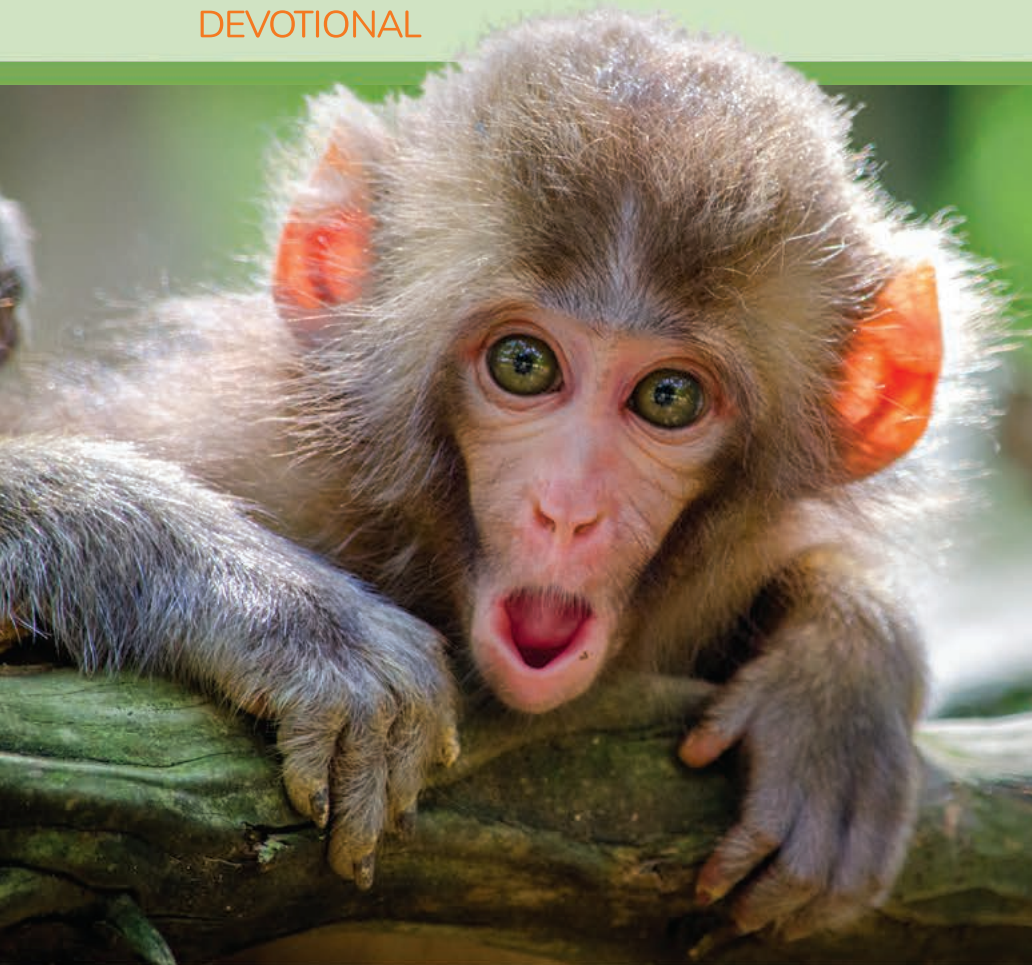




keys
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DEVOTIONAL



MARCH • APRIL • MAY

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF KEYS FOR KIDS



HEY, KIDS! I'M ZACH, HOST OF THE KEYS FOR KIDS RADIO

PROGRAM. I'm so glad you're here! I love getting to know God better by listening to what He says in the Bible. That's what *Keys for Kids* is all about—it's a daily devotional meant to be read with your Bible.

TO GET THE MOST OUT OF EACH DAY'S DEVOTION:



1) Read the Bible passages at the top of the page before you read the story. They'll help you understand how the story relates to God's truth in the Bible.



2) Each story ends with questions to help you apply God's Word to your life. Read them carefully, and think about your answers. What did you learn from the Bible verses and story? What do you think God is saying to you?



3) Each story includes a key verse. Read it a few times and see if you can memorize it, or write it down and put it somewhere you can see it. Then take God's Word with you as you go about your day!

In each issue of *Keys for Kids* I'll help you take a deeper look at God and the Bible, and I also love to answer questions from kids like you! Flip to "Hey Zach!" on page 52. If you have a question, send it to me at keysforkids.org/heyzach.

Want to hear me read the *Keys for Kids* devotional story? Each day I host the *Keys for Kids* radio program on Keys for Kids Radio. Check it out at keysforkids.net, download the Keys for Kids app, or scan this QR code with your phone's camera.

And don't forget to sign up for the WORD with Zach summer reading program for a chance to win prizes! WORDwithZach.org



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WATCH OUT FOR SHEEP

I shouldn't have let you see my test paper," Teo said as he and his friend Joel rode the bus home after school. "I think I should tell Mr. Grant I cheated."

"Why would you do that?" asked Joel. "You didn't cheat. I did."

"But I helped you," said Teo, "so I cheated too."

"We'll never do it again, so nobody will know," said Joel.

"Nobody saw us."

"God did," said Teo. "He sees everything."

"You mean God spies on us?" Joel asked.

"No, but He sees what we do. It's more like, well..." Teo sighed, not sure how to explain what he meant.

That evening Joel went with Teo's family to a basketball game in another town. On the way home, they met a car on a two-lane country road. Teo's dad squinted. "That guy should dim his lights," he said. "They're blinding me!"

"Look out!" Mom exclaimed. "There's a—"

The brakes squealed and the car swerved, then stopped with a thud. A sheep had wandered into the road through a broken fence, but nobody was hurt—not even the sheep. The car had hit a fencepost but wasn't badly damaged.

"Well, that was exciting," Joel said when they dropped him off a couple hours later. "It's lucky nobody got hurt."

"It was more than luck," Teo's mom said. "God was watching over us."

"That's it!" said Teo. "That's what I meant earlier today. God watches us to protect us, not just to catch us doing something bad."

Dad nodded. "The Bible says Jesus watches those who trust in Him like a Shepherd watching over His sheep. He takes care of us, and when we wander away from Him and do things that are wrong, He offers us forgiveness."

Joel found Teo at school the next morning. "I've been thinking," he said, "and, well, if you still want to tell Mr. Grant about the test, I'll go with you." He sighed. "Do you think God will see us do that too?"

"He sure will!" said Teo. "And if we tell Him we're sorry for cheating, He'll forgive us."  *Barbara J. Westberg*



GOD SEES EVERYTHING | KEY VERSE: The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good. Proverbs 15:3 (NIV)



Did you know that God always sees you? Nothing you do—good or bad—is hidden from Him. He knows we all sin by doing things that are wrong. That's why Jesus died for our sins—so we could be forgiven. If you've done something wrong, confess it to Him and accept His forgiveness. Then trust Him to watch over you as your Good Shepherd.



PRAY ABOUT IT

Snow was starting to fall from the sky as Nick looked out his bedroom window, and he let out a sigh of frustration. His cousins were supposed to come that weekend, but if the roads were snowy and slippery, they wouldn't be able to make it.

Nick missed his cousins and looked forward to their visits a few times each year. He had all kinds of plans for when they arrived, and he even had their sleeping bags already set up in his room.

Nick turned from the window and went downstairs, where his parents had the TV on. "Is it going to be a bad storm?" he asked as the weatherman talked away on the screen.

"We're not sure yet." Dad got up. "Help me make some hot chocolate?"

Nick wasn't really in the mood for hot chocolate even though it was one of his favorite treats, but he followed his dad to the kitchen.

"Hey, don't look so down," Dad said as he filled the tea kettle with water. "The roads might be clear enough by morning. We can pray that they will be."


Nick pulled his favorite mug from the cupboard. "Do you think God cares about this?"

Dad set the tea kettle on the stove and turned to him with raised brows. "Do I think so? I know so. The Bible tells us over and over again how much God cares about us. He loves us so much that He sent Jesus to save us so we could start a new life with Him, and that means He cares about every worry or problem we have."


"So He doesn't think it's weird if we ask for the roads to be clear?" Nick asked.


"Not at all," Dad said. "The Bible says God knows what you need even before you ask Him. He always knows what's on your heart and mind and wants to help you."

Dad tossed Nick a bag of marshmallows. "That doesn't mean the roads will for sure be clear tomorrow. Sometimes He doesn't answer our prayers the way we ask or expect. But we can always talk to Him about anything that's on our minds and ask for His help."

"Okay." Nick set the marshmallows down and folded his hands. "I'm going to ask right now."  *Bethany Acker*



 **PRAY ABOUT ANYTHING ON YOUR MIND** | KEY VERSE: Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Matthew 6:8 (NIV)

 When you start to worry about things, do you think to pray? God cares about everything that's happening in your life—even the "small" things. He knows what you need even before you ask Him for help. He may not always answer your prayers the way you want, but He promises to be with you and help you. Tell Him what's on your mind, no matter how small it seems.

LEAVING TRACKS

Chase stomped his feet to warm them while he waited at the edge of the woods for his grandpa and sister. When they caught up with him, Iris pointed. “What animal made these tracks, Grandpa?”

Grandpa crouched in the fresh snow to peer at the tracks. “Let’s see. Four toes and a heel. And see what a straight line he left? I’d say a fox was here. A fox’s narrow chest lets him place one paw right in front of the other, which is why there’s a single line of prints.”

They followed the trail a little way, and Grandpa pointed out places where squirrels had played tag and rabbits had been hiding. “Wow, Grandpa!” Iris said. “You’re the best tracker in the whole world!”

Grandpa laughed. “All tracks tell a story.”

When they got home, Chase sniffed the air. “Yum! Mom’s making pizza, and it smells like it’s ready to eat!”

Iris put away her wooly coat and fuzzy mittens, but Chase dumped his coat on the floor, yanked off his boots, and turned toward the kitchen. Snow clung to the bottom of his pants in small clumps.

“Chase, I can always tell when you’ve been through a room,” Grandpa said, stopping him in the hall. “You leave tracks. And just like animal tracks, what you leave behind tells a story. What kind of story do you think people get from tracks like puddles and coats on the floor?”

“Umm...” Chase thought about it. “That I’m messy?”

“Anything else?” asked Grandpa.

Chase looked down at the puddles on the floor. “I guess it could tell people that I expect someone else to clean up my messes.”

Grandpa nodded. “As Christians, the story we want our actions to tell others is how much Jesus loves them. By acting in unselfish ways—like showing others respect by picking up your things—your actions will leave tracks that tell His story. He cleaned up our mess by dying for our sins, and when we act in thoughtful, loving ways toward others, we point to Him.”

Chase nodded. “I’m sorry, Grandpa. I’ll put away my things and wipe up the puddles on the floor right now.” He grinned. “From now on, you’re going to have a harder time telling where I’ve been!” ♥ *Lisa Nagel*



YOUR ACTIONS LEAVE TRACKS | KEY VERSE: Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Philippians 2:3 (CSB)



What kind of story do your tracks tell? Do your actions show others the kindness and love of Jesus—or that you’re only thinking of yourself? If you trust in Jesus, He gives you the power to leave tracks that point others to Him. Even if it’s just in small ways, like cleaning up after yourself or not cutting in line, you can tell His story through kind, loving actions.

IN THE SHADOW OF HIS WINGS

Jacob's throat tightened as he peered out the kitchen window. *I wish we didn't have to move*, he thought. *I miss my friends and my old school.* After wiping his blurry eyes, he heard something chirping outside. "Look, Mom!" Jacob called. "There's a nest under the roof over there, and a mother robin is sitting over four babies!"

Mom came in from the other room. "You're right, Jake! The mother bird will protect her babies until they're ready to fly and live on their own."

Jacob watched as the male robin flew in and dropped a worm into the mother's open beak. She ate part of it, then pushed it out and dropped it toward her babies' throats. The tiny birds stretched their necks skyward, chirping until the worm was gone.


"Those babies don't ever have to worry," Jacob said. "They are warm, safe, and well-fed."

Mom grinned. "Speaking of being well-fed, you need to eat your pancakes and get ready for school."

Jacob swallowed hard. "Mom, can I stay home? My new school is nothing like my old one. I don't have any friends here. Besides, I've got a huge test today. I've studied, but what if I don't do well?"

Mom sat down. "You've gone through a lot of changes lately. It's not easy attending a new school, is it? But I bet you can find someone to play with at recess and invite them to eat lunch with you. And I'm sure you'll do fine on the test—you studied well. Just leave the rest to God. Remember what you said about the baby birds never having to worry?"

Jacob wrinkled his brows. "Yeah, but what does that have to do with me?"

"Well, Jake, God is like that mother bird. He loves us so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for us, and we can take refuge in the shadow of His wings. He promises to use everything in your life for good, including the hard stuff. Give Him your worries about making friends and taking tests and trust Him to take care of you and guide you. Just like that mother bird, He will provide everything you need."  *Linda Champagne*



DON'T WORRY | KEY VERSE: How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!
People take refuge in the shadow of your wings. Psalm 36:7 (NIV)



Do you worry about your problems? Is there something in your life that you're struggling with right now, like moving or making new friends? Life can be tough sometimes, and God understands that. That's why He wants you to give all your worries to Him and trust Him to do what's best for you. He loves you and wants to help you with every problem in your life.



CHILD OF THE KING (PART 1)

Want to come over to my house for a while?" Elsa asked as she and Maggie got off the school bus.

"Okay," said Maggie. "I'll just have to make sure it's okay with my mom."

After checking with Maggie's mother, the girls had a snack and then went to Elsa's room. "My mom gave me some of her old dresses," Elsa said. "We could put them on and pretend to be princesses."

"Yeah! That would be fun!"

After choosing dresses and putting them on, the girls made paper crowns and walked around in their long princess gowns. They sat on imaginary thrones while imaginary servants did everything they were told.

When Elsa's brother Stellan walked by, he stopped a moment and looked in. "Your Royal Highnesses," he said dramatically, "I hate to be the one to tell you this, but I think you need to fire your royal stylist. Your dresses look old and outdated."

"They do not!" Maggie said indignantly. "They're beautiful princess gowns. You're just jealous because you're not a prince!"

Stellan laughed. "Whatever," he said and continued down the hall.

After Maggie went home, Elsa sat down to dinner with her family. Stellan passed her the bread basket. "Have a roll, Your Royal Highness," he teased. "Tell me, are you able to butter it yourself? If not, just snap your royal fingers and someone will apply the golden butter with a golden knife." Elsa grinned and made a face at her brother.


"What's that all about?" asked Dad. When he heard about the girls' afternoon activities, he surprised Elsa by saying, "You want to know something? You really are a princess—and Stellan is a prince!"

"What?" cried Elsa. "But you're not a king!"

"No," said Dad, "but since you both trust Jesus as your Savior, God is your Father, and He's the King of kings. So in a way, that makes you a princess, right?"

"Cool!" said Elsa. "Maggie will be surprised to hear that! I'll tell her about it tomorrow."

"Does Maggie know Jesus?" asked Dad. "Is she a child of the King of kings too?"

"I don't know," said Elsa. "I'll ask her. If not, I'll tell her she can become a real princess too!"  *Victoria Johnson*



GOD IS THE KING OF KINGS | KEY VERSE: He is Lord of lords and King of kings. Revelation 17:14



Are you a child of God—the King of kings? If you know Jesus as your Savior, He has saved you from sin and made you God's child. You might not feel like a prince or princess, but your heavenly Father is the Ruler of the universe! If you haven't put your faith in Jesus, do it today and He will make you a child of the King of kings. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.)

CHILD OF THE KING (PART 2)

Elsa was eager to find Maggie at school. “Remember how much fun it was to pretend we were princesses?” she asked her friend. “Well, guess what? My dad says I really am one! I’m a child of God, so I’m a child of the King because God is King of everything!”



“I’ve never heard that before,” Maggie said doubtfully.

“It’s what the Bible says,” Elsa replied. “Anyone who trusts in Jesus is a child of God. You can be His child too! Don’t you want to be?” Maggie just shrugged.

After school the girls went over to Maggie’s house, but Elsa didn’t stay very long. “I’m not playing with Maggie anymore!” she said as she burst into the kitchen. “We pretended to be princesses again, and she kept all the prettiest dresses for herself. She wouldn’t let me wear any of them. Then when I got off my throne for just a second, she took it!”

Mom frowned. “Are you sure you weren’t trying to get all the best things for yourself?”


“But I was her guest—and I really am a child of the King, and she’s not,” Elsa replied. “I told Maggie that, but she wouldn’t even give me back my throne.” Elsa scowled. “But I showed her!”


Mom raised her eyebrows. “What did you do?”


“I threw her stuff at her and told her she looked ugly in those dresses anyway, and then I ran home.”

“Elsa,” Mom said quietly, “do you think you acted like a princess today? The Bible says that when we trust Jesus to save us from our sin and become God’s children, He makes us new people. The Holy Spirit comes into our hearts so we can live pure lives that show others we belong to the King. Do you think your actions today were pure? Do you think your attitude showed Maggie what Jesus was like and made her want to become God’s child?”

“I guess not,” Elsa admitted. “Can I go back and apologize?”

“Sure,” said Mom. “That will help Maggie see what it’s like to be a real princess—a daughter of the King of kings!”  *Victoria Johnson*

 **LIVE A PURE LIFE** | KEY VERSE: All who have this hope in [Jesus] purify themselves, just as he is pure. 1 John 3:3 (NIV)

 Do you act the way a prince or princess—a child of God—should act? Do you show others who Jesus is by treating them with love and kindness? If you belong to the King of kings, your life should show it. The Holy Spirit is making you more and more like Jesus each day. Show His love to others so they can see who He is and want to become His children too.

THE FALSE FRIEND

Editor's note: This story's subject matter may not be suitable for young children.

It's not fair, Ruth typed into her phone. Mom lets Jubilee go out with her friends after school all the time.

Three little dots floated in a pale blue bubble as Ben typed back. *She just doesn't want to admit you're old enough to start making your own decisions.*

Ruth stared at Ben's profile picture. His big blue eyes smiled back at her. They hadn't met in real life yet, but it seemed like he understood her better than anyone in the world. So what if he was as old as her big sister? He was nice and funny. And he liked her. He'd told her so more than once.

So, have you decided? Ruth's heart skipped a beat at Ben's next message. *It's just the park. You'll be home before your mom even misses you.*

He's right, Ruth thought. *Mom's treating me like a baby.* She started typing OK when a verse she'd memorized barged its way into her brain: *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*

Ruth stopped. It was like someone spoke the words out loud. Just last week her youth group leader had reminded her that her mom was a blessing from God. He'd put her in Ruth's life because He loved her. God was helping Ruth grow in her faith in Jesus and become more like Him. That's why He wanted her to obey Mom's rules—not to spoil her fun. But was meeting a friend so bad?

Another thought came to mind. Her friends didn't know Ben either. He'd sent her a friend request one day, and she'd let him into her life without question. She'd been talking to a stranger for two months and lying to everyone about it because he'd asked her to keep their friendship a secret. At first it was exciting. Now she was scared.

Ruth's hands shook as she typed: *I can't.*

Ben said, *I thought we were friends.*

Ruth's heart sank. She answered, *Friends don't ask friends to lie to their parents.*

Ben's next words weren't very friendly at all. Ruth made her choice. It didn't matter if she got in trouble or not, it was time to talk to her mom.

"Mom?" Ruth took a deep breath and started down the hall. "I need to tell you something." ♥ *Jennifer Lindsay*



OBEDY YOUR PARENTS | KEY VERSE: Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Ephesians 6:1



Have you ever been tempted to break the rules because they seemed unfair? Sometimes it may feel like your parents are trying to make your life hard or stop you from having fun, but God placed them in your life because He loves you. Trust that He's protecting you and making you more like Jesus as He teaches you to obey your parents. When you obey them, you obey Him.

If someone is trying to talk to you and have you keep it a secret, tell a trusted adult right away.

SCHOOL BUS STOP

The school bus was expected any minute, so Ethan shoveled his cereal into his mouth. Then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw his baby sister, Addy, pick up his tablet. He dropped his spoon, darted across the kitchen, and snatched it from her hands.

“Don’t touch that!” he yelled. “I told you not to touch my stuff. You break everything!”

Addy burst into tears, and Mom came hurrying into the room and picked her up.

“What happened?” she asked.

“Addy was messing with my stuff again,” Ethan said. “She’s so annoying!”

Mom sighed. “I’m sorry, Ethan, I wasn’t paying attention to what she was doing. But you also need to be more careful about not putting your things where she can reach them. And you know yelling at her like that scares her and is not the way we solve problems.”

Ethan bit his lip, feeling guilty. “I didn’t mean to make her cry. I’m sorry, Addy.” He gave Addy a hug, and she calmed down.

Ethan frowned as he put his cereal bowl in the sink. “I shouldn’t have yelled at her. Is God disappointed in me?”

Mom ruffled his hair. “God knows we all mess up. That’s why He sent Jesus to die for us—so we could be forgiven for the wrong things we do. You can tell Him you’re sorry.”

“But how do we know that God’s forgiven us?” Ethan asked.

Mom smiled. “Do you think your school bus is coming? Even though you can’t see it yet?” She pointed out the window.

“Of course,” Ethan said.

“Why?”

“Because it comes every school day,” Ethan replied.

“God is like that,” Mom said. “He never changes. You can always count on Him to forgive you because Jesus died for you—and He’ll help you be more patient with Addy too.”

Ethan smiled. “I’m going to ask God to help me be nicer to her and set a better example.”

The school bus pulled up, and Ethan looked at the clock. Eight-fifteen a.m. Just like every morning. He grabbed his backpack and ran out the door. It was nice to have things he could count on. ♥ *Abigail Singrey*



WE CAN COUNT ON GOD’S FORGIVENESS | KEY VERSE: If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9



What are some things in your life that you can count on? Maybe you eat the same thing for breakfast every day, or your parents say the same thing to you every night before you go to bed. Like the sun rising every morning, we can count on God to forgive us when we make mistakes. Jesus died for our sins so our wrongs wouldn’t be counted against us. Confess your sins to Him and trust Him to forgive you.

SMILES

Ella was pouting when she and her mother returned home from shopping. “What’s the matter, grumpy face?” asked her brother, Jax.

Ella scowled. “Mom gets you everything you want, but she wouldn’t buy anything for me. All I wanted was a smiling flower shirt.”

Jax laughed. “A smiling flower shirt on you? That would be a joke! The way you whine?” Using a high-pitched tone, he imitated her. “*Mooooom! Why won’t you buy me everything I want?*” He smirked, and his sister hit him. “Ow!” he yelled, hitting back.

Dad walked into the room as the kids continued to hit each other. “Break it up!” he said. “The place I’d like to see a smile is on your faces for a change.”

On Sunday, Jax and Ella got ready to go to church with their next-door neighbors. “Why don’t you come to church with us today?” Jax asked his parents hopefully. Both he and Ella had been Christians for some time, but their parents were not believers.

Dad settled into his armchair. “And miss out on some peace and quiet without you two fighting? I don’t think so!” Jax and Ella didn’t know what to say.


“We’ve got to quit fighting,” Ella told Jax later. “It’s not helping us get Mom and Dad to listen when we try to tell them about Jesus.”

Jax nodded thoughtfully. “I know. It’s like what Pastor Peters said last week—love is what shows others we belong to Jesus. He gave us the Holy Spirit so we can show His love in all we do. We need to remember that when we’re tempted to fight.”

So they prayed and asked Jesus to help them remember to show His love in their words and actions. And He did! Soon their parents noticed a difference. When a vase was broken several weeks later, both Ella and Jax admitted to not being careful as they played.

Dad was amazed. “You’re not blaming each other! I never thought I’d see the day.”

The next Sunday, Dad surprised them. “Mom and I aren’t too old for church, are we?” “You mean you’ll go?” Jax asked.

Mom and Dad nodded, and Jax and Ella gave each other high fives. “Hey!” Dad said, laughing. “That brought smiles to your faces!”  Agnes Livezey



LET OTHERS SEE JESUS’S LOVE IN YOU | KEY VERSE: [Jesus said,] “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:35 (NIV)



Do your actions and attitudes show that you have the love of Jesus in your heart? If you’re a Christian, He’s made you a new person and given you the Holy Spirit, who fills you with His love. When you let that love shine out in the way you treat people, others will be able to see that you belong to Him. Trust Him to help you show His love in all you do so others can see who He is.

REJOICE ALWAYS

Dad?" Madison opened the door to her dad's workshop. "My favorite girl! How was art class?" Dad asked.

Madison ran to hug him. "The art part was good." She paused as she bit her lip.

"What part wasn't?" Dad asked her, looking concerned. He took off his gloves and set them on the bench.

"Well, Mia told me that I'm too happy. She said I need to wipe the smile off my face sometimes." Madison frowned. "But isn't being happy good? I don't like being sad."


"Being happy is great. It reminds me of one of my favorite verses, First Thessalonians 5:16. It's a really short verse, only two words—"Rejoice always." God wants us to rejoice in Him. We can always be joyful because He loves us and sent Jesus to save us."

Madison smiled. "I like that verse. But I know sad stuff happens, like when Mom died." She frowned. "I guess that was sadder for you. Did you ever smile then?" Madison's mom had died when she was three months old, and Dad often told Madison stories about her.

"I was sad, and I'm still sad that she's gone. But yes, I still smiled." Dad looked at Madison. "After all, I have you! You make me smile every day. I thank God that I was blessed with such a bundle of joy."

Madison giggled. "I love you too, Dad. And if Mia asks, I'll tell her about the verse. Being happy is good." She twitched her nose. "Being sad isn't bad, is it?"

Dad shook his head. "Not at all. In fact, there's another short verse about that in the Bible—'Jesus wept.' He cried when He found out that Lazarus had died. None of our emotions are bad, and Jesus felt them all the same way we do. Whatever we feel, He wants us to share it with Him. That's a great way to rejoice—by sharing everything with God."

Madison gave her dad a hug. "Thanks, Dad. I'll make sure Mia knows that it's okay if she feels sad, but I'm gonna rejoice!"  *Kimberly Brokish*



YOU CAN ALWAYS REJOICE | KEY VERSE: Rejoice always.

1 Thessalonians 5:16 (NIV)



How do you feel right now? We all experience a lot of emotions, and none of them are bad. Remember Jesus was human just like us, and He felt all those emotions too—He knows what it's like to be happy, sad, even angry. He knows exactly how we feel and loves us. Can you tell Him how you feel? He would love to help you rejoice in Him.

GOOD PIZZA AND AN EVEN BETTER JESUS

This is the best pizza I've ever eaten!" Jonah pumped a fist in the air. "I can't believe this place is here to stay. I'm going to tell my friends about it."

Mom smiled. "I think our family will be eating here often."

As soon as he got home, Jonah started a video conversation with a couple of his friends. He was quick to tell them about the pizza he'd just had and where they could get it.

When he went outside that afternoon to help his dad shovel snow from the sidewalk in front of their house, Jonah saw one of his neighbors also shoveling. "Hey, Mr. Fisher!" He waved as he walked over to the older man. Jonah couldn't help but tell him about the pizza. "You'll love it," he said. "You should get it for dinner when you're done shoveling."

"I just might do that." Mr. Fisher grinned.

Dad tapped Jonah's shoulder as they headed into the house. "I think it's really interesting how you're spreading the word about that pizza."

"It's just so good!" Jonah's mouth watered just thinking about it.

"It reminds me of something I was reading," Dad said. "In the book of John."

"They didn't have pizza in the Bible, did they?" Jonah made his way to the kitchen. All that shoveling had made him thirsty.

"No," Dad said. "But they had something even greater. Jesus."

Jonah pulled a bottle of water from the refrigerator. "Why did the pizza make you think of Jesus?"

"When the early disciples first started following Jesus, they told their friends and family," Dad said. "They got others to follow Him too. Sort of like how you're getting others to go out and get pizza."

"Because the pizza was amazing," Jonah said. "Following Jesus had to be pretty amazing too."

