



keys
for
kids[®]
DEVOTIONAL



JUNE • JULY • AUGUST

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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ALPACA PARADE

Brayan and his parents lived out in the country, right next door to the McNairs' alpaca ranch. Brayon was fascinated with the alpacas. He would often sit outside and watch them grazing.

"Brayan!" Mom called to him one day. "Mr. McNair invited you to come over at six-thirty this evening to help feed the alpacas."

"All right!" Brayon rushed through his homework and dinner and arrived at the McNairs' barn right on time.

"First we're going to fill the hay bins and pour the feed into the troughs," Mr. McNair told him. "Then we'll call the alpacas in."

After the hay bins and troughs were filled, Brayon followed Mr. and Mrs. McNair toward the pasture. Mr. McNair began to call the alpacas. "Come, pacas, come!" Brayon watched in amazement as the alpacas responded to the sound of Mr. McNair's voice. They began running toward the barn. Soon all the alpacas were gathered around the feeding troughs.

Once the alpacas were done eating, Mr. McNair put a halter on Loki and led him over to Brayon. "You can gently stroke his fur, if you like."

Brayon, with a big smile on his face, slowly raised his hand and began to pat Loki. "You're a good boy!" Brayon said.

Mrs. McNair smiled. "You can come back anytime, Brayon."

When Brayon returned home, Mom asked, "How did it go?"

"I loved it! The coolest part was watching all the alpacas running toward the barn when they heard Mr. McNair calling them. All he had to say was 'Come, pacas, come!' and they all came running."

"That reminds me of a verse in the Bible," said Mom. "In the book of John, Jesus says, 'My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.' The alpacas recognize Mr. McNair's voice because they know him and trust him. As Christians, we trust and follow Jesus because we have a relationship with Him. He speaks to us through His Word, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit helps us hear His voice and know what He says is true."

"Wow, that's really cool!" said Brayon. "Can I help feed the alpacas tomorrow? Maybe someday they will trust me too, just like they do Mr. McNair." ♥ *Lisa Fuller*



LISTEN TO GOD'S VOICE | KEY VERSE: My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. John 10:27 (NLT)



Are you a follower of Jesus? Do you listen to His voice? The Bible reminds us that we are like the Lord's sheep, and just like sheep follow their shepherd, we trust and follow Jesus. As we spend time with God in church, in prayer, and in His Word, we learn to recognize and respond to His voice. Spend time with the Lord today and listen to what He tells you.

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WHY IS MY NEIGHBOR SO MEAN?

Knock off that noise!” Mrs. Steele yelled in Lila’s direction. Lila was startled. She’d been curled up with a book, reading quietly on the porch. Surely Mrs. Steele wasn’t talking to her. But she was.

Later, when Lila’s dad came home, he noticed that the small windchimes from the front porch were now on the kitchen table. “Did the chimes fall down?” he asked Lila.

Lila shook her head, clearly upset. “They were bothering Mrs. Steele. She yelled at me because they woke her up. Dad, why is she so cranky?”

Dad sighed. “I’m sorry, honey. Listen, Grandma taught me that when someone is cranky, they might be dealing with hard things, like sickness or loneliness. Let’s try to help Mrs. Steele by being kind to her, even when she’s not kind to us. That’s the kind of love Jesus showed us when He died for our sins, and He’ll help us show His love to Mrs. Steele.”

Lila sighed. “Could you hang the chimes up in my bedroom? They remind me of Mom.”

“Sure,” he said, giving her a hug. “I miss Mom too.”

The next morning before church, Lila saw that Mrs. Steele’s newspaper had landed where it would be hard for the older woman to reach. Lila was tempted to pretend she didn’t notice, but then she remembered what her dad said. So, she took a deep breath, then picked up the newspaper and carried it to her neighbor.

“Good morning, Mrs. Steele. How are you today?”


Mrs. Steele frowned. “I couldn’t sleep again last night. Too much back pain.”

Lila said, “When my grandpa’s back hurts, I do chores for him, like emptying the trash and weeding his garden. Maybe I can do chores for you after Dad and I get home from church and grocery shopping.”

Mrs. Steele brightened up. “I could really use a few groceries. I could make a list and give you some money.”

“Of course.” Lila smiled.

Later that afternoon, Lila carried a small bag of groceries next door and put them away for Mrs. Steele. “What else can I do for you?” she asked.

“You could pour us both some juice and tell me what you learned in church today. I used to go, but it’s been ages. I miss it.”  *Teresa Ambord*



BE KIND TO DIFFICULT PEOPLE | KEY VERSE: Therefore, as God’s chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Colossians 3:12 (CSB)



Do you know someone who seems difficult for no reason? It might be a neighbor, a relative, or someone at school. It can be tempting to respond to them the same way they treat you, but Jesus says to be kind and patient. They might be going through something difficult, and you could help them by showing them God’s love. Talk it over with an adult, and trust Jesus to help you treat them the way He would.

FAITH LIKE A SPRINKLER



I'm worried I'm not going to pass my math test!" Clara told her dad as they walked barefoot in the grassy yard after dinner.

"You've been studying and doing math problems for weeks, Clara," Dad said. "I'm sure you'll pass."

"But I'm not going to be good enough. I just know it!" Clara looked up and wished she was one of the birds soaring overhead. They didn't look worried at all.

"Hmmm." Dad pulled open the door to their shed, which let out a metal squawk, and poked his head inside. "I might have something..." His voice trailed off as he stepped inside. He reappeared seconds later holding a rusty sprinkler.

Clara crossed her arms. "Is this a joke?"

"No," said Dad. "It's a quiz. Does this sprinkler have water in it?"

Clara shook her head. "It's not even connected to the hose!"

"Passed the first question!" Dad said, smiling. "Is this sprinkler empty?"

"Yeah," Clara said, uncertain how this was supposed to help.

"Guess we should just throw it out then, huh? No good anymore."

"Dad, it's a sprinkler! It's supposed to be empty until the water's turned on!"

"Exactly." Dad sank into the sun-dappled grass and handed Clara the sprinkler.

"We're a lot like sprinklers. A sprinkler doesn't worry it's not good enough to do its job. It's not afraid to be empty. When it's connected to the hose, the water's power flows through it. It's the same with us. Because we have faith in Jesus, we're always connected to Him through the Holy Spirit, and His power flows through us. He'll give us the strength we need to do the things He wants us to do."

"So He'll help me pass my math test?" Clara asked.

"Well, I can't promise you that, but you don't have to worry about it. He wants you to pray about your math test and then do the best you can. Trust Him with the results, no matter what they are."

"I didn't know He cared about stuff like that," Clara said.

"Absolutely He cares! He even cares about the birds." Dad pointed to the birds flying above them. "But you're far more important to Him."

Clara thought about that. "Dad, can we pray?"  *Pearl Allard*



PRAY INSTEAD OF WORRY | KEY VERSE: Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Philippians 4:6 (NLT)



Are you worried about something right now? Maybe you have a test coming up at school or you're trying out for a sports team. Whatever it is, have you prayed about it? Jesus loves you and cares about all the details of your life. Instead of worrying, He wants you to pray about what's bothering you. Then trust Him to give you strength and be with you, and leave the results in His hands.

WATERMELON BURGLAR

Asher looked up when he heard a knock at the window. Mom was outside motioning for him to join her. He pressed the pause button for his video game and ran out to the backyard.

Mom was standing behind the garage, looking at the ground. “There’s something here I want you to see,” she said, pointing down. “Look at those plants.” There, almost hidden by tall grass, Asher saw a cluster of green vines. “Those are watermelon plants,” Mom said. “The funny thing is, I never planted any watermelons.”

“Maybe they got planted accidentally,” Asher said. “Maybe a squirrel dropped some seeds there.”

“You think so?” Mom asked, raising an eyebrow. “I was thinking of something else. Remember when someone stole a watermelon from Mr. Smith’s garden last summer? The whole neighborhood was talking about it. He was planning to enter it in a contest.”


“Yeah.” Asher shifted uncomfortably. “It was as big around as a basketball, wasn’t it?”

“You seem to remember a lot more details than I do,” Mom said. “I don’t remember how big it was, but I was wondering if maybe the person who stole it came here, ate it, and then buried the rinds and seeds so no one would find out.”

“I...uh...I guess that could have happened,” Asher said quietly. His face was red.

Mom looked at him closely. “Is there something you need to tell me?” Asher refused to look her in the eye. “It was you, wasn’t it, Asher?” Mom said softly. “I wondered about it last summer because of the way you reacted back then.”

“I...I...Ward and I did it,” Asher finally said, close to tears. “When we buried everything, I thought that would be the end of it. I didn’t know those little green plants were going to come up and tell on me!”

“Sin often pops back up to tell on us when we try to hide it,” said Mom. “The good news is no matter what you’ve done or how you’ve tried to hide it, you can always confess it to Jesus and He’ll forgive you.” Mom wiped a tear from Asher’s cheek. “I’ll walk you over to Mr. Smith’s house so you can tell him what you’ve done and ask him to forgive you too.”  *Harry C. Trover*



YOU CAN'T HIDE SIN | KEY VERSE: God, you know my faults. I cannot hide my sins from you. Psalm 69:5 (ERV)



When you do something wrong, do you try to hide it? You may be able to keep parents, teachers, or friends from knowing what happened, but you can't hide anything from God. Instead of trying to keep the sin a secret, confess what you've done to Jesus and ask Him to forgive you. Then ask anyone you've hurt for their forgiveness too.

LAWS OF BREAD

Mom, in Sunday school today we learned about Abraham and Isaac.” Myra climbed onto the stool and watched as Mom kneaded some dough.

“Which story did you learn about?” Mom asked.

“The one where Abraham almost sacrifices Isaac. God was just testing Abraham to see if he would give up his son for Him, so He didn’t let him go through with it.” Myra scrunched her nose. “But then God provided a sheep for Abraham to kill instead, and Abraham put that on the altar. People in the Bible sacrificed sheep and other animals a lot. It’s so gross! Why did they do that?”

“Well, in Abraham’s time, Jesus hadn’t been born yet.” Mom punched the dough in front of her. “It’s kind of like this bread. Right now, it hasn’t been baked.” She picked up a knife and a plate. “If I cut a slice of this, it won’t even hold it’s shape.”

Myra giggled as the dough turned into a puddle on the plate. “That’s not what bread is supposed to look like.”

“Exactly.” Mom added the dough back to the rest of the pile. “People back then were under a different law, like this bread dough has different ‘laws’ than baked bread. Animal sacrifices were a way to remember that the wrong things they did were sins against God and required payment.”

Mom put the bread dough into a pan, then covered it with a towel. “Years later, Jesus came to be the ultimate sacrifice. He paid for every one of those sins on the cross, and even ones that hadn’t happened yet—He paid for them all. When we trust Him as our Savior, our sins are forgiven. There’s no need for sacrifices because Jesus was sacrificed for all of us. He met every requirement of God’s law so we could have a new life of freedom with Him instead.”

Myra nodded slowly. “I get it now. I mean, I still think it was gross that they killed animals and burned them, but I’m really glad Jesus came to be the ultimate sacrifice so we don’t have to follow those laws.” She glanced at the pan. “And I’m glad that bread is going to follow different ‘laws’ when it’s baked, because I like toast better than puddles!” ♥ *Kimberly Brokish*



JESUS IS THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE | KEY VERSE: For God’s will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time. Hebrews 10:10 (NLT)



Have you ever wondered why people sacrificed animals in the Old Testament? The people of those days had to follow a different law, and sacrifices were very important. But in the New Testament, Jesus came and died for every one of your sins. Sacrifices aren’t needed anymore because He sacrificed Himself for you. When you trust in Him, all your sins are forgiven. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 104.)

COME AND SEE

Hey, Tristan,” Antonio called as he caught up with his friend in the school hallway. “There’s going to be a special kids’ program at my church on Sunday. There’s going to be music and games and prizes and other cool stuff. Why don’t you come?”

“Nah,” said Tristan as he stopped to get some books out of his locker. “I’m gonna watch the baseball game on TV. Nothing’s gonna get in the way of me watching the Tigers!” He laughed. “Even if there wasn’t a game, I wouldn’t want to go to church. It seems pretty silly to me.”

“Church isn’t silly. It’s great!” said Antonio.

“Church is a big waste of time!” Tristan insisted.

“No, it’s not!”

“Yes, it is!”

“Is not! You don’t know what you’re talking about because you never—”

“Forget it, Antonio,” Tristan said as he slammed his locker shut. “I’m not going.”

Antonio felt bad as Tristan walked away. *I wish he’d come, but I shouldn’t have argued with him about it*, he thought. He remembered the Bible story he’d heard in Sunday school a few weeks before about Philip and Nathanael. When Philip told Nathanael about Jesus of Nazareth, Nathanael said, “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” But Philip didn’t get angry. He simply said, “Come and see.”

Going to church isn’t the most important thing anyway, Antonio thought. *Knowing Jesus and having a relationship with Him is what matters most. Maybe if I’m just friends with Tristan, he’ll come to see that knowing Jesus is a good thing.*

“Tristan, wait up!” Antonio called, running after his friend. “Look, I’m sorry I argued with you about coming to church. I really do think you’d like it, and you should come sometime and see for yourself. But this Sunday, how about coming to my house after I get home from church? We can watch the game together.”

“Even if I don’t go to church with you?” Tristan asked in surprise.

“Sure,” said Antonio. “What kind of snacks should I ask Mom to get?” He knew it was going to be a good Sunday.  *Linda Weddle*



BE A FRIENDLY CHRISTIAN | KEY VERSE: Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. Psalm 34:8 (NIV)



Have you invited friends to church and told them about Jesus? If they laugh and say you’re silly, don’t argue. Keep being a good friend to them and showing them Jesus’s love. After a while, your friends may be curious and willing to come and see what your faith is all about. Best of all, they may come to know Jesus!

SLUG BUG

“Slug bug blue!” Zac exclaimed when he spied a blue Volkswagen. As he spoke, he slugged his brother Teague, who was sitting beside him. The boys were playing their favorite game on the way home from school—seeing who could spot a Volkswagen first and slug the other guy. They kept count to see who got the most.

Violet sighed. She pulled down the mirror on the sun visor and looked at herself. “My freckles look awful,” she said.

“Slug bug yellow!” Teague yelled and slugged Zac as a yellow Volkswagen sped past them.

Violet frowned. “If I can’t do something about these freckles, I think I’ll go into hiding.”

“Violet, lots of people have freckles. Besides, I think they make you look cute,” Mom said as she turned onto their street.

“Slug bug red!” Both boys laughed as they spotted the same Volkswagen at the same time and socked each other.

“You hit me too hard,” Teague said, “so I get the point. That’s the rule.”

“Is not!” Zac appealed to his mother. “Mom?”


“Boys,” Mom said, looking at them in the rearview mirror, “that’s enough slugging. It’s time to end the game.”

Violet turned around and glared at her little brothers. “I think you’re making those up. I’ve never seen that many Volkswagens in one short ride home from town.”

“You aren’t looking for them,” Teague said. “You only see what you look for.”

“That’s true, you know,” Mom said, looking at Violet. “It’s easy to overlook the good things in life—or in others or even ourselves—when we’re constantly looking for things to criticize and complain about. That’s why the Bible says to look for the blessings God has given us. When we remember that He loves us so much He sent Jesus to save us and promises to be with us in every difficulty we face, even things we don’t like won’t seem as bad to us anymore.”

Violet looked at herself in the mirror again. This time she looked at her shiny brown hair and bright green eyes, and suddenly the freckles didn’t seem so bad after all.

Mom pulled the car into their driveway. “Let’s try to remember to look for the good things God has given us and thank Him for all He’s done for us.”  *Barbara J. Westberg*

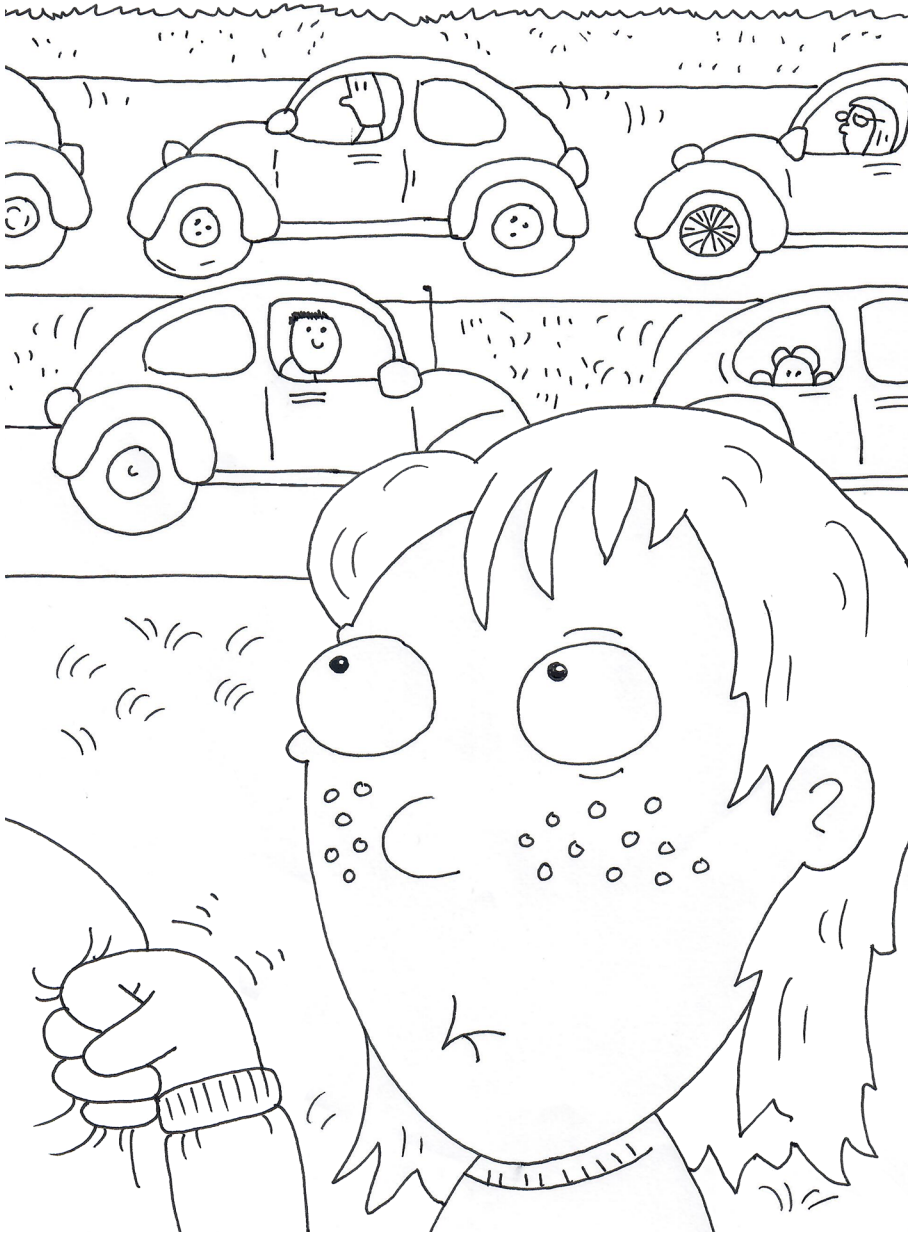


LOOK FOR GOOD THINGS | KEY VERSE: Praise the Lord; praise God our savior! For each day he carries us in his arms. Psalm 68:19 (NLT)



What do you see—good things or bad things? When Moses sent twelve spies to check out the land of Canaan, most of them only saw problems because they didn’t trust God. Only two were able to see the blessings God had for them there. Instead of finding things to criticize, trust Jesus to take care of you and look for all the good things He puts in your life each day.

COLOR!



NO TEASING

Emerson angrily kicked a stone and sent it flying along the sidewalk. When he heard someone coming up behind him, he turned and saw that it was Isaac, one of his classmates. “You mad about something?” Isaac asked when he saw how upset Emerson looked. “What’s wrong?”

Emerson sighed and kicked another stone. “I’m just so sick of being bald. Some of the kids at school make fun of me.”

Isaac frowned. “Having leukemia doesn’t make your hair fall out, does it?” he asked cautiously. “That just happens because of the treatments, right?”

Emerson nodded. “My mom says the kids will get used to seeing me like this, but they still tease me.” He bit his lip, struggling not to show how much the teasing hurt. “You never tease me, though,” he told Isaac.

Isaac shrugged. “You look fine to me,” he said as they turned onto Emerson’s street. “Want to come over and play with my race cars?”

“Sure,” said Emerson. “I’ll just stop by my house and ask my mom if it’s okay.”

Once Emerson got permission and they went on to Isaac’s house, the boys talked as their little cars sped around the track. “Does it hurt to have leukemia?” Isaac asked.

“Some of the tests hurt, and the treatments make me feel sick,” said Emerson. “And even though I wear a cap most of the time, I know I look funny with a bald head. When kids tease me about it, it just makes me feel worse.” He stopped his race car and looked at Isaac. “How come you don’t tease me like other kids do?”

“Like I said, you look fine to me. Besides, I...” Isaac paused before continuing. “I don’t want to make you feel bad, and Jesus wouldn’t want me to. He loves everyone, and He helps me see people the way He does.”

“Well, I wish the other kids knew more about Jesus then,” said Emerson. “Actually, I don’t know much about Him either.”

“Let’s go to the kitchen for a snack and I’ll tell you more about Him,” Isaac said. “Maybe you could even come to church with me sometime and learn more about Him there.”

Emerson smiled. “Okay,” he said and followed Isaac to the kitchen.  Carolyn E. Yost



DON'T TEASE WHEN IT HURTS OTHERS | KEY VERSE: Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. 1 Corinthians 13:4-5 (NLT)



Do you know someone whose appearance is affected by a health problem? Maybe they have scars from an injury or were born with a physical challenge. Don't cause them further difficulty and pain by teasing them about it. Jesus loves them so much He died for them, and He'll help you treat them with kindness and respect. You might even end up with a new friend who wants to hear more about Him!

THE LIGHTHOUSE

We're almost there!" said Jeff. He sprinted along the path toward the lighthouse in Peggy's Cove. He crossed the large flat rocks surrounding the building. He didn't notice his mom pause to help his little sister, Sarah, clamber onto a boulder. While his family admired the ocean, Jeff climbed a few concrete steps built into the rock leading to one of the most photographed lighthouses in the world.

He tilted his head back, gazing in awe at the white building with the red top. "Can we go inside, Mom?" When she didn't answer, Jeff turned around. He scanned the crowd of strangers. She wasn't there. Jeff's heart pounded. "Mom? Where are you?"

"Right here." Mom and Sarah approached him from the side.

Jeff exhaled. "I thought I got lost." He hugged his mother.

"You looked the wrong way," she said, squeezing him back. "I was watching you from over there." She pointed to a boulder.

"I climbed that big rock!" exclaimed Sarah, bouncing on her toes. "Now let's climb the lighthouse."


"We can't go inside," said Mom. "This building is more than a hundred years old." She led her children around the lighthouse. "Think of all the sailors and fishermen saved by its one beam of light."

"How could it help them out there?" asked Sarah, staring at the ocean.

"When it was dark or foggy, they pointed their boats toward the beacon's light. It guided them to land. Without the light, they wouldn't know which direction to go and could get lost at sea."

Jeff's brow wrinkled. "That would be scary...like when I thought I was lost but worse."

"You were looking the wrong way. I was always nearby," said Mom, putting her arm around his shoulder. "So is Jesus. He's the light of the world. He saved you from sin and will always be there to guide you, especially when you're afraid or don't know what to do...sort of how a lighthouse shines into the darkness to help people find their way."

Mom took out her camera. Jeff saluted like a sailor, kindling laughter from Sarah. Mom snapped their photo and said, "We'll frame that one!"  *Elena Dee*



JESUS IS OUR GUIDING LIGHT | KEY VERSE: Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." John 8:12



Are you sometimes unsure about what to do in a complicated situation? If you feel lost, ask Jesus for help. He is the light of the world, and you can trust Him to lead you through difficulties. He gives guidance through His Word, the Bible, and He's put people in your life you can go to for help too—like a friend, a family member, or a trusted adult. No matter what you're going through, you are never alone when Jesus is your guiding light.

HOPE'S BLUE CAST

Hope sat on the porch swing, staring at the blue cast on her arm. It stretched from her wrist to above her elbow and was covered in scribbled messages and doodles from her friends.

She held out her arm and frowned. "This is *not* how I wanted to spend my summer."

Dad sat down beside her, holding two popsicles. He handed her the blue one—her favorite. "How are you doing, kiddo?"

Hope didn't answer at first. She peeled back the wrapper and took a bite. "I was only on the hoverboard for twenty minutes," she finally said. "One tiny wobble, and now..." She lifted her arm again. "Boom. Cast. No swimming. No sports. Nothing."

Dad nodded. "I know you were excited about this summer."

"I had *plans*, Dad. I was going to ride my hoverboard to the park, have a sleepover every weekend, go to soccer camp, and now I can't do *any* of it." She shook her head. "Why would God let this happen? I didn't do anything wrong."

Dad leaned back on the swing. "You know, I've asked that question too. When I lost my job last year, I asked God, 'Why?' It didn't make sense."

"But you got a better job later," Hope said.

"I did. But back then, I couldn't see what God was doing. I just knew I had to trust Him, even when nothing made sense."

Hope was quiet for a while. A squirrel darted across the yard, and a breeze rustled the trees. "I guess it's just hard to trust Him right now," she admitted.


Dad looked over at her. "That's okay to say. God already knows what's in your heart. But here's the thing—He still has a plan for you, Hope. It might not look like *your* plan, but it's still good."

"How can breaking my arm be good?" she muttered.

"Maybe it's not about the arm. Maybe it's about what He wants to teach you while you *can't* do everything. Maybe it's about growing your heart and helping you become more like Jesus."

Hope took another bite of her popsicle and let the quiet sit for a moment. "It still stinks."

"Yep," her dad agreed. "But God's still good."

Hope looked down at her blue cast and sighed. "Okay. Then I guess I'll trust Him. Even if I don't like it right now."  Naomi Beachy



GOD'S PLANS ARE BETTER THAN YOURS | KEY VERSE: We can make our plans, but the LORD determines our steps. Proverbs 16:9 (NLT)



Have you ever had something ruin your plans? Maybe it was something small, like losing a game, or something bigger, like losing someone you care about. It's okay to feel upset. But remember, God's plan is always filled with love, even when we can't see what He's doing. Trust Him to be with you and shape your heart as He works out His plans for your life.

TASTY DEVOTIONS



Naomi couldn't wait! Any minute now the bus would arrive to take her and her dad to the chocolate factory. "Do you think we'll get to taste any chocolate?" she asked eagerly.

"I'm sure there will be some samples," her father replied. "But don't get too excited. We won't eat more than a few bites, most likely."

Naomi's face fell. "Oh." She sighed. "Can we buy some to take home then?"

Dad smiled. "Of course. I know your mom and Ethan would like some."

Screech! The bus pulled up to the curb. Over the next two hours, Naomi and her dad toured the whole factory and saw how every machine worked. Finally, it was time for the samples. As they sat down and took their first nibbles of the tiny chocolate samples, Dad asked, "Did you do your devotions this morning?"

Naomi looked at the table. "No," she admitted. "I was too excited about this!" She held up her last piece of chocolate before popping it into her mouth.

