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Paige rubbed her eyes hard. *Don’t be a baby,* she told herself. *So you won’t go to summer camp this year. That’s no reason to cry.* She stuffed the camp brochure into her pocket, closed the mailbox, and went into the house.

“Is that you, Tom?” called her mother.

“No, it’s me,” Paige said as she walked into the room.

“I thought it might be your dad. He’s gone to interview for a job.”

“Won’t do any good,” Paige said. “He’s interviewed for a bunch already.”

“Sooner or later he’ll find one,” Mom replied.

Paige dumped the mail onto the coffee table, then took the camp brochure out of her pocket. “Why doesn’t God give Dad a job? We’re God’s children. I thought He took care of His children.”

“He does, Paige,” said Mom. “The bills are paid. We have our home and each other. There may not be money for extras like summer camp this year, but God has given us many benefits.”

They both looked up as Dad came in. “Well, the interview went well!” he said with a smile. “The pay is good, and the benefits are great! Let’s pray that this will be the right job for me.”

“We’ll definitely pray about that!” said Mom.

“What are benefits?” asked Paige.

“They’re things like medical insurance, a retirement plan, paid holidays, and sick leave,” Dad explained.

Paige looked puzzled. “Well, what did you mean when you said God has given us many benefits, Mom? He doesn’t give us insurance and sick leave.”

“Job benefits are things businesses offer their workers in addition to the wage they earn at their jobs,” Mom replied. “When it comes to us and God, we don’t earn anything—our salvation was paid for by Jesus on the cross. But along with the free gift of eternal life, He gives His children additional blessings—love, joy, peace, His promise to supply all our needs, things like that. Even though we may go through hard times, we can remember the blessing of salvation and all the other benefits He gives us.”

Paige thought it over. “I guess I need to remember all the blessings He’s given me,” she said, “whether Dad gets this job or not.”

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**DON’T FORGET GOD’S BLESSINGS**

**KEY VERSE:** BLESS THE LORD, O MY SOUL, AND FORGET NOT ALL HIS BENEFITS. *PSALM 103:2*

Have you thought about all the benefits—the added blessings—God gives you? Or are you so busy looking at what you don’t have that you forget to be thankful for what God has provided for you? God has given you eternal life through His Son, Jesus, and blesses you with benefits every day. Make a list of at least five blessings God has given you. Then stop and thank Him for them.
I am the king!” four-year-old Bryce said majestically, putting on the glittery cardboard crown he’d just made. He took his mother’s broken wooden spoon for his scepter and climbed into Dad’s big leather chair. “Now you have to do whatever I say, Caden,” he told his foster brother.

Caden laughed, then bowed dramatically. “Great sir, I am your humble servant,” he said solemnly. For a few minutes Caden let Bryce boss him around, then he said, “Well, enough of this, kiddo. I’ve got homework to do, so I’d better get busy.”

“But you have to obey me,” Bryce insisted. “I’m the king!”

“Oh yeah?” Caden swooped Bryce up from Dad’s chair and tickled him. “That’s not how you treat a king!” Bryce said, giggling. He broke away and scampered off.

“Bryce’s game reminds me of our conversation yesterday,” said Mom, who was sitting on the couch with her laptop.

Caden grabbed his backpack and plopped down next to Mom. “Which conversation is that?”

“The one where you said you didn’t see any need to give your life to Jesus.”

Caden shrugged. “I’ve been going to church every week with you guys, and I haven’t been getting into trouble like I used to before I came to live here. My social worker even told me she’s proud of how much better I’ve been acting. Isn’t that good?”

“Yes, of course it is,” said Mom. “But doing good things doesn’t make you a Christian. You have to trust in Jesus to really be one. Otherwise, you’re just like Bryce. He said he was the king, and he went through what he considered to be kingly motions. But did it really make him a king?”

“No,” replied Caden, frowning. “He was just playing.”

“And it’s possible for someone to play Christian without really being one,” Mom said. “Only Jesus can save us from our sin and make us new people. We can’t make up for the wrong things we’ve done ourselves. That’s why we need to trust in Him—so we can be forgiven and start a new life.”

“I guess I never thought about it that way before,” Caden said. “Maybe you’d better tell me more.”

---

**PLAYING CHRISTIAN**

*READ: EPHESIANS 2:1-9*

**BE A TRUE CHRISTIAN**

*KEY VERSE: EXAMINE YOURSELVES AS TO WHETHER YOU ARE IN THE FAITH. 2 CORINTHIANS 13:5*

Are you a real Christian, or are you just playing? Going to church and doing good deeds won’t save you. The only way to truly become a Christian is to trust in Jesus and accept His gift of salvation. So examine your heart—are you trusting Jesus? If not, become a real Christian by trusting in Him today. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 102.)
BOOM! BOOM! As the loud sound of the fireworks was followed by a shower of colorful sparks cascading downward, Hudson grinned and Chloe covered her ears. “I don’t like the noise,” she said, “but the fireworks sure are pretty!”

The fireworks at the county fairgrounds the night before the Fourth of July was an event Hudson and Chloe looked forward to each summer. Delighted gasps of “ohh” and “ahh” were heard from the crowd as rockets whistled through the air and burst into umbrellas of brilliant, jewel-like sparks. Each time one of the fireworks was set off, the sky was filled with many brightly colored lights, making the grassy slope as light as day.

All too soon the fireworks display was over. Sparks flickered and died before they reached the ground. Smoke vapors trailed off into nothing.

“That was so cool!” Hudson exclaimed as they made their way back to the car.

“Yeah,” said Chloe. “Those fireworks shoot up really high, don’t they?” She glanced up at the sky, where the stars shone brightly. “But not nearly as high as those stars.”

Hudson looked up too and pointed. “There’s an airplane. See its lights?”

Chloe nodded. “Do you think the pilot saw the fireworks? I wonder what they’d look like from way up there.”

Mom smiled. “I wonder what God thought about it from His viewpoint. Maybe He said, ‘Quite impressive, folks, but have you considered the lights I put in the sky? They can be seen all over the earth. And they don’t die out.’”

“Like the sun and moon and all the stars,” Hudson said. “Fireworks are tiny compared to them!”

“Yes,” said Dad. “And fireworks only last a few seconds, but the lights God created are always there for us to see. They show us how huge and vast the universe is and remind us how great and powerful God is—and how much He loves us. Enough to create the sun and moon and countless stars so we could have lights in our sky.”

“And we don’t have to wait to see them only once or twice a year,” Chloe added. “We can see His beautiful lights in the sky anytime!”

BONNIE L. KINNE

GOD CREATED EVERYTHING

KEY VERSE: THE HEAVENS DECLARE THE GLORY OF GOD; AND THE FIRMAMENT SHOWS HIS HANDIWORK. PSALM 19:1

Do you like to see fireworks? It’s fun to see their beautiful colors light up the sky on summer nights, isn’t it? What about the lights God placed in the sky? The sun, moon, and stars—and everything else He’s created—remind us how great He is and how much He loves us. Take a moment to enjoy His beautiful creation, and thank Him for loving you.
Isaac closed his eyes and let the cool breeze of the New York Bay wash over his face. He turned to his sister, Hannah, who was standing next to him on the ferry headed toward Liberty Island. “I can’t wait to see the Statue of Liberty up close! My friend Zack said she’s as high as a twenty-two-story building!”

“Wow!” Hannah squealed as she craned her neck to see around her brother and catch a glimpse of the statue. “And just think, tonight Lady Liberty will be surrounded by fireworks!”

“That’s right,” Mom said. “It’s even more special that we get to see the Statue of Liberty on the Fourth of July. Today is a very special day in our country. Do you remember why?”

“Yes,” Isaac answered. “It’s Independence Day! In school we learned that on July 4, 1776, America declared that we would be a new nation and no longer be ruled by the British. We wanted to be a nation where people could come and be free.”

“Just imagine if we were new immigrants coming to America and we were seeing Lady Liberty for the first time,” Hannah chimed in. “It would be so exciting to know we were starting a new life!”

Mom smiled. “I’m glad to hear you’ve been paying attention during your history lessons. The Statue of Liberty is a beautiful symbol of freedom, and it makes me think of another symbol of freedom—the cross.”

“The cross? Like the cross Jesus died on?” Hannah asked. “What does the cross have to do with freedom from the British?”

Mom gently laughed and said, “The cross doesn’t give us freedom from the British, but it does give us a different kind of freedom. When Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, He freed us from the bondage of sin. The cross reminds us that we have freedom and a new life in Him.”

“Oh, I get it!” said Isaac. “The cross is a symbol of freedom for Christians.”

“And if I’m a follower of Jesus, then I’m a little lady of liberty!” Hannah said with a giggle.

“That’s right,” Mom said. “We have two kinds of freedom we can celebrate on Independence Day!”

