leading, in the vain effort to forget.

Then his thoughts strayed to the strange postal card he had received the previous day. It had been directed in care of his attorney, and forwarded by the lawyer to the remote mountain post office where Waring received his mail. It was an ordinary postal card, its peculiarity consisted in the fact that the communication on the back was composed, not of words, but music—four measures in the key of G. He had hummed the notes over and over, and though they had a strangely familiar sound, yet he could not place the fragment nor even determine

the song, or composer. It had a meaning of that he was convinced, but what could it be? Who could have sent it? Among his friends were many musicians any one of whom might have adopted such a method of communication with him. He began to hum the phrase as he rode around the cattle.

Suddenly, while in the midst of a passage from one of the great works of a master composer, he stopped short in surprise. He was singing the notes of the card! It had come to him like a flash. He tore open his coat and drew the postal card from an inner pocket, and wrote some words beneath the notes. There was no mistake. He had solved the mystery. Pulling up with a jerk that almost lifted the iron-jawed bronco from the ground, he literally hurled himself from the saddle and reached the boss in two bounds.

"I must be in Denver tonight! I want your best horse quick!"

"Why man, its a 120 miles! You're crazy."

"It's only 60 miles to Empire, and I can get the train there. It leaves at one o'clock and I can make it, if you will lend me Star. I know he's your pet horse, but I tell you, Mr. Goberly, this means everything to me. I simply must get there."

"You ought to know, Jack, that I won't lend Star; so what's the use o' asking? What in the world is the matter with you that you're in such a terrible rush?"

Waring drew the boss beyond earshot of the listening cowpunchers and spoke to him rapidly and earnestly, finally handing him the postal card. Goberly scanned it instantly and a change came over his face. "Why didn't you show me this at first? Of course you can have the horse. Hi there! Some of you boys round up the horses an' rope Star for Mr. Waring. Jump lively!"

In an incredibly short time a rush of hoofs announced the arrival of

the horse. A dozen hands made quick work of saddling, and with a hurried good-bye all around, Waring, swinging himself astride of the magnificent animal, was off on his long ride. The long, pacing stride of Goberly's pet covered the ground in a surprising manner and eight o'clock found 23 miles behind his nimble feet. A five minute stop, and then on across country to the stage station 15 miles away. Twenty minutes of ten o'clock Waring drew rein. He unsaddled and turned the big thoroughbred into the corral. A half-hour's rest would put new life into him. Twenty-two miles of steep climbing to the summit of Berthound Pass meant more than twice that distance on the flat plain. A quarter past ten, Star was carrying him up the road. Up, up they went, mile after mile. Two miles from the top, Waring dismounted and led his panting horse along the icy trail.

Twelve o'clock! Could he make it? He must! Waring was again in the saddle, racing down the dangerous path toward the sea of dark green forest that stretched far below. Down at last to the level road they came with five miles still to go! Rounding a turn in the road, he spied a horseman approaching. The stranger eyed him sharply and as he drew nearer, suddenly whipped out a six-shooter.

"Hold up there! I want to talk to you. I want to know where you're going with Joe Goberly's horse."

"I've been working for Goberly, and he lent me the horse to ride over here to catch the train!"

"That yarn won't do. I know old Joe and I happen to know that he wouldn't lend that horse to his own brother let alone one of his cowpunchers. I guess I'll have to lock you up till the boys come after you."

"Look here, Mr. Sheriff, I'm telling you the truth."

"It's no use, my friend, your story won't hold water. Why are you in such a tearin' hurry anyway?"

Waring remembered the postal card; so he reached into his breast pocket and produced it. "That is my response for haste," he said, "and that is why Goberly let me take his horse."

Keeping his captive covered with the muzzle of his revolver, the officer took the card. As he read it, his face lighted up, and he lowered his gun. "That's all right youngster. I'm sorry I stopped you. I hope you won't miss the train. I'll ride down to the station with you, as some of the boys might want to string you up on account o' the horse—everyone knows him."

Mounting a rise, they saw the town before them, a mile distant. The train was at the station! A touch of the spur, and Star stretched out into a run that left the sheriff behind him. The black smoke began to come in heavy puffs from the funnel of the engine, and the line of cars moved slowly away from the station. Star bounded forward and swept down upon the crowd like a whirlwind.