"Hmm," Dad said. "That reminds me of something my dad told me when I was about your age. He said we should think of our devotion time as a tasty treat!"


"What's that supposed to mean?" asked Naomi. "We can't eat our Bibles!"

"No, but we can take in what we read and store it in our hearts and minds. Remember how excited you were to come here this morning? Well, how much more exciting is it that God speaks to us through His Word? That He loves us so much He sent Jesus to die for us so we could have a relationship with Him? And that He wants to spend time with us and help us remember His truth and promises?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Naomi. "Now I get it. The Bible is a gift from God. He loves us and wants us to know Him, and spending time with Him tastes good to our hearts!"

"Bingo!" Dad declared.

Naomi grinned. "Dad, when we get home, can we do devotions together?"

"Sounds like a plan!" Dad announced. "And maybe we can even eat some chocolate while we're at it!"  *Katelyn Claggett*



SPEND TIME WITH GOD | KEY VERSE: How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Psalm 119:103 (NIV)



Have you ever gotten really excited about something? What about devotions— are you ever excited to read the Bible and spend time with God? We don't usually think of devotions as exciting, but being able to have a relationship with God and hear Him speak to us is the most exciting thing of all! When you spend time with God reading the Bible, you'll see how good His words taste to your heart and mind.

WRINKLE-FREE

When he got home from school, Jason found his mom in the laundry room. “How was your day?” Mom asked as she looked up from a shirt she was ironing.

“Terrible!” said Jason. “I failed a math test and have to take it over again. Then I found out my favorite teacher is moving away. And then I accidentally knocked down the principal’s daughter!”

“Knocked her down? How did that happen?”

“I came around a corner really fast and ran right into her,” Jason said. “I apologized, but she’s probably still mad.”

“I’m sure she knows you didn’t do it on purpose,” Mom said.

Jason sighed. “I doubt it. She probably told all her friends what a loser I am.” Jason looked at the shirt Mom was ironing. “That’s my shirt for your cousin’s wedding this weekend, isn’t it?”

“That’s right.” The doorbell rang, and Mom handed him the partially ironed shirt. “Here. Why don’t you finish ironing it while I answer the door?”

When Mom returned, Jason had just finished pressing the shirt. He held it up. “Look at this,” he said. “It’s wrinkle-free!”

Mom nodded. “The heat and pressure of the iron took the wrinkles right out.” She turned off the iron and unplugged it. “Sometimes that’s how God gets the wrinkles out of us too.”

“Wrinkles?” Jason rubbed his forehead. “I don’t have wrinkles yet.”

Mom laughed. “I’m thinking of wrinkles in the ways we think and act—things like impatience, anger, and self-pity, just to name a few. God sometimes uses the heat and pressure of difficulties in our lives to iron them out.”

“So you think God is using the stuff that happened to me today to make me more patient and not feel sorry for myself so I can be wrinkle-free?”

“Well, we’ll never be wrinkle-free until we get to heaven—we’ll always have things we struggle with. But He does use the things that happen in our lives—even things we don’t like—to make us more like Jesus and help us love and care for others. And He’s always with us in the troubles we face too.”

Jason nodded. “I guess I’d better go study for that math test, huh?”

“Yes,” Mom said. “At least you’re getting another chance to iron that out!” ♥

Barabara J. Westberg



PATIENTLY ENDURE DIFFICULTIES | KEY VERSE: For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 2 Corinthians 4:17 (NIV)



Do you ever feel pressured by what’s going on in your life? God sometimes uses difficult circumstances to press the wrinkles out of us. It may be uncomfortable for a while, but He’s doing it to make us more like Jesus. Be patient as He teaches you to trust Him and show His love to others. He promises to be with you as He irons the wrinkles out of your life.

THE GARDEN

I hate that we don't have money to do stuff!" Don wailed when he saw his mom in the garden. It was the last day of school, a day he'd looked forward to, but he came home pouting. He sat down beside Mom in a huff. "I love summer, but I hate hearing about all the cool stuff my friends get to do. One of them's even going to Japan, and his hotel room has an indoor slide! Before they could ask me what I'll be doing, I ran home. I feel like such a loser!"

Mom kept pulling weeds, then suddenly gripped Don's arm, looking pale.

"Mom! Are you okay?" Don asked, alarmed.

"I'm just a bit woozy," she whispered, rubbing her belly. She was pregnant and needed daily injections to protect the baby. After a moment, she smiled as color returned to her face.

"How can you be so happy? You're sick every day!" Don said.

Mom gestured around her in response. "What do you see in my garden?"

"Weeds!" Don muttered, noticing how they kept cropping up. "They're so irritating!"

"Besides the weeds, what else?"

"I see...uh...flowers. Oh, they're finally blooming!" Don passed by the garden every day but hardly noticed the colorful blooms.

"That's like life," Mom explained. "When we focus only on the weeds, we miss the other beautiful things around us." She rubbed her bulging belly. "It's the same with my pregnancy. If I focus on the discomfort, I'd lose sight of the miracle growing inside me."

She tapped Don's chest. "Our heart is like a garden, Don. If you count the blessings you have in Jesus, your heart will be full of flowers. He saved you from sin and has given you eternal life, and He shows His love to you in so many ways each day. Because of Him, you can rejoice. When you do, you'll be surprised to find yourself being happy for others and their own triumphs. But if you only focus on what they have that you don't, then jealousy will choke out whatever happiness is in your heart."

Don sat in thoughtful silence. Finally, he turned to his mom and grinned. "Maybe I'll help you with the weeding this summer! I'll take out the pesky stuff and make this garden even better!"

Mom laughed. "That's the spirit!" ♥ *Kristin Lim*



COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS AND REJOICE | KEY VERSE: A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. Proverbs 17:22 (NIV)



Do you compare yourself to friends and feel like they have it better? Maybe they get the latest gadgets or go on exciting trips while you stay home. Don't let jealousy poison your heart. Focus on the gifts God has given you. The greatest gift of all is Jesus, who died for us so we could have eternal life. No earthly treasure can compare to Him!

IT'S NOT MY JOB!

Jordan, could you please put Athena's toys away while I give her a bath?" called Mom as she carried Jordan's little sister to the bathroom.

Jordan groaned. He was right in the middle of a video game. He slammed his controller down and stomped into his baby sister's room. "This is so unfair!" he said as he threw Athena's toys into the toybox. "I didn't make this mess. It's not my job!"

After soccer practice the next day, Coach handed Jordan a big bag of dirty laundry. It was Jordan's turn to take the soccer uniforms home to be washed. Jordan dumped the bag of filthy clothes in the kitchen.

"Hang on a minute," said Mom. "What's all this?"

Jordan was confused. Mom had washed the soccer uniforms countless times before. "It's our turn to wash the uniforms," he replied.

Mom tossed the bag back at Jordan. "Well, I don't play soccer, so why should I wash them? It's not my job!"

All of a sudden, Jordan's own words came back to him. "But I can't wash these!" he cried. "I don't know how!"

Dad got up from his chair, a wry smile on his face. "Well then, I'll show you!"

Dad patiently showed Jordan how to operate the washing machine. "You know, families should help one another, Jordan, and sometimes that means cleaning up someone else's mess."

Jordan sighed. "But cleaning up after Athena is hard!"

"Well, so is going to work every single day," said Dad.

Jordan had never thought about that before.

"And how about Mom?" Dad continued. "She changes dirty diapers. She washes our clothes and cleans up after people all the time. Imagine if she stopped doing all those things because they weren't her job?"

Jordan laughed. "We'd all stink!"

Dad grinned. "It reminds me of what Jesus did to save us. He came to earth and cleaned up the great big mess of sin we had made. Jesus never sinned. Not once. But He was willing to die on the cross so our sins could be forgiven. I'm so thankful He saved me and made me clean!"

"Me too!" Jordan said as he dumped the dirty uniforms into the washing machine. ♥
Angela Jelf



JESUS MAKES US CLEAN | KEY VERSE: He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. Titus 3:5 (NIV)



Do you moan and complain when you're asked to clean up a mess someone else made? Jesus loves us so much He was willing to save us from the biggest mess of all that none of us were able to clean up—sin. When we trust in Him, He removes our filthy rags of sin and clothes us in garments as white as snow. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.)

PEACE IN THE MIDST OF NOISE

Lisbeth was shocked at the amount of noise that hit her ears when she stepped into the animal shelter behind her best friend. She had never heard so much barking before.

"It's not always like this," Jenna said. She had been volunteering for a long time, but this was the first time Lisbeth had come with her and her mom.

They walked down a hallway lined with cages, and it seemed like every dog was barking. Lisbeth smiled when she saw one dog just lying in her cage. She didn't look upset or sick or anything like that; she just looked peaceful, like she really wasn't bothered by all the noise the other dogs were making.

"Do you remember what the Bible says about being peaceful?" Jenna's mom shouted to be heard above the dogs. "It says we should do our part to live in peace with others, even if the world around us isn't peaceful. I think Miss Ruby got the message." She pointed toward the dog Lisbeth had noticed. "But we have something she doesn't," Jenna's mom continued. "Since we belong to Jesus, we have His peace and love in our hearts. That's what allows us to be truly peaceful."

They spent time playing with the dogs and giving them love, then Lisbeth was dropped off at her house. As she walked up to the door, she could hear shouting. Ever since her mom remarried, the house was constantly noisy.


Lisbeth opened the front door. Her older brother was arguing with one of their stepbrothers. Her twin sisters were fighting over a doll. One of her stepsisters was screaming. She covered her ears.

There were times when Lisbeth would just join in with everyone else. When everyone else was upset, it was hard not to be mad too. But today she wanted to try something different.

Lisbeth walked over to her younger stepbrother and sat down beside him. He wasn't joining in with all the screaming, but he didn't look happy either.

"Do you want to play a game?" Lisbeth asked. "I'll play with you."

"Outside?" Darren asked, his eyes wide as he looked around the room.

Lisbeth laughed. "Sure." She wanted to help bring peace to their home, but she didn't have to stay right in the chaos in order to do that.  *Emily Acker*



LIVE A PEACEFUL LIFE | KEY VERSE: If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Romans 12:18 (CSB)



When everyone around you is getting loud and grumpy, do you join in? Or do you try to be the one peaceful person in the room? If you know Jesus as your Savior, you can treat others in a peaceful, loving way, even when tempers flare and no one agrees. Trust Him to help you do what you can to keep the peace. Is there anything you can do—with God's help—to make your home more peaceful?



BEYOND WHAT YOU SEE



Luca's grandfather patted the tire of the four-wheeler he had purchased. "I found this quad online and got a good deal on it," he said with a smile.

Luca wasn't so sure. The fenders were dented, and the seat had a tear in it. The rack behind the seat was bent, and a headlight was cracked. "It doesn't look very good," he said. "Why didn't you buy a new quad, Grandpa?"

"Well, this was much less expensive than a new one, and the engine is in excellent running condition. It also gives us something to work on together. It just needs a little body work, that's all. We'll get it all fixed up. You'll see."

Luca wasn't convinced. "It looks awfully banged-up to me," he said as he began to polish a black helmet that had come with the four-wheeler.

"You've got to learn to see beyond outward appearances," said Grandpa. "Put on that helmet and hop on. I'll give you a ride."


Luca slid on behind his grandfather. After a drive through the field across the road, Luca was impressed with the quiet, steady hum of the dented-up quad. "This runs really well!" he said.

"Just goes to show that you should never judge things by appearance alone—and that includes people," said Grandpa. "I didn't like the looks of this quad myself when I first saw it. But when I heard it run, it was music to my ears!" He grinned. "Know any people like that?"

"Well, Aaron, I guess," Luca replied. "He's new in my class, and when I first saw him I thought he'd be mean. But we started talking, and now we're friends."

"We need to see people like God does," said Grandpa. "He doesn't judge us by the way we look. He sees way beyond that. He sees what's in our hearts and what we can become—just like we see what this beat-up quad can become. Jesus can make anyone a new person. He made us new people when we trusted in Him, and He wants us to treat everyone in a way that shows them His love."

"You're right, Grandpa," Luca said. "You're always right!"

Grandpa laughed. "You go on inside now and tell that to your grandma!" 

Vicki Reinhardt



LOOK BEYOND LOOKS | KEY VERSE: People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart. 1 Samuel 16:7 (NLT)



Do you judge people by the way they look? We often focus on appearance when we look at others, but not God. He looks at our hearts. You can't see inside hearts like He does, but you can look past a person's outward appearance and see how much they're loved by Jesus. Treat everyone in a way that shows them His love. You might even end up with a new friend!

THE GOOD LEADER

Reid sighed happily at the sound of a mountain stream trickling nearby. “I sure love hiking!” he said.

“Me too!” said his twin sister, Nicole. “It’s so pretty out here today!”

“Yeah,” said Reid. “I’m so glad school is over for the summer so we can do this again!”

“Hey, you two, don’t get too far ahead!” Dad called from further down the mountain. The twins decided to rest and wait for their parents.

“Hey, look at that,” Nicole said, pointing to a nearby tree branch.

“What’s going on up here?” Mom asked as she and Dad came up the path and sat down on a log.

“There’s a trail of ants walking on that branch,” said Reid.

Nicole squinted to get a better look. “Why are they all following that ant in front? Why don’t they just walk wherever they want to?”

“They’re following the leader,” Dad explained. “He’s probably leading them to some food he discovered.” He thought for a moment. “We’re a lot like ants.”

Reid and Nicole looked at each other, confused. “How are we like ants?” Reid asked.

“Well,” said Dad, “these ants are trusting their leader to guide them safely, and they go wherever he goes. We need to make sure we’re following our leader with the same trust and obedience.”

“You’re talking about Jesus, aren’t you?” said Nicole.

“That’s right!” said Dad. “He’s our leader. He died for our sins and rose from the dead to save us, and we need to have faith in Him and follow and obey Him in everything we do.”

Mom nodded. “We might be tempted to follow people or chase after things that can lead us away from God and what He tells us in the Bible. But Jesus is the only right path for our lives.”

“I don’t want to follow the wrong crowd,” Reid said.

“Me neither,” said Nicole. “I want to follow Jesus!”

Mom beamed. “I’m very glad to hear you say that.” She stood up. “Let’s finish this hike so we can get some food of our own.”

“I know the way to the top,” Reid said, running to the path. “Follow me!”

Nicole laughed. “Okay, but only because I know you follow Jesus!”  Elena Ketner



FOLLOW JESUS | KEY VERSE: Lead me in the right path, O LORD...Make your way plain for me to follow. Psalm 5:8 (NLT)



Do you follow Jesus? Do you trust and obey Him? It may seem hard to follow Him when you’re tempted to chase after what the world has to offer or what other people think of you, but Jesus is a good leader who loves you and will lead you on the right path. John 14:6 says He is the way, the truth, and the life. Trust and follow Him.

CADEN'S GIFT

Caden tugged his mom's sleeve in the church hallway. "I need some money for our offering."

"Okay," Mom said, opening her purse. Caden took the money she held out and dashed off to class.

"I'm guessing many of you get your offering money from your parents," Mrs. Hallman said after the class had taken the offering. "I have a suggestion. For the next month, why don't you only put your own money in the offering? Missionaries will be using it to set up a school. You'll be giving your money to the Lord so those kids can hear about Jesus."

Caden didn't like the idea of giving away his own money. "I don't see what difference it makes whether we give the money ourselves or our parents help us," he said on the way home from church.

"The difference is you don't get any real joy out of giving to the Lord when the gift doesn't cost you anything," Mom said.

"Maybe not, but I don't get much money, and I've got to save up for a new bike."

"God doesn't expect us to give what we don't have," Mom said. "No matter how little we have to give, God can use it to bless others in big ways. But giving still requires sacrifice. Jesus sacrificed His life for us, and we give to Him out of gratitude for all He's given us. Maybe you can give some of the money you've already saved for a new bike—and if you want to give more, you could find ways to earn extra money. Pray about it and ask God what you should do."

Caden prayed about it and decided to give a portion of his bike money to the missionaries. Then, over the next few weeks, he was surprised at how many extra jobs he was able to pick up. He mowed lawns for neighbors and cleaned his grandma's basement. He actually enjoyed earning money for the missionary offering.

"When I'm working for extra money, I pretend I'm a missionary and that I'm doing the work so people can hear about Jesus," Caden told his mom one day.

"Pretend?" Mom smiled. "It isn't pretend, Caden. Even though you're not in a far-off place, God is using the work you're doing to help more people come to Jesus!" ♥

Bernard Palmer



GIVE TO GOD | KEY VERSE: I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing. 2 Samuel 24:24 (NIV)



Do you truly give to God, or do you just pass along someone else's gifts? Remember that giving always costs something. When God gave us His Son, it cost Jesus His life. Ask God to show you how you can give to Him. Maybe it's by giving your own money or by donating your things or time to show others His love. Whatever it is, give out of gratitude for all He's done for you.

IMAGE

Layna held her position as she landed a pirouette, the final move in the dance. She pushed her bellybutton as far back to her spine as she could, gazing at herself in the mirror. Her eyes then followed down the line of girls. She stood a head taller than any of them, and though she tried, she couldn't get her stomach in far enough.

"Nice job," said Miss Susan, the instructor at her dance school, when class ended.

Layna shook her head, disagreeing with her teacher.

Miss Susan raised her eyebrows. "What's wrong? You nailed that turn."

Layna's eyes followed the other dancers as they filed out of the studio. She waited until the room had emptied to speak. "I'm the biggest person here, and I'm not even the oldest. I feel so weird, like everyone must be pointing at that big girl and laughing whenever I dance." Layna studied her reflection some more.


"Layna, you're a beautiful dancer," said Miss Susan. "Don't let anyone speak lies and tell you any different. Besides, I wouldn't want all my dancers to look the same."

Layna didn't answer, but she stopped staring at herself in the mirror to look at Miss Susan.

"Did you know humans are the only ones created in God's image?" Miss Susan asked. "No animals or even the angels reflect God the way we do. And when God finished creating everything, He saw it was good. Imagine God patting Himself on the back and saying, 'Wow, look at Layna. I did good!'"

"God thought He had done good by creating me?" Layna asked. She tried to picture God forming Adam out of the dust. "When He made Adam, did He know He'd make me one day too?"

Miss Susan nodded. "Yes, He did. And He loves you, Layna—so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for you so you could be saved from sin. And He gave you a wonderful body that can do amazing things—like think and talk and do pirouettes!"

Layna smiled as she picked up her dance bag. God created her, loved her, and sent His Son to die for her. She'd heard the words before, but she had never let them sink in until now.  *Joanna Bair*



YOU ARE MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE | KEY VERSE: So God created humans in his own image. He created them to be like himself. Genesis 1:27 (ERV)



Do you ever find yourself staring in the mirror worrying about how you look? Remember that God made all people in His own image—including you! He made each one of us unique and loves us so much that He sent Jesus to die for us. Instead of comparing yourself to others, remember that you're created in God's image and loved by Him, and that makes you truly special.

TRAINING BAXTER

Austin's black Labrador tilted his head to one side and lifted his front paw. "No, not shake! Lie down! Can't you learn anything?" Austin sighed. "Let's try something else. Fetch, Baxter! Fetch!" Austin hurled a ball across the yard, and Baxter raced after it. Before it dropped to the ground, Baxter leaped into the air and caught it in his mouth. "Wow! Good dog!" Austin called, clapping his hands. "Now bring it here, Baxter!"

Baxter's wagging tail stopped and pointed into the air. He perked his ears and stared at the other side of the yard. Then he dropped the ball and dashed after a squirrel. "This is hopeless," Austin said, letting himself drop to the ground.


"What's hopeless?" asked Austin's older sister, Makenna. She sat on the grass next to him.

"I'm trying to train Baxter. I've been trying to teach him how to sit and shake and lie down and fetch, but I'm about ready to give up. Sometimes it seems like he's getting the hang of it, then, out of the blue, he runs off and chases a squirrel or something."

"Baxter's a hunting dog, so it's in his nature to do that," said Makenna. She glanced at her brother. "Kind of like it's in our nature to do the wrong thing sometimes. That's what Pastor Pham's sermon was about, remember?"

"Yeah, thanks for the reminder," Austin said, thinking of something mean he'd said to Makenna the day before. He hoped God didn't give up on him as easily as he gave up on Baxter. "Do you suppose God thinks we're hopeless?" he asked.

"Of course not," said Makenna. "When we were hopelessly lost in sin, God sent Jesus to save us! He promises to train us and make us grow to be more like Jesus by helping us understand and obey what He says in the Bible. And though there will be many times when we wander away from Him and do something wrong—like Baxter going after those squirrels—He never gives up on us and will always forgive us."

Something pawed at Austin's back. He turned to find Baxter holding the ball in his mouth. Austin smiled and patted Baxter's head. "Want to try again?" He threw the ball, and Baxter bounced away after it.  *Debra VanDyke*



GOD TRAINS CHRISTIANS | KEY VERSE: Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. May your gracious Spirit lead me on level ground. Psalm 143:10 (CSB)



Do you feel like a hopeless case—like you'll never be able to stop doing things that are wrong? Struggling against sin is part of every Christian's life, but don't give up on yourself, because God never will! He sent Jesus to save you from sin and will always forgive you, no matter how many times you do something wrong. Trust Him to train you and make you more like Him—He is all the hope you need.

MORE THAN WORDS

After a delicious lunch on Father's Day, Ophelia joined the rest of her family to watch Dad open his presents.

"Open mine first, Daddy," Evelyn said eagerly.

"I made you a picture."

"Don't tell," said Ophelia, but everyone laughed as Evelyn insisted on helping her father open the package containing the picture she had drawn for him. Then they watched while he opened the rest of his gifts. Every family member had bought or made something for Dad—everyone, that is, except for Ophelia.

"These gifts are wonderful!" said Dad. "I can hardly wait to use them. Thank you all very much!"

"You didn't open Ophelia's present," Evelyn said. "Where is it, Ophelia?"

Ophelia was embarrassed. Everyone was waiting to see what she had for Dad. "I—love you, Dad, and I was going to buy or make you something, but I've been so busy," she said, blushing.

Dad was very gracious. "I know," he assured her, "and I have enough presents. Come on, let's have some of that great-looking cake!"


That night Mom found Ophelia crying in her room. "I didn't have a present for Dad," she said, tears spilling onto her pillow.

"It's okay, Ophelia. You couldn't help it if you didn't have time or money to get something for Dad," Mom told her.

"I know, but...I could have taken time to make something for him," Ophelia admitted. "You even offered to help me make him some cookies, but I just didn't get around to it."

"It would have been nice to do something to show your love," Mom said. "It's so easy to say we love someone, but love is more than words. It's action—like God showing how much He loved us by sending Jesus to save us."

Ophelia nodded. "I'm going to make tomorrow another Father's Day for Dad!" she said. "I'll, uh—oh, I know! I'll show him I love him by cleaning out his car."

"I'm sure He'll love that," Mom said. "And let's not forget to let our actions show our love for our heavenly Father too."  *Jan L. Hansen*



PUT LOVE INTO ACTION | KEY VERSE: Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. 1 John 3:18 (NLT)



Do your actions show your love for your parents and others who are important to you? It's important to tell people you love them, but those words need to be backed up with actions. God showed us His love by sending His Son, Jesus, to die to save us from sin. We can show our love for Him in return by obeying and serving Him.

INSPIRING OTHERS

Abbey was happy with herself for coming up with a good morning routine. Each morning before she went down for breakfast, she picked up her Bible from her nightstand and read a bit from it, and then she prayed. It felt good to connect with God before she even talked to anyone in her family.

Abby knew her aunt had been doing something like that for a long time, and she was the one who had inspired her. She felt a bit silly telling her about it, but when she saw her aunt one afternoon, she did just that.

“Wow! I’m so proud of you.” Aunt Hannah hugged her.

Abby blushed. “You inspired me. I know you read your Bible and talk to God every day.”

Aunt Hannah’s brows lowered as she took a seat on the porch step. “Actually, I’ve been so busy lately that I’ve been forgetting to do that.”

Abby’s eyes widened. “Really?”


Aunt Hannah nodded. “It’s too easy to become distracted by other things. But I want to get back into good habits and a good routine.” She smiled at Abby. “Thank you for telling me what you’ve been up to. Now you’ve inspired me!”

“I have?” Abby hadn’t expected that. She had just wanted her aunt to know how she had encouraged her.

Aunt Hannah got up and hugged her. “We all need to do that for each other sometimes. As Christians, we’re all part of God’s family, and the Holy Spirit uses the truth of God’s Word to work in our hearts and make us more like Jesus. That means we need to remind each other what Jesus did to save us and how He wants us to live. We need to encourage one another and set an example for others.”

“Even a kid like me?” Abby asked.

Aunt Hannah laughed. “Yes. The Bible says not to let anyone think less of you because you are young. You can do so much to inspire others, just like you did for me today.”

Abby had never thought of that before. She knew she wanted to read her Bible and pray each day to grow in her relationship with Jesus, but maybe she could do more to encourage others in their relationship with Him too.  *Bethany Acker*



YOU CAN INSPIRE OTHERS | KEY VERSE: Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. 1 Timothy 4:12 (NIV)



Has someone inspired you to make changes in your life that will help you grow in your relationship with Jesus? Maybe you’ve seen how their spiritual habits have helped them and you want to follow their example. God uses the encouragement and example of other Christians to work in our hearts, and He wants you to be an example for others, no matter how young you are. How can you encourage others in their walk with Jesus?

DOG WASH



Millee grunted as she helped her aunt lift the heavy dog into the tub. Titan was a giant, and it took both her and Aunt Jodie to pick him up.

Millee turned on the handheld sprayer while her aunt mixed the soaps. Aunt Jodie was a dog groomer, and a few times a year Millee would bring her long-haired dog over to Aunt Jodie's house for a good bath and a brush.

"He's extra gross today," Millee warned her aunt. "He really loves rolling around in the dirt."

Her aunt smiled as she applied a generous amount of shampoo to the dog's long coat. "I see we have a lot of mats to work out today too," she said, running her fingers over the thick chunks of fur around Titan's ears, neck, and belly. "We've got our work cut out for us today."

The two worked in silence for a while, scrubbing the dog's fur and rinsing his thick coat. Then they wrapped him in a big towel, carried him to the grooming table, and kept working. Aunt Jodie ran the blow dryer while Millee struggled with the dog brush.

By the time Aunt Jodie was finished, Titan's fur looked extra fluffy. "I always love getting the big, hairy, matted dogs to work on," she said.

Millee looked at her in surprise. "You do? But aren't they more work to groom?"

Aunt Jodie nodded. "Oh yes, but they're the most fun. They have the most remarkable transformations. And they're always the ones that make me think about the Lord."

Millee's eyebrows scrunched together. "What? How do shaggy dogs make you think about the Lord?"

Aunt Jodie picked up another brush and helped Millee work out the tangles. "When I'm cleaning and grooming a particularly shaggy and dirty dog, I'm reminded of what Jesus does for me. Because He died for my sins on the cross, I've been made clean and declared righteous, which means I'm faultless in God's eyes. And day by day He is also washing me, cleansing me, and transforming me more into His likeness."

Millee smiled. "And that's an even bigger transformation than we're giving to Titan."