---

**JESUS SETS US FREE**

**KEY VERSE:** THEREFORE IF THE SON MAKES YOU FREE, YOU SHALL BE FREE INDEED. JOHN 8:36

When you see a symbol of the cross, do you think of the freedom you have in Jesus? If you trust in Him, then you are no longer a slave to sin. You are free to live your life in a way that pleases God. If you know Jesus, thank Him today for the freedom He’s given you. If you don’t, you can celebrate freedom from sin today by trusting in Him. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 102.)
Raya stood in the backyard and looked up into the big maple tree. “Dad!” she called. “Help me!”

“What’s wrong?” asked Dad as he ran toward her.

“It’s Daisy,” said Raya, tears filling her eyes. She pointed up. “She’s stuck in the tree. She climbed up there, but now she can’t get back down.”

Dad spotted the tiny kitten perched high on a limb overhead. It was clinging to the branch with all its strength. “We’ll get her down,” said Dad. He got a long ladder from the garage, leaned it against the tree, and began to climb. When he reached Daisy, he gently scooped up the kitten and carried it down to Raya’s waiting arms.

“Oh, thank you!” said Raya. She stroked the kitten gently. “I tried to stop Daisy from climbing the tree, but she did it anyway.” Raya looked up at her father. “If Daisy had listened to me, she wouldn’t have got stuck up a tree.”

Dad smiled as the kitten purred loudly in Raya’s arms. “Do you know that people are sometimes up a tree too?” he asked.

“They are? You mean like kids who climb too high and get hurt?” “I mean like all of us,” Dad said. “‘Up a tree’ is an old expression that means to be in difficulty. Daisy should have listened to you, and Jesus is the one we all need to listen to. If we do, He’ll guide us in our thoughts and actions, but like Daisy, we often don’t listen. We just do what we want to do, and that can get us into a real mess—or up a tree. Then we have to admit our wrong and cry out to God to forgive us and help us down.”

“But how can I know what Jesus is telling me to do?” Raya asked. “I can’t hear Him, can I?”

“Not with your ears,” said Dad, “but He will speak to you through His Word and through prayer—and through parents, teachers, and other Christian adults. Ask Him to guide you and to help you remember that you belong to Him. He’s always with you and will help you know what to do.”

Do you ask Jesus to guide you when you’re not sure what to do? He loves you and is always with you. Talk to Him about difficulties you face, and then listen to what He tells you. He may use the Bible, your parents, a teacher, a Christian friend, your pastor—any number of things or people—to show you the right things to do. He will give you the desire and strength to obey Him.
Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths.
Psalm 25:4

Draw the faces of Raya and her dad.
Look, Forest! An old baseball card!” exclaimed Jalen as the boys searched through a box in Grandpa’s attic. “Maybe Grandpa will let us have it.”

“Yeah. I’ll ask him,” Forest said. He disappeared through the attic’s trap door while Jalen continued to look at other things Grandpa had stored up there.

“Grandpa says we can have it,” Forest said when he returned. “He said we can have any other cards we find too!”

“Cool!” said Jalen, and the two continued searching through the dusty piles. “Here’s another one!” Jalen called out.

Grandpa’s smiling face appeared at the trap door a little later. “Find any more cards?” he asked.

“We did, Grandpa!” Jalen held up a card he had just found. “This is fun! It’s like looking for treasure!”

“This is treasure,” Forest told him. “These cards could be worth a lot of money, couldn’t they, Grandpa? You sure you want us to keep them?”

“Keep every one you find, boys,” said Grandpa.

“All right!” said Forest. He grinned. “This treasure was right under our noses, but we only just found it now.”

“Under our noses?” asked Jalen.

“That’s an expression that means it was right here where it could easily be found all along,” Grandpa explained. “But come on down now for lunch.”

After they finished eating their grilled cheese sandwiches, Grandpa reached for his Bible. “Let’s look at some more treasure,” he said.

Jalen looked at Grandpa’s Bible. “Are there treasures in your Bible?” Grandpa nodded. “There sure are.”

Jalen and Forest looked at each other. “Really?” Forest asked. “What kind? Are they worth lots of money?”

Grandpa chuckled. “The treasures of God’s Word are worth far more than money. God’s treasures are His promises, His wisdom, His comfort and encouragement. They contain the treasure found in Jesus, who died for our sin and gives us eternal life.” Grandpa opened the Bible. “They’re right here under our noses, but we often fail to find those treasures. Let’s see if we can find some right now.”

Are you finding God’s treasures? His Word, the Bible, is full of treasures worth far more than money—they’re things money can’t buy. Look in your Bible for encouragement and comfort offered by the Lord. Look for the hope of Jesus and all He’s done and promises to do for those who trust in Him. You’ll find these treasures lead to peace, joy, and blessings. Find some today!
Dominic grinned as he looked at his little brother. “Your shirt is buttoned wrong, Brock! Look at this.” Dominic tugged at the bottom of the shirt. “See how this side hangs longer at the bottom than the other side?” Brock looked down and began to fumble with the buttons. “Here . . . I’ll help you fix it,” Dominic offered. “Let’s start with the top button and work our way down.”

Brock pushed his brother’s hand away. “I can do it myself.”

“Okay,” said Dominic. “But you’d better hurry up. We have to leave for church soon.”

The rest of the family were already seated at the breakfast table when Brock arrived. He quickly slipped into his seat beside his sister, Myla, and they bowed their heads for prayer.

“Having a little trouble with your shirt, Brock?” Dad asked after thanking God for the food.

Dominic looked at his brother. “I told him it wasn’t buttoned right, and I tried to help him. But he wouldn’t let me, so I let him do it himself.”

Brock’s face puckered up. “I fixed it! The bottom is straight now.”

Dominic snickered. “Yeah, but now there’s a part sagging out in the middle!”

Myla reached over to her little brother. “Let me help you,” she said.

Mom smiled. “I think you started out wrong, Brock. When that’s the problem, the way to fix it is to go back and start over.”

“I don’t like to start over,” Brock muttered as he allowed Myla to help him.

“No, but starting over is often the only way to correct things,” said Mom. “It gives you a fresh start.”

“That sounds like what Pastor Jeffries talked about at church last week,” said Myla. “The Bible says if we confess the wrong things we do, Jesus will forgive us and cleanse us. We can put our sins behind us and start all over again.”

“Hey, Mom,” said Dominic. He winked at Dad. “I’m sorry I ate my pancakes so fast! I’d better start over again. Can I have another stack?”

SUSAN S. ARCAND

CONFESS SIN

KEY VERSE: I CONFESSED ALL MY SINS TO YOU AND STOPPED TRYING TO HIDE MY GUILT. . . . AND YOU FORGAVE ME! PSALM 32:5 (NLT)

Are you sorry for something you did that was wrong? Perhaps you told a lie, disobeyed, or were unkind. Do you wish you could undo what you did and start over again? You can’t undo what’s been done, but you can have a fresh start. Confess your sin to the Lord—and to others who have been affected by it. Jesus loves you, and He’s ready to forgive and let you begin again, fresh and clean.
William watched as little Jackson slowly walked toward his mother’s outstretched arms. “How’s Jack’s walking coming along?” he asked his mother.

“He’s doing quite well—watch this. Come here, Jacky!” Mom cooed, encouraging Jack to walk to her. He giggled and slowly stepped closer and closer until he was in his mother’s arms.

“That’s pretty cool! Looking good, Jack,” William said. Then he sat down on the couch and sighed.

“Is something wrong?” Mom asked when she noticed William’s downcast face.

“I don’t know. I just can’t seem to get through to Alex.”

“Who’s Alex?” Mom asked.

“He’s a new kid at school. I’ve been trying to get him to trust Jesus as his Savior, but he won’t budge. I don’t know what to do.”

“Maybe you should take a lesson from Jack,” Mom suggested.

“What do you mean? I’m not learning how to walk!”

Mom smiled. “No, but you’re learning how to share God’s love with others. Do you notice anything special about the way Jack is walking?”

William studied his little brother as he slowly walked from the couch to the chair. “His legs are a little wobbly. Is that it? I’m a wobbly witness for Jesus?”

“Actually, I was referring to the size of Jack’s steps,” Mom replied. “He falls down at times, and yes, he is a little shaky on his feet, but he just takes one little step at a time until he achieves his goal. It’s the same with sharing Jesus with others. Instead of walking up to Alex and asking if he’d like to pray and ask Jesus into his heart, start small. Start by being friendly and kind. After a while, ask him if he’d like to come to church with you. If he gets to know you as a friend and sees what a difference Jesus makes in your life, he might want the same thing for himself. Just take it one baby step at a time.”

William thought for a moment. “That’s a good idea. Can I ask Alex to come over to play my new video game tomorrow night?”