"It was, and it is," Dad said. "And you've got me thinking that maybe we should be telling others about that, sharing our faith a little more. I mean, if you can get people that excited about pizza..."

Jonah nodded. "We could get people excited about Jesus too!" ♥ *Emily Acker*



TELL OTHERS HOW GREAT JESUS IS | KEY VERSE: Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you. Mark 5:19 (NIV)



Have you ever experienced something great and wanted to tell everyone you knew all about it so they could experience it too? Have you told others about Jesus, letting them know how amazing He is? As you share your faith with others and let them know what Jesus has done for you, they might want to know Him themselves. Let others know how great Jesus is so they can get excited too!

WHO'S THAT KNOCKING?

Grandpa, I think Grandma needs hearing aids," said Kelsey. "Someone knocked at the door this morning and Grandma didn't hear it. By the time I got to the door, the person was gone."

"That's odd," said Grandpa. "I haven't noticed a problem, but I'll try to pay more attention."

Kelsey had been living with her grandparents for a few weeks while her mother was away on military duty. She loved her grandparents, but living with them was weird.

She refilled Grandpa's coffee cup and asked, "Do I have to go to church today?"

"Of course! We always go as a family. Going to church is a privilege many people don't have. It's a way we worship God and connect with other believers."

"That's just it," said Kelsey. "You and Grandma love all that God stuff and talking to your 'believer' friends. I believe in God, but I'd rather spend Sunday hanging out with my school friends."

"Honey, you have the whole afternoon for that," Grandpa said.

That day in Sunday school, the lesson was about Jericho, but Kelsey was thinking about her mom. Mom never took her to church. Sunday mornings with Mom were for sleeping in. Then they'd walk to the Waffle Barn. The waffles smelled like a cake baking. You could smell them from a block away. She'd smother her waffles with pecan syrup and butter.

Kelsey was still thinking about those waffles when suddenly, there was a firm knock on the Sunday school room door. To her shock, no one went to answer the door. No one else seemed to hear it.

Maybe I'm the one with bad hearing, thought Kelsey.

That evening as she got ready for bed, she noticed a small painting on her bedroom wall. It was Jesus standing outside a door. At the bottom it said, "I stand at the door and knock."

Knock? thought Kelsey. What's the deal with all this knocking that nobody seems to hear but me? Is it my imagination or...Jesus, is that You?

Kelsey took the picture and carried it to Grandpa. "I've heard this verse before, Grandpa. But what does it mean? Does Jesus knock for real?"

"Sit down here, honey," he said. "I'll tell you all about it."  *Teresa Ambord*



JESUS IS KNOCKING | KEY VERSE: Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. Revelation 3:20



Is Jesus knocking at the door of your heart? It's not a sound you hear with your ears but an invitation He offers to you in His Word, the Bible. If you're not a believer, He wants you to trust Him to save you from sin and give you eternal life. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.) And if you do know Him as your Savior, He invites you to spend time with Him in prayer, at church, and in His Word so He can fill your life with peace, hope, and joy.

LEAP OF FAITH

Callie turned down the final loop of the zoo. “Best day of school ever! I love animals!”

“And I love that we’re both homeschooled and can go on field trips more often!” Callie’s best friend, Katie, grinned. “Hey, look at that cool-looking antelope!” Katie and Callie marveled at the antelope’s twisted horns that spiraled close to thirty-five inches high.

“Mom, why are they enclosed with such a short fence? It can’t be more than four feet high!” Callie pointed out.

Katie frowned in concentration. “Yeah, it says right here that African impalas can jump up to ten feet in the air! I wonder why they aren’t just roaming all around the zoo?”

“Let’s consult my phone,” Mom joked. “You girls always have great questions. Interesting! This article says impalas won’t jump unless they see where they’ll land. Since they can’t see the ground on the other side of this wall, that must keep them in their habitat.”

“It’s kind of sad when you think about it,” Katie pondered. “Freedom is just a jump away, but fear keeps them trapped.”


Mom nodded. “We can learn a lesson from the impalas. Callie, remember when you felt like God wanted you to serve in the children’s ministry at church, but you were scared because you weren’t used to working with kids?”

“Yeah, I was nervous about it.”

“But then your best friend reminded you that faith is stepping out in confidence even when you can’t see the outcome,” Katie reminded her. “Just like it says in Hebrews chapter eleven.”

“That whole chapter is filled with people who trusted God to help them take great leaps of faith, even though they weren’t sure how things would turn out,” Mom mused. “We can do the same when we remember that Jesus is always with us. He died and rose again to give us eternal life, and that means we can always trust Him.”

Katie smiled. “Hey, maybe we can have a code word! The next time one of us wants to hold back because of fear, we can yell ‘Impala!’”

Callie jumped in the air dramatically. “That will remind us to take a leap of faith!” 
Savannah Coleman

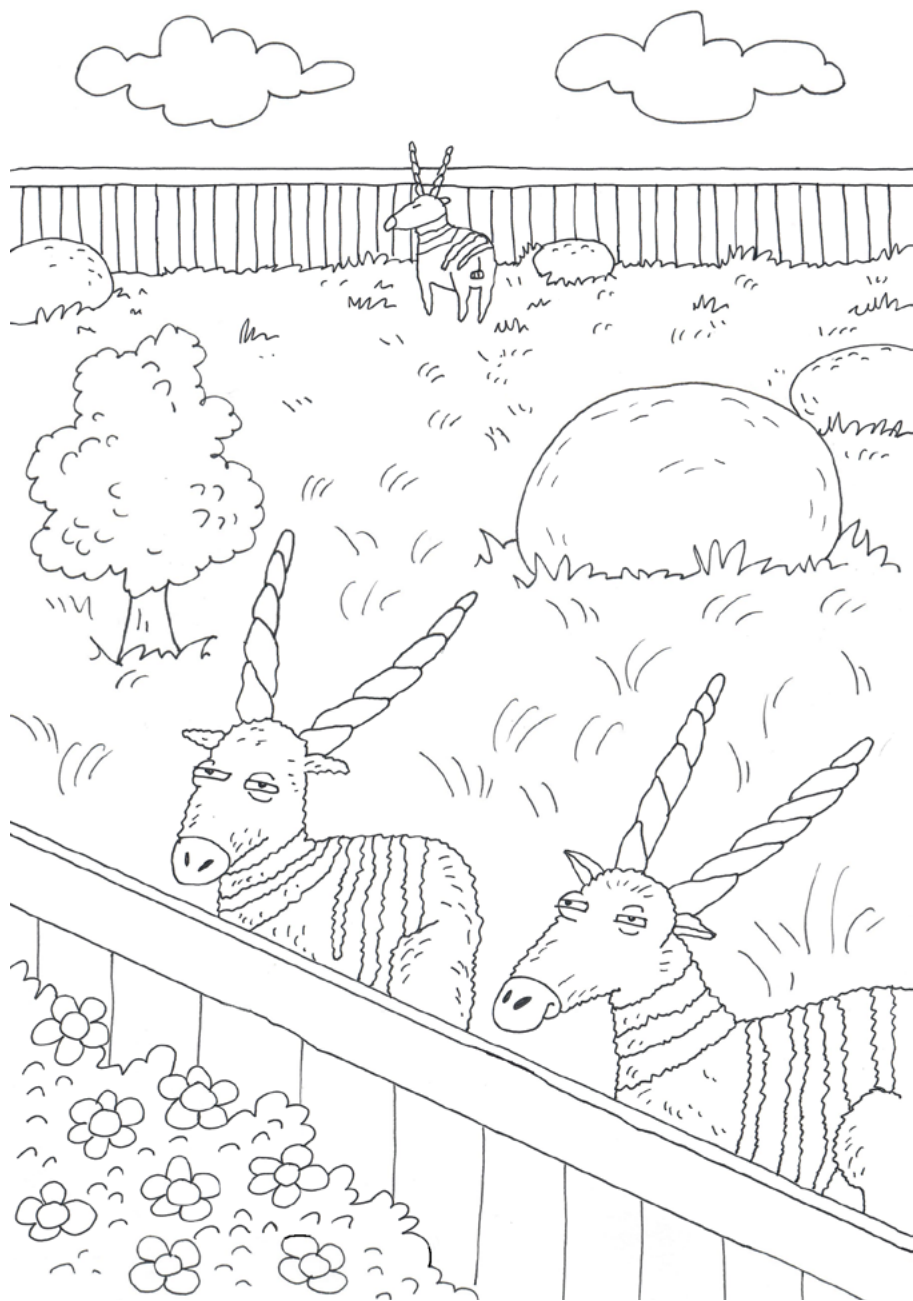


TRUST JESUS AND TAKE THE LEAP | KEY VERSE: Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)



Do you ever feel held back by fear? Maybe you sense God’s prompting to talk to a lonely kid. Perhaps you need to confront a friend for doing something they shouldn’t. God may even put it on your heart to speak about Him to someone who doesn’t know Him. If you know Jesus as your Savior, He is with you and will help you complete the work He wants you to do. Trust Him to help you take that leap of faith.

COLOR!



HEART BANDAGE

Dad, look at this sore on my arm.” Cole pulled up his sleeve to expose a weeping red gash on his forearm.

“Is that where you got burned at the bonfire?” Dad asked. “It’s getting worse. Let’s see if Dr. Patel can look at it.”

While Dad called the clinic, Cole scratched his arm. When Dad hung up the phone, he said, “They had a cancellation. If we hurry we can see the doctor.” As Dad drove, he said, “I hope they can do something so you can go to your church group tonight.”

“I don’t want to go. I might run into Brad, and this is his fault. I told him to stop pushing me by the fire. But he wouldn’t quit, and I got burned.”

“He was wrong to do that, Cole. But missing church to stay away from him is just going to make things worse. Jesus says that if someone sins against you, you’re supposed to tell him, and if he asks you to forgive him, you do it because Jesus forgave you.”

“I told him, but he just laughed. Our youth leader had a talk with him. Even if Brad apologizes now, I’ll just laugh at him.”


Dad parked in the clinic lot. “Does your arm look good to you, Cole?”

“No, it looks gross.”

“That’s exactly what an unforgiving heart looks like to God—oozing, stinking, and unable to heal. When you hold a grudge against someone, it’s like tearing open a wound every time you think about it. You told Brad that he did wrong—that’s the first step the Bible tells you to take. Now you need to trust Jesus to help you forgive. Remember, He paid for all your sins and forgives you completely whenever you do something wrong.” Dad opened the car door. “Let’s go or we’ll miss the appointment.”

Dr. Patel cleaned and bandaged the wound and told Cole to come back in a week.

On the drive home, Dad said, “I see that bandage is protecting your sore. You’re not scratching it now.”

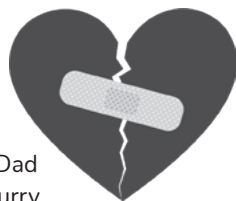
“It feels better. And I feel better about forgiving Brad. I prayed about it at the clinic, and instead of imagining how I’ll get back at him, I’m ready to forgive.”  *Laura Roesler*



GET RID OF BITTERNESS | KEY VERSE: Be kind to each other, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. Ephesians 4:32 (NLT)



Is there anyone who has wronged you and won’t apologize? Do you feel bitter about it? Do you plan to hold a grudge and never forgive that person? Don’t let bitterness ooze like a wound that won’t heal in your heart. Remember how much Jesus has forgiven you, and trust Him to help you always be ready to forgive.



STAY FOCUSED

Harley's cat jumped up on the desk and started batting at her pencil. "Mom, can you come get Sassy?" Harley called down the hallway. "I'm trying to do my homework."

Mom came to Harley's door and laughed when she saw Sassy bat Harley's pencil out of her hand and onto the floor.

"Can you take her, please?" Harley asked. "She's distracting me, and I need to get this done so I can meet Grace at the park."

Mom took Sassy out of the room and closed the door. A few minutes later, Harley saw something move out of the corner of her eye. Sassy was sticking her paws through the crack underneath the door. "Mom, Sassy's still pestering me!" Harley called.

"Harley, there's really nothing I can do," Mom called back. "If I take her away, she'll just come back the moment I set her down. Just ignore her and stay focused, and eventually she'll stop."


Harley did her best to focus on her homework and found that Mom was right. Sassy soon stopped. Harley finished her homework, then left to meet her friend at the park.

Later that day, Harley joined her mom in the living room. "Hi, Harley," Mom said. "How was the park?"

"It was okay, but Grace kept wanting to talk badly about some of the kids at school," Harley said as she picked up Sassy, who was lounging on the couch.

"How did you handle it?" Mom asked.

"Well, I thought about Sassy distracting me earlier and that when I stayed focused on what was important, she eventually stopped. So I did the same with Grace. When she tried to get me to talk badly about others, I stayed focused on Jesus and how much He loves the people Grace was talking about. Then when Grace said something bad about someone, I'd think of something nice to say about them instead. Eventually she stopped trying to get me to talk about people."

Mom got up to pet Sassy, who was now curled up in a ball on Harley's lap. "It sounds like Sassy has taught you how to resist temptation by focusing on what's important—Jesus." At that, Sassy batted at Mom's hand, and both Harley and Mom laughed.  *Melissa Yeagle*



STAY FOCUSED ON JESUS | KEY VERSE: Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. James 4:7



Do your friends ever try to get you to do things you know are wrong? You can resist by focusing on Jesus. When you're faced with a tough situation, remember that He saved you and you belong to Him. He gives you the ability to do what's right and wants you to show His love to others by treating them kindly. When you're tempted to sin, focus on Him.

SWAYING CASTLE

“Here!” Isaac said as he finished pounding a nail. “This is the best tree house ever! When it’s really windy like this, you can feel the whole tree house move. It’s like being in a swaying castle! Let’s ask if we can sleep out here tonight.”

“I know my dad won’t let me,” said Bryce. “He says he has to be sure it’s safe first.”

“My dad said the same thing,” said Isaac. “I know! Let’s each ask our parents if we can spend the night together. They’ll think we’re at each other’s houses, but we’ll really be sleeping in the tree house.”

“I don’t know,” Bryce said, but he finally agreed to try it.

Their plan worked, but in the middle of the night, a loud crack of thunder and the sound of wind and rain woke the boys. “The whole tree house is swaying!” Bryce said.

“And the roof is leaking!” said Isaac. “Let’s go into the house.”

The storm had awakened Isaac’s parents too, and they were very surprised when the boys stumbled into the kitchen. “What happened? Is something wrong at your house, Bryce?” Isaac’s dad asked.

“No,” Isaac said, “we...um...we were sleeping in the tree house. But it starting swaying and leaking in the storm, so we came here.”

Mom’s eyes widened. “You mean you’ve been in our backyard this whole time? You asked if you could stay at Bryce’s house overnight.”


“Well, not exactly,” said Isaac. “I just asked if I could spend the night with Bryce.”

“I see,” said Dad. “So you didn’t exactly lie, but you still deceived us by letting us think you were at Bryce’s, didn’t you?”

With downcast eyes, the boys nodded.

Dad sighed. “Boys, lying and deceiving others makes you like that swaying tree house—it tells people they can’t trust you. And how do you think we and Bryce’s parents would feel if none of us knew where you were in the morning?”

“I’m sorry, Dad,” Isaac said.

“I forgive you,” Dad said. “But the tree house will be off-limits for a while. As you build back our trust, remember that the Bible says Jesus is a firm foundation who is always trustworthy. Trust Him to help you show His love by being truthful in both your words and your actions.”  Agnes Livezey



BE TRUSTWORTHY | KEY VERSE: So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. Ephesians 4:25 (NLT)



Are you trustworthy? Can people count on you to be honest in both your words and your actions? God hates lying and deceitfulness because it goes against everything He is—a firm foundation who always acts in goodness and truth. We can always trust Him to tell us the truth and do what’s right. As His children, He will help us be truthful in all we say and do.

THE WHOLE PARADE

Why, God?” murmured Jolene as she hugged her baby brother. They had recently learned that Jaiden was deaf.

“Oh, Jolene,” Mom had said gently after they found out. “I don’t know why God allowed this to happen. His ways are not like ours, but He is good and loves us so much that He sent His own Son to save us from the mess sin made of us and our world. Even when we don’t understand, we know that Jesus understands what we’re going through and promises to be with us.”

But Jolene wanted to understand. *Isn’t God supposed to take care of Christians?* she thought. *How can Mom and Dad be so calm?*

Mom interrupted Jolene’s thoughts. “Are you ready to go to the parade, Jolene?” She held out her arms to the baby. “Come to Mommy, Jay.”

“I don’t see why you talk to him, Mom. You know he can’t hear you!”

“It’s important for him to see our lips move and feel the vibration of our words,” said Mom. “Now, let’s get going.”

At the parade, people were standing three-deep in front of Jolene’s family. She stood on her tiptoes and tried to see past those in front of her. “It would be so much better if I could see more than just one row of the parade at a time,” she said.

Dad handed Jaiden to Mom, and with a swoop, Jolene was up on her father’s shoulders. “Thanks, Dad! Now I can see the whole parade.”

Soon the parade was over and they were on the way home. “Life is a lot like a parade,” Dad said. “We’re like kids in the crowd, and we can only see one moment at a time. But God is above the crowd. He sees each person’s entire life—past, present, and future. We don’t know why He allowed Jaiden to be deaf, but that’s because we can only see the present. God knows why because He sees the whole picture.”

Mom nodded. “He’s working everything out for good and promises to be with us for every step of the journey.”

Jolene reached out to hold her sleeping brother’s hand. She knew it was time to bring her hurt and questions to Jesus. ♥ *Barbara J. Westberg*



TRUST JESUS WHEN YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND | KEY VERSE: Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. Proverbs 3:5



Are you confused or angry about something that happened? Bring your hurt and questions to Jesus. You can trust Him, even when you don’t understand. We see only a small part of life, but He sees it all from beginning to end. Trust Him to do what’s best because He died to save you and promises to work everything out for good. When you face hard things, go to Jesus.



HAPPY ST. PATRICK’S DAY!



FIRED UP

Max felt sad every time he and his family walked past anyone asking for money. Living in the city, it happened pretty much every day. He wished there was some way to help those people and change their lives.

What do You want me to do, Lord? Max prayed as he followed his family on their walk to church one Sunday.

As Pastor John started to talk, Max was surprised to hear him bring up his favorite basketball team. “Did you hear about the halftime talk the players had?” Pastor John asked. “One of the players told the team they needed to start playing better, that it was time to start *doing* something. He fired them up, and now they’ve won three games in a row.”

Pastor John tapped the Bible he was holding. “Hearing that reminded me of how we as Christians are told to encourage one another as we live out our faith. Jesus showed His love for us by dying on the cross for our sins, and as His followers, we need to show that love to others. How can you encourage those around you to love and serve others?”

Max thought about his pastor’s words as they passed a homeless man on their way home. He asked his mom if he could speak to everyone at the dinner table.


Mom smiled. “Of course you can.”

“Guys...” Max began as he looked at his brothers, dad, grandma, and mom. “I’ve been thinking about something, and I need your help. There are a lot of people out there on these streets who don’t have money for food or a place to stay. I prayed about it, and I think we need to do something for them as a family rather than just walking by them.”

“What could we do?” Grandma asked.

“I’m not sure yet, but if we work together, we can find a way to show them God’s love.”

“You know what, Max?” Dad said. “I’ve been feeling a nudge from God too, but I’ve been ignoring it. You’re right, it’s time for us to do something and serve others together.”

Max thought of his favorite basketball team and smiled. He and his family were getting fired up too.  *Emily Acker*



ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO DO GOOD | KEY VERSE: Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. Hebrews 10:24 (NLT)



Has anyone ever encouraged you to serve others in a way you wouldn’t have on your own? God doesn’t intend for us to live out our faith all by ourselves—He wants Christians to support and encourage one another as we follow Jesus and show others His love. Who could you encourage today? How can you help each other get fired up about loving and serving those around you?

THE OLD TRUNK

I haven't seen the stuff in this old trunk in years," Gramps told Evan. "There's no telling what we're going to find today."

Digging through the trunk was like digging through a treasure chest. "Wow, is this a picture of you and Grandma on your wedding day?"

"It is. We sure look different now, don't we?" Gramps laughed. "Look at this." He opened up a box with his first pocketknife in it. "Tell you what, I'm going to give this pocketknife to your dad to hold on to, and when he thinks you're old enough, he can let you have it."

"Cool!" Evan gave him a hug. "Thanks, Gramps!" He took another item from the trunk. "What's this?"

"That's my old compass. My dad, your great-grandpa, gave it to me when I was just a boy. I always took it with me when we went on our big hikes through the mountains. I sure did use it a lot. It helped me find my way more than once when I was lost." Gramps handed Evan the compass. "It's yours now."


"Really?" Evan's eyes lit up.


They continued to look through the old trunk for a while longer. Evan enjoyed hearing all the stories Gramps told as he pulled out different items. "I imagine Grandma will have dinner ready soon," Gramps said. "Let's put everything back in except for the pocketknife and compass."


"Did you find any treasure?" Grandma asked during dinner.

"We sure did! Gramps is giving me his old compass. He says I can have his old pocketknife too when I'm old enough."

"You know, Evan, that compass got me thinking about a Bible verse," said Gramps. "Psalm 119:105 says, 'Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.' Just like the compass keeps us heading in the right direction, God's Word guides us through life. It tells us how we can have eternal life by trusting in Jesus and helps us live in a way that shows we belong to Him."

That night Evan sat looking at his compass, thinking about what Gramps had said. Then he set the compass on his nightstand and picked up his Bible.  *Lisa Fuller*

 **GOD'S WORD GUIDES US** | KEY VERSE: The LORD says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you." Psalm 32:8 (NLT)

 Have you ever been lost before? Did you have a compass to help you find your way? Like a compass, the Bible shows us which way to go in life. It points us to the only way we can be saved and have eternal life—Jesus—and guides us as we follow Him. Spend time in God's Word each day and trust Him to lead you along life's path.



GOD'S GARDEN

It was a beautiful spring morning, and Leah couldn't wait to help her mom plant their garden. This was the first year she was big enough to help.

"Morning, Mom!" Leah exclaimed as she entered the kitchen.

"Well, look at you, up and ready to go."

Over breakfast, Mom and Leah talked about what to plant.

Leah loved tomatoes, so they'd definitely plant some tomato seeds. They decided on tomatoes, green beans, squash, and cantaloupe.

The garden had already been prepped and was ready for planting. Mom showed Leah how to plant the seeds at a certain depth and make sure there was enough space between them. "The seeds need room to become healthy plants," she said.

Mom and Leah worked happily all afternoon in the garden. It was so nice to be outside in the fresh air again after being cooped up inside most of the winter. When they finished, they put away the gardening tools and headed into the house.

"That was fun today, Mom," Leah said.

"I enjoyed it too, and as I was planting the seeds down each row, it made me think of a Bible verse."

"Really?" Leah asked. "Which one?"

Mom got her Bible off the coffee table. She opened it up and read, "I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow." She smiled at Leah. "We planted all those seeds in the garden today, taking special care to do it properly, and now all we have to do is wait for the sun and rain to do their job—besides weeding, of course. That's how we plant seeds in people's hearts too. God wants us to plant seeds of the gospel by telling others about Jesus and showing them His love, and He will make the seeds grow. We may not ever know whose life may have been changed, but we can plant seeds and trust God with the rest."

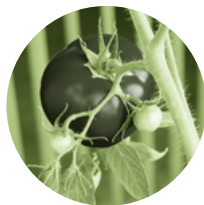
"Wow, that's really cool!" Leah smiled. "And we don't have to wait for spring either—we can plant seeds in God's garden all year long!" ♥ *Lisa Fuller*



PLANT SEEDS OF GOD'S LOVE | KEY VERSE: [Jesus] told them, "Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone." Mark 16:15 (NLT)



Are you sharing the gospel with others? When you tell people about Jesus and show them His love in how you treat them, you are planting seeds of the gospel in their hearts. You may not ever know if someone turns to Jesus, but you're not the one responsible for making that seed grow—God is. Plant seeds of His love and trust Him to make them grow.



LOSE THE COWBELL!

Samantha sighed and slid in her earbuds. Sometimes being part of a blended family wasn't easy. She now had three siblings instead of just one, and they were constantly arguing.

"We always watch this game show on Mondays." Tori stood in front of the TV with her hands on her hips. "It's a tradition."

"Well, guess what?" said Reid. "Now you have a new tradition—watching sports on Mondays."

"No way!" Little Sarah joined in the shouting.

"Yes way!" Reid poked out his tongue.

Their voices grew louder and meaner when suddenly, the most dreadful sound came from the kitchen. "What is that?" Reid asked, his eyes as round as saucers. The tinny thud sounded again. And again. And again.

"It's horrible!" Sarah put her hands over her ears.

Mom and Dad marched into the family room holding weird metal farmyard objects, which they hit over and over with a spoon. The noise was deafening.

"Dad, what's going on?" Samantha asked.

"This is my cowbell. Doesn't it sound great?"

"Please stop the banging!" Sarah begged.

Mom and Dad stopped. "Don't you like what you heard?" Mom asked.


"No!" the four kids answered in unison.

"Hmm." Dad put down his cowbell. "Come to think of it, Mom and I didn't like what we heard coming from you guys when we were cooking in the kitchen."

"We weren't making a horrible noise like that cowbell," Reid said. "We were just talking."

"But there was no love in your words," said Mom. "Just anger and selfishness."

Everyone was quiet for a moment. "We know you kids really do love each other," said Dad. "But this new family is going to take some getting used to. We all need to depend on Jesus to help us speak with love and show each other grace as we learn to live together. The Bible says if we speak without love, we sound awful—like a clanging cymbal or a—"

"Cowbell?" Samantha smiled. "If we remember to be more loving with our words, will you do something for us?" Dad nodded. "Please," Samantha said. "Lose the cowbell!"  *Laura Thomas*



SPEAK WITH LOVE | KEY VERSE: If I speak human or angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 1 Corinthians 13:1 (CSB)



Do you always speak with love? It's not easy, is it? Especially if someone is annoying you or you're frustrated. Yet the Bible tells us that even if we say great things, if we don't speak with a loving attitude, we sound like a tuneless cowbell and our words are useless. The good news is we don't have to do it on our own. Trust Jesus to help you speak to others with love.

WELCOME

All right!" Garrison exclaimed as Dad pulled the car into Grandma's driveway. "We're finally here!" Grandma lived so far away that they had been traveling for two days to get to her house.

"Yay!" said Charis. "I'm tired of being in the car."

Dad grinned. "Me too. All I want to do right now is relax with a nice tall glass of iced tea."

Garrison laughed. "Well, when you called Grandma a little while ago, you said you couldn't wait to have some of her iced tea. I bet she has a pitcher of it all ready."

Charis pointed. "Look! Grandma's at the door, and she's got a glass of something in her hand. It's probably your iced tea."

Charis was right. "I knew you'd want this right away," Grandma said as she handed the glass to Dad. Then she gave everyone big hugs. "You must be hungry. Come to the kitchen. I made your favorite pie, Garrison. And here's some of that fudge you like so much, Charis."

"Oh, and I see a wonderful cheese tray here on the counter!" Mom said. "You know just what snacks we all like, don't you?" She helped herself to some cheese and crackers.


"You got new books for us!" Charis called from the living room. "And there are new games here too! Thank you, Grandma!"

Mom smiled. "I can see you've been very busy getting ready for us to come."

"Well, I loved preparing for you to get here because I love you," Grandma replied.

"That sounds like what we talked about in church last week," Garrison said. "About how Jesus loves us and is preparing a place for those who trust in Him."

"That's a great thing to think about," Grandma said. "He prepared a place for us in God's family by dying for our sins, and one day He will welcome us into the new, perfect world He's getting ready for us. I'm so thankful to know that each of us here trusts in Jesus and that we'll all enjoy heaven together with Him. What a wonderful place that will be!"