Aunt Jodie nodded. "It sure is."  *Emily Tenter*



JESUS TRANSFORMS US | KEY VERSE: For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. Hebrews 10:14 (NIV)



Have you been washed and cleansed by Jesus? If you've trusted Him as your Savior, He has washed your sin away and made you right with God. And day by day, as He forgives your wrongs and helps you love others and turn from sin, He is making you more like Him. It's quite a transformation! If you haven't yet trusted in Him, you can have a clean heart and new life today. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.)

WINGS

Liam looked out the window of his friend Michael's house as they finished their lunch. "Look at those trees," he said. "They're bending over from the wind."

"So were we, a few minutes ago," said Michael.

"It's too hard to play ball with this much wind. I'm tired. We'll have to think of something to do inside." Liam pulled a movie out of his backpack.

Michael's mom took their plates. "I'm sorry, Liam, but I promised your mother you'd play outside, not watch movies. I'm sure you boys can think of something to do."

"I know!" said Michael. "You brought your rollerblades, right? I have an idea."

The boys put on their skates, and Michael pulled four snow shovels from the shed and handed two to Liam.

"Are you crazy?" Liam asked, giving his friend a fake punch. "It's hot out, not snowing!"

Michael smiled. "Just wait and see." They stumped around the house to the driveway. "Hold up your shovels like this," Michael said. He held his shovels high. A blast of wind whooshed, and Michael skimmed along the drive and onto the sidewalk. "Come on, Liam!" he shouted.

Liam held his shovels up, but nothing happened. Grumbling, he bent and struggled against the wind to where Michael stood. Just as he got there, panting, another gust sent Michael soaring. He made a wide circle and swooped over to Liam.

"Are there wings on your rollerblades or what?" Liam demanded. "You took off like a huge bird!"

"That's what gave me the idea! In church we talked about how even kids get tired and how God gives us wings like eagles. Wings made me think of using snow shovels to catch the wind. The trick is to hold them up in the right direction so the wind does the work."

Mom walked over carrying knee pads. "That's what Jesus does for us," she said. "He did all the work of saving us by dying for our sin, and He gives us strength when we grow tired. When we feel worn out from trying to do things on our own, we need to depend on Him for strength and trust Him to lead us in the right direction."

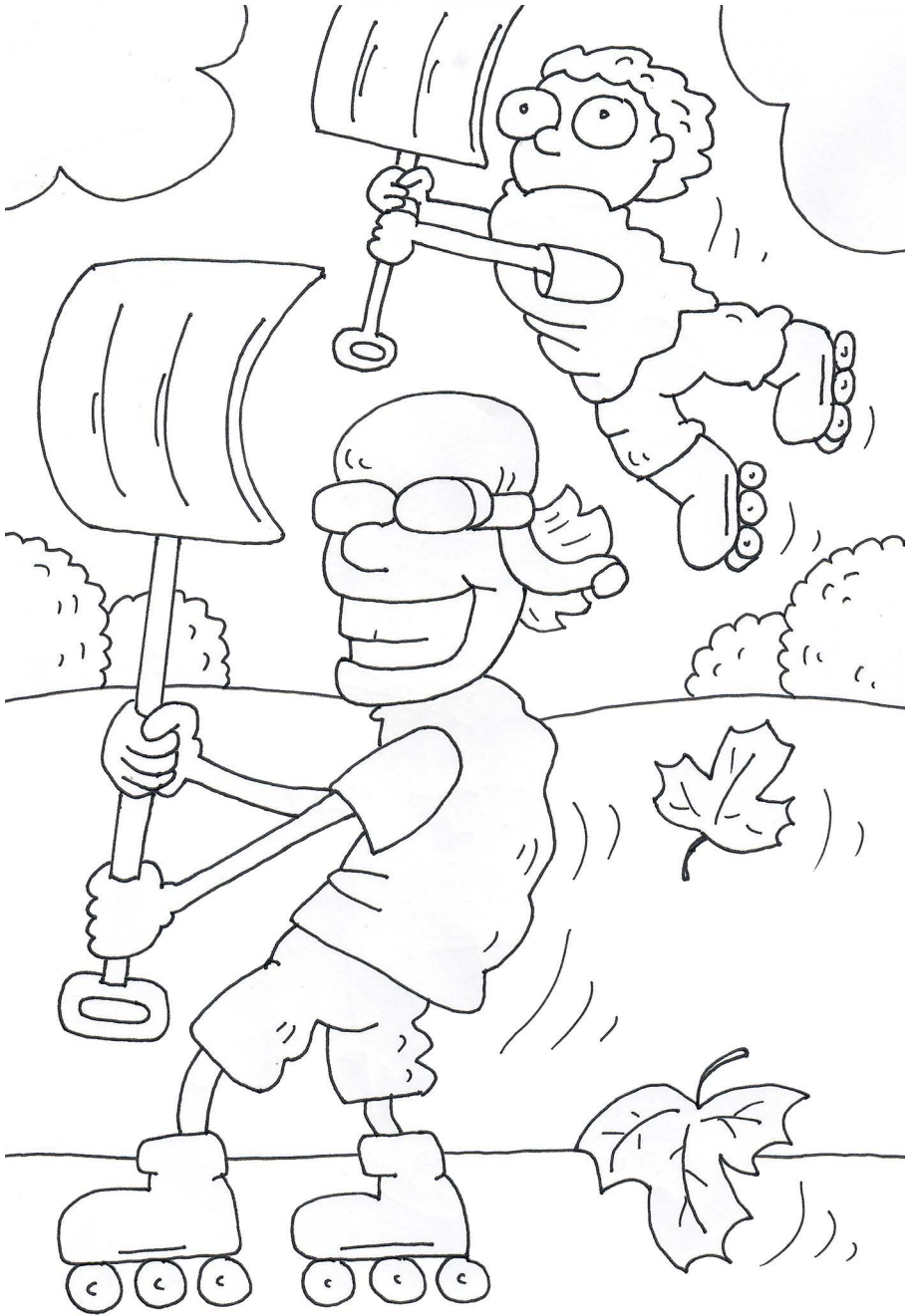
"Cool. Thanks, Mom. Let's go!" The boys put on their knee pads and sailed off. ♥
Robin Steinweg



JESUS GIVES YOU STRENGTH | KEY VERSE: Those who trust in the LORD will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not become weary, they will walk and not faint. Isaiah 40:31 (CSB)



Do you feel tired and worn out? Are there problems in your life you're trying to fix on your own? Life can be difficult sometimes, but remember that if you trust in Jesus, He's always with you. He is strong enough to save you from sin, and He promises to give you strength when you face hard times. Trust Him to help you through difficulties and lead you in the right direction.

COLOR!

SPEAKING UP FOR ALLI

Dallon grinned when he saw the mascot of his favorite baseball team coming toward them near the stadium entrance. “Look, Alli!” he said.

But Dallon’s excitement turned to anger when the mascot gave him a high five but didn’t even acknowledge Alli. “Hey,” he called after him, “you didn’t talk to my sister!”

His aunt touched his arm. “Let’s go inside.”

Dallon and his aunt walked toward the stadium, his mom pushing his sister’s chair in front of them. “That was so rude,” said Dallon. “Alli loves him. That’s why Mom brought us to the game today. How could he just go past her like that? It’s like he didn’t even see her.”

“He doesn’t know your sister like you do,” his aunt said. “He didn’t realize she was interested in him.”


“She was moving around like she does when she’s excited,” Dallon said. “If she could talk, she would have been yelling out to him.”

“He didn’t know the way she was moving meant she was excited. You knew that because you know your sister; that makes you the perfect person to speak up for her.”

Dallon’s mom turned toward them, holding out their tickets. “We can all use our voices to speak up for Alli and those like her,” she said. “We know things others don’t because we’ve spent a lot of time with her. God can use us to change how others see her.”

“But we need to be patient,” Dallon’s aunt said. “We’ve had a lot of time to get to know Alli and all that makes her unique, but others haven’t. God has blessed us by putting her in our family, but others only spend a short amount of time with her.”

They made their way into the crowded stadium. “It’s great that you’re willing to speak up for your sister.” Dallon’s aunt put an arm around his shoulders. “It shows the love you have for her, and it helps others see that God loves her too.”

Dallon looked around. He didn’t see a single person in a chair like Alli’s or who seemed similar to her. He nodded slowly. In Sunday school he had learned about the unique gifts God gave to different people that reflected Jesus’s love, and maybe speaking up for his sister was part of his.  *Emily Acker*



USE YOUR GIFT TO HELP OTHERS | KEY VERSE: As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 1 Peter 4:10



Has God given you a gift that allows you to look out for others in a special way? Perhaps it’s speaking up for those who can’t speak for themselves, or encouraging others when they’re feeling down, or being a friend to those who need one. God gives spiritual gifts to everyone who trusts in Jesus so we can reflect His love to others in our own unique way. Trust Him to help you use your gift to show others His love.

SEASONED BLESSINGS



What are you doing, Auntie Laura?" Deb clambered onto the stool for a better look at the lemon her aunt was grating. "You said you'd make blueberry muffins...but you're putting in lemon peel?" Deb grimaced.

"It's my secret ingredient," replied Aunt Laura, tapping strands of lemon skin into the batter.

Deb's grimace remained stamped on her face. "But no one eats lemon peels."

Aunt Laura chuckled. "No, not right off the fruit." She measured the salt, saying, "No one eats salt from a teaspoon either."

Deb giggled. "That would be gross!"

Aunt Laura whisked the batter. "The lemon rind and the salt are both seasonings that add flavor so the muffins will taste better."

"I don't understand how that works," said Deb. She leaned her arms on the counter. "I also don't understand what Jesus meant about *people* being the salt of the earth."

"People can act like salt!" replied Aunt Laura, wiping her hands on her apron. "As followers of Jesus, we can trust Him to help us blend His truth and love into what we say and what we do." She scooped batter into the muffin tins. "If we do that, then we're adding the extra ingredient of faith to our words and actions. In a way, we're 'seasoning' them with God's goodness."

"I get it!" exclaimed Deb. "If I say and do things that show I have faith in Jesus, then I'm adding flavor like salt does." She hopped off the stool to open the oven door for Auntie Laura. "But how do I know if I'm doing it right?"

"That's easy," said her aunt, sliding the muffin tray into the oven. "When your words and actions line up with what God says in the Bible and the kindness and love Jesus has shown us, you leave a trail of blessings wherever you go!"

"I want to be a blessing," said Deb. She headed to the sink and picked up a dishrag. She wiped away drops of spilled batter from the counter. "Does that add some flavor to your day?" asked Deb with a grin.

Aunt Laura hugged her and said, "Now that's a blessing I can savor." ♥ *Elena Dee*



BE A BLESSING | KEY VERSE: Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Colossians 4:6 (NIV)



Do your words and actions reveal your faith in Jesus? Do you "season" your day with conversations and acts that reflect the love He has shown you? Trust Him to guide you in what you say and what you do so others can see His truth, love, and goodness in your life. Can you think of some people you want to help? Show others your faith and be a blessing to them!

SPILLED WORDS



Gemma looked in horror as her chocolate milkshake began to spread over the table. “Why can’t you leave my stuff alone, Elle?” she yelled at her sister.

“I didn’t mean to spill it,” said Elle. Her lower lip was trembling. “I just wanted a taste.”

Mom unrolled some paper towels and took them to the table.

“No, wait,” Gemma said. “I want to drink it! We’ve got to put it back in the cup.”

“I don’t see how you can do that,” said Mom.

Gemma grabbed a spoon and tried to scoop up the creamy drink, but it was no use. “I bought this with my own money!” she said angrily.

“I’m sorry,” Elle said.

“Well, you should have just kept your little hands to yourself,” Gemma shot back. “You’re going to buy me another milkshake the next time we’re at the mall.”

“But I don’t have that much money,” Elle said, tears springing to her eyes.

“Then save up,” Gemma said. She glared at Elle. “I wish I didn’t have a little sister.”

“You can go play, Elle,” said Mom, “but after this, leave Gemma’s things alone.”

After Elle left, Mom turned to Gemma. “Elle shouldn’t have touched your milkshake, but that’s no excuse for saying unkind things to her.”


Gemma looked up from wiping the table. “Why are you lecturing me? She’s the one who messed with my stuff!”

Mom frowned. “Gemma, hearing you say you wish you didn’t have a sister hurt her much more than the spilled milkshake hurt you.”

“Well, I was mad,” Gemma said. “I didn’t mean it.”

“We can be angry and still watch what we say,” Mom replied. “When we don’t, words can spill out and make a bigger mess than that drink did. And taking those words back is just as impossible as putting a milkshake back in a cup. You can never take them back—the damage can only be repaired with forgiveness.”

Gemma sighed as she threw the wet paper towels in the trash. “I’ll go apologize to Elle.”

“Good,” said Mom. “And you can ask Jesus to forgive you too. He promises He will, and He’ll help you respond to others in a loving way, even when you feel angry.” 
Debra W. Smith



CONTROL YOUR TONGUE | KEY VERSE: Let the words of my mouth...be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD. Psalm 19:14



Are you careful to not say angry, thoughtless words? Sometimes it’s hard not to let them spill out, but once they’re said, it’s impossible to take them back. But that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t try to make things right. When your words have hurt someone, ask for forgiveness—both from Jesus and the person you hurt. Then trust Jesus to help you control your tongue in the future.

NEW CLOTHES

Camden and Callie grinned at each other as Mom pulled the car up to the sandy shores of the lake. They grabbed their shovels, raced to the edge of the sparkling water, and began to create castles with deep moats in the sand.

Suddenly, Camden cried out in pain and covered his eyes. “What’s the matter, sweetie?” Mom asked.

Camden pointed an accusatory finger at his sister. “Callie threw sand in my eyes—on purpose!” Mom carefully rinsed out Camden’s eyes with clean water. “Thanks, Mom.” Camden hurried off to jump into the beckoning water.

“Callie, could you please come here?”

Callie put her pink shovel down and plopped down next to Mom with a sigh.

“What just happened with your brother?” Mom asked.

“Well, I think he got upset because I accidentally threw sand at him.”

Mom’s eyes widened. “Accidentally?”

“Yep!”

“Is that what you would tell Jesus?” Mom asked softly.

Callie looked down. “No. I did throw the sand at him on purpose. I was mad because he started digging next to my castle’s moat and it crumbled. I’m sorry, Mom! I didn’t want to tell the truth and get in trouble.”

“Callie, you belong to Jesus, right?”

Callie smiled wide. “Yes I do!”


“Do you remember those verses in Colossians you memorized a few weeks ago?”

“The ones about not lying to each other because we’ve been made new in Jesus?”

Mom nodded. “Because we belong to Jesus, we have taken off our old selves, just like you’ll take off your sandy beach clothes later. You won’t put the dirty ones back on again tomorrow, will you?”

Callie wrinkled her nose. “No! I’ll put on new clothes!” She sighed. “I see what you mean, Mom. I’m not the same person I used to be. I belong to Jesus now, so I need to put on the new life He’s given me and trust Him to help me be like Him.”

Mom smiled. “Exactly! Now, don’t you think you should go apologize to your brother?”

Callie jumped up. “Yes! And the next time I want to tell a lie, I’ll remember to put on God’s truth instead. I don’t like dirty clothes!”  Savannah Coleman



PUT ON YOUR NEW LIFE | KEY VERSE: You have taken off those old clothes...

Now you are wearing a new life. Colossians 3:9-10 (ERV)



Do you belong to Jesus? If so, He’s forgiven your sin and made you a new person. That means it’s time to take off your old, sinful habits and put on the new life He’s given you. You’ll still feel the urge at times to lie or do other things that are wrong, but you don’t have to do those things anymore. Instead, embrace who you are in Jesus by speaking the truth and doing what’s right.

WAITING FOR THE ONE WHO KNOWS WHAT TO DO

Something was rubbing against the chain when Lyle tried to ride his bike, and with his mom's medical bills piling up, there was no way his family could afford a new one.

"Dad said he would fix that." His sister's voice came from behind him as he started to work on the bike himself.

"He's looking over the budget again," Lyle said. "He never has time." Lyle tugged on the wheel with all his might, and his mouth dropped open when he broke it right off the bike. "Oops."

"Lyle!" his sister exclaimed. "Now it can't even be fixed."

Lyle put a hand over his face. "I should have waited for Dad."

That evening Lyle's dad peeked into his room. "I just saw your bike. What happened?"

Lyle sighed. "I was trying to fix it."

"I told you I would take a look at it."

"I know, but you were so busy," Lyle said. "You have Mom to take care of, and you've been trying to figure out how you're going to pay the bills..."

Dad stepped into the room. "I have been busy. Life has been hard for all of us. I'm sorry."

"I was trying to fix it by myself and I ended up making things worse," Lyle said. "I don't know if you'll be able to fix it anymore."

"I'll look at it." Dad walked across the room. "You know, bud, you've got me thinking about something your mom has been telling me. She said that her sickness and our finances are out of my control. She sees me trying to fix things and tells me I need to stop, that I need to put it all in God's hands."

"Because He's our heavenly Father and knows best?" Lyle asked.

"Right." Dad smiled. "He's our Father because He loves us so much that He gave His Son to die for us. He sent Jesus to save us from sin because we could never do it ourselves." Dad sat down on the bed. "I mess up when I try to handle things on my own. I need to trust Him."

Lyle nodded. "I hope I didn't mess up the bike forever."

"Why don't we go take a look at it together?" said Dad. "And maybe we could ask God to show us what to do too."  *Emily Acker*



TRUST GOD AND WAIT FOR HIM | KEY VERSE: Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. Proverbs 3:5 (NIV)



What do you do when you have a problem and don't know what you should do? Do you ask God for help and wait for Him to take care of things? Or do you try to handle everything on your own? God loves you and cares about everything you're going through, and He wants you to come to Him for help. Instead of trying to fix things yourself, ask Him for help and trust Him to know what to do.

GOD'S WORD AND GLASSES



How about this pair, Mom?" Lizzie asked. She slid the glasses onto her face and peeked in the eye doctor's mirror.

"Those look nice on you." Mom held up another pair. "But try these frames on first before you decide which ones you want."

"Isn't it funny," Lizzie said as she stared at her reflection, "how much we care about how the glasses look when they're actually just to help me see!"

"That reminds me of something I read in my Bible this morning," Mom said. "Remember what happened when your old glasses broke and you went to school without them?"

Lizzie nodded. "I tripped on the steps because I couldn't see."

"Right. Well, just like glasses, we need God's Word to help us see clearly. The Bible helps us see how much we need Jesus to save us from sin and shows us how to live as God's children. But our glasses can't help us if we don't wear them."

Lizzie thought of her Bible sitting at home on her nightstand. She left it out because she liked the way her new pink Bible looked with her pink room decorations, but she hadn't opened it in quite a while.

"I guess the Bible won't do me much good if I don't read it," Lizzie said. "I'm going to try to start reading some verses every day."

Mom smiled. "That's great! As we read God's Word, He'll use it to shape our hearts and help us focus on Jesus and the hope we have in Him."

Later that week Mom and Lizzie returned to the doctor's office to pick up her new glasses.

"Wow!" Lizzie said as she looked around. "Having new glasses really makes a difference!" She remembered how earlier that week she had read a verse about showing God's love to others during her devotions. When she had felt angry at school because of a friend's mean words, she reminded herself of the verse. It helped her not say something mean back. *Mom was right*, she thought. *God used His Word to help me see what He wanted me to do in that situation.* Lizzie smiled and reached up to touch her new frames. *Just like glasses.* ♥ Jessica Kleeberger



GOD'S WORD HELPS US SEE CLEARLY | KEY VERSE: How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. Psalm 119:9 (NIV)



Have you ever needed to get glasses? It's fun to pick out nice frames, but the true purpose of glasses isn't to make you look good—it's to help you see! Our Bibles shouldn't be decorations either. They are God's special words that tell us the story of Jesus and how He died and rose again to give us eternal life. Through the Bible, we can clearly see our need for Him and how He wants us to live.

THE HIDDEN EAGLE

What are you making, Grandpa?" Elena asked, walking over to the porch swing where her grandfather was shaving slivers from a small block of wood.

Grandpa held it up to show her. "There's an eagle trapped in this wood, and I'm setting it free."

Elena looked closely at the block in his hands and then up at Grandpa. "I don't see anything in there."

Grandpa smiled. "Oh, it's there all right." He turned the wood block in his hand. "I'll show it to you later this evening."

When they all sat down to dinner that evening, Grandpa placed a newly carved eagle beside Elena's plate. "There you are, young lady," he said with a wink. "There's the eagle I set free from the wood."

Elena's eyes grew wide with amazement. "Wow!" she said. "It's so pretty!"


"I want you to have it," Grandpa said. "And whenever you look at it, I want you to remember that Jesus has done the same with you."

"Jesus made me like this eagle?" Elena asked.

Grandpa nodded. "You couldn't see the eagle in the block of wood this morning, but I could. I freed it from the wood and carved it into a special creation. It doesn't look like an old block of wood anymore, does it?"

"No," Elena said, picking up the sculpture. "Now it's a beautiful eagle!"

"Right," said Grandpa. "And that's what Jesus does for us. He died on the cross and rose from the dead to save us, and when we put our faith in Him, He sets us free from sin and makes us new people. We're no longer blocks of wood but new, beautiful creations. But sometimes we lose sight of that when we face difficult circumstances or make bad choices. That's why I made you this eagle—to help you remember that you're a beautiful sculpture in God's hands. You can always trust Him to forgive your mistakes and guide you in His plan for your life."

Elena looked at the eagle again. "Thank you, Grandpa," she said. "I'm going to put this on my dresser where I'll see it every day!"  *Richard S. Maffeo*



JESUS MAKES US BEAUTIFUL | KEY VERSE: For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)



Did you know that, if you trust in Jesus, you're like a beautiful eagle carved out of wood? You're no longer stuck in a block of sin—He's set you free and has made you into something new. The Bible compares God to an artist—a potter—molding you into something beautiful. Trust Him to forgive you when you mess up and to guide your steps as you live your life as a new creation.

SUMMER'S IN FULL SWING, AND SO IS WORD WITH ZACH!

IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO SIGN UP FOR A CHANCE TO WIN PRIZES!

WORDWITHZACH.ORG

CAMP RUMBLE-GRUMBLE

The dark sky over Star Mountain Camp rumbled with thunder. “Macaroni and cheese, everybody freeze!” Sam, the camp counselor, called out over the rowdy summer campers. It had been raining all week, and everyone was getting restless.

“For this next game, I’ll need volunteers,” Sam announced. Hands shot up all over the rec room. “You and you,” Sam said, pointing to twin brothers Aiden and Connor.

Choruses of “No fair!” and “I was first!” rose up from the grumbling campers.

“Okay, change of plans,” Sam said. “I think what everyone has is a case of the rumble-grumbles. It’s becoming an epidemic!”

“What’s a leopard-demic?” asked one of the younger campers.

“Epidemic,” Sam corrected. “It’s something that spreads—like a bad rash.”

“Ewww,” said the campers.

“So that’s something we want to fix fast, right?” Sam asked them. Young heads slowly started to nod. “Who remembers our Bible verse for the week?” asked Sam.

The twins raised their hands. “You, then you,” Sam said, pointing to each of them.

“Do everything without grumbling or arguing,” Connor began.

“So that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation,” Aiden continued. “Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky.”

“I want everyone to follow me,” Sam said, leading the way outside. He pointed at the sky as the group huddled together in the cool night air. “Check out the stars!”

Gazing at the sparkling sky far above them, murmurs of “Wow!” and “Awesome!” drifted up from the campers.

“That’s how Jesus wants *you* to shine—here at camp, when you go home, at school, wherever you are,” Sam told them. “How do you think you can do that?”

“I guess one way is to remember everything Jesus has done for us instead of grumbling,” Connor suggested.

“And that He wants us to love and encourage one another,” Aiden said thoughtfully.

“Right,” said Sam. “Remember, if you belong to Jesus, you reflect *Him*—just like those stars in the night sky.” He paused.

All was calm. All was bright.

“Hey!” Aiden exclaimed suddenly. “The sky stopped rumbling!”

Connor grinned. “And the campers have stopped grumbling.”  Kelly Hope



DON'T GRUMBLE | KEY VERSE: Do everything without grumbling or arguing...

Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky. Philippians 2:14-15 (NIV)



Do you find it easy to grumble or argue instead of being loving and encouraging to others? Remember that those who trust in Jesus shine like stars that stand out in the night sky. When you feel the rumble-grumbles coming on, remember that you belong to Jesus, who died to save you and fills your life with His love and blessings. Then trust Him to help you reflect His light.

NEW BABY

Peyton loved her new baby brother, Josiah, but lately it seemed like Mom and Dad didn't have time for her anymore. She and her mom used to do things together, just the two of them. But now all Mom seemed to be able to do was focus on Josiah. He had some health problems that required much of her parents' time.



When Dad got home from work, he and Peyton went outside to play ball. "I've been working on writing a song about Jesus!" Peyton said. "I've been practicing it in my head. I hope I don't forget it."

"That's great!" said Dad. "Would you like some help writing down the music for it?"

"That would be great!" Then Peyton's smile turned to a frown. "Mom said she didn't have time to help me with it today. She was really busy with Josiah again."

Dad stopped throwing the ball and thought for a moment. "We've been busy with him a lot these days, huh? Your mother and I knew you would have to share us with your little brother, but we never want either of you to think you're not important to us or that we don't have time for you."

"I know," said Peyton. Then she smirked. "I just wish we had a machine that would duplicate you and Mom so you could be there all the time for both of us!"

Dad laughed. "You know, even though we can't do anything like that, our heavenly Father can! He is always there for us, all the time. We can go to Him in prayer whenever we feel lonely or need help with something, knowing that He loves us so much that He sent Jesus, His own Son, to die for us and make us His children."

"That's a great thought, Dad! So even when you and Mom have to help Josiah, I can have peace knowing God is right there with me."

"That's right!" said Dad. "But always let Mom or me know when you need some time with us. We want to be there for you too." Dad tossed the ball to Peyton. "Now, as we finish our game, I want to hear that song you've been working on!" ❤️

Jonathan Wiles



GOD ALWAYS HAS TIME FOR YOU | KEY VERSE: God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Hebrews 13:5 (NIV)



Have you ever felt like you have to share your mom or dad with your brothers or sisters? Maybe someone in your family has health issues or other problems and needs extra attention. Your parents can't always give you their help or attention when you want it, but your heavenly Father can. Go to Him whenever you have a problem or feel sad. He always has time for you, no matter what!

CONSIDER THE COST

Yum!” Hazel said as her mom set a bowl of bright red strawberries on the table. They had just gotten home from the Fourth of July parade and were enjoying a snack on the patio.

“Can we go see the fireworks tonight?” Ollie asked as he popped a strawberry into his mouth. “And can Zane come with us?”

“As a matter of fact, we’ve asked Zane’s family to join us for a picnic before the fireworks,” Mom told him.

Dad smiled when Ollie let out a whoop. “I’ve been talking to Zane’s dad about Jesus lately,” Dad said. “He’s interested, but he says he can’t believe he doesn’t have to do something to earn his way to heaven—he says nothing is really free. Maybe I’ll get a chance to talk more about it with him tonight.”

Mom helped herself to some strawberries. “Did you kids enjoy the parade?” she asked.

“Yeah!” said Ollie. “When we were waiting in line to get popsicles, we talked to a man in a wheelchair. He was a veteran, and now we appreciate the freedom we have in this country more than we ever did before.”

Hazel nodded. “It never cost us anything, but it cost that man a whole lot.”