“Of course,” said Mom. “That’s a good first step.”

William smiled. “Thanks, Mom. And thank you too, Jack!”

Do you sometimes get carried away in your witnessing attempts? Have you ever scared someone away from wanting to be around you and learn about Jesus? It’s important to share God’s love one step at a time. Start by reaching out to others in friendship. As you get to know them and show them kindness, they’ll experience God’s love in their lives.
Grandpa looked up when Gabby trudged outside and sat down next to him dejectedly. “Is something the matter?” Grandpa asked.

Gabby took a deep breath. “Evan is mad at me. I said I was going to help him with his chores, but then I forgot and went out with my friends. I tried to make it up to him by cleaning his room as a surprise, but not only did I make a bigger mess, I also broke his favorite action figure. He’s never going to talk to me again.”

Grandpa waited for Gabby to catch her breath. “Did you apologize?”

“What’s the point?” Gabby asked. “He’ll never forgive me!”

Grandpa looked down. “What do you think of this bench, Gabby?”

Gabby shrugged. “It looks beat up—kind of like how I feel.”

Grandpa smiled. “It’s been sitting out here a long time, so it sure looks that way. I’ve already finished replacing some of the wood, and now I’m going to paint it. Do you want to help?”

“Sure,” Gabby said, and together they started painting the bench.

A while later, Gabby stepped back to admire their work. “Wow! It looks almost brand-new now!” she exclaimed.

“Yes, it does, doesn’t it?” Grandpa said. “You know, our relationships are like this bench. Sometimes they go through tough times and get beaten and worn, and sometimes they even break. But if you really treasure the relationship, you’ll take the time to try to mend it, like I did with the bench by replacing some of the wood.”

“But he’s not going to forget all the wrongs things I did even if I apologize,” Gabby said.

Grandpa patted Gabby’s shoulder. “Admitting we did something wrong and asking for forgiveness is like putting on a new coat of paint. It’s not necessarily erasing the old, bad parts of the relationship, but it lets the other person know that you’re sorry and want to make things better. It’s hard to do, but Jesus will be there with you. He forgives us when we admit our wrongs, and He gives us the strength to ask for forgiveness when we’ve wronged others.”

Gabby nodded thoughtfully, then went inside to find her brother.

GABRIELLA HSU

APLOGIZE TO PEOPLE YOU’VE WRONGED

KEY VERSE: CONFESSION OF SINS TO ONE ANOTHER AND PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER, THAT YOU MAY BE HEALED. JAMES 5:16 (NIV)

Does it seem pointless to apologize sometimes? Ignoring the problem may seem like the easiest decision, but it can also be the most harmful one. Mend your relationships by apologizing when you’re in the wrong. Ask Jesus for forgiveness when you’ve hurt someone, and trust Him to help you tell the person you hurt you’re sorry too.
Grandma had just finished putting cookies in the oven when Evan came into the kitchen. “I was just about to go outside and cut some roses,” Grandma said. “Want to join me?” Evan nodded and followed her outside. After a few snips, Grandma broke the silence. “What’s on your mind?”
Evan was quiet a moment before answering. “Lately, Gabby has been giving me a hard time. But a few minutes ago, she apologized for everything.” He sighed. “I know it’s wrong, but I don’t really want to forgive her.”
“Why is that?” asked Grandma.
“She broke my favorite action figure!” Evan explained. “I saved up for months for that!”
Grandma didn’t reply as she gathered up the roses. Evan sighed in frustration and sat down on a nearby bench. Then he jumped back up in surprise.
“Ahh! The paint is still wet!” he exclaimed.
Grandma tried to hide a chuckle. “Grandpa must have finished painting that today. You can see where you sat on it how worn the bench was underneath.”
“Yeah,” said Evan. “I wish I could have seen it was still wet though.”
“Well, I think it serves as a good illustration for your problem,” said Grandma. “The bench looks new, right? But we still need to wait for the paint to dry before we can fully enjoy it. Forgiveness is kind of like that. When we forgive, it’s like we’re putting a new coat of paint on a hurt relationship. We’re starting over again with that person. But that doesn’t mean everything will be perfect right away. It’ll still take time before you can fully trust Gabby again.”
“And that’s okay?” asked Evan.
“Of course,” said Grandma. “Forgiveness can sometimes be a difficult process, but it always starts with remembering that Jesus has forgiven you for all your sins and wants you to forgive others. He’ll give you the strength to forgive Gabby.”
“Okay, Grandma,” said Evan. “I’m going to go in and change my pants, and then I’ll ask Gabby if she wants to help me glue my action figure back together.”

JESUS GIVES US STRENGTH TO FORGIVE

**KEY VERSE:** AND IF [SOMEONE] SINS AGAINST YOU SEVEN TIMES IN A DAY, AND COMES BACK TO YOU SEVEN TIMES, SAYING, “I REPENT,” YOU MUST FORGIVE HIM. LUKE 17:4 (CSB)

Is it hard for you to forgive someone who’s hurt you? Forgiving can be difficult sometimes, and God understands that it can take time. Not only does He understand, He promises to be with us and give us strength to forgive others the way He’s forgiven us. When someone wrongs you, remember how much wrong Jesus has forgiven you for and trust Him to help you forgive others, no matter what they’ve done.
Hey, Ashley, guess what I have!” Andy approached his sister with his hands behind his back. “I’ll give you a hint. It’s round and has a hole in the middle.” “A donut,” Ashley said. “Nope,” Andy said. “But you can eat it. It’s hard and sweet and comes in several flavors.” Ashley scrunched up her forehead. “Uhhh . . .” “Here’s a couple more hints,” Andy continued. “And if you don’t guess it this time, you don’t get any. They come in a roll, and when our grandparents were kids they cost a nickel.” “Nothing costs a nickel,” Ashley replied. “They’re about the size of a nickel too,” Andy added, grinning. “Give up?” Ashley shrugged. “Might as well.” “Life Savers!” Andy spouted with glee. “And now I get to have them all.” “Aw, come on, Andy. Can’t I just have one? A cherry one? Pleeease?” Andy laughed, then unwrapped the roll and let Ashley pick out one of the cherry candies. Ashley popped it into her mouth. “Mmmm.” “These candies have been around for a hundred years!” said Andy. “How do you know so much about Life Savers?” Ashley asked. “From the internet, of course,” Andy said. “Did you know they got their name from those floating rings you toss into the water if someone goes overboard? The way they’re shaped makes them look like tiny life preservers, or life savers.” “Oh yeah, you’re right.” Ashley took another red candy from the roll. “Who knew saving lives could taste so sweet?” “I did—and so did you!” Andy laughed at his sister’s confused expression. “Remember? What we talked about in church last week?” “Oh, that’s right,” said Ashley. “We talked about how sweet it is to know Jesus because He saves lives!” Andy nodded. “We couldn’t save ourselves from sin, but Jesus died to take the punishment we deserve so we could be saved and have eternal life.” He popped a green candy into his mouth. “Knowing Him is sweeter than anything else!”

Have you tasted the sweetness of knowing Jesus? Do you trust Him as your Savior? He died and rose again to save you from sin and give you eternal life with Him. Nothing is sweeter than that! If you don’t know Him as your Savior, enjoy the sweet life today by putting your trust in Him. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 102.)
Vince slipped through the front door and plunked down his backpack. “Vince?” Dad called from the kitchen. “Mom baked brownies before she left for work. Want to have one?”

Without answering, Vince shuffled to his room, closed the door, and slumped facedown on the bed. He wished he could talk to Dad about the kids teasing him in gym class, but he felt too embarrassed. The scene from this morning’s class replayed in his mind like a nightmare. “Hey, scar belly!” Antonio had bellowed the moment Vince removed his shirt in the locker room. Soon other boys took up the chant while gawking at the purple scar dividing Vince’s chest in half.

“Can I come in?” Dad called from outside Vince’s door.

Vince buried his face deeper into his pillow. How can Dad possibly understand? he wondered.

“Vince?” Dad called again. Vince muttered a muffled reply. Then he heard the door open, and soon Dad was sitting beside him. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Vince mumbled. But Dad didn’t leave, and after a long silence, Vince poured out the story of his humiliation.

Dad squeezed Vince’s shoulder. “You know, since you’re in a new school this year, those boys don’t know about your operation—how God allowed you to have the heart surgery that made it possible for you to play sports and take part in gym. Here’s an idea. The next time someone makes a remark about your scar, try looking at it and saying, ‘Awesome, isn’t it?’ Then tell them how the heart surgery helped you.”

“That might work.” Vince sat up and gave his dad a little smile. “I wish I’d told you about it sooner, but I—I was kind of embarrassed.”

