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I have to draw a flower for art class this weekend,” Kezi told her mom. “I think I’ll go draw one of the purple ones growing on the other side of Mr. Preston’s fence.” Mr. Preston was a neighbor the family knew well who had a small farm down the road.

“Okay,” said Mom. “But make sure you latch the gate when you’re done. Mr. Preston doesn’t want Annabelle getting out.” Annabelle was Mr. Preston’s rambunctious goat.

Kezi nodded, got a pad and pencil, and went outside. She opened the gate to Mr. Preston’s yard, sat down next to a clump of purple flowers, and began sketching. Once she was satisfied with her drawing, she walked back out the gate and returned home.

Sometime later, Kezi looked out her window and saw Annabelle running across the road. Oh no! she thought. I forgot to make sure Mr. Preston’s gate was tightly latched! That silly goat probably butted her head against it and got out.

Kezi was about to run outside after the goat, but just then she saw Mr. Preston walk up to the house. He rang the bell several times. Kezi darted back into her room. Mom must be in the backyard working in the garden, she thought with relief. She’s not answering the door. Kezi peeked out the window and saw Mr. Preston turn to leave. But then her dad’s car pulled into the driveway. He and Mr. Preston talked a few minutes, and then Mr. Preston returned home.

Soon Kezi was ringing Mr. Preston’s doorbell—Dad had sent her right over to apologize.

Back home, Kezi told her parents what had happened. “Mr. Preston had already gotten Annabelle back by the time I got there—he saw her running by and held out her favorite treat, carrots. He said if I had opened the door and apologized when he came over, he would have forgiven me right away.” Kezi smiled. “That sounds a lot like what Jesus does for us. Jesus wants to forgive people, but first they must see their need for Him and invite Him into their lives.”

“That’s right,” said Dad. “There’s a Bible verse about that—‘Here I am!’ Jesus says, ‘I stand at the door and knock.’”

INVITE JESUS INTO YOUR LIFE

KEY VERSE: HERE I AM! I STAND AT THE DOOR AND KNOCK. IF ANYONE HEARS MY VOICE AND OPENS THE DOOR, I WILL COME IN. REVELATION 3:20 (NIV)

Have you invited Jesus into your life? Have you admitted that you’re a sinner and need His forgiveness? Or are you trying to hide your sin? Jesus knows all about it, and He wants to forgive you. But first you must admit you’re a sinner and trust in Him. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 102.)
Felipe’s fingers raced across his tablet as he sat on the subway. His mom and sister sat behind him going over Adela’s Bible verse for church. Every afternoon, their mom met them at school to ride home with them. And every day, Felipe played the same video game.

“Auggghhh!” Felipe shouted out in frustration as he lost again.

“Shh! I’m trying to concentrate!” barked Adela.

The subway car jerked suddenly, and Felipe’s tablet fell onto the floor. It slid and knocked the cane of an older woman who looked rather lonely.

“I’m sorry,” Felipe said to the older passenger. He stared at her wrinkled skin and dark, almost sad, eyes.

“That’s all right, dear,” the woman replied, a small smile crossing her chapped lips.

That night, Felipe couldn’t get the older woman on the subway out of his mind. He kept on wondering about her. To his surprise, he began to see her on the subway after school a lot. He wondered how long she had been riding with them. Days? Weeks? Months? And he never even noticed her.

One afternoon on their subway ride home, Felipe reached into his bag for his tablet. Once again, he noticed the elderly woman sitting with her cane in one hand and a book in the other. Let us love one another, Felipe thought, remembering the Bible verse from his class at church the week before.

“Mom, can I go talk to her?” asked Felipe, motioning to the woman. Mom smiled and nodded.

“Hello,” said Felipe as he sat down next to the woman. “My name is Felipe.”

“Hello, young man,” said the woman, smiling. “My name is Ms. Ethel. Thank you for saying hello.”

Felipe smiled back and noticed that the book in her hand was a Bible. “Are you reading your Bible?”

“Well, I forgot my glasses, so I can’t see the words today,” replied Ms. Ethel. “I could read it for you. Mom, is that okay?”

“Definitely,” Mom said with a smile.

From then on, Felipe read the Bible to Ms. Ethel on the subway ride home every afternoon. And after a while, he forgot all about his video game.

Do you ever get caught up in a video game, book, or other activity and ignore those around you? God didn’t ignore us. He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins so we could be saved. What a gift of selfless love! It’s okay to do things you enjoy, but don’t forget to stop and look around you. Who can you show God’s love to today?
After shopping at the mall, Cora and her mother headed for the parking lot and climbed into their car. “What’s the matter with the car?” asked Cora in alarm as her mother tried to start it. There was a slight grinding sound, and then silence.

“I don’t know,” Mom said, checking over everything on the panel. Suddenly she spotted it—the switch for the headlights was turned on. “Oh no!” she exclaimed. “The headlights didn’t come on automatically this morning when I thought they should, so I turned them on by hand and forgot to turn them off. Now the battery is dead.”

After asking a few people in the parking lot, Mom found a man with jumper cables in his car who helped them, and soon the car was running. “If you’re not going very far, you might want to stop at a service station and get a quick charge,” the man suggested.

“What’s a quick charge?” asked Cora as they started home. “And why does it matter if we’re not going very far?”

“When a car is running, it charges the battery, so the longer the car runs, the more the battery gets charged up,” Mom explained. “If the battery has been run down like ours was, you need to run the car for quite a while to completely recharge the battery. If you can’t run it long enough, the battery can be hooked up to a charger instead. That’s called a quick charge because it works faster than running the car for a long time.”

That evening, Cora told her dad all about their car trouble and the quick charge they had needed. “The man at the service station said the battery should be okay now,” she told him.

“Good,” said Dad. He reached for his Bible. “It’s time for us to get charged up again too.” He smiled when Cora looked at him curiously. “Reading the Bible is sort of like getting a charge. Focusing on all our daily activities and problems can sometimes make us feel run down. Reading God’s Word helps us get to know Jesus better and remember all He’s done for us. It reminds us that we need to rely on Him for the power we need to obey and serve Him every day.”

READ THE BIBLE

KEY VERSE: ALL SCRIPTURE IS INSPIRED BY GOD AND IS USEFUL TO TEACH US WHAT IS TRUE . . . GOD USES IT TO PREPARE AND EQUIP HIS PEOPLE TO DO EVERY GOOD WORK. 2 TIMOTHY 3:16–17 (NLT)

Do you take time to read God’s Word each day? The Bible reminds us how much Jesus loves us and His promise to be with us and help us in everything we face. It gives us wisdom and teaches us who God is and how He helps us live the way He wants us to. Going about our daily lives can sometimes make us feel run down. Charge up every day by reading God’s Word and spending time with Him.
Hey, Mom! Look at this weird-looking animal!” exclaimed Manuel as he peered over the fence of the city zoo. He and his mom were enjoying walking through the different zoo exhibits and learning neat facts about animals Manuel had never seen before.

“That’s an aardvark,” said Mom.

“An aardvark! I think it should be named a nosevark!” Manuel said with a laugh. “Look at the size of its nose! And it has short legs and big ears. I wonder why God made it look like that?”

“Well, let’s read about it.” Mom stepped up to a big sign explaining all about the aardvark. “This says aardvarks live in the African grasslands. They are nocturnal, so they sleep in an underground burrow during the day and hunt their favorite food at night—ants! They use their long noses to sniff out anthills and their long sticky tongues to search for the ants. It says here that their short legs keep their bodies low to the ground so they can easily find any signs of anthills, and they have big ears so they can listen for danger.” Mom chuckled. “I’d say God gave the aardvark everything it needs to be a great ant hunter, even if it does look a little odd. People are like that too.”

“You mean some people have long noses like aardvarks?” asked Manuel.

“No, silly. I mean that God has given each person special gifts and abilities so they can glorify Him and show His love to others in their own unique way,” explained Mom. “When I was a girl, my classmates made fun of me for being so quiet. But now as a nurse, my patients say that my quiet, caring personality makes them feel calm and comfortable.”

Manuel thought for a minute. “There’s this kid in my class, Ben, who is really smart in math and is always reading big books about science stuff. Kids make fun of him for being different. He kind of makes me think of the aardvark—a little odd, but I guess God made him that way for a reason.”

Mom smiled. “Jesus wants us to appreciate the gifts and talents of others and to love them the way He does. Maybe you could help Ben feel special instead of odd.”

Did you know God gives each of us special gifts and abilities? Some of us can sing and dance or play baseball really well. Others are good at math or making people feel welcome. Rather than making fun of people for being different from you, Jesus wants you to appreciate the skills and talents He’s given others and use the abilities He’s given you to show them His love.
Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others.