“And it cost some people even more—it cost them their lives,” Ollie added.

“It’s so easy to take our blessings for granted,” said Dad. “We forget that someone paid a big price for them.” He looked at Ollie and smiled. “You’ve given me an idea for helping Zane’s dad understand salvation.”

Ollie raised his eyebrows. “I have?”


Dad nodded. “Like I said, Zane’s dad thinks salvation can’t be free—he thinks it should cost something. Maybe I can show him that, like the liberties we enjoy in America, salvation is free to us, but someone paid a big price for it. It cost God the life of His only Son, Jesus. We can enjoy freedom from sin and life with God forever because Jesus was willing to pay the price for our salvation.”

“Wow!” said Hazel. “I’m so glad He paid the price so I could be free.”

“Me too,” said Dad. “Let’s pray that we can help Zane and his family understand that salvation is free for them too.”  *Barbara J. Westberg*

 **JESUS PAID FOR SALVATION** | KEY VERSE: You were bought at a price.

 1 Corinthians 6:20

 Do you realize what salvation cost? Jesus had to leave the glories of heaven and live in this sinful world. He had to take the punishment you deserve and suffer and die on a cross—all to pay the price for you to be saved from sin and have eternal life with Him. Because He paid that price, salvation is free to you. Accept His gift by trusting in Him today! (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 104.)

ALL THINGS

Kate squeezed sand between her toes as she watched a young mother swing her daughter around and catapult her into the water. The girl giggled and called out for more. Kate looked at her mom and remembered when she was strong and healthy enough to do the same thing with her. Now if Mom wanted to get in the water at the beach, she had to crawl through the sand until she reached the water's edge. Walking was just too painful most days.



Mom patted the blanket, and Kate curled up next to her. "Mom, why do you have this awful sickness? Why can't the doctors help you? I've been praying every day, but it seems like God isn't listening!"

Mom stroked Kate's silky hair. "I don't know, sweetie, but I'm so thankful you're praying for me. Don't give up! Remember what we read in Romans this morning about God always being with us and using everything in our lives for good?"


"I remember," Kate said. "It's just that all of this is so bad!"

Mom nodded sadly. "It is. But we have to keep trusting that God is working in all this bad and will make something good come out of it."

"Hey!" Kate sat straight up. "That reminds me of the story of Joseph. He was thrown into a pit by his brothers, sold into slavery, and thrown in jail for something he didn't do. But God used those bad things to place Joseph as second in command over Egypt. When there was a severe famine, Joseph was able to save many people's lives!"

Mom nodded. "Joseph trusted God, even though he didn't understand why He would allow all those bad things to happen to him. And we need to trust God in our situation. We don't know why He allowed me to get sick, but perhaps, like Joseph's hardships, it will help save people's lives by pointing them to Jesus. He did the greatest good of all by suffering and dying on a cross to save us, and we can trust Him to use everything in our lives for good too."

Kate looked at her mom. "I'll remind us to keep trusting Him."

Mom smiled. "I'd be thankful for that. And here's something else to be thankful for—we're at the beach, not in a stinky jail cell!"  Savannah Coleman



TRUST GOD IN HARD TIMES | KEY VERSE: We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God. Romans 8:28 (CSB)



Do you ever wonder why God allows people you love to get sick or hurt? This world we live in is full of pain and sorrow, but we are not alone. Jesus knows what it's like to go through pain and suffering, and He promises to be with us in everything we face and use it for good. He died and rose again so we could have a future free from pain, sickness, and death. We can trust Him.

BIANCA'S BABY BOOK

Look, Bianca!" Mom was sitting on the couch with a big book on her lap. "Here's a lock of your hair from when you were three months old—and look at your footprint from when you were born."

Bianca grinned. "Wow! It's really tiny! That's my baby book, isn't it? It's been a long time since I've looked at it."

"I wrote all these entries in it during your first three years," Mom said. "It says you walked and talked early. You took your first step at nine months. You said 'Dada' at five months—at least, your dad said you did—and you could sing the ABCs by the time you were two and a half. You were a smart little cookie."

"Really?" Bianca sighed. "Well, I'm not smart anymore. I'm always doing dumb things now."

"That's not true," said Mom. "Sometimes you just dwell on your mistakes too much." She pointed to the book. "Why do you think I didn't write things like, 'Today Bianca fell down fifteen times trying to walk?'"


Bianca laughed. "That wouldn't sound too good."

"No, but falling down is part of learning to walk," said Mom. "I don't remember how many times you fell, but I do remember that first step. I didn't record the times you cried for what seemed like hours. But you were a sweet baby, and I recorded that. Moms always write good memories in baby books." She smiled at Bianca. "Did you know that God has a book of remembrance too?"

"He does? Does He only write down good things in His book like moms do?"

Mom nodded. "He doesn't keep a record of the wrong things Christians do. When we trust in Jesus, all our sins are forgiven. He only remembers the good things."

"So He doesn't want us to feel bad about all the wrong things we've done?"

Mom shook her head. "Sin does have consequences, and when we do something wrong, Jesus wants us to confess our sin to Him. But it will never show up in God's remembrance book because Jesus took all our sins on Himself when He died. Instead of dwelling on our mistakes, He wants us to show His love to others and joyfully walk with Him."  *Barbara J. Westberg*



GOD REMEMBERS GOOD THINGS | KEY VERSE: Love is patient, love is kind...it keeps no record of wrongs. 1 Corinthians 13:4-5 (NIV)



Did you know that, if you're a Christian, God doesn't keep a record of your sins? He only remembers the good things you do out of the love He's put in your heart. So don't dwell on your failures and mistakes. When you do something wrong, confess it to Jesus. He promises to forgive you and help you do good things that show the love and joy you have in Him.

CANNING THE WORD

“What a summer this has turned out to be!” said Leah. “When we moved to the country, I thought I’d be riding horses and wading in the creek. But lately it seems like all I’ve been doing is snapping beans, husking corn, shelling peas, and now peeling peaches for canning and freezing.”

Mom smiled. “I think you’ve found plenty of time for fun things too, and when winter comes, you’ll be glad we have all this food preserved.”

Leah shrugged. “Maybe, but I’m tired of it now!”

A few months later, shortly after Christmas, a blizzard began. Soon Leah and her family were snowed in.

“Oh, Mom, what are we going to do?” Leah asked as she stared through the window at the swirling snow. “It might be days before we can get out!”

Mom smiled. “Well, we’ve got lots of wood for the fire, and the freezer is full of meat. And we’ve got plenty of good home-canned food too.”

“That’s true!” said Leah. “There’s no danger we’ll go hungry, is there?” She sighed. “But I’m so bored! It’s too windy and cold to play outside. What can I do that’s fun?”

Mom laughed. “You have lots of books and games and puzzles. You could also memorize your verses for church.”

“Yeah, but I don’t see why we have to learn so many verses,” said Leah. “We’ve got lots of Bibles—and you and Dad even have Bibles on your phones. Anytime we need a verse, we can just look it up.”

“Remember how you complained about all that canning and freezing last summer?” Mom asked. “Now that a storm came along and we’re snowed in and can’t get to the store, we’re glad we have lots of food stored up, right?”

“Sure,” Leah said.

“Well, in life, you never know when stormy times will come. There may be times when you’ll face temptation or need to remember God’s love for you or have a chance to tell someone about Jesus, and it’s not always possible or convenient to look up verses in the Bible or on a phone. Then you’ll be glad to have those verses stored in your heart so you can feast on God’s Word anytime!”

“So I should ‘can’ those verses?” Leah asked with a smile. “Okay, I will!” ♥

Barbara J. Westberg



MEMORIZE BIBLE VERSES | KEY VERSE: All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. 2 Timothy 3:16 (NIV)



Do you memorize God’s Word? Memorizing Bible verses is a great way to help you remember what Jesus has done for you and share Him with others. Verses you’ve learned can be a help, encouragement, and comfort to you. Think about what each verse means as you memorize. Then store it in your heart so you’ll have it whenever you need it.



ACTIVITY

Want some help canning God's Word? Try this fun challenge!

Things you'll need:

- A medium-sized jar
- Note cards or other paper
- Markers, gel pens, stickers, etc.

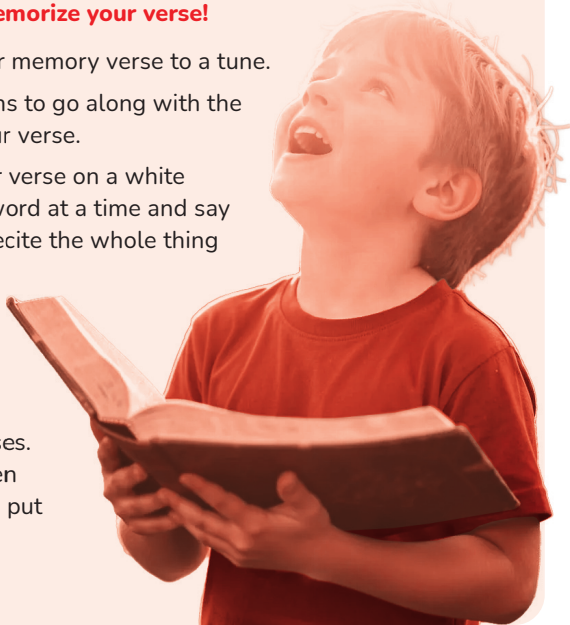


What you'll need to do:

1. Find a few verses you would like to learn. (Ask an adult for suggestions if you need help.)
2. Look up each verse and write it on a note card. Get creative! Try fun fonts or use different colors for the words. You could also include doodles, stickers, beads, ribbon—anything you like!
3. Place your verse cards inside the jar. You could even decorate your jar by taping a drawing of yours to the front or putting stickers on it.
4. Set your goal. Would you like to learn one verse a day, a week, a month? If you miss your goal, don't worry. Just start again!
5. Take one verse card out and try to learn it by the end of the day/week/month. Once you've learned it, start again with another card. Soon you'll have a good supply of verses stored in your heart for whenever you need them!

Have some fun as you memorize your verse!

- **Sing it!** Try putting your memory verse to a tune.
- **Sign it!** Make up motions to go along with the words or phrases in your verse.
- **Erase it!** Write out your verse on a white board, then erase one word at a time and say it back. See if you can recite the whole thing after you've erased all the words!
- **Scramble it up!** Write your verse on a piece of paper and cut it into separate words or phrases. Scramble the pieces, then see how quickly you can put the words back in order.



FALLING SEED



Tell me, kids—if something good happened to you, would you keep it to yourself?” Mr. Miller asked his class at church.

“No!” came the answer as all the kids shook their heads.

“We like to share our good news with our friends, don’t we?”

Mr. Miller continued. “Yet when it comes to the greatest news of all—Jesus saving us by dying for our sins and coming back to life—we often keep that a secret. Why do you suppose that is?” This time, no one could answer Mr. Miller’s question. “If we know Jesus, we need to tell others about Him,” said Mr. Miller. “Let’s bow our heads a moment and ask the Lord to give each of us the name of a friend who needs to hear about Him.”

The children sat quietly, and a name came to Dominic’s mind. *Oh no!* he thought. *Not Thatcher! He’ll never listen!*

After class, Dominic talked with Mr. Miller about it. “Look out the window,” Mr. Miller said. “See the tree growing in the middle of those huge rocks on that hillside? How do you think it got there?”

Dominic shrugged. “I guess a seed from another tree fell there and took root.”

“Do you think the parent tree worried about how hard the rocks looked when it let the seed drop?” Mr. Miller asked. Dominic shook his head. “That’s right,” said Mr. Miller. “The tree just let the seed fall, and God did the rest. That’s what we need to do too. We need to tell others about Jesus so the seed of His good news can fall. Don’t worry about how it takes root. That’s God’s work, and He can handle it.”

Dominic still looked uncertain. “Thatcher’s my friend, but I feel like he’s just gonna laugh at me if I try to tell Him about Jesus.”

“It can be scary to tell our friends about Jesus when we don’t know how they’ll respond,” Mr. Miller said. “But remember that God loves Thatcher and has the power to save him, and He’ll be with you the whole time. Pray for Thatcher, and ask Jesus to give you an opportunity to let him know what He’s done for him. He’ll help you spread the seed of His good news in Thatcher’s heart.” ♥ Agnes Livezey



TELL FRIENDS ABOUT JESUS | KEY VERSE: I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. 1 Corinthians 3:6 (NLT)



Are you afraid your friends won’t listen to you if you tell them about Jesus? It can be scary, but trust Jesus to help you spread the seed of His good news. Faithfully pray for friends who don’t know Him, and watch for opportunities to talk about Jesus and what He’s done for you. Leave the rest up to God—He’s the one who makes the seed take root.

FROM SUNFLOWER TO SON-FOLLOWER

Reagan peered out the window, wearing her soccer uniform and munching on a sandwich. Dad's car pulled up and honked. It was Dad's week to watch her. "Bye, Mom!" Reagan hollered. She slung her bag over her shoulder and ran outside. "Dad! I learned something so cool!" Reagan said, plopping her bag at her feet. She balanced her sandwich on one knee while she buckled up. "Oh yeah?" Dad asked. They rolled past the neighbor's sunflower garden. "What's that?"

"See those sunflowers? Did you know they're edible from root to petal? They're used for all kinds of stuff! Like making sunflower oil, for one thing."

Dad nodded. "I use that to cook with sometimes."

"But the coolest thing about them is heliotropism!" Reagan continued. "That's a fancy word for how a plant grows in response to sunlight. It's easy to see in a sunflower, 'cuz they actually follow the sun's movement—like solar tracking! It helps the plant's growth rate and use of light. Isn't that the coolest?"

Dad chuckled at Reagan's enthusiasm. "Sounds like you're really into sunflowers."

"I am! You know why I think they're so cool?" Reagan asked as she took another bite of her sandwich. "Brehcuzz—"

"Hold on!" Dad said with another chuckle. "Chew your food first. Then you can tell me all about it."

Reagan swallowed. "Sorry. 'Cuz in church, I learned we're supposed to fix our eyes on Jesus and follow Him. Well, Jesus is God's Son, right? So following the Son of God is like sunflowers following the sun in the sky. We can be Son-followers! Jesus gives us life by shining His light on us and making us grow."

Dad pulled the car into the soccer complex and parked. "Hmm. That's some sermon, Reagan. You know I don't go to church, but it sure sounds like you're excited about it."

"I am! Sunflowers are so cheerful—and I want you to have the joy of knowing Jesus like I do. You could be a Son-follower too, Dad." Reagan looked across the parking lot. "Oh! There's my coach. Gotta go!"

Reagan shoved the rest of her sandwich into her mouth, grabbed her soccer gear, and hopped out of the car. Dad watched her run to catch up with the rest of her team. ♥

Pearl Allard



FOLLOW GOD'S SON, JESUS | KEY VERSE: [Jesus] saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him. Matthew 9:9



Have you experienced the joy of knowing Jesus? Like sunflowers following the sun as it moves across the sky, Christians follow the Son of God. He fills us with His light and makes us grow to be more like Him. When others see His light and joy shine through us, they might want to be Son-followers too! You can become a Son-follower today by trusting in Jesus. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.)

HOSPITALITY HABITS

Hannah gave herself a quick look in the mirror while Faith twirled around in her new skirt. “Girls!” Mom called. “Our company is almost here!” The sisters giggled and raced down the hall.

A few minutes later, Mrs. Kelly arrived with her daughter Brittany, who was about the girls’ age, and Brittany’s little sister, Samantha. The girls brought Brittany to their room to play, and Samantha toddled after them. The first thing little Samantha did when she entered the girls’ room was give Faith’s new stuffed kitty a big squeeze.

Faith gasped. “Samantha! No! Please put my kitty down!” She took it from Samantha’s hands and placed it out of her reach.

Ten minutes later the girls were having a tea party when Samantha accidentally bumped into the table and the carefully placed dishes came crashing down. “Samantha!” Hannah said sternly. “You’re ruining everything!”

“I’ll take her back to Mom,” Brittany said quietly. She took her younger sister by the hand and led her out of the room.

While Mrs. Kelly changed Samantha’s diaper, Mom came to check on her daughters. “How’s it going in here, girls?”

Faith sighed. “Brittany’s nice and all, but her baby sister is messing up all our stuff!”

“Yeah!” Hannah chimed in. “She even almost broke my favorite pony!”

“Girls, do you remember the verse we learned this morning? First Peter 4:9?”

“Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling,” the girls mumbled together.

Mom nodded. “Jesus sacrificed everything so He could welcome us into His family, and hospitality is one of the ways we show His love to others. Do you think the way you were acting toward Samantha was very hospitable?”

The girls looked at the floor and shook their heads.

“Well, how can you make this right?” Mom asked.

“Wait and see!” Faith said with a grin.

When Brittany and Samantha walked in a minute later, the girls knelt down beside Samantha and offered her two of their favorite stuffed animals. “Pet her head, Samantha,” Faith said, holding out her stuffed kitty. “She’s so fluffy.” Samantha pet the kitty’s head and giggled.

Mom beamed and headed for the door. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need to go share my favorite chocolates with Mrs. Kelly!”  Savannah Coleman



PRACTICE HOSPITALITY | KEY VERSE: Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. 1 Peter 4:9 (NIV)



Is it hard for you to share your special toys and treats when others come to visit you? A great way to practice hospitality is to remember two things: 1) People always matter more than things, and 2) God gave us everything we have so we could use it to show others His love. When we open our homes to others, it opens our hearts to them as well.

TAKE OUT THE TRASH

Dad closed the trunk of the car. “Okay, everything’s packed. Let’s go!”
 “Wait!” Mom called. “Aria and Nolan, please empty the trash in the bedrooms and kitchen before we leave.”

“I’ll get the bedrooms,” Aria said.

Nolan went to the kitchen and glanced at the trash bag. It wasn’t even full. *I’ll empty it when we get back*, he thought, and ran to claim his spot in the car.

A few hours later, they pulled into the hotel parking lot. “It looks like a windstorm tore through here,” Mom said. “Cans are tipped over with trash scattered everywhere.”

Dad nodded. “Maybe some racoons had a party.”

“Speaking of trash...” Mom looked into the back seat. “Was the garbage emptied?”

“Yup,” Aria proudly announced.

There was a long silence, and Dad looked at Nolan in the rearview mirror. “How about you?”

“It was only half full,” Nolan said. “I thought it could wait.”

“Oh no!” said Mom. “I threw out some spoiled food this morning.” She sighed. “I wish you had done what I asked you to, Nolan. In a couple days, the kitchen is going to smell like a garbage dump!”

“This reminds me of a true story,” Dad said. “Forty years ago, the city of Philadelphia had a huge garbage problem. The trash collectors went on strike, and trash piled up in the whole city and smelled horrible for twenty days!”

“Gross!” Aria wrinkled her nose.

“They decided to burn the garbage, load the ash onto a ship, and sail it away. The ship sailed to several different countries, but no one would take the ash.”

“Well, at least we don’t have that much trash in our kitchen,” Nolan said.

“No, but sin is like garbage we can’t get rid of ourselves,” Dad replied. “But unlike that ship, we know someone who’s always willing to take it away if we ask Him.”

The answer was easy. “Jesus,” Nolan said. “We can confess our sin to Him, and He’ll take out the trash and make us clean.” He sighed. “I’m sorry I messed up and didn’t obey you. I’ll take out the trash the minute we get home.”

Dad grinned. “By then, you’ll need a fly swatter, mask, and gloves!” ❤️

Matt Shoemaker



JESUS TAKES OUR TRASH | 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



Is there a stinky sin weighing on your heart? Do you have trash in your life that needs to be taken out? Ask Jesus to remove it. He died and rose again to save you from sin and is always willing to take out your trash. When you confess your sin to Him, He will gladly forgive you and take it far away!

ACCEPTING THE SCENIC ROUTE

“Where are we going, Grandma?” Daisy asked.

Grandma opened the gate separating her backyard from the woods behind it. “A place you’ll enjoy,” she replied with a smile.

As they walked through the woods, Daisy noticed little chipmunks scurrying up tree trunks, making her giggle. When the wind whistled through the piney limbs, Daisy clung closer to Grandma. “Are you sure you know where we’re going?” Daisy asked.

“Do you trust me?” Grandma replied, squeezing Daisy’s hand. Daisy nodded. “It’s just a little further,” said Grandma.

The edge of the woods opened onto a farm where sheep and cattle grazed on the grassy hills. A lamb bumped over and put his hooves against the wooden fence.

“My friend owns this farm,” Grandma said. “I thought you would love seeing the animals.”

Daisy let the lamb tickle her fingers with his nose. “He’s so cute!” she said. “But why didn’t we just drive here? The path through the woods took forever!”

Grandma leaned against the fence. “Do you think there were any benefits to taking the scenic path?”

Daisy scrunched up her nose. “Well, we got to spend more time together.”

Grandma nodded. “I love spending time with you. What else?”


“The forest was more interesting than the main road,” Daisy added. “Oh! And I had to trust that you knew where we were going.”

“That’s right,” Grandma said. “Do you remember in the Bible when God led the Israelites in the wilderness for forty years before bringing them to the Promised Land?”

“I remember,” Daisy said. “Didn’t God know a faster route?”

“Yes, but God wanted them to learn to rely on Him,” Grandma said. “Instead of trusting God, the Israelites complained and disobeyed Him, which is why God kept them in the wilderness for so long. And through their waiting, they got to experience more miracles, such as God sending them food from heaven and keeping their clothes and sandals from wearing out.”

“It’s hard for me to wait on God sometimes,” Daisy said.

“I know,” Grandma said. “But He’s helping you learn to rely on Him too. As you follow Jesus along the path He has for you, keep your eyes open for the ways He shows you His love and grace on your journey.”  *Hannah Chung*



GOD’S PATH IS BEST | KEY VERSE: In all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:6 (NIV)



Are you waiting for something right now? Do you wonder if God is in control when things don’t happen when you want them to? Remember that God’s timing is perfect, even when you don’t understand it. Look for ways Jesus is showing you His love and grace through waiting periods and trust Him to use scenic routes to help you grow in your faith.

A CONSTANT FRIEND

On Friday, Noah had an invitation to a birthday party and another to a sleepover—and he couldn't go to both. It was hard choosing between his friends, and he didn't want to hurt anyone's feelings. Then on Sunday, Noah tried contacting his friends to see if anyone wanted to hang out, but they were all busy.

"You look bored," his grandpa said when he came over that evening.

Noah sat back on the couch with a sigh. "I thought my friends might want to hang out today, but they all have other plans."

"I see." Grandpa sat down beside him.

"Friends are confusing," Noah said. "Sometimes everyone wants to hang out with you, and sometimes no one can. Sometimes we all get along, and sometimes we fight."

"Sounds like most relationships," Grandpa said. "But I'm glad there's one constant in my life."

"Grandma?" Noah asked.

Grandpa smiled. "No. Even we disagree occasionally. But there is someone who never lets me down."

"It's not me," Noah said with a knit brow. "I'm pretty sure Dad has let you down before too."

"Any more guesses?" Grandpa asked.

Noah shook his head, feeling stumped.


"God," Grandpa said. "He has never let me down."

"God?" Noah asked.

Grandpa nodded. "He's always there for me. The Bible tells us that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and for the rest of eternity. He is never going to change. Even when your friends aren't available or things get confusing, you can rely on God to be steady and constant in your life."

Noah ran his fingers through his hair. "I'm glad God's with me, but it's not exactly the same."

"As having a friend you can play with? Maybe not. But Jesus said that everyone who trusts Him as their Savior is His friend. He is our perfect friend who gave His life to save us and always listens and cares about everything going on in our lives. When you need a friend, you can always talk to Him."

"Thanks, Grandpa." Noah gave his grandpa a fist bump. "You're a pretty good friend too."  *Bethany Acker*



JESUS IS A CONSTANT FRIEND | KEY VERSE: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Hebrews 13:8 (NIV)



Are friendships ever confusing for you? Friends are a gift from God, but they can't always be there when we want them to be and sometimes let us down. But you can have a constant friend who will never fail you. Jesus is available all the time, and He never changes. He loves you and gave His life to be your friend forever. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.) Go to Him and tell Him what's on your mind.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Nora let the door bang shut just as her brother reached it. “Well, *thanks*,” Lloyd said sarcastically.

“You never hold the door open for me,” said Nora.

“You never hold the door open for me,” echoed Lloyd.

Nora scowled. “Don’t copy me.”

“Don’t copy me.”

“Stop it, Lloyd!” yelled Nora.

“Stop it, Lloyd!” came the echo. Nora ran to her room and slammed the door.

As Nora and her friend Zoe walked home from the bus stop the next day, Zoe’s brother Tracen caught up with them. “How’d you do on the spelling test, Zoe?” he asked.

“Great!” Zoe replied. “I got all the words right!”

“Awesome!” Tracen started running to catch up with a friend. “I’ll make popcorn when we get home!” he yelled over his shoulder. Zoe grinned and waved as he left.

Nora looked at Zoe. “Are you and Tracen always so nice to each other?”

“We used to fight a lot,” said Zoe. “But we’ve been learning about Jesus at church and how He loves us so much He died for us and wants us to love others and live in peace. That means caring about other people’s feelings, even when they’re not nice to us. So I tried it, and Tracen did too, and it really made a difference! Sometimes we forget, but we get along a lot better now.”

Maybe I should try that with Lloyd, Nora thought.

Lloyd arrived home just as Nora ran up the steps, so she held the door open for him. “What’s wrong with you?” he asked.

“Nothing,” replied Nora.

“Nothing,” Lloyd repeated. Nora just laughed and went to her room.

At dinner, Nora handed the potatoes to Lloyd before taking some herself. “How was school?” she asked.

“Terrible,” said Lloyd. “I don’t get multiplication.”

“I’ll help you tonight if you want,” Nora offered.

Lloyd was startled. “Why?”

“Because I want to,” Nora replied. Lloyd gave her a strange look, and Nora could hardly believe it when he passed the chicken so she could take a piece first. *Thank you, Jesus*, she prayed silently. *Please help us learn to live in peace.* ❤️ *Janice M. Jones*



BE A PEACEMAKER AT HOME | KEY VERSE: Turn away from evil and do what is good; seek peace and pursue it. Psalm 34:14 (CSB)



Are you kind to your brothers and sisters? Or do you tease them or treat them badly—especially when they treat you the same way? It’s not easy to be kind to someone who’s not being kind to you, but Jesus can help you bring peace to your relationships. Trust Him to help you show His love to your brothers and sisters and bring peace to your home.

AFTER SNOWBUNNY

Whiskers, Lincoln's kitten, leaped into the air and batted the shoestring Lincoln was swinging back and forth. "I don't care how nice Todd is, no one can ever take Dad's place," Lincoln told Uncle Shawn. "I don't want a stepfather." He sighed. His dad had died a few years before, and now his mom was getting remarried.

"Todd isn't trying to take your dad's place, Lincoln," said Uncle Shawn. "He's a good man who loves your mom, and he wants to be there for you too."

"I don't care," Lincoln said. "He's not Dad, so he might as well stop trying to make me like him."

When Whiskers got tired of the shoelace, he jumped up onto Lincoln's lap and purred. Lincoln smiled and petted the kitten's head.

"How long ago did you lose your first cat?" Uncle Shawn asked.

"Snowbunny? A few months ago," Lincoln replied sadly.


