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“For to us a child is born to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6

May God bless you this Christmas with peace and joy,
May His goodness fill your heart and home.
May His grace rid your heart of fear and distress,
loneliness and pain, leaving only the peace and security
of resting in His everlasting love.



Christmas 2008

“Can I have your boots?” *A true story for Christmas 2008*

My blood began to boil; I could not believe my own eyes, there he was, in a bunk just 20 feet from my own. The rage came back with the same intensity I felt 6 years ago. I saw him every morning when I woke up; it was impossible to avoid him during the day, his voice echoed in my mind as I fell asleep every night, there was nothing I could do about it. Worst of all, he didn't even recognize me.

I was obsessed with getting even; everyday my anger grew more intense, as I thought about that day 6 years before when he hit me over the head with a rock and stole \$60 from me. How I had longed for the day to get revenge on this guy and here we were, not only in the same prison in Connecticut, but in the same dorm room. I was getting out soon, if I hit him, my parole would be cancelled and I would be transferred to another prison.

About a week before I was due to get out he asked: *“Can I have your boots when you leave?”* I couldn't believe my ears. I thought: *“Yeah right, I'd love to give you my boots, but for your face not your feet.”*

Then something happened that I still don't completely understand. I'm not a religious guy, but a few days before my release I was invited to go to something called *“Alpha”*. The volunteers who led this program were really nice, friendly and made me feel welcome.

We were going to watch the first session of a DVD, on the topic *“How to find the secret of happiness.”* They put in the DVD, it skipped the first cut and jumped to the next. They tried again and again and *again* to play cut # 1, some of the inmates who knew about TVs and DVDs tried to get it to start at the right place.

Cut # 2 came up on the screen every time. They gave up trying, and let the DVD player have its own way. We watched cut # 2, called *“How to change the world around you.”* Part of it is about Jesus saying: *“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”* An English guy, Nicky Gumbel was speaking, he said that mercy is giving people what they don't deserve. God does the same for us, we don't deserve mercy but because He loves us He gives us mercy.



I knew what I had to do.

When he said: *“Don't give people what they deserve, give them what they don't deserve.”* I started thinking about that guy back in the dorm who mugged and robbed me. Somehow I knew that I had to let go of the rage and quit thinking of ways to get even. At the end of the DVD, the volunteers asked: *“Well, what do you think, how did what you heard make you feel?”* I spoke up; I told all about my anger, my scheming about getting even with the guy. I then said: *“I now know what I have to do before I leave, I have to give him my boots.”* The weird thing in all of this, is that I will be out before I get to see cut #1. I'm sure that the fact that the DVD player acted up is because God wanted me to see # 2.

It happened here in Connecticut.

This amazing story of mercy and forgiveness took place in a prison here in Connecticut, this very month, December 2008. When the woman who leads that particular team told me what God had done during that session, I thought: *"this is the best Christmas present I could get"*. It's the kind of thing that makes our prison ministry with Alpha so worthwhile and exciting.

Gift giving in a tough economy

Is the tough economy making Christmas tough for you and your family? Will you be able to spend as much on gifts for your family as you had hoped? Could this actually be a blessing in disguise? Does this story of mercy in one of our state prisons inspire us to think about giving a much more meaningful gift than merely something purchased at the Mall?

The gift of forgiveness

Do you need to give someone in your life the gift of forgiveness? They don't deserve it; but isn't that what Christmas is all about? Isn't it about the love and mercy of God who gave Jesus Christ; not because we deserve Jesus Christ. In mercy God gave what we don't deserve? That's His amazing grace.

Thank you for praying for and supporting the ministry of Free inside during 2008.

The approach of another new year is always a time of reflection. We never know what the year will bring, as we enter 2009 there is probably a greater sense of uncertainty in our hearts and minds than usual. As followers of Jesus Christ we have confidence that our *"times are in your hands."* Psalm 35: 15

"The gate of the year"

This poem was written in 1908 by Minnie Louise Haskins, Queen Elizabeth the late Queen Mother, showed it to her husband King George VI. He included it in his famous Christmas message broadcast in 1939 at the beginning of the Second World War.

"I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year
'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.'

And he replied, 'Go into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God
That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way!'

So I went forth and finding the Hand of God
Trode gladly into the night
He led me towards the hills
And the breaking of day in the lone east.

So heart be still!
What need our human life to know
If God hath comprehension?

In all the dizzy strife of things
Both high and low,
God hideth his intention."

Sincerely in Christ,

Peter Dewberry.