1 Peter 4:10
(NIV)

Fun fact: Aardvarks love to dig! Draw some dirt mounds above.
Dad!” Declan called from upstairs. “Will you settle an argument for us?”
“I’ll help if I can,” Dad called back. “What’s the problem?”
Declan and his brother Grady came thumping down the stairs. “Well, Grady thinks toads have smooth skin and frogs have lumpy skin, but I think it’s the other way around—frogs are smooth, toads are lumpy.”
“Let’s look online and see what we can find out,” suggested Dad, taking out his phone.
“Oh yeah! Good idea, Dad,” said Grady. It wasn’t long before Grady admitted his mistake. “Declan, you were right after all. Frogs are slick and toads are warty!”
Declan grinned. “I toad you I was right!”
The next day, the boys had another question. “We saw a movie about when Adam and Eve disobeyed God,” Declan said. “We saw them eating an apple. Grady says nobody really knows what kind of fruit they ate—but it was an apple, wasn’t it, Dad?”
Dad smiled. “Let’s look it up and find out.”
“No,” said Dad. “The best place to find information about the Bible is the Bible.” He took a Bible, opened it, and held it out to Declan. “Here—read these verses in Genesis.”
Declan took the Bible and read the verses Dad had pointed out. “Well,” said Declan, “I guess you’re right this time, Grady. These verses don’t say the fruit was an apple.”
“I toad you so.” This time Grady did the teasing.
“Yeah, but it sure looked like an apple in the movie,” said Declan, “and in other pictures I’ve seen too.”
“Bible stories aren’t always presented correctly in movies or in books,” said Dad. “In this case, it doesn’t really matter what the fruit was. But if you’re not sure about something you hear or read, you should always get out your Bible and check for yourself. Try to read at least a few verses on your own every day, and ask Jesus to help you understand what He says in His Word. That’s the best way to learn God’s truths and always have them with you.”

FOR TRUTH, CHECK THE BIBLE

KEY VERSE: THE WORD OF THE LORD IS RIGHT, AND ALL HIS WORK IS DONE IN TRUTH. PSALM 33:4

Do you assume that movies and books about the Bible are correct? People who write them often change the stories to add drama. It’s always good to check what you see and hear with what God says in His Word. Don’t believe everything you hear about the Bible. Read it for yourself, and trust Jesus to help you understand the truth of His Word.
Ellie groaned as she tossed and turned in her bed. In her dreams, she went back to the day her parents died. Ellie’s parents had been missionaries ever since she was a baby, and when she was eight, they were killed for being Christians. Images flashed through her head as she remembered the men breaking into their house. Ellie was hiding under her bed, trembling in fear. She listened as they broke down the door and ran through the house, yelling and destroying things. Then gunshots echoed through the house.

“No!” Ellie screamed as she sat up in her bed.

Grandma appeared in the doorway. “It’s okay, honey, I’m here. You were just having a nightmare,” she said as she sat down on the edge of the bed.

Ellie was sobbing and shaking. “I miss Mom and Dad so much! Why didn’t God protect them?”

Grandma drew Ellie into a hug. “I don’t know. What happened to your parents was horrible, and I don’t know God’s reasons for allowing it to happen. But I do know that, because your parents trusted in Jesus, they’re safe with Him now. And He’s promised that evil will not have the last word. That’s why He died for us—to save us from sin and evil and give us eternal life.”

Grandma wiped tears off her face and looked at Ellie. “I remember when my mother died. It hurt more than anything I had ever gone through before, but it helped me draw closer to Jesus and get to know Him in a deeper way. Through my grief, He reminded me how much He loves me and that He’ll always be with me.”

The minutes seemed to drag by as they both sat there. Ellie wiped the tears from her eyes. “Is it okay if I still miss them and cry once in a while?” she asked.

“Of course it is,” said Grandma. “You’ve had a terrible thing happen in your life, and Jesus knows you need time to heal and grieve. His Word tells us that He will carry us through our grief. You’re never alone.”

“Thanks, Grandma,” Ellie said as she hugged her grandma again. “I love you.” A few minutes later, Ellie drifted back to sleep.

JESUS CARRIES US THROUGH OUR GRIEF

KEY VERSE: SURELY HE HAS BORNE OUR GRIEVES AND CARRIED OUR SORROWS. ISAIAH 53:4

Are you struggling with grief? Have you experienced something terrible? Perhaps you feel so weighted down by sorrow and loss that you’re not sure how to carry on. You don’t have to go through it alone. Jesus, who suffered and died for us, gives us the strength to endure pain and suffering. Trust Him to be with you through this tough time. He will carry you!
Will he bite?” Denise asked fearfully as the handler started to give her a yellow corn snake to hold. Denise and her mother were at a special event at the public library and had stopped by the reptile booth.

“No, she’s very friendly,” the woman replied. “Her name is Melissa.”

Tentatively, Denise stretched out her hands and took the small snake, but she had more questions for the reptile handler. “Why is her tongue going in and out? Is she poisonous? Are you sure she won’t bite me?”

The handler laughed good-naturedly. “I’m sure she won’t bite you. And she’s using her tongue to smell. She’s getting your scent and using a gland on the roof of her mouth to smell you.”

“Oh, wow! That’s cool!” Denise pulled the snake closer to examine her.

“And no, she isn’t poisonous,” the handler continued. “You can tell by the shape of a snake’s head whether it’s venomous or not. A harmless snake like this makes a good pet. The corn snake got its name because it’s useful to farmers since it eats the mice that would eat their corn.”

Denise took one more look at the pretty little snake before handing it back to its owner.

Later, as they left the event and headed for the car, Denise said to her mom, “I was pretty scared of that snake before the woman told me all about it. Once I knew it was harmless, though, I wasn’t scared at all.”

Mom chuckled. “That reminds me of a verse.”

“Really?” asked Denise. “A verse about snakes?”

“Well, not exactly,” said Mom. “The verse I’m thinking of says, ‘You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’ Knowing the truth about that little corn snake set you free from being afraid of it.”

“Oh, that’s true!” agreed Denise.

“That’s why it is so important to study God’s Word and know His truth,” Mom said. “There are many things in this world that can cause us to be fearful, but the more we know about Jesus and His love and power, the more we can trust Him with our fears. We can be free from worry and fear when we know the truth about Jesus and trust Him in every situation.”

LEARN GOD’S TRUTH

KEY VERSE: YOU WILL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE. JOHN 8:32 (CSB)

Are there things you’re worried about or afraid of? God’s truth will set you free. The more you know about Jesus and what He’s done for you, the less you will be controlled by fear. He died to save you from sin and death and promises to always be with you. You can trust Him. Spend time getting to know Him by studying His Word. His truth will set you free!
Jackson aimed the hose and squirted water into the center of an orange inflatable pool—his sister’s favorite birthday gift. The first thing Addy wanted this morning was to get in her “swimmy pool.” Jackson’s job was to fill it while she finished breakfast.

Soon she burst through the back door, and Mom followed carrying towels and swim toys. Addy ran to him, clapping her three-year-old hands with excitement. “I’m going swimmin’ to-day, to-day!” She jumped up and down, making the ruffle on her swimsuit flap.

“Almost finished?” Mom set the towels and toys on the nearby picnic table.

“It takes a lot of water to fill this little pool. More than I thought.” Jackson directed the water stream in impatient patterns. His friends were waiting to play soccer in the park like they did every Saturday. What if he missed playing today because he was stuck filling Addy’s new pool?

Mom leaned over with Addy to dip her fingers in the cool water. “How much does it take to fill you up?” she asked, flicking some water droplets in his direction.

“Fill me up?” The hose drooped in Jackson’s hand. “With what—water?”

“Not water,” Mom said. “Love!”

Addy threw some pool toys into the pool and giggled when water splashed on her legs. “Filled wif wuv!” she said.

“I don’t get it, Mom,” Jackson said. “I only want to go play soccer.”

“I know, yet you’re taking time to help your sister first. That’s because Jesus fills us with love, just like you’re filling this pool.” Mom picked up a yellow plastic watering can, dipped it in the pool, and poured out some water. “The Bible says the love of God has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.”

Jackson twisted the nozzle on the hose and turned off the water. The pool was finally full. Mom held Addy’s hand as she stepped into the cold water.

“You’ve shown God’s love for your sister by filling her pool even though you’d rather be playing at the park.”

“So God fills me up with His love,” Jackson said as he wound the hose into a pile, “and we share it with others?”

“You got it!” said Mom. “Now go play soccer and have a great time.”

SUSAN HOLT SIMPSON

GOD FILLS OUR HEARTS WITH LOVE

KEY VERSE: THE LOVE OF GOD HAS BEEN POURED OUT IN OUR HEARTS BY THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO WAS GIVEN TO US. ROMANS 5:5

Have you ever felt impatient like Jackson? Sometimes it’s hard to be loving—especially when you’re in a hurry. But if you know Jesus, God promises to fill your heart with His love so you can share it with others. So the next time you struggle to be loving, trust God to pour His love into your heart and fill it all the way to the top.
Oh, it smells good in here,” said Presley as she and Kenna stepped into the kitchen. “Thanks for inviting me for dinner.”

“What’s cooking, Mom?” Kenna asked.

“It’s a chicken and rice casserole.” Mom lifted the cover off a crockpot. “I hope you like it, Presley.”

