

TODD'S FOLLY

"Boy, things would sure be different if I had my way," said Todd to Alex his best friend.

Todd and some of his friends had spent the last two weeks after school making a fort out of an abandoned house. When Todd's father had found out about it he told Todd he wasn't allowed to go play there anymore. "My dad treats me like I'm six instead of eleven," he bitterly protested to his friend. "I can hardly wait until I'm old enough so I can have my own way. You'd think that my father never was a kid by the way he treats me. That fort is so neat and we spent so much time fixing that place up." The more Todd talked the more he felt like his father was being unfair. His disappointment was turning into anger and he decided that he was going to play at the fort anyway, no matter what his father had said. He would just keep it a secret.

At first he felt guilty when he would tell his parents that he would be over at Alex's house after school when he knew that he was planning on going to the fort. But after a while it stopped bothering him. He even thought he was doing his parents a favor because if they really knew where he was they would worry about him, but as long as they thought he was at Alex's house they wouldn't worry.

The abandoned house that the boys had made into their fort was an old house that had caught on fire years before. It was a three story house that had only the walls and roof remaining. There was a lot of broken glass but the boys had swept it out. They had gotten a lot of old crates and pieces of wood and had managed to build a ledge up to the window of the second floor and they used boxes to get on it. The ledge made it possible for them to look out the second story window so that they could see if any Indians were attacking.

Altogether there were eight boys who had worked on this house to turn it into a fort. Half of them would pretend they belonged to the Cavalry and the other half would pretend they were Indians.

It was a lot of fun until Todd's father dropped in on them one day. Todd's father had wanted to get hold of Todd and he had called Alex's house and found out that Todd was out playing at the abandoned house.

Todd was absolutely terrified when he saw his father walking towards the fort. Todd had been pretending to be in the Cavalry and he was standing on the ledge looking out the second story window. His first thought was to run but he knew there was no point to that. He heard his friend say hi to his father and he could tell by the tone of his father's voice that he was angry.

"Todd," his father yelled, "come here."

Todd quickly got down from the ledge and went out to meet his father.

“Didn’t I tell you that you weren’t allowed to play here?” he asked in an angry voice.

Todd didn’t answer; he just looked at his feet.

His father then walked away from Todd and went into the abandoned house to look around. When he came out he said, “I can see that you boys have put a lot of work into this house but it just isn’t safe. Someone could really get hurt. I know that if any of your parents knew you were playing under such conditions that they would forbid you to do so. I think that you should all find a safer place to play.”

After saying this he told Todd to come home with him. As they were walking home together his father said, “Todd I’m really surprised at you. You have lied to your mother and me. Did you think that you could get away with it forever? You know that God sees all that you do. Didn’t you know that He wouldn’t let you get away with it?”

When they got home Todd’s father got the Bible and showed him Ephesians 6:1-3, which says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee and thou mayest live long on the earth.”

After reading him these verses he said, “You see, God wants you to obey your mother and me, and if you do He promises that He will bless your life. But because you have disobeyed me I’m going to have to punish you. You are going to have to come directly home from school for the next month and you won’t be allowed to go out and play.

Todd could not believe how unfair his father was being, so he protested, “But Dad, I promise I won’t do it again. Please don’t make me stay in for a month.”

“I’m not going to change my mind,” he answered, “so there’s no reason to discuss it any further.”

When Todd went into his room he was really mad. It just seemed like God and his father wanted to make sure that he didn’t have a good time. How could he be expected to obey his parents when they made such unreasonable demands on him? How he wished he were eighteen and on his own!

That month seemed to drag on forever. When the time of his punishment was finally over he felt like an animal that had been freed from a cage.

Now his friend Alex had an older brother named Jack. Jack asked Alex and Todd if they would like to go with him on his paper route. He promised them that they would have a good time. Alex and Todd had no idea what he was promising them but it sounded good to them.