“You can always talk to Mom and me,” Dad said. “If those boys keep giving you a hard time, we’ll make sure the school does something about it. And you can always talk to Jesus about your problems too. He loves you and understands everything you’re going through. He wants you to give all your worries and problems to Him so He can help you through them.”

“Thanks, Dad,” Vince said. “Do you think we can talk some more and eat a brownie at the same time? I’m starving!”

GIVE YOUR PROBLEMS TO GOD

KEY VERSE: GIVE ALL YOUR WORRIES AND CARES TO GOD, FOR HE CARES ABOUT YOU. 1 PETER 5:7 (NLT)

Do you have a problem so embarrassing that you can’t talk about it? Perhaps you’re being bullied, having trouble with schoolwork, or a friend is telling lies about you. It’s important to share your problem with an adult so they can help you—especially if it’s something serious. Most importantly, share your problems with Jesus in prayer. He’s always ready to listen and to help you.
Hi, Claire. Hi, Mrs. Miller. What are you doing?” asked Molly, the Millers’ next-door neighbor. Claire and her mom were kneeling near some flowers in their backyard.

“We’re picking some of the flowers we planted in the spring,” Claire answered.

“Oh, cool. Well, I came over to see if you want to go to the beach with us tomorrow, Claire. We’re leaving in the morning and staying there all day, and when it gets dark, we’re going to roast marshmallows in a fire pit!” Molly said excitedly.

Claire looked at her mom before responding. “That sounds like a lot of fun, Molly, but I can’t,” she replied. “I have church tomorrow morning, and I don’t want to miss it. You could come with me! I’d love it if you’d come.”

Molly shook her head. “I’d rather spend the day playing in the ocean and eating marshmallows than singing songs and listening to a boring preacher,” she said.

Claire’s mother smiled. “Molly, I think you’d be surprised by what a good time you’d have at church with Claire,” she said. “I hope you’ll come and find out for yourself one of these days.”

“Well, maybe,” Molly replied, not really convinced. “Too bad you can’t come with us, Claire. I’ll miss you while I’m eating all those yummy marshmallows!”

After Molly returned home, Claire sighed. “I just don’t get it, Mom. I keep inviting Molly to church and telling her about Jesus, but she just doesn’t seem interested. Sometimes I think I must be doing something wrong. Should I just give up?”

“Telling someone about Jesus is sort of like what we did in the spring, Claire,” Mom said. “We planted flower seeds, and you’ve been planting gospel seeds. It takes a while for seeds to grow, and it’s easy to get discouraged sometimes. When you look at tiny little seeds, you can hardly believe they’ll ever be worth much. But now, just look at these.” Mom held up some of the flowers they had picked. “With watering, nurturing—and most of all, time—those seeds we planted grew into beautiful flowers. Trust God to make gospel seeds grow too. Keep on being Molly’s friend and telling her about Jesus.”

Claire nodded. “Okay, Mom,” she said. “I will.”

Keep Planting the Seed of God’s Word

KEY VERSE: My Word . . . shall accomplish what I please. Isaiah 55:11

Do you have friends who don’t know Jesus? Have you told them about Him? Have you invited them to church? Don’t give up if they don’t seem interested in going to church with you or hearing about Jesus. God says His Word is like a seed. Every time you talk to your friends about Jesus, you’re planting seeds in their minds. Keep planting, and trust God to make those seeds grow.
The storm’s here,” Pete said as Dad closed the last window. Lightning ripped across the sky, making the lighthouse stand out. Waves crashed against the seashore with a fierce intensity Pete had never seen before.

“Looks like we finished just in time,” Dad said.

Pete ran into his room and grabbed a flashlight. “I’m ready.”

Marsha moved closer to the window. “Careful,” Mom said. “Let’s back away from that glass.” She looked around the room. “At least we still have electricity.” The lights flickered, then the whole house went dark. “Uh-oh,” Mom said.

Pete flipped on the flashlight and handed it to Dad. He smiled. “Perfect timing, son.”

Pete looked out the window. The power was off all over town—except the lighthouse. “I love that old lighthouse. Ships will sure need its light tonight to guide them away from the rocks and into a safe harbor.”

Dad shined the flashlight around the room and held the beam on a wall poster of the Statue of Liberty. “Did you know the Statue of Liberty originally was a lighthouse?”

Pete stared at the poster. “Really?”

“Yes,” Dad said. Lightning flashed and lit up the room. “It guided ships away from rocks and safely into New York Harbor.”

“It pointed them to safety—and freedom,” Mom said. “The Statue of Liberty is a symbol of freedom, welcoming the tired, the poor, and the mistreated to this country so they can get a new life and a fresh start.”

Dad shined the flashlight onto the Bible sitting on the table. “Can either of you tell me how the Bible is like a lighthouse?”

“It shines light on our lives and shows us the danger of sin,” said Pete, “and it points us to Jesus.”

“Very good,” said Dad. “And how is Jesus like a safe harbor?”

Marsha raised her hand. “He welcomes everybody to Him and offers us a new life and a fresh start.”

“Excellent,” Dad said. “See? The Bible is like a lighthouse because it points us to Jesus and the new life He gives.”

Pete grinned. “No wonder I like lighthouses so much!”

THE Lighthouse
READ: PSALM 119:105, 129-133

Have you ever seen a lighthouse shining at night? Ships need lighthouses to protect them from rocky shores and guide them to safety. The Statue of Liberty is a lighthouse known for welcoming people to a new life in America. But no lighthouse shines as brightly as the Bible. It points us to Jesus and the new life and freedom we can have in Him.
Uncle Rob and Aunt Jen are here!” Juliana called when the doorbell rang. She went to let them in. “Hey there, Joey. What have you got?” asked Juliana when she saw that little Joey had brought a toy with him.

“My new jet. Look!” Joey held it out, laughing, but his laughter quickly turned into a cry of fear when Juliana’s dog, Barkley, came running toward them. Joey hid behind his father and screamed. The rest of the family came running to see what was wrong.

“Barkley won’t hurt you,” said Juliana, trying to get Joey to come back. “Look—he’s real gentle. See, Joey?”

Uncle Rob soothed Joey as he hoisted him into his arms. “Joey, look. He won’t hurt you,” Uncle Rob said. He bent down and began to pet the dog. After a few moments, Joey turned to look and finally reached out to touch the dog too. His tears turned into a smile when Barkley gently licked his hand. But he objected when Uncle Rob started to set him back down on the floor.

Juliana’s mother smiled at Joey. “I see you’ve found a nice, safe place to be. Barkley isn’t nearly so scary when you’re in your daddy’s arms, is he?” Joey shook his head.

Uncle Rob smiled. “You’re safe with me, kiddo,” he said. “Wouldn’t it be nice if all of us could feel that safe all the time?”

“Yeah!” said Juliana. “So many kids in my class have been scared lately. My teacher says that’s natural because it’s a scary world.”

“Yes, but remember that everyone who trusts in Jesus is in His arms,” said Dad. “Remember your Bible verse from last week?”

Juliana nodded. “The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”

Dad nodded. “This may be a scary world, but Jesus promises to keep His arms around us. Even though we can’t hide away and be shielded from everything, we know we have eternal life with Jesus and that nothing can happen to us unless it’s God’s will. With Jesus we’re safe, no matter what happens.”

Trust Jesus to care for you

Does news of war and terrorism make you afraid? Do reports of earthquakes, floods, and out-of-control fires scare you? The news is often frightening, and this can seem like a very scary world. If you know Jesus, remember that you have eternal life with Him and nothing can happen without His permission. Trust Him to take care of you, and thank Him for His everlasting arms that hold you and keep you safe.
Jacob and his little brother, Danny, squished and squashed in cool mud with bare toes. "It sounds like the thing at the dentist that sucks your spit!" Danny said gleefully. He pulled his foot out of the mud and stuck it back in with a satisfying squelch.

"Don't remind me," Jacob said. "My appointment's tomorrow. I hate the dentist." He backed up from the big mud hole in their yard and then ran straight toward it. "The dentist can just take this!" he yelled and slipped across the mud on his belly, sliding past Danny. The boys were soon slip-sliding through the mud, pretending to race in the Olympic skeleton event.

Several minutes later, Mom called the boys inside to clean up. Jacob showered first. Then Mom drew a bath for Danny. As the water ran, Mom called, "Jacob, please watch your little brother. I'll be right back."

Watching Danny scoop water and pour it out again gave Jacob an idea. "Watch this, Danny," Jacob said, and he lodged a container under the faucet. Danny stared, fascinated, at the roaring water filling the container and spilling over into the bathtub like a fountain.

"This faucet is kinda like God," Jacob said.

"How?" Danny asked, wide-eyed.