When Presley murmured an answer no one could understand, Kenna looked at her suspiciously. “You don’t think it sounds good!” she exclaimed. “I can tell!” She laughed. “But you’ll like it, Presley. It’s really good. Trust me!”

“Okay!” said Presley. “I believe you.” So when they began to eat, she reluctantly tried the chicken dish. “Wow! This is great!” she said. “I like it!”

As the girls played a game after dinner, they talked about their class at church. “Mrs. Hart said next week’s lesson will be on faith,” said Presley. “She said to think of ordinary ways we show faith in what people tell us. Have you thought of any?”

“No,” replied Kenna. She turned to her dad, who was reading a book. “Help us out here, Dad. What’s an everyday example of faith?”

“Well,” said Dad, “Presley, you didn’t think you’d like the casserole. So why did you try it?”

“Kenna had tried it and told me how good it was. I trust her, so I tried it too,” said Presley. “So by tasting it myself, I showed that I had faith in what she said, and I found that it was true.” She smiled. “Like my grandpa would say, it was tried and true.”

“Yes,” Dad said. “It’s often like that with faith in Jesus too. His promises of love, forgiveness, and peace have been tried and proven true. When we see and hear about how others have experienced them, it encourages us to trust Him too.”

“Like the Davis family at church,” said Kenna. “Their son Gabe is overseas with the army, and Mrs. Davis said Jesus has given her peace about it. When I see how she trusts Jesus, it helps me trust Him too.”

Dad nodded. “Jesus fulfills His promises in the life of every Christian, and when we see what He’s done for others, we know He will do the same for us.”

Do you have faith in Jesus? Maybe you became a Christian because you’ve seen how He’s worked in the life of a family member or friend. Do you know someone who’s going through a difficult time but still trusts God? Jesus will be with you when you face difficulties too. When you see how He loves and comforts other Christians, remember that He does the same for you. You can always trust Him.
David and Timothy were excited about the baby watermelons growing in the garden of their new house. “Come look at our garden!” Timothy said when their new neighbors, Jacob and Brandon, came over to play.

“Are those watermelons?” Jacob asked.

“Yes,” David answered. “We can’t wait until they’re big enough to eat!”

A while later, Mom came outside. “Boys, we need to run to the store.”

“See you guys later!” David and Timothy told their new friends.

When they returned home, Timothy and David headed out to play but soon came running back into the house. “Mom!” they called. “Our watermelons are smashed!”

Mom walked outside and looked at the garden. A trowel was stuck in the ground near one of the smashed watermelons. “This trowel is not one of ours,” she said, frowning.

Just then they heard giggling and looked up to see Jacob and Brandon peeking over the fence. Then the neighbor boys ran off, laughing loudly.

Tears filled Timothy’s eyes. “Why did they do this? I thought they were our friends!”

Mom looked sad. “I know you’re angry, but we need to forgive them.”

“What?” asked David.

“Because we’ve done sinful things that make God angry, yet He forgave us through His Son, Jesus, who died to take the punishment for our sins. That’s why we must forgive others. When we do that, we point them to God’s love and forgiveness.”

The next day, the boys asked Mom to take them to the store again. They brought home a beautiful watermelon and carried it over to the neighbors’ door along with the trowel left in their yard. When Jacob and Brandon came out, David said, “This is for you. We just want to tell you that we forgive you. We hope you’ll come over and play with us again sometime.”

Jacob and Brandon mumbled, “Okay,” took the watermelon and trowel, and went inside.

“Don’t be sad they didn’t say much,” Mom told them when they came home. “Sometimes God changes people’s hearts slowly. Let’s pray that you’ll be able to build a friendship with them that will help them see the love of Jesus.”

HANNAH ALAGANOU

FORGIVE OTHERS

KEY VERSE: AND BE KIND TO ONE ANOTHER, TENDERHEARTED, FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER, EVEN AS GOD IN CHRIST FORGAVE YOU. EPHESIANS 4:32

Have you ever felt sad or angry about a bad thing someone did? That’s how God feels about our sin. But if you’ve trusted Jesus for the forgiveness of your sin, God isn’t angry at you anymore. He’s forgiven you, and He’ll help you forgive others who have wronged you. Trust Jesus to help you point others to His love and forgiveness.
Isabelle looked worried as she walked into the living room. “Mom says you’re going to have surgery on your back,” she told her dad.

Dad nodded. “Yes, I’ve had a sore back for a long time. The doctor says an old injury is causing the trouble. I was butted by a goat years ago.”

“Butted by a goat?” asked Isabelle. “How’d that happen?”

“My grandfather always kept animals, and one was a mean old billy goat. Grandpa had a high fence around the yard where the goat was allowed to be, and he warned me not to go in there. Well, one day while I was kicking a football around, it got into that yard. Instead of asking for help, I figured I could get the football myself. I went into the goat pen, and before I could get back out, the goat got me.”

Isabelle was surprised. “I didn’t think being butted by a little goat could hurt someone so badly.”

“It wasn’t a little goat,” said Dad. “He was a mean critter, and he was strong. He had big horns and could butt really hard.” Dad shook his head, remembering. “I had a huge bruise and was really stiff for a long time, but I didn’t tell anyone what happened because I was afraid I’d be punished. Grandpa never found out about it.”

“And that’s what’s giving you all this trouble?” Isabelle asked. “If you had told someone right away, could a doctor have done something that would have kept you from having back problems now?”

“We’ll never know for sure, but it’s quite possible,” said Dad. “I figured if I didn’t tell anybody, I could keep it a secret, but I forgot that there are no secrets from God. Psalm 44:21 says God knows the secrets of our hearts. For a while it seemed like I got away with disobeying, but I really didn’t. It’s a good reminder that sin has consequences and can’t be hidden forever.”

Dad grimaced as he shifted in his chair, and Isabelle brought him a pillow. “It never helps to try to hide sin, does it?” she said.

“Nope,” Dad replied. “That’s why we need to confess our sins to Jesus right away. He will forgive us and help us deal with the consequences.”

AGNES G. LIVEZEY

CONFESS SIN RIGHT AWAY

KEY VERSE: I, THE LORD, SEARCH THE HEART . . . TO GIVE EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS WAYS. JEREMIAH 17:10

Do you try to hide things you do that are wrong, thinking no one will ever know? That never really works. Even if nobody on earth finds out, God knows all about it. You can’t hide anything from Him. Confess your sin to Jesus when you do something wrong. Even if there are consequences you must face, He will forgive you and help you through them.
Wow! This beach is crowded today,” Micah said as Mom spread out some towels and Dad planted an umbrella in the sand.

“It’s awfully noisy too,” said Mom. “Everybody’s laughing or shouting or making noise of some kind.”

Adding happy shouts to all the beach sounds, Micah and his brothers and sisters headed for the water. As they passed a lifeguard stand, the lifeguard suddenly jumped down from his perch high up on the tall bench and ran into the ocean. A crowd gathered and watched as, with quick strokes, he swam out into the deep water and rescued a drowning girl.

“I’m surprised the lifeguard even knew that girl was drowning,” said Micah when they were eating their picnic lunch a little later. “There was so much noise all around. I was right there, and I didn’t hear her call for help.”

“Well, your ears and eyes weren’t trained or tuned to hear or see people in trouble,” replied Dad. “Before anyone can work as a lifeguard, they have to take a lifesaving course. When lifeguards are put on duty, they have to stay very alert. They continually watch for anyone who might be in trouble, and they listen for people calling out for help.”

“Cool!” said Micah. “Maybe I’ll learn to be a lifeguard someday.” After thinking about it, he asked, “Don’t they ever miss a call for help?”

“It’s possible, of course,” Dad said. “But I know someone who never, ever misses a call for help. Someone who always hears His children when they need Him.”

“You mean God, don’t you?” said Micah.

Dad nodded. “One verse in the Bible says, ‘Call to Me, and I will answer you.’ Another one says, ‘I cried to the Lord in my trouble, and He answered me.’ Those are just a couple of the verses that tell us God hears when we call on Him. There are many more.”

Micah looked out at all the people splashing around in the water. “God has lots of people to listen to, doesn’t He? Way more than a lifeguard, but He still hears them all!”

Did you know God is always ready to help you when you need Him? He loves you and wants you to turn to Him whenever you’re facing a tough situation. Learn today’s verse, then follow its advice and pray to God when you need help. Trust Him to hear your call and to answer you.
Ahchoo!” Cole sneezed into his elbow as he wandered into the kitchen. He sniffed, then scowled. “Why did I have to get sick on the weekend?” he grumbled. “Dad was going to pick me up and take me hiking! Now he says I can’t go with this cold.”

“And he’s right,” said Mom.

“But I haven’t seen him for two weeks, and I really wanted to go hiking with him,” Cole said. “I even prayed about it, but it didn’t help. I’m still sick, and now I’m stuck at home with nothing fun to do.” He sighed. “Can I have a snack?” Mom nodded, so Cole opened the cupboard and peered inside. “Hey, Mom! Did you notice these bananas in here?” He pulled out some shriveled, brownish-black pieces of fruit and headed for the wastebasket.

