



Would you like to receive a free devotional at your house four times a year?

US and Canada: Sign up for your free subscription by

- filling in the order form found on the enclosed card and sending it to:
Keys for Kids Ministries • 2060 43rd Street SE • Grand Rapids, MI 49508
- calling toll free 888-224-2324 to order
- placing an order on our website: keysforkids.org/getkeys

Quantity orders, samples, or books to be sent to other international addresses can be ordered on our website: shop.keysforkids.org (or call for information).

Note: Our mailing list is confidential and is not sold or given to others.

Free subscriptions are made possible by the generous support of donors who see the value of bringing God's Word to kids and families. To give, visit keysforkids.org/donate, or call 616-647-4500 or toll free 888-224-2324.

Internet radio. Just for kids. keysforkids.net

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version.
© Copyright, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked CSB are taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Scripture quotations marked ERV are taken from the Holy Bible: Easy-to-Read Version © 2014 by Bible League International. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007, 2013, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NLV are taken from the New Life Version, copyright © 1969 and 2003. Used by permission of Barbour Publishing, Inc., Uhrichsville, Ohio, 44683. All rights reserved.

© 2022 Keys for Kids Ministries | 2060 43rd Street SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49508
office: 616.647.4500 | toll free: 1.888.224.2324 | keysforkids.org | Printed quarterly in the USA.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APRIL TITLE.....	KEY.....	PAGE
April One Birthday.....	Share the light of Jesus.....	4
Overflow.....	Let God's love in you overflow to others.....	5
Names in Stone.....	Your name can be written in heaven.....	6
Open Wide.....	Learn all you can from God's Word.....	7
One Wrong Note.....	Be in harmony with your family.....	8
Lifeprints.....	Let your actions point to Jesus.....	9
Part of God's Family.....	Christians belong to God's family.....	10
Out of the Tube.....	Speak in a kind way.....	11
It Happened to Me.....	Comfort others with God's love.....	12
Pulling on the Leash.....	Obey those in authority.....	13
God's Strength (Part 1).....	God is in control.....	14
God's Strength (Part 2).....	God gives power.....	15
Where the Fish Are.....	Share Jesus wherever you are.....	16
The Servant.....	Be a servant for Jesus.....	17
Redeemed.....	Jesus died for you.....	18
A Light in the Dark.....	Jesus is the light of the world.....	19
Seeing and Believing.....	Jesus arose—believe it.....	20
Fantastic Frigate Birds.....	The earth is full of God's glory.....	21
Not Sugar.....	Follow God's standards.....	22
Crash Course.....	Love God.....	23
A Big Family.....	Be adopted by God.....	24
Clean-up Day.....	Care for God's creation.....	25
The Same but Different.....	You are special to God.....	26
Tried and True.....	The Bible is true.....	27
The Snooze Button.....	Wake up and live for Jesus.....	28
Growing in Jesus.....	Jesus helps us grow.....	29
It's Free!.....	Eternal life is free.....	30
A Way to Serve.....	You can serve God now.....	31
A Special Number.....	Praise and honor God with music.....	32
Calm in the Storm.....	Trusting God brings peace.....	33
MAY TITLE.....	KEY.....	PAGE
Bitterness Bubbling Over.....	Let go of bitterness.....	34
No Stains.....	Jesus's blood washes away sin.....	35
The Lighthouse.....	Let your life reflect Jesus.....	36
Rascal's Song.....	Sing praises to God.....	37
The Demonstration.....	Demonstrate God's love.....	38
Moppet's Choice.....	Be a friend to others.....	39
By Myself, Daddy.....	Accept God's help.....	40
Mother's Voice.....	Thank God for mothers.....	41
Immediate Help.....	God is always available.....	42
Talking Tongues.....	Keep confidences.....	43
Just Like Clockwork.....	Your service is important.....	44
The Race of Life (Part 1).....	Run a good race in life.....	45
The Race of Life (Part 2).....	For Christians, death means seeing Jesus.....	46
A Special Diet.....	Develop convictions.....	47
The Winning Team.....	Jesus will be the final victor over Satan.....	48
Not Alone.....	Jesus loves you.....	49
Rubbed the Wrong Way.....	Confess sin.....	50
The Safe.....	Memorize Bible verses.....	51
Hey Zach!.....	The Ten Commandments.....	52
Top Priority.....	Put Jesus first.....	54

God's Image	Jesus shows us who God is	55
A Special Name	Honor God's name	56
The Sabbath Day	Honor Jesus on the Sabbath	57
Why Can't I?	Honor and obey parents	58
A Hateful Heart	Don't hate others	59
Family Loyalty	Be loyal to your family	60
Eddie's Raincoat	Give, don't steal	61
A False Accusation	Don't make false accusations	62
Be Happy	Be content in Jesus	63
Hear That Bird	Hear the good news of Jesus	64
Color!		65
No Mistakes	The Bible is never wrong	66
Telltale Mirror	God's Word reveals sin	67

JUNE TITLE.....	KEY.....	PAGE
A Bridge to the Gospel.....	Reach others with friendship	68
The Early Bird—or Worm?.....	Put others before yourself.....	69
The Fawn.....	Trust God when you feel afraid.....	70
Color!		71
Only Joking.....	Don't hurt others by teasing	72
God's Good Plan	Trust God's plan	73
No Jerking!	Use words wisely.....	74
Real Darkness.....	Jesus is the light of the world	75
Time Well Spent	Take time to say thanks.....	76
Activity.....		77
Delicious Goodness	God shows goodness by providing for us	78
Not Ashamed	Tell others about Jesus	79
Imagine That.....	Develop your talents.....	80
Treasures in Heaven.....	Earthly things don't last.....	81
The Boredom Cure	Serve Jesus by helping others.....	82
Who Needs Brothers?.....	Appreciate your brothers and sisters.....	83
The Perfect Pen Pal.....	Be a living letter for Jesus	84
No Doubt About It	You can know you're saved	85
Wings Like Eagles	Rely on God's strength	86
A Hopeless Case	No one is hopeless	87
Good Gifts	God gives good gifts.....	88
Color!		89
What Comes Out of Your Mouth.....	Think before you speak	90
The Old Bracelet.....	Live in a way that reflects Jesus	91
Just Outside Ella's Window	God cares for you.....	92
Watch Your Step!	Walk wisely in your life	93
Recharged Power	The Bible helps recharge you	94
Leaping Lemurs.....	Use the gifts God gave you.....	95
The Counselor Hunt	Jesus came to find you	96
Feeding the Birds	Spread the good news	97
Fainting Goats	Trust God when you're afraid	98
Color!		99
A Different Viewpoint.....	Be kind and understanding.....	100
Light of the Fireflies.....	Let your light shine	101
Have You Heard the Good News?.....		102
Prayer Power	We Want to Hear from You.....	103
The Humble Bumblebee.....	Creature Feature: Bumblebee.....	104

APRIL ONE BIRTHDAY

READ: MATTHEW 5:14-16; PHILIPPIANS 2:12-15

Happy birthday to you,” sang Liam and Hallie as their mom brought a cake to the table. “Happy birthday, dear Dad. Happy birthday to you.”

“Blow out the candles, Dad,” said Liam.

“And don’t forget to make a wish!” added Hallie.

“All right! Let’s see...” Dad closed his eyes, took a deep breath, puffed out his cheeks, and blew.

All around the cake, little lights went out. But one recovered and burned brightly again. “Oops,” said Dad, and he blew again. The candle flickered and appeared to go out, but when Dad stopped blowing, the flame came right back. He tried a third time and it happened again. “Hey, wait a minute!” he said when Liam and Hallie erupted in giggles. “That has to be a trick candle! Whose idea was it to pull a trick on your poor old dad?”

“That’s what you get for being born on April Fools’ Day,” Liam teased.

“It’s a special kind of candle that won’t blow out,” said Hallie. “It says on the box that you have to put it under water to put it out.”

“Yeah, but I’m sure I can blow it out,” Liam said. He took an extra large breath and gave it a try with no success. Then Hallie tried—and even Mom took a turn. But no one could do it.

After dinner, Dad opened his Bible for family devotions. “That special candle reminds me of what Jesus has done for us,” he said. “He rescued us from the darkness of sin and has called us to be lights in this world. We point others to Him by living out the love and grace He has shown us. But when we choose to follow selfish desires instead of living God’s way, it blows against our lights, causing them to flicker. It makes it harder for others to see the light of Jesus in us.”

“But that doesn’t mean our lights go out completely, does it, Dad?” Hallie asked.

“No,” said Dad. “Jesus has given those who trust in Him His Holy Spirit, and He will never let our flames go out. He keeps us burning and guides us in showing His light and love to others. We can depend on Him to help us shine for Jesus.” ♥

HAZEL W. MARETT



SHARE THE LIGHT OF 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)

Are you shining with the light of Jesus? He has filled us with His love so we can share His light with others. Our flames may flicker when we choose to act selfishly or listen to the world’s lies, but they will never go out because we have the Holy Spirit inside us. He helps us turn away from sin and guides us in sharing God’s love and truth with others. Trust Him to help you burn bright in this dark world.

OVERFLOW

READ: 1 CORINTHIANS 13; 1 JOHN 4:7-5:5

Violet peered down into a shiny silver bucket hanging off a sugar maple tree. Her homeschool friends crowded around her as a crystal-clear liquid dripped out of the tap from the tree and into the bucket.

“It’s hard to believe this clear stuff is made into maple syrup!” Trey motioned to the surrounding tapped trees. The silver buckets glistened in the sunshine.

“Are you kids ready to go inside and see the whole process?” Mr. Les motioned the homeschool group inside the sugarhouse.

Inside, Violet sniffed in appreciation. “It smells like candy in here!”

Mr. Les grinned. “It’s one of my favorite things about the transformation. As the steam rises, the smell of sweet syrup fills the whole sugarhouse.” The kids watched in fascination as Mr. Les showed how the sap was heated in the evaporator until the temperature reached 219 degrees. “As the water evaporates, the sap thickens until you get this.” Mr. Les had Trey twist a knob, and the kids gasped in delight as golden syrup came pouring out into a bucket below. Just before it overflowed, Mr. Les turned it off. “Next, we filter the syrup and measure the sugar content.” Mr. Les showed the group a few more things before he asked if there were any questions.

“Do we get to taste any?” Trey jumped up and down.

Mr. Les laughed. “Of course!” He pointed to a table with samples of syrup in tiny paper cups.

Violet took a sip of warm maple syrup and sighed. “It’s so good! I could drink a whole overflowing cup of syrup.”

“*Overflow*—that word was in the verse my mom just had us memorize,” Bree mused. “First Thessalonians 3:12—it’s about having overflowing love for others.”

“Sometimes it’s hard to love others—especially when they aren’t being nice,” Trey interjected.

“True—that’s why we need to rely on Jesus to help us love the way He loves,” Violet replied.

“I’m glad we have His help to make our love for others increase and overflow,” Bree said as she finished off her cup of syrup.

“Me too.” Trey licked the last bit of syrup from his cup. “He helps us show others how good He is!” ♥ SAVANNAH COLEMAN

LET GOD’S LOVE IN YOU OVERFLOW TO OTHERS

KEY VERSE: MAY THE LORD MAKE YOUR LOVE INCREASE AND OVERFLOW FOR EACH OTHER AND FOR EVERYONE ELSE. 1 THESSALONIANS 3:12 (NIV)

Do you ever have a difficult time showing love to others? If you are a child of God, you don’t have to love others in your own strength. Jesus showed us the depth of His love by sacrificing His life on the cross for us, and He helps us love others. He makes our hearts overflow with love and spill out into our words and actions so others can see how good He is.

NAMES IN STONE

READ: REVELATION 20:12-15; 21:1-2, 22-27

The last avalanche of rocks at this site took place in 1990,” announced Stella as she read the plaque at the rest stop. She turned to look at the huge boulders along the side of the mountain road. “So all these rocks landed here back then,” she said thoughtfully. “I hope no more of them decide to fall today!”

“Hey, look there!” Carson pointed to a big rock bearing the names *Jason* and *Sarah*, along with a date from several years before in faded spray paint. “Looks like some kids wanted to have their names written on stone.” He grinned. “If we had some spray paint, we could add ours too.”

Mom shook her head. “Not a good idea. It’s a shame to spoil the mountain that way!”

Dad nodded. “Maybe Jason and Sarah come back sometimes to see if their names are still here.”

“Well, they’ve lasted quite a while, but they’re fading away,” observed Mom.

“It seems like everybody wants their name to live on forever,” said Dad. “You know, I had my name written in a special place too, and it’s still there.”

“Mitch!” Mom scolded. “You didn’t!”

Dad grinned. “Yup. It was when I was younger...before you met me.”

“Cool!” said Carson. “Where is it? Can we go see it? You said it’s still there.”

“It sure is,” said Dad. “The Bible says so. My name is written in heaven.”

“In heaven!” exclaimed Stella. “On stone?”

“Nope.” Dad shook his head. “It’s in the Book of Life. When I trusted in Jesus, He wrote my name in His special book where no avalanche can bury it, no rain can fade it, and nobody can come and wipe it out. When He returns to judge the world, my name in that book will prove that He has washed my sins away with His blood and that I belong to Him, and He will welcome me into the new, perfect world He’ll create on earth to be with Him there.”

“I trust in Jesus too,” said Stella.

“So do I,” said Carson. “So our names are written there forever, right?”

“They sure are,” said Mom. “And so is mine.” ♥ HEATHER TEKAVEC



YOUR NAME CAN BE WRITTEN IN HEAVEN

KEY VERSE: REJOICE BECAUSE YOUR NAMES ARE WRITTEN IN HEAVEN.
LUKE 10:20

Is your name written in heaven? If it is, that’s a reason to rejoice and give thanks to God. If it’s not already written there, it can be. When you trust Jesus as your Savior, your name will be written in the Book of Life where it can never be destroyed or removed. Trust in Him today, and you can look forward to spending eternity with Him. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 102.)

OPEN WIDE

READ: PSALM 119:129-135

Mom, come and see!” Cora called. “Robins are building a nest in the tree by the porch.” Mom went to join Cora, and together they watched a pair of robins fly back and forth with grass, moss, and small twigs in their beaks.