As the usual crowd of train-time loafers lounged around the station, they paused to watch the race. "Hello, the first horse is Goberly's black and he's sure movin' too. The other feller ain't in it. Why it's the sheriff! An' he's after the other chap. Horse thief!" The others took up the cry of "horse thief." A volley of shots greeted him. Fortunately, they went wild, and before any more could be fired, the sheriff tore into the crowd and roared, "stop shootin', the man's all right. He's only tryin' to catch the train." Then there was a rush to the track where a view of the race could be obtained.

"Will he make it? He's gaining! Hooray for the black! He'll make it!"

Waring with eyes fixed and jaw set, was riding desperately. Thirty feet. The spectators in the doorway of the last car gazed breathlessly. Twenty feet—and Star straining every nerve and muscle in his body; ten feet—and still he gained. Only five feet

now! Swerving his flying horse closer to the track, Waring leaned over and grasping the railings with both hands lifted himself from the saddle, kicked his feet from the stirrups, and swung over to the steps of the car. The faint sound of a cheer reached him from the distant depot.

As the train neared Denver, Waring remembered something he had forgotten in his excitement—that the banks would probably be closed and that he would be unable to cash a check. But the postal card had served him well thus far; perhaps his mission was not yet ended. Jumping to a carriage, he was driven to the nearest drug store where he consulted a directory.

*"Let me see the card. . . .
I will assist you sir.
It is, of course, a purely
personal accommodation
as it is contrary to all
my business methods. . . ."*

"Number 900 South Seventeenth Street," he cried, as he reentered the vehicle. Arriving at his destination, he sprang out and ran up the stone steps of the palatial residence. To the dignified butler who opened the door, he said, "I wish to see Mr. Foster. My name is Waring. I haven't a card with me." Instinctively perceiving the gentleman beneath his rough flannel shirt and mud covered "chaps" the servant ushered him into the reception room. Mr. Foster appeared almost immediately. "What can I do for you, Mr. . . . er . . . Waring?"

"Mr. Foster, you are the president of the Denver National Bank, which I believe, handles the western interest

of the Second National Bank of Boston?"

"Yes,"

"I have an account at the Second, and I want to cash a check here. It is after banking hours, I know, and even if it were not, I have no immediate means of identification. It is of the greatest importance that I take the Eastern Express tonight or I would not come to you in this irregular way—"

"One moment, Mr. Waring. Pardon me for interrupting you, but it will save your time as well as my own if I say that what you ask is impossible as you should know. My advice to you is to wire your bank for the money."

"Of course, I know I can do that, but it means a day's delay, and that is what I want to avoid. See here, Mr. Foster I am willing to pay any amount within reason for the accommodation if you will oblige me."

"It must be a very urgent matter that requires such haste. Really, Mr. Waring, I must positively decline to do anything for you."

"It is an urgent matter; I was about to explain to you." And he told of the postal card and its purpose, adding a brief account of his efforts to get into the city in time to take the train that night. "Let me see the card. From what is it taken, did you say?"

Upon hearing the answer, he left the room to return in a few minutes with a musical score, which he laid upon the table and turned the pages until he found what he sought. Carefully he compared the music on the card with that of the printed sheet. "I will assist you sir. It is, of course, a purely personal accommodation as it is contrary to all my business methods, but I cannot resist such an appeal as this. What amount do you require?"

"One hundred dollars will serve my purpose."

"Make your check for a hundred and fifty. You will need that amount

unless you care to travel in your present costume. You can cash this at the Brown Palace Hotel. I will phone the cashier so you will have no trouble."

"I cannot tell you how I thank you, Mr. Foster."

"You are perfectly welcome, my boy. I am glad to be able to help you. You have my best wishes for a pleasant journey."

A cordial hand grasp, and Waring ran down the steps.

Ten minutes later, these words were speeding over the wire. "Postal card received. Arrive Boston Friday night. See Luke 1:13. Jack."

When the Chicago Limited pulled out of Denver that evening, John Talbot Waring arrayed in garments of the most approved cut, was standing on the rear platform, of the pullman softly humming from the great oratorio, "The Messiah." There was a tender light in his eyes as he gazed at the postal card he held in his hand. And the words he sang were: "For unto us a child is born; Unto us a son is given."

At the same moment, two thousand miles away in the East, a pale young wife was holding a telegram close to her lips. An open Bible lay on the bed beside her. Turning softly on her pillow, she glanced lovingly at the dainty cradle, and whispered: "Thou shalt call his name John." 



