

## A Lesson at Christmas (2018)

Tonight's Christmas story is about my new shiny sting-ray bicycle.

Now this story happened to me when I was in the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade. It was about a month before Christmas and my mom and dad were asking me what I wanted for Christmas? I could not decide. Then one day, when I was looking through the Sears Roebuck catalog, I saw the perfect gift.

It was a Sting-Ray bicycle with a metal flake banana seat. Now these bikes were expensive so, I knew it would be a hard sell. I told my dad, "This is what I want. Please, please can I have it for Christmas? I know it's a lot of money. But if you get it for me, it's the **only** gift you have to buy."

My dad shook his head and said, "Even if it's the only gift we have to give you, it's still a lot of money. But I'll make you a deal. Now I've noticed that you and your sister have been fighting and teasing one another.

If you promise that from now until Christmas you will be a good brother to your sister, that you won't tease her or fight with her, then we'll see if we can make it happen".

"No problem I said, I can do it!"

My dad said, "John, I am serious. No teasing, no fighting."

"No teasing, no fighting. It's done, Dad, it's done."

"I don't want you coming up to your mom and me saying you said this, she said that."

"No, no, it's not going to happen, Dad."

“Okay, he said, we have a deal.” We shook on it, and he left. I remember thinking, “That was easy.” But I was so wrong. It was going to be the hardest month of my life.

It all started one day when I was coming home from school. I had saved up some of my allowance money to buy a treat for myself, my favorite treat as a matter of fact. I bought a Nutty Buddy.

Do you know what a Nutty Buddy is? An ice cream cone with chocolate and nuts. I walked into the house after school eating my Nutty Buddy and there was my sister. She had this funny smile on her face and she said, “John, would you give me the rest of your Nutty Buddy?”

And I said, “You’ve got to be out of your mind. This is my Nutty Buddy. I bought it with my own money. If you want a Nutty Buddy, go buy one for yourself.”

Then she said, “That would be so selfish. I would have to go and tell mom that you were not sharing and you were not being a good brother. How that would hurt me. In fact, I feel as if I am starting to cry right now.”

This sick feeling came over me. And almost in disbelief I watched as my hand reached out and gave her the rest of my Nutty Buddy. Then I watched in silence as she ate it bite by bite. Then she licked her fingers and said, “Thank you, thank you very much.” It was going to be a long time until Christmas.

Another time I came home and I heard music coming from my bedroom. I walked in and there was my sister. She had all of my records out, spread over my bed. (This was before IPODS and CD’s.) She was playing them on my record player. I said “Kathy, those are MY records. What are you doing”?

She said “I am being very careful. I am picking them up so I do not scratch them or break them. Thank you, John, for being such good and giving brother.”

And all I could do was grit my teeth and say, “You’re welcome.”

So, there it was, day after day, week after week. I never thought I could do it. But in time, it was Christmas Eve. I only had a few more hours to go and the Bicycle was mine!

That Christmas Eve afternoon my mom said “I am going out for a few errands. You children have been very good the last couple of weeks, no fighting or teasing. Now keep it up. I will just be gone for a little while. Remember tomorrow is Christmas”.

So, she went. My sister started coloring. I took out my rock collection, because when you have a rock collection every so often you have to look at it and organize it.

My favorite rock was a round white smooth one about the size of an Oreo cookie. I was admiring it and my sister said, “John, let me hold that rock.” I said “Marge, not now. I am busy. I am working and organizing.”

She said, “No I want to hold it. Give it to me.” Suddenly, she grabbed it from me and started running out of the room. Without thinking I jumped up and began fighting for the rock. And then—I still don’t know how this happened—but somehow I saw the rock sail through the air and hit the front of the television set.

We both watched as a large crack formed down the television screen. But there it was. My mother came in at that point and saw the crack. She turned to me and said “You were fighting weren’t you?”

I nodded. She said “I don’t believe it. I leave for one hour and when I come back, you kids have cracked the television screen!

Go to your rooms.” So, we went, and step by step I knew I would never see that Sting Ray bicycle.

But you know, the next day, when I went down on Christmas morning, the bicycle was under the tree. After I admired it and rode it, I went to my dad and said, “Dad I don’t understand. I didn’t keep the deal. I fought with Kathy. We cracked the television set. But you still gave me the bicycle. I don’t understand.”

My dad said, “I know. Your mom and I talked about it. We decided that maybe if we gave you the bicycle, you would learn a lesson”.

“What kind of a lesson” I said?

“A lesson about Jesus, he said. You know Jesus came on Christmas not because we were all good people but because he loved us.

John, I want you to be good. I don’t want you to fight with your sister. I don’t want you to do what’s wrong. But even if you do, your mom and I still love you.

The same is true about Jesus. Even when you do things that are wrong, he still loves you no matter what. You belong to Him. Your mom and I thought if you could learn that lesson, it would be worth the price of the bicycle.”

And, you know, it was. I did learn that lesson, and I still believe it today. It is that lesson that I want each of you to know today. You belong to Jesus. He comes to you not simply because you’re good. He wants you to be good. But even when you’re not, He comes to you because he loves you, no matter what.

You belong to Jesus and He comes to you simply because He loves you. That is a lesson I think all of us should know. God doesn't come to us because we're good; God comes to us because God loves us.

“And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest and peace to people on earth.”

**Merry Christmas!**