A couple of weeks later, the robins began carrying worms to the nest and Cora heard peeping sounds. “They have babies!” she exclaimed, and every day she spent some time watching the activity around the robins’ nest.

One day Cora’s grandpa came to visit. “Come see our robins, Grandpa!” Cora eagerly led him down the back porch steps and pointed to the nest in the nearby tree.

“Here comes Mother Robin,” said Grandpa, and he and Cora watched as three little bald heads bobbed up, three little mouths opened wide, and one of them received the food from its mother.

Cora smiled. “They open their mouths so wide! I can tell they’re getting stronger, and I can’t wait to watch them learn to fly.”

“That will be interesting,” Grandpa agreed as he and Cora sat down on the steps. “What do you think would happen if those baby robins wouldn’t open their mouths for food?”

“Well, they wouldn’t get fed—and they sure wouldn’t ever get strong enough to fly.”

“That’s right,” said Grandpa. “I have another question for you. What happens when Christians don’t open their hearts and minds to take in the milk and meat of God’s Word—the spiritual food He gives to strengthen His children?”

“You’re saying I need to read my Bible, aren’t you?” Cora sighed. “I know I should do that, but it’s really hard sometimes. I’m busy with homework and sports and stuff.”

Grandpa put his arm around Cora’s shoulders. “I know it can be hard, but remember that Jesus feeds us spiritually through His Word. He uses it to strengthen our faith in Him and help us grow as Christians. He does that when we read it on our own and when we learn about it with others, like we do at church.”

Cora nodded. “I do learn a lot from the Bible at church, but I’d like to start reading it on my own too. I want to be more like those robins and open wide.” ♥

CAROLYN E. YOST

LEARN ALL YOU CAN FROM GOD’S WORD

KEY VERSE: I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD...OPEN YOUR MOUTH WIDE,
AND I WILL FILL IT. PSALM 81:10

Are you opening wide to take in the spiritual food Jesus wants to give you? Do you read your Bible and listen carefully when you hear it taught at church? Jesus has lots of good food for you in His Word, the Bible—promises, lessons, encouragement, warnings, and much more. Listen to what He has to say to you. He will use the truth of His Word to give you strength and help you grow.

ONE WRONG NOTE

READ: PHILIPPIANS 2:3-8, 13-15

Maggie flipped through the channels on TV while she finished her snack. “All done?” her mom asked. “Good. Now before you do anything else, you need to clean your room. And then practice piano.”

Maggie groaned. “Mom!” Seeing her mother’s warning look, Maggie stopped complaining and hurried to her bedroom. There, she angrily piled books and papers in a corner and flung clothes from the floor onto her bed. Then she reluctantly went to practice her music.

After practicing only a short time, Maggie crashed her hands on the keyboard and scowled at her little brother, who was making engine noises as he played with his trucks. “Get out of here, Eli,” she shouted. “You’re making me hit the wrong notes!” Just then, Mom came into the room. “I can’t get this music right with Eli in here,” Maggie said. “It sounds awful!”

“You’ve been hitting just one note wrong, but it’s one that’s repeated often.” Mom sat down and played several chords. She showed Maggie which note she had been missing. “One wrong note in a chord causes discord—lack of harmony.” She looked at Maggie. “And one member of a family out of harmony with the other members causes discord in a home.”

Maggie stared down at the piano in silence, avoiding her mother’s eyes.

“Why don’t you try this piece again,” said Mom. “Do it carefully. You’ll feel better about it when the notes are all in harmony.” Mom got up from the piano bench. “Think about what you need to do to be in harmony with your family too. I know it’s not always easy, but Jesus helps us love others the way He does so we can live in harmony together. Trust Him to help you change your attitude.” Mom turned to Eli. “Come on, Eli. You come with me to the kitchen.”

Maggie tried to be angry as she played, but she knew her mom was right. When she finished practicing, she got up and hurried to the kitchen. “Mom, I’m sorry for my bad attitude lately,” she said. “I know I’ve been the wrong note around here. I..” She hesitated. “I need to go clean my room again!” Maggie grinned at Eli. “You can bring your trucks and come along if you like.” ♥ BARBARA J. WESTBERG

BE IN HARMONY WITH YOUR FAMILY

KEY VERSE: IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE ANOTHER, HAVE THE SAME MINDSET AS CHRIST JESUS. PHILIPPIANS 2:5 (NIV)

Are you in harmony with your family? Or are your words and actions off-key? Do you yell at your brothers and sisters when they bother you or use your things? Do you snap at your parents when they ask you to do something? Jesus wants to help you have the kind of attitude in your relationships that He did when He became human and died for our sins. Trust Him to help you be in harmony with others.



LIFEPRINTS

READ: COLOSSIANS 3:8-9, 12-15

At the sound of the school bell, Flynn slowly made his way into the building. He went to the drinking fountain and pushed his way in at the front of the long line of kids waiting there. “Hey, no cuts!” several of them called out. Flynn ignored them and drank deeply. He shuffled down the hall to the coatrack and muttered when he saw a jacket already hanging on the coat hook nearest the door. He yanked the offending coat off, threw it across another hook, and put his own jacket in his favorite spot.



It was the start of a typical day for Flynn. During class time, he daydreamed instead of studying. When the morning recess bell rang, he was the first one out the door. After recess, he was the last one in. He glared at his teacher when she made him stay in at afternoon recess to finish his work.

That evening, Flynn’s grandma stayed with him while his dad went to a parent-teacher conference at school. While he was gone, Flynn got out his detective set and pretended he was solving mysteries. When his dad returned, Flynn greeted him with a grin. “Hey, Dad, you better be careful what you touch, because we leave prints on everything.”

Dad nodded. “I know. And what kind of prints have you been leaving?”

“The same kind as always, of course. People’s fingerprints don’t change.”

“True,” said Dad, “but wherever we go, we leave other prints too. Let’s call them lifeprints. Everything we do makes an impression—a lifeprint—on other people. What kind of prints do you make on your teacher and the kids at school?”

Flynn looked at the floor. “Not very good ones, I guess.”

Dad nodded. “I’m afraid you’re right. I was sorry to learn about that tonight. But unlike fingerprints, you can change the kind of lifeprints you make. When you trusted in Jesus, He made you a new person who’s able to leave the kind of lifeprints He did—lifeprints of love and sacrifice. With His help, you can leave lifeprints that point others to Him instead of yourself. I think you need to do that, don’t you?”

Flynn nodded slowly. “I’ll trust Jesus to help me—and ask Him to forgive me for the way I’ve been acting.” ♥ HAZEL W. MARETT

LET YOUR ACTIONS POINT TO JESUS

KEY VERSE: WHATEVER YOU DO, DO IT ALL FOR THE GLORY OF GOD.
1 CORINTHIANS 10:31 (NIV)

What kind of lifeprints are you making on others? Do kids and teachers see kindness, respect, and friendliness in your life? Do they see you put others ahead of yourself? Do you show responsibility in your school assignments and jobs at home? If not, ask Jesus to forgive you, and trust Him to help you change. If you know Him as your Savior, you can leave lifeprints that point to Him.

PART OF GOD'S FAMILY

READ: EPHESIANS 2:19-22

This trip is so much fun!" said Clara as her family drove back to their hotel during spring vacation.

Her sister Sydney grinned. "Yeah! That water park today was really cool! What are we gonna do tomorrow, Dad?"

"Tomorrow we're going to church," Dad answered.

Sydney frowned. "We don't usually go to church when we're on vacation."

"Yeah," said Clara. "Won't we feel out of place in a church where we don't know anyone?"

"Actually, we do know someone—or at least, Pastor Burke does," Dad replied. "He has friends who live in this town, and your mom and I would like to meet them, so we're going to their church tomorrow. I think we'll feel at home there." The girls were not convinced, but they knew better than to argue.

Early Sunday morning, Mom woke Clara and Sydney. They had breakfast at the hotel and then headed to church. "Can't we at least skip Sunday school?" Clara asked. "We won't even know where to go."

"Pastor Burke's friends have a daughter your age, so she'll take you there," Mom assured them.

When they arrived, they were welcomed at the door by Pastor Burke's friends Mr. and Mrs. Ortiz and their daughter Gabriella. "Look at those posters on the wall!" Sydney whispered to Clara as they followed Gabriella to her Sunday school class. "They have the same Wednesday night program we do!" The girls were also a little surprised to find they enjoyed the songs they sang—both in Sunday school and in the morning church service—even though they hadn't heard some of them before.

"That wasn't bad after all," said Sydney as they got into their car after church.

"No," said Clara. "Actually, I liked it a lot. I liked their songs almost as much as the ones we sing at home. And Gabriella and the other kids were nice."

Dad smiled. "When we're away from our own church, we might feel like we're the only Christians in the world, but that's not true. There are people everywhere who love Jesus, and it's nice to meet some of them."

"Yes," said Mom. "After all, we all belong to God's family! Meeting Christians in unfamiliar places reminds us we're never alone." ♥ LINDA WEDDLE

CHRISTIANS BELONG TO GOD'S FAMILY

KEY VERSE: YOU ARE NO LONGER FOREIGNERS AND STRANGERS, BUT FELLOW CITIZENS WITH GOD'S PEOPLE AND ALSO MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD.

EPHESIANS 2:19 (NIV)

Have you ever visited a church in a place you didn't live? Was it a lot like your church at home? Chances are that some things were familiar and other things were different, but the important thing is that you were able to meet others who love Jesus. A church in a new place can be a home away from home because all those who trust in Jesus are part of God's family.

OUT OF THE TUBE

READ: PROVERBS 10:31-32; ECCLESIASTES 10:12-13

I gotta go, Ian texted his friend Spencer after helping him with a homework question. I'm babysitting Colton, so I'd better see if he finished his snack. Ian put down his phone and returned to the kitchen, but his little brother was no longer there. "Colton, where are you?" Ian called.

"In here." The little boy's answer came from the bathroom.

Ian hurried in and found toothpaste all over the counter. More was oozing out of the tube as Colton stood on a stool, trying to push it back in.

"Colton!" Ian grabbed the tube away from his brother. "You can't put toothpaste back. Once it's out of the tube, it stays out. Don't be such a dummy!"

Colton began to cry. "I'm dumb," he sobbed. "I'm a dummy!"

When Ian saw how upset his little brother was, he wished he hadn't been so harsh. "No, you're not, Colton, you just have to learn some stuff."

"But you said..."

Ian ruffled his brother's hair. "Forget it. I shouldn't have said that. I'm sorry."

When Mom and Dad came home, they asked how the babysitting went. "I'm a dummy," Colton whimpered.

"No, you're not," said Ian quickly. He knew he'd have to explain what had happened. "We had a...a toothpaste explosion, that's all," he said, and he told his parents about it.

"And I'm a dummy," Colton repeated. "Ian said so."

"I told you you're not," Ian replied. "I told you I'm sorry for saying that."

"Colton, you shouldn't have been playing with the toothpaste," Dad said, "but Ian, you should have been watching him more carefully. And it sounds like you already know you were quick to say hurtful words."

"Yeah, and I really am sorry—I just wish Colton would believe me!"

"Words are like toothpaste squeezed out of a tube—you can't take them back," said Mom. "You can only clean up the mess with forgiveness. I know Colton will forgive you once he understands you're sorry you hurt him. But there's someone else who's always ready to forgive—and who will help you speak loving words instead of hurtful ones."

"You mean Jesus, don't you?" Ian sighed. "I need to ask Him to clean up the mess I made." ♥ LINDA WEDDLE

SPEAK IN A KIND WAY

KEY VERSE: LET YOUR SPEECH ALWAYS BE WITH GRACE. COLOSSIANS 4:6

Do you often speak in anger? Do you scold or make unkind remarks to brothers or sisters? Do you jokingly say things without considering how others will feel about them? Words can never be unsaid—they can only be forgiven. The Bible says your speech should always be "with grace." In other words, speak in a way that shows others the grace and love of Jesus.

IT HAPPENED TO ME

READ: 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-7

Harper's back at school today, Emma noticed. *Maybe her mom is doing better.* But a few minutes later, Emma learned that Harper's mother remained in critical condition after being in a serious car accident a week before. Many of their classmates stared curiously at Harper and avoided speaking to her. A few of them awkwardly attempted to comfort her. *At least they're trying,* Emma thought. *But since Dad was in a bad car accident last year, I think I know just how Harper feels. Maybe it would help her if I tell her about Dad's accident.*

Emma walked over to Harper. "You doing okay?" she asked.

Harper shrugged. "Dad thought it would get my mind off Mom's accident if I came to school, but it's not really working."

"It's hard, I know," said Emma. "My dad was badly hurt in a car wreck last year."

"Oh." Harper sighed. "Then you know how I feel!"

Emma nodded. "I was so scared, but I knew lots of people were praying for him, and that helped me. Would...would you like me to pray for your mom?"

"Really?" Harper tried to smile. "I don't think anyone ever prayed for us before."

"I'll pray for your whole family," Emma assured her. "Would you like to pray together now?"

"I don't know much about praying," said Harper.

"That's okay," Emma said. "I'll pray. Then maybe I can tell you more about how Jesus helped our family through that tough time."

Harper nodded and followed Emma's example as she closed her eyes and bowed her head.

When Emma got home from school that day, she told her mom about Harper's mother. "I told Harper how knowing Jesus helped me when Dad had that accident. She listened to what I said because she knew I understood how she felt." Emma smiled. "It's almost like God used Dad's accident to help me know what to say to Harper."

"Yes," said Mom. "That's what the Bible says. Jesus comforts us during hard times, and He tells us to comfort others when they go through hard times too. One way we can do that is by telling hurting people how Jesus helped us like you did. Let's pray it will encourage Harper to trust Him."

Emma nodded. "Let's pray for her right now." ♥ LINDA WEDDLE

COMFORT OTHERS WITH GOD'S LOVE

KEY VERSE: HE [JESUS] COMFORTS US IN ALL OUR TROUBLES SO THAT WE CAN COMFORT OTHERS. 2 CORINTHIANS 1:4 (NLT)

Have you experienced difficult things? Maybe there's been a serious illness, a death, or an especially hard time in your family. Jesus cares and offers His comfort—through His Word, through talking with Him, and sometimes through other people. You, in turn, can comfort others. Pray for those who are going through a tough situation. Trust God to help you reach out to them and tell them about His love.