"That's what I thought, so I'm really surprised to see you treating Whiskers the way you do," Uncle Shawn said. "You're just as nice to him as you were to Snowbunny."

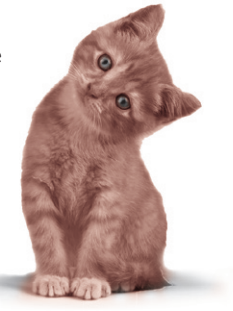
Lincoln frowned. "So? What's wrong with that?"


"Don't you miss Snowbunny?" Uncle Shawn asked.


"Of course," said Lincoln. "But Snowbunny is gone, and now I have Whiskers. He's a different cat, but he's special in his own way, and I'm glad I have him."

Uncle Shawn nodded. "I understand, and I think it's a bit similar to your situation with Todd. I don't think Todd is trying to be the same as your dad. He knows you loved your dad and would never try to take his place. But if you give him a chance, I think you'll be glad to have him as part of your family. More than that, since he knows Jesus, he's already part of your Christian family. God puts other Christians in our lives because He loves us and wants us to show His love to one another. I'm sure Todd will do that for you and your mom, and you can show Todd God's love in return by giving him a chance and respecting him as your stepfather."

Lincoln looked at the kitten purring in his lap. "Okay, Uncle Shawn," he said. "I guess I can do that."  *Susan Arcand*



 **RESPECT STEPPARENTS** | KEY VERSE: Be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. 1 Peter 3:8 (NIV)

 Do you have a stepparent? Most stepparents try very hard to fill a difficult position. They know they can never replace your mom or dad, but they can be a wonderful presence and help in your life, especially if they know Jesus. Remember that Jesus is with you in all the changes you face in life and trust Him to help you show His love to stepparents.



HEY ZACH!

Hey, kids! I'm Zach, host of the *Keys for Kids* radio program. Have you ever had one of those days when you just don't feel like reading your Bible? You're not alone. Everyone feels that way sometimes—even grown-ups! But there are lots of things we don't always feel like doing that are still important, like brushing your teeth, eating healthy food, or cleaning your room. Sometimes we don't want to do them, but we know they help us stay healthy. Reading the Bible can be like that too.

One important thing to remember is that feelings aren't always the best guide for what is true or important. Feelings can also change quickly. If someone says something mean, you might suddenly feel sad or angry. If you wake up with a cold, you might feel miserable all day. Feelings are real, but they don't always tell us what is best.

So, instead of thinking about Bible reading as a chore, try thinking about it as a conversation with God. When you read the Bible, God is speaking to you through His Word. When you pray, you are speaking back to Him. That means every time you open your Bible, you are starting a conversation with God!

And here's something amazing: Even if you don't feel like reading the Bible, God can use His Word to make you feel better. Lots of people find that after reading the Bible, they feel much better because it reminded them of God's love and promises.

**So the next time you don't feel like reading your Bible, remember:
You're not just reading a book. You're talking with God!**



Ready to start reading your Bible this summer?
WORD with Zach starts on June 1! Sign up at
WORDwithZach.org for a chance to win prizes.

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, send it to me at keysforkids.org/HeyZach

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

A CONVERSATION WITH GOD

Ready to have a conversation with God? In the left column below are Bible verses. Look up each one and read it slowly, remembering that God speaks to us through His Word. As you read, think about what God might be saying to you. Then, in the right column, write your response. It could be a request, a question, or something you're thinking about after reading the verse. (The first one has been filled in as an example.)

To keep going, you can write down more verses in a notebook and your prayers in response. The key verses in *Keys for Kids* stories are a great place to start!

What God says

What I say (prayers)

Joshua 1:9

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go (NIV).

Sometimes I get nervous speaking in front of my class. Thank you for reminding me that You are always with me. I'll remember that next time!

Deuteronomy 31:6

Psalm 23:1

Philippians 4:6-7

Psalm 119:105

EXPRESS YOURSELF

HEY ZACH!
keysforkids.org/heyzach

FLICKERING FIREFLIES

The evening was cool and clear. The earthy smell of the forest filled the air, and stars shone brightly through the trees. A group of boys and their teacher lingered around the dying campfire at their youth group retreat. “Wow!” Joshua said, craning his head back. “The stars are really bright tonight.”

Enoch looked up toward the sky. “They just look brighter because there are no other lights around,” he said. “They stand out more against the darkness.”

“I see a firefly,” said Joshua. “Look! Over there.” He pointed toward a tree a few feet away from the fire. The light of the firefly flickered in an on-and-off pattern.

“Maybe he’s sending a message in Morse code,” Enoch said. “Quick, Josh, figure out what he’s trying to say.” The boys laughed as they watched the firefly blink on and off.

Mr. Bardot, their teacher, looked thoughtful. “Fireflies are amazing little creatures,” he said. “And they have a good lesson to teach us as Christians. Can you guess what it might be?”

The boys were silent for a moment. “I know!” said Enoch. “That we need to let our lights shine for Jesus.”

“Yeah,” said Joshua. “But not the way fireflies do.”

“Why not?” asked Mr. Bardot.

“Because whenever our lights are shining, they help draw people to Jesus. So we want them to shine all the time, not flicker on and off.”


Mr. Bardot nodded. “Good thinking. What things might keep our lights from shining?”

“I think our lights flicker when we’re unkind or selfish or do things we know are wrong,” Enoch said quietly. “Like lying to our parents or cheating on a test.”

“Or saying something mean to someone,” added Joshua.

“You’re right,” said Mr. Bardot. “Doing things like that doesn’t show others Jesus’s light and the love He’s put in our hearts.”

“So how can we keep our lights for Jesus from flickering?” asked Enoch.

“By depending on Him to help us reflect His love in all we say and do,” said Mr. Bardot. “He loves us so much that He gave His life for us, and He gives us the Holy Spirit so we can shine the light of His love to others. Let’s rely on Him to help us shine brightly as steady lights in the darkness.”  *Linda J. Dahlin*



BE A STEADY LIGHT FOR JESUS | KEY VERSE: Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:16 (NIV)



Does your light for Jesus shine all the time, or does it flicker on and off? Do you consistently treat others with kindness, or only if they’re your friends or you’re in a good mood? When you put your faith in Jesus, He gave you the Holy Spirit so you can show His love to others in everything you say and do. Let His light shine through you so others can see His love for them.

PRETTY PRESENTS

Whoa!" Vivian exclaimed when she saw the pile of things her mother had laid out on the table. "Is Gracie getting all of that for her birthday?"

Mom nodded. "Grandma brought some of it over. She found a lot of things on sale, so your little niece is probably getting more than she needs. I offered to wrap Grandma's gifts for her."

Vivian sat down beside her mom. "Can I help?"

"You sure can," Mom replied.

Vivian chose a doll in a pink dress. She wrapped it in bright purple paper and tied a silver ribbon around the package. "There! That looks really pretty, doesn't it? But do you know what I like most about presents?"

"What's that?" Mom asked.

"What's inside them," said Vivian. "That's the best part of a present."

"I agree," said Mom, a thoughtful expression crossing her face. "P-r-e-s-e-n-t spells an interesting word. It can be pronounced *present*, which is another word for gift, or it can be *present*, which means to give."

Vivian laughed. "So when I give a gift, I *present* a present."

Mom nodded. "That makes me think of a verse in the Bible—one that tells us to present ourselves to God."

Vivian reached for more wrapping paper. "If we do that, are we making ourselves a present for Him? And if our lives are a present, we should make sure they're filled with good things, right?"

"Well, actually, we have nothing good in ourselves to offer God," Mom said. "We're saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus. When God looks at us, He sees Jesus's goodness, not our own."

"But the Bible tells us to do good things after we're saved, doesn't it?" asked Vivian.

"Yes," Mom said. "When we put our faith in Jesus, He gives us His Spirit so we can show His love to others and serve Him."

Vivian held up the present she had just finished wrapping. "So it's not enough to just look good on the outside, like we're wrapped in pretty paper. When we present ourselves to Jesus, He makes us good on the inside. That's the kind of present God wants."

"That's right," said Mom. "It's what's inside that counts." ♥ *Eunice C. Matchett*



JESUS MAKES YOU GOOD | KEY VERSE: Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. Romans 12:1 (CSB)



Has Jesus made you good on the inside? Or are you trying to make yourself look good on your own? You have nothing good in yourself, but when you trust Jesus as your Savior, He gives you His goodness and makes you a truly pleasing gift to God. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.) Then you can let others see His love and goodness in the way you live.

WALKING HOME

Owen looked at the frail man on the bed. *Grandpa's getting so weak*, he thought. *I know he's going to die soon.* "Are you afraid, Grandpa?" he asked.

"No, Owen." Grandpa smiled as he reached for Owen's hand. "I'm not afraid to die. Jesus is with me. I'm going home to be with Him."

Owen nodded, but he thought he'd be afraid anyway. After all, he couldn't see Jesus!

Later that afternoon, Owen got a text from his friend Kian. "Wanna come over for a while?" Kian asked. "Mom says you can stay for supper." After checking with his mom, Owen walked across the field to Kian's house.

A few hours later, the boys had just finished a game when Owen glanced out the window. "It's already dark!" he said, jumping to his feet. "I gotta go!"

As Owen started across the field, he could barely make out the path. The moon was hidden behind the clouds, casting weird shadows on the waving grass. Strange sounds came from the trees at the edge of the field. Owen's heart thumped, and his knees felt weak. *Don't be a baby*, he told himself. *Shadows can't hurt anyone.*

"Owen?" a voice called from the darkness. For a second, Owen's heart almost stopped, but then he recognized the familiar voice.

"Dad! I'm so glad to see you!" Owen said in a wobbly voice. "Or at least, I'm glad to hear you. It's so dark, I can hardly see anything."

"I know. I came to walk home with you," Dad said. "I thought you might like some company crossing this dark field." With Dad beside him, Owen felt like the shadows were friendly, and the sounds were no longer scary.

When they got home, Owen went to Grandpa's room to tell him about the experience. "Once I knew Dad was there, I wasn't scared anymore," Owen said, "even though I couldn't see him. It was almost like I could feel him with me." He hesitated. "Is that kind of how you're not afraid to die?"

"Exactly," said Grandpa. "Death is like a dark shadow, and even though I can't see Jesus, I know He's there. I feel His presence, and with Him beside me, there's nothing to be afraid of."

Owen nodded, beginning to understand.  *Barbara J. Westberg*



CHRISTIANS DON'T HAVE TO FEAR DEATH | KEY VERSE: Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me. Psalm 23:4



Do you know someone who is dying? Are you afraid of dying yourself? For a Christian, death is like a shadow. As Psalm 23 says, you don't have to fear death when Jesus is with you. In fact, the last verse of the Psalm tells what will happen to you if you know Jesus as your Savior. It says you will "dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Jesus promises to walk with you through everything, even death, and bring you home to heaven with Him.

WITH LOVE



Keira, let me help you with that.” Alexis reached for a pile of laundry needing to be folded. “It will earn me points for my youth group contest. I want to get the most points so I can win!” One of the ways kids in the youth group could earn points was by helping the members of their family.

Keira frowned and batted her sister’s hands away. “I’m not signing any paper saying you helped me with anything. Just leave me and my things alone!”

The other members of Alexis’s family were delighted with her behavior. They could hardly believe how helpful she had suddenly become—she did dishes, made beds, offered to help with her brother’s homework, babysat, and even carried out the trash! Keira was the only one who refused her help.

Alexis did well in the contest, but she didn’t win. Yet to everyone’s surprise, her helpful ways continued.


One day, Keira asked Alexis to help her fold the laundry. Alexis was puzzled. “Why do you let me do things for you now?” she asked. “When we were having the contest, you wouldn’t let me do anything for you.”

“Well, now you really want to help me,” Keira replied. “Before, you just did it for points.”

Alexis thought about that. “I guess that’s true. I wanted to win the prize for getting the most points.”

“Why do you want to help now?” Keira asked.

“Well, on the day the contest ended, Miss Wilson talked about a Bible passage that says no matter how much good we do, without love, our good deeds are worthless in God’s sight. She said that’s why she came up with the contest in the first place—to show how often we might think we’re earning points with God when we do good things, but if we don’t have the love of Jesus in our hearts, our good deeds mean nothing. She said we need to trust in Jesus and depend on Him to help us do things for others out of love, and I realized she was right.” Alexis grinned at her sister. “I’m glad you can tell the difference.”

“I can.” Keira laughed. “But now I’m sorry I didn’t help you win the contest!” 
Agnes Livezey



LOVE ONE ANOTHER | KEY VERSE: This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. John 15:12



Do you do nice things for other people? Why? Is it so you’ll win points with them and make them like you? Or do you think doing good deeds wins you points with God? He says that all the good things you do mean nothing if they’re not done out of genuine love—the kind of love Jesus has for you. Trust Him to fill your heart with His love so you can let it overflow to others. They can tell the difference!

ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME (PART 1)



"It's so pretty here!" Kennedy told her aunt and uncle as she gazed around the picnic area. She turned to her brother.

"Don't you wish we could live in the Rockies, Elliot?"

"It sure is nice," Elliot said. "Look—I guess everybody likes this spot. There are paths coming here from all directions. It's just like the city of Rome."

"How is this like Rome?" Aunt Sue asked.

"Last week our pastor said that in the days of the Roman Empire, you could follow any road and it would lead you to Rome," Elliot explained. "He said that's like going to heaven. No matter what religion we follow, it will lead us to heaven if we're sincere and do our best."

Uncle Don frowned. "Perhaps all roads did lead to Rome, but all religions certainly don't lead to heaven. The Bible has something to say about that."

"That's right," said Aunt Sue. "If we want to know what's true and what's not, we can't accept the word of any person—unless what they say agrees with what we read in the Bible. And in the book of John, Jesus says He is the way to heaven. We can only be saved from sin and have eternal life by trusting in Him."

Kennedy looked doubtful. "I never heard our minister say that. Wouldn't he know?"

"Yeah," said Elliot. "He's had lots of training, and he's a really cool guy!"

"It doesn't matter who he is or how nice he is," Uncle Don said. "What matters is whether he teaches what God says in His Word. The book of Acts talks about the apostle Paul going to a city called Berea. When he preached to the people there, they checked the Scriptures to see if what he said was correct. That's what we need to do too."

"I never thought about that," Elliot said. "I always thought whatever our pastor said was true, but I guess he could be wrong."

Uncle Don nodded. "People can be wrong, but what God says in His Word is always right." He pulled out his phone. "How about I show you some more Bible verses that talk about how Jesus is the only way to have eternal life?"

Elliot and Kennedy nodded and scooched closer.  *Harry C. Trover*



STUDY THE BIBLE | KEY VERSE: They received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Acts 17:11 (NIV)



Do you go to church to learn about God? Do you read books, watch videos, or listen to programs that talk about God? That's great, but make sure what you're learning agrees with God's Word. If you're not sure whether something is true, ask a parent or teacher to help you find it in the Bible. Follow the example of early Christians and study the Bible so you know what it says.

ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME (PART 2)

After enjoying a picnic lunch, Uncle Don pointed toward the paths around the picnic area. “Do you remember which path we took to get here?”

“It was the one by the swings,” Kennedy said.

Elliot disagreed. “It was the one by that flowering bush over there.”

“Nuh-uh! I remember seeing the swings right away,” Kennedy insisted.

“But I remember seeing a bird’s nest on the other side of that bush!” Elliot shot back.

“Let’s try an experiment,” said Uncle Don. “You each sincerely believe you’re right, don’t you?”

“Yes!” shouted both of the children.

“All right. How about you each try your path and we’ll see who’s right. I’ll walk with Elliot, and Aunt Sue can walk with Kennedy. Whoever finds the car can text the other group. If no one finds the car, meet back here in fifteen minutes.”

The kids agreed, and off they went. Fifteen minutes later, they were back at the picnic spot. “I can’t believe neither of us found the car!” Kennedy said. “Uncle Don, do you know where it is?”

Uncle Don smiled. “Follow me.”


They followed Uncle Don down a path near some wildflowers, and after a few minutes, they saw he was right.

“There’s the car!” yelled Elliot.


“How did you know, Uncle Don?” Kennedy asked.

Uncle Don held up his phone. “I have an app that tells me where my car is parked. It showed me which path to take.”

“That’s kind of like what we were talking about earlier—about how the Bible shows us the only path to heaven,” Elliot said.

Uncle Don nodded. “You both were very sincere in believing that the path you chose would lead to the car, but your sincerity didn’t help you. You can also be very sincere about the path you choose to try to get to heaven, but unless you choose the right one, your sincerity won’t help you get there either. My phone showed me the truth about where the car was parked, and God’s Word shows us the truth about how to get to heaven. There’s no other way to have eternal life except through Jesus. He’s the one and only way to heaven.”  *Harry C. Trover*

 **JESUS IS THE WAY TO HEAVEN** | KEY VERSE: There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. Proverbs 14:12

 Do you know the way to heaven? Do you think the way to get there is by going to church, saying prayers, or doing good things? The Bible says nothing you do will ever get you to heaven. It says Jesus is the only way—only He can give you life that lasts forever. Choose the right path by trusting in Him. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 104.)

STILL SHINING

I can't believe Grandma gave me a Bible for my birthday!" Ethan said as he and his older brother Sam walked home from the library. "What am I gonna do with that?"

"Well, you could read it," Sam said.

Ethan laughed. "How could an old book written thousands of years ago have anything to say to us today? Dad is always saying the Bible is old-fashioned and outdated. Maybe he'll let me return it and get something else." He pointed down the street. "Hey, let's stop and see the house Uncle Andrew is building. It's only a couple blocks away."

Sam agreed, so the brothers stopped at the new house. "Looks nice," Sam said when he saw it. "Is that a solar panel on the roof?"

Ethan nodded. "Most of the power for heating and cooling will come from the sun. Uncle Andrew says more and more people are using solar energy now. It's cheaper and better for the environment."

Sam glanced up at the sky and shrugged. "I don't see what the big deal is. The sun is just an old star. How could it be useful?"

"What are you talking about?" asked Ethan. "The sun gives us the light and energy we need to survive. There wouldn't be any life on earth without it!"


Sam smirked. "Yeah, but it's older than the Bible, so it can't be any good to us today, right?"

"Oh, I see what you're doing," Ethan said, rolling his eyes. "You know it's not the same thing."

"Actually, it kind of is," said Sam. "The sun gives us the light we need to live on earth, but the Bible shows us the light of a different Son—Jesus, the Son of God. It tells us how we can have eternal life by trusting in Him. And just like sunlight, the light the Bible shines on our lives is just as powerful today as it was thousands of years ago. It's the light of God's truth, and He never changes."

Ethan was quiet as they started heading home. "I guess I'll give my new Bible a try," he finally said.

"I'll give you some verses to start with if you want," Sam said. "Then maybe we can talk about them."

Ethan smiled. "That would be great!"  *Barbara J. Westberg*



THE BIBLE IS FOR TODAY | KEY VERSE: Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. Mark 13:31 (NIV)



Do you think the Bible is outdated because it's been around for a long time? It may be old, but it shines the light of God's truth on our lives, and His truth never changes. It tells us how God's Son, Jesus, died for us and rose again so we could have eternal life. Even though it was written thousands of years ago, its light is still shining today. Read it and ask God to help you see and understand its truth.



ACTIVITY

Books of the Bible Word Search

Did you know there are sixty-six individual books that make up the Bible? They include different types of books, such as history books, poetry books, and letters to the early church. Each one helps us learn more about God and His plan to save us from sin through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus.

Find some of the books of the Bible in the word search below. We've shown you the first one. Find the rest from the list. Then pick one to start reading today so the light of God's Son can shine on your life!

JUDGES	V	E	S	M	C	T	H	G	Y	L	E	M	Z	B
ESTHER	Z	J	X	P	I	N	C	F	E	W	F	Z	U	R
PSALMS	H	D	J	J	V	Z	T	A	S	R	T	J	N	L
PROVERBS	X	Y	G	V	N	C	Y	Y	R	V	C	P	B	P
HABAKKUK	A	V	G	D	Y	Q	Z	U	B	V	E	R	J	A
MATTHEW	H	Y	R	F	V	Y	Z	R	H	K	F	Q	O	K
MARK	P	R	O	V	E	R	B	S	U	L	S	R	H	S
LUKE	J	M	N	R	E	V	E	L	A	T	I	O	N	H
JOHN	F	Y	D	H	A	W	L	P	S	A	L	M	S	Q
ROMANS	L	X	T	M	H	E	B	R	E	W	S	A	D	W
HEBREWS	L	S	D	N	M	A	T	T	H	E	W	N	V	Z
REVELATION	E	H	L	A	D	K	Q	J	G	I	U	S	F	V
	R	G	X	P	R	I	O	D	N	L	C	D	Y	U
	H	A	B	A	K	K	U	K	U	F	N	B	F	E
	J	E	M	G	Y	J	W	S	C	B	N	D	P	O



BIKES AND BOASTING

Hey, Joel!" shouted Micah from the other side of the parking lot at school. "What's up?" Joel asked as the two of them began to walk toward the school building together.

"I was wondering if you'd like to come to my house after school," Micah said. "I got a new bike for my birthday, so maybe you could bring yours."

"Sure, I'll come over," said Joel. "My dad bought me a girl's bike, and we had to paint over the flowers! We worked really hard on it."

After school they went to Joel's house and got his bike. Then they went to Micah's house.

"I present to you, the fastest bike the world has ever known!" Micah said with a flourish. He looked at Joel's bike and giggled. "Umm...I can still see the flowers you painted over," he said. "My bike is new, and I bet it's faster than yours."

Joel looked down at the ground as he put his helmet on, looking hurt.

Just then Micah's mom came out of the house. "Micah," she said, "I'd like to speak with you for a minute. Please come inside."

"Wait a minute, Joel!" Micah said as he quickly ran inside. He sat down on the couch beside his mom. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"How do you think you were treating Joel out there?" Mom asked. Micah didn't answer. "You were boasting about your bike, weren't you?"

"I'm sorry, Mom," Micah answered. "I'll tell Joel I'm sorry too, but...I thought you said we could boast about..." Micah's voice trailed off.

Mom laughed. "You mean we can boast about God. That's much different than what you were doing. God tells us not to boast about ourselves because everything we have comes from Him, and putting down Joel's bike and bragging about your own hurt him. But boasting about God and the wonderful things He's done for us helps us share His love with others. What are some things God has done that we can boast about?"

"Well," said Micah, "we can boast about God because He is so good and faithful, and because He sent His Son to die for us."

"Very good," said Mom. "How about you go apologize to Joel and compliment his bike?"

"Sure," said Micah. "And no more bad boasting!"  *Emmaline Craymer*



BOAST ABOUT GOD | KEY VERSE: My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; the humble shall hear of it and be glad. Psalm 34:2



Have you ever boasted about something you own or something you can do? You probably have, maybe even without knowing it. If others have bragged about themselves in front of you, you know how much it hurts. When you put yourself above somebody else, it hurts them. But when you boast about God and the wonderful things He's done for all of us, you praise Him and reflect His love and kindness to others.

A DELIGHTFUL AROMA



A delicious aroma drifted through the door as Audrey walked into the house. She inhaled deeply, wondering for a minute what it was. *I know—apple pie! Maybe Mom will let me have a piece before supper.* Her stomach growled as she went into the kitchen. No Mom. No apple pies either.

Audrey found her mother in the living room. “I was just reading an email from your teacher,” Mom said, grinning. “I think you’ll be pleased to hear what she has to say.”

Mom turned to her computer and read the email out loud. “It’s such a delight to have Audrey as one of my students. She often gives up her free time to help her classmates and has befriended the new girl from Indonesia. She is like a breath of fresh air in our class. By the way, she invited me to visit your church sometime, and I’d like to do that.” The email was from Mrs. Hollis, Audrey’s teacher at school.

Mom beamed and gave Audrey a big hug. “I’m so proud of you, honey!”


Audrey looked pleased. “Hey, where’s the apple pie?” she asked. “I know you made one—I can smell it. Can I have a piece?”

Mom furrowed her brows. “Apple pie? I didn’t make any...oh, it’s the candle.” She pointed to the candle burning on the mantle. “It’s an apple pie spice candle.”

“Oh.” Audrey was disappointed. “It made me hungry for apple pie.”

Mom smiled. “You know what? I think your life is like that candle. It made you hungry for apple pie because it smells so good, and I believe your actions and attitude at school have made your teacher hungry for what you have—I think that’s why she wants to come to church.”

“I made her hungry for church?” Audrey asked, confused.

“Not church, exactly—Jesus,” said Mom. “Your teacher doesn’t realize she’s really hungry for a relationship with Jesus, but she sees something in your life that appeals to her. I think that seeing you display Jesus’s love in the way you treat others is making her want the real thing—Him.” Mom grabbed her keys. “Come on. That candle is making me hungry for apple pie too, so let’s run to the store and pick one up!”  *Barbara J. Westberg*



MAKE OTHERS HUNGRY FOR JESUS | KEY VERSE: We are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. 2 Corinthians 2:15 (NIV)



Do your actions and attitude make people want to be around you? Does seeing how you treat others make them want to know more about Jesus? As you show others love, kindness, patience, and helpfulness, they get a taste of who Jesus is and what knowing Him is like. As people interact with you, they may become hungry for what you have—hungry to know Jesus.

DIRTY CONNECTION

Sean, the family shelter downtown needs donations. I've collected some items. How about donating some of your toys?"

Sean knelt in front of his toy box. "I don't have any toys I want to give away, Mom." "What about this car?" Mom asked. "I haven't seen you playing with it in a while, and I'm sure any little boy would love to have it."

Sean looked at the remote control race car his mom was holding. "It doesn't work anymore."

"Let's have dad take a look at it. Maybe he can get it running again. Then would you like to donate it?"

"I guess. I do have a lot of toys."

After supper Sean handed his father the race car. "Can you fix this, Dad? It doesn't work anymore. I'd like to give it to a kid at the shelter."

"Let's take a look at it." Dad examined the body of the race car. "I don't see why it wouldn't be working. This car looks as good as new." Sean followed his dad to the garage. After taking the screw out of the lid holding the batteries, Dad held the car out for Sean to see. "I think we've found the problem."

"Eww!" Sean said. "What is that?"

"It's corrosion, and the build-up has caused the electrical connection to be broken."

"Can you fix it?" Sean asked.

"I think so. But first we'll need to clean the inside of the battery pack." Sean's dad handed him a cloth and a little brush and showed him how to clean the inside. "This is like the story Pastor Tim told on Sunday, isn't it, Sean? About how Jesus told people they were making the outside of themselves clean but ignoring the nasty stuff on the inside. Do you remember?"

Sean nodded. "He said it doesn't matter how good you look to others. If your heart is dirty, you're broken and disconnected from God."

"Right. That's why we need Jesus." Dad replaced the old batteries with new ones and reattached the lid. "When we trust in Him, He cleans our hearts and makes us run as good as new—just like this car."

"Wow," Sean said, watching the car zoom across the floor. "It is as good as new!" ♥
Sharon Mowery



JESUS CLEANS OUR HEARTS | KEY VERSE: He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds. Titus 2:14 (NLT)



Do you try hard to make your life look clean when you're really broken and dirty on the inside? No matter what good things you do, you can't be clean until Jesus removes the sin from your heart. He makes you clean and new so your heart can work the way it's supposed to. Trust Him to give you a clean heart today. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.)