“Oh no, don’t throw those away!” Mom said quickly. “I’m saving them for banana bread. They’re just about right.”

Cole made a face. He could hardly believe it. “Just about right? You mean you wanted these bananas to turn rotten?”

Mom smiled. “Very ripe would be a better description. Soft, dark, mushy bananas make the best banana bread. You might think firm, fresh yellow ones would be better, but the flavor isn’t nearly as good.”

“That sounds crazy to me, but you do make good banana bread,” said Cole. Then he sneezed twice.

“You know,” said Mom, “in a way, your cold is like these bananas. Right now, you can’t see anything good about it, but God can use it for His purposes. You never know.”

Cole sniffed and thought about it. “I did get extra homework done this morning,” he said, “and since I had some free time, I texted Hunter for a while. His parents are going through a divorce, and I’ve been trying to help him since I know what it’s like. I even invited him to come to church with us tomorrow, and he said he would!” Cole paused. “I sure hope my cold is better so I can go myself.”

“I hope so too,” said Mom. “Let’s pray for it to get better—and even if it doesn’t, for God to use it for good.”

TRUST GOD IN ALL THINGS

KEY VERSE: WE KNOW THAT GOD MAKES ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM AND ARE CHOSEN TO BE PART OF HIS PLAN. ROMANS 8:28 (NLV)

Are you in a situation that seems to keep getting worse instead of better? Maybe God is using it in a way you’re not aware of. Keep trusting Him. Even when it seems like He isn’t answering your prayers, remember that He loves you and will work things out for your good.
It’s hot out here!” Maria whined as she climbed up the grassy hill on their family campout.

“Calm down, Maria,” her mom replied, “we’re almost to the campsite.”

“My feet hurt, and I’m thirsty. I’m so hungry I could eat a horse!” Maria complained loudly.

“Whoa! I’d like to see that!” her brother, Carlos, said with a laugh.

Soon the Hernandez family reached their campsite after a full day of exploration. They enjoyed cooking dinner over the fire, except Maria protested that her hot dog was burnt. After their meal, it grew dark, and they began to gaze at the sky in hopes of seeing some beautiful stars.

“Aw, man! I don’t see anything! There’s not a star in the sky!” Maria crossed her arms and frowned.

“Oh, they’re there,” said Dad. “We just can’t see them tonight because the clouds are blocking our view.”

“Well, that stinks. So much for stargazing,” Maria kicked the twigs under her feet and then stomped to her tent to grumble some more.

“Maria,” her mom called out, “it seems like you might have a cloud over your head.”

“What do you mean?” Maria turned around to face her mother.

“There seems to be a complaining cloud that is blocking you from shining joy. Did you know that in the Bible, the book of Philippians talks about how we can shine the brightest? It says to do everything without complaining or arguing so we can shine like stars in the world. When we whine and complain, we don’t shine with the joy that comes from knowing Jesus and having eternal life with Him,” Mom explained.

Maria sighed. “I guess I haven’t been the most joyous person today.”

“You can say that again!” said Carlos.

“Okay, okay.” Maria rolled her eyes at her younger brother. “I’m sorry. And I guess I haven’t been that much fun to be around either.”

Dad stood up and gave her a hug. “There’s always tomorrow, my shining star. Just remember the joy you have in Jesus and shine for Him.”

“Okay,” said Maria. “I think I’ll head to bed and start again tomorrow. I think the forecast is calling for clear skies!”

**DON’T WHINE, JUST SHINE**

**KEY VERSE:** DO EVERYTHING WITHOUT COMPLAINING OR ARGUING. PHILIPPIANS 2:14 (ERV)

Do you complain about things you don’t like? Do you whine about homework or having to wake up early or clean your room? When you complain, you don’t let the joy you have in Jesus shine as brightly to those around you. Even when you have to do things you don’t like, remember what Jesus has done for you and trust Him to give you a joyful heart, no matter what the circumstance. Let your light shine!
Okay, I’ll talk to y’all next week. Bye!” London hung up the phone and turned to find her brother Liam snickering behind her. “What’s so funny?” she asked.

“I would have known you were talking to our grandparents in Texas even if I hadn’t talked to them a few minutes before you did,” Liam said. “You always copy the accent of people you’re talking with. It’s hilarious!”

“I do not!” London said.

“Well, maybe you don’t try to do it, but you still pick up a hint of how they talk,” Liam said. “You should hear yourself! It’s ‘y’all’ with Grandma and Grandpa, and ‘brilliant’ with your friend who lives in England.” Liam mimicked London’s accents. “If I hear you on the phone, I never have to wonder who you’re talking to!”

London narrowed her eyes. “Oh yeah? Well, I’d rather talk to anyone than to you!”

“Fine. Who’d want to talk to someone as mean as you anyway?”

Insults flew back and forth until Mom came into the room. She did not look pleased. “What’s going on?”

“Liam is making fun of me,” London said.

“Well, you should hear her, Mom! She always picks up the accent of the person she’s talking with.”

Mom was silent for a moment, then she said, “That makes me think of something I read this morning.” She went to the coffee table and picked up her Bible. “Here it is—Acts 4:13. It says that when the Jewish leaders saw the way Peter and John conducted themselves, they could tell they had been with Jesus.” Mom looked from London to Liam. “From your conversation just now, I could tell who both of you hadn’t been talking with.”

London and Liam exchanged glances. “You mean Jesus?” Liam asked.

“Yes,” Mom said. “As you get to know Jesus better, you begin to copy His speech and actions. As Christians, we need to listen to Him and spend time with Him so we can understand His love for everyone and pick up His accent in the way we talk to and treat others.”

London sighed and turned to Liam. “I’m sorry I got irritated.”

“Me too,” said Liam. “Let’s help each other remember to copy Jesus’ accent!”

COPY JESUS

KEY VERSE: LIVE A LIFE FILLED WITH LOVE, FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST. EPHESIANS 5:2 (NLT)

Do your words and actions show others that you know Jesus? Are you kind, patient, loving, and forgiving like He is? If you trust in Him, He will help you grow to be more like Him. Spend time praying and reading His Word so you can get to know Him better, and trust Him to help you show His love to others in your speech and actions.
Can I have apple pie for dessert?” asked Beck. He and his family were having dinner at their favorite restaurant, celebrating their decision to move to Honduras and start a church there.

“Sounds good!” said Dad. “I’ll have a piece too.”

As the waitress left with their dessert order, Beck had a question. “Dad,” he said, his forehead creased with lines, “you’ve decided to quit your job so we can go to Honduras, but how will we live without money?”

“I’ll be working part-time for a while,” replied Dad, “and before we go, we’ll be speaking at various churches to raise support, remember? We won’t have as much as before, but God will provide everything we need.”

“But how?” Beck asked, folding and refolding his napkin. “We’re not rich, are we? How will we make it until our support money comes in?”

Leaning back in the booth, Dad smiled at Mom. “Beck, why don’t you pay for our dinner here out of your allowance?”

“Me? Pay for dinner? You can’t be serious, Dad! I don’t have enough . . . I didn’t . . . I don’t . . . I thought you . . .”

Dad grinned. “Relax, Beck. I’m paying, but why did you assume I would pay in the first place?”

“Well, you’re the dad,” said Beck, “and it was your idea to celebrate by going out to eat. Besides, I’m just a kid. I don’t have as much money as you do.”

“That’s right, Beck,” said Dad. “I’m your father, so I provide for you. And God is our heavenly Father, so He provides for us. He has unlimited resources. Besides, it was God’s idea for us to go to Honduras. We sensed Him calling us to help the people there and tell them about Jesus.”

Beck’s face brightened. “It was His idea and He owns everything, so He’ll take care of the money part—just like a dad, right?”

Dad nodded. “We’re His children, and He’ll take care of us and provide whatever we need so we can do the things He wants us to do.”

“I get it,” said Beck, digging into the warm apple pie that had just been placed in front of him. “Boy, am I glad I don’t have to pay for this! Thanks, Dad, for taking us out to eat!”

GOD PROVIDES FOR ALL YOUR NEEDS

KEY VERSE: AND MY GOD WILL MEET ALL YOUR NEEDS ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GLORY IN CHRIST JESUS. PHILIPPIANS 4:19 (NIV)

Are you thankful for a father who provides for you? Maybe your dad isn’t with you, or he’s lost his job and you wonder where money will come from. If you trust in Jesus, God is your heavenly Father and He will take care of all you need. That doesn’t mean He’ll give you everything you want, but He’ll provide what you need to do His will. Trust Him to take care of you.
Noah ran out to meet his father when he saw his car pull into the driveway. “Hey, Dad! Did you see the picture I sent you? Sheba had her puppies!”

“Yes, I saw it. That’s great! How many does she have?” asked Dad.

“Seven,” replied Noah. “Come see them.” He led the way out to the dog house where Sheba and her new family were cuddled up on a warm, soft blanket. “Good girl,” Noah said as he patted Sheba’s head gently. “What pretty babies you have!”