PULLING ON THE LEASH

READ: EPHESIANS 6:1-3

Mia panted as she tugged and pulled to get her Labrador puppy to go into the house. Prince was only six months old, but he was strong.

Mom looked up from her computer and laughed. “I’m not sure who took who for a walk,” she said.

Mia frowned. “Prince always wants to go for a walk, but when I take him, he pulls on the leash the whole way! He acts like he’s the one who should decide which way to go.”

“He’s still just a puppy,” said Mom.

“I know,” said Mia, “but I wish he’d learn to listen to me. He should learn to heel like my friend Nevaeh’s dog does.”

“Maybe we should take him to obedience school,” said Mom. “Or at least start some obedience lessons on our own.” Mom studied Mia a moment, then said, “Sometimes Christians act a lot like Prince. On our walk through life with Jesus, we pull and tug to go our own way too. We think we should decide for ourselves what’s good for us, and we don’t want to listen to God or to the people He puts in our lives to guide us—like parents—who really know best.” She gave Mia a pointed look. “Like last week when I wouldn’t let you go to Jessica’s party.”

Mia sighed. “I didn’t want to admit it, but you were right about that. Jessica’s parents weren’t home, and I found out today that some of the kids got so loud, the neighbors called the police.”

“Well, I’m very glad you weren’t there,” said Mom.

“I am too,” said Mia. “I guess I am like Prince. I wanted my own way, but you knew it wasn’t a good idea for me to go to that party. I’m sorry for acting like I thought you were being mean.”

Mom gave Mia a hug. “It’s hard for all of us to remember we’re not wise enough to choose our own way and need God’s guidance,” Mom said. “That’s one reason why God gave kids parents—so we can share the wisdom God’s given us with you as we teach you about Jesus and encourage you to trust in Him.”

Mia nodded thoughtfully. “From now on, I’ll do less tugging and more listening.” ♥

KAREN E. COGAN

OBEY THOSE IN AUTHORITY

KEY VERSE: OBEY THOSE WHO RULE OVER YOU, AND BE SUBMISSIVE, FOR THEY WATCH OUT FOR YOUR SOULS. HEBREWS 13:17

How do you respond to direction from your parents, grandparents, or other adults? Do you listen to them, knowing they want what’s best for you? Or do you pull and tug, trying to go your own way? Parents aren’t perfect, but God provided them for you because He loves you and wants you to learn to depend on Jesus. Appreciate and obey those God has placed in authority over you as they teach you to walk with Him.

GOD'S STRENGTH (PART 1)

READ: MARK 4:36-41

Andrés glanced nervously out the school window. *It's been looking stormy all day,* he thought. *I hope there isn't going to be another tornado alert.* Sighing, he tried to concentrate on his math lesson.

As Andrés began the first problem, a bell rang. "Take a large book and file quietly into the hall," Miss Grey told the class.

The kids quickly obeyed, taking their places in the school's inner hall and putting the books over their heads as they had done during tornado drills before. But something seemed different today. Andrés could hear a siren blowing from a nearby fire station. It was the signal to the town that a tornado funnel had been seen nearby.

Andrés had never been so scared before, but as he sat trembling, he recalled something Dad had said the weekend before. They had gone swimming, and as Dad walked out into the deep water, Andrés's little brother Liam clung to his father's shoulders. "Are you scared in the deep water, Liam?" Andrés had asked.

Liam shook his head. "Nope. Dad's got me."

Dad had laughed. "Good boy! I'm in control here, and I'm glad you trust your father." Then he'd added, "I hope both you boys will remember that you can always trust your Father in heaven too. He's in control of everything, even when bad things happen that we don't understand. We just need to trust Him and remember that, no matter what happens, we have eternal life through Jesus." As Andrés remembered that, he felt better.

A few minutes later, Andrés heard a roaring sound. It began softly, but got louder and louder. *Is that a train?* Andrés wondered. *We're not even close to the tracks.* Then he remembered hearing that a tornado sounded a lot like a train rushing by. *I'm still scared,* Andrés thought, *but God is my heavenly Father, and He's in control. I can trust Him—even if a tornado hits.*

Finally the all-clear siren sounded, and the kids returned to their classroom.

"A tornado passed by not too far from our school," the principal announced over the intercom a few minutes later. "It caused a lot of damage, but thankfully no one was hurt."

Andrés smiled and silently thanked his heavenly Father for watching over them. ♥

HAZEL W. MARETT

GOD IS IN CONTROL

KEY VERSE: EVEN THE WIND AND THE SEA OBEY HIM! MARK 4:41

Are you afraid of storms? They can be frightening, can't they? That's because they are powerful and can cause a lot of damage. But God is even more powerful. When the lightning flashes, the thunder rolls, and the wind whistles through the trees, remember that God is in control of all those things—and that He saved you and is always with you, even when He lets you go through difficult experiences. Trust Him.

GOD'S STRENGTH (PART 2)

READ: ACTS 1:8; 2 CORINTHIANS 12:7-10

Andrés looked closely at the small log Dad had brought home to show him. There was a long piece of straw sticking out from the wood. “Weird,” said Andrés. “How did that straw get into the wood?”

“The tornado that passed by the other day did that,” said Dad. “One of the guys at work found this on his property. His place was right on the edge of the storm.”

“Wow!” said Andrés. “The wind drove that flimsy piece of straw right into the hard wood. And the straw didn’t even get bent!”

“That took a strong, special kind of power,” said Dad. “I’ve been thinking about that all afternoon. As a result, I’ve decided to teach the Sunday school class I’ve been offered.”

“Really? What does teaching a class have to do with this wood and straw?”

“Well, this straw was weak, but powered by the storm, it became very strong,” Dad replied. “I’m weak too, and I was afraid I wouldn’t be able to hold the interest of the kids in the class. When I thought about the straw in this log, I was reminded that a special kind of power is also available to me. Through that power—the power of the Holy Spirit—God can use me to help those kids know more about Jesus.”

“You’ll be a good teacher,” said Andrés.

“Thanks for the vote of confidence. I hope and pray you’re right.” Dad smiled. “I thought about you too, Andrés. Mom told me you’ve been having trouble figuring out what to say to a friend who’s going through a rough time.”

“Yeah—my friend Mason. His dad died a couple weeks ago, and I want to be there for him, but I don’t know what to say.”

“It can be hard to comfort someone in a situation like that, but remember that you have a special power available to you too,” Dad told him. “Because you trust in Jesus, you have the Holy Spirit’s power. Even though you feel weak in such a tough situation, He will help you comfort Mason.”

Andrés nodded. “Okay. You teach your class, and I’ll talk to Mason, and God will help us both!” ♥ HAZEL W. MARETT

GOD GIVES POWER

KEY VERSE: I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS ME.
PHILIPPIANS 4:13

Are you afraid you won't be able to make a difference in sharing Jesus with others? Do you want to tell people about Him and show them His love, but don't know how? You won't be doing it on your own. You have a special power—the Holy Spirit! He is working through you to help more people know about Jesus and see His love in their lives. Depend on Him to give you the strength and power you need.

IT'S ALMOST EASTER!

LISTEN TO KEYS FOR KIDS RADIO APRIL 11-17 FOR SPECIAL
EASTER MUSIC AND STORIES AT KEYSFORKIDS.NET

WHERE THE FISH ARE

READ: MATTHEW 4:18-22



Our teacher told us to start thinking of people we could invite to vacation Bible school this summer,” Asher told his dad after church. “We talked about being fishers of people in class today—which means telling others about Jesus, not *real* fishing,” he said with a grin. “Mr. Benson said that’s what vacation Bible school is for—to share Jesus with kids who haven’t heard about Him.”

“So who are you going to invite?” asked Dad.

“No one.” Asher shrugged when Dad raised his eyebrows. “All my friends already know Jesus.”

“Hmm,” said Dad. “Speaking of *real* fishing, I hear they’ve been biting lately. Care to go?”

“All right!” exclaimed Asher. “I’ll get ready right now.”

Dad nodded. “I’ll get the fishing gear. Meet me out back when you’re ready.”

When Asher ran out the back door a little later, he stopped short and stared. Dad was sitting in a lawn chair, holding his fishing rod. The hook lay on the grass, and Dad watched it intently. “What are you doing?” Asher asked.

“Shhh!” said Dad. “I’m fishing. Don’t scare the fish away.”

Asher looked at the hook and then at his dad. “Dad! Didn’t anybody tell you that fish live in water?” Asher said, rolling his eyes. “C’mon. Let’s go where the fish are.”

Dad looked up. “You know, that’s a very good idea.” He reeled in his line and got up. “Okay. The fish aren’t far from here. We’ll go to Pearson Lake.” He looked at Asher and added, “You need to go where the fish are to be a fisher of people too. Apparently, they’re not in your group of close friends, but I think you’ll find they’re not far away. I’m sure there are lots of kids who need a friend—especially one who will introduce them to Jesus.”

Asher sighed. “Yeah,” he murmured, climbing into the car. As they drove down the street, he suddenly pointed. “Maybe the new kid in that blue house would come. And I guess I could ask Mary, who sits across from me at school—I suppose it wouldn’t hurt to ask a girl.”

“See?” said Dad. “I knew you could think of someone. Why don’t you ask the new kid if he wants to come over and play your new video game sometime?”

Asher smiled. “I’ll do that.” ♥ HAZEL W. MARETT

SHARE JESUS WHEREVER YOU ARE

KEY VERSE: JESUS CALLED OUT TO THEM, “COME, FOLLOW ME, AND I WILL SHOW YOU HOW TO FISH FOR PEOPLE!” MATTHEW 4:19 (NLT)

Do all your friends already know Jesus? That’s wonderful if they do, but don’t take it for granted. Talk to them about Jesus, but don’t stop with just those you know best. Jesus wants to help you bring others to Him. To do that, you may have to go outside your circle of friends. Look around. Who needs a friend to introduce them to Jesus?

THE SERVANT

READ: MARK 9:35; 10:45; EPHESIANS 2:10; 1 JOHN 3:18

Why do I have so many chores?” Madison complained as she pushed the vacuum cleaner down the hall. “I feel like a servant in this house!”

Madison’s mom looked up from the dishes she was washing. “A servant? You talk as if that’s a bad thing.”

Madison stopped and stared at her mom as if she had lost her mind. “Of course it’s a bad thing! Who would want to be a servant?”

“Jesus would,” answered Mom. “He came to earth to serve, as well as to save.”

“How was Jesus a servant?” Madison wanted to know.

“Well, He washed His disciples’ dusty feet, and that was considered a very undesirable job—a job only a lowly servant would do.”

“I guess so!” Madison wrinkled her nose at the thought of touching someone’s dirty feet.

“Jesus also fed people when they were hungry. He comforted and healed the sick many, many times.” Mom smiled at Madison. “And I imagine, if it was needed, Jesus would have vacuumed the house.”

Madison laughed. “I’m pretty sure they didn’t have vacuums in Jesus’s time!”

Mom laughed too. “True. But think about it, Madison. Jesus, who is God, King of Kings, and Creator of everything that exists, lowered Himself to come to earth as a human and serve us! Our hearts were dirty with sin—dirtier than the disciples’ stinky, dusty feet—so Jesus became a servant and died on the cross for the wrong things we’ve done so He could wash our sins away. If He hadn’t done that, we would have no hope of eternal life.”

Madison looked down at the vacuum and then back up at her mom. “I guess you’re saying I should quit complaining and start vacuuming!”

“That’s exactly what I am saying, because that’s what Jesus would do,” Mom replied. “And because we trust in Him, we’re His servants. We serve Him by serving others and faithfully carrying out the responsibilities we’ve been given.”

Madison put her ear buds in her ears, turned on her music, and started the vacuum. With a grin for her mom, she headed down the hall to finish her chores. ♥

BONNIE CARR

BE A SERVANT FOR JESUS

KEY VERSE: FOR EVEN THE SON OF MAN DID NOT COME TO BE SERVED, BUT TO SERVE, AND TO GIVE HIS LIFE AS A RANSOM FOR MANY. MARK 10:45 (NIV)

Do you ever feel like there’s too much you’re expected to do? Do you ever wish your parents, your teachers, or your coach wouldn’t ask so much from you? We all feel that way at times, and it’s important to have time to rest, but remember that Jesus calls those who trust in Him to be servants like He was. He served us by becoming human and sacrificing His life to save us. When we help others and do the tasks we’ve been given, we’re really serving Him.

REDEEMED

READ: ROMANS 5:6-11

Derek stood at the glass counter as his mom handed over his grandmother's emerald necklace. A man took it and handed her some money. Derek heard her sigh as she placed it in her wallet. They walked silently out of the shop.

On the bus ride home, Derek finally spoke. "Mom, why did you sell Gigi's necklace? I thought you loved it."

"I do, but I love you more. The money we got for it will help us get by until I can find work," his mom replied.

They stopped at the market near their apartment to buy some groceries. Mom even splurged and bought Derek his favorite candy bar.

At Sunday school the next day, Derek's teacher, Mrs. Brown, asked if anyone had any prayer requests. Derek hesitated but then raised his hand. "Please pray that my mom can find a job so she doesn't have to sell anything else she loves," he said quietly. Mrs. Brown prayed, and after class she took him aside. Derek told her about the trip to the pawn shop, Gigi's beautiful necklace, and even the candy bar. Mrs. Brown didn't say much but gave him a tight hug.

A few days later, Derek entered his apartment building after school and stuck his key in the mailbox. Inside, he found a small package addressed to his mom. He ran upstairs and found her looking for jobs online.

"This came today, Mom. What is it?" Derek asked.

Mom opened the package and poured the contents onto her desk. It was Gigi's necklace! As shiny and beautiful as ever. His mom began to sob.

"I don't understand. I thought you sold it!" Derek exclaimed.

Wiping away tears, his mom said quietly, "I did. But it has been redeemed."

"Redeemed?" Derek asked. "That sounds like a church word."

"It is," Mom said. "It's just like what Jesus did for us, Derek. The Bible says we were sold into death by our sins—just like I sold this necklace—but Jesus's death on the cross bought us back. He redeemed us and gave us eternal life—just like someone bought this necklace back for me." She smiled at him. "Their kindness has reminded me how very much God loves and cares for us."