A Song in the Night

John Walter Halliday

It was Christmas night. The French trenches were filled with weary men. A fine snow was falling. All was silent and calm. Suddenly an officer sprang to his feet and cried, "Get ready! It is almost time for the charge!"

The men aroused themselves. There was no complaining, but some of the men were crowding back tender memories of other Christmas nights when they were home with their loved ones in the midst of peace and good cheer.

Word came down the line that there were but five minutes left. The loyal sons of France tried in vain to forget their homes and loved ones. They gripped their rifles and waited for orders.

Then it happened. The stillness of the night was broken by the sound of men's voices singing in German. Every Frenchman grew tense. The song grew in volume. Its message, which in any language thrills the heart, was full of rest and comfort for the worn and weary soldiers:

Silent night, holy night, All is calm, all is bright;

Round yon virgin mother and Child!

*Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.*

Here and there a soldier lowered his rifle, his lips trembling as he recognized the song.

Then the command was given: "Charge! Vive la France!"

Not a man moved forward. Something like a sob was the only response. The commanding officer was amazed. Again he prepared to issue the command, but paused; the words of the song had reached his ears also. He lowered his sword, and in a softened and subdued voice said, "Very well, no charge tonight. Let us also sing!"

At this season, in the midst of the vain strivings of this atomic age, our Saviour appeals to those whose hearts have been closed to His heavenly message of peace and good will. He wants their love and service. By His tender Spirit He is trying to awaken their acceptance of Him as their Saviour, too. Then, as they respond and accept Him, with joy they can join in the words of praise: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Luke 2:14. 

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Holy Bread

Author Unknown

Donley had spent half an hour resolving to speak to the next man who stopped at the door. He had never begged before; begging came hard.

"But I might as well get used to it," he reflected grimly. "Looks like the only way for me now."

A man came to the door fumbling for the key. He'd be a rich man, belonging as he did to this exclusive club and having a key to enter by the side door. The woman who had gotten out of the car with him waited at the bottom of the steps.

Donley came close, muttering in a shamed voice: "Could you stake me to the price of a meal, Sir? I've not eaten today."

"Sorry, fellow, but I've no change with me," the man said crisply.

Donley shrank back and hung over the railing with his back turned, until they should go.

"I didn't bring the right key," said the man to his companion. "We must go to the other door."

"What did he want?" the woman asked, nodding toward Donley as they turned to the street.

"Price of a meal. Said he was hungry."

"Oh Larry! We can't go in and eat a meal we don't need, and leave a hungry man out here."

"There's one of them begging on every corner now. Likely he wants

the money for booze. Anyway I have nothing less than ten dollars, and I don't see myself handing that to a bum."

"He looks hungry. I couldn't eat for thinking of him. You know what Christ says to the unrighteous in the day of judgment: 'I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat.' I don't want Him to say that to me. I'll have to give food to Christ, wait a minute; I have something in my purse."

Donley, with his back turned in shame, could hear it all. An electric shock passed through him. She was talking about Christ, just as his mother used to do back home. His mother had read that very same verse to him more than once. He could almost hear her saying it now. He had supposed vaguely that rich people didn't think about Christ, didn't need Him with all the other things that they had. But here was this woman, beautiful and gentle, dressed in luxurious clothes, talking about Christ, as if He were a real person to be met any moment.

She touched his arm, and he turned about. She was standing before him, looking up into his face. "Here is a dollar; buy yourself some food. And don't lose courage, even if things look hard. There's a job somewhere for you. I hope you'll find it soon."

He could only stammer pitifully: "I'll buy food, not booze. You've

given me a fresh start, lady. I'll never forget your kindness."

"You'll be eating Christ's bread. Pass it on," she said and smiled at him in a friendly fashion, as if he were a man, not a bum. Then she was gone to join her escort who waited at the steps. She left a faint breath of sweetness behind.

Donley started toward the region of cheap eating houses. His head was up. A good meal would enable him to try again. He could get a meal for fifty cents; there would be half a dollar left over for food tomorrow. He would be eating Christ's bread these two days. Again, that feeling as of an electric shock passed over him. Christ's bread! But, look here, one could not save up Christ's bread just for one's self!