UNGLUING HURTS

Hailey knew she should ask for help before trying out her new manicure set, but she couldn't wait. She needed something to take her mind off the bad day she'd had. She spilled the glittery nails onto her desk, and without bothering to read the directions, she grabbed the glue and unscrewed it.

"What's wrong with this glue?" she muttered as the watery liquid squirted out of the tiny spout. She shook it, wondering why it wasn't thick like school glue. Shrugging, she held it against her fingernail and squeezed out a generous amount. She pressed one of the nails onto the glue, which seeped out the edges and down her finger.

Moments later, Mom walked in. "Oh! You're already trying those out? Be careful with that glue!"

Hailey smiled, then frowned as she tried to pull her hand away from the table. "Help! My hand is stuck!"

Mom groaned and rushed over to inspect. "I wished you'd asked me for help! This glue sticks really tight."

Hailey gulped back a sob. "It does? I think I used a lot!"

Soon Hailey's hand was free, but some of her fingers had lost patches of skin. She held up her bandaged fingers. "Mom, you know what this reminds me of?"

"What's that?" Mom asked.

"The bad news I heard from Megan today," Hailey said sadly. "Her parents are getting a divorce, and that's a lot like getting my fingers unstuck from that table, only worse. Ungluing hurts!"

"I'm sorry to hear about Megan's parents," Mom said as she sat down. "You're right, divorce hurts much worse than trying to get that strong glue off your fingers. God created marriage as a picture of Christ and His church—the unity and love between a husband and wife is meant to show how much Jesus loves us. But divorce is a result of living in a world full of sin and broken relationships, and it hurts."

Hailey nodded. "Megan's really upset, and both her parents are too."

"Maybe you can help Megan by reminding her how much Jesus loves her," Mom said. "When broken relationships hurt us, He promises to comfort us and never leave us. Show her what that looks like by sticking by her as a friend."

Hailey looked at her bandaged fingers and nodded.  *Rebekah Love Dorris*



DIVORCE HURTS | KEY VERSE: Walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. Ephesians 5:2 (NIV)



Do you know someone who's gone through the pain of a divorce? Maybe you've experienced divorce in your own family. Divorce hurts because it's not God's plan for marriage. If you're experiencing the pain of divorce, remember that Jesus loves you and promises to never leave you. If a friend is dealing with divorce, point them to the love and comfort they can find in Jesus as you walk by their side.

HEARING GOD EVERYWHERE

Why are we lying on the trampoline?” Penny asked her dad as she looked up at the sky. “All I see is a couple clouds. And it’s so creepy and quiet.”

“There are clouds, you’ve got that part right. But I don’t think the silence is creepy. Let’s listen for a few moments and see what specific sounds you can hear.” Dad shifted on the trampoline as he spoke.

Penny sighed, but did what her dad said. She watched as one of the clouds floated across the sky. She heard the soft tweeting of birds from somewhere in the yard and noticed the rustling sound the leaves made when the wind hit them. “I hear wind and birds,” she told her dad.

“Great! I hear the little tip-tapping of a woodpecker on a tree, and the swish of the grass moving. Who gave us all those sounds?”

Penny sat up, frowning. “Gave us sounds? I don’t know.”

“God did,” Dad explained. “I know that life has been moving really fast and is probably pretty scary for you with your mom and me getting divorced. A lot is happening, and a lot is changing.” Dad looked around the yard. “Sometimes we just need to stop and listen for a little bit. God is right here with us. You can hear the wind He made in the trees. You can hear the birds He created singing to Him.”

Penny frowned. “But mom’s apartment doesn’t have an outside. There’s no trampoline to listen on.”

Dad smiled. “You don’t have to be in a certain place—you don’t even have to be outside. God is everywhere—there’s nowhere you can go where you won’t hear Him. Even when everything is crazy and confusing, God is always there. You can open a window and hear nature singing His praises.”

Penny clapped her hands together. “And I can open my Bible too! That’s another way to hear God.”

“That’s right!” said Dad. “The sounds of nature point us to God, but He speaks directly to us in His Word. The Bible tells us about the hope and promises we have in Jesus and reminds us that He is always with those who trust in Him.”

Penny smiled. “I’m glad He’s always with me and I won’t ever be alone.” ♥
Kimberly Brokish



YOU CAN HEAR GOD EVERYWHERE | KEY VERSE: Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. Revelation 3:20 (NIV)



Do you ever feel like life is moving really fast? Sometimes we forget to take a break and listen to God. We can hear Him everywhere, like out in nature, where all of creation sings His praises. Most importantly, we can hear Him speak to us in the Bible, where He promises to always be with us and invites us to come to Him anytime. Where can you go to take a break and listen to God?

BRAVING THE STORM



“I miss our old house,” said Tomás. He sighed as he thought about why they had moved into a trailer on Grandpa’s farm. First his little brother, Felix, was seriously injured in a car accident. Then the company Dad worked for went bankrupt, and it had taken him quite a while to find a new job. Tomás knew living in the trailer on the farm saved a lot of money. “But it’s kinda nice to be living near Grandpa,” he said.

“I like that too,” replied Mom. “It’s one of the blessings that has come along with our troubles.” She glanced out the window. “It’s terribly windy today, and I think we’re in for quite a storm. Let’s get over to Grandpa’s house. We’ll be safer there.”


Mom picked up Felix and they hurried over to the farmhouse. “I think we’d better get downstairs,” Grandpa said soon after they got there. “I don’t like this wind.” So they went down and huddled together in the basement. Even there, they could hear the storm raging outside. “Let’s pray,” Grandpa said. He prayed out loud, thanking God for the rain. *I can’t believe Grandpa didn’t even ask God to stop the storm!* Tomás thought.

When the storm finally did stop, they hurried out to look things over. “It’s still raining a little,” said Mom, “but look at the beautiful rainbow the storm brought us!”

“Grandpa, when you prayed, why didn’t you ask God to stop the storm?” Tomás asked.

“Well, the storm was really a blessing. It brought the rain we needed so badly.” Grandpa smiled at Tomás. “You know, sometimes it takes storms in our lives to bring special blessings too. When everything goes the way we’d like, we often forget how much we need Jesus. But when we go through difficult times, we learn how much He loves us as He takes care of us and walks with us through our struggles.”

Mom nodded. “I’ve learned that when God allows storms to come into my life, He can use them to help me know Him more deeply and trust Him to see me through them.”

“Right!” said Grandpa. “Having faith in Jesus and trusting Him to give us strength will help us brave any storm that comes our way.”  *Barbara J. Westberg*



TRUST JESUS IN LIFE’S STORMS | KEY VERSE: Count it all joy...knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. James 1:2-3



Are there storms in your life right now? Is someone you love sick? Are you having trouble with friends or siblings? Is money tight at your house? You may never know the reason for the storms in your life, but you can trust Jesus to be with you and help you through them. Remember how much He loves you and be thankful for the blessings He brings through the storms.

TWICE ADOPTED

Morgan never got tired of hearing what happened when her parents took her home from the adoption agency. “You were only six weeks old,” her dad told her one evening when she begged to hear the story again. “I’ll never forget when the agency called to say they had a baby for us. I was at work, and I was so excited I forgot to ask if it was a boy or a girl.” Everyone laughed as they recalled the happy event.



Mom continued the story. “The ride home was a long one, and they sent a bottle along with us so we could feed you on the way home. But you kept falling asleep when you were supposed to be drinking your bottle.”

Morgan giggled. “So Dad kept blowing the horn to try to keep me awake, right?”

“Yes, I did,” Dad said with a grin. “I guess that was kind of silly.”


“And so you adopted me,” said Morgan. “What does the word *adopt* mean again?”

“It means to take something as one’s own,” said Mom. “In the case of parents and children, it means to voluntarily take a child of other parents as one’s own child.” Mom gave Morgan a hug. “We gladly took you as our own. We’re so thankful the Lord brought us together.”

“I am too,” said Morgan.

“You know, Morgan,” Dad said, “the Bible talks about adoption. God wants to adopt us into His family. The Bible says that when we trust in God’s Son, Jesus, God accepts us as His own children.”

“That’s right, and being adopted into God’s family is even more wonderful than being adopted into our family,” said Mom. “We become God’s children and heirs—we inherit the gift of eternal life that Jesus earned for us by dying for our sins.”

“Then I’ve been adopted twice,” Morgan said. “I was adopted into your family when I was a baby, and I was adopted into God’s family when I trusted in Jesus. Now I belong to you, and I belong to God.” She grinned. “I love being adopted!” 
Charles VanderMeer



GOD WANTS TO ADOPT YOU | KEY VERSE: To all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. John 1:12 (NLT)



Have you been adopted into God’s family? Even if you have a wonderful family here on earth, God wants you to become part of His family too. You can only become a child and heir of God by trusting Jesus as your Savior. What could be more wonderful than that? Become God’s child today! (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 104.)

SHARE JESUS

Hudson dribbled his basketball up the driveway, aiming for the hoop above the garage. As the ball swished through the net, he glanced next door. The new girl was at the window again. She always seemed to be watching, especially on weekends when his family left for church.

One afternoon, Hudson was riding his bike up and down the street when he spotted her kicking a football. As he zoomed past, she gave him a shy wave. Hudson stopped his bike and smiled. "Hi," he said. "I'm Hudson."

"I'm Sami," she said shyly. "Do you want to kick the ball with me?"

Hudson hesitated, but then nodded. "I'll ask my mum."

With permission to stay for an hour, he followed Sami into her garden. They kicked the ball back and forth, laughing as they tried trick shots. After a while, Sami tilted her head. "So...why are you always dressed up on the weekends?" she asked. "And why do you and your family carry black books?"

Hudson scratched his neck. "Oh...hmm...well...that's because we go to church. The black book is the Bible."

Sami's eyes widened. "I've never been to a church. What's it like?"

"It's nice." Hudson relaxed. "We sing songs, read the Bible, and learn about Jesus."

Sami kicked the ball gently. "Jesus...what's so special about Him?"

Hudson thought for a moment. "Well, He's God's Son, and He loves us. He came to earth and died and then rose from the dead to save us. That's why we want to know Him more."

Sami nodded slowly. "Sounds interesting. Can I ask my mum if I can go with you one day?"

Hudson's heart thumped with excitement. "Yeah! That'd be cool."

A few days later, Sami peeked over the fence. "Hey, Hudson!" she called. "Mum said I can go with you to church!"

When Sunday morning arrived, a knock on the door startled Hudson. He opened it to find Sami standing there in a bright yellow dress, beaming. "Ready?" she asked.

Hudson grinned. "Yep! Let's go."

As they drove to church, he felt a warm feeling inside. He was glad he hadn't been too embarrassed to talk about Jesus. Maybe this was the beginning of Sami giving her heart to God. ❤️ *Esther Espinoza*



SHARING JESUS BRINGS JOY AND HOPE | KEY VERSE: I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. Romans 1:16 (NIV)



Have you ever felt shy talking about Jesus? Don't be embarrassed to talk about Him. You never know whose heart you might touch. Jesus wants us to share His love and truth with others so more people can know about Him and live in heaven with Him one day. Sharing your faith is a powerful way to show God's love to the world. Trust Him to help you tell others about Jesus.

EVEN BETTER

On the way home from church, Joanna noticed her brother staring out the window. “What’s wrong, Derek? You’ve hardly said a word since we got in the car.”

Derek sighed. “I was just thinking about what Pastor Kevin said about Jesus coming again.”

Joanna frowned. “Don’t you want Him to come?”

“Sure...someday,” Derek replied.

“Sometimes I wish He’d come right away,” said Joanna. “Like before my math test tomorrow.”

“If you’d study, you wouldn’t have to wish that,” Derek pointed out.

“Wishing for Him to come soon is a good thing,” said Joanna. “Grandma always ends her prayers with ‘Lord, come quickly,’ remember?”


“That’s easy for her to pray—she’s old!” Derek said. “I want a dog first, but if Jesus comes too soon, I’ll never get to have one.”

Dad smiled. “Remember the camping trip we took last summer? I promised we’d go, but we couldn’t set an exact date because I didn’t know when I’d be able to get off work. So we got all our camping stuff ready and then went on with our daily lives.”

“That’s right,” said Mom. “When Dad finally said he could go, we hopped in the car and took off. Nobody wanted to stay home and miss all the fun of camping, even if it meant not being able to do other things we had planned.”

“You’re saying that being with Jesus will be even better than having a dog, aren’t you?” Derek asked.

“Better than we can imagine!” Dad said. “He’s always with those who trust in Him, but when He comes back, we’ll be able to see Him face-to-face, and He’ll restore all of creation so there will be no sin, sickness, or death ever again! Until that time comes, He wants us to keep loving others and growing in our relationship with Him. Working, learning, making plans, having fun—those are all important things God wants us to enjoy, but none of them compare to what it will be like when we’re with Jesus.”

“I guess you’re right,” said Derek. “But I still hope I get to have a dog while I wait for Jesus to come!”  *Bonnie L. Kinne*



NOTHING COMPARES TO BEING WITH JESUS | KEY VERSE: [Jesus] says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! Revelation 22:20 (ERV)



Have you ever hoped Jesus wouldn’t come back before you had the chance to do certain things? Are there places you want to see, people you want to meet, or activities you’d like to try? It’s good to hope and plan for things like that, but remember that nothing compares to what awaits for those who know Jesus. When He returns, we will live with Him in a new, perfect world, and it will be better than anything you can imagine!

THE TALKING TOOLS

Your friend Mason is really growing in his faith, isn't he? It's been fun to see him plug in at church," Uncle Ken said as Aiden helped him replace the worn-out boards on the porch.

"Yeah," Aiden said.

"His solo with the junior choir was great," Uncle Ken said between creaks and squeaks as he pulled nails. Aiden didn't answer. As they worked, he was very quiet—too quiet. Uncle Ken put down his hammer. "Aiden, is everything okay?"

Aiden sighed. "It's just that Mason does everything better than I do. I used to sing solos, but now Mason sings most of them. He's the star student in our class at church too—he brings more visitors and learns more Bible verses than anybody else."

Uncle Ken nodded. "Get the tape measure out of the toolbox, will you, Aiden? Let's measure and cut the new boards." He grinned. "What would you think if the hammer got mad when we started using the tape measure? Or what if the tape measure said, 'You left me in this box for an hour, so I'm not going to measure anything for you'? Or, 'If you don't let me pull nails, I won't work?'"

Aiden grinned. "They couldn't do each other's jobs! They're tools. They have to do what they're made to do."

"Right," Uncle Ken said. "And Christians are tools in God's hands—He gives each of us a job to do. It's not a competition. We serve because we love Jesus and want to share His love with others, not to make ourselves look good."

Aiden frowned. "But why does Mason have to do everything I do—only better?"

"How many hammers are in my toolbox, Aiden?" asked Uncle Ken.

Aiden checked. "Two," he said.

Uncle Ken nodded. "And I use both of them. It's like that with Jesus. He uses us in different ways, but like any tool's purpose is to serve the carpenter, His purpose for all of us is the same—to work in our hearts so that we'll grow in our relationship with Him and share His love with others. It's not about what we do or how well we do it—it's about trusting Him to use us however He pleases to accomplish His greater purpose." ♥ *Barbara J. Westberg*



CHRISTIANS ARE GOD'S TOOLS | KEY VERSE: Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others. 1 Peter 4:10 (NIV)



Are you jealous of other Christians? Remember that Jesus uses each of us to do His work and share His love with others in the way He knows is best. We often compare our tasks and abilities to other people's, but that's not what God is concerned about—His focus is on our hearts and how to shape them to make us more like Jesus. Trust Him to help you serve Him faithfully as one of the many tools in His toolbox.

ONE MORE MONTH OF WORD WITH ZACH TO GO!

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SO MUCH LOVE

Oh no! Poor little bird! Aelin thought when she noticed a bird fluttering around in the grass. *It's hurt. I think it has a broken wing. Maybe I can help it.* She picked up her butterfly net and tried to catch the bird, moving slowly and quietly toward it. But each time she got close, it flapped its wings and wiggled out of her reach. The bird led her to the front of the house. Just when she thought she could catch it, the bird flew up and perched on a power line high above her. Aelin was surprised. *That bird can fly! Why was it acting like its wing was hurt?* She ran into the house to ask her mom about it.



Mom smiled when she heard Aelin's story. "There's a nest with baby birds in the maple tree out back," she said. "I think that must have been the mother bird, and she wanted to lead you away from her babies."

"But wasn't she afraid I'd catch her?" Aelin asked.

"Maybe, but she'd rather have you come after her than get too close to her family." Mom smiled at Aelin and gave her a hug. "She's a good mother, isn't she? Parents who love their children that much would do almost anything to keep them safe."

"Wow!" Aelin said. "I guess we don't think about that very often."

"What's even better is that someone loves us more than parents do," said Mom. "Someone actually died for us!"

Aelin smiled. "You mean Jesus, don't you?"

Mom nodded. "He willingly gave His life for us so we could have our sins forgiven and live with Him forever. We know that, but we don't often think about how much love it took. It makes me feel good to think someone loves me that much."

"Me too," said Aelin.

When Aelin went back outside to play, she heard baby birds chirping way up in the tree. "Your mother loves you," she called to them, "but Jesus loves me even more!" ♥
Karen Cogan



JESUS LOVES YOU | KEY VERSE: We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. 1 John 3:16 (NLT)



Do you realize how much Jesus loves you? He loves you so much that He came down to earth and suffered and died on the cross so that you could be saved from sin and have eternal life with Him. Have you responded to His great love by trusting Him as your Savior? If not, trust in Him today! (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.)

COLOR!



FOUR LEGS ARE BETTER THAN TWO

Chan walked into the six-inch-deep stream right behind his friend Oliver. The water filled his shoes and stuck his pants to his ankles. The round stones shifted under his feet as he slogged through the water.



Further downstream the rocks became larger and rougher, the ground more uneven, and the water muddy. Chan felt around with one foot before taking each step. Even when he found a good rock, sometimes the surface was slick.

Suddenly his foot slipped. He fought for balance, but he fell with a huge splash.

Oliver hurried back to him. “Chan, are you okay?” he asked, reaching down to help Chan to his feet.

“I’m fine,” Chan said. “I mean, besides being so wet.” He laughed and tried not to cry. His elbow hurt, and he had scraped his knee. He wasn’t sure he wanted to keep walking. He would probably just fall again.

“I have an idea,” said Oliver. “Put your arm around my shoulder, and I’ll put my arm around yours. Now let’s try walking in the creek.”

Chan and Oliver took a step forward at the same time. Then another. And another. Suddenly Chan slipped again, but this time Oliver held him up.

After a couple more steps, Oliver slipped, and Chan caught him. They started walking faster and with more confidence, and whenever one of them slipped, the other caught him so he didn’t fall.

“This is fun,” Chan said. “I was scared I’d fall again, but now I feel safe.”

“Maybe we can help each other out of the water too,” Oliver said. “You know, like Pastor Evans was talking about in church last week. He said Christians need to hold each other up spiritually when we start to fall. That’s why going to church and having Christian friends is so important.”

“How can we hold each other up spiritually?” Chan asked. He thought about it. “I know! We could talk about what we read in the Bible.”

“Yeah, and we can share stuff we’re struggling with or worried about and pray for each other,” added Oliver.

“That sounds like a great idea,” Chan said, holding on to his friend as he walked across another slippery rock. “We’re stronger together!” *♥ Amy Glendinning*



CHRISTIANS CAN HELP EACH OTHER | KEY VERSE: Two are better than one...For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10



Do you ever feel like the Christian life is too hard? Do you forget to read your Bible or have trouble praying? Maybe you’re discouraged about struggles in your life. Jesus never meant for you to walk with Him alone. Become friends with other Christians and talk often about Jesus and His promises in the Bible so you can encourage and support each other as you walk with Him.

TEMPORARY TENTS

Hey, kids, how about a camping trip to the mountains this weekend?" Dad asked enthusiastically at the dinner table one night.

"I'm in!" yelled Rico. He wanted to get his vote in before his older sister said something negative.

Sure enough, Cara frowned. "Dad, remember the last time we went camping? Our tent collapsed in the middle of the night because we didn't put it up right, and the mosquitos nearly ate us alive."

Rico giggled. "Don't forget the night we camped on a beach. When the tide came in, water sloshed into our tent. Everything got soaked!"

"The scariest experience for me," said Mom, "was lying in the tent listening to some animal making a racket outside. I was sure it was a bear."

"But it was only a cute little raccoon!" Dad grinned. "Fun memories, huh? Reminds me of something I read in the Bible the other day about tents." He got up to find his Bible.

"Really? The Bible talks about tents?" Rico asked.

"Yup. Here it is. Second Corinthians 5:1-5." Dad read the passage aloud.


"You see?" Cara looked triumphant. "Even the Bible says tents are trouble!"

Mom laughed. "Except those verses are really comparing our bodies to tents. It's saying that as long as we're in our frail human skin, we're at risk of experiencing all kinds of sicknesses, temptations, and hardships."

"Right," said Dad. "But don't forget that it also says our weak bodies are temporary. We'll only have them for as long as we live on this earth. One day, when Jesus returns, He will provide those who trust in Him with a new home—He's going to get rid of sin, sickness, and death forever and make the whole world new. And there we will have perfect bodies. Invincible!"

"Like Superman!" shouted Rico. "Cool!"

"Well, in the meantime," said Mom, "what do you say we trade the tent for a mountain lodge this weekend, maybe near a lake?"

Everyone cheered but Dad, who shrugged good-naturedly. "Okay, okay. I hear you! But we're not through with camping. We've got plenty more adventures out there, just waiting for us!"  *Deborah Meroff*



OUR WEAK BODIES ARE TEMPORARY | KEY VERSE: For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened. 2 Corinthians 5:4 (NIV)



Have you ever thought of your body as a kind of tent? A tent is temporary—it's meant to be used for a short time while you're away from home. And this world is not our home—as Christians, our home is with Jesus. One day He will come back and make the world new so it can be our home forever, and He'll give us perfect bodies that will never wear out! Until then, remember He's with you in the temporary hardships you face.

ALWAYS THERE

"It's gone!" Abigail exclaimed one morning as she and her older sister walked to the school where they attended day camp. "They just put it up, and now it's gone!" A huge telescope had recently been installed on a mountain near their town. The girls usually saw it clearly as they walked down their street.

Sophia laughed. "In this fog, lots of things are gone. They're really just hidden by the fog. I'm sure we'll be able to see the telescope by the time we walk home this afternoon."

Sophia was right. As they walked home, the telescope was visible again, but by then Abigail had something else on her mind. "I don't want to go to camp tomorrow," she said. "There's a girl in my craft class who doesn't like me, and I'm scared of her. She's mean!"

"Maybe I can stay with you most of the time tomorrow," Sophia suggested.

"But we're taking different craft classes—and you're in a different age group," Abigail replied. "You can't stay with me all day."

Sophia thought for a minute. "No, I can't—but you know someone who can!"

"I do?" asked Abigail. "Who?"

"Think about the Bible verse we read in our family devotions last week—Jesus is always with us," Sophia replied.

Abigail rolled her eyes at her sister. "I know that, but I can't see Jesus!"

Sophia was quiet for a minute. Then she pointed toward the big telescope on the mountain. "We couldn't see that telescope this morning, but it was there. And even though we can't see Jesus, He's there too. He loves us so much that He died for our sins, and He promises to always be with us."

Abigail sighed. "Okay. You can stay with me until we have to split up for craft classes," she said. Then she smiled. "And then I'll remember that Jesus is with me the rest of the time—even though I can't see Him."

Sophia smiled at her sister. "Let's talk to Mom when we get home. She might have more ideas about what to do about this girl who's been bothering you." ♥

Karen R. Locklear



JESUS IS ALWAYS WITH YOU | KEY VERSE: I [Jesus] am with you always, even to the end of the age. Matthew 28:20



Do you ever wish you could see Jesus? Perhaps when you have a nightmare or get lost in a store? Even when you face scary things, you can breathe a little easier just by thinking of one thing—the fact that even though you can't see Him, Jesus is right there with you. He promises to always be with those who trust in Him, and He keeps His promises!

SHOW YOUR COLORS

Hey there, Noah,” Mr. Davis called from his yard as Noah passed by his neighbor’s house. “Problems? You don’t look very happy.”

Noah walked over to talk with him. “My friends are all mad at me,” he said. “Some of my school friends told some of the kids at church that I said bad things about them.”

“And did you?” Mr. Davis asked.


“Well, the kids at school are always gossiping about people they know, so I started doing it too.” Noah wiped a hand across his eyes. “I didn’t want them to tease me for not joining in, so I told a few stories about the kids at church. The thing is, I didn’t even like it—I felt bad because they’re my friends and I knew it was wrong—but now they say I’m two-faced, and no one likes me anymore.”

Mr. Davis sighed. “Noah, you remind me of a chameleon—a lizard that changes colors. When it’s against the bark of a tree, it turns brown. When it’s against a leaf, it turns green. Now, God intended for chameleons to be that way so they could protect themselves from predators, but He didn’t intend for Christians to be like that. He wants us to show our true Christian colors all the time.”

“But it’s hard to be so different from the other kids,” Noah said.

“Well, Jesus never said it would be easy to follow Him. The Bible tells us that being a Christian often means people will make fun of us for loving Jesus and obeying Him. After all, Jesus was mocked by the very people He set out to save, and sometimes we’ll be treated badly too. That’s why we need to depend on Him for the strength to show our true colors instead of trying to blend in. When you refuse to join in your school friends’ gossip, you’re showing them how Jesus is helping you love others and treat them with kindness.”

Noah sighed. “I guess I should apologize to both my school friends and my church friends, huh?”

“I think that would be a good place to start,” Mr. Davis said. “And tell Jesus you’re sorry too. He’ll forgive you and help you show your true colors so others will know you belong to Him.”  *Barbara J. Westberg*



BE TRUE TO JESUS | KEY VERSE: Do not offer any part of yourself to sin...but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life. Romans 6:13 (NIV)



Are you like a chameleon—trying to blend in with those around you? Depending on who you’re with, do you sometimes tell mean jokes and make fun of people, and other times act in a kind, loving way? As a Christian, Jesus wants you to show others His love all the time, not just when it’s convenient. Trust Him to help you let your true colors stand out.

NO JOKE

I wish I had a hundred dollars to put in the offering tomorrow!" Isabella told her mom. "The missionaries we're collecting money for really need it, and I want to help them care for people and tell them about Jesus."

"If you'll clean the cupboards for me this afternoon, I'll pay you—not a hundred dollars, but a little," said Mom. "Have you prayed about the money you'd like to give?"

"Prayed for a hundred dollars?" asked Isabella. "No."

"You should," Mom said. "Trust God to provide whatever amount He wants you to give."


Isabella was cleaning the cupboards when her friend Lillian came over. "I can play as soon as I finish cleaning this cupboard," Isabella told Lillian. She sat down and looked at the cupboard. "I wish I was done."

"Well, I'll help you," said Lillian. "That'll do more good than wishing."

"I know." Isabella stood up. "I'm always wishing for things, and Mom keeps telling me that wishing doesn't help. Praying does. So guess what I'm praying for now? A hundred dollars for the missionary offering!" She got down on her hands and knees to pull out something that was stuck in a corner of the cabinet. "Look," she said, holding up an old penny. "This must be the start of the answer to my prayers!" The girls laughed at the joke.