And with that, his mom slipped the necklace over her head and gave Derek a big hug. ♥ LAURA KUEHN

JESUS DIED FOR YOU

KEY VERSE: IN HIM WE HAVE REDEMPTION THROUGH HIS BLOOD, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE RICHES OF GOD'S GRACE. EPHESIANS 1:7 (NIV)

Do you know that, if you trust in Jesus, you have been redeemed—bought back from sin and death? When Jesus died on the cross, He paid the penalty for your sins so you would never have to. If you have not accepted Jesus's payment for your sins, you can do so right now. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 102.) You are a special treasure to God and were worth the cost.

A LIGHT IN THE DARK

READ: JOHN 8:12

Rain pattered against the window as Will sat on the couch, reading. The rain got louder and louder as the wind picked up, and then a flash of lightning lit up the sky, followed by a crash of thunder. Suddenly the room plummeted into darkness.

“Hey!” Will shouted.

“It’s the storm. It knocked our power out,” said Will’s dad, walking over to the window. “Look, the whole block is out.”

Will got up. “Ow!” he said, banging his knee against the coffee table. “I can’t see anything!”

“Hold on,” said Dad.

There was a rustle of movement, a scratching sound, and then a burst of light as Dad lit a candle and set it on the coffee table. Warm orange light filled the room. He lit a few more candles, and soon the room was much brighter.

Will collapsed back on the couch and rubbed his knee. “It’s a good thing we had the candles. I don’t want another bruise.”

Dad laughed. “Walking in the dark isn’t smart. You can get lost or hurt yourself.” He pointed at Will’s knee. “We need light. We’re helpless without it.”

“That sounds a lot like the verse we learned in my class at church last week,” said Will. “It talked about Jesus being the light.”

Dad nodded. “In the Bible, Jesus says He is the light of the world. Without Him, we are walking blind in the darkness of sin. But with Jesus as our light, He chases all the darkness away. Through His life, death, and resurrection, He shines His love and forgiveness on us so that we can see and follow Him. Without Him, we’re lost.”

Will rubbed his sore knee. “But what if the light goes out?”

Dad shook his head. “Jesus is the light no darkness can defeat. He has promised us eternal life with Him, and nothing can separate us from His love.”

Just then the lights flickered back on. Will smiled and picked up his book. The storm was passing. “Better leave the candles, Dad. We need the light.” ♥

CATHRYN FREE

JESUS IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

KEY VERSE: [JESUS] SAID, “I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. WHOEVER FOLLOWS ME WILL NEVER WALK IN DARKNESS, BUT WILL HAVE THE LIGHT OF LIFE.”

JOHN 8:12 (NIV)

Have you ever been lost in the dark? Maybe you got up in the middle of the night to get a drink and stubbed your toe or thought you saw something moving in the shadows. But what happens when you turn on the light? You can see, and suddenly it’s not scary anymore. Without Jesus, we are lost in the darkness of sin and death. But just like turning on a light in a dark room, Jesus shines His love in our lives. He forgives our sins, saves us from Satan and death, and guides us in our walk with Him each day.

SEEING AND BELIEVING

READ: JOHN 20:19-20, 24-31

Let's play hide-and-seek!" said Ethan. He was at his friend Jin's house where there were lots of great places to hide. "Mei can play too."

They found Jin's sister, who agreed to play. "I'll be it first," Jin volunteered. He covered his eyes and counted. "One, two, three, four..." As he continued counting, he heard Ethan and Mei running and giggling. Jin thought he heard one of them go to the basement. "Twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five!" Jin yelled the last number. "Ready or not, here I come!"

Jin headed toward the basement, watching and listening for any sign of Ethan or Mei. Suddenly he noticed the window next to the fireplace—and through the long curtain he could see the outline of a person! He recognized Ethan's red sweatshirt through the thin fabric and pulled back the curtain. "Found you, Ethan!"

"How did you know I was behind the curtain?" asked Ethan.

"I saw you," Jin replied. "This curtain is thin, and I could see your red sweatshirt through the fabric. That's how I knew it was you!"

"I guess seeing is believing," said Ethan.

"I guess so," agreed Jin. He grinned. "Hey! Remember our lesson at church last week from the book of John? Remember what happened after Jesus died on the cross?"

"Yeah," said Ethan. "A lot of people didn't think they'd ever see Jesus alive again."

"But He was resurrected—He rose from the grave," said Jin. "Before He went back to heaven, He appeared to a lot of His friends. When they saw Him with their own eyes, they knew He really did rise from the dead like He said He would and that He was the Son of God who came to save them."

"So for them, seeing was believing too," Ethan said. "And knowing that Jesus appeared to His friends helps us believe in Him too."

"Yep," Jin nodded. "And Mr. Michaels said that even though we can't see Jesus with our eyes like they did, we can see Him working in our lives."

Suddenly the two boys heard Mei's muffled voice from somewhere in the basement. "Hey!" she yelled. "I'm still hiding! What's taking you two so long?"

"Let's go find her!" said Ethan. ♥ JEANETTE BROOKS

JESUS AROSE—BELIEVE IT

KEY VERSE: BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN AND YET HAVE BELIEVED.
JOHN 20:29

Do you believe Jesus rose from the dead even though you can't see Him with your eyes? After He rose, many people did see Him with their eyes. You can believe their testimony in the Bible. If you're a Christian, you can see Him in your own testimony too. Have you seen evidence of His work in your life? How has knowing Him changed you? Yes, Jesus arose. Believe it!

TODAY IS EASTER!

THANK JESUS FOR GIVING HIS LIFE AND THEN RISING
FROM THE DEAD TO SAVE YOU.

FANTASTIC FRIGATE BIRDS

READ: PSALM 104:1-4, 24-26; ROMANS 1:20

Mina grabbed her second warm roll from the bowl on the table. “I can’t believe your family actually lives in the Caribbean! It’s so beautiful there—well, from the pictures I’ve seen, anyway.”

Mrs. Callaway smiled. “When God called us to be missionaries there, we were certainly surprised.”

“But we love living there and are so glad God is using us to help more people know about Jesus,” Mr. Callaway said.

“I really like to learn about interesting animals—do you have any favorites where you live, Timothy?” Mina looked up from buttering her roll. Timothy was about her age and had lived almost all his life in the Caribbean.

“Sure I do! Have you ever heard of the frigate bird?” Mina shook her head. “They live in tropical climates, and one of the largest colonies of these birds is right off some of the smaller islands of the Caribbean. One of the cool things about the males is how they attract females during the mating season. God gave them this bright red throat pouch under their beak that they inflate like a balloon. It looks kind of funny, and they make a sound like someone banging on a drum.”

Mina’s eyes were wide. “That’s fantastic! How big are they?”

“About the size of a goose, but their wingspan is over seven feet long.” Timothy stretched his arms out.

“Let me guess, they eat fish?” Mina pointed to the fish on her plate, and Timothy laughed.

“Yep! And squid.”

“Ewwwww.” Mina shuddered.

“God’s creatures are pretty amazing,” Mr. Callaway said. “Timothy learns about a new one every few weeks, it seems.”

Mrs. Callaway chewed her fish thoughtfully. “Talking about these birds reminds me of a verse from Psalm 104 that says, ‘How many are your works, Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.’”

“The earth is full of fantastic creatures!” Mina exclaimed. “I’m thankful that God isn’t a boring Creator—He made some awesome animals!”

Mrs. Callaway nodded. “Because He is an awesome God.” ♥ SAVANNAH COLEMAN

THE EARTH IS FULL OF GOD’S GLORY

KEY VERSE: HOW MANY ARE YOUR WORKS, LORD! IN WISDOM YOU MADE THEM ALL; THE EARTH IS FULL OF YOUR CREATURES. PSALM 104:24 (NIV)

Do you like to explore the wonders of God’s creation and learn about interesting animals? The Bible says God created the world and everything in it to point people to Him. He is a great and awesome God, and He loves you! Praise Him for the fantastic creatures He has made—and for the great things He has done for you through His Son, Jesus.

NOT SUGAR

READ: ISAIAH 5:20-21

Marcus watched as Jayla placed a cake in the oven to bake. “I’ll clean the bowl,” he offered, licking his lips.

“Nope.” Jayla quickly ran water into the bowl. “Raw batter isn’t good for you. You’ll have to wait till the cake is done.”

But when the cake was done, it did not look good. “I’ll try it,” said Marcus. He cut out a small piece. “Yuck! Not even frosting will help that!”

Jayla tried the cake and made a face. “What’s going on?” Dad asked as he and Mom came in from the garage.

“Jayla’s cake tastes funny,” said Marcus.

Dad startled at the sight of the sugar canister sitting on the counter. “Oh no! It’s my fault, Jayla—I’m so sorry. Yesterday I picked up a few groceries. When I got home, a box of salt was leaking. The sugar canister was empty, so I poured the salt into it. Then my phone rang and I forgot all about it.”

“See? You should have let me clean the bowl,” said Marcus. “Then we would have known your cake wasn’t good before you baked it!”

“Does this remind anybody of Pastor Holt’s message last week?” Mom asked. “He talked about the verse in Isaiah where people said evil was good and bitter was sweet, remember?”

“Yeah,” Jayla said. “Kind of like how the label on the canister said its contents were sweet, but they sure weren’t!”

“At least you can bake a new cake,” said Dad. “If people say something is good when God says it’s evil, that’s much more serious.”

“Like...what sort of things might they say?” Jayla asked.

“Well, how about if someone says we can do whatever we want as long as we’re true to ourselves?” Mom said.

“That’s calling evil good, isn’t it?” said Marcus.

“Yes,” said Mom. “In the Bible, God says He sets the standard of right and wrong. We need to live according to His truth, not our own feelings and desires.”

“Some kids say being a Christian just means you think you’re better than everyone else,” said Jayla. “It’s saying that something good is evil.”

Dad nodded. “Even though Christians aren’t perfect, Jesus has saved us and is working in our lives so others can see His love through us. And that’s a very good thing!” ♥ LINDA WEDDLE

FOLLOW GOD’S STANDARDS

KEY VERSE: WOE TO THOSE WHO CALL EVIL GOOD, AND GOOD EVIL.
ISAIAH 5:20

Do you know which things God says are good and which He says are evil? In today’s world, many people try to make good sound evil and evil sound good. That’s why it’s important to use the truth of God’s Word as the standard for your life. Listen to what God says in the Bible, and trust Him to help you live out His truth and love.

CRASH COURSE

READ: MARK 12:28-34

Mom!” Landon screamed, running toward her car. A truck had hit it as she was turning into their driveway. *Please, God!* Landon prayed as he approached the driver’s side. *Please let Mom be okay.*

As Landon opened the car door, his mom gave him a shaky smile. “I’m all right,” she assured him, stepping out of the car. “Everything is okay, Landon.”

The truck driver got out, and he was okay too. Landon gave a huge sigh of relief and quietly breathed a prayer of thanks as his mom and the driver took care of reporting the accident to the police and other necessary details.

Every once in a while for the rest of that day, Landon gave his mom a hug and said, “I love you, Mom.”

“I love you too, Landon,” she replied with a smile.

That night, as Mom was tucking him into bed, Landon hugged her again. “Mom, when I saw that truck hit you, I was so scared! I guess I thought you’d always be here, but today I was scared you were hurt—and could even die.”

“We tend to take each other for granted, don’t we?” replied Mom. “Every now and then, we’re reminded we shouldn’t do that.”

Landon nodded. “From now on, I’m going to tell you I love you more often.”

Mom smiled. “I’ve always known you love me, Landon, but it’s wonderful to hear it.” She looked thoughtful as she tucked Landon’s blankets around him. “I wonder if we often take God for granted too,” she said. “Sometimes, in the busyness of life, we can lose sight of how much Jesus means to us—how He loves us and died for us and promises to always be with us.”

“Are you saying we should tell Him we love Him every day too?” asked Landon.

Mom nodded. “We can do that by spending time praying and offering thanks to Him every day. We also show our love for Him when we help and care for others.”

“I guess those are all things I could do more often,” said Landon.

“Me too,” said Mom. “I didn’t enjoy being in an accident today, but I think we both learned an important lesson from it.” She grinned. “I guess you could call it a crash course on love!” ♥ LISA MEISTER



LOVE GOD

KEY VERSE: LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH. DEUTERONOMY 6:5

When was the last time you told your loved ones that you love them? It’s easy to take them for granted and assume they know how you feel, so don’t hesitate to let them know that you love and appreciate them. Let Jesus know you love Him too. He already knows your heart, but you can still tell Him you love Him and that you appreciate all He’s done for you. Why not pause and tell Him right now?

A BIG FAMILY

READ: ROMANS 8:14-17; GALATIANS 4:4-7

Ellie lingered in her Sunday school classroom after the other kids had rushed out the door. Clutching her Bible, she stared at her teacher, who was putting books and papers away. “Can I help you with something, Ellie?” asked Miss Robyn.

A tear escaped down Ellie’s face, and she quickly brushed it away with her sleeve. “Miss Robyn, did you know that Keisha isn’t here this morning because she’s visiting a family that’s going to adopt her?” she asked. “I know that’s good for her, but...but she’ll have to move away.” Ellie’s voice shook a little. “I don’t want her to move. She’s my best friend, and I’ll be so lonely without her.”

Miss Robyn put an arm around Ellie’s shoulder. “I know it’s difficult to have a friend leave, but try to be happy for Keisha. She didn’t have any family left on this earth after her mom died, but now she’s going to have a home with a family who loves her. Best of all, Pastor Carlson knows the family, and he told me they love Jesus too.”

Ellie nodded. “I know, and I am happy for her. She’ll have a mom and a dad and a brother and two sisters! She’ll have a bigger family than I do—I only have a sister.” Ellie sighed. “It’s just that I’ll miss her so much when she’s gone!”

“Yes, but you can still keep in touch. You can text her and have video calls with her,” said Miss Robyn.

Ellie smiled a little. “That would be fun. Being adopted is a good thing, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it is,” said Miss Robyn with a smile. “Did you know that everyone who trusts in Jesus is also adopted? All those who know Him as their Savior are adopted into God’s big family—so they’re all brothers and sisters in Christ.”

Ellie gave her teacher a big smile. “I forgot about that. I’ll remind Keisha that she’s already been adopted because she knows Jesus, and I’ll tell her I’m adopted too! And that means we’re sisters, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, it does” said Miss Robyn. “And you’ll still be sisters even after she moves away.”