“Let’s see—three black, two brown, and two yellow,” said Dad. After watching the pups for a few minutes, they heard Mom calling them in for supper.

As they ate, Noah and his little sister, Thea, talked excitedly about the puppies. “All their eyes are closed,” said Noah.

“Puppies are always born with their eyes closed,” said Dad. “Their ears are closed too. In about ten days the pups will begin to see and hear.”

“Were my eyes closed when I was born?” Noah wanted to know.

Mom and Dad chuckled. “No, Noah. Your eyes were open,” Mom told him. “But you slept a lot, just like the pups will. God knows babies need lots of sleep.”

“Did God know how many puppies Sheba would have?” asked Thea.

“He sure did,” said Dad. “He created Sheba and the pups too. He created everything—including you!”

“Did He know what I would be like?” Thea asked. “Did He know I’d like horses and books and stuff like that?”

Dad nodded. “The Bible tells us God knew us even before we were born. He knew all about you then, and He knows all about you now. And He loves you! He sent His Son, Jesus, to save you, and He will always take care of you.”

“God even knows how many hairs you have on your head,” added Mom.

Noah grinned. “Well, at least it must be getting a little easier to keep track of yours, Dad,” he said, laughing as he rubbed Dad’s balding head.

Mom and Dad laughed too. “All right, Mr. Smarty-Pants.” Dad stood up. “If you’ve finished eating, let’s go check on the new family in the backyard.”

DEBORAH L. WHITSITT

**GOD MADE YOU SPECIAL**

**KEY VERSE:** I WILL PRAISE YOU, FOR I AM FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE. PSALM 139:14

Did you know that you are important to God? Even before you were born, God knew what you would look like, what things would interest you, and what talents you would have. He created you and knows all about you, and He loves you very much—so much that He sent Jesus to save you from sin. He takes care of you each day. You’re special to Him.
Greyson sat up, threw his legs over the side of his bed, and dried his tears on the sleeve of his shirt. **There’s no use wasting time praying for Dad anymore,** he thought. **There’s nothing I can do to make things better. I’ve prayed and prayed, but nothing’s changed. Dad’s still in prison—I don’t think he’ll ever change—and Mom has to work long hours every day. We might never be together as a family again.**

Greyson got up and went outside. He found his grandfather getting honey from the beehives at the edge of the woods. Greyson thought Grandpa looked like an astronaut in his white coveralls and the veiled safari hat he wore for protection from the bees.

When Grandpa was finished, he waved to Greyson. “You can help me take this sourwood honey to the house,” he said.

“Okay. I can help put the honey in jars too if you want,” Greyson replied. He peered into his grandpa’s face through the netting and asked, “Why is it called sourwood honey when it’s so sweet? That doesn’t make any sense.”

Grandpa pointed to a nearby tree. “Because it’s made from the nectar bees take from the blossoms of that sourwood tree,” he explained. “After the bees put the honey through their unique processing system, it becomes one of the finest kinds of honey in the world.”

Grandpa removed his safari hat and took a deep breath. “It reminds me of what Jesus does for us. He takes a lost soul out of the clutches of sin and death, processes them through His love and forgiveness, and out comes a brand-new person.”

Grandpa put his hand on Greyson’s shoulder. “I know things are difficult for you right now—and may even seem hopeless—but don’t give up. Keep praying for your dad, Greyson. No matter how bad things seem to be, everything is possible with God. Your dad needs to know Jesus as his Savior, and then he’ll be a new and very different person—a new creation, as the Bible puts it.”

Greyson nodded. “Can we pray for him right now?”

“Of course,” Grandpa said, and they bowed their heads to pray.❤

**GOD CAN CHANGE ANYONE**

**KEY VERSE:** **IF ANYONE IS IN CHRIST, HE IS A NEW CREATION; OLD THINGS HAVE PASSED AWAY; BEHOLD, ALL THINGS HAVE BECOME NEW. 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17**

Does it seem like someone you love will never change? Do you wonder if it’s any use praying for them anymore? Don’t give up. God hears your prayers, and He can save and change anybody. Today’s Scripture reading describes the great change that happened in the apostle Paul’s life. It reminds us that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,” of whom Paul says he is the worst. Keep praying for your loved one and trust God to answer.
Greta and Harper ran through an empty field behind their house. The warm summer breeze rustled in the grass, and golden butterflies flitted among the wildflowers.

“It was nice of Mom to pack us a picnic lunch to bring out here, wasn’t it?” Greta said as she placed their picnic basket on the ground. “She said we could play out here as long as she can see us from the house.”

“Look!” Harper pointed to a clump of pink flowers. “Pink is Mom’s favorite color—let’s pick some flowers for her.”

The girls gathered some flowers and placed them in the shade. Then they played the rest of the morning before eating their picnic lunch. “This is so good!” Harper said as she took a big bite of her sandwich.

Greta nodded in agreement. “Grandpa says everything tastes better outside, and I think he’s right.”

After the girls ate, they played some more. “There’s Mom,” said Greta, looking toward their house. “She’s motioning for us to come home. Let’s go.”

“Wait! Her flowers,” said Harper. She ran over to the tree to get them. “Oh no!” she cried, holding them up. “Look! They’re all wilted and ugly. Let’s pick some more.”

“It’s too late. We have to go home,” said Greta. “We should have taken them to Mom right away.”

When the girls told their mother about the flowers, she smiled. “That’s okay,” she said. “It was a nice thought. You can bring me some another time.” She hugged them both. “There’s a Bible verse that compares our lives on earth to grass that withers and flowers that fade. It always reminds me that time goes by really quickly. Sometimes we think we have a lot of time to do something, but before we know it, the chance to do it is gone.”

“That’s what happened with the flowers today,” said Harper.

“Yes,” said Mom, “and even missing out on little, everyday things like giving someone flowers can make us feel sad. But it’s much sadder when someone misses the chance to know Jesus as their Savior. The Bible urges us to trust in Him for salvation now. We don’t want to put it off until it’s too late.”

SHERRY L. KUYT

NOW IS THE TIME TO TRUST IN JESUS

**KEY VERSE:** I TELL YOU, NOW IS THE TIME OF GOD’S FAVOR, NOW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION. 2 CORINTHIANS 6:2 (NIV)

Are there things you put off doing until later? Is trusting Jesus as your Savior one of them? Right now it probably feels like there’s plenty of time to make that decision. But the truth is, you really don’t know if you’ll have another day—or even another minute. Don’t wait any longer. God’s invitation won’t last forever. Trust in Jesus today. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 102.)
Fading Flowers (Part 2)
READ: PROVERBS 3:27–28; HEBREWS 13:15–16

As Greta and Harper walked to a friend's house, they saw some yellow wildflowers by the side of the road. “These sort of look like the flowers Mrs. Cranston used to have in her yard before she got too sick to take care of them,” said Greta.

Harper nodded. “I’m sure she’d like to see some pretty flowers like that again. Let’s take some to her.”

“Why don’t we wait till next week?” said Greta. “If we go there now, we won’t have much time to play with Melanie.”

Harper frowned. “Remember what happened to the flowers we picked yesterday? And what Mom said about it?”

“Of course I remember,” Greta replied. “The flowers wilted, and Mom said if we put off doing things, something might happen to keep us from doing them later.” She grinned at her sister. “Okay. Let’s take some flowers to Mrs. Cranston now!” So the girls picked flowers and took them to the elderly woman.

“I can hardly believe you girls came to visit an old lady like me!” said Mrs. Cranston. “Thank you!” She coughed into her sleeve. “I don’t know much about God, but I’m sure He sent you here. I was feeling lonely.”

When the girls told their mother about their visit, she decided to pay Mrs. Cranston a visit too. When she returned home, Mom had a big smile on her face. “I talked to Mrs. Cranston about God while I was there, and she decided to trust Jesus as her Savior!” she told them. “She was so happy you girls came to visit her, and you got her thinking about God. She asked a lot of questions, and then she prayed with me.”

Greta and Harper looked at each other in amazement. “That’s great!” Harper said.

A couple days later, Mom had sad news when Greta and Harper came to the table for breakfast. “Girls, Mrs. Cranston died last night,” she told them. “She’d been sick for a long time, and her heart finally gave out.”

The girls were shocked. “I’m so glad we visited her,” Greta said, “and I’m really glad she trusted in Jesus when you visited her, Mom.”

“Me too,” said Harper. “If we had waited, it would have been too late!”

SHERRY L. KUYT

DON’T WAIT TO DO GOOD THINGS

KEY VERSE: DO NOT KEEP GOOD FROM THOSE WHO SHOULD HAVE IT, WHEN IT IS IN YOUR POWER TO DO IT. PROVERBS 3:27 (NLV)

Is there something you know you should do that you’ve been putting off? Maybe you’ve felt the need to help out a parent or neighbor, send a friendly note to a new kid at school, or thank someone for helping you. If God puts a thought into your mind of something you should do, take action. Do it now! Tomorrow might be too late.
Down under the water Graham went! He came up sputtering. “What did I do wrong?” he asked Aunt Sue. He and his sister were spending a week with their aunt at her lakeside cottage, and she was teaching them to float. Graham looked over at Kinley. “She’s just lying on the water!” he exclaimed. “Why can’t I do that?”