"God fills us with His love, and then we're so full, the love spills right out!" Jacob said. "I learned a verse that says we love because God first loved us. Now I'm going to remember that verse whenever I see a faucet!"

"Does the water squirter at the dentist count as a faucet?" Mom asked, entering with a stack of fresh towels.

Jacob groaned. "Did you have to remind me? I'd finally forgotten."

"Forgetting doesn't fix our problems. What if you remembered what you told Danny about God's overflowing love instead?"

"At the dentist? Mom! God's love is the last thing I think about there! Some people are just impossible to love."

"Maybe you need to get closer to the faucet," Mom suggested. "Jesus showed His love for us when He died on the cross for our sins. The more we receive His love—through His words in the Bible and from His people, the church—the more prepared we are to overflow that love to others." She smiled and ruffled Jacob's hair. "Even the dentist." ♥ PEARL ALLARD

OVERFLOW WITH GOD'S LOVE

**KEY VERSE:** WE LOVE BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US. 1 JOHN 4:19 (CSB)

Who is the impossible-to-love person in your life? The Bible says we love because God first loved us. You can’t love anyone well until you’re filled with God’s love for you. So let Him fill you with His love. Spend time talking to Him and learning more about Him in His Word, and spend time with His people—other Christians. Those are good ways to remind yourself how much He loves you!
Trisha’s stomach clenched nervously, and her eyes filled with tears. “Goodbye, Summerville,” she whispered. “I’ll miss you.” Trisha’s dad had recently gotten a job in another state, and her family was moving.

“Alright, kiddos, time to get in the van,” Dad called. “We have a long ride ahead of us.”

Trisha’s brother, Karl, whooped in excitement. “Yay! This will be an adventure,” he hollered. “I’m glad we’re moving to the coast. We can go to the beach all summer long!”

Trisha was angry. Why was her brother so happy when they were leaving everything they had ever known behind?

Mom noticed Trisha’s expression. “What’s wrong, sweetie?” she asked.

Trisha burst into tears. “I’m so scared. We’re moving so far away from home. What if a hurricane comes and we have to evacuate? What if someone gets bitten by a poisonous snake? What if I don’t make any new friends at school?”

“Trisha, do you know what is in front of every single one of those questions you just asked? Two little words: ‘what if.’ Honey, God doesn’t want us to have a spirit of fear. Unfortunately, we live in a broken world, and bad things do sometimes happen. But we can’t live our lives in a shell because we’re afraid of what-ifs.” Mom gave Trisha a hug. “Remember when Dad and I took you to the amusement park for your birthday? You were afraid to ride the roller coaster because you thought you might fall off or get sick. But you finally tried it, and it was one of your favorite things.”

Trisha smiled. “Yeah, once I got on it, it was really fun!”

“Many times the fear that is in our hearts makes us more miserable than the problem itself,” Mom said. “But you don’t have to live in fear, because Jesus is always with you. He saved you from sin and death, the scariest things of all, and promises to watch over you. Trust Him to help you when you feel afraid.”

Trisha nodded. “Thanks, Mom. I won’t let what-ifs stop me from having a good time anymore!”

DON’T FEAR WHAT-IFs

KEY VERSE: FOR GOD HAS NOT GIVEN US A SPIRIT OF FEAR, BUT ONE OF POWER, LOVE, AND SOUND JUDGMENT. 2 TIMOTHY 1:7 (CSB)

Do you struggle with the fear of what-ifs? Are you afraid of bad things that might happen? It’s easy to let our fears keep us from enjoying life, but that’s not the way Jesus wants us to live. He saved us so we could enjoy the life He’s given us. Enjoy the blessings He’s brought into your life, and trust Him to take care of the what-ifs.
As Tessa and Milo walked out of the hardware store with their father, Milo noticed a cage sitting next to the entrance. “Hey, Dad!” he said. “There’s a dog in that cage!”

“He’s so cute!” Tessa exclaimed. She and Milo stooped to pet the small brown dog while Dad talked to the woman sitting next to the cage.

“What were you and that woman talking about?” Milo asked as they got into the car.

Dad sighed. “She works at the animal shelter, and she told me that dog only has a few more days to live if no one adopts him. The shelter can’t take care of all the stray animals they find, so by bringing them to places where people can see them, they give the animals a better chance of being adopted.”

Milo’s face fell. “You mean—that dog is on death row?”

“In a way, I guess he is,” Dad said. “Though I’m sure someone will take him.”

“But, Dad! What if nobody does?” wailed Tessa. “He’ll be put to sleep! Can’t we take him home with us? He likes us. He was wagging his tail like crazy while we were petting him!”

“Yeah, he needs us, Dad!” Milo said.

“Well . . .” Dad hesitated. “Let’s wait till this evening, and I’ll call the shelter and check on him. And we’ll have to talk it over with your mother.”

When Dad called the animal shelter, he learned the dog was still waiting to be rescued. Since Mom had agreed, they went to pick him up the next day. As they drove home, Tessa looked up at Dad. “It’s kind of like what Jesus did, isn’t it, Dad?”

“What do you mean?” Dad asked.

“When we had devotions yesterday, the verses you read from the Bible said that before Jesus saved us, we were condemned,” Tessa explained. “In a way, that’s like being on death row, isn’t it? But Jesus died on the cross to take our punishment. When we put our trust in Him, He rescued us—kind of like how we rescued this dog.”

Dad smiled. “Good thinking, Tessa.”

Milo laughed as the dog licked his face. “He’ll be a good reminder of how we’ve been rescued by Jesus!”

SHERRY L. KUYT

RESCUED (PART 1)
READ: JOHN 3:14-18

JESUS RESCUES SINNERS

KEY VERSE: WHOEVER BELIEVES IN [JESUS] IS NOT CONDEMNED. JOHN 3:18 (NIV)

Have you trusted Jesus as your Savior? If not, the Bible says you’re condemned. But the good news is that God did something to rescue you. He sent His only Son, Jesus, to take the punishment you deserve for your sin. If you put your trust in Him, you’ll no longer be condemned, and He’ll give you a new life. Trust Him today! (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 102.)
When Milo and Tessa came home with their new dog, Mom lined a box with an old, soft blanket to make a bed for him. “Come here, Little Guy,” Milo called gently. “That’s what Tessa and I are naming him—Little Guy.” The dog trotted across the floor and sniffed at his new bed. Then he curled up in it and shut his eyes.

“He must be tired—it’s been quite a day for him,” Mom said. “We’ll let him sleep while we have lunch.”

When they finished eating, Milo and Tessa returned to their new pet. “I bet Little Guy is hungry,” said Milo. “What can we feed him?”

“We’ll have to get dog food,” said Mom, “but for now, you can give him some scraps from the chicken we had for supper last night. Just make sure you don’t give him any bones.”

Tessa and Milo quickly prepared a plate of scraps and set it on the floor. Little Guy began to eat greedily. “Oh—there’s still a piece of bone in there!” exclaimed Tessa.

“Take it away from him, or it might get caught in his throat,” said Dad.

As Milo reached out to take the bone, Little Guy growled and snapped at his hand. “Ow!” yelled Milo. “He nipped me! I was only trying to help him!”

Dad managed to get the bone, while Mom looked at Milo’s hand.

“Trust us, Little Guy,” said Milo, patting the dog’s head a bit later. “We won’t hurt you or take good things away from you. Why would we do that after all we did to save your life and make you happy?”

Dad smiled. “Little Guy reminded us that we need Jesus to rescue us, and now he’s reminding me of Christians—like me. Your dog hasn’t yet learned to trust you completely, and sometimes I don’t trust God completely. I act like I think He might take something I love away from me or that He wants to make me unhappy when I go through hard times.”

Mom nodded. “We all need to remember that God rescued us in the first place. That should be proof enough that He wants only what’s best for us!”

Tessa smiled. “Little Guy will help us remember that.”

SHERRY L. KUYT

GOD CAN BE TRUSTED

KEY VERSE: HE WHO DID NOT SPARE HIS OWN SON . . . SHALL HE NOT WITH HIM ALSO FREELY GIVE US ALL THINGS? ROMANS 8:32

Are you a Christian who’s afraid to trust God completely? Don’t be! He sent His own Son to save you. You can trust Him to do what’s best in your life. That doesn’t mean everything will always be great or that you won’t face difficult circumstances, but you can trust God to use them for your good. Always remember that He’s with you and wants the best for you.
You look just like your father when you do that,” Grandma told Lance. “When I do what?” asked Lance.

“When you laugh the way you just did,” Grandma answered. “You look and sound so much like him.”

“I do?” Lance jumped up and raced to the bathroom to gaze into the mirror. He studied his reflection from every angle and tried repeating the laugh that had caught his grandmother’s attention.

“It doesn’t work,” he said when he returned a few moments later. “I can’t make myself laugh like that. Besides, even when I’m not laughing, people always say I look like Dad.”