Ellie smiled again. “I like that—and Keisha will too.” ♥ BETH ANNE INGRAM



BE ADOPTED BY GOD

KEY VERSE: SEE WHAT GREAT LOVE THE FATHER HAS LAVISHED ON US, THAT WE SHOULD BE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD! 1 JOHN 3:1 (NIV)

Have you been adopted by God? Do you have lots of brothers and sisters because you’re part of God’s big family? If you haven’t yet trusted Jesus as your Savior, why wait any longer? He wants you to become His child so you can enjoy everything that comes with being part of His family. Trust in Him today. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 102.)

CLEAN-UP DAY

READ: GENESIS 1:1, 26-31; ROMANS 8:19-23

There's a cleanup at the beach today to celebrate Earth Day," Dad said at breakfast. "Volunteers are needed to walk along the beach and pick up any trash they find. Why don't we go help?"

Diego made a face. "I don't want to pick up other people's trash! It's not my job to clean up after them."

"It's true we're all responsible for our own trash and should not throw it on the beach," said Dad. "But, sadly, littering is still a problem, and one way to help fix it is to work together to clean it up. We all need to help take care of the beautiful world God gave us."

Diego still didn't look convinced. "Think of it this way," Dad told him. "Remember what happened to your bike last winter? You left it lying under a bush behind the garage, and by the time the snow melted, it was all rusted. Your mom and I trusted you to take care of it."

Diego sighed. "But I didn't."

"Well, God made this world for us to enjoy—and that's way more important than a bike," said Dad. "The trash that people leave pollutes God's creation. It makes the beautiful beach look messy, and it may even kill or injure fish, animals, and birds that live in or near the ocean." Dad paused. "Do you remember who God created in His own image and put in charge of all the living creatures in Genesis, the first book of the Bible?"

"Adam and Eve," said Diego. "So, does that mean we're in charge of them too?"

Dad nodded. "As people made in His image, God has given us the job to take care of His creation—and as people who trust in Jesus, we've also been given the job to share the hope of Jesus with the world. One small way to do that is to pick up other people's trash, because that's like what Jesus did for us—He removed our sins! And even though we can't fix everything that's wrong in the world, Jesus can, and one day He will when He returns to make all things new."

Diego thought for a moment. "Okay. Let's go help with the beach cleanup." ♥

JACQUELINE J. LEAYCRAFT

CARE FOR GOD'S CREATION

KEY VERSE: IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH.
GENESIS 1:1

Are you thankful for the beautiful world God created for us? Are you doing what you can to take care of it? Today is Earth Day. Check to see if there are any activities in your area that you can participate in to help protect the earth and keep it clean—or come up with your own! But don't limit caring for God's creation to Earth Day. Celebrate the gift of His creation—and His promise to one day restore it to perfection—every day of the year.

THE SAME BUT DIFFERENT

READ: PSALM 139:13-16; JEREMIAH 1:5

Kyle and Kent were identical twins. They looked so much alike that the only way to tell them apart was by the dark birthmark on Kyle's shoulder. They even enjoyed doing all the same things. They both loved to run and were part of the elementary boys' running club in their area.

SAME

During devotions one night, Kent asked, "Dad, Kyle and I are so much alike. How can God tell us apart? We look the same, and we even like the same things, except for broccoli. I don't know how Kyle can stand the stuff!"

Dad laughed. "Well, let's read some Bible verses that talk about that." He turned to Psalm 139 and read a couple verses out loud. "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." He looked at the twins. "So you see, even though God made you the same, He also made you different. He knows and loves each one of you and gave you unique talents and gifts to be used for His glory."

"But...I'm not sure our talents are all that different," said Kyle. "We both seem to be talented in exactly the same things."

"Think of it this way," said Mom. "Kent is better at sprinting short distances while you are stronger at running cross country. So even though running is a talent for both of you, you are stronger in different areas."

Dad nodded. "That could be true in other ways too." He flipped through his Bible. "Here's another verse—Ephesians 2:10. 'For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.'" Dad looked at the twins. "Even though you're alike in many ways, Jesus has given you different strengths so you can point others to Him in your own special way. He made you and saved you, and He'll help each of you serve Him using the unique gifts He's given you."

After devotions, Mom made them some popcorn and they sat down to watch a movie.

"I know what one of Mom's talents is," Kyle said. "Making great popcorn!"

"Yeah," said Kent. "And we're both really talented at eating it!" ♥ LISA FULLER

YOU ARE SPECIAL TO GOD

KEY VERSE: FOR YOU CREATED MY INMOST BEING; YOU KNIT ME TOGETHER IN MY MOTHER'S WOMB. I PRAISE YOU BECAUSE I AM FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE. PSALM 139:13-14 (NIV)

Do you ever feel like you're no different from anyone else? That you're not that special? You are special to God. The Bible says He knit you together in your mother's womb, which means He made you and loves you. He created you to have unique talents and abilities, and He will help you use them to point others to Him. You are God's special creation!

TRIED AND TRUE

READ: 2 PETER 1:16-21

Riley carefully measured a cup of sugar into a bowl. “I like making cookies,” she said, “and Dad says my cookies are second only to yours.” She cracked an egg and grinned at her mom.

“You do a great job,” Mom said as she frosted a cake, “and I appreciate you helping me make treats for my Bible study.”

Riley furrowed her eyebrows as she stirred the mixture. “Mom, how do you know the Bible is true? I mean...couldn’t it have some mistakes?”

Mom looked surprised. “No, it couldn’t.”

“Well, Addie’s dad is a pastor, and they believe most of the Bible, but he says some of the things just couldn’t have happened—like some of the miracles. He says God has set up certain laws of nature, and those things don’t fit in.”

“God did establish laws of nature,” said Mom, “but God Himself is not limited by them. He has power over them.” She paused as Riley took the baking soda from the cupboard. “Riley, why don’t you put a few extra teaspoons of baking soda in the cookie dough today?”

Riley frowned. “Why? What for?”

Mom shrugged. “Maybe it would make the cookies taste even better. And maybe if you added an extra cup of milk to make the dough nice and soft, you’d get some nice, soft cookies.”

Riley stared at her mom, then laughed. “Are you trying to ruin my cookies because you’re afraid Dad will like them better than yours? Won’t work, Mom! I’ve made these before, and I know this recipe is just right the way it is.”

“You’ve tested it and found it to be accurate.” Mom pointed to a Bible on the counter. “That’s also been tested and proven to be accurate. For example, the Bible tells of things that will take place, and many of them have already happened—like Jesus being born and then dying for our sins to save us. He fulfilled many prophecies in the Old Testament that promised God would send a Savior one day. The Bible points us to Jesus, and as we experience His love and power in our lives, it confirms that what God tells us in His Word is true.”

“I get it,” Riley said. “The Bible is tried and true—just like my recipe!” ♥

HAZEL W. MARETT

THE BIBLE IS TRUE

KEY VERSE: THE WORD OF OUR GOD STANDS FOREVER. ISAIAH 40:8

Have you wondered if the Bible is really true? It is! There were eyewitnesses to many things recorded there. Many events foretold in the Bible have already happened. But perhaps the greatest evidence that the Bible is true is its message about Jesus. His truth and love have changed people’s lives. The Bible has stood the test of time, and it will continue to stand forever.

THE SNOOZE BUTTON

READ: ROMANS 13:11-14

Grant stirred and fumbled for the snooze button on the alarm clock. As soon as the noisy alarm stopped, he burrowed deeper under the covers. A few minutes later, the beeping sound of the alarm roused him again. Once more, he hit the snooze button and nestled back in his bed. Before the alarm could sound a third time, his mother was at his door. “Get up right now, Grant! You’ll have to hurry or you’ll miss your bus.”



“Oh!” Grant sat up quickly, then stumbled from his bed. He hurried to get ready and ran outside just in time to catch the bus.

That evening, Grant informed his parents that he needed a new alarm clock. “My alarm didn’t go off this morning, and I almost missed my bus.”

Mom laughed. “It went off all right.”

“Are you sure?” asked Grant. “I didn’t hear it.”

“I’m sure,” said Mom. “I heard it, and you actually did too. But you didn’t wake up fully, so you just don’t remember. I finally went in and woke you up myself because you kept hitting the snooze button and going back to sleep.”

“That sounds a lot like the way Christians sometimes live,” said Dad, picking up his Bible.

Grant frowned. “You think Christians hit the snooze buttons on their alarm clocks more than other people do?”

Dad grinned at Grant’s puzzled look. “Well, the book of Romans tells us that Christians need to wake up,” he said. “Why don’t you read it for us?” Dad handed the Bible to Grant and pointed to some verses.

When Grant finished reading, Dad said, “God warns that our time on earth is getting shorter and shorter, so we’d better wake up and live the way people who trust in Jesus should live. Ignoring God’s warning is like hitting the snooze button, and we fail to put the short time we have left to good use.”

Mom nodded. “Someday, it will be too late for those who don’t know Jesus to trust in Him and be saved. As Christians, we need to put sinful, selfish ways behind us and live in a way that points others to Jesus, who freed us from sin. We need to wake up and embrace the new life He’s given us.” ♥ HAZEL W. MARETT

WAKE UP AND LIVE FOR JESUS

KEY VERSE: AWAKE TO RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND DO NOT SIN. 1 CORINTHIANS 15:34

Have you hit the snooze button in your Christian life? Are you living to please yourself instead of God? Time is passing quickly, and people need to know about Jesus now. Wake up and start living like the person He’s made you to be—one who points others to His love, patience, and forgiveness. Let others see Jesus in you—in the way you talk, act, and respond to the things that happen each day.

GROWING IN JESUS

READ: JOHN 15:1-9; JAMES 1:2-4

“Love spring!” Mia announced to her older sister, Jade, as they prepared to do work in their garden. “Being able to play outside again makes me happy.” Mia sighed and kicked a garden stone. “But it also makes me sad, because I miss our neighbors. We used to play a lot in the backyard before they moved away. But now I won’t be able to play with them anymore.”

“I miss them too.” Jade smiled sadly. “But working in the garden always makes me feel better, and now you’re tall enough to help me with the pear tree. Can you bring me those pruning shears?”

Mia brought over a pair of clippers, and Jade began to cut back the branches of the tree. Mia gasped. “What are you doing?”

“I’m pruning the tree,” Jade answered.

Mia was surprised. “But won’t cutting the branches hurt the tree?”

“Pruning may look like it hurts, but it helps plants grow better,” Jade replied and trimmed another branch. “Because we pruned it, the pear tree will be stronger and healthier, and it will have even more fruit in the fall.”

“Really?” Mia’s eyes widened.

“Did you know that God is a gardener?” Jade asked. “Just like how we’re pruning the pear tree to help it grow better, God helps us grow in our relationship with Him—and He sometimes uses hard times in our lives to do that.”

“Hard times like friends moving away?”

Jade nodded. “In the Bible, Jesus says that He is the vine and we are the branches. Because He died for us and we trust Him as our Savior, we’re connected to Him through the Holy Spirit, who prunes us and helps us bear fruit.”

“Fruit? Like strawberries?” asked Mia, looking at a package of seeds.

Jade laughed. “No, fruit of the Spirit—like love and joy and kindness and patience. So even though the things we’re facing right now may hurt, God has a purpose in our struggles. He will use them to help us learn and grow.”

“Jade?” Mia asked. “Do you think we can mail some of these seeds to our old neighbors? I want to remind them that God uses hard times to help us grow.” ♥

ABBY CIONA

JESUS HELPS US GROW

KEY VERSE: WHEN TROUBLES OF ANY KIND COME YOUR WAY, CONSIDER IT AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GREAT JOY. FOR YOU KNOW THAT WHEN YOUR FAITH IS TESTED, YOUR ENDURANCE HAS A CHANCE TO GROW. JAMES 1:2-3 (NLT)

Are you facing hard times? Maybe you’re feeling lonely, a family member is sick, or you miss a friend who lives far away. Remember that Jesus is with you in life’s struggles. He’s given you His Holy Spirit, who is working in your life to help you grow and bear fruit. He can use even difficult circumstances to help you know Jesus better and make you more like Him.

IT'S FREE!

READ: EPHESIANS 2:4-9

You're late. The game is over," said Parker's brother Hunter as he put his glove and baseball cleats into a duffel bag. "Hey! Where'd you get that drink?"

Parker held up his slushy and shook it with a grin. "I got it at that new ice cream place on my way over here. It was free!"

Immediately, Parker was surrounded by hot and thirsty baseball players asking questions. "Where did you get it?" "You had to pay something for it, didn't you?" "Did they tell you to come here and advertise?" "What's the catch?"

Parker laughed. "There's no catch. The ice cream place is giving away free samples today. They said they hoped I'd come again whenever I want a slushy or ice cream."

"Free slushies? Yeah, right," one of the players said sarcastically.

"You expect us to believe that?" said another. "There's a catch somewhere."

Some of the boys walked over to the water fountain for a drink. Others just went home. But some, including Hunter, took off running toward the ice cream shop.

Back home, the boys talked about what had happened. "Some of the kids drank warm water instead of cold slushies," said Hunter. "They were so sure the slushies had to cost something."

"Yeah," said Parker. "Why didn't they believe me when I said they could get them for free, Dad?"

Dad shrugged. "I don't know, Parker."

"Maybe they hear so much bad news, they just don't believe it when the news is good," Hunter suggested. "They can't believe someone would actually give something away."

Dad nodded thoughtfully. "That sometimes happens when people hear the good news of Jesus," he said. "Some just can't believe He'd give us eternal life as a free gift. They think there's a trick to it and they have to earn their way to heaven."

"But the Bible says eternal life a gift," said Parker. "When you're offered a gift, you can't pay for it. A gift is always free."

Dad nodded. "That's right! All we have to do is believe and accept God's gift."

"Just like those slushies," said Hunter. "We couldn't pay for them." He grinned. "Maybe they'll give free samples of something else tomorrow! I'll accept those too."♥

H. LEE MACK

ETERNAL LIFE IS FREE

KEY VERSE: WHEN PEOPLE SIN, THEY EARN WHAT SIN PAYS—DEATH. BUT GOD GIVES HIS PEOPLE A FREE GIFT—ETERNAL LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.
ROMANS 6:23 (ERV)

Have you heard the saying that the best things in life are free? In fact, the very best thing you could ever receive truly is free—it's God's gift of eternal life. There's nothing you can do to earn it. God offers it to us as a gift, which means it's free! It's free because Jesus has already paid the price for it. You simply receive it when you trust in Him. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 102.)