The next morning, the only offering Isabella had was the old penny and the money Mom had paid her. All together, it was far from a hundred dollars.

That afternoon Lillian came over looking excited. "My dad helped count the offering this morning," she told Isabella, "and he noticed that old penny. He collects coins, and he says it's valuable—he said it might be worth over a hundred dollars! When I told Dad you were the one who gave it, he said I should tell you and give you a chance to take it back. Otherwise he can sell it and give the money to the missionaries." She stopped to catch her breath. "So? Do you want it back?"

Isabella stared at her in amazement. "Of course I don't want it back! I'm giving it to the missionary offering, whatever it's worth." She grinned. "I prayed for money to give, and God answered my prayer in a way I never expected!"  Agnes Livezey



PRAY AND TRUST GOD | KEY VERSE: The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. James 5:16 (NIV)



Are there things you wish were different? It doesn't help to just wish for things. When you stop wishing and start praying, things happen. God works wonders when His people pray. That doesn't mean He will always answer your prayers the way you want, but He will use your prayers to help you grow in your faith and show His love to those around you. Pray and trust Him to use your prayers for good.

LOVE LIKE MUFFIN'S

Muffin!" yelled two-year-old Reya as she toddled into the living room. She plunked down on the floor next to Muffin, the family dog. Reya reached out a chubby hand and pulled Muffin's fluffy brown tail. Muffin didn't bite or even growl. She just moved away as quickly as she could, lying down by the fireplace. Reya followed. She tugged on Muffin's ear. "Nice doggie," she cooed. Muffin still didn't growl or bite. Instead, she licked Reya's knee with her rough tongue.



"Careful, Reya," said Mom. She walked over, gently loosened the little girl's hand, and helped her stroke the dog's head. "Be nice to Muffin."

"Why does Muffin put up with all that torture?" asked Charlotte, who was sitting on the sofa with a book. "No matter how many times Reya pulls her tail or ears, Muffin puts up with it and doesn't even growl at her."

"Muffin loves Reya, just like she loves the rest of our family," Mom replied.


Charlotte nodded. "Muffin sure is a good dog. I wouldn't be so nice if I were her!"

"We're blessed to have a faithful dog who is so loving and patient with Reya," said Mom. She smiled as Reya laid her head down on Muffin's back. "Muffin is a good example of how we all should treat other people—even those who don't treat us well."

"Like when people are mean to us?" Charlotte asked.

"Yes," said Mom. "We need to do what the Bible teaches and show them love. Instead of trying to get even, we need to talk with them and resolve our issues in a calm way. Many times, people who hurt us don't mean to—just like Reya doesn't mean to hurt Muffin. But even when they're mean to us on purpose, Jesus wants us to do good to them. He died to save us from sin when we were His enemies, and He wants us to treat others with the same kind of love. It's not easy, but He promises to help us show His love to everyone."

Charlotte smiled. "Love like Muffin's?"

Mom smiled too. "Love even greater than that. Jesus is the only one who can give us humans the kind of love we need to treat others the way we'd like to be treated ourselves."  *Wanda E. Brunstetter*



LOVE LIKE JESUS | KEY VERSE: Do for other people what you would like to have them do for you. Luke 6:31 (NLV)



Do you treat others the way you'd want to be treated? The key verse for today is called the Golden Rule, and it's one of Jesus's greatest commands. It can be hard to follow when someone treats you badly, but remember that Jesus was treated badly too. He died on a cross so He could save you! Trust Him to fill your heart with His love so you can treat others the way He would.

GOD'S CREATION

After church, Elizabeth and Mom climbed into the car. “I liked my class today,” Elizabeth said. “It was lots of fun.”

“Good,” said Mom. “Tell me about it.”

“We learned about a Bible story, and we sang some songs.”

Elizabeth began to hum one of them.

Mom grinned. “I know that song! I think it’s one of the first ones you learned. Let’s sing it.” So together they sang the words: “Jesus loves me, this I know.”

Elizabeth stopped singing and looked at her mom. “Does God really love me?” she asked.

“Of course He does!” Mom said. “God loves you very much.”

“Why?” asked Elizabeth. “Why does He love me?”

“Well, think of it this way.” Mom pointed to a picture Elizabeth held in her hand. “I see you have a picture full of flowers and trees and nice green grass. That picture is special to you, isn’t it? Why do you like it so much?”

Elizabeth looked at her drawing. “I made it in class today,” she said proudly.


Mom smiled and nodded. “It’s something like that with God. He made us, and that’s one reason why we’re very special to Him. It’s one of the reasons He loves us.”

“So God loves me the way I love my picture?” Elizabeth asked.

“Well, I know your picture is special to you, but you know what? You’re more special to God than that. Much more! He loves you even more than I do.”

Elizabeth gazed at her picture. “Whoa,” she said. “That’s a lot, isn’t it, Mom?”

“Yes, it is,” said Mom. “God loves us all so much that He sent Jesus, His very own Son, to die for our sins and make us His children. That’s another reason He loves us—because we belong to Him. When we trust in Jesus, He makes us new people and helps us share His love with others. The Bible calls us His handiwork—His masterpiece or artwork.”

When they got home, Mom helped Elizabeth put her artwork on her bedroom wall where she could see it every morning when she woke up. And every morning it reminded her that God made her and that she was special to Him.  *Karen E. Cogan*



GOD MADE YOU AND LOVES YOU | KEY VERSE: For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works. Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)



Is there something that’s special to you because you made it? Well, God made you, and you’re very special to Him. In fact, God loves you so much that He sent His Son to die so you could be His child. Do you love Him too? Have you trusted Jesus as your Savior? Don’t wait any longer. Put your trust in the one who made you and loves you. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 104.)

THE SECRET VACUUM

The broom swished across the kitchen floor as Mom worked to gather the crumbs and dirt from under the table. Ethan, Evan, and Everett sat nearby watching.

“Wow, Mom,” Everett said. “That’s a lot of crumbs.”

Mom laughed. “That’s what happens when three hungry boys live here.” She swept everything into a little pile, then walked over to the wall. With a *whoosh*, the hidden vacuum inside the wall sucked every last crumb away.

“Whoa!” Evan’s eyes went wide. “Where did it all go?”

“It’s like a secret vacuum in the wall,” Mom explained. “When we built this house, Dad had it installed. All I have to do is sweep dirt close enough, and it’s gone.”

“That’s awesome,” Ethan said. “So...why do you still use the dustpan?”

Mom smiled. “Because sometimes I forget about the vacuum. I do all the work, scooping up dirt into the dustpan, when the vacuum is right here, ready to help.” Mom leaned on her broom. “You know,” she continued, “that reminds me of Jesus. He’s always with us, ready to take our sin, worries, and junk. But sometimes, I forget. I try to handle everything on my own, like using the dustpan when the vacuum is right there. Jesus is so much better at handling my mess than I am.”

“Do you have to keep asking Him to save you over and over?” Everett asked.

“No,” Mom said gently. “When you put your trust in Jesus, He saves you once and for always. But, like floors that keep getting dirty, our hearts pick up things every day—like bad attitudes, selfishness, or worries. I need to keep bringing those things to Him. Some struggles He takes away for good; others I bring to Him again and again. But He never gets tired of helping me, and He always forgives me when I confess my sins to Him.”

“So, like the vacuum in our wall, Jesus is always here and always ready to help us, and He’s way better at cleaning than we are,” said Ethan.

“Exactly,” Mom said with a grin. “We just have to remember He’s with us and bring Him our mess.”

The boys all nodded. “I like that,” Evan said. “And I *really* like the vacuum.”

Mom laughed again. “Me too, bub. Me too.”  LaVerne Vest



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



Do you try to clean up life’s messes on your own? Or do you bring them to Jesus? Think about one “mess” you’ve carried this week—maybe you got angry with a sibling, struggled with your homework, or had an argument with a friend. Instead of holding it in or working hard to handle it on your own, talk to Jesus. Tell Him about your worries, struggles, and shortcomings. Then trust Him to forgive any wrongs and to help you with difficulties.

ARIA'S FALL

Has anyone seen my math book?" asked Aria. "I can't find it anywhere." But no one had seen it, and Aria finally remembered she had left it at Zoe's house. *My perfect homework record will be ruined!* she thought miserably. She always had her homework done at the beginning of class each day. *Maybe if I stayed home sick tomorrow, I could make up the lesson.*

So the next morning, she pretended to have a stomachache and went back to bed while her family got ready for school and work—except for Mom, who insisted on staying home with her.

That afternoon, Aria's sister brought her math book home from school. "Zoe sent this," she said. "She wondered if you were going to try to come to choir practice tonight. If you can't, she'll have to sing that solo part, and she doesn't know it that well."

Oh no! I forgot all about choir, Aria thought. *I really do want to go, and I'm tired of lying in bed.* So Aria announced that she felt better.

Mom wasn't convinced. "If you were so sick that you had to miss school, you'd better stay home the rest of the day too."

That evening, Mom found Aria sobbing into her pillow. "What's wrong, Aria? Do you feel worse?"

Aria shook her head. "I wanted to go to choir practice. I'm not sick. I wasn't sick this morning either," she said through a sob. "I just didn't want to ruin my perfect homework record."

Mom sat down on the bed. "You may not be sick, but you sure took a fall. You wanted your homework record to be perfect so everyone would think highly of you, right?"

Aria sniffed. "I guess so."

"That's pride," said Mom. "Your pride caused you to fall—to tell a lie rather than let others see you as less than perfect. Pride is harmful because it causes us to hide our flaws and our constant need for Jesus's grace—from both ourselves and others."

Aria hung her head. "I'm sorry, Mom."

Mom gave her a hug. "I forgive you—and Jesus will forgive you too. Trust Him to help you let go of your pride so you can help others see how much we all need Him." ♥
Agnes Livezey



DON'T BE PROUD | KEY VERSE: Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Proverbs 16:18



Are you proud? Do you do things just to impress others? It's okay to want to look your best or do well in school or sports, but when you're willing to do anything—even something you know is wrong—to keep others from seeing your flaws, that's pride. Ask Jesus to forgive you and to help you root out pride in your life. Then be honest about your shortcomings and your need for Him.

TOTAL ECLIPSE



Reid came to a stop, panting. He'd been playing tag with his cousins for the last twenty minutes. They were playing outside while they watched the solar eclipse. He took advantage of the pause in play to grab his cardboard glasses, adjust them to cover his eyes, and look up at the sky. The sun was now half-covered by the moon. Reid knew that eventually the moon would completely cover the sun. It was supposed to be dark. Reid really didn't like the dark. He looked around and felt comforted knowing his cousins were close by.

The eclipse continued, and the sky grew steadily darker. As the eclipse approached totality, the time when the moon would completely cover the sun, Reid felt a chill run over his skin and realized the air was suddenly cooler. He felt the familiar fear of the dark, but then his cousins ran up and his aunt came outside, and he remembered he was not alone. He thought of something his Sunday school teacher had said—Jesus was with him in darkness.

When his aunt told him the eclipse had reached totality, Reid looked up at the sun. He was surprised by what he saw. The sun was completely blocked by the moon, but a bright ring shone around the moon's edges. Reid suddenly remembered what his teacher told him the day before—the ring was the sun's outer atmosphere, called the *corona*. The moon wasn't big enough to block the corona! Reid looked around, realized that there was still enough light to play tag, and took off after his cousins.

That night, Reid told his dad about the eclipse. "I was surprised by the brightness of the corona that shone from behind the moon," he said.

Dad looked at him thoughtfully. "It makes me think of the light of Jesus, which shines even in darkness."

Reid smiled. "Dad, I felt Jesus with me today, even in the darkness!"

Dad squeezed Reid's shoulder. "Satan tries his hardest to block out Jesus with the darkness of this world, but he just can't do it. Like the sun with its corona, Jesus shines so bright that He always overcomes darkness. He came into the world to free us from sin and give us His light, and nothing can ever separate us from His love." ♥ *Chelsea Mohler*



NOTHING CAN BLOCK JESUS'S LIGHT | KEY VERSE: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. John 1:5 (NIV)



Did you know that no darkness in this world can block out Jesus's light? If you're facing a frightening situation, Jesus promises to be with you. If you're struggling with sin and guilt, Jesus offers you forgiveness and gives you the power to turn from sin. If you're feeling sad, He will comfort you. Remember that He is always with you, shining the light of His love into your life.

A LISTENING EAR

As Colin sat down to begin his homework, he heard his little sister whining in the kitchen. He began to study, but all the noise his sister was making distracted him. Then Colin heard his mother's voice. "Kinsley, I want you to stop whining." Colin returned to his homework, but soon he heard his sister again.



Colin got up and went to the kitchen. "What's wrong with Kinsley?" he asked. "I have tons of homework, and her whining is driving me crazy!"

Kinsley made a face and threw a sock at Colin.

"She wants someone to put her socks on for her," Mom said.

"But she knows how to do that herself," said Colin. "Oh, well. I'll help her just to make her be quiet!"

"Hang on, Colin," Mom said. "Kinsley also knows how to ask nicely for things. So far all she's done is whine and throw her socks."

"Well, I don't know if I can stand all the noise she's making much longer," Colin said.

"I wonder if God ever feels that way," Mom said thoughtfully. "It seems like we often whine and complain about things instead of praying about them."

Colin frowned. "You mean, instead of complaining, God wants me to pray about stuff like being bothered by the noise Kinsley's been making?"

"I was actually thinking of a problem I've been dealing with at work, but yes, God wants us to tell Him what's bothering us and pray about everything." Mom smiled. "Why don't we pray now?" Mom and Colin bowed their heads. "Dear Father," Mom prayed, "thank You for caring about all the details of our lives, and thank You for sending Jesus to die for us and make us your children so we can come to you in prayer about anything. Right now we ask You to help Kinsley—and all of us—learn to ask for help instead of whining about our problems. Please help each of us remember that You love us and know what's best for us. Thank You for always listening to us."

After Mom finished praying, Kinsley walked up to her and held up her socks. "P'ease help me put my socks on, Mommy." As Mom gave her a hug and knelt down to help her with her socks, Colin smiled and went back to his homework. ♥ Dawn Yrene



PRAY ABOUT EVERYTHING | KEY VERSE: Pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Philippians 4:6 (NLT)



Do you pray about your problems? Or do you whine and complain instead of asking for help? God cares about you and wants you to talk to Him about what's going on in your life. He may not always give quick solutions to your problems, but He'll always help you and do what's best. Tell Him what's bothering you, and thank Him for the blessings He's given you. He loves you and is always listening.

ROOTS AND ALL

James looked up from his job of pulling dandelions as his friend Alex pedaled his bike up the driveway. “Hey,” called Alex. “Let’s go to the splash pad at the park.”

“Can’t,” James replied. “My mom says she’s sick of seeing yellow dandelions instead of green grass, and I have to get rid of them.” He held up the tool he was using. “I work around the plant with this so I can pull out the whole root—and they sure go deep!” He wiped his brow with a dirty hand. “It’s really hot too.”

“Yeah,” said Alex. “Too hot to do it that way. Why not just cut the tops off? Here, I’ll help you. Then we can go cool off.”

“Okay,” James said. The boys soon finished the job and were off to the park.

Several times in the next few weeks, the dandelions sprouted back up and Mom sent James out to pull them again. Each time, he simply cut off the tops.

One day Mom came out to talk to him. “I didn’t understand why we kept getting so many dandelions, but now I see the problem. You aren’t pulling them up by the roots the way I showed you.”


“Oh,” said James, looking at the weeds in his hand. “I didn’t think it mattered as long as you couldn’t see them.”


“But it does matter,” said Mom. “If the roots are still in the ground, the dandelions grow right back. You have to get rid of the whole thing—roots and all.”

That evening, Dad heard about the returning dandelions. “That’s a good example of the way we sometimes treat sin in our lives,” he said. “If it isn’t seen by other people, we often think it doesn’t matter. But just because it isn’t visible to everyone else doesn’t mean it isn’t harmful. No matter how much we try to cover it up, it will keep popping back up in our lives, hurting us and others.” Dad looked at James. “Do you know how to root out sin instead of just trying to hide it?”

James nodded. “We need Jesus.”

“That’s right,” said Dad. “We need to confess any wrongs we’re trying to hide and remember that because Jesus has saved us and given us new life, sin has no power over us.” ♥ A. W. Smith

 **ROOT OUT SIN** | KEY VERSE: Consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus. Romans 6:11 (NLT)

 Is there a sin in your life you’re trying to keep covered so others won’t see it? No matter how you try to hide it, it will keep popping back up. It needs to be pulled up by the roots, and the only way to do that is to stop trying to hide it and remember that through Jesus you have the power to turn from sin. Trust Him to help you let go of sinful habits and live the new life He’s given you.

NIGHT SERVANT

The church building was dark and empty. Mandy's mom turned on all the lights. Mandy followed her down to the cleaning supply closet in the basement. "I'll start in the bathrooms," Mom said. "How about you mop and dust upstairs? And try to finish a little faster this week, okay?"

Mandy wandered slowly upstairs with the mop, swinging the bucket and humming. As she dusted music stands on the stage, she looked out at empty seats and imagined them filled with smiling, clapping people who raised their hands in praise. She took her mop handle and, pretending it was a microphone, sang into it. She called to the pretend crowd, "Sing out! Everyone!" She dropped the mop, strummed an imaginary guitar, and jumped off the stage. On her landing, she raised her hands along with the clapping "crowd."

Suddenly she heard real clapping, and she looked up and saw Mom. Mom smiled. "Now I see why it takes you so long to clean."

"I'm sorry, Mom. I just wish I could be up there playing music and singing when real people are here. Mopping all alone doesn't seem like it matters much to anybody. The singers and guitar players are the ones who really serve God."


"Did you know that God put a psalm in the Bible for people like us?" asked Mom. "They served in the temple at night."

"Really? Did anyone notice what they did?"

"I don't know, and I don't know if anyone notices what we do, but God notices. He told night workers to lift up their hands and bless the Lord. God told all His servants to worship Him."

"Not just the music leaders?"

"When you're cleaning, you're serving Him just as much as they are. The Bible tells us it's not what we do, but how we do it, that matters to Jesus. He served us by leaving heaven and coming to earth to save us from sin, and when we do our work out of thankfulness and love, we're serving and worshiping Him." Mom picked up the mop and handed it back to Mandy.

"Then I'd better do a good job!" Mandy swished the mop across the floor and made it shine.  *Laura Roesler*



WORSHIP GOD DAY AND NIGHT | KEY VERSE: Oh, praise the LORD, all you servants of the LORD, you who serve at night in the house of the LORD. Psalm 134:1 (NLT)



Do you feel like you're worshipping when you're cleaning or doing other chores behind the scenes at home or church? The Bible says to let everything you do be done in love (1 Corinthians 16:14). Whatever you do, day or night, can be done out of love for Jesus and others—including work that no one notices. Even if you serve in a way no one sees, Jesus sees you, and you can do it to thank Him for saving you and to honor Him.

HOW DIRTY WE ARE!

“I like coming to visit you, Grandma,” Olivia said as she sprayed more cleaner onto her rag.

“It’s nice having you here,” said Grandma. “Miss Cindy was glad for your help with the younger children at youth camp. She wondered if you’d be interested in leading the children’s class at church this week.” She picked up a knick-knack to clean and winked. “You might become a great youth leader someday.”

Olivia lowered her head. “I don’t know. I’m not sure God can use me for anything. My stubbornness gets me into trouble a lot.”

“Hmm.” Grandma gazed down at the picture frame she was holding as she slowly wiped the glass.

“Oh, Grandma, look!” Olivia giggled when she showed Grandma her soiled rag. “This shelf was really dusty.”

“My goodness!” Grandma chuckled. “I guess it’s been a while since I last cleaned it. It reminds me how God can make great things out of dirt.”


“What do you mean?” asked Olivia.

“Well, doesn’t the Bible say we were made from the dust of the earth?” Grandma asked. Olivia nodded. “That means we’re made of dirt,” Grandma said.


After the last shelf was cleaned and everything was put back, Grandma tapped her chin with her finger. “You know, Olivia, if God can use dirt to make something as beautiful and miraculous as a human being, just think what He can do with our faults and mistakes.”

“Like what?” Olivia plopped onto the couch.

“God can use them for good. That means not only forgiving our wrongs, which He does, but using them to help others see how Jesus has transformed us,” Grandma said, nestling into her rocker. “For example, He can use mistakes from our past to help us understand what others are going through and show them His love. Or He can take personality traits that sometimes get us into trouble and help us use them in a positive way instead.” She smiled at Olivia. “Like using someone’s stubborn streak to make them a strong spiritual leader who won’t back down when faced with difficulty.”

“I never thought of it like that,” said Olivia. She smiled back at Grandma. “Maybe I’ll help Miss Cindy with the smaller children after all!”  *Beth Anne Ingram*

 **JESUS CAN USE OUR SHORTCOMINGS** | KEY VERSE: He has made everything beautiful in its time. Ecclesiastes 3:11

 Do you think God can’t use you because of your bad habits or past failures? Guess what—He can! He doesn’t let anything go to waste, but finds a way to put it to good use. He forgives your sins and uses the traits and experiences you have to develop qualities in you that help you show His love to others. Trust Him to use every part of you for good.

CLENCHED FISTS AND OPEN HANDS

Alicia tried to peel back her baby sister's fingers. "Mom left me to watch you for five minutes, and you're already trying to take something you shouldn't."

Bella's hands were in tight fists, and it was hard for Alicia to get back the little ball that belonged with her dollhouse. "You could choke on that. You don't want it."

Alicia got her toy back and tried to get her sister settled with something safer. She was relieved when Mom came back and took Bella to get ready for their grandma's birthday party.

At the party, Alicia greeted her grandma then sat down to listen as her aunt thanked everyone for coming.

"We have a question for you, Mom," her aunt said. "As you're turning seventy, do you have any advice for us?"

Alicia's grandma smiled. "Always live your life with open hands."

"What does that mean?" Alicia's mom asked, moving to her aunt's side.

"Never hold on to anything in your life, thinking you can control it or that it's yours," Grandma said. "Always live with open hands, letting God have control. You don't know what's best for you, but God does. We can trust Him with our lives because Jesus gave His own life to save us. I am who I am because I've been trying to put my life in God's hands year after year."


Alicia thought of her sister and her tight fists. The things that Bella tried to hold on to weren't good or safe. She wanted those things, but she didn't know they could hurt her.

"You look deep in thought." Mom stepped up to Alicia, Bella in her arms.

"Mom..." Alicia stood. Her sister's hands were in tight fists. With her mom's help, she opened Bella's hand and took a small stone away from her. "Where did you even get this?"

Mom shook her head. "We should know that when she has her hands like that, she's trying to keep something she shouldn't have."

"That's kind of like what Grandma was saying," said Alicia. "We sometimes want to hold on to things when God knows they're not good for us."

Mom nodded. "Grandma gave us good advice—to live with open hands and trust God to fill them with good things He wants for us."  *Emily Acker*



LIVE WITH OPEN HANDS | KEY VERSE: You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. Psalm 16:11 (NIV)



Do you live with open hands, trusting God to take care of you and direct your life the way He knows is best? Or do you try to control everything and hold on to the things you want, no matter what? We often want things God knows aren't good for us. Instead of clenching on to what you want, put your life in God's hands and trust Him to fill it with the things He knows are good for you.

LIKE A BROTHER

Mom, can I go play at the park with Logan?” asked Michael.

Mom laughed. “Logan, Logan, Logan. Ever since you met him, all I hear is ‘Logan.’”

“He’s lots of fun,” said Michael. “I think we’re going to be really good friends. It almost feels like he’s the brother I never had.”

“Well, he seems like a nice kid,” said Mom. “Why don’t you invite him to come to church with us this week?”

“Okay,” said Michael, “I will.”

That evening, Michael was excited when he got home. “I invited Logan to church, and he said he’d come!”

Later that week, Logan attended church with Michael and his mom. He came the next week too, and then the next, and the next. And then one Sunday, Logan trusted Jesus as his Savior.

Several weeks later, Michael came home looking worried. “Logan and I were supposed to meet at the park this morning, but he didn’t show,” he told his mom. “I tried texting him, but he didn’t respond. I’d go to his place to make sure he’s okay, but I don’t know where he lives—he always came here or met me at the park.”


“I’ll ask around,” said Mom. “Maybe I can find out what happened.”

The next day, Mom had news. “I’m afraid Logan won’t be coming around anymore,” she said. “I found out his dad is wanted by the police. He apparently learned they were on his trail, and he packed up his family and took off. Seems he’s been on the go like that for a couple years.”

Michael’s face crumpled as tears filled his eyes. “So I’m never going to see Logan again? But he was like...like...”

“I know,” Mom said as she hugged him. “He was like a brother to you. And you know what? Because you both trust in Jesus, you are brothers in Christ. You’ve both been adopted by God. Maybe Logan will be able to get in touch with you someday, but even if you’re never able to reconnect with him in this lifetime, you’ll see him in heaven.”

Michael wiped his eyes. “I’m glad I told him about Jesus. I’m going to pray for him, wherever he is.”

“Good,” said Mom. “Let’s pray for him right now.”  *Agnes Livezey*



SHARE JESUS WITH YOUR FRIENDS | KEY VERSE: How can they put their trust in [Jesus] if they have not heard of Him? Romans 10:14 (NLV)



Have you told your friends about Jesus? Do you pray for them? Being someone’s friend involves more than just having fun together. If you truly love them, tell them what Jesus has done for you and pray for them. Ask God to help them understand how they can become a part of His family too. If they already know Jesus as their Savior, pray for them as your brother or sister in Christ.

PATRICK THE SCARECROW

Why are we making a scarecrow for the garden?" Cora asked her grandma as she put in some more stuffing.

"Well, the scarecrow helps keep the garden safe from crows. The crows love to pull up the sprouts just as they're popping out of the ground, but when they see the scarecrow, they're afraid to come into the garden."

"So the scarecrow is pretty important. I think we should name him," Cora said. "Let's call him Patrick, Protector of the Garden."

"I like that name," Grandma replied.

When they finished putting the scarecrow together, Grandma and Cora carried him to the center of the garden and set him up. "Okay, Patrick, protect our garden!" Cora exclaimed as she gave him a salute.

Grandma smiled. "Now let's go have some lemonade and cookies."

Grandma got a tray of cookies and two glasses of lemonade, and they went out and sat at the picnic table under the big shade tree.

"Making the scarecrow was a lot of fun today," Cora said as she took a bite of her cookie.

"And having you here to help made it even more special for me," said Grandma. "You know, each year when I make a scarecrow, I stop and think about how the Lord is always watching over me and protecting me. The scarecrow gives me a visual picture. He looks like he's keeping watch in the center of the garden, and I envision the Lord keeping watch over me in the same way."

"But the scarecrow can't actually see anything," Cora said. "He just scares the crows away."

"Right," said Grandma. "But God sees everything. Proverbs 15:3 says, 'The Lord is watching everywhere, keeping his eye on both the evil and the good.' God sees us, and He also loves us. He sent Jesus to save us from sin and evil and to be with us through all of life's difficulties. So, Cora, if you ever feel like God is far away and you're all alone, just stop and think of Patrick the Scarecrow and remember what the Bible says about God's faithfulness to us."

"I will, Grandma." Cora grinned. "Can I take Patrick home with me after the harvest?"