“You do,” said Grandma, “but when you do certain things, the resemblance is even stronger.” She smiled as she sat down on the sofa. “All of us should look like our Father.”

“Hey!” Lance’s sister, Sage, frowned. “Everybody says I look like Mom. What’s wrong with that?”

Grandma laughed. “That’s good too, but I was thinking about our heavenly Father. The Bible says we’re made in God’s image, but we look even more like Him when we do certain things.”

“Like when we do good stuff?” asked Sage.

“And when we’re nice to everybody and helpful?” Lance added.

“Exactly,” said Grandma. “Our resemblance to our heavenly Father is stronger when we follow the example of His Son, Jesus, who is the embodiment of God’s character. When we trust Him to save us from sin, the Holy Spirit works in our lives to make us holy so others can see that we belong to God. He helps us love and treat others the way Jesus did.”

Lance looked at his sister. “Don’t worry, Sage. I think you look like both Mom and our heavenly Father.” Sage gave Lance a surprised glance, and he laughed.

“There,” said Grandma, “you did it again!”

“Did what?” asked Lance.

“You looked just like your father.”

Lance grinned. “Which one, Grandma? God or Dad?”

Grandma’s eyes twinkled. “Both.”

Would anyone say you look like your Father—your heavenly Father, that is? You resemble Him when you follow the example of His Son, Jesus. If you’re a Christian, the Holy Spirit is working in your life to help you treat others with the love and kindness Jesus showed everyone. What can you do today to show others that you are a child of God?

**SHOW THAT YOU ARE GOD’S CHILD**

**KEY VERSE:** BUT JUST AS HE WHO CALLED YOU IS HOLY, SO BE HOLY IN ALL YOU DO; FOR IT IS WRITTEN: “BE HOLY, BECAUSE I AM HOLY.” 1 PETER 1:15-16 (NIV)
Cooper lay on his stomach in the sand and stared at the sandcastle he and his dad had just built. Large towers were at each corner, and they were joined by four wide walls. “I’m naming this Fort Sandcastle,” Cooper announced. He turned to his father. “How soon will the ocean wash it away?”

Dad turned his head to check the approaching tide. “The water probably won’t reach our castle until after we’ve left to go home.”

“Good.” Cooper sat up and crossed his legs. “Wouldn’t it be cool if we had castle walls around our house?” Dad opened his mouth to answer, but Cooper kept on talking. “We could have a tower at each corner so we could see people coming long before they got there. And we’d let down a bridge only if we knew it was safe. Nobody could get in unless they knew the secret password!”

Dad smiled and leaned on his elbow in the sand. “You know, Cooper, we do have a strong tower.”

Cooper frowned. “Aw, Dad, we do not. Where would we have a tower?”

Dad rolled over onto his back and grinned at Cooper. “Of course, there isn’t a tower we can see, but the Bible refers to God as our strong tower. He sees all that’s coming our way and allows only what is good for us. The Bible also says He shelters and protects us. No matter what we face in life, we know we’re safe because we’ve been saved by Jesus, and He’s always with us. That sounds a lot like the protection that comes from the walls of a fort or a castle, don’t you think?”

Cooper thought about it. “Well, okay, but I’d still like to live in a castle with towers and walls that I can see.”

Dad laughed. “Yeah, me too,” he said and lunged at Cooper. “Then I could throw you in the dungeon when you don’t eat your vegetables!”

BOB HOSTETLER

**KEY VERSE**

FOR YOU HAVE BEEN A SHELTER FOR ME, A STRONG TOWER FROM THE ENEMY. PSALM 61:3

Would you like to live in a castle with towers and walls? The Bible says that if you’re a Christian, God is your strong tower. He protects you and keeps you safe. Jesus saved you from the enemy by dying for your sins on the cross, and He knows what’s ahead and promises to work all of it out for your good. Trust Him to care for you.
Luke sat in the back seat of the car, pouting. When Mom asked why he seemed so unhappy, his sister, Sydney, laughed. “He’s mad because Dad wouldn’t let him buy that junk at the gift shop.”

Luke scowled. “It wasn’t junk. I never get to buy anything. Besides, we’ve been on vacation four days already, and I’m tired of always sitting here in the back seat with you.”

“Well, I’m tired of sitting back here with you too,” Sydney grumbled. “It’s so hot, and you know I get carsick sometimes.”

Dad and Mom exchanged glances. Sydney and Luke had been complaining most of the morning. Then Mom’s eyes twinkled. “Well, what about me? That mattress in our motel last night was so hard I couldn’t sleep, and the eggs I got for breakfast were cold and overdone.”

“You think you’ve got it bad?” said Dad. “This trip is costing me a bundle! I work hard to make money so we can take trips like this, but no one seems to appreciate it very much!”

The children stared at them. It sure seemed strange to hear their parents whining!

Dad turned and looked at Luke and Sydney, and Mom glanced back at them in the rearview mirror. Both parents laughed at the expressions on the kids’ faces. “We thought we’d get in on the pity party,” said Dad.


“That’s what you call it when people feel so sorry for themselves they don’t even want to be cheered up,” said Mom. She pulled into a scenic turnoff. “Wow! Look at that magnificent view,” she said. “We were so busy with our pity party we forgot to notice the good things around us.”

Dad nodded. “I think we should spend the next few minutes thinking of things we’re thankful for. God has done so many great things for us. A praise party is much more fun than a pity party any day! What do you say?”

“I say let’s turn our pity into praise,” said Sydney.

“Yeah,” said Luke. “Maybe we can turn our whole vacation into one big, powerful praise party!”

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**THE PITY PARTY**  
**READ: PSALM 103:1-5, 10-14**

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**TURN PITY INTO PRAISE**

**KEY VERSE:**  
**LET ALL THAT I AM PRAISE THE LORD; MAY I NEVER FORGET THE GOOD THINGS HE DOES FOR ME.**  
**PSALM 103:2 (NLT)**

Have you had a praise party lately? Or are you too busy throwing a pity party? When you look for reasons to complain and feel sorry for yourself, your attitude blinds you to God’s many blessings—like His beautiful creation, His great love for you, and the gift of His Son, Jesus. Sometimes things you don’t like will happen, but don’t let them keep you from being thankful for all God has given you. Turn your pity party into praise.
Melanie.” Andréas tiptoed to the doorway of the living room where his sister stood. “What are you doing up?”

Melanie nodded toward their parents, who were talking urgently in low voices. The two listened as rapid Spanish words tumbled out of Mamá’s mouth. Papá shook his head. “No, Maria.” He took Mamá’s hand. “I’m not sure what will happen, but there are two things we can do—trust God and pray.” Mamá sighed and nodded.

“What’s going on?” Andréas asked softly.

Melanie shrugged. Just then Andréas sneezed loudly, startling Melanie and their parents. Papá and Mamá hurried toward them.

“What are you two doing? You should be in bed!”

“I’m sorry, Mamá, but…what’s wrong? You sound so anxious,” Melanie said.

Mamá and Papá glanced at each other. “Well, come into the living room and we’ll explain.”

They all traipsed into the living room, and Papá motioned for them to have a seat. Mamá gave him an encouraging nod, and he began. “Well, kids, we didn’t want you to worry, but…” He paused and sighed. “I lost my job.”

“A man at work who was jealous of your father’s position lied about him,” Mamá added.

Andréas and Melanie looked at each other, their brown eyes wide. “But what will happen to us?” Melanie asked.

“And what about the man who lied? Can’t your boss make it right?” Andréas asked angrily.

Papá shook his head. “This is in God’s hands. I don’t know why He allowed this to happen, but I know He will work it out for our good. We must pray and trust Him.”

“Papá, can we pray right now?” Melanie asked.

“Yes, Melanie, you’re right. We should. And we should pray for the man who lied about me too.”

They all bowed their heads and prayed that Papá would find a job soon, and that Jesus would help them show His forgiveness to those who hurt them. Above all, they asked Him to help them remember to trust Him and not be afraid. ❤️  ADELYN NEWTON

TRUST GOD

KEY VERSE: IN GOD I TRUST; I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT CAN MERE HUMANS DO TO ME?  PSALM 56:11 (CSB)

Are you facing something hard? Do you feel alone or afraid? Remember, God promises to be our refuge. All you have to do is trust Him! He knows exactly what you’re feeling right now, and He will be with you and guide you. He loves you and will always do what’s best for you, even when it hurts. Trust Him to help you in every situation.
I’m never going to invite José to church again,” Declan told his dad while they were out walking the dog. He threw a stick. “Fetch, Rusty! Go get it!” he called, and his dog bounded after the stick.

“Why won’t you invite José again?” Dad asked. “Because I’ve invited him three times already, and he always says no.”