A WAY TO SERVE

READ: 1 SAMUEL 2:18-19, 26; 3:1

Isabella lay across her bed as she read a letter from a missionary printed in her church bulletin. *Wow!* she thought. *I wish I could help people too.* She sighed. *But there's not much I can do. I'm just a kid. Maybe I'll be a missionary and serve God when I'm older.*

"Isabella! Come here, please," Mom called. Isabella went to the kitchen, and Mom handed her a bowl. "Mrs. Nelson's back is bothering her, so I made her some stew. Can you bring it over to her?"

"Okay," said Isabella, taking the bowl.

When she got to their neighbor's house, Isabella noticed that breakfast and lunch dishes were still on the table, so she loaded them into the dishwasher and set the table for dinner. Then she sat and kept Mrs. Nelson company while she ate her stew.

"Thank you for all your help—and for visiting with me," said Mrs. Nelson when Isabella was leaving. "Most young people don't seem to have time for us old folks."

When Isabella got home, her baby brother was sitting on the floor of the kitchen, crying. "Isabella, would you please feed Jacob?" said Mom as she chopped vegetables.

"Sure," said Isabella. "Come on, Jakey. It's time to eat."

After dinner, Isabella showed her mom the missionary letter. "Did you read this letter in the bulletin, Mom? It's so cool to hear about all the ways these missionaries are helping people in their village and telling them about Jesus. I wish I could serve the Lord like that."

Mom smiled. "You've been serving the Lord all afternoon, Izzy," she said.

"Me? Serving the Lord?" asked Isabella.

"You helped Mrs. Nelson and spent time with her. And you helped me with Jacob."

"But, Mom, that was just helping people," said Isabella. "I want to do something for God, but I'm not big enough yet."

"How do you think missionaries serve Him?" asked Mom. "They do it by doing things for people. We serve God by serving others, and that's what you've been doing, just like the missionaries. Your helpful, caring actions point to Jesus, who loves us so much He came to earth to rescue us from sin. By helping others, you're serving Him."

A big smile slowly spread over Isabella's face. ♥ BARBARA J. WESTBERG

YOU CAN SERVE GOD NOW

KEY VERSE: [JESUS SAID,] "TRULY I TELL YOU, WHATEVER YOU DID FOR ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF MINE, YOU DID FOR ME."
MATTHEW 25:40 (NIV)

Do you think you're too young to serve God? You're not. The Bible gives several examples of children who served Him. One of them is found in today's Bible reading. You can serve God too. When you help and care for others, you're showing them the love of Jesus, who served us by dying for our sins on the cross. You serve Him through every loving action, big or small. What can you do to serve today?

A SPECIAL NUMBER

READ: PSALM 150

Bella covered her ears. “I am so tired of that song!” She and her brother had been asked to play a special number for the morning worship service at their church. Choosing a song for the occasion was proving to be a problem.

“This is a cool piece,” said Lance. “It has a good harmony.”

Bella made a face. “It’s an old song, and we need something newer. You just have bad taste.”

Lance was indignant. “Look who’s talking! You want to play that song we learned at camp. Nobody knows it, and it sounds horrible!”

“Does not,” said Bella.

“Does too!” Lance insisted.

“Just forget it then!” snapped Bella. “I have better things to do than sit here and argue with you!” She placed her flute in its case and snapped it shut.

“I don’t hear any practicing,” said Mom as she entered the room.

“Lance won’t cooperate,” said Bella. “He wants to play that old hymn. I think a newer song would be better.”

“People won’t even know the words of the song she wants to play,” Lance argued.

Mom sighed. “It’s so easy to disagree about music styles and preferences and forget why we sing and play songs in church.” She looked at Lance, then Bella. “Why do you play at all?”

“We...we were asked to play,” Lance replied.

Bella sighed, knowing that wasn’t a satisfactory answer. “We sing and play to praise Jesus.”

Mom nodded. “We worship Him because He is our Lord and Creator who has saved us from sin and given us eternal life. He is worthy of our praise. But I certainly didn’t hear any praises when you were talking together about what to play. If your goal is to praise Jesus, I think you’d better check your attitudes first.”

Lance and Bella looked at each other as their mother left the room. “Mom’s right,” Bella said. “Honoring Jesus is the important thing—both with our song and our attitudes.” She smiled at her brother. “Let’s play the hymn you chose. We can play my song another time.”

“You’re sure?” Lance asked as he picked up his guitar.

Bella nodded. “I’m sure.” ♥ LINDA WEDDLE

PRAISE AND HONOR GOD WITH MUSIC

KEY VERSE: LET EVERYTHING THAT HAS BREATH PRAISE THE LORD. PSALM 150:6

Do you sing or play songs at church to praise Jesus for all He has done for you? Even if the music doesn’t always fit your personal preferences? The purpose of music in church is to allow God’s people to praise and worship Him together. It’s about Him, not us. Don’t let your preferences get in the way of why we sing and play songs in church—because Jesus is worthy!

CALM IN THE STORM

READ: PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7

Sadie snuggled under the covers as rain drummed against her bedroom window. Jagged streaks of lightning flashed across the black sky, and thunder crashed. Sadie pulled the quilt over her head. But the storm inside her heart seemed far greater than the storm outside, and tears rolled down her cheeks.

The awful news had come. Sadie's parents were getting a divorce. They had been separated for several months, and Sadie had been praying they'd be able to work things out. Now there would be no chance of restoring their family to the way it was, and Sadie felt she would never be happy again.

A few minutes later, Sadie heard her door opening softly, and Mom came in. "Is the storm bothering you, honey?" Mom asked.

Sadie wiped her eyes. "Not really."

Mom sat down in a chair next to the bed. "When you were small, you were very afraid of thunder and lightning," she said.

"I was?" Sadie asked. "I don't remember that. How did I get over it?"

"When a bad storm came, I used to sit beside you in this chair," Mom replied. "Just having me here seemed to make your fears go away."

"Oh." After a moment, Sadie said, "I still like having you here, but you don't need to stay tonight, Mom. I'll be okay."

"I know you will, but another storm hit us today, didn't it? I know the news was terrible for you. It was for me too. That's not the way I wanted things to go." She stroked Sadie's hair. "I know how upset you've been lately, and I've prayed that God's presence will help you through this tough time. I'd never make it without Him, and I hope you'll remember that He's always here to help you through any of life's storms." They talked a little longer, and then Mom returned to her own room.

Sadie looked at the empty chair. She tried to imagine Jesus sitting there, watching over her. "Dear Lord," she prayed, "thank You for being with me—and with Mom too." Suddenly she knew that even though her problem was still there, things were different now because she was trusting Jesus to take care of her.

Sadie rolled over and was soon sound asleep. ♥ SHERRY L. KUYT



TRUSTING GOD BRINGS PEACE

KEY VERSE: YOU WILL KEEP IN PERFECT PEACE ALL WHO TRUST IN YOU, ALL WHOSE THOUGHTS ARE FIXED ON YOU! ISAIAH 26:3 (NLT)

Do you have a difficult problem in your life right now? Have your parents divorced? Has a family member died? Is someone you love seriously ill? Have you been abused? Perhaps you feel lonely and neglected. As you go through hard times, Jesus is right there with you. Trust Him to be with you in life's storms and help you through them. He is always with you and offers you His peace.

BITTERNESS BUBBLING OVER

READ: EPHESIANS 4:26-32

Jake stomped into the kitchen. Slamming his backpack on the ground, he grumbled, “I have the worst science teacher ever!”

Mom dried her hands on a towel and turned to face him. “Calm down, Jake. What’s wrong with your science teacher? When I met Mr. Harnetty at the parent-teacher conference, he seemed very nice. But he mentioned you often have a bad attitude in class.”

“Mr. Harnetty is too hard! He assigned a project over the weekend. It’s so unfair!” Jake pulled out a crumpled piece of paper from his backpack and shoved it toward Mom. “He said we’re supposed to make a volcano and write a lab report on it.”

Mom studied the instructions. “I think we have just enough time to make it before dinner.”

With a disgusted sigh, Jake got started. Skimming the instructions, he put air-dry clay around a water bottle to cement it in place. Then he added baking soda and red food dye to the water bottle.

“What’s the last step?” Mom asked.

“Adding a cup of vinegar.” While filling the cup, Jake muttered, “This is so lame.” He dumped the vinegar into the bottle and leaned back to watch the volcano. Without warning, the volcano erupted in a burst of red, coating Jake with slime.

Mom gasped. “What happened?”

Jake wiped goo from his eyes and looked at the instructions again. “Ugh! I forgot to punch holes in the water bottle!”

“Hmm,” Mom said as she sat down at the table. “You know, I think your attitude about Mr. Harnetty has been a lot like this volcano.”

“What do you mean?” Jake narrowed his eyes.

“You seem to be storing bitterness in your heart—bitterness that explodes and leaves a nasty mess everywhere. But Jesus fills our hearts with something different—He makes our hearts overflow with kindness and forgiveness, not bitterness.”

Jake studied the ground. “I guess I was bitter at Mr. Harnetty because he gives us so much work, but I should be kinder and more forgiving—especially since he’s just trying to help us learn.” He looked back up at Mom. “I’m going to email Mr. Harnetty an apology for having a bad attitude. Then I’m going to write a lab report about the best science project ever!” ♥ OLIVIA SUMMERS

LET GO OF BITTERNESS

KEY VERSE: WATCH OUT THAT THAT NO POISONOUS ROOT OF BITTERNESS GROWS UP TO TROUBLE YOU, CORRUPTING MANY. HEBREWS 12:15 (NLT)

Are you quick to hold a grudge and slow to forgive? Do you store up bitterness against others and let it smolder until it bursts out? The Bible tells us to forgive others the way Jesus forgives us. Instead of being bitter when you feel like you’ve been treated unfairly, give your burdens to Jesus. Then trust Him to fill your heart with His love.

NO STAINS

READ: COLOSSIANS 1:12-14; 1 PETER 1:18-21

New and improved,” read Evie’s mom as she picked up a bottle of spot remover at the store. She grinned at Evie. “I saw this advertised on TV the other day. It’s supposed to work wonders. According to the satisfied customer in the commercial, it removes the most difficult stains.”

“Oh, could we try it on my blue shirt? Please?” asked Evie. “It’s got that spot that won’t come out. I try to hide it with my arm, but I can’t always keep my arm in the right place to cover the spot. Maybe this stuff would take it out.”

“Well, it’s not cheap,” said Mom. “But okay, I guess we can try it. Don’t get your hopes up too much, though. Just because you hear something on TV doesn’t mean it’s true.”

They took the spot remover home, and after carefully following the directions on the bottle, Evie washed the shirt. She was disappointed with the results. “I guess the money spent on that expensive stuff was wasted.” She shook her head. “I can’t believe it! They can launch rockets into space, but they can’t find a way to get this little spot out of my shirt.”

Mom laughed. “Nope. Their best efforts have failed.” She looked thoughtfully at the shirt. “You know, there’s another area where everyone’s best efforts fail.”

“Where’s that, Mom?” asked Evie.

“Everybody is born a sinner and does things that are wrong—it’s as though the stain of sin is on each person’s life,” Mom explained. “People often try to hide it by being good. Sometimes they manage to keep other people from seeing it, but it’s still there! There’s nothing a person can do to remove the stain of sin.”

“Nope,” said Evie, “but I know you’re going to point out there is something that can wash sin away. It’s the blood of Jesus.”

“You’re right,” said Mom. “God offers salvation freely to all who admit their need for Jesus and trust Him as their Savior. He alone can wash away our sin and make us clean.”

Evie nodded. “And we don’t have to pay a thing for our salvation. Jesus paid it all when He died on the cross to take the punishment we deserve.” ♥

HAZEL W. MARETT

JESUS’S BLOOD WASHES AWAY SIN

KEY VERSE: JESUS CHRIST...LOVED US AND WASHED US FROM OUR SINS IN HIS OWN BLOOD. REVELATION 1:5

Did you know you were born a sinner? Every person sins against God by doing things that are wrong. Do you try to cover up your sin or get rid of it through your own efforts? You’ll never be able to do that. Sin can only be washed away by the blood of Jesus. If you’ve been trying to hide your sin with good behavior, admit your failure today. Trust in Jesus, and He will make you clean. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 102.)

THE LIGHTHOUSE

READ: MATTHEW 5:14-16; JOHN 8:12

Up...up...up...Aiden and his classmates were getting tired as they followed the lighthouse caretaker. Way up in the top room, the caretaker pointed to the powerful lamp. “This runs on electricity,” she said, indicating the heavy cables that went into the lamp. “Its light can be seen for many miles.” Walking over to a counter, she pointed to an old lamp on display there. “This is the one that was used before they had electricity here. It ran on kerosene. Back in those days, the caretaker’s most important job was to make sure the lamp didn’t run out of fuel.”

“But that lamp is so much smaller than the one used now,” observed one of the kids. “It couldn’t shine very far over the ocean, could it?”

“Actually, it could.” The caretaker picked up two odd-shaped pieces of glass from the counter. “These are prisms. They’re cut in a special way to bend the rays of light that hit them and reflect them back—not once, but several times. By using prisms, the beam of light from the lamp can be magnified up to a thousand times. Even with the smaller lamp, a sailor far out at sea could see the beam of reflected light.”

That night, Aiden told his dad some of the things he learned on the visit to the lighthouse. “Years ago they used a much smaller lamp than the electric one they have now,” he said. “They used prisms to reflect the beam of light, and it could be seen by sailors miles out at sea.”

“That’s interesting,” said Dad. “And do you know what that reminds me of?”

Aiden chuckled. “Probably something to do with the Bible. Maybe that Jesus is called the light of the world?”

Dad grinned at him. “That too, but I was actually thinking of the prisms. If Jesus is the light of the world, who are those prisms?”

“Umm...I know. Christians!” Aiden said. “We shine with Jesus’s light.”

