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December'25

The Heart of Christmas



- GOD'S GOODWILL TOWARDS US

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HOW YOUR FAMILY CAN Take BACK Christmas

BY: SEEDTIME.COM

Over the years, Jan and I have seen the joy of Christmas turn to stress as we annually exhausted ourselves with shopping lists, shopping extravagances, and mounds of gifts to be wrapped and delivered. We had allowed Christmas to become our master, and we found ourselves enduring rather than enjoying the season. However, we decided three years ago to take back Christmas and we have loved it ever since. No, we didn't turn into Scrooges; we simply decided that we (not tradition or expectations from others) would determine how we should celebrate Christmas. A few simple changes made a huge difference, and you can make them too:

CREATE *Memories* INSTEAD OF STUFF

Our immediate family (four grown children and their families) opted to forego our Christmas gift exchange in lieu of a family vacation – funded by the money we would have spent on gifts. Our logic is that the memories from those vacations are infinitely more valuable than whatever stuff one receives at Christmas.





We still get together at Christmas time to share a meal, celebrate the season and enjoy a Christmas play the kids perform for us. We also have some gifts for the kids to open. How did it happen? Obviously, Jan and I cannot unilaterally dictate how other families (even our own children's families) celebrate Christmas, but this concept was an easy sell, especially after our grandson remarked a few years ago about the overabundance of gifts. Each family, of course, still has their own Christmas traditions, but everyone was ready to try something different with our big family gathering, so exchanging stuff for memories was the perfect solution. Hopefully, we can continue to do so for many years to come.

'TRY Secret Santa' GIVING

Jan's side of the family (including kids) all commit to blessing a needy person or family sometime during the Christmas season. Then, when we gather on Christmas Day, we share our experiences instead of piles of presents. These times of sharing have become very meaningful - often tearful — as we touch on the very essence of Christmas. How did it happen? This change has happened in stages, starting at a Thanksgiving gathering four years ago when Jan's niece handed out $10 bills to each family member with the challenge to be a Secret Santa. Everyone loved the experience, but never considered using it to replace the long time family tradition of everyone buying gifts for everyone else.

The next year, Jan and I handed out the $10 bills along with the thought of replacing the gift exchange with Secret Santa stories . . . a thought that was not well received; obviously this huge gift exchange was very entrenched. But we persisted in asking the family to cut back on the gift exchange the following year and much of the family began to agree. This year, along with our Secret Santa stories, we will have a very limited gift exchange, involving Jan's mom (the family matriarch who will never stop buying for everyone) and the little ones.

START Sibling Charity GIFTS

My six siblings and I take turns picking a charity to support each Christmas. This year my youngest sister selected Books for a Better World, so we each sent her a donation which she passed along to her charity of choice. This fun tradition is simple and significant. How did it happen? I take zero credit for this tradition. As my family has grown older and relocated all over the nation, our Christmas gatherings became more and more sporadic.



For years, my siblings and I drew names for a Christmas gift exchange, but, over time, the spirit of the gift exchange began to wane. However, about seven years ago, one of my sisters came up with the sibling charity idea . . . a concept which all of us have loved ever since. Changes are difficult, especially when Christmas traditions are deeply rooted, but Jan and I are happy to report that, over time, all of the above ideas have taken root. We are even happier to report that joy has returned to our Christmases. With some intentional work, your family can take back Christmas too.

The Heart of Christmas



- GOD'S GOODWILL TOWARDS US

BY: ANDREW ROEBERT



LUKE 2:13 – 14 (NKJV) SUDDENLY THERE WAS WITH THE ANGEL A MULTITUDE OF THE HEAVENLY HOST PRAISING GOD AND SAYING: 'GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOODWILL TOWARD MEN!'

Whether or not you choose to celebrate the birth of Jesus at this time of the year, one thing we can all be deeply grateful for is the goodwill of God towards us. The message of Christmas is more than a date on the calendar, it's a reminder that God's heart towards humanity is one of love, mercy, and grace. When the angels announced, 'Peace on earth, goodwill toward men' they were declaring Heaven's great truth: that God is for us, not against us. His goodwill is His kindness in action, shown to us through Jesus Christ, Who came to bring peace, hope, and salvation to all.

WHAT IS *Goodwill?*

Goodwill is not a term we use often today. Goodwill is described as a benevolent, kind and generous intention or action towards others. It is an attitude of kindness, mercy, and compassion that can be expressed through service, generosity, and forgiveness. Goodwill can be seen in the following ways:

Through acts of kindness and generosity.
In the giving of support and encouragement
In displaying a positive attitude towards others.
In the desire for the wellbeing of someone else.