Declan took the stick from Rusty and tossed it again.

Dad was quiet for a moment. “Have you ever heard of the word steadfast, Declan?”

“No. What does that mean?” asked Declan.

“It means to stand firm. In the Bible, the early Christians are described as being steadfast. Perhaps it’s the reason many people were brought into the church. Christians today need to be steadfast too.” Dad watched Rusty dash after another stick Declan threw out. “Think about the way you trained Rusty, for example. How long did it take you to teach him to fetch? Just one try? Three? Or even more?”

“Way more than that, Dad,” said Declan.

Dad nodded. “And how long has it been since you accepted Jesus as your Savior?”

Declan looked up at his father in surprise. “I don’t know exactly. About a year, I guess.”

“Well, before that, how often did you hear the gospel at church or from Mom and me?”

Declan shrugged. “I heard it over and over. It seems like I’ve known it all my life.” He hesitated. If people told me about Jesus only three times and then quit, maybe I wouldn’t be a Christian now, he thought.

“I guess I’m giving up on José too soon,” Declan admitted. “I should keep inviting him and be patient, like I was with Rusty and like you were with me.”

“Good idea,” said Dad. “But first, keep being a good friend to him and showing Him God’s love and what He means to you. Then, one day, he might show interest in coming to church. But even if he doesn’t, be patient, and keep praying for him. We need to be patient with others the way Jesus is with us. He’ll help you be a witness to His love and grace and tell others about Him, even when you don’t see any results.”

BE A STEADFAST WITNESS

Do you know people who need Jesus? Have you told them what He’s done for you? Do you consistently show them His love in your words and actions? Stand firm in witnessing and praying for your friends and family. Even if you don’t see results right away—or ever—you never know how God might use your influence to bring someone to Him. Be a steadfast witness, and leave the results to the Lord.
I just created a quiz to post on my social media page,” Payton’s uncle told him. “Want to give it a try?”

“Sure,” said Payton. He took Uncle Tim’s phone and looked at the screen: \textit{Take this quiz to see if you will go to heaven.}

\textbf{First question: Have you trusted Jesus as your Lord and Savior?}

Payton felt uncomfortable. Uncle Tim often talked to him about trusting Jesus. After a moment’s hesitation, he hit the “No” button.

Then the quiz went through a series of questions about church attendance, grades, community projects, and gifts to charities. \textit{Good! I’ve done most of these things,} Payton thought, and by the end of the quiz, he was satisfied with his answers. \textit{I’ve done lots of good stuff,} he thought. \textit{I should get a pretty high score.}

A message popped up on the screen: \textit{Your quiz score is 0. Your score indicates that you will not go to heaven. See Romans 3:23 for details.}

“What! My score is 0?” Payton couldn’t believe it. He pressed the verse link and read, “\textit{For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.}”

Payton angrily put down the phone. “I had good answers for most of those questions!” he told his uncle. “How can your quiz tell me I’m not going to heaven?”

“It’s important to know that this is God’s quiz and His answer, not mine,” Uncle Tim told him. “If you could answer yes to the first question, it would tell you your score was too high to calculate and point you to Romans 6:23, which says, ‘For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.’”

“You mean, no matter how I answered the other questions, it wouldn’t have made any difference when I got to the end?” Payton asked.

“None at all,” said Uncle Tim. “I set it up that way because the Bible says trusting in Jesus is the only way a person can be saved from sin and have eternal life.”

Payton sighed. “You’ve told me that before, but I still thought going to church and doing good things helped me get to heaven. Maybe you’d better explain it to me again.”

\textbf{TRUST JESUS AS YOUR SAVIOR}

\textbf{KEY VERSE:} \textit{Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them. John 3:36 (NIV)}

Would you pass God’s quiz? People may tell you that the good things you do determine whether or not you’ll go to heaven, but that’s not what God says. He says the only way to have eternal life is through His Son, Jesus Christ. Do you trust Jesus as your Savior? The answer to that question is the important one. The only way to get it right is to accept His free gift of salvation. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 102.)
How was your birthday, honey?” asked Dad as he opened the car door. “It was great!” said Madeline as she wiggled into her seat. “I got a doll from Mom. She’ll be best friends with the doll you gave me. I can’t wait for them to play together.”

“That’s great!” Dad said. “I bet Addison will be excited to play with them too.”

“Uh-huh,” said Madeline. She sighed and looked out the car window, thinking about her stepsister, Addison. Her dad recently remarried someone named Jessica, and Addison was her daughter. Madeline was no longer an only child.

When Dad pulled into the driveway, Madeline rushed up the steps of their garage, took off her shoes, and eagerly ran to her room to play.

A few minutes later, Addison walked in. “Can I play with you?” she asked. “No!” said Madeline sternly. Addison’s face welled up, and she stormed out of the room in tears.

Shortly after, Madeline heard footsteps approaching. “Hi, Dad,” she said nervously as she stared at her floor.

“Let’s have a seat on your bed,” said Dad. Madeline sat beside him, her legs dangling over the side. “Addison told Jessica and me that you wouldn’t let her play with you,” Dad said. “I came up here to understand why.”

“Dad, they’re my dolls! Why do I have to share?”

“Do you remember the greatest commandment Jesus taught us?” Dad asked. “To love God with all your heart and to love your neighbor as yourself. We can’t do one without doing the other, and I know you love God because you trust in Jesus. That means you need to love your neighbor too.”

“But Addison isn’t my neighbor,” said Madeline. “She’s my stepsister!”

“Sweetie, when Jesus says to love your neighbor, He’s referring to everyone in your life, including your stepsister. You said on the ride home that you wanted your dolls to be best friends. Well, that’s how God feels about us. He wants Christians to love and support one another. Did you ever think that maybe He brought Addison into your life so the two of you could be friends?”

“I guess not,” Madeline admitted. “Maybe if I let Addison play with my dolls, we can be friends too.”

Amber Metz

Love One Another

**Key Verse:** A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. John 13:34 (NIV)

Is there someone you’re having a hard time loving? Maybe that person came into your life because of a big change in your family and you’re having trouble adjusting. Remember that Jesus loves you and will help you through any changes or difficult situations you face and that each person He puts in your life is someone He wants you to love. Love others the way He has loved you.
Mom, can Julian and I go to Ethan’s house?” asked Noah one day. “He invited us to come swim in his pool.” Mom agreed, so the boys ran off to get their swimsuits. Soon they were ready to leave.

“Bye, boys,” said Mom. “Be sure to thank Ethan for the invitation. And be good!”

“We will,” they promised.

Their sister, Piper, laughed. “Easy to say, but impossible for the two of you. Being good is not included among your talents.”

After the boys had ridden away on their bikes, Piper had a question for her mother. “I know that when you tell us to be good, you’re telling us to behave ourselves wherever we are, but people really aren’t good, are they? Nobody is good—except God, right? I read a verse in my Bible this morning that says, ‘There is no one who does good, not even one.’”

“Well, let’s think about that verse,” said Mom. “It’s pointing out that everyone is a sinner. Nobody is good enough to get to heaven based on their own actions. We all need to receive Jesus and His goodness—His righteousness—to have eternal life. When we trust in Him to save us from sin, He makes us new people. Ephesians 2:10 says we’re ‘created in Christ Jesus to do good works.’ In other words, Jesus gives us the ability to do good things.”

“I learned that verse in church last year,” said Piper. “I didn’t think of that.”

“When we know Jesus as our Savior, He makes us good and helps us do good things,” Mom continued. “He helps us do things that reflect His goodness and show His love to others.”

Just then, Piper’s phone buzzed, and Piper looked at the screen. “It’s a text from Angela,” she said. “She wants to know if I can go with her and her mom to the ice cream shop. Can I go?”

“Sure, that’s fine,” said Mom. She grinned. “Be good!”

Piper grinned back. “I will!” she promised. “I’ll be very good!”

HAZEL W. MARETT

JESUS MAKES US GOOD

KEY VERSE: WE ARE GOD’S HANDIWORK, CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS TO DO GOOD WORKS. EPHESIANS 2:10 (NIV)

Do you do a lot of good things? You can’t earn your way to heaven by doing good deeds. God says the only way to be saved and have eternal life is through His Son, Jesus. If you know Jesus as your Savior, He’s made you a new person who can show His love and goodness to others. You can always be good because you trust in Him.
Hi, Mr. Jarvis,” said Shane as he entered the elderly man’s room. His mother, a home health nurse, occasionally brought him and his little sister, Kimmi, with her to visit while she worked. “What puzzle are we putting together today?”

Mr. Jarvis smiled. “Well, young man, bring over my lap table and I’ll show you.” He picked up the small box on his nightstand.

“It doesn’t have a picture on it to go by,” Shane said.