When Todd went home and asked his parents if he could get up at four the next morning to go with Jack, his father said no.

“But why?” asked Todd, “I’ll be back in plenty of time to get ready for school. Alex’s father is letting him go.”

His father answered, "Jack is fourteen years old and you are only eleven. I don't think eleven year olds should be out at four in the morning."

Todd could tell that there was no use trying to change his father's mind.

When Todd called Alex to tell him he couldn't go Alex said, "Come on Todd, be a sport. Why don't you sneak out your window. Me and Jack will come by around quarter after four and wait for you at the end of your street."

Todd thought about it for a minute and the idea sounded good to him. "Okay," he said, "I'll see you there."

That night Todd set his alarm clock for three forty-five and he put it under his pillow so that no one could hear it go off. He had two younger sisters who shared a room next to him and the last thing he wanted was for them to wake up.

It was hard for him to go to sleep because he kept thinking about getting up and he was hoping that nothing would go wrong. It seemed like he had just fallen asleep when the alarm went off. He quickly turned it off and began to get dressed very quietly. He was starting to have second thoughts about whether he should even go but he knew that Jack and Alex would be expecting him so he felt like he had no choice.

He had already opened his window before he went to bed so that he wouldn't have to make any unnecessary noise. When the clock said four he crawled through the window and headed toward the place where he would meet his friend and his brother.

When Jack and Alex arrived at the end of Todd's street, Todd was there waiting for them. The three boys went together to pick up the newspapers. After helping Jack fold and pack each paper in a plastic bag, Jack said, "I told you guys that I was going to show you a fun time and I wasn't kidding. About three blocks from here there is an old Chevy that I borrow every night to deliver my papers."

Todd knew that Jack wasn't old enough to have a license so he couldn't imagine who would loan Jack a car. So he asked, "Who do you borrow it from?"

"An old man who is too hard of hearing to know that someone is borrowing his car," he answered.

Of course Todd knew that Jack wasn't borrowing a car at all, he was stealing it. "But that's stealing," he said.

"Look," said Jack, "if you want to be a baby about it why don't you head on home. I've been taking that Chevy every night for over a year now and if you're afraid to come along then just forget it."

When Todd heard that he had been taking the car for over a year, almost all his fear disappeared. And by looking at Alex's face he could tell that he was really excited about going for a ride in a stolen car.

"Well," said Todd, "I guess it really does sound like a lot of fun. I'm game."

The boys then went to the car and Jack played with some wires and within minutes the car was running. The first place they headed to was a gas station.

Jack said, "I always put a buck of gas in so the old man won't notice any difference in the amount of gas he has."

After delivering the newspapers Jack drove around a little. It really was fun to be driving this old car. Todd really wasn't nervous about being stopped because Jack looked more like seventeen than he did fourteen.

When Todd snuck back in his room before daybreak he was determined that getting together with Jack should become a regular event.

The next time however didn't go so smoothly. When they were out driving all of a sudden they heard a "thump, thump" and a few seconds later they realized that they had a flat tire.

"Oh no," said Jack, "I never planned on this. We don't have a key to get into the trunk so the only thing I can think of is to abandon the car."

"But," said Todd, "we'll never be able to make it home before six from where we are. My parents get up around then and if they catch me out they'll kill me."

"Sorry buddy," said Jack, "like I said, I didn't plan this.

We might as well start walking."

Todd was right about his not being able to get home before his parents got up. When he walked in the door he was greeted

by two very upset and worried people.

"And where have you been?" asked his father.

"I went with Alex to help Jack deliver his newspapers," he answered.

"Didn't I tell you that I didn't want you to do that?" his father asked.

"Yes," he answered.

"Did both Alex and Jack know I had told you that you couldn't go with them?" his father asked.

"Yes," Todd nodded.

"Then I think that you should no longer have anything to do with those two boys and you are grounded for another month."

