

Praise for
A Better December

“I’ve found it! The perfect gift for special friends at the season of the year that’s so full of delights and stresses. This unique little gem of a book seems to have managed lightning strikes on every page—surprise lightning strikes of wit and wisdom that wouldn’t let me put it down until I’d explored it to the end, an end that came all too soon. Steve, you’ve done it again—invented a new genre and made it soar.”

— **J. Robertson McQuilkin**, President Emeritus,
Columbia International University

“In a uniquely original style, Steve seamlessly merges poetry, narration, and Scripture, with strikingly creative phrasing. A master of prose, poetry, and the Bible, Steve has written a little book that bends and blends genres. *A Better December* is a winning combo of insightful content about how to ‘do life’ (Steve’s phrase) and innovative style. We

enjoyed this little book so much that when we finished it, we immediately reread it—for its profound biblical tracing from Solomon to Someone, for its emphatic message about ‘unstuffing’ life, and for its fresh use of language and memorable style.”

— **Don and Jenny Killgallon**, coauthors of the *Sentence-Composing* textbook series. Don teaches writing at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County

“Here’s a book like you’ve never read before. It meets us at the intersection of ancient biblical wisdom and the dreams, struggles, and disappointments that are part of our Christmas season. With humor, poignancy, and clarity, Estes demonstrates that Solomon knew things about our holidays that we all need to know. With the help of Solomon, Estes shows you how you can have a Christmas that actually matches the message of the season you are celebrating.”

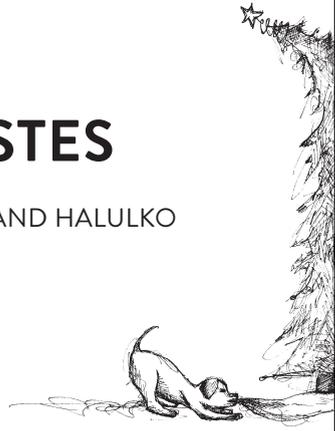
— **Paul Tripp**, Paul Tripp Ministries; best-selling author

A BETTER DECEMBER

PROVERBS to BRIGHTEN CHRISTMAS

STEVEN ESTES

ILLUSTRATED BY SARAH BLAND HALULKO



Foreword

Before you begin . . .

You know the feeling when you want to introduce your best friend to others? They're probably thinking, *Yeah, yeah, he's so special, what else is new?* But I simply cannot write this foreword without telling you about the man behind it.

When I was eighteen, I broke my neck in a diving accident and became paralyzed. Many people offered me comfort by quoting favorite Scriptures. But I was frightened of the Bible—it seemed antiquated and out of touch with my pain. Yet Steve made it winsome. With every page he turned there'd be a surprise. Something fresh and firsthand. He possessed the art of pulling those ancient words and placing them smack in the middle of everything current and contemporary. I was hooked.

He's done it again with *A Better December*. Flip to any page and Steve gives an arresting twist on our modern Decembers gone crazy.

A B E T T E R D E C E M B E R

Overspending and overeating. Too many Christmas sales, too many parties. Too many battles over manger scenes in the public square . . . and for some, too many sad memories from yesteryear.

Between the pages of this special little book, you'll find a genuine guide to the purposeful and peaceful holiday we all long for. Who'd ever have thought Proverbs would make a good Christmas read?! But it does. You're holding proof of it.

So let me introduce you to my best friend, Steve (well . . . my husband really holds that honor, but you know what I mean). And let him introduce you to Christmas the way it was meant to be celebrated!

JONI EARECKSON TADA

CONTENTS

Foreword	vii
Introduction	1
YESTERYEAR	3
GIFTS	13
CONTENTMENT	17
CHILDREN	21
PERFECTIONISM	27
SURPRISES	33
OTHERS	39
LONGINGS	43
DISAPPOINTMENT	51
SOMEONE	57
CHANGES	67
LIGHT	73
JANUARY	79

Introduction

The longer I live, the more I like short books.

Here's one.



YESTERYEAR

About 3,000 years ago
the wisest man who ever lived
wrote a HUGE best seller.

A real wick-burner
about CHRISTMAS.

The funny thing is . . .
Christmas was still
1,000 years off.

His name was Solomon, king of Israel.

Here was one savvy author. A man who had unrolled a few scrolls in his day—who could handle himself with a quill. His market research nailed exactly what future readers would need come December.

A B E T T E R D E C E M B E R

C'mon, you say. Dusty ages ago, some guy was scratching on a sheepskin about hanging wool stockings over a fireplace?

Sure.

He knew about Bing Crosby? And parking lot jams on Black Friday?

Doubtless.

He foresaw my bloated VISA bill? Grasped the awkwardness of eye contact with those earnest bell-ringers standing by their red kettles? Knew about pine needles in my face when dragging in the tree?

Unquestionably.

Though I can understand your amazement.

After all . . .



Y E S T E R Y E A R

. . . his family *was* Jewish. They weren't sure about a holiday that promotes plastic, plug-in reindeer on the front lawn.

His mother probably said,

“What’s a nice Jewish boy
like you doing—
writing about Christmas?”

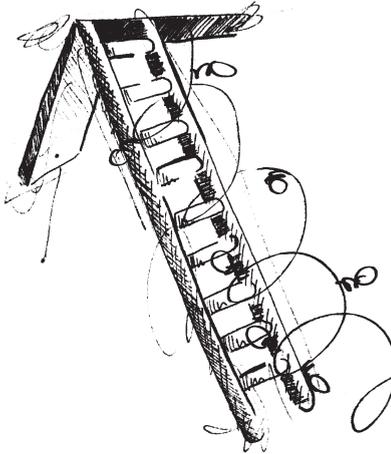
But Solomon forged ahead, sensing a definite trend on the horizon.
His blockbuster would be about:

Getting Through the Holidays

For as you know,
if there’s one time of year
when things may not go
as planned . . .

