

Moldova: A new perspective on Christmas

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It was Christmas morning, and 10 of us were crowded into my grandmother's toasty living room. Torn wrapping paper was piled high, and the folded gift bags were stacked neatly to return to the box for next year. The smell of bacon and sausage filled the air, and each of us sifted through our hauls to see just how good Santa was this year. Just like every year, I was surrounded by the people I love most in the world. Together, we celebrated the birth of the baby boy who came and changed our lives. Just like every year, we got what we wished for and more. Just like every year, I knew the day would bring an endless flow of every kind of sweet treat I could imagine. But something about this year was unlike every other year.

Sitting on the floor of my grandmother's living room, I was not filled with endless amounts of joy, and I did not feel the overwhelming gratitude Christmas usually brings. Instead my mind, and a piece of my heart, was more than 6,000 miles away with 10,000 beautiful children. These are children who probably didn't get to have a Christmas that's anywhere near as good as mine.



I've always known that there were kids out there who weren't as blessed as me. Christmas is one of those times when I always feel bad there are some kids out there with no presents to open and no family to love them on

Christmas morning. But this year, it was real. I witnessed them, first hand—hundreds of children who don't know the joys of Christmas or the peace that the Lord brings. I saw them, talked to them and held their hands in mine. And I have to say, it was more heartbreaking than I could have imagined.

When I was preparing to go to Moldova to fit boots on children, I really had no idea what I was getting myself into. I didn't know their faces would show so much joy and gratitude, just from getting a piece of candy and a simple pair of boots. I didn't know the reason the majority of Moldovan children are in the Child Protection System is because of poverty. I didn't know so many of them would look at me with a blank expression when I asked if they wanted a Bible to take home. But thankfully, God knew all those things and equipped the CERI team to handle the challenges that come with them.

I think that's what's so incredible about the CERI mission. We didn't just pass out 10,000 pairs of boots to needy kids and go on our way. We showed those kids and their parents and their social workers and the whole country what it means to know Jesus. Some people were overjoyed by our gifts, some grateful and some just plain confused. But because of the work we did, they now all have seeds planted in their hearts. I hope the experience will lead them to find Jesus—to experience him again and again.

As I think about those precious children who may not have ever had a happy Christmas morning, I can have a peace of mind knowing that something that I contributed may make an eternal difference. I pray they will experience a gift far greater than the winter boots some strangers gave them. That knowledge, that hope, even stacked next to some of my most longed-for gifts, is the best thing I received this year—the hope that someday, those children will all join me at the feet of Jesus.

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in Moldova through Go Now Missions.