An old man was shuffling along just ahead of him. Donley had seen him before at two places where he had asked for work. Poor old chap! It was hard times, looking for work when one got to that age. Maybe the old duffer was hungry, too. Christ's bread must be shared. Suddenly Donley felt a great uplifting of the heart. He, too, could give. A dollar was enough for both of them. Tomorrow? Well, Donley felt an amazing sureness about that.

"Hey, Buddy, what do you say to going in and getting us a good meal?"

The old man turned, his watery eyes blinking up at Donley. "You wouldn't go to fool me?" he quavered.

Donley assured him that he would not, but the old man couldn't believe it until he was seated at the oilcloth-covered table with a bowl of hot stew before him. Donley ordered grandly. They ate with concentration. Presently Donley noticed that the old man was wrapping up his buttered bread in a paper napkin.

"Well, Buddy, do you have too much?"

"N-no. There's a kid down here. Old man out on a drunk, nice kid. Had tough luck. He was crying a little when I passed; hungry. I aim to give him the bread."

Christ's bread! Donley was shaken as by a mystic presence, a third Guest, at that oilcloth-covered table. "Let's both take him our bread. We've got plenty without it. I'll wrap up my pie, too."

They wrapped up the food and carried it out with them. The old man led the way to where the boy stood with a few papers that he was trying to sell.

"Here, kid, eat this," said the old man proudly.

The boy began to greedily eat the bread; then he stopped, and called a dog that hung back in the alley; a frightened, lost dog, as one could see at a glance. "Here, Jack, you can have half," he said.

Christ's bread! Ah! Yes! It would go to the four-footed brother, too.

The kid stood up gamely now, and began to cry out his papers. He sold three while they watched.

"Good-by," said Donley to the old man. "There is a job for you somewhere. You'll find it soon; just hang on. You know"—his voice sank to a whisper—"what we have eaten is Christ's bread. A lady told me so when she gave me the dollar. We're naturally bound to have good luck."

"Yes sir," agreed the old man. "I've thought of a new place where maybe they need a night watchman. I wouldn't ask much pay. It would be a warm place to stay, though, and I'd earn enough to buy my eats. Yes sir, we're just naturally bound to have good luck."

Donley parted with his pensioners and went his way. He, too, had thought of a new place to ask for a job. He was turned down, but somehow it didn't hurt so much this time, and as he was going out the man said: "Come back next week. Maybe things will open up a little by that time."

*Once one had eaten
Christ's bread,
one didn't need
to be afraid of
going hungry any
more.
There was enough
of that bread for all.*

As he turned away from the shop he noticed that the lost dog was following him. "Did you know I furnished the grub, old fellow? I haven't got any more. But don't worry; we'll have more tomorrow."

In fondling the dog he felt a narrow strap around his neck, and found a license tag and an address.

"You're in luck," he said to the dog. "Someone wants you. Guess you'll eat tomorrow, all right. Come along, I'll take you home."

It was a long walk uptown, but after a while the dog was barking madly at a door which was opened by a starched, disapproving maid.

"Come in," she said coldly to Donley. "The master will see you. He told me to bring in the person who brought the dog home."

Donley hesitated. He could hardly say to this stranger that he had had to do it because he had eaten Christ's bread.

"He followed me from down in the market district. I stopped to pat him and I found the tag. I like dogs. I wanted to bring him back to his own folks."

The keen-eyed man had meant to say sharply, "Didn't you steal him for the sake of the reward?" But he didn't say it. There was something of dignity about Donley that day. Instead, the man found himself saying, "I advertised in last night's paper. Ten dollars reward."

"I didn't know—I didn't see the paper. It wasn't for the reward—"

"I can see that. I'm glad it came to you. Thanks, and good luck to you."

Donley looked at the bill in his hand, half dazed. "I don't like to take it. I just wanted to do the dog a good turn."

"Take it along. What you did is worth more than that to me. And if you want a job, come to my office tomorrow. I may have something for you."

Donley walked down the avenue, the bill clutched in his hand. A miracle! Had he been down and out, hopeless? There was Christ's bread. It had multiplied like the loaves and fishes that he had read about in the country Sunday School long ago, long, long ago. Once one had eaten it, one didn't need to be afraid of going hungry any more. There was enough of that bread for all. Here were courage, and a job, and a new chance, and always something to pass on to the other hungry ones. Oh, something more than the bread that one could see!

And the world could not beat the man who had eaten holy bread! 