Dad nodded. "You've given us a great welcome here, but you're right. We can't even imagine how special Jesus's welcome will be!"  *Lenora McWhorten*



 **JESUS IS PREPARING A PLACE FOR CHRISTIANS** | KEY VERSE: [Jesus said,]

"I go to prepare a place for you." John 14:2



Have you helped prepare for company by getting everything just right for those who are coming to visit? If you know Jesus as your Savior, He's preparing a place for you in the perfect world He will create when He makes everything new. It's hard to imagine what a special, wonderful place that will be—and it won't be just for a visit. It will be forever!

JESUS IS OUR SAVIOR

And I'm just so thankful God forgives and helps us, or else I'd be totally lost!" Mandy's mom was saying as she talked on the phone.

"What is she talking about? What does she mean God forgives us? For what?" Mandy's friend Hailey asked as they sat coloring at the kitchen table.

"God forgives us for our sins," Mandy replied.

"What does 'sin' mean? Why do we need to be forgiven?"

"Umm..." Mandy was uncertain how to respond to her friend's questions.

When Mandy's mom got off the phone, Mandy asked her Hailey's questions. Mom sat down at the table with them. "Hmm, let's see..." She drummed her fingers against the table. "Mandy, why weren't you allowed to play on the tablet yesterday?"

Mandy blushed and gave a nervous giggle. "Because I sneaked a cookie right before dinner."

"Do you ever get punishments like that, Hailey, for doing something you're not supposed to?" Mandy's mom asked.

"Yes, lots!" Hailey nodded.

"Exactly. We all do things we're not supposed to, and because of that, we deserve punishment. God, who created us and everything there is, never does anything wrong. The stuff we do wrong is called sin, and sin separates us from God because God is perfect."

"But you said God forgives us for our sins," Hailey pointed out.

Mom nodded. "God's Word, the Bible, tells us the punishment for sin is death—not just physical death, but complete separation from God. But God sent His Son, Jesus, to earth to take our punishment. Jesus is God and a human. He lived a perfect life and never sinned! Then He died and took our punishment on Himself."

"Right," Mandy said, "Like if Dad would've taken my punishment and said he doesn't get to play on the tablet so I can."

Mom laughed. "Kind of like that. But Jesus didn't stay dead. He rose again and now lives with God in heaven! Because Jesus took our punishment, God forgives all our sins when we trust Jesus as our Savior. Then, when we die, we won't stay dead either—Jesus will raise us from the dead and we'll live with Him forever! I know that was a lot. But do you think you understand?"

"I think I get it," Hailey said. "But I have lots of questions!"  Elizabeth Cooper



JESUS TOOK OUR PUNISHMENT | KEY VERSE: For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 (NIV)



Do you have lots of questions about God and the Bible? That's okay! God loves when we seek to know Him better. Are there any believers in your life or a nearby church you can go to and ask questions? Ask God to show you someone who can help you understand more about Jesus and what it means to trust Him as your Savior. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.)

GOD IN THE DARK

"I'm scared, Mom," River said. "What if Dad never comes back?"

"I don't know if he's going to, River. I don't know how things will work out."

River's stomach hurt. It had been hurting a lot since his dad stormed out of their house weeks earlier. "It's just you and me?"

"You, me, and God." Mom tapped her computer screen. "And I need to find a job."

Things went from bad to worse that evening when the power went out. River stumbled his way through the house, calling for his mom.

"I'm in here." Suddenly Mom appeared in front of him and wrapped her arms around him. "I don't know why they would cut it off like that...I told them I would pay soon..."

"You didn't pay the bill?" River asked.

"I don't have the money right now," said Mom. "I'm sorry."

"It won't come back on tomorrow?"

"I'll see what I can do." Mom sighed. "We'll be okay."

River tried to look around, but he couldn't see anything. Darkness from outside filled the house. He heard a sound in the corner of the room. "I'm really scared, Mom. I don't like the dark."

"That was just the house settling," Mom said. "It does it all the time, but we don't think anything of it when it's light in here. Do you know who can see in the dark?"

"Not me," River said.

"Me neither," Mom said. "But God can. The Bible says that both dark and light are the same to Him. He can see now like if the lights were all on."

"Really?" River asked. "He can see if there are any bad guys in here?"

Mom chuckled. "Yes. And there aren't." She rubbed his back. "God is light. Our light. When we were lost in the darkness of sin, Jesus came and died for us so we could have the light of His love in our lives. He sees us now, and He can see the future too. He knows what's going to happen with your dad, and He promises never to leave us. We can trust Him."

"Everything is so scary right now," River said.

"I know, but God will take care of us." Mom pulled him close. "Always."  *Emily Acker*



GOD SEES IN THE DARK | KEY VERSE: The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? Psalm 27:1 (NIV)



Are you scared of the dark? Not being able to see what's around you can be scary—and that's true in life too. Perhaps you're going through a difficult situation and don't know how it's going to turn out. Remember that even though you can't see the future, God can, and He cares about you. Trust Him to be your light in the darkness and take care of you in every situation.

MULLIGANS AND MERCY

Jacki and Blake waited anxiously in line with their uncle at High Seas Tees—the best mini-golf course in the entire world. Blake stretched himself tall to see to the front of the line when he noticed a sign that read: *Mulligans \$2, all proceeds go toward field trip funds!*

“What’s a mulligan?” Blake asked Uncle Lee.

“It’s a redo in golf,” Uncle Lee answered. “The first attempt doesn’t count on your scorecard; it’s like it never happened. You might ask for one if a gust of wind messes up your shot or the ball lands in an obstacle. Or if you just take a terrible swing.”

Jacki laughed. “Might need to buy some for Blake!”

“Hey!” Blake scowled at his sister. “I’m going to win the whole tournament!”

“How about I get one mulligan for each of us,” Uncle Lee said. “That way we each have a redo swing.”

The kids nodded and soon got their clubs, balls, and scorecards. On a particularly difficult hole, Jacki swung off the tee, but her ball sunk into a shallow pool of water. Jacki groaned.

“Use your mulligan,” Uncle Lee offered.

Jacki fished her ball out of the slimy water, shook it off, and set it back at the start as if her mess-up never happened. Just as she was about to hit the ball, Blake shouted, “I know what this reminds me of!”

Startled, Jacki swung off course again, and her ball landed back in the pool.

Blake gasped. “Sorry, Jacki! I just wanted to say your mulligan reminded me of forgiveness.”

Jacki crossed her arms in frustration. “You couldn’t have waited until *after* I swung?”

Uncle Lee chuckled. “You’re right, Blake. When you use a mulligan, it wipes your score card clean, much like how God wipes our sin away when we confess our wrongs to Him. Jesus died to pay for all our sin so we could be forgiven and have a redo whenever we need one.” Uncle Lee looked at Jacki. “God also wants us to forgive each other.”

Jacki sighed. “I forgive you for messing up my shot, Blake.”

Blake grinned. “I’ll give you *my* mulligan for free.”

“Oh no,” Jacki said, a smile growing on her face. “I’m winning fair and square.” ♥

Zoe Sherman



GOD FORGIVES SIN | KEY VERSE: I will forgive their sins. I will remember their sins no more. Jeremiah 31:34 (NLV)



Have you ever done something and wished it never happened? Although we can’t go back in time and change our past, God offers us forgiveness when we sin and wipes our record clean. He loves us so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross so that we can always be forgiven. Tell Him what you’ve done wrong and He will forgive you so you can start over.

A PACK OF WORRIES

What if I don't make the team, Dad?" Felix asked as they hiked a rugged trail. He had spent most of their backpacking trip finding things to worry about.

"Felix, all you've done today is worry," Dad said. "I could understand your concerns if we were fending off mountain lions or something, but the most dangerous animal we've seen was the timid gray squirrel that scurried across our path a few minutes ago."

Felix wasn't listening. He was too busy worrying. "What if I make the team but none of my friends do? I won't know anyone!"

When Felix stopped to take a drink from his water bottle, Dad picked up a handful of stones from the side of the trail. As they continued walking, he reached over and slipped a rock in an open pocket of Felix's backpack. Felix didn't even notice.

"What if I don't figure out the new stuff we're doing in my math class? It's so hard!" With each new worry Felix brought up, Dad managed to sneak a rock into his backpack.


"I'm getting kind of tired," Felix said after a while. "What if I get too tired to finish the hike? Maybe we should turn back."

Dad added another rock to the backpack. This time Felix noticed.

"What are you doing?" he asked. He stopped, took off his backpack, and opened it. "Dad!" he said with a groan. "My pack is heavy enough without these rocks! Why are you making it heavier?"

Dad shrugged. "It's not much different from what you're doing yourself, is it?"

"I'm not picking up rocks!" Felix said.

"No, but worrying about every little thing is kind of like carrying a load of rocks. It just makes you tired and doesn't solve anything." Dad took off his backpack. "Let's take a break. We'll dump the rocks from your backpack, and I think it would also be a good time to pray and give your burdens to Jesus. Don't you agree?" Felix nodded. "Good," said Dad. "He gave His life to save you and promises to take care of you. When you remember that, you'll be able to live life without being weighed down by worries."  Mike Dize



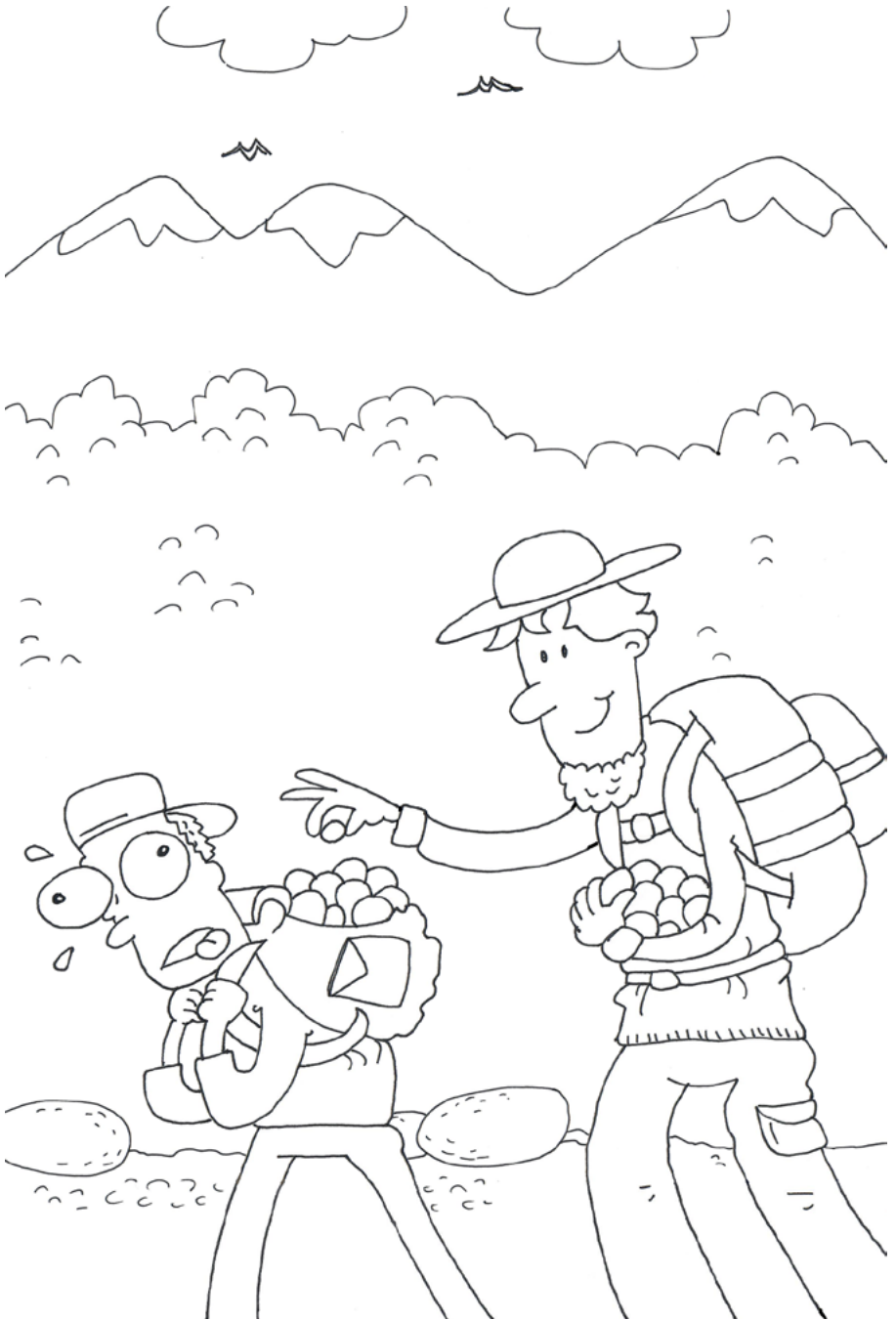
GIVE YOUR BURDENS TO JESUS | KEY VERSE: Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you. 1 Peter 5:7 (NLT)



Do you spend a lot of time worrying? Has it ever helped you? Instead of fretting about things you have no control over, go to Jesus with your worries. He's in control of everything, and He loves you and cares about every detail of your life. Trust Him to handle the problems you face and to give you wisdom. Then you can live without the burden of worry weighing you down.



COLOR!



PRAY FOR YOUR ENEMIES

No, not Amie! Now we're really gonna lose!" The entire team sighed in unison as Amie approached the plate and waited for the kickball. She hadn't felt well all morning, and now the weight of her teammates' disgust seemed to make her insides churn even more. Just as the teacher was about to roll the ball, Amie gasped. "Mrs. Anderson! I have to—"

It was too late. She threw up all over home plate as both teams squealed and retreated. Tears streaming down her face, Amie stumbled to the restroom as Mrs. Anderson tried to corral the howling class.

Since nobody was available to come pick up Amie, she had to wait and ride the school bus home. No one asked to sit with her. As she looked out the window, her mind replayed the words of her classmates over and over.

"Amie will make us lose."

"Who picked *her*?"

"You mean you're gonna stay the rest of the day and make us all sick?"

Amie knew it was wrong, but part of her wanted to see them get hurt. She imagined some of the meanest kids throwing up all over the principal and getting suspended.

Shaking her head, she tried to dismiss her vengeful feelings. But instead, more memories flooded her mind of all the times her classmates had ignored her or purposefully humiliated her.

"Jesus," she whispered, "I want to forgive them. But they don't even care that they've hurt me. How can I love people who like seeing me sad?"

Immediately the Bible verse she'd read that morning came to her mind. *Pray for them.*

Amie gulped. "Really, Jesus? Did You just say to pray for them?"

The verse repeated in her mind. *Pray for them.*

Still feeling angry, Amie leaned her forehead against the cool glass of the window and squeezed her eyes shut. *Dear Jesus, please bless my classmates. Help them do well on their tests and in kickball, and please don't let any of them get sick. Please help me forgive them as you've forgiven me so I can show them Your love. In Your name, amen.*

Amie opened her eyes and smiled. Jesus was helping her forgive. ♥
Rebekah Love Dorris



PRAY FOR YOUR ENEMIES | KEY VERSE: But I [Jesus] say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. Matthew 5:44



Have you ever wondered how to forgive people who don't seem sorry for hurting you? Forgiveness isn't a feeling—it's an action. One of the best ways to begin forgiving others is to pray for them. Try praying the same things for your enemies you'd want someone to pray for you. Then thank Jesus for forgiving you for your sin and for empowering you to forgive others.

ONE OF THE LEAST

Simi pouted as she placed the bag of toys beside the other cartons in the back of the minivan. “Mummy, why do we have to go to the refugee camp on a Saturday?”

Simi’s mum shut the van’s back door. “You already know why, Simi. Those children need all the love and attention they can get.”

“I know.” Simi kicked a stone into the sand as she walked to the front seat of the minivan. “But Saturdays are supposed to be for fun and games.”

Mum opened the driver’s side door. “I know you feel like you’re missing out,” she said, buckling her seat belt once they were inside. “But just think of the trauma those children have been through. Their villages were raided, houses burned, and some of them lost their parents and close family members. That’s sad, isn’t it?”

Simi nodded her head.

“So, the least we can do is put a smile on their faces,” Mum continued. “When we do, we put a smile on Jesus’s face too. There’s a verse in the Bible where He says that ‘whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

Simi looked up. “I don’t understand.”

Mum smiled. “When we give food and clothes to people who don’t have any and take care of them, it’s the same as doing it to Jesus.”

Simi brightened up a bit. “Oh! Just like what we’re doing for the people at the refugee camp?”

Mum nodded. “Jesus loves us so much that He became human and sacrificed His life to save us from sin. Because we trust in Him, we’re able to show His love to others. When we make sacrifices to help others, He counts it as us doing those things for Him.”

Some hours later at the camp, Simi’s mum was serving food to a line of children while Simi stood beside her, glancing around. Then her eyes caught a baby crying. The volunteer nurse holding her couldn’t seem to calm her down.

Simi walked over. “Can I help?”

The nurse gladly released the baby into Simi’s outstretched arms. Simi cradled the baby, and she stopped crying.

Simi’s mum, who had been silently watching, beamed.  *Elo Omonkhogbe*



SHOW LOVE THROUGH SACRIFICE | KEY VERSE: Do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. Hebrews 13:16 (NIV)



How can you show the love of Jesus to others? Perhaps there’s someone at your school or church who needs a friend. Maybe you can help meet the needs of people in your community or another part of the world by sharing what you have and telling them about Jesus. When we make sacrifices for others to show them Jesus’s love, we’re doing those things for Him. How can you make Jesus smile today?

SITTING STILL

Konan looked at the fish lying in the bucket at Grandpa's feet and frowned. "Why are they biting for you and not me?" he asked.

"Well, you keep pulling in your line to check the bait and moving to different sides of the boat," Grandpa said. "If you want to catch fish, you can't keep moving around all the time. Try sitting still."

Konan sighed. "I don't like to sit still."

"I know, but you need to learn how. Otherwise you'll miss out on even more important things than catching fish."

"Like what?" asked Konan.

"Well, you need to sit quietly and listen to learn and do well in school. And you need to take time to sit still and listen to God so you can learn about Him and hear what He wants you to do."

"You mean like how Samuel heard Him in the Bible?" Konan asked. "God doesn't talk to us like that anymore, does He?"


"Maybe not," said Grandpa. "But if you set aside time to spend with God, He may speak by bringing something to your attention."

"I pray every night," Konan told his grandfather.

"Good," said Grandpa. "That's one way to listen to God. He uses prayer to align our hearts with His and remind us to trust and depend on Him. Another way to listen to God is by reading the Bible—alone and at church with other believers. Before you read or go to church, be still for a moment and ask God to show you what He wants you to know about Him and what Jesus has done for you." Grandpa smiled. "Now, why don't you practice sitting still and see if you can get any fish to bite?"

"Okay." Konan sat and quietly listened to the sounds of birds singing and water softly lapping against the boat. *Thank you for all the beautiful things you created, Lord,* he prayed silently.

Just then, he felt a jerk. "I've got a bite!" he yelled. Soon he was taking a fish off his hook. "Look at that fish!" he said, holding it up for Grandpa to see. "It paid to sit still that time, didn't it?"

"It sure did," said Grandpa. "And it will pay off in even better ways. Keep practicing!"  *Barbara J. Westberg*



BE STILL AND LISTEN TO GOD | KEY VERSE: Be still, and know that I am God. Psalm 46:10



Do you take time to quietly wait for God to speak to your heart? Before you read the Bible, go to church, or say your prayers, pause and ask Him to bring something to your mind He wants you to think or pray about. Wait quietly so you can hear Him speak to you. Don't expect to hear a voice like Samuel did, but let God bring the things He wants you to know and remember to your attention.

DIRTY WORK

It was a warm day, and Dad had just finished digging up the garden plot so he and Eliza and Jeremiah could plant sweet corn. “Hey, look!” exclaimed Eliza, bending over a corner of the plot. “An earthworm! We learned about earthworms at school. They eat dirt.” She picked it up and waved it under her brother’s nose. “Doesn’t that sound yummy, Jeremiah?”

“Ew, gross!” Jeremiah batted at the worm in front of his face. “Cut it out!”


“Okay, you guys,” said Dad. “That’s enough of that. But you’re right, Eliza, in a way, earthworms do eat dirt. As they move through the soil, it passes through their bodies and gives them nourishment, and the quality of the soil is also improved. Millions of acres of the earth’s topsoil are loosened in this way, allowing all kinds of good things to grow. As Christians, we can learn a lot from earthworms.”

Eliza gave her dad a puzzled look. “What do earthworms have to do with Christians?”

“Well,” said Dad, “since they live underground, we don’t see earthworms working—and like Jeremiah, we may think their job sounds unappealing—but they keep at it anyway. That worm you’re holding is a good example of a faithful worker. Because he and all the other earthworms out there do their jobs faithfully, lots of people benefit from the things that are able to grow.”

“But Dad, a worm doesn’t decide to be faithful,” said Jeremiah. “It just does what earthworms do.”

“That’s right,” said Dad. “Earthworms are faithful because God made them that way—and He does the same for us as Christians. Jesus gives us the ability to faithfully serve Him, even in hidden places—places where no one notices or praises us, doing tasks that aren’t always fun or rewarding. In those times, we need to remember that we’re serving Jesus and depend on Him to help us be faithful in doing our work, trusting that He will use it to help others grow.”

Eliza looked at the worm squiggling in the palm of her hand. Then she put it down and smoothed dirt over it. “Thanks, faithful friend,” she said. “Keep working so we can have lots of good sweet corn!”  *Christi B. Kehn*



BE FAITHFUL | KEY VERSE: A faithful person will be richly blessed.

Proverbs 28:20 (NIV)



Are you depending on Jesus to help you be faithful in the things He has given you to do? Trust Him to give you the ability and strength to do what He wants you to do—even when those things are difficult or others don’t seem to care. Remember that you are serving Jesus and trust that He will use your work to bless both you and others.

BUTTERFLY RESCUE

As Jana sat at the dining room table doing her homework, she looked out the window and saw a beautiful butterfly. It was flying from flower to flower, getting nectar. Jana loved how gracefully the butterfly floated through the air and then landed on a flower for some nectar.

“How’s your homework coming?” Mom called from the kitchen.

“It’s coming!” Jana replied. She looked away from the window long enough to get another math problem done. When she looked back up—“Oh no!” Jana ran out the door. “Try to be nice and still, butterfly. I’m going to try to get you out of this spiderweb.”

Mom dashed into the dining room when she heard the commotion. She smiled as she watched Jana gently rescue the butterfly and set it carefully on a flower in their garden.

“Now you’re safe. I saved you from that spider,” Jana said softly. She stood back and observed the butterfly as it began to flutter around again. She was thankful she’d been able to rescue it in time.


“I rescued that butterfly from a spider’s web,” Jana said as she walked back inside.

“I saw that. I’m sure the butterfly is really happy to be out of that web.” Mom smiled. “It reminds me of how happy I am to have been rescued too.”

“You were rescued?” Jana looked at her mom in surprise. “How?”

Mom took a Bible from the shelf and flipped through its pages, then began reading. “For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins.” She looked at Jana. “Jesus rescues us from sin when we trust Him as our Savior. He paid the price for our sins on the cross and then rose again so we could be given a new life and spend eternity with Him.”

Jana looked out the window and watched the butterfly again for a long moment. “Mom, I think I’m ready to ask Jesus to be my Savior.”

Mom held Jana’s hands, and they prayed together. “Thanks for praying with me, Mom,” Jana said. “Now I’ve been rescued too!”  *Lisa Fuller*



JESUS RESCUES US FROM SIN | KEY VERSE: For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins. Colossians 1:13-14 (NLT)



Have you trusted Jesus as your Savior? The Bible says that our sin—our selfish desires and the wrong things we do—is like a web that we can’t break free of ourselves. We need to be rescued, and God loves us so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to save us. When you trust in Him, He will rescue you and give you a new life of freedom with Him that will never end! (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 104.)

SWEET TIMING

I can't wait to taste maple syrup!" Brady said, smacking his lips. Mom laughed. She was chaperoning his field trip to the nature center to see how maple syrup was made.

As they trudged behind their group, Brady sighed. "I wish I was invited to my teacher's wedding."

Mom was surprised. "Why do you want to go?"

Brady frowned. "What if I get married someday? I need to know how to do it!"

"If you do get married, it won't be for a long time, Brady," said Mom.

Brady bit his lip. "But what if I'm not ready when the time comes?"

The group stopped in front of a large sugar maple. They watched a man drill a hole in the tree and tap a wooden peg he called a spile into the hole. After several seconds, the sap began to drip, and the class formed a line to get a taste.


"What do you remember about the temperatures needed to collect sap?" Mom asked Brady.

"It has to be twenty degrees Fahrenheit at night and forty-five degrees during the day, in the spring."

Mom nodded. "God cares an awful lot about the details in preparing trees for maple syrup-making, doesn't He? But He cares about people even more than trees. He sent Jesus to save us so we could be His children, and He'll prepare us for whatever He has planned for our lives—like getting married or having a job. We can have confidence in His timing."

Brady caught a drop of sap on his tongue. "This isn't very sweet."

"They still have to boil it before it turns to syrup," Mom explained. "Preparing maple syrup is a process—and being prepared for the things God wants for us is a process too. We don't have to know everything right away. See that little sapling?" Mom pointed to a tree no bigger around than Brady's thumb. "It's got a lot more growing to do before it can give sap for syrup. And you've got a lot more growing to do too."

Brady smiled as they were handed samples of sweet golden syrup. "Let's have maple syrup for dinner!" he said after tasting it. Mom arched an eyebrow, and Brady grinned. "You know, to remind us to be confident in God's timing."  Pearl Allard



BE CONFIDENT IN GOD'S TIMING | KEY VERSE: Trust in the LORD with all your heart...and He shall direct your paths. Proverbs 3:5-6



Do you worry about your future? Are you afraid you won't be ready if you ever get married, attend college, or work at a job? You can have peace knowing that God cares about you and promises to be with you through life's every step. He will prepare you for whatever He has planned for you in the future. You can be confident in His timing.

THE OLD TIN CAN

Look!" Naomi pointed to a tin can outside her family's apartment building. "Somebody is a litterbug."

"Yeah," said Samuel. "Let's throw that old can in the trash." As he picked it up with a napkin, he noticed something stuffed inside. "Hey! There's money in here!"

Samuel and Naomi hurried inside, eagerly discussing all the things they could do with the money. "Hold on!" Dad said when he heard about it. "This is quite a bit of money. We need to see if we can find whoever lost it so we can return it to them."

The kids gave each other glum looks, but they handed the money over to Dad.

"I found the owner of that money," Dad told them the next day. "On my way to the subway this morning, a homeless man I often see looked very upset. I asked him what was wrong, and he told me he lost a tin can containing all his money. When I asked how much was in it, the amount matched what we found in this one."


"But we're not going to give it to him, are we?" asked Samuel. "He probably got it by making people think he needed it when he was really planning to use it for something bad, like drugs."

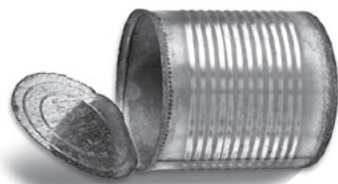
"You don't know that," Dad said. "And he does need money to buy food. In any case, it's his money, not ours, and we need to return it to him."

Naomi frowned. "But we were going to use it to buy groceries and give to the missionary fund at church! Now it's just gonna go to waste."

"It doesn't sound like you have a very high opinion of the person who lost this money," Dad said. "But he's kind of like that old tin can. You thought it was just a piece of trash, but when you looked inside, you found something valuable. That homeless man is valuable too. God loves him so much that He sent Jesus to die for him. As His children, God wants us to show that man how loved and valuable he is."

Samuel and Naomi looked at each other. "Okay, Dad," Samuel said. "We'll return the money."