Christmas



WHAT IS THE GOODWILL OF
God towards men?

1. His divine favour towards us:

The concept of goodwill is often linked to God's favour and pleasure towards those who are righteous.

Psalm 5:12 'You surround them with the shield of Your favour.'

2. His kind gift to us:

The birth of Jesus is announced as 'peace on earth, goodwill toward men' (Luke 2:14), highlighting God's inherent kindness and goodwill towards humanity as seen through the birth and the gift of Christ.

–3. His transformative power in us:

Philippians 2:13 states that God 'works in you to will and to act for His good purpose,' suggesting that goodwill is a divine quality God cultivates in believers.

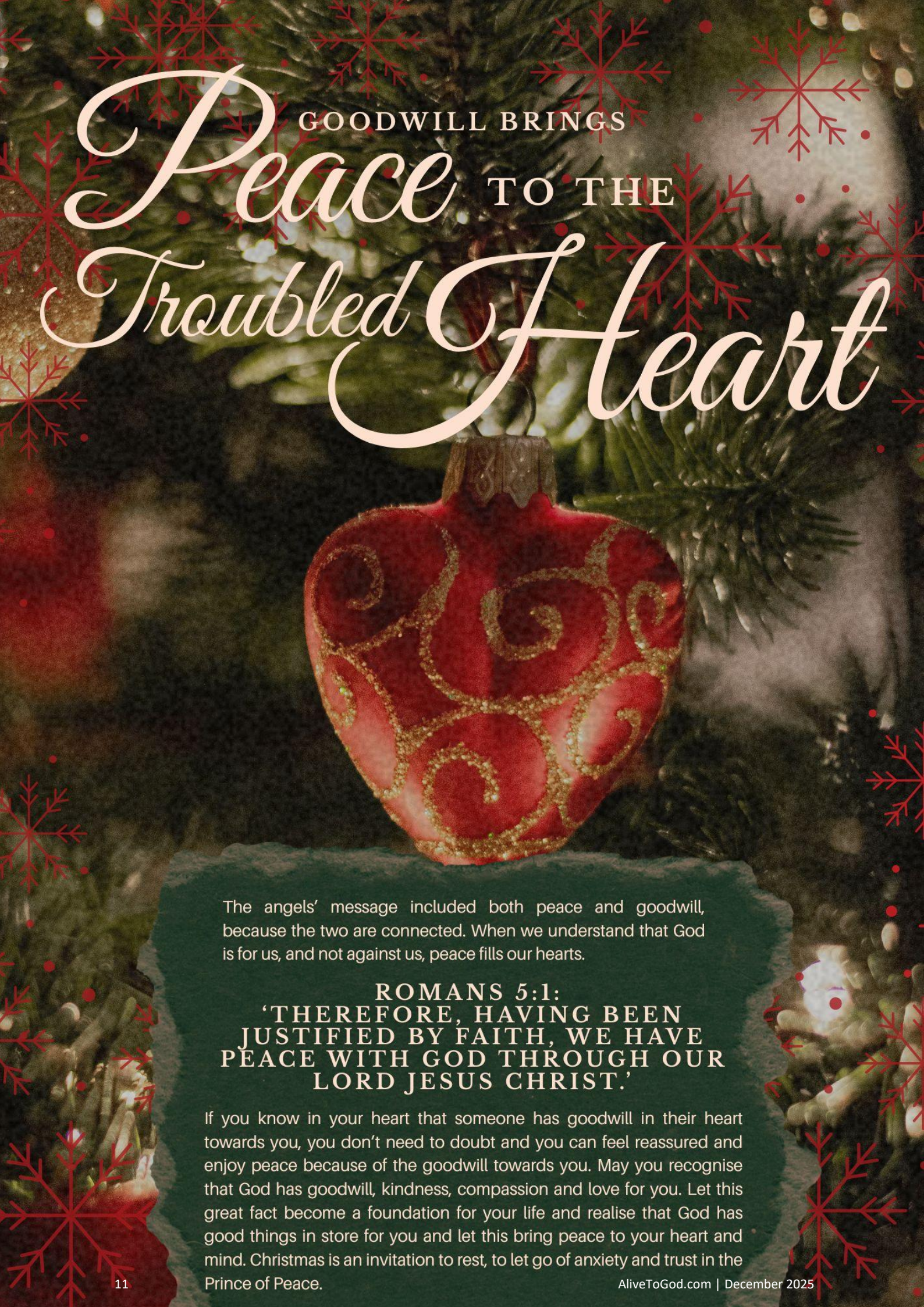
GOODWILL IS GOD'S HEART TOWARDS ALL
Mankind

The birth of Jesus was God's ultimate expression of goodwill, His kindness, mercy, and love revealed to the world. We live in a world that often feels harsh and divided, but Christmas reminds us that God's heart is full of peace and favour toward us.