“You tried to make yourself float, so you sank,” said Aunt Sue. “Just relax and let the water hold you up.”

“Okay,” said Graham. He took a deep breath and tried again, but BLUB . . . GASP . . . GURGLE. He sank a second time.

“Do like Aunt Sue said,” Kinley encouraged her brother. “Just relax.” Several minutes later, Graham finally floated. “I’m not doing anything!” he exclaimed. “This is fun!”

That evening, Graham thought about his experience in the water. “As long as I tried to do something to make myself float, it didn’t work,” he said. “I had to quit trying to help myself stay up and just lie back in the water. Then I could float!”

“Yeah,” said Kinley. “We just had to trust the water to hold us up.”

“It’s kind of like what the pastor told us in church yesterday,” Graham said. “He said we can’t do anything to help ourselves be saved—we’re only saved by having faith in Jesus.”

“That’s what the Bible says too,” said Aunt Sue. “I guess I always thought going to church and obeying my parents and teachers helped,” said Graham. “But that’s not right, is it? That doesn’t help me be saved.”

“No, it doesn’t,” said Aunt Sue. “You had to quit trying to float, and you have to quit trying to save yourself by doing good things. You simply need to trust Jesus and you will receive His gift of eternal life.”

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” That was my verse to learn,” Graham smiled. “I’m done trying to save myself. From now on, I’m trusting Jesus!”

TRUST JESUS TO SAVE YOU FROM SIN

KEY VERSE: BELIEVE IN THE LORD JESUS, AND YOU WILL BE SAVED.
ACTS 16:31 (NIV)

Are you trying to do something to save yourself? Do you think you can make it to heaven on your own? It won’t work. Only Jesus can save you. He took the punishment for your sin when He died on the cross, and only He can forgive your sins and give you eternal life. Trust Him as your Savior today! (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 102.)
Can we get balloons, Mom?” Julian asked on the way into the hardware store. It was the store’s grand opening, and a man was blowing up helium balloons at the front of the store and giving them to the kids. “Sure,” said Mom. “Why don’t you take Titus over there while I look at these flowers?”

Julian took the stroller from his mom and pushed his two-year old brother to the man with the balloons. “Can my brother and I have balloons, please?” he asked.

“Sure thing,” said the man. “What’s your favorite color?”

“Blue,” Julian answered without hesitation.

The man filled a blue balloon and handed it to Julian. “And what color would you like, young man?” he asked Titus.

“Wahyo boon!” shouted Titus, bouncing up and down in his seat. “Well, I hope this won’t go ‘boom’ for you too quickly,” said the man as he selected a green balloon and handed it to Titus.


Grinning, the man filled a yellow balloon. “I hope you appreciate your brother, little guy,” he said as he handed it to Titus. “He does a good job of interpreting for you.”

When Julian wheeled Titus back to Mom, he proudly showed her his yellow balloon, and Julian explained how he got it. Mom grinned and ruffled Titus’s hair. “It’s a good thing your brother can understand you,” she said.

Titus played with his balloon as they walked through the aisles of the store. “You know,” Mom said, “I was just thinking that we’re all a little like Titus.” She smiled when Julian looked at her curiously. “He needed help in speaking, and you were able to help him. All Christians need that kind of help sometimes when we pray. We don’t always know what to say or even what to ask God for, but Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit to help us. He makes our requests clear and right before God.”

“I’m thankful for that,” Julian said, playfully batting his blue balloon at Titus’s yellow one. “It encourages me to keep praying!”

THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPS YOU PRAY

KEY VERSE: WE DON’T KNOW HOW TO PRAY AS WE SHOULD, BUT THE SPIRIT HIMSELF SPEAKS TO GOD FOR US. ROMANS 8:26 (ERV)

Do you feel like you don’t know how to pray? Is it hard for you to tell God what you need or how you feel? When you have trouble finding the right words, the Holy Spirit takes your prayers and make them just right. So don’t worry when you find it difficult to pray—God hears your prayers and will give you exactly what you need.
Who wants to help me sweep up these crumbs?” Mom asked as she picked up the lunch plates and walked to the sink.

“I will!” three-year-old Elim yelled enthusiastically as he rushed over to get the broom. Ruby giggled as she watched her little cousin sweep up the crumbs at top speed. “All done!” he announced proudly.

“Great job!” Mom placed flour, sugar, eggs, and chocolate chips on the counter. “Now who wants to help me make chocolate chip cookies?”

“I will!” Elim shrieked before Ruby could get a word in. Both kids helped Mom fill the bowl with ingredients and mix them. “Who wants to add the egg?” Mom asked. Ruby eyed her cousin knowingly.

“I will!” Elim proudly cracked the egg under Ruby’s watchful eye.

Later that day, after playing outside in the sand, Mom asked, “Who wants to go inside and get cleaned up?”

Elim stuck out his lip and pointed at Ruby. “You will,” he stated firmly.

Ruby and Mom burst out laughing. “I guess Elim isn’t ready to go inside yet!” Ruby said, giving her sand-covered cousin a hug.

Mom looked thoughtful. “You know, Ruby, Elim just reminded me of what I read in Psalm 71 this morning. The psalmist was talking about how his enemies were after him, but he knew that even in that scary time, God was his refuge and his fortress. There were a bunch of ‘I will’ verses: ‘I will always have hope,’ ‘I will praise you,’ ‘I will proclaim your mighty acts.’”

“Were there any ‘you will’s,’ Mom?” Ruby teased.

“As a matter of fact, yes!” Mom grinned. “The psalmist had some ‘you will’s’ about God, like ‘you will restore my life’ and ‘you will comfort me.’”

After the trio finally went inside and got cleaned up, Ruby snuggled up next to her Mom and cousin on the couch. “You know, Mom, I want to be like Elim . . . and the psalmist. Even in hard times, I want to practice ‘I will’s’—I will praise God, I will remember what He has done for me . . . things like that.”

Mom smiled at her daughter. “Me too, Ruby.”

Elim grinned at them both. “You will!”

REMIND ME WHAT GOD HAS DONE

KEY VERSE: AS FOR ME, I WILL ALWAYS HAVE HOPE; I WILL PRAISE YOU MORE AND MORE. PSALM 71:14 (NIV)

Do you ever have hard days or weeks? God never promised us an easy life with no hardships, but He does promise that He will be with us. Read about His great love for you in the Bible and all Jesus has done for you. When you face hardships, remember that He will help you and always be with you.
Food tastes so good out here!” Levi said as his family enjoyed a picnic lunch at the park. He took a big bite of his sandwich, and his sister Nina started to laugh.

“I’m glad you like the food out here so much,” she said with a grin. “That little black ant you just ate must have added extra flavor!”

“Oh no!” Levi exclaimed. Everyone laughed as he carefully searched through the rest of his sandwich.

“Don’t worry, Levi. One little ant won’t make you sick,” Mom assured him. “No,” Dad said. “An ant in a sandwich is not so bad, but I heard about some really bad sandwiches in my class at church last week.”

“You did?” asked Nina. “What kind were they?”

“The kind of sandwiches Satan likes to make—truth on the outside, baloney in the middle,” Dad replied. “Satan likes to deceive people by surrounding his lies with truth. That makes him very dangerous.”

“But why would Satan want to tell us anything that’s true?” asked Levi. “I thought he just tried to get us to believe lies.”

“Think about it. Would you have taken a bite of your sandwich if the whole thing was full of ants?” Dad asked.

“Of course not,” said Levi. “I wouldn’t have eaten even one if I’d seen it, but the rest of my sandwich was so good that I didn’t even notice the ant.”

“That’s what Satan counts on—that people won’t notice the bad parts if he sprinkles enough good things into what they hear,” Dad explained.

“But what sort of good things does he tell people?” Nina asked.

“Well, some religious groups teach that we should love everybody and do good deeds,” replied Dad. “That’s true, but some of those same groups teach that Jesus was just a good man, not the Son of God who died to save us from our sin.”

“Oh, that is bad,” said Nina.

Dad nodded. “A little ant in your stomach won’t kill you, but a wrong belief in your heart can hurt you spiritually. That’s why we need to check everything we hear with what the Bible says and trust the Holy Spirit to give us wisdom. We need to be careful not to swallow Satan’s lies. They’re full of baloney!”

BELIEVE GOD’S WORD, NOT PEOPLE

KEY VERSE: THE SIMPLE BELIEVES EVERY WORD, BUT THE PRUDENT CONSIDERS WELL HIS STEPS. PROVERBS 14:15

Are you aware that Satan often mixes some truth into his lies? If someone quotes a Bible verse in support of something they believe, do you think all of what they say must be true? Watch out! Satan wants to fool you. The real, whole truth is in the Word of God. Compare everything you hear with what the Bible says. Don’t swallow a lie!
Dad, that TV guy is in town,” Levi said excitedly. “Hudson’s family is going to see him, and he invited me to go along. Can I go?”