"Yeah," said Naomi. "And let's make him a card that says how much Jesus loves him."  *Harry C. Trover*



SHOW GOD'S LOVE TO EVERYONE | KEY VERSE: If you look on one man as more important than another, you are sinning. James 2:9 (NLV)



Do you show God's love to everyone and treat them with respect? Or just people you think are worthy of it? None of us are worthy of God's love—we're all sinners who have done bad things. But God loves us anyway. He loves us so much that He sent His own Son, Jesus, to die for our sins! And He wants us to show that same love to others, no matter who they are.

SCARS

Mom,” Ethan said hesitantly one day, “did you...uh...did you ever think about having plastic surgery to fix all those scars on your face?” For as long as Ethan could remember, there had been ugly red scars on his mother’s face and hands. He was used to them and hardly noticed them, but some kids in his class had asked what was wrong with her and whispered about the way she looked.

Mom put her hand up to her face. “I had plastic surgery years ago. Maybe doctors could do a better job now, but it would be very expensive.”


“I know you got those scars in a fire,” Ethan said. “I sorta remember hearing something about it years ago, but I can’t remember what happened. Couldn’t you get out? You never talk about it.”


Mom hesitated, then took a deep breath. “Well,” she began, “when you were just a little baby, our house caught on fire. You were in your crib, and that whole area went up in flames. I ran in and grabbed you and wrapped you up in blankets. I’m so thankful I was able to shelter you as I ran out of the house. We both were all right, but as you can see, my hands and face were burned very badly.”

Ethan stared at her, stunned. “You mean you got those scars saving me?” he asked, his eyes filling with tears. “I didn’t know that!” He threw his arms around his mother. “Knowing you loved me so much makes me love you more than ever!”

Mom squeezed him tight. “I love you too,” she said. “And maybe my scars can help you understand how much Jesus loves you. We’re all helpless sinners—we’re as helpless as babies and can’t save ourselves. So Jesus came to rescue us. He suffered and died on a cross to pay the price of our sin. His body was scarred where a spear was thrust into His side and where nails pierced His hands and feet. He went through that so we could be saved and have eternal life with Him, and He’ll carry those scars forever.”

“Wow,” said Ethan. “Jesus really does love us, and His scars show us how much!” ♥
Harry C. Trover

 **JESUS DIED TO SAVE YOU** | KEY VERSE: We love Him because He first loved us. 1 John 4:19

 Did you know that Jesus suffered and died for you? He died on the cross so you could have your sins forgiven and enjoy eternal life with Him. He made a great sacrifice to save you because He loves you. Have you put your faith in Him as your Savior? Don’t wait any longer. Trust in Him today. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 104.)



TODAY IS GOOD FRIDAY
 THANK JESUS FOR THE SACRIFICE HE MADE FOR YOU.



SEE YA LATER, ALLIGATOR



Elizabeth squealed and grabbed her mom as the tram stopped by a huge alligator in the Everglades. People around them stood to snap pictures of the beast sunning himself at the edge of the road.

Their guide told them some facts about alligators, and then the tram began to move. Elizabeth relaxed as the guide pointed out ibis, herons, and other native birds. She laughed at the funny sounds they made as they were startled by the tram and flew away.


Every time they came to an alligator, Elizabeth would tense up and grab her mom's arm. Mom tried to assure her that they were perfectly safe. "Honey, you don't have to be afraid. The alligators rarely bother people. Just relax and enjoy being able to see such interesting creatures."

"But Mom," Elizabeth said, "they have so many teeth, and the guide said they move really fast sometimes. I'm scared. What if one climbs up here and eats me?"


Mom laughed. "Oh, Elizabeth, you don't have to worry. The tram driver can speed away, and I won't let a gator get up here. It would have to eat me first before it got to you."

The tour guide began telling a story about a boy who fell into one of the canals a long time ago. He landed on an alligator, and the animal grabbed him in its strong jaws. The boy's mother jumped in and stuck her arm into the alligator's mouth. It let go of the boy, and he was saved.

Mom patted Elizabeth's arm. "That mom was willing to risk her life to save her child, and so am I. And don't forget that you're God's child too! When we were lost sinners stuck in Satan's grip, God sent His Son to rescue us. Jesus defeated Satan and set us free by dying for our sins and rising from the dead. Satan may still try to get us to sin or make us feel guilty, but we don't have to be afraid of him anymore. And you don't have to be afraid of these alligators either."

Elizabeth smiled. "Can we get a stuffed alligator today so I can remember I don't have to be afraid? Hey, there's another alligator!" She leaned forward to get a closer look.  *Robyn Mulder*

 **JESUS SAVES US FROM SATAN'S GRIP** | KEY VERSE: If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. John 8:36 (NIV)

 Have you ever seen a live alligator? Were you scared? Seeing a creature like that can be scary, but nothing is as scary as being in the grip of sin and Satan. That's why Jesus came to earth and died—to pay the price for our sin so we could be saved and have eternal life with Him. When we trust in Him, we don't have to be afraid of Satan. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.)

EASTER EVERY DAY

Who's that guy on TV?" Ashton asked.

"That's the father of the boy who went missing last year," Dad said.

"Oh yeah, I remember that. He went missing on a camping trip, and they never found him. It's so sad."

Dad nodded. "I can't imagine what his family must be going through. It was a story we heard on the news and quickly forgot about, but it's been their everyday reality for the past year."

"We should pray for them," said Ashton.

"That's a great idea," said Dad, and they prayed for the missing boy and his family.

On Sunday, Dad glanced at Ashton on the way home from the Easter church service. "You look like you're thinking about something pretty hard."

Ashton shrugged. "I was just thinking about what Pastor Edwards said—that Christians celebrate Easter every day, not just once a year. What did he mean by that?"

"Well, think of it this way," said Dad. "If we heard that the boy who went missing had been found and was okay, how would we feel?"

"I'd be happy to hear that!" said Ashton.

"Me too," said Dad. "But would it change our lives?"


"Well, no," said Ashton. "We didn't know him, so even though we'd be happy for him and his family, we'd probably forget about it after a while."


"Right," said Dad. "We didn't have a relationship with him, so it wouldn't change our day-to-day lives very much. But if his family got the news that he was alive and safe, their lives would change a lot, wouldn't they?"

"Yeah," Ashton said. "Because they know him and love him."

Dad nodded. "That's how it is with us and Easter. For many people it's just a yearly holiday that quickly passes by, but for those who know Jesus, it's our everyday reality. Because we have a relationship with Him, His resurrection gives us new life and affects every part of our lives. When we sin, He forgives us. When we're hurting, He is with us. When we experience difficulties, we can find strength and joy in His promise to make everything right one day and to put an end to sin, sadness, and death forever."

Ashton smiled. "I'm thankful we have Easter every day!"  Courtney Lasater

 **EASTER IS AN EVERYDAY REALITY** | KEY VERSE: Just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. Romans 6:4 (NIV)

 Did you know that Easter is an everyday reality for those who trust in Jesus? It's more than just a holiday that comes once a year. Jesus died and rose again so we could have a relationship with Him that lasts forever, and that means our new life with Him starts now. If you trust in Him, you can celebrate Easter every day! (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.)



HAPPY EASTER!
CELEBRATE JESUS'S RESURRECTION TODAY AND EVERY DAY.

TEACHING PATIENCE

With a big sigh, Peyton dropped her books on the table and flopped into the chair beside her mother.

“Something wrong?” Mom asked, closing her laptop.

“It’s Mila,” Peyton replied. “You know—that annoying girl in my class. I can’t help it—I just don’t like her at all.”

“I know it can be hard to love some people, especially those who seem to make life more difficult,” said Mom. “But Jesus loves them, and He wants us to love them too.”

“I know!” said Peyton. “But I don’t think I’ll ever be able to love Mila the way I’m supposed to.” She sighed. “God must be getting pretty annoyed with me.”

Mom laughed. “I don’t think God’s annoyed with you, honey. He’s always patient and loving with His children. Ask Him to help you remember that so you can treat Mila the same way. Dad and I will pray about it too.”

“Okay,” Peyton said. “I just hope God doesn’t give up on me.” She stood up. “Can I make some chocolate chip cookies, Mom?”

“Sure,” said Mom. “Need any help?”

“Nope! I can handle it.” As Peyton got out the ingredients, her four-year-old brother burst into the kitchen. “Hey, buddy! Want to learn how to make cookies?” Peyton asked.

“Yeah!” Otto jumped up and down in excitement.

“You know, Peyton, teaching Otto to make cookies will take some patience,” Mom said.


“That’s okay,” said Peyton. “I’ll give him all the help he needs.”

“You won’t get annoyed with him and give up?” Mom asked.

“Of course not! I know he’s little and needs extra time to learn things.”

“Well, you don’t think God is less patient than you are, do you?” asked Mom.

“Um...no,” Peyton said, a bit confused.

Mom smiled. “Just like you’ll be patient with Otto as you help him learn to make cookies because he’s your little brother and you love him, Jesus will be patient with you. He loves you so much He died to save you, and He will patiently teach you to love others. He’s not ever going to give up on you. Trust Him to help you learn and grow to be more like Him—no matter how long it takes.”  Rhonda Brunea



TRUST GOD TO BE PATIENT | KEY VERSE: He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.
Philippians 1:6 (NIV)



Are you impatient with your spiritual growth? Are you frustrated that you find it difficult to love people or resist doing things you know are wrong? Don’t give up. Jesus knows you have a lot to learn. He loves you, and He won’t give up on you. Trust Him to be patient and give you strength as you grow to be more like Him and show others His love.

REAL ROBINS

I wish I never came to your house for spring break,” Miles told his cousin Jonathan. “Since you became a Christian, all you say is ‘Don’t do this’ and ‘Don’t do that.’ Next you’ll be complaining about the picture on my t-shirt and telling me to dress in a choir robe!” Miles stomped outside, letting the door slam behind him.

When the house grew unusually quiet, Jonathan’s dad came into the living room. “Where’s your cousin?” he asked.

Jonathan told his dad about the argument. “I was only trying to get Miles to act more Christian,” he said.

Just then a male robin flew to the driveway and began attacking the side mirror of Dad’s truck.

“Hey, look at that!” Jonathan exclaimed. “That bird’s a fighter!”

“You’re right,” said Dad. “If he keeps that up, he’ll wear himself out. I’d better go put the truck in the garage.”

Once the truck was out of sight, the bird flew to the lawn and tussled with another male robin on the grass.

“Why are those birds fighting?” asked Jonathan.

“They’re fighting to claim nesting territory,” Dad answered. “The fight at the mirror was also over territory. When the robin saw his reflection, he assumed an intruder was challenging him. After I put the truck away, the bird left to chase a real robin.”

“Well, that makes more sense,” said Jonathan. “He wasn’t going to get anywhere fighting his own reflection!”

“Right,” said Dad. “That’s why it’s important to chase the real robin in Miles.”

Jonathan looked at his dad. “You want me to chase birds?”

Dad laughed. “No! What I want you to do is fight real battles. Miles’ problems are deeper than his actions. He needs Jesus. While Miles is here, I’ve set certain limits for him. But rules won’t change his heart—only Jesus can. Instead of expecting Miles to act like a Christian, let’s show him Christ’s love. He needs to know Jesus died for him and trust Him as his Savior. Only then will he be able to live as a Christian.”

“Okay, Dad. I’ll go find him and tell him I’m sorry for making him upset.”

“Good,” said Dad. “But first let’s pray and ask Jesus to help us show Miles His love.” ♥

David J. Belleau



ONLY JESUS CHANGES HEARTS | KEY VERSE: Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT)



Have you wished a non-Christian friend would act more Christian? Even if you could get them to change their behavior, you wouldn’t be able to change their motives. Only Jesus can change a person’s heart. Pray for your friend. Show them God’s love through your actions. Then, if they ask what makes you different, tell them how Jesus changed you.

THE PARTY PROBLEM

Happy birthday!" Ivy said when she arrived at her friend Rennah's birthday party. Ivy's family had moved recently, and she'd been praying for new friends. Now she had some.

But there was a problem at Rennah's party. "Okay, you guys," Rennah said when they were ready to play the first game. "Here's what you do. Everybody has to draw a slip of paper from this basket. When it's your turn, you have to do what it says." She began to pass the basket, and each girl pulled out a piece of paper.

Ivy eagerly unfolded her slip of paper and looked at it. *Oh no!* she thought. *Doing this would be wrong, but if I don't do it, everyone will laugh at me.* Ivy tried to think of a way out. *Maybe I could trade with somebody—but then I'd be asking someone else to do it. What am I going to do?* She silently asked Jesus to help her know what she should do. Then she heard her name being called.

Ivy took a deep breath. "I'm supposed to draw a picture of who I think is the ugliest boy at school and have you guess who it is, but I—I can't do it." The room became very quiet. "I don't like to look at people that way," Ivy continued. "I feel like I'd be treating someone God created and loves very badly if I did that."

After a moment, Rennah shrugged. "That's okay. We'll skip you. Jasmine, you're next."

The next day at school, Serena, one of the girls who had been at the party, came up to Ivy. "I've been thinking a lot about what you said at the party," Serena said. "I'm a Christian too, but I don't usually let people know that because I'm afraid they'll make fun of me. I probably would have just done what was on that slip of paper and then felt bad about it afterward." She paused. "I'm glad you didn't do that. You reminded me that I need to let people know I belong to Jesus and show it in the way I treat others."

Ivy was surprised. "Thanks, Serena." She smiled. "Wanna join me for lunch?"

Serena nodded, and the girls continued talking on their way to the cafeteria. ♥
Bernard Palmer



LET OTHERS KNOW YOU FOLLOW JESUS | KEY VERSE: I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Romans 1:16



Are you afraid to let others know you're a Christian? Do you think they'll make fun of you for doing what God says is right? People might respond negatively, but Jesus will help you. He took your sin and shame on Himself to give you eternal life. Because of Him, you have nothing to be ashamed of! Let others know you follow Him and see His love in your life.

NOT WORTHLESS



Audrey sat on the front steps, lost in thought. She'd had a rough week. She failed her math test and skinned her knee, and one of her best friends had moved away. *Why is God letting all these things happen to me?* she thought. *It almost seems like He doesn't care about me anymore.*

Audrey glanced up when her puppy came bounding out onto the front porch. "Hello, Shamrock," she said. But Shamrock didn't seem interested in her—he was too busy gnawing on something. "Hey, that's mine!" Audrey exclaimed, grabbing a wallet from the puppy's mouth. "I just got this, and now you've ruined it!" She looked the torn-up wallet over and sighed. "Maybe Mom can fix it."

Mom came out onto the front porch and examined the wallet. "Hmm, this is pretty torn up. We'll probably have to throw it out."

"But it's still good," said Audrey. "It's just a little torn."

"This wallet has been through a lot," Mom said. "Are you sure we shouldn't throw it away? It's too torn and dirty to be worth anything."

"Mom, just because it doesn't look so good doesn't mean it isn't worth anything. If we fix it up, it will be as good as new."

Mom smiled. "You probably feel a lot like this wallet right now, don't you?"

Audrey gave her a puzzled look. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"I know this wallet is still good, and with a little TLC, I can fix it up," Mom said. "I just wanted to help you see that your life is like this wallet. I know this week has been rough for you. But even though you've been through a lot, you're still valuable. You belong to Jesus, who came into our broken world and gave His life to save you and make you His, and He'll always be there to help you through life's difficulties. His thoughts toward you will never change, no matter how torn up you feel."

"Thanks, Mom," Audrey said, giving Shamrock a hug. "I'm glad I'll always be valuable to Jesus. And I'm glad you can fix my wallet—things are already starting to look up!" *♥ Norah Varner*



YOU'RE VALUABLE TO JESUS | KEY VERSE: This is my comfort in my affliction: Your promise has given me life. Psalm 119:50 (CSB)



Have you ever felt like God has turned away from you? Do you feel like you can't do anything right? Jesus loves you so much that He died and rose again to save you, and He'll never leave you. No matter what has happened to you or what you've done, His thoughts toward you will never change. He will always love you and care for you.

THE LEPER

Mom, I don't understand this verse," Alec said. "It's Second Corinthians 5:21. 'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' I know it's talking about Jesus, but what does it mean when it says He was made to be sin for us? Jesus never sinned, did He?"

"No, He didn't," said Mom. "That's why He was able to save us by taking our sin upon Himself. Let's see if I can find a way to help you think about it." She pulled up a picture on her phone. "Here's a picture of a leper—a person who has leprosy. It's a contagious disease mentioned often in the Bible, and it can still be found in some parts of the world today."

Alec looked at the picture and frowned. "That poor man. He doesn't have any fingers or toes, just little stumps!"

"Yes," said Mom, "and he's blind too. If you saw this man, what would you do for him?"

Alec thought about it. "I would give him a drink of water and some food."

"But he's dying," said Mom. "Would you love him enough to get down beside him and take him in your arms and tell him that if he trusts in Jesus, he'll go to heaven?"

Alec hesitated, then nodded. "But I'd want to wear a mask so I wouldn't get sick."

"But what if, in order to really help him, you had to get sick?" Mom asked. "What if you had the power to allow all of his sickness to flow into your body and let all of your strength and health flow into his? Would you do that?"

Alec cringed at that idea. "I don't think I could do that," he said. "He has such a horrible disease!"

Mom nodded. "Yet that's what Jesus did for us, Alec. He never sinned, but He took all our sin upon Himself and died on the cross to take our punishment. That's what caused Him to suffer so much—not just the physical pain of the crucifixion, but bearing the huge weight of our sin."

Alec thought it over. "I think I'm beginning to understand." ♥ *Harry C. Trover*



JESUS TOOK YOUR SIN UPON HIMSELF | KEY VERSE: God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV)



Have you ever thought about what Jesus did when He died for your sins? He suffered great shame and horror by taking your sin upon Himself. He took your place on the cross so you could spend eternity in heaven with Him instead of hell—He loves you that much! Accept His sacrifice for your sins and trust Him as your Savior. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.)

STINKY SINS

Ronan!" Mom called. "Can you take out the trash, please? I had to get rid of the old trash can, so you'll just have to stack the bags in the garage for now."

Ronan scowled. "Why can't Daisy put it out for once? All she ever does is sit around and text her friends."

Daisy scowled back at him. "At least I have friends!"

"Both of you, stop it!" said Mom. "Why do you kids have to fight all the time?"

Ronan didn't say anything more as he grudgingly took out the trash.

When they pulled into the garage a couple days later, Daisy held her nose as she got out of the car. "Ugh! Something stinks in here!"

"It's the trash!" said Mom. "Let's move these bags out to the driveway. I'll text Dad and remind him to pick up a new trash can on his way home."

"Hey! Come back here and help!" Ronan called to Daisy, who was going into the house. "No wonder you didn't get a part in the school play—they must have known you'd be too lazy to learn your lines!"

Daisy kicked at the bag he was holding. "Be quiet, dummy!" she yelled.

"That's enough!" Mom said sternly. "You'll both help."

When they finished, Mom made them go to the kitchen and sit down. "Your attitudes remind me of that trash," she told them.

"Sorry," Ronan muttered. "Can I get up now?"

"No!" Mom pulled out a chair and sat down. "The way you've been acting stinks worse than the trash you took out of the garage today. Things like bad attitudes, selfishness, and jealousy hurt people Jesus wants us to love and drive them away from us. That's why we need to confess those stinky sins to Jesus. He'll forgive us and make us clean. He'll also help us apologize to others for what we've done and replace mean, selfish attitudes with kindness and love."

Daisy and Ronan were quiet for a moment, then they looked at each other. "I'm sorry," they said in unison. That made them smile.

Mom stood up and grinned. "It smells better in here already!" ♥ *Barbara J. Westberg*



CONFESS SIN AND BE CLEAN | KEY VERSE: If we confess our sins,

He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9



Have you noticed any trash in your life lately? Sins like meanness, gossip, laziness, selfishness, and unkind words can really stink up your life and hurt your relationships with others. Ask Jesus to take out the trash! When you confess your sins to Him, He forgives you and makes you clean. Then trust Him to help you tell others you're sorry and replace unkind attitudes with His love.

THE THINGS I REMEMBER

Manuel looked up when Grandpa walked into the room. “Do you know where I left my glasses?” Grandpa asked as he reached for his Bible.

Grandma sighed. “Did you lose those glasses again? You had them on when you paid the pizza delivery man.”

“We didn’t order pizza today. That was yesterday,” said Grandpa. “Somebody else was here today. Now...” He stopped a moment to cough.

“Your cough doesn’t seem to be getting better,” Grandma said. “You’d better get more medicine.”

“I just got some,” said Grandpa. He paused and furrowed his brows. “Leo!” he suddenly called out, making Manuel jump. “That’s who came today!” Grandpa turned to Manuel. “Leo lives next door, and he picks up medicine for me.”

Just then Manuel spied Grandpa’s glasses lying on the table. “Here are your glasses, Grandpa.”

“Oh good, you found them,” Grandma said. “Now, if only I could find mine!”

Manuel grinned. “They’re on your head, Grandma!”

“Oh, look at that!” Grandma laughed. “I don’t remember putting them on.”

Grandpa put on his glasses and opened the Bible he was holding.


“Are you gonna memorize some verses, Grandpa?” Manuel asked.

Grandpa shook his head. “Not today, but we used to memorize whole chapters when we were kids.”

“That’s right,” said Grandma. “Sometimes when our eyes are tired now, we just say some of them together.”

“Wait a minute,” Manuel said with a puzzled look. “You can’t remember things that happened today—even just a little while ago—so how do you remember things you learned when you were kids?”

Grandpa smiled. “The things we learn as kids just stick in our brains better, I guess. The older you get, the harder it is to remember things. That’s why we encourage you to read and memorize God’s Word as much as you can now, while you’re young.”

Grandma nodded. “The verses I learned as a child have stuck with me all through my life. They’ve reminded me in difficult times that I belong to Jesus and that He’s always with me. That’s something I’ll never forget!”  Agnes Livezey



MEMORIZE BIBLE VERSES | KEY VERSE: Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You. Psalm 119:11



Are you hiding God’s Word in your heart? One way to do that is by memorizing Bible verses. Try it now with today’s key verse. Read it over a few times, then shut your eyes and see if you can say it out loud. Try to do that with a different verse every day or week. But don’t just memorize the words—think about what God is telling you. Use His Word to help you remember His truth and promises.

THE WRONG WAY

As Dad and Micah walked into the station, the train on the track gave two long whistles. “It looks like our train is almost ready to pull out—we must be later than I thought!” said Dad. “Good thing I got our tickets ahead of time. Come on!” They made a dash for it and were just settling down in their seats when the train began to move.



Micah was so excited he could hardly sit still. “I can’t believe we’re really going to see the Cubs play in person! How many miles is it to Chicago, Dad?”

“I don’t know exactly. You can ask the conductor. Here he comes now—get your ticket ready! Here, you can give him mine too.”

The conductor approached, and Micah proudly held out the tickets. “Thank you, young man,” the conductor said. He looked at the tickets, and then turned to Dad. “Sir, I’m afraid you’ve either got the wrong tickets or the wrong train. Your tickets are for Chicago, but this train is going to St. Louis.”

“Oh no!” exclaimed Dad. “How could I have made such a mistake? I was sure I had the right train.”

“You can get off at the next station,” the conductor said. “Then you can catch the first train back the other way. It shouldn’t take too long.”


“Are we going to make it to Chicago, Dad?” Micah asked anxiously. “What about the ball game?”

“I think we’ll still make it to the game,” Dad assured him. “You know, Micah, this kind of thing happens a lot.”

“You mean a lot of people get on the wrong train?” Micah asked.

“I was thinking of something even worse than that,” Dad replied. “Everyone wants to go to heaven someday, but when we try to get there the wrong way, it’s like we’re on the wrong train. No matter how good we try to be, the Bible says we won’t get to heaven by anything we do. Do you know the way that does lead to heaven, Micah?”

“Sure,” Micah answered. “Jesus says He’s the way.”

“Right,” said Dad. “He’s the one and only way to heaven. We can only have eternal life with God by trusting in Him.”  *Harry C. Trover*



JESUS IS THE WAY TO HEAVEN | KEY VERSE: Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”
John 14:6



Are you trying to get to heaven by living a good life? By going to church, giving to people in need, or doing nice things for others? If so, you’re going the wrong way! None of those things will get you to heaven. Jesus is the only way. It’s not what you do, but what He did for you on the cross, that gives you eternal life. Trust in Him today! (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 104.)

OKAPI EARS

Mom, what is this animal?" Tiana asked as she gazed past the zoo fence. The animal looked strong like a horse, but it had the stripes of a zebra on its legs. "Is it a type of zebra?"

Mom looked at the plate in front of the cage. "It's an okapi. It's related to the giraffe."

"Not a zebra?" Tiana asked, wondering where the dark brown on the animal's head and back came from. It was kind of cute with its big ears. "Do you think okapis have good hearing?"

"Not sure, but they can lick their own ears!" Mom exclaimed. "They have long, blueish tongues that help them reach and grab hold of leaves they want to eat. That's crazy!"

"I hope I see one stick out its tongue today." Tiana watched the okapis closely, hoping to catch a glimpse of one licking its ear.

"They also have oily coats that make rain slide right off," Mom said as she continued reading the plate. "So, they never get wet."

"That's super cool," Tiana said, still staring at the animals.

"Tiana, how did the okapi learn to get an oily coat?" Mom asked her. "Do you think they rub their backs in a puddle of oil?"

Tiana frowned. "No, that's silly. They were made that way."


"Made that way by who?" Mom asked.

"God," Tiana answered. "He made everything."

"He did, didn't He? He gave them their ears and tongues and oily skin. He clearly cares a whole lot about okapis."

Tiana shrugged. "I guess."

"If God cares so much about these animals, how much more do you think He cares about you?" Mom asked gently. "I know you've been having a hard time since I started dating Rod. I know you miss your dad. I just want you to remember that Jesus loves you and is always with you. He came to earth and died to save you, and He cares about every detail of your life. You can talk to Him about anything—big or small."

"I'm glad God cares about me." Tiana watched one of the okapis lie down and lick its ear. She smiled. "And I'm glad He cares about okapis too."  Kimberly Brokish



GOD CARES ABOUT YOU | KEY VERSE: Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you. 1 Peter 5:7 (NLT)



Do you ever wonder if God cares about you? He does. When you look at the amazing way He created each animal and gave it exactly what it needs, you can see how much He cares about His creation. Yet the Bible says He cares about us even more than animals. He made us in His image and sent His Son, Jesus, to save us so we could have eternal life with Him. You can talk to Him about anything, knowing He cares about you.

COLOR!





HEY ZACH!

Hey, kids! I'm Zach, host of the *Keys for Kids* radio program. Have you ever heard someone at your church say, "We need to preach the gospel," or "The gospel changes everything"? Maybe you nodded along but inside you were thinking, *Uh...what exactly IS the gospel?* Good question! And the answer is actually really cool. Let's start with the word itself.

A long time ago people said "good spell." Now, don't think magic spell. Back then, a *spell* was like a story someone told. So, "good spell" basically meant "good story."

And guess what? That's a perfect match for the Bible's Greek word *euangelion* (you-ang-GHEL-ee-on). It means "good news."

So when we say *gospel*, we're talking about the best news in the history of the world. Here are some examples of gospel good news:

- Jesus came to earth as a baby
- Jesus died on the cross for our sins
- Jesus rose from the dead and beat death forever
- Anyone who turns to Him can be forgiven and belong to God's family

So, the gospel isn't just a word adults say in church. It's the good news that changes how we live, how we hope, and how we understand God's love for us.

And the coolest part? Good news is meant to be shared. Think about one friend or family member you could encourage, help, or pray for—and let them know the amazing news about Jesus.

The gospel is good. The gospel is true. And the gospel is for you!



I love learning about the Bible with you, and I also love answering your questions! If you have a question about God, the Bible, or the Christian life, be sure to send it to me. Go to keysforkids.org/heyzach

And don't forget—WORD with Zach starts on June 1. Sign up at WORDwithZach.org for a chance to win prizes!

