

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
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You Better Be Good...

Santa Claus is Coming—with a Lie Detector

By Paul Asay

What Happened:

Santa's watching us. From the time we were little kids, most of us were told to be especially good this time of year, because good old St. Nick is aware of our naughty and nice deeds. If we were too naughty, our parents told us, we might just get a lump of coal.

In London, they've taken the whole concept of Claus-based accountability one step farther. Before sitting on Kris Kringle's lap, kids are forced to sit down, get strapped to a polygraph machine and answer some basic, but potentially incriminating, questions, such as: "Have you been good this year?" "Have you straightened your room?" "Have you been nice to your little brother?"

It's uncertain how Mr. Claus hopes to use this information, or whether he is connected at all with the NSA. However, it does seem the jolly old man (also sometimes called Father Christmas) is taking his role of naughty-and-nice overseer more seriously.

Some 6 million families now have an "Elf on the Shelf." A stuffed elf is set in a different place around the family home on the days leading up to Christmas. The elf is apparently tasked with keeping an eye on the behavior of young 'uns.

Not everyone, however, believes the responsibility of monitoring a child's behavior should be farmed out to the North Pole. "I don't think that's a very good strategy," clinical psychologist Margret Nickels told *The Chicago Tribune*, regarding the Elf on the Shelf phenomenon. "It's the parents who want to be in charge as the authority in the house. Not the Elf, or Santa Claus."

Talk About It:

Perhaps you're past the age of worrying too much about Santa Claus' naughty list, but when you were younger, did you worry about whether Santa was watching what you said and did? Do you know kids, maybe little brothers or sisters, who to be a little bit better this time of year to impress Santa? Have you known anyone to invoke Santa as a threat?

We don't like to be judged by others—even stuffed elves—yet if we think or know someone's watching us, we sometimes behave better. It's called "being held accountable." When we're little, parents might check our hands to make sure we've washed them. Teachers make assignments and check homework to ensure we've done the work. Sometimes we ask friends to hold us accountable, too.

Can you think of other ways in which you've been held accountable? How do your parents check up on you and keep you on the right path? Your teachers? Your youth leaders? Are there ways you and your friends hold each other more accountable?

Sometimes forced accountability can feel insulting; it can feel as if we're not trusted. However, we're not always good on our own. Sometimes, our actions force people to watch us more closely. Have you ever gotten caught in a lie or doing something

you shouldn't have done? Did that put you in a spot where someone else forced greater accountability on you—a stricter curfew, for instance, or restrictions on cellphone use?

What the Bible Says:

God knows we're sinful by nature and that we don't always do what we should. That's probably why so many Bible verses deal with accountability.

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (Eccl. 4:9-12).

“Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:1-2).

“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts” (Col. 3:16).