“It’s more fun that way,” replied Mr. Jarvis. “We can watch the scene take shape as we put all the pieces together.”

Shane and Kimmi nested out a spot for themselves on the bed and started helping with the puzzle. They were nearly done when Kimmi suddenly snatched up the three remaining pieces and scurried to the other side of the room, giggling proudly.

“Come back here with those,” Shane said. “We can’t finish the puzzle and see what the picture is without them.”

“Bring the puzzle pieces over, Kimmi,” Mr. Jarvis said gently, “and we’ll let you put in the last one.” But Kimmi shook her head and sat down in the corner.

“You know, this kind of reminds me of the body of Christ,” said Mr. Jarvis. “Even though all these pieces belong to the same puzzle, they each have something different to offer to the picture as a whole.”

“How’s that like the body of Christ?” asked Shane.

“God’s Spirit indwells those who trust in Jesus, giving each person in His church gifts that are unique and special to them,” answered Mr. Jarvis. “Only we can offer and share what our piece is, and to hoard it is selfish. Christ’s body is incomplete without it, and we keep others from being able to enjoy the gifts God has given us that help others see who He is.”

Slowly Kimmi returned and opened her hands. Mr. Jarvis divided the leftover pieces between the three of them, and they each took turns adding their piece to the puzzle.

“It’s a big fish jumping out of the water!” Shane exclaimed. He smiled, then cocked his head. “I wonder if I’m sharing my piece of God’s picture with others.”

“You sure are,” Mr. Jarvis said with a smile. “Every time you kiddos walk through that door.”

Are you sharing the gifts God has given you with others? Wouldn’t you feel cheated if someone else wasn’t sharing their piece of God’s picture with you? He gave us our talents and abilities so others in Christ’s body—the church—could experience them and see His Spirit at work. Don’t keep your gifts to yourself—use them to give others a fuller picture of who God is.
Malia’s Sunday school teacher held up a vase. “I’m taking an evening pottery class,” Mrs. Jordan told the girls, “and I thought you might like to see the vase I molded a few days ago. It’s dry enough to handle now, so it’s ready to be scraped and rubbed and cleaned. Then it will be put into the kiln—that’s a kind of oven that gets as hot as fire.” The class watched as their teacher worked on the piece of pottery. She used a knife and sandpaper to scrape and smooth the vase. Finally, she rubbed it with a soft sponge.

“That’s a lot of work!” said Malia.

Mrs. Jordan smiled. “Yes, and this is just the beginning. After the vase has gone through one firing, a glaze will be applied. Then it will be put into the kiln again.” She held up the vase. “I brought this today because in our lesson, the Bible compares God to a potter and the nation of Israel to clay. We can apply that illustration to our lives as well.”

Malia raised her hand. “You did a lot of scraping on that vase, and it has to go in the hot kiln. Do Christians have to go through stuff like that too?”

Mrs. Jordan nodded. “Difficult circumstances—times of sickness or sorrow or disappointment—can be compared to the scraping and smoothing, and to the firing in the hot kiln too.”

“That doesn’t sound very fun,” one of the girls protested.

“I know, and I’m glad the Christian life is not all hardship,” Mrs. Jordan said. “But everyone, including Christians, faces problems and difficulties. When they come, we need to be willing to learn from them. God often uses hardships to help us get rid of sinful habits and attitudes and learn to depend on Him. He has a purpose for allowing hard things.” Mrs. Jordan smiled as she held up the vase again. “I’m new at this craft, but even so, this vase will look much better when it’s finished. But God is the Master Potter. He knows just what we need. He won’t scrape or polish any more than necessary, and when He’s finished, the results will be beautiful.”

TRUST GOD AS HE MOLDS YOU

KEY VERSE: WE ARE THE CLAY, YOU [GOD] ARE THE POTTER; WE ARE ALL THE WORK OF YOUR HAND. ISAIAH 64:8 (NIV)

Are you willing to let God teach you as He molds you? Will you trust Him through all the experiences He allows in your life? In both good times and in difficult ones, remember that God is the Master Potter. He is working in your life because He cares for you. Trust Him to help you through hard times and to make you more like Him.
Ready or not, here I come!” Jayna announced loudly from the back porch. “Ta-da!”

“Wait! We’re not ready!” her brother Patrick teased as he covered his eyes.

Moses, her younger brother, snickered. “What is that?” he asked, pointing to the bright blue shower cap perched on top of her head.

Jayna stuck her nose up in the air. “It’s a shower cap to keep out all the spiders and other yucky bugs from getting in my hair when we clean out the shed.”

“That’s actually not a bad idea,” Uncle Lee said, walking toward them wearing a baseball cap.

“You want us to wear shower caps too?” Moses asked with wide eyes.

Uncle Lee laughed. “Well, it wouldn’t hurt. But I meant it’s not a bad idea to get prepared for what we’re about to do—tackle some pretty dirty stuff inside that shed. What do you think we could do before we start?”

Patrick looked down at his bare feet and gave a sheepish grin. “I guess I should put some shoes on.”

Moses scratched his head. “Do you have a hat I can borrow, Uncle Lee? I’m getting itchy just thinking about all those bugs.”

As they walked to the shed, Uncle Lee said thoughtfully, “This reminds me of how important it is to make sure we’re getting ready spiritually to face dirty stuff.”

“What do you mean?” Patrick asked.

“Ephesians 6 talks about putting on the whole armor of God so we can be ready and alert to stand against the devil’s tricks. Satan tries to discourage Christians and get them to do things that are wrong. You can get prepared spiritually by remembering that you belong to Jesus. He saved you from sin and gives you the power to resist temptation. I find that when I read my Bible and pray, I’m reminded of that truth and am more alert and ready to stand up to temptation.”

“Remember that I belong to Jesus and stay alert,” Moses repeated. “Got it. I think I can do that . . . as long as I don’t have to wear a shower cap,” he added with a grin.

“You said it!” Patrick agreed as they high-fived.

Jayna just smiled and patted her head. “You can borrow mine anytime.”

KELLY HOPE

PREPARE YOURSELF SPIRITUALLY

KEY VERSE: PUT ON THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD SO THAT YOU CAN TAKE YOUR STAND AGAINST THE DEVIL’S SCHEMES. EPHESIANS 6:11 (NIV)

Did you know that it’s important to protect yourself against Satan? You can do that by putting on the armor of God. As you read your Bible, it will help you remember what Jesus has done for you, and as you pray, it will help you know that He is always with you and gives you strength. Stay alert and trust Him to help you do what is right.
It’s not my turn to take out the trash. Do it yourself!” José yelled at his brother as he slammed the door and stomped down the steps. He looked up to see Kegan, his new neighbor, leaning against the gate and watching him.

“Hi, José. Why are you always yelling?” Kegan asked.

José scowled. “None of your business.”

Kegan pointed at the shirt José was wearing. “I’m a King’s kid,” he read. “What does that mean? Your dad’s a plumber.”

“It’s talking about God,” said José. “I’m a child of God—a Christian.” He picked up his bat and glove. “I’m going to the park to play ball. You want to come?”


“Really? Okay! If the other guys agree, you can try it,” said José.

When the game began, Kegan pitched. The first three batters walked, and José began to doubt Kegan’s pitching ability. At the end of the second inning, they were behind six to one, and they replaced Kegan with their usual pitcher.

Back home after the game, José told his mom about Kegan. “He’s just a bunch of talk. He wouldn’t know a good pitcher if he saw one—and I told him so too,” José said in disgust.

Mom raised her brows. “I wonder if he’s thinking you and he are two of a kind.”

“Why would he think that?” asked José.

“I heard you talking to Kegan this afternoon, José,” said Mom. “I heard him ask why you yell a lot, and he asked about your shirt. I also heard your response. You told him you’re God’s child.”

José shrugged. “So? That’s good, isn’t it?”

“Kegan claimed to be a pitcher, but you think he’s just a bunch of talk. You say you’re a Christian, but I wonder if he thinks you’re just a bunch of talk too.” José looked a bit startled. “It’s fine to let others know you’re a child of God through the words on your T-shirt,” Mom said, “but you need to be more than a T-shirt Christian. Your actions need to match those words.”

José nodded. “I guess I’d better go apologize to Kegan.”

BARBARA J. WESTBERG

WITNESS THROUGH WORDS AND ACTIONS

KEY VERSE: IF YOU ARE WISE AND UNDERSTAND GOD’S WAYS, PROVE IT BY LIVING AN HONORABLE LIFE. JAMES 3:13 (NLT)

Do your actions match your words? It’s great to speak up and tell others you’re a Christian. That’s an important part of witnessing for Jesus. But the way you act is equally important. Letting people know you belong to Jesus involves more than T-shirt advertising. Let others see His love and grace in everything you do.