Listen to Zach on the *Keys for Kids* radio program at keysforkids.net

READER QUESTION



Hey Zach,

Why did God make bugs?

Drew



Dear Drew,

Such a great question! I know some people really don't like bugs, and they might seem creepy or gross sometimes. But like everything God makes, He has a very good reason. Bugs do all kinds of things for the planet that keep it running. Some help flowers grow by pollinating them. Some eat old dead leaves and plants to keep the world clean. And many bugs are food for birds and other animals. They are part of God's purposeful created order.

However, because sin entered the world, some bugs do harmful things like bite, sting, or cause destruction. The good news is that Jesus promises to make the whole world new again one day. When He does, bugs won't hurt us anymore! So even though they might "bug" us now, they can remind us of God's promise to restore everything He created to the way He intended it to be.

Thanks for your question. I hope that helps!

Your friend,

Zach

EXPRESS YOURSELF

HEY ZACH!
keysforkids.org/heyzach

TAKING TURNS

George rubbed his stomach and John licked his lips as they entered the kitchen. “That sure was a good meal,” said George. “I love that chicken Mom makes.”

John set his plate in the sink with a *clang*. “But look at all the dirty dishes,” he said. “The sink is full of them. I’m glad it’s your turn to clean up.”

“It’s not my turn. I did dishes last night. Don’t you remember?”

John put his hands on his hips. “I know you did them last night, but last week I did them two nights in a row because you had soccer practice. So you owe me.”

Mom entered the kitchen. “Goodness, boys. Do you have to fight about everything? I worked hard to make this meal because I know it’s one of your favorites. I’d appreciate your help cleaning up.”

John pointed his finger at George, and George stuck out his tongue.

“You know what the Bible says?” Mom asked.

“It says lots of things,” said George.

“In the book of Philipians, Paul tells us to do everything without complaining or arguing.”

“Everything?” asked John. “Even dishes? I bet Paul never had to do dishes.”

“Maybe not,” Mom said. “But he worked really hard as a missionary. And he also worked as a tentmaker because he didn’t want to ask for money. In Colossians, another book of the Bible, Paul tells us to do our work willingly and joyfully because we’re really doing it for Jesus, who willingly died on the cross to save us. And do you know what else the Bible says?”

George and John both answered at the same time. “It says lots of things.”

Mom smiled. “In Psalms it says it is good and pleasant when brothers live in unity.”

George and John glared at each other. Then George’s lips curved up the tiniest bit. Then John grinned even more. And suddenly they were both laughing.

“I know you did the dishes last night,” said John. “Sometimes when I have band rehearsal, you do them two nights in a row, and I don’t always repay you. So I can do them tonight.”

“Or maybe we can do them together,” George said as he picked up a dish towel. “You wash, I dry?”

John nodded and flicked on the faucet. ♥ *Carol Raj*



HELP WITHOUT COMPLAINING | KEY VERSE: Do everything without complaining or arguing. Philipians 2:14 (ERV)



Do you complain about work you have to do? Do you argue with others when it seems like you’re doing more than they are? Instead of complaining and arguing, think of chores and other tasks as opportunities to show others God’s love. The Bible tells us that Jesus is the one we’re truly working for, and when we do our work out of love and joy, we reflect Him.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT (PART 1)

Riley!" Wynn called to her sister as she inspected her four tiny tomato plants. "Look, little green tomatoes!" This was Wynn's very first time growing a garden, and she was very excited.

Riley smiled. "See? You just needed to have patience." Riley was fourteen and had helped their mother grow vegetable gardens before.

"Look at those shrimpy tomatoes!" a voice taunted from next door. "We had tomatoes on our plants weeks ago." The voice came from Kai, their neighbor, who was always mocking Wynn. He and his mother also had a garden. They had bought their plants already half grown, and they were now full of fruit.

Riley put her hand on her sister's shoulder. "Ignore him. Yours are growing just fine. Now that they're starting to get fruit, we should name them," she told Wynn, trying to distract her from Kai's rudeness. "That's what Mom and I do with our plants each year."

"What should we name them?" Wynn asked.

"Well, tomatoes are fruit," said Riley. "And the Bible tells us that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

"Wow, that's a lot of fruit!" said Wynn.

"Yep," said Riley. "And it's all fruit that the Holy Spirit grows in our lives when we put our faith in Jesus, just like your tomatoes grow in your garden."


"But we only have four plants, so which names should we choose?" asked Wynn.

"I think the first one should be Patience," said Riley, "to remind you to have patience as the tomatoes grow."

Wynn giggled. "Okay, and we'll name the second one Joy because I will be full of joy when they finally do! And the next one can be Goodness, because the tomatoes will be full of yummy goodness." Wynn smiled. "Now I've named two and you named one, so you have to name the last one."

"The last one should be Love," said Riley. "Because nothing grows without love."

Wynn looked down at her garden. "Now all four of our fruit of the Spirit plants have names."

"Yep," said Riley. "And they're going to keep growing just like the fruit of the Spirit is growing in you."  *Kristin Beaven*



GOD GROWS FRUIT IN CHRISTIANS' LIVES | KEY VERSE: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Galatians 5:22-23 (CSB)



Did you know that, if you're a Christian, you have fruit growing in your life?

When we trust Jesus as our Savior, the Holy Spirit begins to work in our hearts so that His ways grow in us like fruit in a garden. As He fills our hearts with love, He grows the fruit of the Spirit in our lives to make us more like Jesus.

Trust Him to fill your life with good fruit so others can see His love.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT (PART 2)

Wynn visited her garden every day, and her tomato plants, which she and her sister had named Love, Joy, Patience, and Goodness, grew and grew. Then one evening dark clouds began to gather on the horizon. At first Wynn watched from her bedroom window as droplets of water fell from the sky, but soon she could no longer see her poor little tomato plants through the sheets of falling rain. Suddenly lightning cracked in the sky, and the wind blew so hard that a tree branch fell inches from the window. Mom called for Wynn and Riley to come down into the basement.



In the morning, when the storm was over, Wynn and Riley walked timidly to the garden. The grass was swampy, and several branches littered the ground. Wynn's and Riley's rain boots made great slurping noises as they plodded through the mud. Both girls were afraid of what they might find in the garden, but when Wynn approached, she let out a shout of excitement. "They're okay!"

All four tomato plants were unhurt. Wynn was about to give Riley a hug when she heard a sob from next door. She looked over to see Kai, the mean neighbor boy who had made fun of her tomato plants, crying. The wind had lifted his tomato plants up by the roots, and the rain had pounded them into the ground. Now the space of earth where Kai's garden had been was nothing but green mush.

Riley leaned down and whispered into Wynn's ear as they watched Kai go back into his house. "Do you remember what the first fruit of the Spirit is?"

"Love," said Wynn. "Nothing grows without love."

The girls whispered together for a moment longer, then Riley got a shovel. Carefully she dug up Love, the tomato plant that had just begun to sprout little green fruits. They were careful not to damage the roots as they lifted the plant out of the ground. Together they took the plant next door. Riley dug a spot in the ruined mush of Kai's garden. Then, ever so carefully, Wynn placed the tomato plant inside the hole. She filled the hole with dirt and planted Love there in the center of her neighbor's garden. ♥ *Kristin Beaven*



PLANT SEEDS OF LOVE | KEY VERSE: Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:13 (NLT)



Is it hard for you to love someone who's been mean to you? The Bible tells us that love is the most important way we show others who Jesus is and what He's done for us. He loved people who were mean to him—He died for us when we were His enemies, separated from God because of our sin. When we're kind to others—even when they're not kind to us—we're planting seeds of His love.

FOGGY FAITH



Mallory blew her nose. Again. “Mom, how long do allergies last?” she asked as they drove away from the doctor’s office.

Mom smiled sympathetically. “The doctor said you have seasonal allergies, so you’ll probably have them the next couple of months.”

“Great,” said Mallory glumly. She felt stuffed up, and her head was foggy.

“I know you don’t feel well,” Mom said. “We’ll be home soon.”

As they drove across a bridge, a blanket of fog seemed to come up out of nowhere and surround them. Mallory peered out the window, trying to see the water below the bridge, but it was like everything had disappeared.

“I can hardly see a thing,” Mom muttered as she turned on the headlights. She slowed down and carefully steered the car over the bridge.

A few minutes later they were off the bridge and heading home. Mallory couldn’t believe how quickly it went from being so foggy to clear skies and sunshine. She turned around to watch the fog slowly float away behind them. “Wow, that was crazy, Mom! Weren’t you scared driving over the bridge when you could hardly see?”

Mom nodded. “It was a little scary, but as long as I kept my eyes focused on what was in front of me, I knew we’d get to the other side of the bridge eventually.” She turned the headlights off and headed into the sunshine. “You know, Mallory, faith can sometimes be foggy too,” she said thoughtfully.

“How can faith be foggy?” Mallory asked.

“Even though we have Jesus in our lives, there will sometimes be days when we won’t feel joyful or know what to do about a tough situation. That’s when we need to depend on God to show us the way through our foggy faith.”

“How do we do that?” asked Mallory.

“By keeping our focus on Jesus. We can do that by listening to what He says to us in the Bible and talking to Him about everything. Even when we can’t see what’s in front of us, we can hold on to God’s promises and what we know is true. Jesus will always be with us in the fog, and we can trust Him to bring us out on the other side.” ♥

Kelly Hope



TRUST JESUS IN FOGGY TIMES | KEY VERSE: Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)



Are you going through a foggy time in your faith? Maybe you’re not feeling very joyful or you’re facing difficulties in life. Keep talking to Jesus in prayer and reading your Bible to get to know Him better. Remember that He saved you by dying for your sin, and trust Him to help you get through the fog and show you the next step to take.

TAKE IT TO GOD

Bryson wrote something on a piece of paper, then crumpled it up and threw it in the trash can. He did this several times, and before long he was out of paper. He laid his head on his desk in frustration.



Just then Mom walked by. “What’s wrong, Bryson?”

“I’m all out of paper. Can we go to the store so I can get some more?”

Mom glanced at the crumpled balls of paper in and around the trash can. “What are you trying to write?”

“Our Sunday school teacher challenged us to write an encouraging letter to someone. I immediately thought of Dylan. He’s been really upset lately about his parents getting a divorce. So I’ve been trying to write him a letter, but everything I write sounds dumb.” Bryson picked up a ball of paper and handed it to his mother. “You can read one of my attempts if you want.”

Mom uncrumpled the paper. “Hey, Dylan. Sorry your parents are getting a divorce. Hope you have a good day anyway.”

“See, Mom? Everything sounds so dumb, and I don’t know what I can say to make Dylan feel better. I have no idea what he’s going through, but I know it must be hard.” Bryson sighed. “And now I’m all out of paper.”

“I’m sorry, Bryson,” Mom said. “I have no idea how to make paper, so I can’t help you.”

Bryson frowned. “Mom, I don’t need you to make me paper. I just need you to take me to a place where I can get some.”

Mom nodded. “You’re exactly right—and it’s the same with Dylan. He doesn’t need you to solve his problems. He just needs you to take them to someone who can—God. Jesus understands what Dylan is going through and loves him so much that He suffered and died to save him. He knows exactly what Dylan needs. The biggest encouragement you can give Dylan is to tell him you’re praying for him and then do it.” She smiled. “I’ll pick up some more paper at the store tomorrow. In the meantime, why don’t you take Dylan’s problems to Jesus in prayer?”

Bryson nodded, and after Mom left, he bowed his head and said a prayer for Dylan. ♥
Melissa Yeagle



PRAY FOR THOSE WHO ARE HURTING | KEY VERSE: God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. Psalm 46:1 (NLT)



Do you know someone who’s going through a hard time? Even though you may want to, you can’t solve everyone’s problems. The best thing you can do for a friend in need is take their problems to God in prayer. He may direct you to help them in other ways too, but ultimately He’s the only one able to give them what they need. Encourage your friend by letting them know you’re praying for them.

FRIENDSHIP BRACELETS

I can't believe Aanya would do this to me!" Lucy pulled the friendship bracelet off her wrist and dropped it in the trash.

"Lucy? Are you okay?" her mother asked. "Why are you throwing away your bracelet from Aanya?"

"I thought she was my friend." Lucy hung her backpack up on its hook and sat down at the table. "But she told my secret to the entire class. Even the boys!"

"What secret?" asked Mom. Lucy told her, and Mom sighed. "I'm sorry, Lu." Mom thought for a moment. "Do you have any more of the thread you use to make bracelets?"

Lucy nodded. She got up and brought the box of brightly colored threads to the table. Mom started looking through the threads and picking some out.

"What are you doing?" Lucy asked.

"I'm making you a friendship bracelet. It will remind you that you always have a friend, one who will never betray you." Mom began twisting the strands together. She pointed to a dark thread. "This friend loves you even though you've done bad things and will always love you no matter what you do."

"Is it you?" Lucy asked.

"No. Even though I love you very much, this person loves you even more." Mom picked up a red thread. "He died to save you from your sins." She held up a white one and a green one. "He washed you clean of sin and gave you new life."

"I know who my friend is! It's Jesus!" Lucy exclaimed. "And the bracelet has the same colors as the wordless book I made at church. The gold stands for the streets of gold in heaven."

"Yes, Jesus loved you enough to give His life so you could have eternal life with Him. He loves you so much, Lucy. He'll always be there for you, even when no one else is." She reached over and slipped the bracelet onto Lucy's wrist. "You can wear this as a reminder that Jesus is the best friend you'll ever have."

Lucy looked at the bracelet. "Since Jesus is such a good friend to me, maybe I should give Aanya another chance."

Mom smiled and gave Lucy a hug. "That's a great idea. Jesus will be with you as you show His forgiveness to Aanya."  Jessica Kleeberger



JESUS IS THE ULTIMATE BEST FRIEND | KEY VERSE: There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. John 15:13 (NLT)



Have you ever been disappointed by someone? Maybe it was a friend, a parent, a brother, or a sister. The good news is that God's children have a friend who will never let them down. That friend is Jesus Christ! He loved you enough to die for you so you could have eternal life with Him. You can trust Him as your very best friend. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.)

JEALOUSY

Anna came home from yet another lost softball game. As she walked past the living room cabinet, she saw her sister's softball trophies. Macy's team was undefeated. Anna sighed as she walked upstairs.

"Macy, have you started your math homework?" asked Anna.

"Started? I already finished. It's easy," said Macy.

Macy was in the advanced track at school. Anna was not. As Anna opened her binder to her math assignment, she felt a knot in her stomach. She couldn't remember how to do the problems. She slammed her binder shut, put her head on her desk, and cried.

Anna heard a knock at her bedroom door. "Go away," she said through tears.

Macy opened the door anyway. "What's wrong?" she asked.

"What's wrong is that no matter how hard I try, you're always there being a know-it-all!" yelled Anna.

"I'm not a know-it-all!" Macy yelled back and slammed the door.

"Who slammed that door?" Mom asked.

"I did," said Macy, "because Anna called me a know-it-all."

"Girls, come out here, please," said Mom. Anna and Macy stepped out of their rooms.

"I have an idea," Mom said. "Let's play softball in the backyard."

"But we don't have any infielders," said Macy.

"Or enough people for the basemen," added Anna.

"We need people with different strengths to make a whole team, don't we?" said Mom. "That's true for more than just sports. As Christians, God has given each of us different strengths so we can work together to spread the good news of Jesus and show others His love. He made each of you girls to be smart and talented in your own way, and He loves you so much that Jesus died for you. Math might be harder for you, Anna, but Dad and I are so proud of you for winning your school's essay contest."

"I know." Anna sighed. "I'm sorry for calling you a know-it-all, Macy."

"I forgive you," Macy said. "Would you like me to help you with your math homework?"

Anna smiled. "I'll trade you homework help for the painting I made today."

"Deal," said Macy.  *Alexa Fetterly*



GOD MADE YOU UNIQUE FOR A PURPOSE | KEY VERSE: Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4:10 (NIV)



Have you ever felt jealous of someone else? It's easy to compare ourselves to friends and siblings, but God created each of us with unique gifts so we can show His love to others in our own special way. Jesus thought that you, in all your uniqueness, were worth dying for—that's how much He loves you! Let Him replace your jealousy with love so you can use your gifts alongside other Christians to point people to Him.

RESPECTING GOD'S STUFF



Judah stomped into his brother's room. "You are *not* going to believe this, Isaac!" Judah was so angry his ears were red. Isaac closed the book he was reading. "What's the matter?" "Just look at my new interactive robot!" The robot's arm dangled from its side. "That's the last time I ever let Sam use one of my toys. Do you know how much I paid for this?" Judah shook his head. "That guy has no respect for other people's stuff!"

The next morning, Isaac and Judah were late for school. "Here." Isaac tossed Judah a granola bar. "We don't have time for breakfast, so eat this on the way."

As the brothers took a shortcut through a neighbor's backyard, Judah ate his granola bar in just three bites, then tossed the wrapper on the ground.

"Hey!" Isaac stopped and pointed to the wrapper "That's littering! Go pick it up."

"Oh, come on. It's just one wrapper, Isaac."

"It's not your yard, Judah. How do you think the neighbors would feel if they saw you dropping trash in their yard?"

Judah sighed and picked up the wrapper. "I guess I wasn't thinking."

"Yeah," said Isaac. "Kind of like Sam wasn't thinking when he broke your robot."

On Sunday, Mrs. Rawlings gave a lesson on creation. "God made everything," she said. "But because our sin has made a mess of everything, Jesus is making everything new—not just the people who trust in Him, but one day, all of creation! Everything belongs to Jesus, and He wants us to enjoy everything He's made. But we also need to respect that it belongs to Him and take good care of it."

I know what it's like to have someone not respect your stuff, thought Judah. *I wouldn't want to do that with God's stuff!*

The next morning, as Isaac and Judah passed by a neighbor's yard on their way to school, Judah saw a plastic bag blowing across the grass. "I got it!" he called out. He raced over and stepped on it before it blew away, then placed it in the trash can at the end of the driveway.

"Hey!" shouted their neighbor from the porch. "Thanks for cleaning our yard!"

"No problem!" Judah shouted back. "And actually, it belongs to Jesus!" ♥

Kelly Carlson



CARE FOR GOD'S CREATION | KEY VERSE: The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth. Acts 17:24 (NIV)



Do you respect what doesn't belong to you? Jesus created everything in the world around you—trees, grass, land, animals—and will one day make everything new and even better than it is now! Everything belongs to Him, and He wants you to help take care of what He's made. How can you be respectful and take care of God's beautiful creation?

BECOMING FOSSILS

Amir rushed into the house and dropped his backpack. “Look at this!” he said, holding out a fossilized bone. “My teacher said I could borrow it to show Grandpa. Can I show it to him today?”

Mom smiled. “We’ll go over to the nursing home after supper.”

“Mrs. Patterson says only one out of millions of bones becomes a fossil,” Amir told his mother. “It has to be buried in just the right minerals. As the bone decays, the minerals seep into the pores, and bit by bit they replace the bone until there’s no bone left, just hard, strong rock mineral.”

“Really? Grandpa will love to hear about that,” Mom said. “I bet his neighbor, Mr. Wyatt, would like to see that fossil and hear about it too.”

“I doubt it,” said Amir. “He doesn’t like anything—or anybody. He’s too grumpy!” Amir set the fossil on the table. “I know he’s old, but Grandpa isn’t grumpy like that, and he’s even older than Mr. Wyatt.”

Mom thought for a moment. “Grandpa is a lot like that fossil,” she said.


Amir’s eyes grew wide. “He’s not that old!”

Mom laughed. “What I mean is, because Grandpa knows Jesus, God’s goodness and love have seeped into his heart over the course of his life. Just like minerals filled and replaced the materials originally found in the fossil, the Holy Spirit filled Grandpa with love, joy, and peace—all the right things. Now he’s pretty old. He’s growing weak and tired and is starting to forget things, but God’s Spirit is evident in him.”

“And it’s not in Mr. Wyatt?” Amir asked.

“As far as we know, Mr. Wyatt has never trusted Jesus as his Savior,” said Mom. “If he hasn’t, then he doesn’t have the Holy Spirit in his heart working to replace his old self with God’s goodness and love.”

Amir picked up the fossil. “Maybe I should show this to Mr. Wyatt like you said.” He looked at Mom. “And we should tell him how Jesus changes people like minerals change bones.”

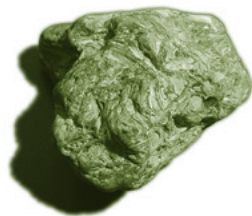
“Yes,” Mom replied. “It’s not too late for him. God can still work a miracle in his life.” 
Heather Tekavec



JESUS CHANGES US | KEY VERSE: Our human body is wearing out. But our spirits are getting stronger every day. 2 Corinthians 4:16 (NLV)



Is God’s goodness seeping into your heart? Are the desires of your old sinful self being replaced with His love? When you trust in Jesus, the Holy Spirit begins working in your life to make you more like Him. Even though our physical bodies may grow old and weak, we have eternal life with Jesus, and through His Spirit our faith in Him grows stronger each day.



PRAYER WALK

Hadley came running out of children’s church. “How was your class today?” Mom asked as they climbed into the van.

“Mrs. Burton’s lesson was on *intercession*. When we pray, we need to pray for others too. Mrs. Burton explained that *intercede* means to act or plead on someone’s behalf,” Hadley proudly stated as she buckled in.

“Praying for others is important,” Mom said. “It’s easy to pray for ourselves, but sometimes we forget to ask God to help others with their needs and let them feel His love and presence in their lives.”

“Mrs. Burton often walks around her neighborhood praying for her neighbors. She calls it prayer walking,” Hadley said. “We went on a prayer walk this morning while you were in big church. We prayed for Pastor Tom, the congregation, and all the children’s church teachers. Mae and I want to start prayer walking around our apartment complex each week.”

“I think that’s a wonderful idea, Hadley!” Mom replied. “Why don’t we put together a list of specific prayer requests for our neighbors.”

Starting that week, Hadley, Mae, and their moms prayer walked every Tuesday. One evening, as they were walking past Mr. Swanson’s apartment, he came out to visit. “Getting your exercise each week, I see.”


“And we’re praying too,” Hadley explained. As she talked, she noticed a tear slide down Mr. Swanson’s cheek. “Is everything okay?”


Mr. Swanson shook his head. “May I share a prayer request with you?” Hadley, Mae, and their moms gathered around as he spoke. They took turns praying over Mr. Swanson, then he said, “Thanks for praying with me.”


“Anytime,” Mae answered.

As the weeks went by, many prayer requests were answered in their small apartment community. The most exciting news was when one of Hadley’s neighbor friends gave his life to Jesus!

“You know, Mom, prayer walking has really taught me how to pray for others, and it’s been so exciting to see prayers answered,” Hadley said one Tuesday night.

“It’s given us so many reasons to praise God,” Mom replied as she gave Hadley a hug. “And it’s been great exercise too!”  Lisa Fuller

 **PRAY FOR OTHERS** | KEY VERSE: I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. 1 Timothy 2:1 (NLT)

 Did you know that God wants us as Christians to intercede for others in prayer? Prayer is powerful, and when we ask God to act in other people’s lives out of love for them, it can result in changed hearts and deeper relationships with Jesus. You can pray for anyone anytime and anywhere, but doing a prayer walk in your church, school, or neighborhood is a great way to practice praying for others.

THE UGLY DUCKLING

Cade,” Mom said, coming into Cade’s room, “do you know where Ducky is?”
Finley, Cade’s little sister, was wailing in the hallway. “Cade took him. I know he did!”

“I don’t know where that dumb duck is, but I hope it’s gone forever!” Cade said. Ducky was a stuffed toy, and although the little duck was worn and ragged, Finley loved it dearly. She didn’t care that its fluff was all rubbed off and it was limp and faded. But Cade thought it was awful. He called it the Ugly Duckling.

“Well then, come out here and help look for Ducky,” Mom said, and the search was on. They looked everywhere—in the basement, under the furniture, even in the garbage can—but Ducky was nowhere to be found.

The next day, Mom had a talk with Cade. “Have you noticed that Finley is still very unhappy over losing Ducky?” she asked.

Cade rolled his eyes. “Why would she feel so bad about that thing? It looks like it’s made of old rags and sawdust. How can anybody love anything so ugly?”

Mom smiled. “Actually, Finley’s love for the Ugly Duckling, as you call him, reminds me of God’s love for us. He loves us even though we’re ugly ducklings, in a way—we’re all ugly sinners. For example, some of us tell lies.”

Mom looked intently at Cade, and his face turned red. “I—I lied,” he admitted. “I hid Ducky. He’s on the top shelf in my closet.”


“I saw him there when I was putting away laundry,” Mom said. “How do you think God feels about that?”

“I guess I never thought about how He feels—or thought of myself as an ugly duckling.” Cade hesitated. “Do you think God loves me anyway? Like Finley loves the Ugly—I mean, like Finley loves Ducky?”

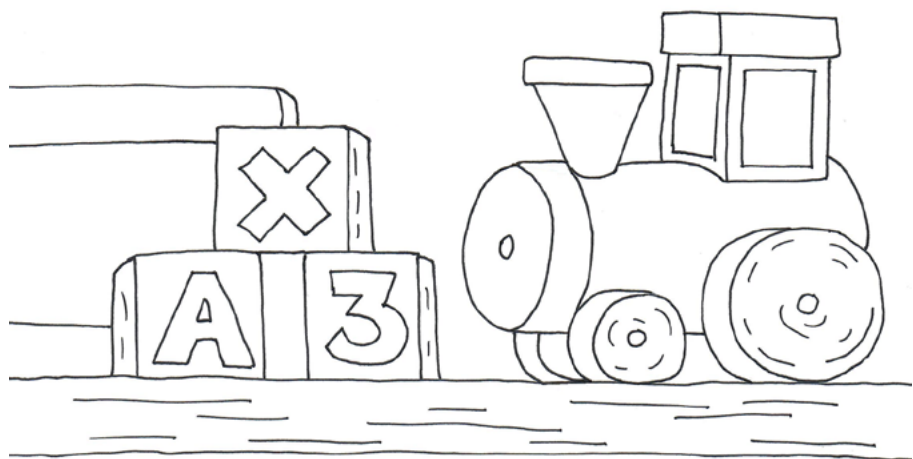
“He loves you much more than that,” Mom assured him. “He loves you so much that He sent Jesus to take the punishment for your sins. He wants to cleanse you and make you His child. Would you like to ask Him to do that?”

Cade nodded. “I don’t want to be an ugly duckling anymore.”  *Harry C. Trover*

 **JESUS DIED FOR SINNERS** | KEY VERSE: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

 Do you realize that, in God’s sight, you’re like an ugly duckling? The Bible says everyone—including you—has sinned by doing wrong things, and sin is ugly. But God loves you in spite of your sin. He loves you so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for you. You don’t have to be an ugly duckling any longer. Trust Jesus as your Savior, and He will make you clean and new. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 104.)

COLOR!



I DO LOVE YOU

Bye! Have a great time! Take lots of pictures!” Everyone was waving to Leanne and Logan as they left their wedding reception to go on their honeymoon.

Charis noticed Leanne’s little sister Bryn sitting off by herself, looking unhappy. “What’s the matter?” Charis asked the little girl.

Bryn sniffed. “I don’t want Leanne to go. I’m gonna miss her.”

“But she’ll be back soon!” Charis said. “Maybe you can make a ‘Welcome Home’ poster to hang on the door of her and Logan’s new apartment before she gets back. Won’t that be fun?”

On the way home, Charis told her parents about her conversation with the little girl. Mom smiled. “Bryn doesn’t understand that Leanne’s place is with Logan now. But imagine how hard it would have been for Leanne to convince people she loved Logan if she hadn’t wanted to go with him today.”

Charis laughed. “I guess it would have been awkward if everyone had heard Leanne say ‘I do’ to Logan during the wedding ceremony but then not want to go with him on their honeymoon. They’d think she didn’t really love him after all!”