Christmas Help Wanted



Ned Hedderjohn as told to Jeanne Hill©

I climbed into my old car and slammed the door, my face stinging from the cold wind and colder rebuff I'd just received when applying for the last job listed in the want ads. The classified section of the newspaper lay crumpled on the car seat beside me. I stared at the listings I had penciled through. I marked through this one and felt I was crossing off the last remnant of my self-confidence.

At first I had been logical about it. I had told myself that it was simply a case of too many veterans like myself just home from the second world war, fresh out of service and looking for work in a job-scarce market. But, as the weeks went by, I began to fear it was me. (Strange that most of us raised with the work ethic feel that unless an employer thinks we're worth a paycheck, we're worthless as persons. Anyway, that's how I felt.) "Lord, what should I do?!" It was more a lament than a prayer.

But right away my eyes fell on the part-time listings. I hadn't considered that; I needed more money. I ran my finger down the "Holiday Help

Wanted" column, pausing at an ad for Santas for a popular department-store chain. "Really what we want isn't just holiday help," the ad read. "It's *Christmas* help we're after—Santas who believe in the Christmas spirit of caring!" I sighed. My war injury had resulted in some hearing loss, which counted me out as a good department-store Santa.

But it was just as well, I told myself moving down the ads, because I'd never felt less like a cheerful Santa. All my time at war, this paratrooper had dreamed of coming home to Utopia. But home had proved to be no job, savings nearly gone, and an awful feeling of being out of step with civilian life. How I longed for a feeling of being "at home" again inside! Only my wonderful wife, Mary, and our two kids kept me going. But lately I was too moody to be sociable with them.

Suddenly my finger was resting on the last holiday help ad: "Post office needs package delivery men from December first through Christmas." I knew city addresses well: I'd *try!*

I went into the post office with a doubtful heart and came out with a job for the next three weeks. At least the kids would have a little something under the tree.

That night I felt so much better about everything that I played games with the kids for the first time in

several days while Mary made popcorn. Just before bedtime I listened while she read a family devotional. "These are the words . . . which Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the elders of the exiles." That hit home. I felt like an exile myself, somehow out of the mainstream of life. Could it be that I was being sent a message too? Mary read on, "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find welfare." Jeremiah 29:1, 7 RSV. I shrugged, feeling a little sheepish about thinking such a thing.

My first week as a mailman was so hectic that I didn't have time to brood. But, by the second week, the job's end loomed up like a monster before me. That monster might have devoured me if it hadn't been for the nice folks on my route—the old couple whose car battery I jump started, the frail widow whose groceries I carried to her kitchen a few times, and the little Troost boys. The towheaded boys—six and three years old—often walked to doors with me in their neighborhood, their shining eyes fastened on those brightly colored packages with their mysterious contents—packages I was delivering up and down their block. I knew they must be hoping for one of their own.

Jeanne and her husband have 3 children and celebrated their 50th anniversary in June. She has written articles for a variety of magazines and speaks for many groups. Jeanne has been serving as contributing editor for Guideposts since 1997. This article appeared in the Signs of the Times December 1984.

That Friday, the boys' mother was standing at the curb when I drove up. She leaned into the mail truck—a thin woman with wispy blond hair. "Package for Troost?" Her voice was softly southern and her smile patient. The neighbors had said they were newcomers. When I shook my head, she thanked me and moved away from the truck.

On Monday of Christmas week, she met my truck again. But, this time at my head shake, she didn't move away. "Are packages often delayed?" Her eyes were worried. "Do they," she bit her lip, "sometimes get lost?"

"Sometimes," I answered honestly. "If you'll tell me what package you're expecting, where it's coming from, and when it was mailed, I'll do my best to check on it for you."

"My folks in Montgomery, Alabama, mailed two boxes to us for our boys' Christmas. And we sure hope they get here in time." She swallowed hard. "You see, it's all the Christmas that the boys will get because we used up our money coming here for work. My husband has got a job promised as a construction worker, but the job won't start until January. If the boxes don't come—" I followed her gaze to the towheads playing ball in the driveway.

"I'll try to see if they're hung up somewhere," I volunteered, "but I'm sure they'll get here." I took the information and turned it in. There didn't seem to be a delay anywhere.

She and the boys met the mail truck every day, but no packages arrived. Not even on Christmas Eve morning!

That last day, before I drove out of the post office, I checked every package in the pile again. But there were none for Troost from the Fred Greenaways in Alabama. I'd have rather made another jump over enemy territory than face that wispy little woman and her kids with a mail truck loaded floor-to-ceiling with

Christmas packages—and none for them!