“Right,” said Dad. “When we treat others with the kindness and love Jesus has shown us, we reflect His light for the rest of the world to see. Each of those prisms was important, and each one of us is too.”

“Yep.” Aiden grinned. “It’s our job to reflect God’s light to everyone.” ♥

LINDA WEDDLE



LET YOUR LIFE REFLECT JESUS

KEY VERSE: YOU SHINE AS LIGHTS IN THE WORLD. PHILIPPIANS 2:15

Do you know Jesus as your Savior? If so, you have His light shining within you. How can you reflect that light to those around you? Are you telling others about Him? Are you using the talents He gave you to glorify Him? Are you treating others in a kind and loving way? Trust Him to help you shine out so others can see the light of His love.

RASCAL'S SONG

READ: PSALM 68:3-4, 32-35

What pet should I get? Eli wondered. His parents had agreed that he could have either a bird or a guinea pig if he would care for it properly. He thought about getting a bird. It would be cool to have a pet that sings, but he could hold a guinea pig and play with it. It was a hard decision, but Eli finally decided on a guinea pig and named it Rascal.

Each day, Eli checked Rascal's food and water and spent time petting him. "I'm glad I got Rascal! He's fun to play with," Eli told his parents. "Now if he could just learn to sing, we'd be all set."

One morning, Eli rushed into the kitchen. "Mom! Come to my room! There's something you've got to see!" Mom hurried with Eli to his room. "Listen!" said Eli as Rascal began to make whistling sounds. "He's singing! I thought about getting a bird because it would sing, and now Rascal is singing! Do you think all guinea pigs sing like that?"

"I read online that they often make squealing and whistling sounds when they're happy," said Mom.

"I guess Rascal must be happy then!" Eli said.

Mom nodded. "He sounds happy to me, and I noticed he began whistling when you stepped into the room. He seems to recognize you. Perhaps he's singing to express affection in his own way and to thank you for taking such good care of him."

Eli grinned at that thought. "That would be cool."

"Doesn't it make you feel good to know you're taking care of all his needs?" asked Mom. "And that he's happy and content and showing his gratitude?" Eli nodded. "You know," Mom continued, "God is pleased when we sing praises to Him. Many of the psalms David wrote are songs of praise. They're in the Bible to remind us to praise and thank God for all He's done for us. Through Jesus, He's rescued us from sin and given us eternal life, and He provides us with everything we need. That's a lot to be thankful for!"

Eli smiled and nodded. "I guess we should be like Rascal and sing praises to thank God for the way He cares for us." ♥RONDA L. SHERRILL

SING PRAISES TO GOD

KEY VERSE: EACH MORNING I WILL SING WITH JOY ABOUT
YOUR UNFAILING LOVE. PSALM 59:16 (NLT)

Do you appreciate all the care God gives you? Do you thank Him for the many blessings He has provided—food, clothes, toys, family, friends, protection? Do you thank Him for forgiveness, new life in Jesus, and a future in heaven with Him? Try doing what our Key Verse suggests—sing a joyful song to God! He loves you and likes to hear you sing His praises.

THE DEMONSTRATION

READ: PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11

Guess what?" Grace bounded into the kitchen, followed by her friend Ava. "Ava and I volunteered to give a demonstration at the next youth club meeting."

"That's great," said Mom. "What will you demonstrate?"

Both girls looked at her with a blank stare, and then burst into peals of laughter. "We didn't even think about that," said Ava. "It just sounded like fun to get up and give a demonstration!" All was quiet for a moment. Then Ava snapped her fingers. "I know. Let's give a demonstration on flower arranging. My mom has a book that shows how to do it. I'm sure she'll let us use it."

"Good idea," said Grace, so the girls went to Ava's house and spent the afternoon studying pictures and instructions and practicing arranging flowers.

Finally, they returned to Grace's house to show her mom a bouquet they had made. "This is the kind of arrangement we plan to demonstrate," said Ava.

"Beautiful!" Mom exclaimed. "That's really lovely."

"We have three weeks to practice and get our speech ready," said Grace. She held up the bouquet. "We want to give this to Ava's aunt. She just had surgery and can't even get out of bed. Can I go visit her with Ava tomorrow morning?"

"Sure," said Mom, and the next morning the girls took the flowers to the hospital and spent an hour talking with Ava's aunt.

"How did your demonstration go?" Mom asked when Grace returned home.

"We won't be doing that for a few weeks yet," Grace said, surprised her mother had forgotten. "Today we just took the flowers to Ava's aunt."

Mom smiled. "I know you did, and that's the demonstration I'm talking about. You girls demonstrated something far more important than flower arranging."

"We did?" said Grace.

"A lot of people talk about God's love, but you and Ava demonstrated it by your thoughtfulness," Mom explained, giving Grace a hug. "The flowers you arranged are beautiful, but not nearly as beautiful as the love you showed by giving them to Ava's aunt and spending time with her. Your actions demonstrate that Jesus is working in your life to help you love and care for others the way He does."

Grace's face slowly broke into a huge smile. ♥ BARBARA J. WESTBERG

DEMONSTRATE GOD'S LOVE

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 God's love to others? Are you friendly and kind to other kids? Do you help out whenever you can? Do you put others ahead of your own plans and wishes? We need to tell others about Jesus and His love for us, but we also need to show it through our actions. So let others see Jesus in you. Demonstrate God's love to someone today.

MOPPET'S CHOICE

READ: 1 JOHN 4:7-11, 20-21

Can you think of anyone who needs a friend?" Abby's Sunday school teacher asked the class. "During His time on earth, Jesus sought out those who were rejected or ignored by others so they would know they were loved by God. When we reach out to those who are lonely, we're showing them the love of Jesus, who sacrificed His life so we could have a place in His family. Who can you show God's love to this week who might be feeling lonely?"

Abby tried to think of someone, but there wasn't anyone at her school who seemed lonely. Her class was small, and the kids all knew each other well.

When Abby got home, her dog, Moppet, met her at the door. "Hi, Moppet," Abby crooned. As she sat down to pet the little dog, Abby's brother Topher walked through the kitchen. Moppet promptly jumped up and followed him.

Frowning, Abby glared after them. "Why does Moppet always prefer to be with my brother?" she muttered under her breath. Sighing, Abby got up and went to her room.

Later that day, Abby noticed that her brother didn't seem very interested in the TV show he was watching. *I wonder if Topher is lonely*, she thought with a start. *We've only lived here a little while, and he doesn't seem to have many friends yet.* Abby remembered how she felt when Moppet often chose to follow Topher instead of her. *Is that how Topher feels?* she wondered. *Sad and lonely because everyone else in our family feels at home and has made friends except for him?* Abby thought again of her teacher's words. *I couldn't think of any lonely people this morning, but I didn't even consider my own brother.* She sighed. *Maybe that's why Moppet chooses to follow Topher around—because he knows Topher needs a friend.*

Abby went to the kitchen and got two glasses of milk and some cookies. She put them on a tray and took them to the living room. Topher looked up in surprise when Abby offered him cookies and milk. "What's that for?" he asked.

Abby shrugged. "I just thought we could have a snack and hang out."

Topher smiled. "Okay," he said, and they sat down to watch his show together. ♥

LINDA WEDDLE



BE A FRIEND TO OTHERS

KEY VERSE: HE WHO LOVES GOD MUST LOVE HIS BROTHER ALSO. 1 JOHN 4:21

Do you know someone who's lonely and could use a friend? It might be someone at your church, your school...or even in your own family! Ask God to show you someone who needs a friend. Then reach out to them and let them know you care. Through your kindness and friendship, you can let them know that Jesus loves them and has a place for them in His family.

BY MYSELF, DADDY

READ: COLOSSIANS 1:9-14

Silas watched as his little brother struggled to tie his shoes. When Silas tried to help him, Daniel scowled and pulled away. Silas sighed and waited patiently for the little boy to give up. Finally, Daniel allowed Silas to help him, and the two of them headed for the park.

“Dad, Daniel never wants me to help him tie his shoes,” Silas said that evening, “but he can’t do it alone. How long will it be till he can tie them by himself?”

Dad smiled. “It won’t be long. He just needs a little more time. I remember when you were learning new things. You were a lot like Daniel. You would hardly ever let me help you. If I tried, you’d get angry and say, ‘No! By myself, Daddy!’ And you’d push at my hands.”

“I would?” Silas grinned. “You’re sure you’re not mixing me up with somebody else?”

Dad laughed. “It was you all right. You were very independent. Maybe I should thank you for that, because you taught me something.”

“Really?” Silas was surprised. “What did I teach you?”

“As I watched you, I saw myself. I was a new Christian at that time, and I was trying to live the Christian life all by myself. I hardly ever read my Bible or spent time in prayer. I didn’t even go to church very often. I wasn’t seeking help from God or from my Christian brothers and sisters. As a result, I was struggling with my temper and other bad habits.”

“But you knew you were doing bad stuff?” asked Silas.

Dad nodded. “And I struggled because of it. Then as I watched you resist my help, I suddenly realized I was resisting the Lord’s help. In my spiritual life, I was saying, ‘I don’t need any help.’ It’s a lesson I’ll never forget.” Dad smiled at Silas. “God is patient with us, so be patient with Daniel, but don’t be like him. Accept the help God offers through His Word and through Christian brothers and sisters. And remember that you have God’s Holy Spirit inside you who helps you turn away from sin and is shaping you to be more like Jesus.”

“Okay,” said Silas. “I’ll remember that whenever Daniel doesn’t let me tie his shoes!” ♥ DEBORAH S. MARETT



ACCEPT GOD'S HELP

KEY VERSE: ALL GLORY TO GOD, WHO IS ABLE TO KEEP YOU FROM FALLING AWAY AND WILL BRING YOU WITH GREAT JOY INTO HIS GLORIOUS PRESENCE WITHOUT A SINGLE FAULT. JUDE 1:24 (NLT)

Are you finding it hard to live the Christian life? Are you struggling with fears? Laziness? A bad temper? Pride? No matter how capable you feel, you can't live the Christian life alone. Study God's Word. Meet regularly with other Christians. Take time to pray. Trust God to help you be the honest, kind, loving person He's made you to be.

MOTHER'S VOICE

READ: PROVERBS 6:20-22

As Aurora and her mom walked along a nearby lake one chilly spring day, a wispy mist rose up from the water. “Look, Mom. That lady is feeding the ducks.” Aurora motioned toward a woman seated on a bench. “Let’s go watch them.”

“Okay,” said Mom, so they walked toward the woman. A mob of ducks milled around her, frantically pushing and shoving to get the corn she offered them.

“There’s one with babies!” Aurora laughed as she pointed to a mother duck with several little ones. “They’re so cute and tiny.”

Mom nodded. “Yes, and notice how close they stick to their mother.”

“How do they know which one she is?” asked Aurora. “Ducks all look alike.”

Hearing her, the woman on the bench turned. “To you they do, but not to them. And ducklings know their mother’s voice.”

Aurora noticed two ducklings at the edge of the group, tripping along and peeping at the top of their little voices. “Oh, poor things! They must not have a mother.”

The woman pointed to the duck family. “They belong with the others. They got separated from the brood a minute ago.”

Quacking loudly, the mother duck headed for the water. The five ducklings with her followed. The two other ducklings hesitated, then hurried toward the water too. They fell in line with the others as the mother duck led them far out into the lake.

“Wow! They really do know her voice,” said Aurora. “And they do what she tells them, don’t they?”

The woman nodded. “Kids should listen to their mothers’ voices as well as ducklings do,” she said with a grin.

Mom chuckled. “I agree,” she said as she and Aurora turned to leave.

“I agree too,” Aurora said as they walked along. She laughed when Mom looked at her in surprise. “Okay, I admit I don’t always act like it, but I know mothers really do want what’s best for their kids.”

“I’m glad you know that,” Mom said. “I know I’m not perfect, but I pray every day that Jesus would help me teach you to follow Him. He made me your mother so I can help you hear His voice.”

Aurora reached out and squeezed her mom’s arm. “I’m so thankful He did.” ♥

MARYA DECKER

THANK GOD FOR MOTHERS

KEY VERSE: DO NOT TURN AWAY FROM YOUR MOTHER'S TEACHING.
PROVERBS 1:8 (NLV)

Do you listen to your mother? Do you follow her advice? Even baby animals—like ducklings—listen to their mothers. How about you? Do you hear and obey your mother or other caretaker God provided for you? God puts mothers in children’s lives so they can demonstrate the kind of love Jesus has for us. Mother’s Day is a good time to thank Him for those who love and care for you.

IMMEDIATE HELP

READ: ACTS 17:24, 27-28

Feeling a little nervous about babysitting at the home of a family friend, Anna rang the doorbell. Mrs. King greeted her with a smile. “All ready to work?” she asked. Anna nodded. “Good.” Mrs. King brought her inside and pointed to a list of emergency numbers on a table by the door. “If you need anything, help is only a call away.”

After Mrs. King left, Anna played several games with the two kids in her care. “Your mom said you could have toast and jelly for an afternoon snack,” Anna told them after a while. “Why don’t you pick out another game while I get it for you.” She went to the kitchen, fixed toast for each of the kids, and took it back to the family room. As they began to eat, they were all startled by the loud buzzing of the smoke alarm. *Oh, what do I do now?* Anna thought in a panic. She jumped up. *Lord, please show me what to do.* Right away she knew she needed to get the kids out of the house.

As they hurried to the door, Anna noticed the list of emergency numbers and grabbed it. Once they were safely on the far side of the yard, she took out her cell phone and dialed the number for the fire department.

With the siren blaring, a fire truck soon rounded the corner. Neighbors came to watch as firefighters hurried into the Kings’ house and then came back out, smiling. “Everything’s fine,” they said. “Smoke from a piece of bread caught in the toaster tripped the smoke alarm.” Anna was relieved, but she was also embarrassed because she had called the fire department over burned toast. “You did exactly the right thing,” the firefighters told Anna. “Never take a chance when there could be a fire.”