“So we could tell that Leanne loves Logan by what she said and by what she did, couldn’t we?” Dad said as he turned onto the highway. “Speech and actions are both important in showing that we love others.”

“And also in showing that we love Jesus,” added Mom.

“Yes,” said Dad. “He loves us so much that He willingly died on the cross to save us. But do you think others will believe us when we say we love Him but don’t show it through our actions?”

“You mean if we say we love Jesus but don’t do what He says or treat people the way He wants us to? Then we’re not acting like we love Him very much?” Charis asked.

“It seems that way to me,” Dad said. “After all, real love is more than words. It’s showing your love through your actions.”

“Right,” said Mom. “And the best way to show that we truly love Jesus is to obey Him by trusting Him to help us show His love to others.”  *Barbara J. Westberg*



SHOW YOUR LOVE FOR JESUS | KEY VERSE: [Jesus said,] “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” John 14:15



Do your actions show that you love Jesus? Or do you just say you love Him but not do what He says? The Bible says that those who love Jesus obey Him, and His greatest commands to us are to love Him and love others. Trust Him to fill your heart with His love so you can treat others with kindness, even if other people don’t like it or make fun of you for it. Let your actions show others how much you love Jesus.

THE LAW OF SPACE

Zachary leaned back and sighed. He couldn't concentrate on his homework. He'd been worrying about next week's science test all day, and then he'd overheard someone tell a bad joke and couldn't get it out of his head. When the worries and bad thoughts just wouldn't stop, he finally decided to talk to Dad about it.

"I'm so sorry you've been going through that, buddy," said Dad. "Sometimes bad things we see and hear or our own fears and worries can put bad thoughts in our minds that are hard to get rid of."

Zachary sighed. "So what can I do about it?"

"Have you heard of the law of space?" asked Dad.

"Yeah," said Zachary. "No two things can occupy the same space at the same time. We learned that in science class, but it's also just common sense." He pointed to a book. "Like that book. Nothing else can be in that space on the table unless the book is moved."


"Right," said Dad. "Well, it's the same with your mind. When it's filled with good things, there's no space for heavy worries or bad thoughts."

"But how do I fill it with good things?" Zachary asked.

"By staying focused on Jesus and remembering that His power is greater than the power of bad thoughts," replied Dad. "As soon as you feel heavy with worry or a bad thought comes to your mind, ask Jesus to cleanse your mind and help you replace those thoughts with thoughts of things that are good and true—like how He freed you from sin and promises to take care of you in every situation. Give your thoughts over to Him."

"Okay," Zachary said. "But what if I still worry or can't stop thinking about something bad?"

"Well, then it might be good to talk to me or another adult about it," said Dad. "And you know what else can help? Looking for ways you can show God's love to others. Focusing on others helps you think more about them and less about whatever it is that's bothering you."

"Thanks, Dad," Zachary said. "I'm going to go pray and ask Jesus to help me rearrange the space in my mind."  *Agnes Livezey*



FOCUS YOUR MIND ON JESUS | KEY VERSE: We take every thought captive to obey Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:5 (CSB)



Do you have trouble controlling your thoughts? Are you constantly worrying about problems or thinking about something you saw or heard that you know doesn't please God? Give your thoughts over to Jesus. He saved you from sin and gives you the power to replace bad thoughts with good ones. When you're struggling with your thoughts, focus your mind on Him.



PEACEMAKERS

I know, but that's what Bianca said." Kaylee switched the phone to her other ear. "She told me she was sick of hearing you whine all the time. I can't help it if she says mean things about you."

When the call ended, Kaylee went into the living room. "Who was that?" asked Dad. "Sounded like you were trying to stop World War III!"

Kaylee sighed. "It was Emmylou. She and Bianca are my best friends, but they hate each other! And I seem to always get caught in the middle of their arguments."

"Why don't they like each other?" asked Dad.

"I don't know," said Kaylee. "But they're always saying mean things about each other."

"Hmm," said Dad. "Well, I don't know what their problem is, but when you hear one of them say something unkind about the other, have you tried keeping it to yourself? Didn't you just tell Emmylou that Bianca told you she was sick of her whining?"

Kaylee blushed. "Uh, yeah, I guess. But that's what Bianca said."

"Yes, but you're contributing to the problem, Kaylee," Dad told her. "Jesus tells us to be peacemakers. He brought us peace by making us right with God, and He wants us to help make peace between others. To do that, we need to act in a kind, loving way when others aren't being kind to each other."

"But I was just telling the truth!" said Kaylee. "Isn't that what Jesus wants me to do?"

"While Jesus wants us to tell the truth, the way you're doing it isn't very kind or loving to either of your friends. When you tell one of the girls the mean things the other said about her, you're making her feel bad about herself and angry at the other person. Instead, see if you can pick up on anything nice they say about each other and repeat those things."

Kaylee thought it over. "I guess it's worth a try."

"At the very least, you can stop spreading the bad feelings around," said Dad. "And as they see God's love in you and your care in what you choose to tell them the other person has said—and in what you say yourself—they might start saying kind things more often!" ♥ *Barbara J. Westberg*



BE A PEACEMAKER | KEY VERSE: Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Matthew 5:9 (NIV)



Do you repeat unkind things and stir up trouble? Today's Bible reading says to seek and pursue peace. One way to do that is to keep any unkind words you hear someone say about another person to yourself. Instead, listen for kind things said about others and repeat those—and add some of your own! Let the peace and love you have in Jesus spread into your relationships through the words you choose to say.



WARNING! WINDOW HERE!

THUD. “Oh no! A bird flew into the glass!” Torin turned to his dad. “I hope he’s okay!”

Dad and Torin went to the large glass window in the living room. “I don’t see him,” Dad said as they looked down at the ground. “I guess he must be okay—he probably flew away.”

“Well, I think we should put up a poster or something to warn the birds that there’s a window here,” said Torin. “They can’t see the clear glass.”

Dad smiled. “What should it say?”

“Dad! You know birds can’t read. It would just have to be something solid on the glass so they could see it was there.”

“Well, I don’t think Mom would like a sign like that on the front window,” Dad said.

Torin shrugged. “Probably not.”

“You know, Torin, we can be like that bird sometimes,” Dad said thoughtfully.

“We can?” asked Torin. “How?”


“There are dangerous things in life that we may not see either,” replied Dad. “There’s a difference though—while we’re unable to warn those birds about the window, God warns us about things that will hurt us. Do you know how He does that?”

“Well, my teacher once warned me not to run in the hallway, but I did anyway and ran into someone, and we both got hurt,” said Torin. “Is that how God warns us? Through our teachers?”

“That’s one way,” Dad replied. “He puts parents and teachers in our lives to teach us to be wise and do what’s right. But I was thinking of something bigger than running in the hallway.”


Torin thought about it. “Last week Pastor Grey talked about sin and gave a strong warning about that.”

“Right,” said Dad. “God warns us about sin in the Bible, and He puts people in our lives who help us understand those warnings. He warns us that if we don’t trust Jesus to save us from sin, we won’t have eternal life. The Bible also warns Christians about the consequences of sinful actions in our lives. He warns us because He loves us and doesn’t want us to get hurt.”

Torin nodded as a bird flew by the window. “Then we’d better pay attention!” 

Karen Locklear

 **PAY ATTENTION TO GOD’S WARNINGS** | KEY VERSE: [God’s] teachings warn his servants, and good things come to those who obey them.
Psalm 19:11 (ERV)

 Do you pay attention to God’s warnings? God warns us about the dangers of sin in the Bible, and He often uses people, such as parents, teachers, and pastors, to help us understand those warnings. Do you listen? Don’t ignore God’s warnings about sin. Trust Jesus to save you. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 104.) Then depend on Him to help you do what’s right.

DO NOT WORRY

Nari sat at the kitchen table, staring blankly at her math assignment.

“You’ve been looking at the same problem for ten minutes,” said Mom. “Is something the matter?”

“I’m worried about the game on Friday,” Nari replied. “What if we lose?”

Mom stopped chopping vegetables and put down her knife. “Follow me,” she said.

Mom led Nari to her bedroom and pointed to a cage on Nari’s dresser, where Mr. Whiskers, Nari’s pet hamster, was running on his little hamster wheel.

Nari arched an eyebrow at her mom. “Mr. Whiskers is supercute, but I don’t understand what he has to do with my game on Friday.”

“Mr. Whiskers runs on his wheel quite a bit, doesn’t he?” Mom said. “How much time do you think he spends running on his wheel every day?”

“He runs on it all the time,” Nari answered. “He probably spends four or five hours a day on it.”

Mom nodded. “And he uses a lot of his energy to run on the wheel too.”

“Yeah, he sure does!” Nari looked at her mom. “But I’m still confused.”


“With all the time and energy Mr. Whiskers devotes to running, how far has he run?”

Nari giggled. “Mom, that’s a silly question. He hasn’t run anywhere! He’s still right there in his cage.”

“Well, honey, it’s the same with worrying,” said Mom. “You can spend a lot of time and energy worrying about something, and you’ll still be in the same place you were when you started. That’s why the Bible tells us not to worry. Instead, we need to give our cares to Jesus.”

“How do I do that?” asked Nari.

“First, remember that He loves you so much He died to save you from sin and that He cares about every worry and problem you have. Pray about whatever it is you’re worried about and ask Him to give you peace and strength. Then trust Him do what’s best—even if it’s not what you were hoping for. Play your best at the game on Friday and leave the results to God.”

The wheel in the hamster cage grew quiet as Mr. Whiskers slowed down and then hopped off. Nari picked him up and held him in her hands. “Okay, Mom. I will.” 
Casey Comstock



GIVE WORRIES TO JESUS | KEY VERSE: Give all your cares to the Lord and He will give you strength. Psalm 55:22 (NLV)



Do you ever worry about things that are out of your control? It’s easy to get caught up in a cycle of worrying that doesn’t get you anywhere. That’s why Jesus wants you to give your cares to Him. Pray about your worries and look to Him to give you peace and strength. Then trust Him to do what’s best in any situation, knowing He’s in control.

PART OF THE FAMILY

Leo, it's your turn to help with the dishes tonight," Mr. Phillips said as the kids finished scraping up the last smudges of tomato sauce with their garlic bread.

"Why do I have to do so much around here?" asked Leo.

"Because you're part of the family, and family members help with the chores," answered Mr. Phillips.

Leo looked down at his plate. "Even though you're just my foster family?"

Mr. Phillips looked across the table at Mrs. Phillips, who smiled as the kids began carrying their dishes to the sink. "Leo, do you know why we agreed to be your foster parents?" she asked.

"Well, I'm guessing it wasn't for my dishwashing skills!"

Mrs. Phillips laughed. "Not even close! We didn't care what you looked like, sounded like, or how smart you were. We loved you even before you joined our family because God created you in His image and brought you to us."


"Okay, but what does that have to do with me washing dishes?" Leo asked.

"Think of it this way," said Mr. Phillips. "We become part of God's family when we trust Jesus as our Savior. We can't earn a place in His family, but He sent His Son to die for our sins because He loves us and wants to be our heavenly Father. When we become His children, our actions and words should show it. His love for us makes us want to serve Him and love others."


Mrs. Phillips nodded. "You weren't born into our family, but since you're part of it now, I hope you'll want to show it by helping with the dishes."


Leo brought his dishes to the sink and turned the water on hot. As he began to scrub, he turned to Mr. and Mrs. Phillips. "So it's okay that I'm not the smartest kid in class or the best on the basketball team? You guys love me no matter what and want me to be part of the family?"

"Absolutely," said Mrs. Phillips. "It's not about what you do, Leo. We aren't going to send you away when you mess up or make a mistake. You're part of our family now."

Leo couldn't hide his smile as he turned back to the sink and continued washing dishes for his family who loved him.  *Emily Saxe*



 **BE PART OF GOD'S FAMILY** | KEY VERSE: See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! 1 John 3:1 (NIV)

 What's your family like? Maybe you're adopted, in foster care, or you live with relatives. Whatever your situation, if you trust Jesus as your Savior, you're in God's family forever! He loves you and will help you love others, and He'll never turn you away when you mess up. If you're not part of His family, you can become one of His children today. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.)

BITTERNESS TRAP

When Rayna went into the kitchen, Mom was putting the finishing touches on her birthday cake. “It looks like the ants have decided to come to your party,” Mom told her.

“Aunt Joyce and Aunt Linda?” Rayna asked.

Mom laughed. “No, *those* ants!” she said, pointing to the floor where several ants were scurrying around. “Why don’t you get an ant trap from the closet.”

As Rayna crouched down to put the trap on the floor, she began to cry. Mom set the cake aside. “What’s wrong, honey?”

“Everything!” Rayna said between sobs. “I hate this old house. Melody has a nice house, and she got more stuff shopping yesterday than I’m going to get for my birthday.” Rayna tried to stop her tears. “And she has a dad, and her mom doesn’t have to work like you do. It’s just not fair! Sometimes I—” She hesitated. “Sometimes I almost hate Melody. I try not to feel that way because I know it’s wrong, but I can’t help it.”

Mom put an arm around Rayna. “It can hurt to see others with something we wish we had, but it’s important not to let those feelings turn to bitterness and jealousy.” She pointed to the plastic square on the floor. “Do you know how those traps kill ants?”

“They have poison inside that the ants think is food. They bring it home for all the ants to eat, and it kills them.” Rayna frowned. “But what does that have to do with bitterness and jealousy?”

“Well, they’re a lot like ants. Trying not to feel them is like trying to kill ants one by one—they just keep coming back! But a thankful spirit works like an ant trap—it kills bitterness at its source. After your dad left, I was very bitter. But when I looked to Jesus and remembered that He died to save me and saw all His blessings in my life—like you, my health, and my church family—that bitterness turned to thankfulness. Though I still feel sad, I remember that Jesus loves me—and that He loves your dad too.”

Rayna nodded and wiped her eyes. “I’ll put out a bitterness trap right now by thanking Jesus for all my friends coming to my party—especially Melody.” ♥

Barbara J. Westberg



JESUS FREES YOU FROM BITTERNESS | KEY VERSE: Let the peace of God rule in your hearts...and be thankful. Colossians 3:15



Are you jealous of people who have more stuff than you? Do you feel bitter because your life doesn’t look like someone else’s? Bitterness and jealousy are poisonous and can eat you up inside. When you feel them creeping in, go to Jesus. Remember that He died and rose again so you could have eternal life with Him, and think of some other blessings He’s put in your life. Then trust Him to help you replace bitterness with thankfulness.

IN THE DARK



After the church service was over, Cooper helped his mother straighten up the nursery. It was raining hard, so when they were almost finished Mom went to get the car while Cooper put the rest of the toys away. Just as he was about to leave, a crash of thunder shook the building and all the lights went out. “Oh, great!” Cooper said, waiting for his eyes to adjust to the blackness. They didn’t. The room was deep in the building and had no windows. *I’ll just have to be careful*, he thought.


Cooper walked cautiously toward the door. His knee bumped into something. He reached down and felt a table the toddlers used. He stepped to the right. “Ow!” he exclaimed as his head caught the corner of a shelf. It rattled, and books fell to the floor. *This isn’t like when the power goes off at home*, he thought. *There you know where things are*. Feeling his way along the wall, he walked straight into a box of building blocks. The box turned over and the blocks tumbled out as Cooper fell to his knees. *This is ridiculous*, he thought. He found the wall again and moved slowly to the door. *Where is Mom, anyway? I need a light!*

Just then a phone light flickered at the end of the hall, and he heard his mom’s voice. “Hang on, Cooper,” she called. “I’m coming.”

As they headed home, Cooper told his mother about the verse his class had learned that day. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path,” he recited. “But the Bible certainly didn’t give me any light in that dark nursery room!”

Mom laughed. “You know that verse isn’t talking about the kind of light that comes from the sun or from lamps, right? It’s talking about light the Bible shines on our lives by showing us our sin and what Jesus has done to save us. It also gives us wisdom and direction as we trust and follow Him. Does that make sense?”

Cooper nodded. “That’s pretty much what my teacher said too.”

“Stumbling through the building in the dark was bad enough,” said Mom. “I’m glad God gave us the Bible so we wouldn’t have to stumble through life without His light!”  *Debra W. Smith*



THE BIBLE GIVES LIGHT | KEY VERSE: Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Psalm 119:105



Are you stumbling through life without the light God gives through His Word, the Bible? It tells us who God is and how we’ve been separated from Him because of our sin, and how Jesus died to save us so we could have eternal life. It also offers us wisdom and encouragement as we trust in Jesus and show His love to others. Shine light on your life by reading God’s Word!

PURE TECHNOLOGY

Brooke's bag bounced against her back as she raced across the field. Her sister April stood on the sidewalk just outside the middle school.

"I can't believe you're here!" Brooke squeezed her big sister. "How long will you be home before you have to go back to college?"

"Two weeks." April smiled and tossed her long brown hair over her shoulder.

Kids poured out of the school and whizzed by. One of Brooke's friends waved as she zipped past. "See you on Monday, Brooke."

"Bye," Brooke called after her. Her cell phone vibrated against her leg, and she pulled it out.

You HAVE to text me after you see this. It was a message from her friend Mindy.

Brooke touched the screen and music blared from her phone.

"What are you watching?" April asked. She peered over Brooke's shoulder at the screen.

An unflattering photo of the principal's head was attached to the body of an ape. It danced around for a couple seconds, and then everything faded to black.

April frowned as Brooke slid the phone into her pocket. "I hope you don't watch videos like that all the time."

Brooke shrugged. "I've asked Mindy to stop sending them, but she doesn't listen."

"Well, it's not your fault if she tries to get you to watch things that you shouldn't. But you *do* have a choice. You can choose not to view the things she sends."

Brooke nodded. Her sister was right. The videos Mindy sent her didn't even make her laugh. They made her feel terrible.

April rested a hand on Brooke's shoulder. "You know how Mom's always talking about how we need to love others the way Jesus loves us and treat people the way He would? Well, that includes people online and on our phones too. We need to treat them with love and respect because Jesus loves them and died for them."

"I guess that makes sense," Brooke said.

"Why don't you get out your phone so we can take some selfies?" April gave her cheesiest grin and made bunny ears behind Brooke's head as Brooke took a picture. "Then maybe you can show me the most recent pics of you and your friends."

Brooke nodded, then held up her phone for another selfie and smiled. ♥

Annika Klanderud



USE TECHNOLOGY IN GOOD WAYS | KEY VERSE: Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)



Have you ever watched something online that you knew you shouldn't have? Sometimes it may feel like the things we do online are pretend and don't really matter, but they can hurt both you and others. Show others God's love by treating them with respect both online and in person, and use technology to enhance your relationships with others instead of hurting them.

BEST DOG FOR NATHAN

Nathan typed an email to his dad, who was away on sea duty with the Navy. “The Carlsons next door have a litter of puppies,” he wrote. “Can I please have one? Mom says it’s okay with her if it’s okay with you. I wanted to have a dog just like Rex, Uncle Brad’s dog, but this one is free.” Nathan clicked send. He could hardly wait for his dad’s answer.

When Nathan got home from school the next day, Mom met him at the door. “I just talked to Dad on the phone,” she told him. “He’ll be home next week.”

Nathan grinned. “That’s great! Did he say I could have a puppy?”

Mom shook her head, and Nathan’s grin disappeared. “Dad doesn’t want you to get one right now,” she said. “I know it’s hard for you to understand, but please trust your dad. He loves you and wants what’s best for you.”

“Yeah, right,” Nathan muttered as he went inside.

For a while, Nathan’s disappointment clouded the joy of looking forward to his dad’s return. But when Dad arrived, Nathan threw his arms around him and started asking lots of questions. Then he remembered that Dad hadn’t let him get one of the neighbors’ puppies. “I still don’t see why I couldn’t get that puppy, Dad,” he said with a frown.

Just then a sound came from Dad’s pile of luggage. “What’s that noise?” Nathan asked.

Dad grinned and lifted a wriggling ball of fur out of a plastic carrier. “A puppy!” Nathan exclaimed. Dad placed the puppy in his arms. “He looks just like Rex!” said Nathan.

“The reason I said no to the other puppy was because I knew this was the kind of dog you really wanted,” Dad explained.

Mom smiled. “Like I told you before, you can trust your father to do what’s best for you.”

“We can trust our heavenly Father to do that too,” said Dad, “even when He says no to something we ask Him for. When that happens, we need to remember that He loves us so much He sent His Son to die for us and that everything He gives us is meant to help us grow in our relationship with Jesus. We can always trust Him to do what’s best.”

Nathan grinned and hugged the puppy tight.  *Agnes Livezey*



GOD GIVES THE BEST | KEY VERSE: Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father. James 1:17 (NIV)



Does your heavenly Father sometimes say no to the things you ask Him for? You may not understand why He answers your prayer with a “no” or “wait” instead of a “yes,” but remember that He loves you more than any earthly father could. Even when He doesn’t answer your prayers the way you want, you can trust Him to give you good gifts that help you grow in your faith.

HORN HONKERS

HONK! Honk-honk-HONK! The horn on Jace's tricycle was making an awful racket. Mya clapped her hands over her ears as she came in from school. "You're hurting my ears with all that honking!"

"Jace," Mom said, "let Mya help you take your tricycle to the playroom in the basement."

"But I wanna ride up here!" Jace wailed.

Mya picked up the tricycle and started for the stairs. "Blow it all you want in the basement where it won't bother anybody."

When Mya came back, she said, "Now I can tell you my news, Mom. I've been promoted to the advanced math class! Only five percent of the kids make that class."

Mom came over to give her a hug. "Congratulations, honey!"

Mya beamed. "And my art teacher told me she wants me to enter one of my projects in a competition for kids my age. She thinks I might win an award!"

"That's great!" said Mom. "I hope you win!"

"Me too. I think I will—the other kids' projects weren't nearly as good as mine. Now I just need to tell my friends! Oh, and I need to tell them I'm going to see a Broadway show with you and Dad in New York next month. They'll be so jealous!"

"Mya," Mom said, "that's enough. You're hurting my ears!"

Mya looked puzzled. "But Mom, I'm not talking that loud."

"No, but you're blowing your own horn, and it's getting louder and louder."

"What do you mean, Mom? I just want to share my news with my friends."

"I know," said Mom. "But there's a difference between sharing an accomplishment or opportunity you're excited about and bragging because you think you're better than others. God has given you many blessings, like a sharp mind your teachers have helped you develop. But He wants you to use those blessings to point others to Jesus, not brag about how great you are. When none of us could save ourselves from sin, Jesus came and died for us. He's the one who deserves our praise, not us."

Mom smiled as the faint sound of a tricycle horn drifted up the stairs. "If you're going to honk your own horn, do it in the basement."

"No thanks," said Mya. "I don't want to sound anything like that!" ♥ *Barbara J. Westberg*



DON'T BLOW YOUR OWN HORN | KEY VERSE: Let someone else praise you, not your own mouth. Proverbs 27:2 (NLT)



Do you like to hear people brag? Do you brag yourself? It's great to accomplish something difficult or receive a special opportunity, so go ahead and be excited when that happens. But don't brag. Thank God for the blessings He's given you, and remember that He wants you to use your accomplishments and opportunities to show people the love of Jesus.



A BUSTED-UP SANDCASTLE

Bax scooped the wet sand with as much care as he could stand, completing the last tower on his masterpiece. *Finally*, he thought. He sat back and admired his creation, but only long enough for his three-year-old brother Matt to run up from the water's edge.

"Mommy, I found a—" *CRASH!* Matt tripped over Bax's bucket and fell headlong into Bax's castle!

"Matt! Look what you did! I've been working on my castle the whole time we've been here!" Angry, Bax advanced on his brother, wielding his plastic shovel. Matt beat a hasty retreat behind their mother.

"I sorry, Bax, I sorry! Accident!" Matt cried.

Mom stepped in. "Bax, we don't hit others. You know that Matt just tripped over your bucket. I think you can show him some grace."

"But Mom, he ruined my sandcastle! If I had wrecked something Matt made, I'd definitely get in trouble," Bax complained.

"Maybe, but remember what we talked about at church this week? We don't suffer the worst consequences for the bad things we've done because Jesus showed us grace. He died for us on the cross and came back to life. Because of that, you can show that same kind of grace by forgiving your brother."


"But that's not fair!" Bax exclaimed.

"No, that's not fair, but neither is the grace Jesus gives us. It's not fair that God should treat us like we've done no wrong when we've certainly lied and cheated and acted selfishly." Mom looked at him expectantly as Matt snuffled noisily.

Bax looked down at his smashed castle, then back at his brother's red face. "I'm sorry for yelling at you, Matt. I'm sad about my sandcastle, but I know you didn't do it on purpose. I forgive you. Can you forgive me too?"

Matt shuffled back around Mom and said, "I sorry too, Bax. I forgive you."

"Thank you, boys," Mom said. "And I have an idea. Let's go up to the snack shop and get some ice cream!"

"Yes!" both boys exclaimed, and they started running up the beach, both relieved that they had been shown grace.  *Dylan Kraayenbrink*



FORGIVE OTHERS | KEY VERSE: Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:32 (NIV)



Can you think of a time when you were forgiven even though you had done something wrong? That wasn't fair, but it was an example of someone showing you grace. God showed us grace by sending Jesus to die for our sins. When you trust in Jesus and accept God's forgiveness, He gives you the Holy Spirit, who empowers you to give grace to others, even when it's not fair or you don't feel like it.

EGGS-RAY VISION

Ryan and his mom were having boiled eggs for lunch. Ryan watched the eggs impatiently as they rolled around in the saucepan. “How long do they take to boil?” he asked. “I’m so hungry!”

“Well, that depends on how you like them,” answered Mom. “Three minutes for a runny egg, and around ten minutes if you prefer them hard-boiled. I like them somewhere in between.”

Ryan nodded. “Me too! So how do you know when they’re just right?”

“I set a timer for just under eight minutes,” said Mom. “I bet you never knew boiling eggs was so complicated, did you?”

“I had no idea!” Ryan said as he buttered the toast. “If only you had X-ray vision so you could see inside the shell.”

Mom laughed. “Imagine that? All my food would turn out perfectly every time!”

“Yeah, no more burnt turkeys!” Ryan said. People were always teasing Mom about the time she overcooked the Thanksgiving turkey.

Just then, the oven timer began to beep. Swiftly, mom spooned the eggs into two egg cups. “Well, here it is. The moment of truth.” She grinned. “Let’s see how they turned out!”


Ryan cracked open the shell of his egg and plunged his spoon in. Sticky orange yolk oozed upward from the middle of the egg—not too runny, not too hard. Just perfect for dunking your toast in.

“Do you know what’s funny?” asked Mom. “This morning I was reading the story of how God chose David from all of Jesse’s sons.”

“I love that story!” said Ryan. “David was the youngest, wasn’t he?”

“That’s right,” said Mom. “And he wasn’t even included in the lineup! David was left out in the fields to look after the sheep. But God doesn’t miss a single thing! One by one, all of Jesse’s sons came parading before Samuel—strong and tall and handsome. But not one of them fit the bill. The Bible says God wasn’t looking at their outward appearance—He was looking straight into their hearts!”

Ryan gasped. “God has X-ray vision!”

“Exactly!” Mom said with a laugh. “God sees beyond our exterior—what we look like on the outside. His eyes see our hearts and whether they’ve been made clean by Jesus.”  *Angela Jelf*



GOD SEARCHES OUR HEARTS | KEY VERSE: The LORD doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart. 1 Samuel 16:7 (NLT)



Do you worry about the way you look? Do you compare yourself to others who seem taller or thinner or have better clothes? We live in a world that places so much value on appearance, but that’s not what matters to God. He’s interested in our hearts. That’s why He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for us. Trust Him to remove the sin from your heart and make you clean. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 104.)

THE MIRACLE OF MOVING

Ingrid sat slumped on the couch in the empty living room. Her family was next door eating lunch before packing up the moving van.

Aunt Kristin burst in holding a plate of brownies.

“Nothing will cheer me up,” Ingrid declared, turning her back to her.