. . . it’s December.

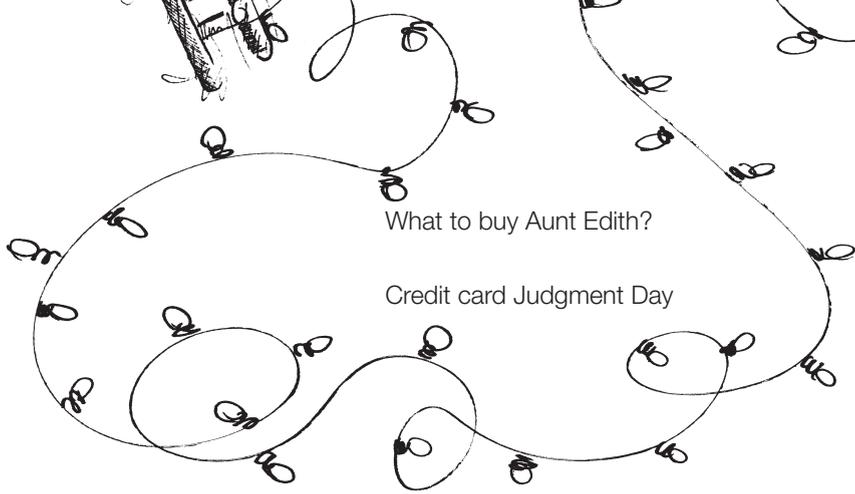
A BETTER DECEMBER



Crawling in the attic
for decorations

Waiting lines

Relatives out of a
horror flick



What to buy Aunt Edith?

Credit card Judgment Day

YESTERYEAR

Fall-asleep office parties

One shopping day left

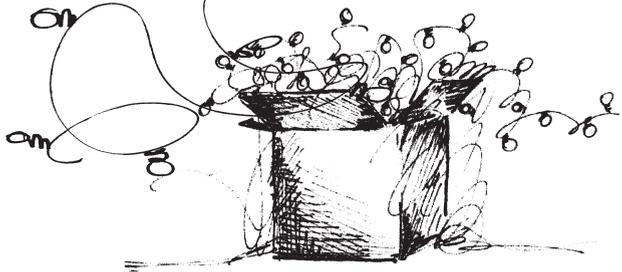
Dinner without the kids

Dinner *with* the in-laws

Sad memories

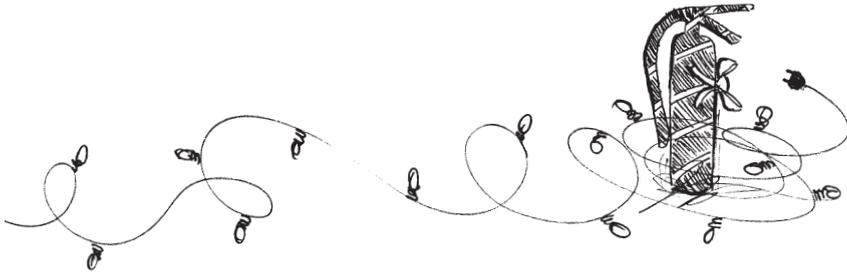
Spending Christmas
alone

Too busy!



A BETTER DECEMBER

Unreturnable “you-shouldn’t-have” gifts



Y E S T E R Y E A R

So, Solomon wrote his little book. (Good things come in small packages.)

He called it Proverbs. It's helpful in an everyday,
tie-your-shoes, commonsense way.

. . . and very Christmasy.

Not sure you can picture Solomon in a green and red sweater?

Think about it.

Any writer who pens:
"The coolness of snow . . .
refreshes the spirit"

Proverbs 25:13

is all about December.

Any poet with an eye for
"an ornament of fine gold"

Proverbs 25:12

A B E T T E R D E C E M B E R

understands readers
willing to wrestle
an evergreen into the living room.

Any author waxing lyrical that
“Perfume and incense
bring joy to the heart”

Proverbs 27:9

would surely savor the whiff
of yuletide candles named
Spruce Forest or Vermont Sugar Cookie.

And any man rolling his eyes about:
“It’s no good, it’s no good!”
says the buyer—
who then goes off and
boasts about the purchase”

Proverbs 20:14, author’s paraphrase

Y E S T E R Y E A R

feels for the cornered husband
held at fingernail point by his wife
'til she's finished recounting
her exploits in the mall.
Still not convinced?

Consider Solomon's little zinger below.
Tell me he never envisioned waking up to

pajama-clad urchins,
like Wee Three Kings,
avalanching down the stairs,
bearing
 squeals
 giggles
 and whoopifications

WAY TOO EARLY

. . . on Christmas Day. Here's how he put it:

A B E T T E R D E C E M B E R

“If you shout a pleasant greeting
to your neighbor
too early in the morning,
it will be counted as a curse!”

Proverbs 27:14 NLT

You can bet your Macy’s card, Solomon knows Christmas. He *gets* the stress of the year’s twelfth month.

He shares his wisdom about it in Proverbs. The book in your hand sums up what he wrote.

Rummaging through these pages, you’ll find he knows *your* Christmas.

He’s practically been hiding
in your chimney.