“What TV guy would that be?” Dad asked.

“The guy who contacts people who have died.” Levi hurried on when he saw Dad frown. “He’ll be at the civic center tomorrow night. Hudson says if I go there with him tomorrow, he’ll go to church with me on Sunday.”

“Levi, God forbids the kind of activity that man is involved in,” said Dad. “I can’t allow you to go be part of something like that.”

“But it’s for a good reason,” said Levi. “You know I’ve been trying to get Hudson to come to church. And his parents will be going to hear this guy, so maybe I can get them to come to church on Sunday too. I might not get another chance.”

“I think you’ve swallowed another baloney sandwich,” Dad said.

Levi looked at him in surprise. “You mean the sandwiches Satan likes to feed us? The ones made up of a little truth mixed with lies?”

Dad nodded. “The lie Satan wants you to believe is that it’s okay to disobey God in order to do some good. But while it would be great for Hudson and his parents to come to church so they can learn about Jesus, that’s not the way to show them what knowing Him is all about. God forbids trying to communicate with the dead because only He has power over death. I think staying home tomorrow night would help them understand more about your faith in Jesus than taking part in something that’s sinful.”

Levi sighed. “You’re right. I just wanted Hudson to come to church . . . and I guess I was a little curious about the guy on TV too. How does he talk to dead people?”

“He doesn’t,” answered Dad. “At best, he’s a scam artist who takes advantage of grieving people. And at worst, he communicates with demons who are fooling him and using him as their pawn.”

“Wow!” Levi was shocked. “I’ll tell Hudson I can’t go and why. Maybe he’ll come to church anyway. Otherwise, I’ll keep praying for him and ask Jesus to help me show him what being a Christian is really all about.”

SHERRY L. KUYT

IT’S NEVER RIGHT TO SIN

KEY VERSE: SHALL WE CONTINUE IN SIN THAT GRACE MAY ABOUND? CERTAINLY NOT! ROMANS 6:1–2

Do you sometimes think there’s a good reason to do something that’s wrong? Baloney! Stay away from that sandwich—it’s a lie Satan tries to feed you by mixing it with some truth to make it look good. Jesus died to free you from sin so you could obey Him and do what’s right. Trust and obey Him, even when you’re not sure how things will turn out.
Sierra watched the TV eagerly when a commercial for her dad’s business appeared on the screen. His company was a sponsor for a local TV station, and an ad for their business had been recorded at the office where he worked. “Where’s your desk, Dad?” asked Sierra. “I don’t see it.”

“You’re seeing the front desk and the reception area right now,” said Dad. “You can’t see everything all at once on the TV screen, you know, only a little at a time. You’ll probably see my office in a minute.”

“Well, I hope so. That’s the most important part of—oh, there’s your office and your desk now. All right!” Sierra grinned. “Looks good, but you should be in this commercial. That would make it even better.”

“Thanks,” said Dad with a smile. “I’m glad you think so.”

The ad for Dad’s company ended, and Sierra got up to leave. “I’m going to go read in my room for a while,” she said.

“You mean you’re not getting together with Madison?” Dad asked. Sierra shook her head. “Madison doesn’t like me anymore. She’s ignoring me. Who wants to be friends with a mean, selfish person like that?”

“Now wait a minute—be careful not to jump to conclusions,” Dad said. “There might be something going on with Madison that you don’t know about.”

“Like what?” asked Sierra.

“Well, perhaps her dad lost his job or her mom is sick again, and she’s not ready to talk about it. Maybe she needs special understanding and love right now. Or it may be that she’s just been busy with other things and doesn’t mean to ignore you at all.” Dad nodded toward the TV screen. “Just like the TV couldn’t show the whole office at one time, we can’t see everything that’s going on in another person’s life. We don’t see the big picture, but God does. And He can use you to shine Jesus’ love into Madison’s life, whether she’s going through a difficult situation right now or not.”

“I guess you’re right,” said Sierra. “I don’t know what’s bothering Madison right now, but whatever it is, I should be there for her.”

KATHERINE R. ADAMS

BE THERE FOR OTHERS

KEY VERSE: A FRIEND LOVES AT ALL TIMES. PROVERBS 17:17

Are you having problems with a friend or family member? Maybe they’ve been avoiding you or acting differently. Remember that you have a limited perspective when it comes to other people. Only God knows everything that goes on in a person’s life. So don’t give up—keep showing love to that person, and be there for them in whatever it is they’re going through.
As Parker’s family left their mission work to return to their own country for a few months, they sadly said goodbye to Aniceta. She had helped them translate the New Testament into her language. They knew she would miss them very much, and they would miss her too.

In the weeks that followed, Parker often thought of Aniceta, and the whole family prayed for her. Parker wished they could contact her, but there were no phones or computers in the area where she lived. “Let’s send her a letter,” Parker suggested one day.

“That’s a good idea, Parker,” said Dad, “but mail isn’t delivered up in the mountains where she lives.” He tapped his chin, thinking. “I know! Her son, Isauro, lives in town. Let’s send the letter to him. He can deliver it to his mother.”

Several months later, the family returned to the mission field. Immediately they visited Aniceta, who was thrilled to see them. “Praise the Lord!” she exclaimed. “You’re back!”

“Yes, we are!” Parker said, giving Aniceta a hug. “We prayed for you every day we were gone.”

“I know,” Aniceta said. She held up a piece of paper. “Isauro gave me your letter, so I knew you hadn’t forgotten about me! Now come, have some tea with me.”

When Parker and Dad saw Isauro later, they thanked him for delivering the letter.

“You’re welcome,” he told them. “And thank you for delivering God’s letter to us!”

“God’s letter?” Parker asked.

Isauro nodded and held up a copy of the New Testament Aniceta had helped them translate. “Before you came, none of us here knew God loved us. We thought that, if there was a God, He had forgotten about us. But then you brought us a letter from Him! You brought us this book and helped us translate it into our language. Now we know that God loves us so much He sent His Son, Jesus, to save us!”

“I never thought of it like that before,” Parker said on the way home. “The Bible really is a letter from God, isn’t it?”

Dad nodded. “And we need to deliver that message to those who haven’t heard—no matter where on earth God puts us.”

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**DELIVER GOD’S MESSAGE**

**KEY VERSE:** IT IS WRITTEN: HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO PREACH THE GOSPEL OF PEACE. ROMANS 10:15

Have you heard and believed God’s message? Are you delivering it to others so they can hear and believe it too? God wants everyone to know that Jesus died for them so they can have eternal life. He has given His disciples—all those who know Jesus—the task of delivering His message. Who can you share God’s message with today?
Moving Day
READ: PHILIPPIANS 2:12–18

It was moving day. Alaina sat sullenly in the back seat as her mom followed the moving truck Dad was driving. She let out a heavy sigh and started complaining . . . again. “I don’t want to move. I don’t want to leave my friends, and I don’t want to make new ones!”

Suddenly, the moving truck stopped at a green light and blocked both lanes.

“What’s going on, Mom? Why did Dad stop?” Alaina asked.

“I don’t know,” Mom replied, “I can’t see around the big truck.”

The light turned red, then green again, but the truck still didn’t move. Cars began lining up and honking angrily. Alaina shrunk in her seat. “Why isn’t Dad moving? No one can get around him!”

“I’m sure your dad knows what he is doing,” Mom said calmly. “Let’s be patient and trust him.”

A minute later Dad continued driving through the intersection and the honking stopped. Then, a few miles down the road, he pulled into a gas station. Alaina jumped out of the car and ran over to the truck. “Dad, what happened at the green light?”

Dad began filling up the truck as he answered, “A woman with a baby had dropped a bag of groceries in the crosswalk. I didn’t want anyone to accidently hit them while she was picking everything up, so I parked over both lanes until she was safely across the street.”

“Oh, wow!” said Alaina. “I bet all those angry cars would take back their honks if they knew what you were doing.”

Mom nodded. “You know, just like those angry cars who couldn’t see down the road, we sometimes get angry too when we can’t see everything God has planned for us.”

Alaina frowned. “You mean like how I’m angry about the move?”

Dad gave Alaina a hug. “Sometimes we want answers right away, but Jesus wants us to patiently trust in Him. We know His plan for us includes eternal life with Him forever, so we can trust Him even though we don’t understand everything He allows in our lives.”

Alaina nodded. “I guess if I can trust that Dad knew what he was doing, I should be able to trust God even more.” She smiled. “And I’ll try not to complain anymore like those honking cars!”

TRUST GOD IN EVERYTHING

KEY VERSE: TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART. PROVERBS 3:5

Have you ever been scared in a new situation? Perhaps you went to a new summer camp or a new school and had to make new friends. Sometimes it feels like bad things are happening and we don’t understand why. But Jesus tells us that in all those scary moments, we can trust Him because He saved us and loves us and is in control of every situation.
Are you ready?” Uncle Rick shouted over the sound of the boat’s motor.