“Not even my world-famous brownies?” Aunt Kristin cried.

Ingrid shook her head. Aunt Kristin plopped down next to her. “I know it’s scary and sad to move,” she said.

“I just don’t want to move!” Ingrid exclaimed. “I know it’s because my parents are helping open a new homeless shelter in the city, but I don’t want to make new friends or have a new teacher.”

Aunt Kristin gave Ingrid a thoughtful smile. “Have I ever told you about my friend Elijah? He would be thousands of years old today if he were here eating cookies with us.”

“Is he one of your Bible friends?” Ingrid asked.

“Yes,” Aunt Kristin said. “He witnessed many miracles and got to hear God’s audible voice. But sometimes God told Elijah to do hard things.”

“Like what?”

“Well, Elijah lived in a land where it hadn’t rained for years,” Aunt Kristin said. “So God led him to a brook and provided him with food. But later on, God allowed the brook to dry up so that He could send Elijah somewhere else.”

“I would’ve been scared,” Ingrid said.

“Me too,” Aunt Kristin agreed. “But Elijah trusted God, so he knew God would provide for him in the next place. And guess what happened there? God showed Elijah a family who needed his help. Through Elijah, God even raised that family’s son back to life!”

“A miracle!” Ingrid exclaimed.

“Just think,” Aunt Kristin added, “because your family is following God’s call to a new place, you’ll be able to bless people you never would have met if you stayed here—and they’ll be able to bless you.”

“No matter where I move, God will be there,” Ingrid said, smiling. “But can I take a brownie for the road?”

Aunt Kristin handed her the whole plate. “Who knows? You might meet someone who needs one too.” *♥ Hannah Chung*



GOD PROVIDES WHERE HE LEADS | KEY VERSE: And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:19 (CSB)



Has God ever brought you to a new place? Maybe it was a new school, home, church, or friend group. Even though change can be scary, God will provide for all your needs no matter where you are. As you grow in your relationship with Jesus, He will help you remember that He is with you everywhere you go. Trust Him to help you be brave as He leads you where He wants you to go.

A GIFT FOR MOM

Daniel plopped down on the top step and scowled. His sister, Nia, found him there. “Tomorrow is Mother’s Day, and we don’t have a gift for Mom yet,” she said. “Let’s go see what we can find.”

“I can’t,” Daniel said. “Mom says I can’t go anywhere. I didn’t clean my room right away like she told me to, and then when I did do it, she still wasn’t satisfied. I told her it was my room and it looked fine to me, so I didn’t care what she thought!”

Nia gasped. “Daniel!”

“I know,” Daniel said. “It was a dumb thing to say. She grounded me and then made me clean my room again anyway.”

“Great, now how am I supposed to get her a present?” asked Nia. “Maybe if I ask her, she’ll let you walk into town with me.”

Nia went and made her request, but when Mom said no, Nia became angry and talked back. So she got grounded too.

After dinner the next day, Daniel and Nia felt bad about not having a gift for their mom. “We wanted to get you something yesterday,” Nia explained to her, “but you wouldn’t let us go to the store.”

Dad raised his eyebrows. “So it’s Mom’s fault you don’t have a present for her?”

“Well...no,” Daniel replied slowly.

“Tell me,” said Dad, “why is it you wanted to give Mom a present in the first place?”

“Because it’s Mother’s Day, and we wanted to show that we love her,” said Nia.

“And what’s the best way to show your love?” Dad asked.

“Well, um...giving presents and stuff is one way,” said Daniel.

“And we also show people we love them by the way we act toward them.” Nia sighed. “Yesterday we didn’t act like we loved you, Mom. I’m sorry I talked back to you.”

“Me too, Mom,” said Daniel. “And I’m sorry I didn’t obey you right away.”

“I forgive you both,” said Mom.

“And so will Jesus,” said Dad. “We also disobey Him when we don’t obey our parents, but He will always forgive us and help us show our love for others through our actions.”

Mom nodded. “When you obey me, you give Jesus a present too!” ♥ *Agnes Livezey*



OBEY YOUR PARENTS | KEY VERSE: Children, obey your parents in the LORD, for this is right. Ephesians 6:1



Do you tell your parents that you love them—not only by saying it or giving them presents, but by obeying them? Or do you whine and complain and sometimes talk back when they ask you to do something? When you obey your parents, it’s like giving them a gift out of love—and you do the same when you obey Jesus. Obey Him by obeying your parents.

EVERYTHING YOU DO

Brighton watched as Mom tied the sash of Kayleigh's sparkly new dress and handed her a basket of flower petals. "It's not fair," Brighton muttered. She had never gotten to be a flower girl, but her little sister had been picked for that job in Aunt Erin's wedding. "All I get to do is stand at the door and hand out programs," Brighton said.

Mom frowned. "Brighton, please stop whining."

"I'm not whining," said Brighton, but she couldn't make herself smile. *It just isn't fair!* she thought again.

"Come here and see Aunt Erin's flowers," said Mom. Brighton walked over to the beautiful bouquet on the table. There were white roses and pink tulips, fragrant lilies, and dainty violets. "Which flower is the prettiest?" asked Mom.

Brighton studied them. "I like all of them," she said. "It's hard to pick one."

"I agree," said Mom. "It takes all the different kinds and colors to make this type of bouquet. Can you imagine the tulip crying because it doesn't smell like the rose? Or the violet being upset because it's smaller than the lily? That would be silly, wouldn't it? Well, like flowers, people are different too. We all have different jobs to do."


Brighton glanced up. "You want me to stop being mad that I can't be a flower girl, don't you?"

Mom nodded. "If you and Kayleigh were both flower girls, who would greet the guests? As the family of the bride, we need to work together to show Aunt Erin and Uncle Jeff how much we love them and make their guests feel welcome."

Brighton sighed. "I guess you're right."

"We need to work together as God's family too," said Mom. "The Bible compares Christians to a body made up of many parts that function in different ways. We need to recognize that Jesus loves and died for all of us and that He's given us different things to do so we can serve Him together. The things God has for you to do won't be the same as those He has for Kayleigh, but whatever He gives you to do is important."

"Like smiling as I greet everyone who comes to the wedding?" asked Brighton.

Mom nodded. "Okay," said Brighton. "Then I will!"  *Jennifer Quakenbush*



EVERY JOB IS IMPORTANT | KEY VERSE: All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it. 1 Corinthians 12:27 (NLT)



Are you content doing the things God has given you to do? Or do you wish you could do what someone else is doing instead? God gives each Christian in the body of Christ—the church—different roles and tasks in serving Him and others. When you refuse to do your part, others miss out on having you share God's love with them. Serve Jesus and show others His love by joyfully doing the things He's given you to do.

NOT GREEK TO GOD

Allison sang out the words of a song. “*Yesu yana kaunar yara.*”
“What language is that?” asked her friend Gianna. “Like my grandma always says when she doesn’t understand something, it’s Greek to me!”

Allison laughed. “It’s not Greek,” she said. “It’s Hausa—a language spoken in Africa. I learned that song from my Aunt Mary, who’s a missionary in Nigeria.”

“What does it mean?” Gianna wanted to know.

“It means ‘Jesus, He loves the children,’” Allison explained.

“Oh, those sound like the words to a song Mom taught me when I was little,” Gianna said. “It’s called ‘Jesus Loves the Little Children.’ The tune sounded familiar too.”

Allison nodded. “Aunt Mary teaches a class of Nigerian girls who are the same age as we are. She says one girl reminds her of me.”

“Really?” said Gianna. “My dad always teases me and says I’m one-of-a-kind. How are you and the other girl alike?”

“Well, Aunt Mary says one way we’re alike is that we both love Jesus,” replied Allison. “And she says we act alike and are interested in a lot of the same things. We’re going to write to each other, and Aunt Mary will translate for us. It’ll be fun having a Nigerian pen pal!”

“Cool! I guess we’re not as different from kids in other countries as we think we are,” said Gianna.

Allison shook her head. “Aunt Mary always reminds me that we’re all the same to the Lord. He loves Nigerian children—and all the children in the world—just like He loves us.”

“Right,” said Gianna. “Just like your song said. How did that go? Sing it again.”

Allison sang the words again, and she laughed as Gianna tried it too.

“That’s okay. You can laugh at me,” said Gianna. “I bet the Nigerians would laugh at you!”

“You’re probably right,” said Allison. “But that’s okay. God understands—even when we mispronounce all the words. It’s not Greek to Him.”

“Let’s make it a duet,” suggested Gianna. So they started singing together. ♥

Linda Weddle



GOD LOVES YOU AND ALL CHILDREN | KEY VERSE: Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me...God’s kingdom belongs to people who are like these children.” Matthew 19:14 (ERV)



Did you know there are children all over the world who love the Lord? They’re like you in many ways. They read the same Bible and memorize many of the same verses and even sing some of the same songs, but in a different language. Always remember that Jesus loves all the children everywhere just like He loves you.



ACTIVITY

Did you know that kids from around the world read the same *Keys for Kids* stories as you? How cool is that! Every day when you open this devotional, a kid your age could be reading the exact same story and Bible verses on the other side of the world. Thank Jesus for loving and caring for kids everywhere!

Find some of the countries where kids get *Keys for Kids* in the word search below.

ARGENTINA

AUSTRALIA

CANADA

GUATEMALA

NIGERIA

NORWAY

PAKISTAN

PERU

PHILIPPINES

POLAND

SOUTH AFRICA

SOUTH KOREA

U M G T P A V C A N A D A T
 B R S P S A R B P P Q R R P
 B T K P F S K G A N O V I O
 S N A Y H G E I E X Z Y B L
 S O T U P I U Z S N V A F A
 W R U S S U L A Q T T I N N
 A W G T O T O I T R A I V D
 R A X N H U R M P E I N N Y
 N Y D W P A T A J P M P M A
 H I G R E Q F H L M I A V O
 F X G F R B D R K I S N L Q
 K B D E U E X N I O A V E A
 R S A G R Z V D Y C R W N S
 P H E Y P I C N B Z A E W K
 J H J O V C A C U E W K A Y

WHO YOU KNOW

Cadence and Izabel listened intently as Dad read the story of Finn, a very poor boy who lived long ago in a faraway country. “Everyone said the king was very kind,” Dad read, “so Finn decided to go see him and ask for help.

“When Finn arrived at the palace, he was stopped at the gate. He explained that he wanted to see the king, but he was refused admission. *Now what can I do?* he wondered. *I know! I’ll climb over the wall.* He looked around to make sure no one was watching, then found a part of the wall surrounded by trees and climbed to the top. *Hey! That was easy!* he thought, but at that very moment, several fierce-looking dogs in the palace yard rushed up. Finn dropped back to the ground. *This won’t work after all,* he thought. *The only way in is through the gate.* Discouraged, he walked back to the gate and sat down at the side of the road.

“Soon a carriage drove up, and a young man stepped out. ‘What’s the matter?’ the man asked. Finn explained that he desperately needed help and wanted to see the king. ‘Come with me,’ the young man said. Then he spoke to the gatekeeper, and the gates were opened. They went inside, and Finn could see the dogs out of the corner of his eye. He cringed when he heard them barking. But again the young man gave orders, and the dogs were restrained.

“Finn looked at the man wide-eyed. ‘Why does everyone obey you?’ he asked in wonder.

“The young man smiled. ‘Because I’m the prince,’ he replied. ‘And now we’ll go see my father—the king.’”

Dad stopped reading and closed the book. “Do you know who Finn reminds me of?”

“Who?” asked Izabel.

“Us,” said Dad. “We all need the King of kings—God—but none of us can reach Him on our own. That’s why He sent His Son to us.”

“Jesus!” Cadence and Izabel said together.

Smiling, Dad nodded. “We can only be saved through Jesus,” he said. “We can only have eternal life with the King of kings by knowing Him.” ♥ Harry C. Trover



YOU NEED TO KNOW JESUS | KEY VERSE: This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. John 17:3



Have you ever heard that it’s not what you know but who you know that matters? That’s often true! It’s certainly true when it comes to entering the kingdom of heaven. You need to know the Son of God—Jesus—as your Savior to be saved from sin and have eternal life. Do you know Him? (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 104.)



TRUST AND PRAISE

Gabby's grandpa was in a lot of pain. His hands were nearly crippled, and he sat in a wheelchair when he was able to get out of bed. Gabby thought she would be miserable if she were in his place, but every time she visited him, he seemed to have a smile on his face.

"How are you so happy all the time?" Gabby asked as she sat in his living room with him one afternoon.

"God has been good to me," Grandpa said, humming softly.

Gabby's brows knit. How could he say that when he was in pain?

"What are you humming?" Gabby asked.

"It's a song about God being good all the time," Grandpa said. "We need to trust Him no matter what we face. We need to remember that He is good and has given us eternal life through His Son, Jesus."

"I wish I had faith like you," Gabby said.

Grandpa patted her hand with his gnarly one. "Did you ever read about Paul being put in prison?"


"I'm not sure," said Gabby.

"Well, when he was beaten and put in prison, he still sang and praised God. Everyone who heard him was shocked." Grandpa smiled. "I want to be like that."

"And I want to be like you," Gabby said.

Grandpa went back to humming, and Gabby leaned into his shoulder. She felt bad for him because of his pain, but he was one of the happiest and most content people she knew. She wanted to be like him when she was older rather than a lot of the grown-ups she knew who weren't nearly as happy or friendly.

"God can get us through all kinds of terrible times and the pain we face," Grandpa said softly. "Because Jesus died and rose again to save us, we can be joyful and praise Him no matter what. We just need to trust Him and know that He's with us." Grandpa smiled at Gabby. "Maybe I could teach you the words to the song I've been humming?"

"Sure," Gabby said. She was eager to learn as much as she could from her faith-filled grandpa.  *Bethany Acker*



TRUST AND PRAISE GOD ALWAYS | KEY VERSE: In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. Psalm 33:21 (NIV)



Do you know someone who is happy even when life isn't easy? We all go through hard, painful times in life, but we can still be joyful and praise God because of what He's done for us. If you know Jesus as your Savior, He has given you eternal life and promises to be with you through every difficulty you face. Trust Him and praise Him no matter what life brings.

INSTANT COMMUNICATION

Your science project is looking good,” Grandpa said as he looked over Sophia’s shoulder.

“Thanks,” said Sophia. “I’m calling it ‘Means of Communication.’ It’s about how the ways people communicate with each other over long distances have developed over time.” She pointed to pictures on her display board showing handwritten letters, telegraphs, telephones, radios, TVs, and computers. “Hundreds of years ago, the only way you could communicate with someone far away was to send them a letter, which could take weeks or even months to get to them. Over time, we invented new ways to communicate that got better and better. Now, with computers, smartphones, and the internet, we can communicate instantly—with just one person or with a million!”

“It’s amazing, isn’t it?” Grandpa studied Sophia’s work for a few moments. “But there’s an even more amazing form of communication that’s not on here.”

Sophia was startled. “There is? What’s that?”

“Communication with God,” Grandpa answered.

“I never thought of that,” said Sophia. “In Bible times, God sometimes talked to people through dreams, didn’t He?”

“That’s right, and at other times He spoke to people directly,” Grandpa said. “But He has another way of speaking to us now.”

“I know,” said Sophia. “He speaks to us through the Bible, right?”

Grandpa smiled and nodded. “He uses His Word to shape the thoughts and desires of His children’s minds and hearts. That’s the work of the Holy Spirit. Before Jesus came to earth, the Holy Spirit only communicated with some people in specific circumstances. But when Jesus died for our sin and saved us, the long distance between us and God was closed up. The Holy Spirit is now with all Christians, all the time!”

“And He tells us how to live, right?” Sophia asked.

Grandpa nodded. “He guides us and shapes us to be more like Jesus. And because He lives in our hearts, we can communicate with God anytime through prayer. He always hears the prayers of His children.”

Sophia looked at the chart she had made and smiled. “I’m so glad God lives in my heart and I can communicate with Him anytime!” ♥ Agnes Livezey



COMMUNICATE WITH GOD | KEY VERSE: O God, You are my God; early will I seek You. Psalm 63:1



Did you know that if you trust in Jesus, you have the Holy Spirit inside you?

There’s no distance between you and God—He is with you every single moment! He speaks to you when you read the Bible and shapes your thoughts and desires to make you more like Jesus. And because He’s always with you, you can communicate with Him anytime through prayer. Talk with God each day and listen as He speaks to you.

WEED OR FLOWER?

I hate weeding,” Lynn timer huffed, yanking another scraggly weed away from the green beans and throwing it into a pile.

Jayson sat on the soft grass, picking blades and throwing them into the air.

Lynn timer watched the wind blow the grass away. “I don’t want to weed anymore, Mom. I want to go play. Weeding is boring.”

Mom knelt in the dirt. “Look at all these weeds. Do you know why we pull them?”

“Punishment,” Lynn timer muttered.

“See these tiny pea shoots? They’re so little. They need water and sunlight to grow. See these weeds? They’re called wisteria.”

Jayson poked at the climbing vines and white flowers with a stick. “That doesn’t look like a weed. It has flowers.”

Lynn timer held one of the white flowers in her hand. “Yeah, these are pretty. They’re not really weeds, are they, Mom?”


“They are pretty. But this plant grows long vines that strangle, crush, and ruin any other plants. It will destroy every pea plant in our garden, and then it will move to the green beans until the whole garden is nothing but weeds.”


Lynn timer dropped the flower on the ground.


“Jesus talked about weeds,” said Mom. “He told a story that described people as different kinds of soil. Each group heard the truth of God’s Word, but one group’s soil had thorns, or weeds. A weed can be any anything that distracts us from God and makes it harder for us to hear and obey Him.”

“Like how these weeds make it harder for veggies to grow?” Jayson held up a thistle weed by the roots, the spiny leaves dangling from his hand.

Mom nodded. “When we get overwhelmed by worries or believe lies that tell us something other than Jesus will give us peace, hope, or joy, it’s like letting this wisteria grow in our garden—it may look like a flower, but it’s a weed. That’s why we need Jesus to weed our hearts. He gives His followers the Holy Spirit to help us focus on Him and understand the truth of His Word. Then good things can grow in our hearts and lives.”

“Like these vegetables in our garden.” Lynn timer grinned at her brother. “Bet I can pull more weeds than you!” And the race was on.  *Nicole Monroe*

 **TRUST JESUS TO WEED YOUR HEART** | KEY VERSE: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13 (NIV)

 Do you like to pull weeds? Probably not, but if weeds aren’t pulled, they’ll take over the garden so that nothing can grow. Because we live in a world filled with worries and distractions, our hearts need to be weeded too, and God does that through the Holy Spirit. Trust Him to make your faith grow by reminding you that peace, hope, and joy come only from Jesus.

GRADUATION AND THE GOSPEL

And now, I would like to present the class of 2026!" Kendis squinted to see her sister, Derica, in the crowd of high school graduates donned in robes of black and maroon. She stood next to her mom, dad, aunt, uncle, and grandma, all of whom were cheering and clapping and stomping in response to her sister's graduation.

At dinner, Derica talked excitedly about all the things she was looking forward to. "I can't wait to find a church and other students at college who also love Jesus. We could start a Bible study. We could learn and grow together!"

Grandma put her hand over her heart and squeezed Derica's shoulder, brushing her coily hair to the side.

"Does that mean you're going to move on from the things you learned at church here?" Kendis asked. Her family looked at her, trying to determine what she meant. "Well," Kendis went on, "we've learned about the gospel—how Jesus died for our sins, rose from the dead, and promises to be with us forever."

"And how the Holy Spirit lives in us," Derica added.

"But people always say there's so much to learn about God and you can never understand it all. I guess I just meant you'll be done learning about Jesus and His life and move onto other things...like the Old Testament." At Kendis's comment, both Derica and Grandma laughed. "Well, it's true!" said Kendis. "There's so much of the Bible left to read!"

"Yes, yes, Kendis," Grandma said. "But the whole Bible is about Jesus. It's one story of how God always loves His people, even when we mess up, and how He fulfills His promise of a Savior. The whole Bible tells the story of the gospel, the good news that Jesus came to save us."

"I always thought of the Old and New Testaments as two separate things," Kendis said thoughtfully.

"Think about it this way," Derica said. "I took math and English classes in high school, and I'll still keep taking them in college. But they'll be more advanced, building on what I already know. I want my faith to be like that. I still need to learn about Jesus because without Him, nothing else matters. Everything else I hope to learn simply points to Him."

Kendis grinned. "I guess you'll never graduate from the gospel!"  Zoe Sherman



YOU NEVER GRADUATE FROM THE GOSPEL | KEY VERSE: Just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him, being rooted and built up in him and established in the faith. Colossians 2:6-7 (CSB)



Have you ever thought about how much there is to learn about God and the Bible? Does that overwhelm you—or make you excited? You can learn new things about God and experience His presence every single day of your life, and you'll still never know everything. Isn't that amazing? But no matter what you learn or how old you get, never forget how much Jesus loves you.

DEAD, BUT ALIVE

Stretching sleepily, Camden wondered why he had a strange, empty feeling in his stomach. Then it all came back to him. He glanced over at the empty bed on the other side of the room. It really was true—his brother Aaron was gone. It had been almost a month since Aaron had left for school in the morning and had not come back. Tears rolled down Camden’s cheeks as he remembered. There was an accident, and Aaron had been killed.

The door to Camden’s room opened and Mom came in. “Morning, honey. I see you’re already awake.” Noticing his tears, she sat beside him on the bed. “You’re thinking of Aaron, aren’t you? Dad and I miss him too.” Mom sniffed and wiped her eyes. “Death is a sad thing, and it hurts to lose someone we love. But we know we’ll see Aaron again someday.”

“But Mom, how do you know?” asked Camden.

“I know because Aaron trusted Jesus as his Savior,” Mom answered. “The Bible says that those who trust in Jesus go to be with Him when they die.”


“But...” Camden stifled a sob. “But he was right there in the casket! And then he was put in the ground at the cemetery.” Camden covered his face with his hands.

Mom leaned over and gave Camden a hug. “Aaron’s body is in the grave, but his soul is with Jesus,” she said.

“His soul?” Camden looked at his hands. “So my hands and feet, and my head and ears and eyes—they’re not really me?”

“Of course they’re you!” said Mom. “Just like your soul is. But because we live in a sinful world, our bodies die. When that happens, our souls go to be with Jesus. But one day, when He returns to earth and makes everything new, He will bring our bodies back to life. Then our souls will be reunited with our resurrected bodies—and they’ll be free of sin and won’t ever get sick or die again!”

Camden wiped his eyes. “I still wish I could see Aaron every day.”

Mom squeezed Camden’s shoulder. “I know. And you will. Because we know Jesus, we can look forward to seeing Aaron again someday. Then we’ll all be together forever with Jesus!”  A. W. Smith



BODIES DIE, BUT SOULS DON'T | KEY VERSE: Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.” John 11:25 (NIV)



Did you know that, if you’re a Christian, your soul will go to be with Jesus after your body dies? Nothing can separate Him from those He’s saved—not even death. But it doesn’t end there! One day He’ll bring your body back to life, and you and every other Christian will live with Him forever! If you’re not a Christian, trust in Jesus today so you can look forward to eternal life with Him. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 104.)

GOD ISN'T TOO BUSY

Pick up, Dad.” Harlow held her mom’s phone. “I need to talk to you.” She heard her dad’s voice and smiled, then she realized it was just his voicemail.

“We’ll try again later,” Mom said. “He must be busy with work.”

Harlow sighed. Ever since her dad had gotten remarried, he was always too busy for her and her sister. Either he was working or he was hanging out with his new wife and her kids. He didn’t have time for them anymore.

After dinner that evening, Harlow watched as Haven typed a text to their dad. “Call me,” her little sister said, her fingers moving over their mom’s phone.

“Tell him I have to talk to him about school,” Harlow said.

Haven wrinkled her nose. “I don’t know how to spell that.”

Mom looked between them with a sad smile. “Just tell him to call, and if he doesn’t call before bedtime, you can try calling him.”

Bedtime came without a response from Dad, and Harlow sank down onto the floor outside the bathroom as Mom combed her sister’s hair after her bath.

“Let’s try again.” Mom grabbed her phone after braiding Haven’s hair.

Harlow waited as her mom tried to get in touch with Dad. She knew he wouldn’t answer.


Mom lowered the phone from her ear. “You know what, girls? This makes me think of something I was reading in my Bible earlier. Your dad has been busy a lot lately, but do you know who’s never too busy for you?”

“God?” Haven asked.

Mom nodded. “The Bible says we can talk with Him anytime—morning, noon, and night. He’s there when we get up, when we eat lunch, and when we’re lying in bed and can’t sleep. He’s never too busy for us.”

“Do you think He knows how much we miss talking to Dad?” Harlow asked.

“I do. Jesus became human to save us, which means He understands everything we feel. And I think He hurts for you.”

Harlow blinked her eyes, feeling like she might cry. “I’m glad we have God,” she said. “And I’m really glad that He doesn’t get too busy to listen to us.”  *Emily Acker*



GOD IS ALWAYS LISTENING | KEY VERSE: The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. Psalm 145:18 (NIV)



Have you ever wanted to talk to someone only to have them be too busy to pay attention to you? It hurts, doesn't it? Jesus understands how you feel, and He has all the time in the world for you. He loves you so much that He died for your sins so you could have a relationship with Him. You can talk to Him anytime. He's never too busy to hear what you have to say.

LEARN FROM THE BIRDS

Finally, something in science I like learning about!" Marissa loosened the binocular cord around her neck. "I wonder what birds we'll see on our nature walk?"

Mom headed down the boardwalk at their local nature preserve. "Or what birds we'll hear!"

"I'm on it." Troy pulled up the bird call identification app on his phone.

The family didn't have to walk too far over the wetlands before Marissa pointed above them. "Isn't that a bald eagle?" They watched the elegant bird turn circle after circle, seemingly effortlessly against the blue sky backdrop.

"It's easy to spot with that bright white head and tail feathers," Troy noted. "How does it turn circles like that without flapping its wings?"

"I'll look it up." Mom scrolled on her phone. "I didn't know this! Eagles find a thermal column and ride it—it's a column of warmer air that allows them to stay aloft."


"So it's resting, not working," Marissa mused. "It reminds me of that verse from Isaiah: 'Those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles...'"


"You're right!" said Mom. "God provided this bird with opportunities to rest by creating the thermal columns. Imagine how tired it would get if it just kept using its wings instead of relying on those wind currents?"


"Like how you sometimes do too much and forget to rest, Mom?" Troy poked Mom's arm.

"Ouch, but you're right. You both have seen how much better I manage my time and how much nicer my attitude is when I take time to rest in Jesus and remember that I'm saved because of what He's done, not anything I do. After all, if the God who created all this thought it was important to rest on the seventh day, who am I to pretend like I can get by without rest?" Mom shrugged sheepishly.

"We all do it." Marissa sighed. "Sometimes I want to read my favorite book series and I'm resting my body, but if I don't spend time reading my Bible and talking to Jesus, I can get a little snippy."

"Guess we can learn from the birds and rest in Jesus with both our bodies and our souls." Troy grinned mischievously. "So, Mom, how about a day off school tomorrow?"  Savannah Coleman

 **RESTING IN JESUS WILL GIVE YOU STRENGTH** | KEY VERSE: But those who trust in the LORD will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. Isaiah 40:31 (NLT)

 Do you ever get tired? We wouldn't be human if we didn't! God knows we need time to rest and be refreshed in our bodies and souls. This is so important that He rested after creating the world to show us how we should rest too. Perhaps you can take a walk in God's creation and practice stillness. Maybe you can read an extra chapter in your Bible and meditate on it. How can you rest in Jesus today?

CLEARING THE ROADBLOCK

Taya sighed loudly when Mom had to stop because of a roadblock. Workers were repairing the bridge ahead, and traffic was temporarily stopped. “How long will we have to wait?” she asked.

“I’m not sure,” Mom replied. “It might be a while.”

