

CHRISTMAS PRESENCE

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We've celebrated many memorable Christmases over the years. Sometimes it was a trip or a special meal with all the family gathered in one place which made the day so memorable. But the one Christmas that stands out in my mind as the most unforgettable was not a very merry one. It is so special to me because I learned a valuable lesson.

It was December "1990-something" and our daughter, Tawny, wanted a new bike for Christmas. After much searching, my husband and I found a bike that was the perfect size and in her favorite color—purple. With smiles of anticipation, we beamed with pride and joy as our wide-eyed little girl opened the huge box. But those smiles of anticipation quickly turned into quizzical looks of disappointment, because the box did not exactly contain a shiny, new purple bike. Instead, the box was full of assorted metal and plastic parts along with a fairly thick booklet of technical directions on how to put the bike together.

When we ordered the bike, the fine print had said, "some assembly required." As it turned out, "*some* assembly" became an entire day clouded by growing frustration, anger and impatience, as it seemed a degree in mechanical engineering was required to put this child's bicycle together! All other presents that year paled by comparison as they were quickly opened and left behind, while we worked toward the all-consuming task of putting together "THE BIKE."

The greatest gift is found in the time we spend together: Presence.

At last, the bike was ready and Tawny was able to ride it for a few minutes before the sun went down on that "most memorable" Christmas Day.

Of course, she continued to enjoy riding her shiny purple bike for many days and months afterward. But I will never forget that Christmas and the lesson we learned spending the entire day caught up in the intricate details of bicycle assembly.

Fast-forward nearly thirty years to last year, December 2019. Our three-year-old granddaughter, Heather, asked for a green bicycle for Christmas. Both sets of grandparents decided to split the cost to purchase the special gift for her. But we suggested it would be well worth a little extra money to purchase a bicycle that was already assembled!

So, her special gift was ready to be enjoyed as soon as little Heather opened the package. My husband and I (AKA "Pops" and "Gaga") spent a perfect day watching Heather enjoy riding her new mint-green bike. We were able to truly enjoy playing with her and basking in the joy of watching her try new

things because we had learned a valuable lesson about enjoying the moment. Now that we are a little older and wiser, we better understand that the greatest gift is not found in material things, but rather in the *time* we spend together with loved ones. In other words, enjoying each other's *presence* as much or more than the *presents*.

It is so easy to get distracted and caught up in all the details



of trying to create the perfect Christmas for our families. But as I look forward to celebrating Christmas this year, it is my prayer that we will all make an effort to be intentionally focused on the *presence* of the One this day is all about. I pray that we will take time to deliberately celebrate *Emmanuel—God with us*. I pray that we will spend time focused on the Creator of the universe who became a tiny infant in order to be with us—his creation—and call us family. Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus made a way for us to be with him and with all our loved ones forever. Jesus is the *reason for the season* and he is, was and always will be the most memorable Christmas present (and *PRESENCE*) ever. □

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