



Fiction

The Post That Stole Thanksgiving

Krysten Williams was on day 14 of her month-long gratitude list on social media when things went south. Every year for the past five, she had done this, and the response was greater than anything else she posted, with the possible exception of the video of her cat jumping on her husband's head while she dangled a feather near his pillow.

by CHRIS FABRY

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PEOPLE LOVED HER LIST, mostly because it was positive and stood out from all the political wranglings and online arguments. Her pastor had even used one of her posts in a Thanksgiving sermon the year before. She considered that as close to viral as you could get and more satisfying.

On the 14th day, she scanned her previous posts. Most showed gratitude for the small, insignificant things of life that were easily overlooked. Her belief was that if you remembered the small things, the bigger ones came naturally. But today, she wanted to go deeper. She wanted to give some soul-weight to her post.

Grateful today that my security in God is not based on my performance for Him but His performance for me. Ephesians 2:8-9

She posted, and almost immediately, the responses began to flood.

Oh, I love this! Thank you for putting it that way.

This is so good, Krysten. I'm thankful for you today.

So true. Christianity is not a religion; it's a relationship. Thanks for keeping it real.

Post after post gushed praise. Friends understood. Friends agreed with her that God is good. That He cares and has given grace and is worthy of all praise. Salvation is a gift we can't earn. She felt a spiritual high reading those responses.

But Krysten's stomach churned when she saw the name Janie Bodley. Janie wrote a long response that Krysten dismissed without even reading it. She didn't have to. She knew what it would be like. Krysten scrolled through other responses that were effusive with praise. Reluctantly, she returned to Janie's post.

This is what gets me about Christians. They talk about Jesus, loving them no matter what. God's grace and all that. He's so accepting of us and doesn't reject us. But Christians feel fine about

rejecting people over their "performance." Glad you're happy with yourself today. You can keep your platitudes.

Krysten stared at the words. They brought an ache to her heart. Why did Janie have to do that? Why did she have to take a post meant to encourage people and turn it into an attack?

Frustrated, Krysten walked away from the computer. Her pastor would never use this

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exchange in a sermon. Unless he was preaching on persecution. Krysten was being salt and light, and Janie was lashing out at true faith in God. Was that what was going on? Or was there something more?

She returned to the screen and saw responses to Janie's post.

Some people just don't get it.

Don't let this bother you, Krysten. Keep praising God.

I'm thankful there's a delete button. You should use it, Krysten.

Krysten smiled. She felt better that others understood what she was saying and commiserated with her. She hovered her mouse over the delete button near Janie's name but instead, she clicked on the picture of Janie and scanned her page.

Memories began to flood. They'd gone to school together. Janie had been a polar opposite of Krysten early on. Krysten was upfront and outspoken. Janie was shy and stayed in the background. From her online persona, Krysten could tell they differed on everything from belief in God to social issues. Krysten leaned right; Janie leaned left. Krysten posted positive observations; Janie posted about everything wrong with the world. Everything Krysten celebrated, Janie criticized. What Krysten saw as evil, Janie called good.

Well, she thought, if nothing else, I have someone to add to my prayer list.

But something gnawed at Krysten. Some memory. What was it?

She brought up Janie's page and her photos. There were pictures of her family, one of her and

her father, and Krysten remembered the man from the neighborhood. Not the most pleasant person on the planet. And there were pictures of Janie and her children. They seemed normal, but Krysten knew that having children brought pain and struggle and heartache and worry. There was no sign of a husband.

She scrolled through the archive until she saw a familiar shot. It was a yearbook photo from high school. It showed Krysten and several friends who were popular, mugging for the camera. In the background, with no expression, Janie stood watching them. She was an observer to the scene. Janie had captioned the photo *Outside looking in. Story of my life.*

And like a lightning bolt, the memory was there, fully formed, fully fleshed. Was it 7th grade? 8th? It was somewhere in that general historical vicinity. Someone had suggested an impromptu party. She and her friends were eating lunch in the cafeteria, and they made plans about where and when and what to watch and what to eat. Janie, who was sitting unobserved at the end of the lunch table, leaned forward.

"Can I come?"

All of her friends looked at Krysten. She knew no one wanted Janie there. Krysten didn't either, but she didn't want to be mean. After all, she was a Christian.

"Sure," Krysten had said.

Janie smiled and finished her lunch.

Later her friends confronted Krysten and told her they needed to lose Janie — that the party would be ruined if Janie showed up — and they convinced her that it was her responsibility to break the news since she had said, "Sure." Given the choice of letting her friends down or injuring Janie, Krysten found the girl between classes and made a lame excuse about why it wouldn't be good for her to be there. And that she would be invited to the next party. Janie paused, looked up at Krysten, and said, "I understand."

Krysten had felt relieved. The party went as planned that night without Janie. Krysten hadn't given it much thought in the intervening years. Until today. Until the memory flashed like

lightning. She couldn't recall the movie they'd watched, the food they ate, the boys they'd talked about, or anything else. All she could remember was the look on Janie's face.

Krysten studied her post about "performance." No, Christianity isn't about following rules and regulations and getting everything right. It is about receiving forgiveness from God and being made right by Him. Salvation is a gift you can't earn. All of that is true. All of that deserves to be gratefully expressed.

But the gift isn't supposed to be hoarded. The gift is to be opened and shared with others. And the first act of opening it and unleashing its power is the realization that you need the gift in the first place. You need grace. And the way you receive it is to acknowledge your need for forgiveness.

Krysten could have chalked all of the online hoopla up to persecution. She could have judged Janie for being a party pooper, a wet blanket on her thanksgiving parade. Instead, she breathed a prayer.

Father, thank You that You have forgiven me. And thank You that I can live forgiven and loved by You. And thank You that You have given me another chance with someone on the outside looking in at a relationship with You. Would You help me respond to Janie the way You would respond?

At first, Janie's response felt like an attack on Krysten's thankful heart. In fact, it opened new possibilities for gratitude. Krysten searched for Janie's phone number. And when she found it, she got the courage to call. There was something she needed to say. A question that burned in her heart.

"Janie, will you forgive me?" 🙏

Note: Encourage friends to read this article at lifeway.com/matureliving.

CHRIS FABRY is an award-winning author of more than 80 books, including his novelization of the Kendrick Brothers film, *Overcomer*. He encourages and inspires those with a writing dream at heyyoucanwrite.com. He is also host of Chris Fabry Live on Moody Radio.