JOHN 3:16: 'FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD…'

that is goodwill in action. God's goodwill is not earned; it is freely given through Christ. All mankind includes you. In fact, this goodwill is something personal that we all need to reach out and receive, because it is meant for each one of us. You are not excluded from the lovingkindness in God's heart towards people. Right now, He is reaching out to you and He wants you to experience His goodwill for yourself. You are seen, you are valued, and you are loved by God and that is His goodwill towards you. May His goodwill towards you become a living reality to you at this most wonderful time of the year.

GOODWILL BRINGS Peace TO THE Troubled Heart



The angels' message included both peace and goodwill, because the two are connected. When we understand that God is for us, and not against us, peace fills our hearts.

ROMANS 5:1: 'THEREFORE, HAVING BEEN JUSTIFIED BY FAITH, WE HAVE PEACE WITH GOD THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.'

If you know in your heart that someone has goodwill in their heart towards you, you don't need to doubt and you can feel reassured and enjoy peace because of the goodwill towards you. May you recognise that God has goodwill, kindness, compassion and love for you. Let this great fact become a foundation for your life and realise that God has good things in store for you and let this bring peace to your heart and mind. Christmas is an invitation to rest, to let go of anxiety and trust in the Prince of Peace.

Goodwill

IS THE GIFT WE GET TO GIVE BACK

God's goodwill toward us should flow through us towards others. True goodwill is seen when we extend grace, compassion, and generosity.

EPHESIANS 4:32: 'BE KIND TO ONE ANOTHER, TENDER-HEARTED, FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER, EVEN AS GOD IN CHRIST FORGAVE YOU.'

This is a time to forgive, to bless, to reach out, and to let love be shared with others. Just as God extended His goodwill to us, we are called to reflect it to the world. Acts of kindness, generosity, forgiveness, and encouragement demonstrate God's character.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:20: "WE ARE THEREFORE CHRIST'S AMBASSADORS..."

We carry His message of reconciliation and goodwill. When we show goodwill to others, we point people to Jesus, the greatest Gift of all. For this very reason this is a season when we give gifts to others because God set the example for us in the giving of the gift of His Son.



Heart of

GOODWILL IS THE

Hope

THAT KEEPS US GOING

The angels sang of peace on earth, and this is a promise that still echoes through time. Even in troubled days, God's goodwill reminds us that His plan for the world and for us is good.

JEREMIAH 29:11:
'FOR I KNOW THE PLANS I HAVE FOR YOU… PLANS FOR PEACE AND NOT FOR EVIL, TO GIVE YOU A FUTURE AND A HOPE.'

