

A Christmas Story Devotional by Sibyl Towner

Scripture

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

—Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NASV)

Engage your Heart

The Christmases that my husband Dick and I have experienced over the years have become a part of our family's story— traveling to visit relatives, with never enough time to see everybody, and assembling toys long after the kids had gone to bed. There was the year that both my parents had died, and we became the legal guardians of my four teenage brothers and sisters. That Christmas, Dick and I spent too much money on gifts as a way to cover for the absence of our parents. And one year, Dick took a job that required a large salary cut and we cut fruitcake from our Christmas budget! Another year, my 95-year-old grandmother, who had lived with us for six years, passed away less than a week before Christmas. At her funeral, we spent time together with family of all ages, telling stories of her life. Her stories became a part of our story.

All these stories weave together as the tapestry that makes up our family's story. But I'll remember one Christmas for the rest of my life, because it became a part of the story of God's transforming love in my heart:

I had asked Dick to choose for me "the perfect gift"—something that would let me know that I was fully and deeply beloved. (Because my father had been killed in World War II when I was only a year old—and my step-father had never known how to love me— until Dick, I had never experienced a man telling me he loved me. I had never got to sit on my dad's lap, and it left a hole in my heart). Dick *wanted* to give me the perfect gift, but that's a tall order. He had a ring made with my birthstone, hoping it would meet the desire of my heart.

But when I opened his gift and saw the beautiful ring, I realized that it was not *possible* for Dick to give me what I was asking for. In the deepest place of my being, I longed to know the kind of love that only God could give me. That moment of realization helped turn the story of my childhood pain into something beautiful. It opened a place inside me to receive God's love. Only then was I able to fully receive the ring from my beloved husband. I asked Dick to forgive me for asking him to give me something that only God could give me. When I wear the ring today, it reminds me of who I am in God's eyes, and of the good gift he has given me in my life partner, Dick.

You, like me, have a tapestry of stories that God is weaving together in your life. As you come to this Christmas, what gift are you yearning for, that only God can give you? What hole in your heart is he longing to fill? May each of us offer him our stories, and receive in return his unconditional love.

Open Your Hands

Tell: Take some time to reflect on Christmases past. How do they weave together to form a composite Christmas tapestry? Tell the story of the best gift you ever received or gave.

Ask: Ask a friend or relative to tell you a Christmas story from their childhood. Give them the gift of listening without interruption. If appropriate, ask if they see God showing up somewhere in their story, even if they didn't recognize his activity at the time. Ask a child to draw you a picture of their best Christmas memory, and invite them to tell you all about that Christmas when they are done drawing.

Prayer

Dear God,

Thank you that all of my story matters to you. Help me to live more honestly and gratefully in that truth.

Help me to be a better listener to the stories of those around me this Christmas and allow my listening to be your light in their lives.

Amen