Taya looked out the window. She saw a red van, a delivery truck, some cars, and a motorcycle. Drivers craned their necks, trying to see if they’d be able to move soon.

“Are we going to be late to swim class?” Taya asked. The class at the community pool on the other side of the bridge started at ten.

“I don’t know,” Mom said. “But we can’t go anywhere until that roadblock is removed.”

Taya sighed impatiently. “I wish they’d work faster!”

“Well, it’s out of our control,” said Mom. “We’ll just have to be patient.”

They waited another five minutes. Then Taya noticed cars moving ahead. “Look!” she said. “I think the roadblock’s down!”

Mom slowly eased the car forward, and soon they were across the bridge. Taya let out a sigh of relief. “I’m so glad we’re going to make it to swim class!”


Mom smiled. “Just this morning I was reading about a different kind of roadblock.”

“Really?” said Taya.

Mom nodded. “The book I was reading referred to sin as a roadblock that keeps us from fully enjoying our relationship with God. But unlike that roadblock on the bridge, we don’t need to wait and wait for Jesus to remove a roadblock of sin in our lives. He does that the moment we confess what we’ve done wrong and trust Him to forgive us.”

“Right,” said Taya. “And we never have to wonder if He still loves us or if we’re still saved when we mess up.”

Mom nodded. “Jesus died to take the punishment for our sin, and that means He will always forgive us. When we confess our wrongs, He removes those roadblocks so they can’t get in the way of us enjoying our relationship with Him.”

Mom swung the car into the pool parking lot and Taya hopped out. “Thanks, Mom,” she said. “If I hurry, I can still make warm-ups.”  Janet Boulter



CONFESS SIN AND BE FORGIVEN | KEY VERSE: In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. Ephesians 1:7



Is there a roadblock of sin in your life that’s keeping you from fully enjoying your relationship with God? Jesus can remove it! He paid the price of your sin on the cross and forgives the instant you ask Him. Confess your wrong to Him and accept His forgiveness. Then get back to enjoying your relationship with Him!

PEN PALS

We're going to have pen pals for an English project this semester!" Moriah told her parents. "We each got the name of a kid our age in another state, and we're supposed to exchange letters—*real* letters, no texts or emails or anything like that. My pen pal's name is Ryleigh."

Moriah sat down that evening and wrote her first letter to Ryleigh. She told all about herself, her family, and her church. Soon a reply came from Ryleigh. It contained a picture and told about Ryleigh's big family and their house in the country. Ryleigh also mentioned that her family didn't go to church.

During the next several months, Moriah and Ryleigh wrote many letters. Then one afternoon, Moriah came running into the kitchen, holding a letter in her hand. "Mom! Mom! Ryleigh's dad is coming here on a business trip, and he said Ryleigh could come too. Can she stay with us that weekend? Please?"


Mom laughed. "Sure, honey. That's fine if it's okay with her dad."

Ryleigh's dad dropped her off at Moriah's house a couple weeks later, and the girls had a great time together. Each night after supper, Dad read a few verses from the Bible. One night, he read a verse that referred to Abraham as a friend of God. "Mr. Davis," Ryleigh said, "I don't know who Abraham was, but how could he be God's friend? We can't see God or hear Him, so how can anybody be friends with Him?"

"Tell me something, Ryleigh," said Dad. "Before this weekend, you and Moriah never met. Yet you seem to be good friends. How did that happen?"

"Well, Moriah told me all about herself in her letters. So by the time I came here to visit, I felt like I already knew her."

Dad nodded. "Well, God has written us a letter too—the Bible. It tells us who He is and how much He loves all of us. It tells the story of Jesus, God's Son, who died for us and rose again so we could become God's friends and know Him personally, even though we can't see Him."

Ryleigh thought about that, then looked at Moriah. "Well, I'm sure glad I got to know Moriah. I think I'd like to know more about Jesus too."  *Jan L. Hansen*



YOU CAN KNOW GOD BY FAITH | KEY VERSE: You have never seen [Jesus] but you love Him. You cannot see Him now but you are putting your trust in Him. 1 Peter 1:8 (NLV)



Are you a friend of God? Even though you can't see Him, you can learn about Him by reading the Bible—His letter to you. You can become His friend by trusting in Jesus. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.) You can have faith that He's given you eternal life and will always be with you. And you can look forward to one day seeing Him face-to-face and living with Him forever!

BOOT CAMP

Ding dong, chimed the doorbell. “Wyatt!” Mom called. “You have a package!” Wyatt galloped down the stairs. “Who’s it from?” he asked.

Mom squinted at the return address on the package. “It looks like it’s from your Uncle Dale in Texas. I think it’s your birthday present,” she said, handing it to Wyatt.

“All right!” Wyatt ripped open the package. A few minutes later his bare feet were hidden in genuine cowboy boots.

“Very nice. Now all you need is a horse,” Mom said with a grin. “Why don’t you go show them to your brother?”

Wyatt clomped down the hallway and into his older brother’s room where Jared was packing for military boot camp.

“Hey, Jared,” Wyatt said, pointing to his new footwear. “Check it out—boot camp.”

Jared laughed. “Nice. From Uncle Dale?”

Wyatt nodded. “Yep,” he said as he climbed up on Jared’s bed and made himself comfortable. “What kinds of things will you do at boot camp?” he asked.


“It’s ten weeks of intense military training. They’ll teach us discipline and a new vocabulary. We’ll take orders without asking questions and learn to take care of our team members. I’ll also learn how to get ready to protect our country and keep its citizens safe—even if it means dying for them.”

“Wow. Are you scared, Jared?” Wyatt asked, wide-eyed. “I would be.”

“I wouldn’t be telling the truth if I said I wasn’t a little scared,” Jared confessed.

“But I’ve been reading about men in the Bible like Joshua and David who depended on God to help them fight battles, and I can depend on God too. I know that because Jesus died to save me, I can trust Him to be with me in every situation—even in death. Remembering that gives me courage, even if my heart is beating like crazy.”

Staring at his shiny new boots, Wyatt had an idea. “While you’re gone,” he told Jared, “I’m going to wear my boots every day. And every time I put them on, I’m going to pray for you.”

“Thanks, little brother,” Jared said, ruffling Wyatt’s hair. “That means a lot.” He grinned. “Just don’t forget to wash your feet!”  *Kelly Hope*



DON'T BE AFRAID—GOD IS WITH YOU | KEY VERSE: Be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9 (NLT)



Do you ever feel scared or lonely? You may not be leaving home to fight for your country, but there may be something else in your life that’s making you feel alone and afraid—like a new school or a divorce in your family. Remember that Jesus is with you in every situation. Trust Him to give you courage, and pray for others who may be scared and lonely too.



ACTIVITY

Whether you want to join the military or not, today's activity will boot you off the couch! Military boot camp is full of training to strengthen potential soldiers both physically and mentally. Create your own custom obstacle course full of fun challenges, then compete against family and friends or race against a timer.

Building Your Obstacle Course

Pick a mix of physical and mental challenges from the lists below. Then find a space in your home or backyard to complete them in whatever order you want. Be sure to ask an adult before moving or using furniture. And get creative—if you can think of something else, add it to your course!

Physical Challenges

- Army crawl under a table
- Toss three socks into a laundry basket
- Run one lap around your house or apartment
- Crab-walk through a tunnel of blankets
- Jump across a room on pillows or cushions
- Do ten jumping jacks
- Somersault from one challenge to the next
- Hurdle over an object

Mental Challenges

- Say the alphabet backwards
- Make a paper airplane and throw it until it reaches the end of a hallway
- Memorize today's key verse (Joshua 1:9) and repeat it out loud
- Count to 60 by threes
- Roll dice until they match
- Write down ten animals that live in the jungle
- Draw a picture of a friend or sibling
- Sing the chorus of your favorite song



DISPOSABLE FRIENDS

Cara took her cookie and a glass of milk into the utility room where Mom was folding laundry. “Mom, can I invite Amber over?” she asked. “She’s my new friend.” Cara dunked the cookie into her milk.

Mom added a towel to the stack on the dryer. “And you probably want to invite Jasmine too, right?”

Cara shook her head. “No, I don’t want her over. We had a fight. Anyway, Amber is much more popular.”

“Oh?” Mom frowned slightly as she handed Cara a stack of towels. “Take these to the bathroom, please.” As Cara set her milk on the dryer, Mom asked, “Are Kenzie and Madison still your friends?”

Cara shrugged. “They’re okay, I guess, but Amber’s more fun.” She turned to leave. “Hey, Mom, can I—oops!” Cara’s arm bumped the glass of milk, and it poured down the side of the dryer. “Sorry!” Cara set the stack of towels down and picked up the one on top to wipe up the spilled milk.


“Don’t use that clean towel!” Mom said. She quickly pulled paper towels from the roll on the wall. “Here, use these.”

Cara sopped up the milk and threw the paper towels into the trash. Mom watched thoughtfully. “Paper towels are pretty handy,” she said. “They’re disposable. Just use them and toss them.”

Cara nodded. “That’s what’s good about them.”

“Yes, but what’s not good is that you’ve been treating your friends like paper towels,” said Mom. “You seem to think it’s okay to use them and throw them away. What if Jesus treated us like we were disposable? If He threw us out whenever we got smudged with sin? But He’ll never do that because we’re valuable to Him. He loves us and promises to clean us when we get dirty. And He wants you to treat your friends like they’re valuable too.” She pointed to the fluffy yellow towel on top of the stack. “When a friendship gets smudged, clean it with love and forgiveness.”

Cara thought about that as she picked up the stack of fresh, clean-smelling towels. “Can I invite Amber and Jasmine and Kenzie and Madison over?” she asked.

“All of them?” Mom laughed. “All right. Invite all of them. The more the merrier!” 
Barbara J. Westberg



VALUE YOUR FRIENDS | KEY VERSE: Never abandon a friend.

Proverbs 27:10 (NLT)



Do you spend time repairing and maintaining your friendships? Or if a friendship gets smudged, do you just toss it and move on? Friends are among the many blessings God gives us. Friendships are so important that Jesus calls those who trust and obey Him His friends. So value your friends the way Jesus values His. Care for the friends you have, and make new ones too!

PEACEFUL SLEEP

Tyler sat up in bed. *What's that noise?* he wondered. He and his family had moved to a new house, and now he slept in a strange new room. Somehow he didn't feel safe the way he had back in his old, familiar home. Tyler heard the noise again. *I don't like this room! I don't want to sleep here!* he thought. He jumped out of bed and bolted down the stairs to find his mom.



"Tyler!" Mom said when he rushed into the living room. "What's wrong?"

"What's that noise, Mom?" Tyler asked.

Mom listened for a moment. "There's a bit of thunder in the distance," she said. "It won't hurt you."

Tyler knew his mom was right. The noise did sound like thunder, and it wasn't even close. There was nothing to be afraid of, but he was still scared. "I don't like my new room," he said.

Mom put her arm around him. "Sometimes it's hard to get used to a new house." She pointed to the little dog sitting at her feet. "I think Sprout still feels a little strange here too. Why don't you take him to your room? He'll keep you company."

Tyler looked at the puppy. "Okay," he said. "Come on, Sprout. I'll take care of you."

Mom went to tuck Tyler back into his bed. "When you feel afraid, remember that we didn't move away from God," she said. "Jesus is right here with you, just like He was at our old house—even when it's dark and there's a storm outside. You can trust Him to take care of you."

When Tyler heard the sound of thunder again a little later, he pulled the blanket snugly around himself and Sprout. "You aren't scared when you know I'm close—you know I'll take care of you and keep you safe, don't you?" he asked as he stroked the puppy's head. "I'm not scared either, because I know Jesus is here with me. He'll take care of me." Then Tyler and Sprout closed their eyes and went to sleep. ♥

Karen Cogan



SLEEP WELL—JESUS IS WITH YOU | KEY VERSE: In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O LORD, will keep me safe. Psalm 4:8 (NLT)



Do you have trouble getting to sleep when things seem scary or new? You may move to a new place, but you can never move away from Jesus. If you know Him as your Savior, He is with you everywhere, all the time. Trust Him to be with you when you need Him and to take care of you. Then close your eyes and enjoy the peaceful sleep and rest He has for you.



WORD WITH ZACH IS ONLY ONE WEEK AWAY!
 READ YOUR BIBLE AND KEYS FOR KIDS THIS SUMMER FOR A
 CHANCE TO WIN PRIZES. SIGN UP AT WORDWITHZACH.ORG

CONSTRUCTION PROJECT

Milo, listen to me say this verse,” Joel said as he helped his little brother learn a memory verse for Sunday school. He recited each word slowly. “Okay, now see if you can repeat it.”

Milo tried to repeat the verse, but he stumbled over the unfamiliar words. Joel tried to help him, but eventually gave up. “You’re hopeless,” he said. “Go practice on your own. I have to finish my homework.”

Milo looked forlorn. “I’ll do better,” he said.

Joel rolled his eyes. “Yeah, right.”

As Milo got up from the table, Joel saw his mom standing in the doorway. She smiled at Milo. “Go work on your verse in your room, and I’ll be in to help you in a few minutes.”

After Milo left, Mom turned to Joel. “I’m disappointed in your attitude toward your brother. He struggles to learn things and needs help and encouragement.”


“Okay. Sorry,” Joel said, flipping open his math book.

Later that day, Joel’s dad put his tablet on the table and scrolled through some pictures. “These were taken before, during, and after the Harrison Hotel construction,” he said. “I need to choose photos to use in my article about the project.”

Joel pointed to a picture. “I like this one—it’s a good before shot. You can see the entire old building and the crane.” He looked at the dates in the file names of the pictures. “Wow! They tore the old building down in just a week. Didn’t it take over a year to build the new one?”

“Yes, it did,” replied Dad. “Unfortunately, it’s much easier to tear down than to build up—in most areas of life, not just construction.”

Mom nodded. “For example, we often find it easier to criticize people for what they do wrong than to praise and encourage them. But none of us is perfect, are we?” She looked at Joel. “That’s why Jesus died to save us. He took the punishment for our sins so we could have freedom and forgiveness in Him, and we need to show His love to others by encouraging them when they’re struggling.”

Joel sighed, remembering how impatient he had been with his brother. “I need to go find Milo,” he said, “and help him learn a verse.”  *Rose Ross Zediker*



 **USE ENCOURAGING WORDS** | KEY VERSE: Encourage each other every day.

Hebrews 3:13 (ERV)



Do your words and attitude encourage others? If someone is struggling with something that’s not a problem for you, do you help them? If somebody does something well, do you say so? Trust Jesus to help you be an encourager. Use your words and attitude to show others His love by building them up instead of tearing them down.

COOKIES AND CREATION

Good morning, Amelia,” Heidi, Amelia’s stepmom, greeted her.

“Good morning.” Amelia rubbed her eyes. “What are you making?” she asked, noticing all the ingredients Heidi had out.

“Breakfast cookies!” Heidi smiled and held up a bag of raisins. “Would you like to help? I need some eggs cracked.”

“Sure,” Amelia replied, pulling over a stool. “My mom says I’m good at cracking eggs. I love cooking.”

“Then you’re the perfect person to help me make these cookies!” Heidi set the eggs on the counter. “You can crack two into that bowl.”

Amelia did as she was asked. “Done,” she announced.

“Now, let’s add some oats.” Heidi handed a measuring cup to Amelia, then leaned over her phone to say, “Open my Bible app.”

Amelia frowned as she measured the oats. “Why do you listen to that book so much?”

Heidi smiled. “Because it’s the best book in the world,” she replied as she added some chocolate chips to their mixture. “It’s about God and what He did for us through His Son, Jesus. Jesus saved me and changed my life.”

“What did God do in the book?” Amelia asked, turning on the mixer.

Heidi waited until the mixer was turned off. “Why do you like cooking?” she asked.

“Making things is fun.” Amelia shrugged and eyed the ingredients they were using. “It’s cool to mix things like flour and oats together and get cookies out of it.”

Heidi nodded. “One of the coolest things God did was make the world. And He didn’t start with flour or oats—He started with nothing. All He had to do was speak the entire world into existence.”

Amelia looked at her skeptically. “The entire world?”

“The entire world. He made us too, and He sent Jesus to save us from sin—our wrongs and everything that makes the world a broken place—so we could know and love God and live with Him forever. I enjoy reading the Bible because it teaches me about God and His love for us.” Heidi tapped on her tablet. “Do you want to hear the very first story in the Bible—the one where God created the world?”

“I’d like that,” Amelia agreed as the pair began to roll the dough into balls. 

Kimberly Brokish



GOD CREATED THE ENTIRE WORLD | KEY VERSE: You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created. Revelation 4:11



What’s the coolest thing you’ve made? Maybe it was a craft, a sweat treat, or a game you came up with. We can make a lot of things, but we have to start with something. Only God is powerful enough to make something out of nothing. He made everything there is, including you—and He wants to have a relationship with you. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 104.) Praise God today because He made you and loves you.

TRASH OR TREASURE

Look what I found!" Juniper called as she ran down the steps of her aunt's house. She had been looking through a pile of old stuff in the attic that her aunt was going to throw out. "Look! This old fruit jar has 1898 stamped on the bottom!" Juniper said, showing her find to her aunt. "It looks like one I saw that was worth a lot on an antique show my dad watches."

Aunt Claire smiled. "Well, you found this one, so you can keep it. But you'll have to clean it up."

"Oh, I will!" Juniper beamed with pleasure as she went to clean the jar.


When she finished, she brought the jar back and put it on the table. "Wow!" Aunt Claire said. "That looks like a whole new jar! By the way, Juniper, do you remember Becca who lives next door? She's coming over pretty soon. I thought you'd like to have someone to play with." Juniper groaned. "What's the problem?" asked Aunt Claire.

Juniper shrugged. "Becca's family is...well...different, and she acts kind of weird. She's not a Christian, and I seriously doubt she'll ever become one. She doesn't seem like someone who would, if you know what I mean."

Aunt Claire picked up Juniper's jar. "Juniper, look at this jar—now that it's cleaned up, it looks beautiful. Just think—it was in the trash pile. Until today, no one realized its value and saved it." She turned the jar in her hands. "In a way, Becca is like this jar—and you and I are too."

"How are we like that jar?" Juniper asked.

"Well, at one time we were in the trash pile of sin," said Aunt Claire. "But Jesus found us, washed us, and made us new. He saved us from sin and gave us new life. We are valuable to Him, and Becca is valuable too—so valuable that Jesus died for her. He can save her and give her a whole new life, and He wants you to help her see how valuable she is by showing her His love."

Aunt Claire handed Juniper the jar, and she held it in her hands a moment before putting it back on the table. "Okay, Aunt Claire. I will."  *Barbara J. Westberg*



EVERY PERSON IS VALUABLE | KEY VERSE: If you are treating one person as more important than another, you are sinning. James 2:9 (ERV)



Do you see every person as valuable—even those who are different from you? God made everyone, and He values each person. He values them so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to die so they could be saved from sin. Spend time with those who are different from you and let them know how valuable they are. Let them see God's love in the way you treat them and value them.

GRANDMA'S TROPHIES

Look, Malachi!" Nevaeh said as she pulled a small worn book out of an old trunk that had belonged to their great-grandmother. Her voice echoed a little in the big attic where they were cleaning. "This looks like a journal Grandma Baker wrote in. She gave it the title 'My Trophies.'"

"I wonder what kind of trophies she won," said Malachi. "Was she an athlete?"

"Well, let's look." Nevaeh opened the book and read out loud. "May 10. Thank You, Lord, for letting me talk to Abigail today and help her understand how much You love her. I'm so glad she trusted Jesus as her Savior." Nevaeh turned a few pages. "July 16. Today Graham left to be a missionary in India. He's changed so much since he got saved, and now he's serving the Lord."


"I wonder who Abigail and Graham were," said Malachi. "Let's ask Dad."

When the kids asked their father, he smiled. "I think they were children Grandma Baker led to the Lord. She worked as a children's missionary for many years. Those kids became living trophies as they turned to Christ—examples of how God was working through her to bring more people to Him. It was the most important thing to her."

"Yes," said Mom. "Grandma didn't have much earthly treasure, but she was rich in heavenly treasures. In the Bible, Jesus talks about how important it is to store our treasure in heaven."

"There's a good lesson here for all of us," said Dad. "Each of us should ask ourselves, 'Where am I storing treasure? On earth, or in heaven?'"

"But do I have to lead somebody to Jesus to get treasure in heaven?" asked Nevaeh. "I'm not sure I could do that."

Dad shook his head. "It's not what we do that stores treasure in heaven, but who we do it for. When we trust in Jesus, everything we do out of love and service to Him builds on the treasure we have in Him. He's our true treasure, and He helps us store heavenly riches that last forever by making us more like Him so we can show others His love." Dad smiled at Nevaeh. "Someday you might be surprised how He'll help you lead someone to the treasure found only in Him."  Jan L. Hansen



STORE TREASURE IN HEAVEN | KEY VERSE: Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Matthew 6:20 (NLT)



Where do you store your treasure? In the rooms and closets of your home? In good grades or likes on a screen? Or in heaven? Things like money, success, and popularity come and go, and they can only last as long as your life on earth. But the treasure found in Jesus lasts for all eternity! Store treasure in heaven by trusting Him to help you share His love with others and point them to Him.

HIDING SOMETHING GOOD

Cali opened her eyes. “Ready or not, here I come!” Her three-year-old sister, Nora, stood behind a scrawny tree hugging her teddy bear. Cali pretended to look around. “Where could Nora be?” she wondered aloud.

Ruff, ruff! Cali’s dog ran out of the house and straight to Nora.

Nora laughed. “Cocoa found me!”

“Lunchtime!” Mama called from the porch.

A wonderful aroma met them inside. “Cookies!” squealed Cali. “Can I have one?”

Mama took a pitcher of lemonade from the fridge. “No cookies until after lunch.”

Nora peeked around Mama. “Is Teddy in there? I think he’s still playing hide-and-seek.”

“No Teddy in the fridge.” Mama shut the door. “Let’s check outside.”

As soon as Mama and Nora left the kitchen, Cali slid a cookie from the plate and popped it into her mouth. She scooted the rest of the cookies around to hide what she’d done.

A few minutes later, with Teddy still missing, they sat down for lunch. Nora bowed her head. “Thank you, God, for this food. Please show me where Teddy is. I know You can because You see everything.”

Cali thought about Nora’s prayer. She hadn’t been hidden when she ate the cookie. God had seen her as easily as Cali had seen Nora hiding behind the scrawny tree.

Cali’s stomach felt funny. She no longer wanted a cookie. She gave a piece of hers to Cocoa, who trotted to his bed and nuzzled it under his blanket. Out from the other side of the blanket popped a fuzzy ear.

“Look,” cried Nora. “Cocoa hid Teddy in his bed!” She ran to get her bear. Once she had him in her arms, she turned to face Cocoa. “No, no!” she scolded.

Cocoa put his tail between his legs. Nora plopped beside him. “Don’t worry, silly dog. Me and Teddy and Jesus still love you!”

Cali suddenly felt better. She’d been wrong to eat the cookie and try to hide what she’d done, but Jesus still loved her. She knew this because of something else she’d hidden—the very best thing to hide—God’s Word in her heart. The Bible promised that because she trusted Jesus as her Savior, nothing could ever separate her from His love. ♥ *Martha Hynson*



JESUS WILL ALWAYS LOVE YOU | KEY VERSE: But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8



Do you ever feel like hiding from God when you’ve done something wrong? Do you worry he might stop loving you? God promises in His Word that nothing can separate us from His love, not even our sin. By memorizing verses like Romans 5:8, you can hide God’s Word in your heart so you will never forget the hugeness of His love for you.

UDDERLY CONTENT

Moooooo. “Whoa!” Jordan shouted. He’d been so deep in thought that he almost plowed right into a large brown cow standing in the middle of the path.

Uncle Tim appeared in the doorway of the barn. “Oh good, you found Clarice!”

“Well, we kind of found each other,” Jordan said. “She wouldn’t *moooove*.”

“Good one!” Uncle Tim grinned. “So tell me, how was your first day? I know it had to be tough changing schools in the middle of the year.”

Jordan shrugged. “It was okay. I hope Dad’s job lets him stay here longer. We’ve lived in three different states in four years!” He sighed. “I don’t know, maybe I’ll be happy once we get settled.”

Leading Clarice into her milking pen inside the barn, Uncle Tim said, “One thing about feelings, Jordan—you can’t always depend on them to make you happy. There’s feeling happy, and then there’s being content.”

“Aren’t they the same thing?” Jordan asked.

Instead of answering, Uncle Tim pulled up a milking stool and wiggled his finger in the air. “Come on over here and I’ll show you the fine art of milking a cow!”

After a quick demonstration, Jordan was milking Clarice.

“You’re a natural,” Uncle Tim said over the *ping-ping* of milk hitting the metal pail. “And to answer your question, feeling happy and being content are not always the same thing. The apostle Paul learned that as he traveled from place to place.”

“Hey, he traveled from place to place like me!” said Jordan. “So how did he learn the difference?”

“Paul learned that when you put your faith and hope in Jesus, He’ll help you *learn* to be content in any situation. That’s different than feeling happy all the time. Contentment is a peaceful feeling that only God can give you.” Uncle Tim patted the side of Clarice, who was slowly chewing her supper. “Kind of like Clarice here. Looking at her, I’d say she looks *udderly* content.”

After laughing together at the silly joke, Uncle Tim prayed out loud that Jesus would help Jordan learn to be content. Even before Uncle Tim said amen, Jordan felt the deep soul-peace that only God can give. ♥ *Kelly Hope*



JESUS BRINGS CONTENTMENT | KEY VERSE: I am not saying this because

I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

Philippians 4:11 (NIV)



Do you find it hard to be content where you are? Do you wish things were different in your life? Even people in the Bible, like the apostle Paul, had to learn to be content when they faced difficult circumstances. When you trust Jesus and remember the hope you have in Him—hope of eternal life because of the sacrifice He made to save you—He’ll help you learn to be content with the life He gave you.

HAVE YOU HEARD THE GOOD NEWS?

God loves you so much, He did something amazing for you!
The Bible—God’s message to all people—tells the whole story.



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’s 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 confess you’re a sinner and 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



BATHED IN LOVE

CREATURE FEATURE: JAPANESE MACAQUE



If someone told you they saw a monkey in a hot tub, would you believe them? Probably not. But if you ventured to Japan, you could see hundreds of monkeys chilling in hot springs called onsens. These monkeys are called Japanese macaques or snow monkeys.

Japanese macaques are native to Japan and live comfortably in tropical and mountainous regions. A small number were introduced to Texas, and although most live in an animal sanctuary, some still roam free! Snow monkeys are the northernmost primates in the world and can tolerate temperatures below zero thanks to their thick fur. You might think they have red faces because of frostbite, but their red skin is a natural part of aging. In fact, the only parts of their bodies that are not covered in fur are their faces and the area below their stubby tails.



**Snow monkeys
like to relax in
hot springs**

These monkeys are mostly terrestrial, meaning they spend most of their time on the ground. They climb up trees and huddle together for warmth—especially in the cold winters when snow might fall for four months. Snow monkeys are omnivores, so they eat plants, bugs, and small animals; they even dip sweet potatoes in salt water for extra flavor!

A group of Japanese macaques is called a troop and can have between ten and seventy monkeys. Together they'll make snowballs, groom each other, forage for food, and relax in the onsens. But popularity does make a difference in these monkeys' lives! They inherit status from their mothers, and only the really important monkeys are allowed to soak in hot springs. The largest, boldest male is the alpha, and he will fend off disobedient troublemakers.

Like Japanese macaques, we might think our value comes from who our parents are or the status we have among others, but that's not true. Every single person is valuable because we are all made in the image of God, and He loves all of us so much that Jesus died to save us. When we put our faith in Him, we become God's children and inherit the gift of eternal life! Snow monkeys may fight to enjoy the warmth of hot springs, but we can trust God to bathe us in His love every single day. ♥ *Zoe Sherman*