

My Crissy Doll

“The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

Exodus 34:6-7

In 1969, Ideal Toys had released a new Crissy Doll with gorgeous red hair that extended to her knees when you pushed her belly button. She had the most beautiful face and huge, black eyes without pupils, so it seemed you could see deeply into her soul. Her orange dress was covered with coordinating lace and accented her hair perfectly. In the mind of a particular 9 year old, such a beautiful doll had never existed – and no 9 year old girl would want to exist without one! Crissy became my obsession. I pleaded and pleaded with my parents, who insisted I simply put it on my Christmas list and wait. That answer did not satisfy my all consuming desire – and I anxiously looked for alternatives.

Then it came to me! We are supposed to give all our requests to God! So I began to pray. At first my prayers were humble, begging for my doll, but over time I began approaching the throne with the wrong kind of boldness. I began to bargain with God about whether he really existed, or whether he really loved me. If he was really there – if he really wanted me to believe in him, then I would get my Crissy Doll. I wasn't sarcastic or mocking in my prayers; unfortunately, I was sincere. The question in my heart was no longer whether I would get the Crissy Doll, but whether God was real and loving enough to answer my personal prayers. I would know if God was real on Christmas Eve – I would know if I got the best gift ever.

In keeping with our family traditions on Christmas Eve, we opened gifts after church. I still remember tearing at the wrapping paper and screaming with delight when I held my beautiful doll. Christmas had arrived and God's gift was in my arms. He was real – and her name was Crissy.

I have wept tears of repentance over that story. To think that after all God has done in sacrificing his Son, I felt he still had to prove himself to me. In stubborn, sinful pride I gave God the option, no, a *challenge* to show me his love through a gift, when he had already given the ultimate gift of his one and only Son. “If,” I said, “If you love me...” “If you want me to know that you are real...” At the time, it seemed like a spiritual search for truth but in retrospect, my heart aches at my pitiful effort to find my own answers. Sometimes I think about the majestic Lord of Lords listening to the prayers of a foolish girl asking belittling questions and tears well up in my eyes.

How God's love could be so patient is beyond me. Who am I that God cares or even thinks about me? I didn't get his attention with my compelling challenge or incessant prayers. It wasn't because of my effort but because the heart of God wants all men to be saved. How would I ever find him if it wasn't for his grace and his love? God didn't see a spark of goodness in me, nor did he respond as I reached for him. He saw the ripped, bloody hands of his Son that died so I could be forgiven. Because of Jesus, God

loves me. I cannot explain his grace and forgiveness apart from the cross of Christ. I cannot understand his loving mercy to a belligerent nine year old. I cannot fathom the tenderness, gentleness and sensitivity he lavished on me when I questioned him. But I believe. Not because I have a doll - not because of my personal experience - and not because God proved himself to me in 1969. I believe because of his grace. I believe because his Word tells me he loves me over and over again. Scripture scourges me as a helpless sinner who deserves eternal death and then bathes me in the comforting message that Jesus died to pay for my sins. It teaches me about my loving God who is compassionate and gracious; slow to anger, faithful and forgiving – a God who listens to little children, struggling believers, and Christians who are weak and broken. This is the God who loves you, too. His grace and forgiveness are yours in Christ! Patient love pours from his fatherly heart to your dry, thirsty soul. Through his Word he will gently nurture you through trials, doubts and weakness. When you wonder if he's really there, he comes to you, seeking you out as a lost little lamb. He doesn't say, "I've done enough," he says, "I'll do it all."

Christmas Eve, 1969 wasn't the day that God proved himself to me. It is a day that keeps me humble as I remember his patient love and extraordinary grace when I didn't deserve it.

And yes, I still have my Crissy doll.

This devotion was written by Naomi Schmidt and reviewed by Prof. David Sellnow.