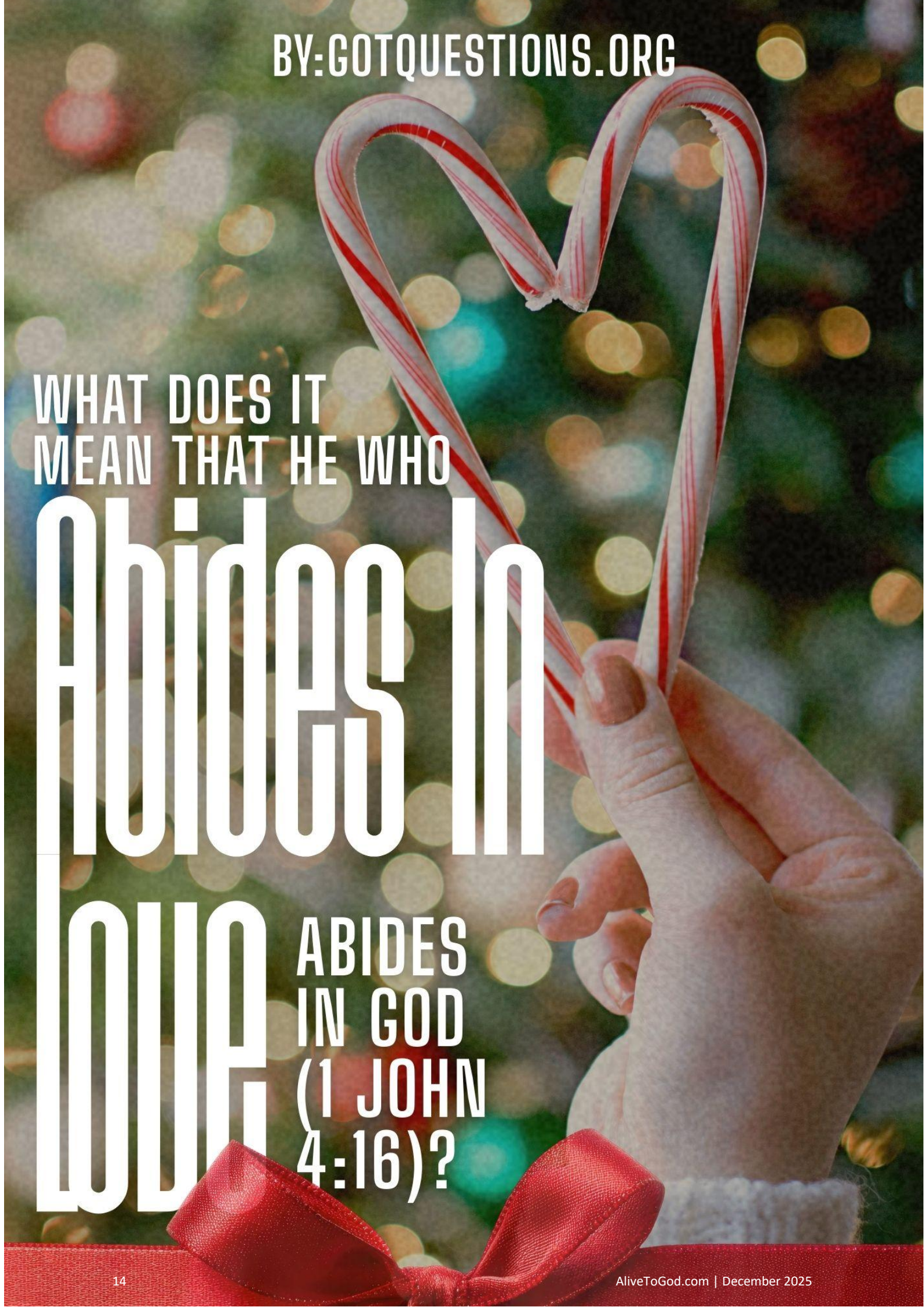
God's goodwill is the guarantee that our story ends in hope and not in despair. The angels' announcement was Heaven's declaration that God's heart had moved toward mankind in love and not judgment. Before the birth of Jesus, humanity was separated from God, but through Christ, goodwill – God's favour – was restored.

ROMANS 5:8:
'BUT GOD DEMONSTRATES HIS OWN LOVE TOWARD US, IN THAT WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US.'

God's goodwill means He is not distant or angry. He is near, loving, and actively working in our lives. We have this wonderful hope and that should inspire you to press on and keep going.

Conclusion

The first Christmas began with heaven singing over earth; 'Peace on earth, goodwill toward men.' That same message still echoes today. God's goodwill towards you has not changed. Receive it, rest in it, and reflect it to others. Let this Christmas be marked not just by celebration, but with the knowledge that God's favour rests on you and by allowing the kindness of God to flow through your life.


BY:GOTQUESTIONS.ORG
WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT HE WHO
Abides In
Love
ABIDES IN GOD (1 JOHN 4:16)?



One could make the case that the main point of the apostle John's first epistle is summed up in this verse: "And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16, NKJV).

God is indeed love. But how do people come to know and see His love if God is invisible (see 1 Timothy 1:17)? The answer to this question helps us understand what it means to abide in love, as "He who abides in love abides in God." People come to know and see God through acts of love, which are expressed through God's presence within His people. John writes, "No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us" (1 John 4:12, NLT).

From the beginning, God has always desired to live with us, in us, and through us. God's presence was with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He walked and talked with them until sin broke that fellowship (see Genesis 3:8). Later, God dwelt in the midst of His people through the tabernacle and temple sanctuary (Exodus 25:8; Exodus 40:33-35; 1 Kings 8:1-11). Finally, God sent His Son in the person of Jesus Christ to live among us in the flesh (see John 1:14; 2:18-22).