Todd could not believe what his father had just said. Alex had been his best friend since they were in third grade. They did everything together. Being grounded for a month was nothing compared to that. But instead of voicing his objections he decided to wait until another time to talk to his father about it.

After Todd's father came home from work that day Todd decided to talk to him.

"Dad," he said, "I know I was wrong to have gone out this morning and I'm sorry, but please don't stop me from being friends with Alex.

“Todd, believe me, I’m not trying to be cruel to you. I have only your best in mind. The people we hang around can’t help but influence us. The Bible says that evil companions corrupt good morals. That means that if a good person becomes friends with a bad person then the good person will become bad. So Todd you’re going to have to look for a different type of friend than Alex.

“I’ve noticed a difference in you son. It used to bother you when you did things wrong but you seem to have become hard. It’s a dangerous thing to be hard. It says in Proverbs 29:1, ‘He that being often reprov’d hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.’ After he quoted the verse, he asked his son, “Do you know what that means?”

“Not really,” Todd replied.

“It means that if you keep ignoring warnings that you are given then there is a day coming when very harsh judgment is going to come your way.”

Todd was so sick of hearing his father quote the Bible. How he wished he had a normal father. Alex’s father didn’t place restrictions on him like Todd’s father. Todd’s father was forcing him to become even more deceptive because he had no intention of giving up his best friend. If things got really bad he thought that maybe Alex’s father would let him live with them.

About two weeks later Alex came up to Todd at school and said, “My brother has found another car that he thinks is safe to take for a couple of hours. Do you want to come along with us tonight?”

It sounded great to Todd and he could hardly wait. That night they were driving in a Ford. But before they had even driven a mile they saw flashing lights behind them. Jack considered trying to run away from the police but realized that that would get him in only more trouble. When the policeman asked to see his license Jack told him that he had left it at home. When the policemen looked at the car registration he knew that the car didn’t belong to Jack so he took all three boys to the police station.

Both Todd’s parents and Alex’s father were called. While they were waiting for their parents to show up Todd said, “Boy I wish your father were my father. Your dad probably isn’t going to be that upset, but mine is probably going to kill me.”

Jack’s reply really surprised Todd. He said, “Yeah, mine won’t be too upset alright because to be honest with you he could care less about us. As long as we stay out of his hair things run smoothly.

“Now your dad is a different story. It’s obvious that he really cares about you. I wish I could trade places with you.”

Todd found out that Jack was right about his father. When he got to the police station to pick up Jack and Alex, he was telling a policeman to go ahead and keep them there or send them to a juvenile detention center. Todd was shocked that Jack and Alex’s dad didn’t even want to take his own children home.

From then on Todd began to look at his father in a different light. It was true that his father placed a lot of restrictions on him, but the reason he did was because

he loved him. He wasn't trying to keep him from having a good time; he was trying to protect him from needless suffering.

When Todd saw his father that night it hurt him to see the expression of pain on his face. Todd hadn't realized how much pain he was causing him. Emotions were welling up inside Todd and he ran to his father and buried his face in his chest and started crying. "Dad," he said, "I am so sorry for all the pain I've caused you. I'm not even worthy to be your son. I'm willing to take any punishment you give me."

But Todd's father didn't punish Todd this time. The only thing he said as he held his sobbing son was, "Welcome home, son."

It wasn't until Todd was a little older that he understood what his father had meant. There is a story in the Bible about a father who had a son who left him to go live a wicked and sinful life. When the boy finally came to his senses and decided to go home, his father didn't scold or punish him, instead he welcomed him home.

Todd realized when he read that story that it was intended to be a lesson about how God feels about His children. When God's children go live wicked and sinful lives, it hurts His feelings because they are turning their backs on Him, not realizing that He wants only what is best for them. But if they come to their senses and want to become God's friends again, then God won't punish them or scold them. He will welcome them back just like Todd's father did him.

When Todd read this story in the Bible and thought about what it meant he prayed, "Lord, thank you that I have a father so much like You."

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