When I drove up, she was waiting at the curb in spite of a cold drizzle—worn coat over her aproned dress. Twisting the hem of her apron, she leaned inside. "I sure do hope you brought my boys something." Her soft southern accent couldn't hide the catch in her voice.

"I checked everywhere, but your packages haven't arrived," I told her. "Now don't give up entirely. When I get through with all my deliveries, I'll check one last time before I go home." The boys came running out, eyes lit up like candles. But the candles flickered out when the boys saw there was no box for them.

Mrs. Troost hugged her sons to her. "That's nice of you to go to that trouble," she said, "but we'll enjoy tomorrow even if those boxes don't come. We know what Christmas is *really* about, don't we boys?"

It was dark and the cold rain had turned icy as I delivered my last package. I was so tired, cold, and hungry that all I wanted to do was go home to a hot supper and a warm bed.

But I wouldn't let myself do that until I'd kept my promise. All day I had kept seeing those little boys' faces—their disappointment similar to my own at coming home from war and finding things fallen short of my shiny-eyed expectations.

As I drove back to the post office, I had a prayer in my heart—a real prayer, not a lament. "Lord, let those packages for Troost from Alabama grandparents be there, please."

But when I saw the mammoth pile of last-minute packages, I realized how foolish my prayer had been. There was no way I could part that sea of packages to even walk through them, let alone turn each over to check the address! Just about that moment my eyes fastened on the first of the Troost packages right

near my foot! The other wasn't far away. For those two from Alabama to be floating like twigs on the surface of that whole sea of boxes took more than luck. Surely it was the work of the good Lord. Moments later, I had both big packages in my arms, struggling out the door. Leaving, I was surprised to hear my own voice sound so joyous as I called, "Merry Christmas!" to the postmaster.

Neighborhood Christmas lights were winking from rooftops and windows as I retraced my route. I could hardly believe it of myself, a big strapping paratrooper, but I could almost hear sleigh bells jingling on my old car as I pulled into the Troost's driveway. Though officially the family had given me up, I could hear the kids shout for joy when I rang the doorbell!

Eyes dancing, the older boy helped unload the packages into his father's arms, while the three-year-old jumped up and down, squealing. Mrs. Troost smiled through happy tears. "Thanks, santa," she whispered as she and her husband saw me to the door. The Troosts hugged each other in the lighted doorway, calling "Merry Christmas!" as I drove away.

When I got home to my own wife and kids on that cold Christmas Eve, I hugged each tightly to me. "Hey," Mary said, her eyes searching mine, "you hugged us as if you'd just this very minute come home from the war!"

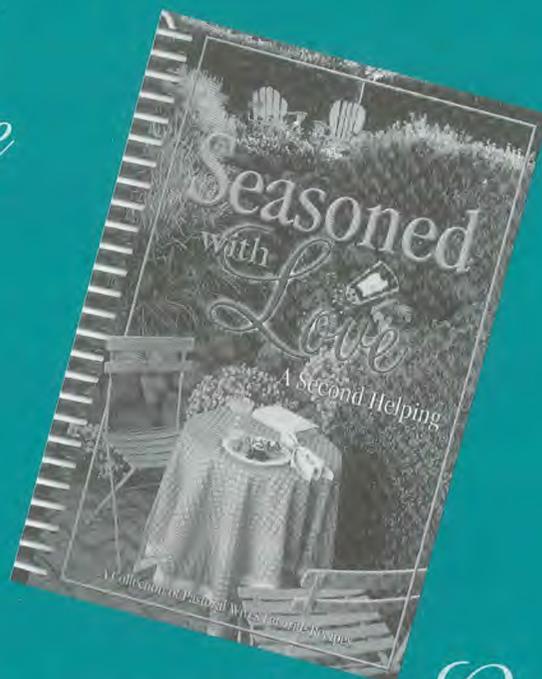
"Maybe I have, Mary," I said, glowing inside. "Honey, God has blessed me so in my life with you and the kids! If I ever act otherwise, kick me!"

"Welcome home!" Mary smiled. And, at last, I felt "at home" again inside—no longer an exile.

That's when it hit me. Maybe Jeremiah's message *had* been meant for me. I'd prayed for the welfare of someone else—the Troosts—and in their welfare I'd found my own. 

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