Grandma chuckled. "I'm sure it will be fine, as long as you keep him outside." ❤️

Lisa Fuller



GOD WATCHES OVER YOU | KEY VERSE: The LORD keeps watch over you as you come and go, both now and forever. Psalm 121:8 (NLT)



Do you ever feel like God is far away and doesn't care about you? When you feel that way, open up your Bible. God's Word is full of verses that will remind you of how much He loves you and His faithfulness to you. He sent His own Son, Jesus, to die for you, and He promises He will never leave you, even when bad things happen. Trust Him to watch over you.

COLOR!



REMEMBER ME

Hey, Dad,” said Parker as he and his family were on their way home from a visit with their grandmother, “what do you want written on your tombstone?”

“What a question!” said Mom. “Why are you asking that?”

Parker laughed. “While you were visiting with Grandma, Sadie and I went to the cemetery across the street, remember? There were some interesting things carved on the grave markers—like little sayings or poems. I was just wondering what you’d want on yours someday.”

“I think I’d like a Bible verse,” Dad said. “I want people to remember that my hope is in Jesus.”

“Why do people put flowers on graves?” asked Sadie.

“It’s an expression of love for the person who died,” said Mom. “They do it in memory of that person, and it comforts them as they remember who that person was and what they did.”

“That reminds me of the memorial service we have at church,” Dad said.

“Memorial service?” Parker asked. “At our church? What service is that?”

“The communion service,” replied Dad. “The Bible tells us to observe it in memory of Jesus and all He did for us. We’re reminded of His life and death and that He rose from the grave.”

“And also that He’s coming again,” Mom said.


Sadie nodded thoughtfully. “Why don’t we bring flowers for Him, like people do at the cemetery?” she asked. “Or write something about Jesus on a tombstone?”

“Jesus isn’t dead, so He doesn’t need a tombstone!” said Parker. “But I guess we could bring flowers—like people do at Easter.”

“Well, Jesus actually gave special instructions on how to remember Him,” Dad said. “The bread and cup—symbols of His body and blood—are reminders of the sacrifice He made so we could be saved from sin.”

“Jesus sacrificed so much for us, but we often take it for granted,” said Mom. “That’s why communion is so important.”

“Next time we have a communion service, I’m going to think about Him and thank Him for what He did,” said Parker.

“Why wait till then?” asked Sadie. “We can thank Him right now too!” 

A. W. Smith



REMEMBER WHAT JESUS DID FOR YOU | KEY VERSE: As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes. 1 Corinthians 11:26



Did you know that communion is a special time to fix your thoughts on Jesus and what He’s done for you? Think about how holy He is and the great sacrifice He made for you out of love. Thank Him for dying on the cross and rising from the grave so you could be free from sin and have eternal life. Remember that He’s coming again and will always be with you.

A SHARP SWORD

We had a missionary from Guatemala in my class today,” Maverick said as his family drove home from church. “He showed us a machete. It was big—and he said it was very sharp.”

“What’s a shetty?” asked Maverick’s little sister.

“Not shetty, Charis—*machete*,” Maverick corrected her. “It’s something like a sword. It can be used as a weapon, but the missionary said people in Guatemala use machetes to whack tall grasses and scoop out clumps of dirt when they’re planting crops. They use them to cut sugar cane and other plants too.” He smiled. “They sound really useful. I’d like to have one!”

“What would you do with it?” asked Charis. “You don’t need a shet...a mush...a sword. Why don’t they just call it a sword?”

Dad chuckled. “We have several swords in our house. Did you know that?”

“Yeah,” said Mom. “In fact, you each own one.”

Charis couldn’t believe that. “No, we don’t! I definitely don’t have a sword, and neither does Maverick.”

“Yes, you do!” Dad said. “Maverick has one in his hand right now.”

Charis looked at the Bible Maverick was holding. “That’s a Bible!”

Dad grinned. “Right. And the Bible is called the sword of the Spirit. It can cut through the lies and excuses we tell ourselves and point out our sin.”

Mom nodded. “For instance, before I became a Christian, I thought I was better than everyone else. I’d look at people and be glad my life wasn’t like theirs. But then a friend gave me a Bible, and when I started reading it, I realized I wasn’t good at all. God’s Word showed me all the ways I’d sinned against Him and how I could only be saved through Jesus, who died to take the punishment I deserve. It’s what led me to put my trust in Him. Now when I read the Bible, the Holy Spirit continues to show me things I’ve done wrong that I need to confess and ways I’m trying to do things on my own instead of trusting God. He’s using it to help me turn from sin and rest in God’s love and grace.”

“See?” said Dad. “The Bible really is sharp—sharp enough to pierce our hearts and show us how much we need Jesus.” ♥ *Janice M. Jones*



THE BIBLE PIERCES HEARTS | KEY VERSE: [God’s word] is sharper than the sharpest sword and cuts all the way into us...It judges the thoughts and feelings in our hearts. Hebrews 4:12 (ERV)



Have you ever been convicted of something as you read the Bible? Did it cut through your defenses and show you sin in your life? The Bible can pierce our hearts and show us our sin, but it also tells us that Jesus died and rose again so we could be saved. Trust Him to free you from sin. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 104.) Then keep reading the Bible and trust God to use it to make you more like Jesus.

HURTING HEARTS

“What’s wrong, Elijah?” Mom asked as Elijah got in the car. Elijah sighed. “Mrs. Lewis told our class that Henry won’t be in school for a few days. His dad had a heart attack and died early this morning.”

Mom gasped. “Oh no! That’s awful.”

Elijah nodded. “Principal Brown came and told us he went to Henry’s house this morning. He said Henry and his mom and little brother are very sad. Then he and Mrs. Lewis let us ask questions and talk for a while.” Elijah paused. “Mom, why did this happen? What are they going to do?”

Mom shook her head. “I don’t know. Is there something you want to do for them now?”

“I want to see Henry. He’s my best friend. Can we go to their house?”

“Okay, but first let’s make a meal for them,” Mom said.

Elijah and his mom made a pot of sloppy joes and put the whole meal in a basket. In the car, Elijah said, “Mom, let’s pray for Henry and his family.” Mom stopped the car at the end of the driveway, and they prayed for God to help the family. Elijah also asked Jesus to give him words to comfort his friend.

Henry greeted them at the door.


“We brought you dinner,” Elijah said, and he carried the basket to the kitchen.

Elijah and Henry slipped out to the porch while their moms talked in the house.

“Henry, I’m so sorry. What can I do?”


“I don’t even know. I miss Dad so much already.” Henry covered his face, wiping away tears. “When Mom said something was wrong this morning, I prayed Dad would be okay. Now I don’t know what’s going to happen to us.”

“I don’t know what’s going to happen either, but I do know that Jesus loves you and will be with you through all of this. He understands how hard it is, and you always have hope in Him.” Elijah put a hand on his friend’s shaking shoulder. “I’ll be here for you too. Let me know if there’s anything I can do. I’ll be praying for you and your family.”

Henry closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “Thanks, Elijah.”  *Lynda Boucher*



 **HELP FRIENDS WHO ARE HURTING** | KEY VERSE: Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2

 Do you have a friend who is hurting? Perhaps someone they love has died or they’re facing a difficult situation. Things like that can really hurt a person’s heart, and they need the love and support of their friends. Help them in whatever ways you can, and let them know you’re praying for them. Even though you won’t have all the answers, you can remind them of the hope they have in Jesus.

PASSING TESTS

"I'll probably fail our math test today," Carter told Lucy as they walked to school. "I'm really bad at multiplication."

"Yeah, me too," said Lucy. "But I'm not going to fail. Want to know why?" She slid a card from under the cuff of her sleeve. "See? The multiplication tables are all right here!" She grinned. "I've got an extra card. Want it?" She pulled a card from her pocket and offered it to Carter.

"That's cheating," Carter said.

"What's worse, cheating or failing?" asked Lucy.

Carter took the card and looked at it. *It would be so easy to cheat!* he thought. *My desk is near the back of the room, and Mr. Collins hardly ever walks around when we have a test. But...* "I'm not going to do it," he said, handing the card back to Lucy. "I don't think you should either. It's not right."

Lucy rolled her eyes. "You are dumb," she replied, "and not just in math!"


At the end of the day, Carter hurried home. "How was school today?" his mother asked.


"Okay," Carter replied. "But I don't know if I passed my math test. I hope so!"


"Well, if you studied and did your best, don't worry about it," said Mom. "Did anything good happen today?"

"Well..." Carter hesitated. "This is gonna sound weird, but I actually felt good about taking the test. I had a chance to cheat, but I didn't. I knew it'd be wrong and that Jesus wouldn't want me to do it. So I decided to trust Him with my test and do the right thing."

"Good for you!" Mom said. "No matter what grade you get on your math test, you definitely passed one test today. You were tempted to do something wrong, but you didn't. That kind of test is really hard to pass sometimes. Jesus faced tests like that when He was on earth, and He passed every single one in order to save us. We can pass them too when we depend on Him to help us resist temptation—and even when we do give in, He'll always forgive us since He paid for all our sins on the cross."

Carter grinned. "I'll remember that tomorrow when I take my history test!" 
Douglas G. DeVries

 **RESIST TEMPTATION** | KEY VERSE: God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. 1 Corinthians 10:13 (NIV)

 Do people sometimes encourage you to do things that are wrong? It can be hard to resist, especially when others make fun of you for it. But you don't have to give in. Jesus always passed tests of temptation, and He'll help you pass them too. And when you do give in, you can always go to Him for forgiveness. Trust Him to give you the wisdom and courage to do what is right.

WHAT A PLAN

Devin looked at the house plan his mom was studying. “I still think you could remove the mudroom and make my bedroom bigger,” he said.

Mom smiled. “I think we’ll trust the designer’s plan. We’ll find something to do with that space.”

That afternoon, Devin’s shoulders slumped as he walked into the house. “I can’t believe my best friend moved. School’s not the same without Trav.”

Mom put down the flooring samples she was holding and gave Devin a hug. “I know it’s hard, Dev. Jesus knows it too, and He loves you and promises to be with you. We just have to trust that God has a plan and will use hard things in our lives for good.”

Devin didn’t see how any of this could be God’s plan.

At school the next day, Devin was trying to choose a spot to have lunch when he saw a table with just one kid at it. He walked to the table and looked at the girl who sat alone. He didn’t remember seeing her before. “Can I sit here?”

The girl looked up and smiled. “Sure. No one else wants to sit by the new kid.” Her smile went away. “No one even talks to me. It’s like no one sees me.”

Devin grabbed a chair. “I could use a friend too.”

At home, Devin was excited to tell his mom about Ashley. “If Trav was there, we wouldn’t have sat by a girl,” he said. “But she needed a friend. Maybe that was God’s plan, like you said. Maybe Trav had to go away so that Ashley wouldn’t feel lonely.”

Devin looked at the papers his mom was holding. She seemed to be making another tough decision between multiple options for the new house, but what were they?

Mom held up the papers. “Which crate do we want?”

“Crate?” Devin asked.

Mom nodded. “The mudroom in the floor plan got me thinking...what if we finally got that dog you’ve been wanting?”

“For real?” Devin jumped up and down.

“For real.” Mom put her arms around him. “And I’m proud of you for being a friend to Ashley. Once this plan is complete, maybe she can come meet your new pet.”

Devin grinned. Maybe he could trust both floor plans and God’s plans. ♥

Emily Acker



YOU CAN ALWAYS TRUST GOD’S PLAN | KEY VERSE: Those who know your name trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you. Psalm 9:10 (NIV)



Have you ever had something happen in your life that made you wonder if God really cares about you? We all go through difficult things in life, but God can use them to work out His good plan in ways we couldn’t imagine. When life is hard, remember that Jesus understands what you’re going through and promises to be with you. Then trust Him to work out the plan He has for your life.

THE UNWASTED PEACH

I met a new friend today, Daddy. She gave me her peach!" Charity reported gleefully. She grabbed her dad's hand as they walked to their new apartment from her bus stop.

"Your first day at a new school, and already a new friend? Awesome!" Daddy answered. "Tell me about your friend—and this peach."

Charity skipped to keep up with Daddy's long legs. "Slow down, Daddy, and I'll tell you!" Immediately Daddy shortened his stride. "Her name's Esther. She gets free lunch in the cafeteria like me! But Esther doesn't like peaches. When I asked for the one on her tray, she gave it to me. I couldn't let it go to waste!" They climbed the steps to their apartment.

Daddy laughed. "I know you like canned peaches. We have a couple of cans from the food bank. That can be today's snack." Daddy opened the apartment door. "God answered two prayers for you today, Charity—for a good day at a new school, and for a friend."

Charity took off her school shoes and exchanged them for soft slippers. "You told me when I gave my life to Jesus last year that I could talk to Him anytime, about anything. He heard me, Daddy!"

Daddy pulled out a can opener. "He also showed us something important with Esther's peach."

"He did?"

"Yep. Even though Esther doesn't like peaches, you didn't want good food to be wasted. Sometimes we go through hard times, and even though we don't like those struggles, God isn't willing to let them go to waste."

"God wants us to struggle?" Charity sounded confused.

"No, but He brings good out of difficult times. Jesus went through the most difficult thing of all when He died on the cross, and He did that to do the best thing we could ever imagine—save us from sin and make us God's children. And He promises to use hard things in our lives for good."

"Like having to say goodbye to old friends and leaving our old neighborhood?" Charity asked.

Daddy nodded. "God understands how hard that is, and we can trust Him to bring something good out of it. Like today when He brought you a new friend."

Charity smiled. "And something else!"

"What?" Daddy placed a bowl of juicy peaches on the table.

"More peaches!"  Allison Wilson Lee



GOD BRINGS GOOD FROM HARD TIMES | KEY VERSE: Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Psalm 126:5 (NIV)



Have you ever gone through tough times and wondered why God let it happen? We don't always get answers to our "why" questions, but we can trust God in hard situations. God loves His children, and He's good to us. He won't let our struggles go to waste. He'll bring something good out of sad circumstances as we grow in trusting Him.

A WORM WITH A PURPOSE

Come here, Mr. Wiggle Worm,” Peter said as he put an earthworm in a can. “Hey, Dad, are worms good for anything besides bird food and fish bait?”

“Yes,” said Dad. “They help the earth breathe.”

Peter laughed. “Like lungs?”

“Not exactly, but as worms burrow through the ground, they let fresh air through the soil. The more they eat and digest the soil, the better it is for growing things. God has a purpose for everything.”

“Well, I’m glad one purpose for worms is to make bait,” said Peter. “We’ll catch more fish that way! This will be enough, won’t it?” Dad nodded, and they headed to the lake.

That evening the family enjoyed fish for supper. “Yum!” Peter said as he took a bite. “Fishing was so much fun! I wish I could skip school and go fishing every day.”

Mom laughed. “Now that would be overdoing it a little.”

“Besides, you like school,” said Peter’s sister, Ann.

“Yeah, except science,” Peter said. “I don’t agree with some of the things Mrs. Moore says. She thinks the universe came about on its own, but the Bible says God created everything, right?”

“That’s right,” said Mom. “The Bible tells us that the beauty and complexity of nature points to God, who planned everything and makes it all work together.”


Dad nodded. “Even though sin has affected creation in deep ways, we can see the goodness of God in everything He made.”

“Like worms and how they help things grow?” Peter asked.

“Right,” said Dad. “The sun is another example of God’s goodness. It’s just the right distance away so we can live comfortably. And seasons follow one another in perfect order. Only God could have planned everything so well.”

“And He has a special plan for people too, right?” asked Ann.

“Yes, He does!” Mom replied. “Jesus came and died for the whole world, and one day He’ll return and make all creation new so it’s no longer affected by sin. And He has a purpose for everyone who trusts in Him—a plan for how He wants each one of us to be part of His kingdom on earth.”

Dad nodded. “Because of Jesus, all of creation—down to the smallest earthworm—has a purpose in the kingdom of God.”  Harry C. Trover



GOD CREATED EVERYTHING WITH A PURPOSE | KEY VERSE: For by [Jesus] all things were created...All things were created through Him and for Him. Colossians 1:16



Did you know that God is in charge of everything? He’s the one who created the whole universe and makes it all work together. Though the sin we brought into the world causes a lot of problems, it won’t be around forever. Jesus died and rose again to save the world from sin, and He has a purpose for everything—including you! Trust Him and His plan for your life. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 104.)

DANDELIONS

I can't believe it! I studied hard for that history test, and I only got a B!" Madelyn said as she and her mother walked Chestnut, their shaggy brown Yorkshire terrier. "But Ella said Jade cheated and got an A. It's not fair!"

"Ella caught Jade cheating?" Mom asked.

"I don't think she saw it happen, but Ella hears about everything. It must be true because Jade never gets A's."

They stopped to let Chestnut sniff the ground. The dog pulled the leash toward a cluster of white spheres anchored in the grass. They were dandelion seed heads. Madelyn picked a feathery globe and blew the seeds until only a bare stem remained.

"Look how far the seeds are traveling!" she exclaimed.

As Chestnut chased the flying seeds, Mom asked, "Do you know what happens when they land?"

"They'll grow into yellow dandelions—pretty weeds!"


Mom nodded. "Isn't it amazing? Those seeds look delicate, but they hold so much power—just like words that start gossip."

"I know what you're going to say, Mom—gossip spreads as easily as dandelion seeds. Now that I think about it, Ella told Jason and Hari about Jade. I told Alma, who is best friends with Jill, so she probably knows too."


"See how words as flimsy as those seeds can take root and grow into gossip?"

Madelyn looked down. "When I was disappointed with my grade, talking about Jade somehow made me feel better. But I don't feel good about it anymore. If Ella starts talking about Jade again, I'll say I'd rather not talk about Jade behind her back."

"That's wise," said Mom. "Jesus tells us to love one another the way He loves us, and that means we need to care about how our words affect others—even when it involves things that may be true. How would Jade feel if she knew you were telling people that she struggles to get good grades?"

Madelyn sighed. "She'd probably feel embarrassed and hurt—and she'd be even more hurt if she knew I spread gossip about her cheating because of it." Madelyn looked at her mom. "I'll ask Jesus to forgive me for listening to gossip and to help me not spread it myself. Instead of wasting time on gossip, I'll use it to study and get that A!"  *Elena Dee*

 **DON'T SPREAD GOSSIP** | KEY VERSE: [Jesus said,] "You must love each other as I have loved you." John 13:34 (NLV)

 Do you spread gossip about others? A few words of gossip can quickly spread and take root—and hurt many feelings in the process. The next time you're tempted to repeat something about someone that they'd find hurtful, stop and think about how much Jesus loves you. Then show that same love to others by not wasting time on gossip.

OWEN AND THE GURDWARA

Singur invited me to his birthday party next Saturday,” Owen told his mom and older sister, Chloe. “He’s an awesome soccer player.” Owen pretended to headbutt a soccer ball into a goal, then raised his arms in victory.

“You could get him a hat with his favorite team’s logo on it,” Mom said.

Owen shook his head. “Singur always wears a turban. It’s part of his religion. He’s a sick.”

“He means *Sikh*, Mom.” Chloe slipped off the bandana that had been tied in her hair.

“Singur’s mom said I can spend the night after the party,” Owen said.

“What about church on Sunday?” Mom asked.

“I could go with Singur to his gurdwara. It’s like church.”

“A gurdwara is not a church,” Mom said. “Sikhism is a different religion from Christianity.”


“But that doesn’t mean Owen shouldn’t be friends with Singur, does it?” Chloe asked. “Didn’t Jesus make friends with all kinds of people?”

“He did,” Mom said, “and He shared God’s love with them. But He never participated in things they did that went against who He was. Sikhs don’t worship Jesus, so a gurdwara is not a place of worship for Christians. We need to be careful that the things we do with our friends are in step with our faith in Jesus. He saved us and made us His people, and we need to follow Him.”

“Give me your leg, Owen,” Chloe said. “I want to show you something.” She put her own leg next to Owen’s and tied their ankles together with her bandana. “You go left. I’ll go right.” When Owen tried to walk away from his sister, he fell. “You’re tied to Jesus, and you need to go in the same direction as Him,” Chloe said. “Otherwise you won’t go anywhere.”

Owen got to his feet. “Mom, I think I should go to Singur’s party and spend the night, but I’ll tell him I can’t go to his gurdwara because I have my own church to be part of.”

“Good thinking,” Mom said. “You might even get a chance to tell him about Jesus and what He’s done for you.”

Owen nodded. “And for his gift, I think I’ll get him a bandana with his favorite soccer team. It’ll work great for winning a three-legged race!”  *Holland Webb*



BE A FRIEND LIKE JESUS | KEY VERSE: “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” Matthew 4:19 (NIV)



Do you have friends who don’t know Jesus? How can you be a friend to them without going against who you are as a Christian? Jesus was friends with all kinds of people, but that doesn’t mean He went along with everything they did. Trust Him to give you wisdom in knowing how to be a good friend to others while remaining true to Him.

ACCEPTING HELP

Madison was sitting at her desk doing math homework when her little sister walked in. “I want to write numbers too,” said four-year-old Ava.

Smiling, Madison wrote the numbers from one to ten on a piece of paper. Then she took Ava’s hand and helped her begin to write. “One...two...”

Ava pulled her hand away. “I can do it!”

“Okay,” said Madison, going back to her homework. She had just finished her last problem when Ava began to cry. “What’s wrong?” Madison asked. Ava shoved her paper away. Her numbers were jumbled on the paper, many of them unrecognizable. “Let me help you,” Madison said, bending down to take Ava’s hand again.

“No!” Ava pulled away, grabbing the paper. “I want to do it myself.”

“Okay,” said Madison. “But I’m finished with my work, and I’m going to get something to drink. I’ll be back in a little while.”

Madison poured herself a glass of water and went to the family room, where her mother was sorting clothes. “I tried to help Ava write her numbers, Mom, but she wouldn’t let me. She’d rather cry because she can’t do it instead of letting me help her.”

Mom smiled. “Admitting we need help with something isn’t always easy.” She handed Madison some towels to fold. “Sometimes we’re a lot like Ava. Her numbers didn’t turn out right when she didn’t let you guide her, and our decisions often don’t turn out right when we don’t let Jesus guide us.”

“How does He do that?” asked Madison.

“Through what He says to us in the Bible, through the prompting of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds, and even through people He brings into our lives,” Mom replied. “We often think we need to do everything on our own, but that’s impossible. Jesus is the one who saved us from sin, which we could never do ourselves, and He wants us to bring all our problems and struggles to Him in prayer and trust Him to guide us and help us make good decisions.”

“I’m glad Jesus is always there to help us,” Madison said as she finished folding the towels. “Speaking of help, I’ll go see if Ava has changed her mind about trying to write numbers on her own.” ♥ *Karen E. Cogan*



WE NEED JESUS'S HELP | KEY VERSE: I am teaching you the way of wisdom; I am guiding you on straight paths. Proverbs 4:11 (CSB)



Do you depend on Jesus as you go about your daily life? Or do you think you can do everything by yourself? Problems at home, difficulties at school, struggles with sin—Jesus wants you to bring all those things to Him in prayer instead of trying to tackle them on your own. Trust Him to guide you and help you do His will in every situation.

A GENTLE NUDGE

Maria and I are going to do something about those kids who tease us for going to the after-school Bible club,” Bailey told her mom on the way home from school.

“Do what, exactly?” Mom asked, coming to a stop at a noisy construction zone.

“We’re going to write a letter telling them they’re sinners headed straight for hell and have everyone in our Bible club sign it,” Bailey said. “Then none of us will talk to them until they quit being so mean.”


The jackhammers ripping up the road made too much noise for Mom to answer. Once they pulled into their driveway, she turned to look at Bailey. “Did you see how hard the people back there had to work to get through the asphalt?” Bailey nodded. “Before you go in, I want to show you something,” Mom said, getting out of the car. Bailey followed her to the end of the driveway where Mom pointed to a little green plant poking through the asphalt.

“How can a little stem like that break through the driveway?” Bailey asked.

Mom smiled. “Isn’t it interesting how those workers back there had to use a jackhammer to break the asphalt, but little plants can gently and steadily push their way through?” She looked at Bailey. “It sounds like you’re planning to use a jackhammer approach with those kids at school, but I think slow and steady gentleness would be more effective.”

“What do you mean?” asked Bailey.

“Instead of writing a nasty letter, speak the truth kindly,” said Mom. “After all, you and all the kids at Bible club are sinners too. The only reason you’ve been saved from sin is because Jesus gave His life for you, and you’re gathering together to get to know Him better. And He says to love your enemies, just like He loves you, a sinner. Instead of trying to jackhammer the truth into those kids, why not plant a seed in their hearts by telling them what Jesus has done for you and inviting them to come to Bible club if they want to learn more?”

Bailey was quiet for a moment. “You’re right,” she said. “If we’re at Bible club to learn about Jesus and how much He loves us, we should act like Him.” 
Heather Tekavec



DEVELOP A GENTLE SPIRIT | KEY VERSE: Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone. Proverbs 25:15 (NIV)



What kind of approach do you use when others tease you about your faith? A jackhammer approach—or a gentle one? Jesus used a gentle approach when He was treated badly, and He wants you to do the same. Talk to an adult about how you can use a gentle approach when others are mean to you. God may use your kindness and gentleness to break through their hearts.

NO CHEESE FOR YOU

How about slicing this cheese, Bryson?" Mom said as Bryson helped her prepare sandwiches for lunch.

"Sure," said Bryson. He got out the cheese cutter and went to work.

As Bryson began slicing cheese, two-year-old Asher ran into the kitchen. "Some!" he said, holding out his hand.

Mom shook her head. "Sorry, Asher. No cheese for you. It makes you sick."

Asher frowned and ignored her. "Some, pwease!" he begged, tugging on Bryson's arm.

"I can't give you any, Asher," Bryson replied. "Mom said no." Asher fussed a little more, but then walked away, obviously not happy. "Too bad Asher doesn't really understand why he can't have cheese," said Bryson. "If he knew it was because he's allergic to it, he might not get upset when you tell him no."


"Parents often have to make decisions their kids can't understand," Mom said, turning to look at Bryson.

"You're talking about the party last night, aren't you?" he asked.

Mom nodded. "When you asked if you could go, Dad and I didn't say no to be mean. Like we told you—based on our experience and knowledge, we felt it wasn't the kind of party it would be wise for you to go to. That's why we said no."

"I think I understand better now," Bryson said. "Well, at least I understand that you have a reason for not always letting me do what I want, just like you have a reason for not letting Asher have what he wants."

"Good." Mom smiled and gave Bryson a hug. "God has placed us over you to teach and protect you. We're doing our best to teach you about Jesus and how to live in light of everything He's done to save you. Someday we won't be able to make decisions for you. As you get older, you'll have to decide what choices line up with following Jesus for yourself through prayer, studying His Word, and seeking wise advice from other Christians."

Bryson nodded. "I know, and until then, I'll try to remember that you have your reasons when you won't let me do things." He grinned. "If I forget, you can just tell me, 'No cheese for you.' That should help me remember!"  *Hope L. Aderman*



OBEY YOUR PARENTS | KEY VERSE: Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Colossians 3:20



Do you ever think your parents make rules for no reason? God puts parents in our lives so they can use their knowledge and experience to teach us about Jesus and train us in the way He wants us to go. We may not always understand their reasons, but we can trust Jesus to use their guidance to help us grow in our faith and show His love to others. Trust Him to help you show His love to your parents by obeying them.

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