This was God's plan of salvation and purpose from the beginning: that Jesus—"the visible image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15, NLT)—would come to earth, reveal God to us, and make it possible for God's presence to live within us. Jesus came so that we could have a relationship with God (John 14:6; 1 John 4:9-10). After Jesus died, rose again, and ascended to heaven, He sent God's Spirit to live with us forever (John 14:16, 26). John attests, "All who declare that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God" (1 John 4:15, NLT).

To abide is "to reside continually; to remain." The word abide is used five times in 1 John 4:12-16 (NKJV). To abide in Christ is to have a personal relationship of constant communion with Him. It means knowing Jesus through intimate fellowship (see 1 John 2:5-6), living so closely connected to Him that we draw our very life from Him and produce the same good fruit that He did (see John 15:4-7). The believer's continual state of abiding in Christ is made possible through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:13).

Now that Jesus has returned to the Father in heaven, people come to know and see God through the lives of His children, through born-again believers. Because God's love and His divine presence are living inside us, people can see God through us. If we abide in Christ—with God's love residing in us through the empowering of the Holy Spirit—we will love others, and that love demonstrated to others will reveal God's love to a lost and dying world (see 1 John 4:19-21).





God's love was proven at the cross through the sacrifice of Christ (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9–10) and made complete in the life of believers (1 John 2:5; 4:12; 16–18). Believers abide in love because they abide in God through Jesus Christ, and God, who is love itself, abides in them. We are God's temple, and His Spirit lives in us (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19–20; Romans 8:9–11; 2 Timothy 1:14). The apostle Paul affirmed, "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5). Jesus Himself confirmed that "He who abides in love abides in God," for He said, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (John 14:23; see also John 15:9–10).

Unbelievers will not know that God loves sinners unless they witness His love operating in the lives of God's people. Jesus did not merely preach God's love; He demonstrated it by giving His life on the cross. He calls His followers to do the same, to present their lives as a living and holy sacrifice in love and service to others (Matthew 16:24–25; Mark 8:34–35; John 12:24–26; Romans 12:1–2). We abide in Christ and He in us. We abide in His love and share it with others. God's love is fully expressed in our service to others. And whenever we share His love with others, it bears witness that we are abiding in Christ as genuine children of God (see 1 John 4:7–8).

BY: GOTQUESTIONS.ORG

What qualities are PRECIOUS



in the sight of God (1 Peter 3:4)?

ECIOUS



In a teaching to Christian wives, the apostle Peter highlights qualities that are considered of great worth to God: "Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God" (1 Peter 3:3-4, NKJV).

This passage is part of a much broader teaching (see 1 Peter 2:1—3:12) in which Peter instructs all believers to exhibit distinctive, godly conduct so that they might serve as effective witnesses of their faith. Peter encourages them to practice this behaviour toward government authorities, earthly masters, family members, and fellow believers. The emphasis is on demonstrating respect, submission, and self-discipline in all relationships.

Godly behaviours, while observable externally, flow from the hidden person of the heart. The inner character or spiritual life of a believer, rather than her outward appearance, is what truly matters and is precious in God's eyes. God "does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7, NLT). God values what is within us—our true inner self—over external adornment or physical beauty.

ECIOUS

The specific internal quality Peter mentions is "the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God" (1 Peter 3:4, NLT). A "gentle" (praeōs in Greek) "spirit" (pneumatos) implies an inner disposition or inclination toward meekness, mildness, and humility and a willingness to yield to others without being harsh or aggressive. It is the opposite of being argumentative or domineering.

A "quiet" (hēsychiou) spirit refers to a peaceful, calm, and tranquil attitude. It does not imply silence but rather describes an inward peace, stillness, and steadiness, undisturbed by circumstances.

Why is a gentle and quiet spirit precious in the sight of God?

These qualities reflect the character of Christ, who prayed, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29, NLT).



A gentle and quiet spirit is precious in the sight of God because it is evidence that a person possesses the wisdom of God. Solomon observed, "Fools vent their anger, but the wise quietly hold it back" (Proverbs 29:11, NLT). James affirmed, "If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honourable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom. . . . But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. . . . And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness" (James 3:13, 17–18, NLT).

Gentleness and peace are fruits of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22–23). They demonstrate that we are living by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are submitting our selfish, fleshly desires to the Holy Spirit and letting Him guide our lives. As the Spirit works to change the inner person of the heart, these virtues flow outward in demonstrations of humility, quietness, trust, and Christlikeness, which are all precious in the sight of God.



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