

W4 | D3

WHAT THEY SEEM

RONNIE MARTIN

is director of leader care and renewal for Harbor Network and pastor in residence at Redeemer Community Church in Bloomington, Indiana.

There was a bike under the tree.

That's what Dad said, anyway. But I didn't see a thing, and I'm pretty sure I had 20/20 vision at 10 years old.

It was the same old yuletide routine with my old man. He began joking on Christmas Eve about what we were getting—and not getting—for Christmas. Our beloved tree sat there, barely upright in all its 1980s glory, gaudy gold tinsel dangling from homemade ornaments that would make any HGTV designer gasp in horror if she could only see it now. But clearly, no bike was lurking under those sad, dying pine needles. Just a gaggle of randomly wrapped presents my grandma had left the week before, none of which were remotely big enough to house any wheels, chains, or handlebars.

I decided to get bold. I asked Dad to promise me that there was a bike under the tree. This would be my ace in the hole, since grown-ups aren't allowed to lie. To my surprise, he uttered the fateful words "I promise you." My 10-year-old brain was dumbfounded. If I had been any good at math like Dad or shown any signs of being a fledgling engineering prodigy, I probably could've easily figured out the mystery. But I was the happy kid who dressed up like Spider-Man and built secret hideaways in our walk-in-closets. You can see my dilemma.

Twelve hours later, in the wee hours of Christmas morning, I practically galloped to the living room with enough energetic glee to power a thousand Christmas trees. Yet there was still no bike under the tree. “I knew it. All men are liars!” I shouted to my oblivious siblings, not realizing my words were a prophetic signpost leading me to a life of preaching in the fairly distant future.

Except here’s the thing: There was a bike under the tree after all. My exhausted, 5:00 a.m. coffee-gulping old man told me to go to the garage, open the door to the crawl-space underneath the house, and look under the blanket. Sure enough, there it was in all its brand-new glory and wonder—sitting directly under the floor where that gaudy, almost needleless tree was somehow still standing.

All I can remember thinking at that moment was *It’s settled. My father is a bona fide genius. How did he ever dream up a riddle like this?*

Today, I look back fondly at this cherished boyhood memory of Christmas, and I’m reminded that things aren’t always what they seem. Even when my lenses have been clouded by the tears of all the sad things 10-year-olds can’t imagine they will someday have to endure, I still have a Father who knows how to give good gifts to his children (Matt. 7:11).

Every year, Christmas enters my life like the final page of a novel, where all the dark years and dashed expectations give way to the one thing we dare to hope will come true—and his name is Jesus Christ. ✨

CHRISTMAS ENTERS MY LIFE
LIKE THE FINAL PAGE
OF A NOVEL, WHERE ALL
THE DARK YEARS AND DASHED
EXPECTATIONS GIVE WAY
TO THE ONE THING WE DARE
TO HOPE WILL COME TRUE.