“All ready!” Alex and Susan responded in unison.

As they slowly moved forward, the long rope connecting Alex and Susan’s tube to the back of the boat began to tighten, and so did their stomachs. This was their first time tubing on the lake, and as the boat accelerated, their excitement was matched only by their fear.

“Whoo-hoo!” Alex shouted as their craft skidded across the open water.

Susan, however, did not say anything as she clutched tightly to the handles of the tube. Alex sensed that his younger sister was growing more frightened by the second. Soon, Susan confirmed it.

“Make it stop,” she begged, her voice quavering, partially from the cold but mostly from fear.

Alex waved at Uncle Rick, their signal to stop the boat.

“He doesn’t see me!” Alex yelled to Susan.

“What are we going to do?” Susan asked.

Alex knew what he had to do. Taking a deep breath of air, he let go of the tube’s handles and plunged into the water. As he surfaced, Alex was relieved to see Susan still sitting on top of the tube as Uncle Rick brought the boat to a stop.

Back in the safety of the boat, Susan sat next to Alex. “I know that you fell off the tube on purpose,” she said. “That was really kind.”

“Ah, it was nothin’,” Alex said, drying his wet hair.

“But it meant everything to me,” Susan replied. “What you did was a lot like what Jesus did for us. He made a huge sacrifice to rescue us from our sin by coming to earth and dying on the cross.”

“I guess you’re right about that,” said Alex. “I know I could never do what Jesus did, but I can demonstrate His love in smaller ways.”

“Yeah,” Susan said. “Like falling into the water so I wouldn’t!”

CHUCK KRALIK

MAKE SACRIFICES FOR OTHERS

KEY VERSE: GREATER LOVE HAS NO ONE THAN THIS: TO LAY DOWN ONE’S LIFE FOR ONE’S FRIENDS. JOHN 15:13 (NIV)

Do you make sacrifices for others? Even when you make a small sacrifice for someone else, you’re pointing them to the great sacrifice Jesus made for us. He died on a cross to take away your sin and give you eternal life with Him. What are some ways you can show His sacrificial love to others?
After playing for a while in the basement, little Penelope came upstairs and walked into the living room with an armful of bundles. “Look!” she cried. “I made presents!” She handed one to each member of her family.

Bryce wrinkled his nose. “Something stinks!” He sniffed the present in his hand. “I think it’s this . . . whatever it is.” He held up a slightly damp object made from old newspaper.

“See? It’s an airplane!” Penelope announced. “We learned to fold them in preschool. I made one for Anna too. And see—I folded hats for Mommy and Daddy. We learned to do them in preschool too!”

“Why, thank you,” said Mom with a faint smile. “That’s sweet of you, but . . . Penelope, where did you get newspapers to make these?”

“In the basement,” Penelope replied. “There was a whole pile of them by the window.” She looked at her mother anxiously. “Is that okay?”

“I noticed that it was damp by that window, and I’ve been meaning to get rid of those old papers!” Dad said. “They’re all wet. That must be why they smell so bad.”

“Don’t you like my presents?” asked Penelope.

Mom tried to soothe Penelope’s hurt feelings. “It was a very nice idea! Come on, let’s find some construction paper so you can make new ones.”

After Mom and Penelope left the room, Bryce and Anna quickly scooped up the smelly “presents” to take them out to the garbage can. “Penelope really did mean well, and I’m afraid she was surprised and disappointed when we weren’t delighted with her presents,” Dad said with a sigh. “She thought they were so nice, but we just see them as smelly junk.” He grinned at the two kids. “Kind of like good deeds.”

“Good deeds?” echoed Bryce.

“A verse in Isaiah says that the good deeds people do to earn their salvation are like filthy rags,” Dad explained. “Some people think they can please God just by doing their best, but all their good deeds are like those smelly presents from Penelope. Only Jesus can remove the smelly, filthy sin from our lives. We need to trust Him to save us and make us clean.”

SHERRY L. KUYT

GOOD DEEDS CAN’T SAVE YOU

KEY VERSE: WE ARE ALL INFECTED AND IMPURE WITH SIN. WHEN WE DISPLAY OUR RIGHTEOUS DEEDS, THEY ARE NOTHING BUT FILTHY RAGS. ISAIAH 64:6 (NLT)

Do you think God will be pleased with the good things you try to do and let you into heaven? God won’t accept your good deeds as payment for salvation. They look—and smell—like filthy rags to Him. You need to trust Jesus as your Savior in order to be saved and have eternal life. He will remove your sin and give you a clean heart. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 102.)
GOD MADE YOU AND LOVES YOU

God created everything there is—including you! He loves you more than any person could ever love you. He loves all people and created them to live in a perfect relationship with Him.

The Bible says:

SO GOD CREATED HUMAN BEINGS IN HIS OWN IMAGE. IN THE IMAGE OF GOD HE CREATED THEM; MALE AND FEMALE HE CREATED THEM. (GENESIS 1:27, NLT)

THE PROBLEM OF SIN

The first people God created—Adam and Eve—disobeyed Him. This caused sin to enter the world, breaking the perfect relationship they had with God. We sin by doing things God says are wrong and making ourselves the center of our lives instead of Him. Because Adam and Eve disobeyed, every person is born a sinner. Our sin separates us from God, and because He is perfect, He must punish sin—and the punishment for sin is death. Not just death of the body but separation from God that lasts forever.

The Bible says:

EVERYONE HAS SINNED; WE ALL FALL SHORT OF GOD’S GLORIOUS STANDARD. (ROMANS 3:23, NLT)

GOD’S PERFECT PLAN

Because every person—including you—has sinned, every person deserves to be punished by death. But God loves us so much He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to take the punishment for our sin. Jesus lived a perfect life on earth and then died on a cross in our place, even though He didn’t deserve it. But it didn’t end there—God raised Him back to life! Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, the punishment for sin was paid so we could be forgiven and have a relationship with God.

The Bible says:

GOD LOVED THE WORLD SO MUCH THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY SON, SO THAT EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WOULD NOT BE LOST BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. (JOHN 3:16, ERV)

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU?

It means you don’t have to pay the price of death for your sin—Jesus paid it for you! When you trust in Jesus by believing He died and rose from the dead to save you from sin, God forgives your sin and gives you a new life as His child that lasts forever. Your grateful response to His wonderful gift is making Jesus the center of your life instead of yourself.

ARE YOU READY TO TRUST IN JESUS?

Tell Him you know that only He can save you from sin and that you want to begin a wonderful relationship with Him.

Still thinking it through? Answer the Key Questions at keysforkids.org/goodnews/keyquestions
Prayer Power

Please pray for my family because this is our first year without our family dog, Bowzer. He died in October I think, but we are grieving a lot so please pray for my family. – Ashley

Please pray that me and my brother will be healed from hand foot and mouth disease and that my family will have peace please. – Ellie

Pray that my bad dreams stop. – Cory

I will have to get surgery on my ear soon and hope the surgeon contacts my mom soon so we know when it will be because we still don’t know. – Christina

We Want to Hear from You
ENCOURAGEMENTS, TESTIMONIES, PRAYER REQUESTS

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________
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____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Send us your prayer requests.
Send mail to: Box 1001 • Grand Rapids, MI • 49501-1001
Or visit: keysforkids.org/Contact-Us
There aren’t just millions of sheep on the earth—there are over one BILLION sheep! That’s one for every seven people. People need sheep. For thousands of years, people have domesticated, or tamed, sheep in order to weave warm yarns from their wool, drink their milk or turn it into cheese, and eat their meat.

Domesticated sheep need people too. Shepherds lead flocks of sheep to fresh pastures of grass and streams of cool water. If sharp, painful rocks get stuck in a hoof, the shepherd is there with a long metal file to gently clean the rocks out. Shepherds protect the sheep from animals who want to kill them for food—predators like wolves, coyotes, mountain lions, and even bears. Left alone in the wild, domesticated sheep would not last very long.

Sheep even need each other! With their eyes set almost on the sides of their heads, sheep scan wide areas, keeping track of one another. They like to see other sheep when they are grazing. If one of them gets separated from the rest of the flock, it gets very upset! Sheep are good followers and will always follow a shepherd or the lead sheep (usually the oldest male sheep, called a ram) to new places to graze.

Most of the time, the leader will take the flock to a good pasture, but sometimes following the leader has terrible consequences! The sheep’s instinct to follow as a flock is so strong that four hundred sheep in Turkey once followed the lead sheep into a ravine filled with deep water and drowned.

Who do you follow? Celebrities? Kids at school? Do they always think about what’s best for you? Sometimes following other people proves to be unwise or even dangerous.

King David wrote, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Psalm 23:1). As a young shepherd boy, David followed God and trusted Him to take care of him. Later, he pointed people to a future king, Jesus, whose kingdom would last forever. In the Bible, Jesus is called the Good Shepherd. We can trust Him to always take good care of us, even in difficult situations. Are you in Jesus’ flock? Follow Him.

SONJA ANDERSON