When Anna got home, she told her family about the excitement. “You know what?” she said. “After I called the fire department, it still took a little time for the firefighters to get there. But when I asked God to show me what to do, right away He helped me remember that it’s important to get out fast if there’s a fire.” She grinned. “Mrs. King told me help was only a call away, and she was right. I can call on the Lord for help anytime.” ♥ HAZEL W. MARETT



GOD IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE

KEY VERSE: HE [GOD] IS NOT FAR FROM EACH ONE OF US. ACTS 17:27

Isn't it amazing that the Almighty God who made all things is right there, ready to help you at all times? He wants you to call on Him when you're concerned about the best way to handle all kinds of situations. Talk to Him about anything that troubles you. He's always ready to listen. He hears every prayer and will help you in every situation.

TALKING TONGUES

READ: PROVERBS 15:1-4; JAMES 3:3-6

Mom, guess what! Karl’s got strep throat!” Nico had just recovered from strep throat, and now others were coming down with it. Nico found his mom on the phone in the living room. “Was that Mrs. Burk?” He asked when Mom hung up. “Sounds like they’re going to move to Texas.”

“Oops! I didn’t hear you come in,” said Mom. “Don’t tell anyone they’re moving. Mr. Burk’s boss is on vacation, so he hasn’t had a chance to tell her yet.”

Nico didn’t tell anyone about the Burks—not until Sunday morning, that is. Then it just sort of slipped out when he told his friend Haru they’d soon have a new Sunday school teacher. “But don’t tell anyone,” added Nico quickly. And Haru didn’t—at least not for a few hours. Then he told his sister Ari, who told her best friend Karen. Not knowing it was a secret, Karen passed the news on to her parents, who mentioned it at a committee meeting.

By the end of the week, several more children in Nico’s class had strep throat—and several more people knew the Burks were moving.

“Nico,” said Mom, “I didn’t tell anyone the Burks were moving. Did you?”

“Well...just Haru. But I told him not to tell,” said Nico.

“Mrs. Burk says the news is all over town. They’re afraid Mr. Burk’s boss may hear it before he’s able to tell her,” said Mom. “News spreads fast.”

“Like strep throat?” asked Nico.

“Something like that,” said Mom. “Once you exposed your friends to strep throat, there was nothing you could do to stop it. And when you tell a secret to even one person, the story is almost sure to spread. That’s why we need to control our tongues. Even if we’re not saying anything bad about someone, sharing secrets they don’t want others to know can hurt them, and it shows that we can’t be trusted to keep confidences. Does that sound like Jesus to you?” Nico shook his head, and Mom continued. “Jesus is trustworthy, so we need to depend on Him to help us be trustworthy too.”

Nico sighed. “I’m sorry. Next time I learn something I’m not supposed to tell, I’ll pretend it’s a contagious disease—like strep throat—and be careful not to expose anybody else.” ♥ LINDA WEDDLE

KEEP CONFIDENCES

KEY VERSE: A GOSSIP GOES AROUND TELLING SECRETS, BUT THOSE WHO ARE TRUSTWORTHY CAN KEEP A CONFIDENCE. PROVERBS 11:13 (NLT)

Do you keep secrets? Or do you think it won’t hurt if you tell just one person? Occasionally, you may be told something parents or a trusted adult need to know—like if someone is being abused or is engaged in harmful behavior, for example. Then be sure you do tell. But generally, when you’re taken into someone’s confidence, don’t talk about it to anyone else. Show others that you are trustworthy like Jesus.

JUST LIKE CLOCKWORK

READ: 1 CORINTHIANS 12:14-22

Kaya walked into the living room and slumped onto the couch. Grandpa looked up from his work on the grandfather clock and laid aside a tool. “What’s wrong?” he asked.

Kaya picked at the fuzz on her jacket. “Oh, nothing. It’s just that when the Millers came to church last Sunday, they were talking about all the amazing things they’ve seen God do in Brazil. After the service, I went up to them and explained that I wanted to help them with their missions work.”

“That’s great, Kaya!” Grandpa said. “What’s wrong with that?”

“Well, I thought that maybe I could join them out in the jungle for the summer, but instead they said they needed help with their mailing. I just spent the last hour stuffing envelopes with letter updates for the Millers’ ministry partners. I wish I could do something actually useful for missions work!”

Grandpa furrowed his brow. “Come here,” he said. Kaya joined him. “Do you see this gear?” Grandpa handed Kaya a small gear about the size of the dime.

Kaya cradled it in her palm. “It’s so small!”

Grandpa gently opened a panel in the back of the clock.

“Oh, wow!” Kaya exclaimed. Inside the grandfather clock was a labyrinth of gears, springs, wheels, and hooks.

“It may not look like much,” Grandpa said, “but this gear is essential to the working of the clock. When the clock didn’t chime this afternoon, I opened it up and noticed this gear was out of place. I was just about to fix it when you walked in.” Grandpa carefully put the gear back in the clock and shut the panel. Moving around to the front, he pushed the minute hand past the twelve, and the clock chimed.

“The body of Christ is the same way. Each person who trusts in Jesus is part of His church, and we work together to help more people know about His love for them and what He did to save them. Even things that may look insignificant on the surface are an integral part of how Jesus uses us to reach others.”

“So even though I may not think stuffing envelopes is that exciting, I’m still serving Jesus?” asked Kaya.

“Exactly!” Grandpa grinned. “Even the small parts make a big difference.” ♥

OLIVIA SUMMERS

YOUR SERVICE IS IMPORTANT

KEY VERSE: THOSE PARTS OF THE BODY THAT SEEM TO BE WEAKER ARE ACTUALLY VERY IMPORTANT. 1 CORINTHIANS 12:22 (ERV)

Do you feel like your service is unimportant? Do you wish you could be making more of a difference? Whether you’re volunteering in the nursery, washing church dishes, or raising money for missionaries, God views your work as important. Sometimes the most unnoticed things are the most foundational. Be faithful with the service opportunities Jesus has given you, knowing you are helping His body of believers share His love with the world.

THE RACE OF LIFE (PART 1)

READ: 1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-25; HEBREWS 12:1-2

Gramps!” Asher called as he burst into his grandpa’s house. “Next month we’re going to have a big race at our school, and I’m going to be in it. I can’t wait! There will be prizes and everything.”

Grandpa chuckled. “You’d better slow down, or you’ll be worn out before the race starts,” he teased. “If you’re serious about running, it would be a good idea to cut down on junk foods. I ran a few races in my college days, and I remember the coach emphasizing the importance of a good diet.”

Asher groaned. “My gym teacher said the same thing, but I love candy and ice cream and potato chips! In fact, I love all the things they say are bad for you. How am I gonna live one whole month without all that good stuff?”

“Well, you can eat it if you want to. It’s up to you,” said Grandpa. “Of course, if you’re really serious about winning, you’ll probably want to cut out anything that would keep you from reaching your goal.”

Asher thought for a moment. “I do want to win, and I’ll do everything I can to come in first—even give up candy and stuff like that. The prize will be worth it.”

Grandpa nodded. “You know, Asher, the Bible compares our Christian lives to a race. Our goal is to run a good race before we cross the finish line and see Jesus face-to-face. To do well in the race of life, we may need to give up some things too.”

“Like what?” asked Asher.

“Well, we might be holding on to sinful habits that are slowing us down—things like lying, gossiping, or a bad temper. Or maybe we’re too focused on our own comfort and enjoyment, and we need to pick up the pace and find more ways to show the love of Jesus to those around us.”

Asher sighed. “That sounds even harder than giving up junk food for the race at school!”

“Maybe, but don’t forget that you’re not running the race of life alone,” said Grandpa. “Jesus is right by your side, and He will help you run a good race. Nothing we give up in this world can compete with the prize He won for us—eternal life with Him.” ♥ SHERRY L. KUYT

RUN A GOOD RACE IN LIFE

KEY VERSE: LET US LAY ASIDE EVERY HINDRANCE AND THE SIN THAT SO EASILY ENSNARES US. LET US RUN WITH ENDURANCE THE RACE THAT LIES BEFORE US. HEBREWS 12:1 (CSB)

Are you running your best race in life? Or are you holding on to things that slow you down? Don’t let anything get in the way of your goal to run a good race. Let Jesus help you keep your eyes on the prize as you trust and follow Him each day. He saved you so you could have eternal life with Him. Nothing you give up can compare with the reward of seeing Him at the finish line.

THE RACE OF LIFE (PART 2)

READ: PHILIPPIANS 1:20-21; 2 TIMOTHY 4:6-8

Panting, Asher crossed the finish line in the big race at school. “Good job!” exclaimed Grandpa, who had come to watch. “Second place—that’s great!”

Asher grinned. “I wanted to take first,” he said breathlessly, “but I knew George would probably beat me. Second’s okay too.”

Several weeks later, when Asher got home from school, his mom told him Grandpa had been taken to the hospital. “We’ll go see him after dinner,” Mom said, “but you need to know that he’s very, very ill.”

Mom was right. Grandpa was very weak, and as the days passed, he didn’t seem to improve. Asher knew his parents were concerned about it.

Asher was solemn as he entered his grandfather’s hospital room one afternoon. “Hi, Asher,” Grandpa said weakly. “Good to see you!”

“I’m glad to see you too.” Asher gave Grandpa a shaky smile. “I miss you, Gramps! I wish you could come home.”

“I miss you too,” said Grandpa. He took Asher’s hand. “I think I’ll be going home soon, Asher,” Grandpa added softly. “Home to be with Jesus. I’m eager to see Him.”

Asher gasped. “Grandpa! You don’t mean you’re gonna die, do you?”

“That sounds awful to you, doesn’t it? But remember that I’ll be with Jesus.”

“But...but...” Asher stuttered.

Grandpa smiled. “Asher, how did you feel when you were almost to the finish line in your race a couple months ago? Not there, but almost there.”

Asher couldn’t help grinning as he remembered the race. “Pretty bad. My legs were sore, my chest hurt, I was hot and sweaty, and I wanted a drink.” Then as he thought about it, he added, “But in a way, I felt great. I knew the race was almost over, and I knew I’d done my best.”

“That’s exactly how I feel,” said Grandpa gently. “Jesus saved me and helped me run a good life race for Him. Now my body is tired and sore, but I’m happy because I can see the finish line up ahead. I look forward to finally seeing Him and all the wonderful things He has prepared for me. Don’t feel bad for me, Asher. It’s almost time for me to get my prize!”

“Okay,” Asher whispered tearfully. “I know it’s going to be a really good one!” ♥

SHERRY L. KUYT

FOR CHRISTIANS, DEATH MEANS SEEING JESUS

KEY VERSE: TO ME, TO LIVE IS CHRIST, AND TO DIE IS GAIN. PHILIPPIANS 1:21

Do you ever think about growing old and dying? Or perhaps you’re concerned you might die at a young age. If you know Jesus as your Savior, you don’t need to be afraid. Death for a Christian means crossing the finish line and seeing Jesus waiting for you with open arms. So trust Him to help you run a good race for Him, and look forward to the day when you see Him face-to-face.

A SPECIAL DIET

READ: ROMANS 14:1-7, 22-23

Mom, how come Christians have such different ideas about right and wrong?” asked Avery one day. “You and Dad won’t let us watch some movies that Stella’s parents think are okay. And Naomi says her family avoids doing certain things on Sunday that we do almost every Sunday. Why can’t Christians agree on what’s right and what’s wrong?”

“There isn’t a simple answer to that, but...” Mom hesitated. “We’re having Uncle Paul and Aunt Sue over for dinner tonight, right? And we’ll all eat quite differently. Aunt Sue has diabetes and avoids starchy foods. Uncle Paul is on a diet to lower his cholesterol.”

“And Daddy wants to lose weight.” Avery giggled. “I guess he’ll eat a big salad and not too much of the other stuff.”

Avery’s brother Cole spoke up. “Yeah, but what does that have to do with it?”

“Well, people have different physical conditions, so they have different dietary needs,” said Mom. “And because Christians have different backgrounds and levels of maturity, they have different spiritual needs.”

“You mean, what’s right for one person may not be right for another?” Cole asked.

“Possibly,” said Mom. “God may convict one believer about a certain activity because it would cause him—or those around him—to stumble in the Christian walk. Or someone may have a tender conscience about something because she had a bad experience related to it, or because of the way she was brought up. Then it would be wrong for her to take part in that activity, though it might not be harmful for someone else.”

“So, each person can decide what they can and can’t do?” Avery asked.

“Well, many things are spelled out so clearly in the Bible that there’s no room to argue about them. As to things not specifically mentioned, we need to depend on the Holy Spirit to show us the best choice for us. We also need to be understanding of Christians who have different convictions than we do. They’re our brothers and sisters in Christ who are loved and accepted by God just like we are—even though none of us is perfect.”

“Okay.” Avery grinned. “One thing I know the Bible is clear about is for kids to obey their parents. So for now, I’ll just ask you what I can do.” ♥ SHERRY L. KUYT

DEVELOP CONVICTIONS

KEY VERSE: EVERYONE SHOULD BE SURE ABOUT THEIR BELIEFS
IN THEIR OWN MIND. ROMANS 14:5 (ERV)

Do you trust God to help you decide what things you should or should not do? Many issues are not specifically spelled out in the Bible, so don’t be critical of the way others handle them. On the other hand, don’t do something you have doubts about, even if other Christians are doing it. Be willing to accept your parents’ guidance as you form your own convictions.

THE WINNING TEAM

READ: PSALM 37:1-2, 7-9; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:56-58

They'll never win! Look at the score," moaned Marco. He was spending the evening with his grandfather, who had suggested they watch a basketball game on TV. Marco loved basketball and couldn't sit still as his favorite team ran up and down the court. He jumped in delight when they scored but collapsed on the sofa when they missed a shot at the basket.

"They're doing awful," Marco said in disgust when his team dropped several points behind. "We should be cheering for the other team." Marco stood up. "Maybe I'll go play with Sparky for a while."

"Is that how you support your team?" Grandpa teased. "Come back and cheer them on."

"It's not like they can hear me," muttered Marco, but he trudged back to his seat.

A little later, a commercial came on. Grandpa hit a button on the remote, and the commercial zipped rapidly by.

"Hey!" Marco pointed at the screen. "Is this game recorded?" Grandpa grinned and nodded. "So you already know how it's going to end!" said Marco.

"I like it that way," said Grandpa. "There's less pressure with no surprise endings." He smiled and pointed to his Bible on the table. "That's one reason I'm so glad to have the Bible. It tells how the biggest match of all will end."

"Grandpa! There's no story of a basketball game in the Bible," said Marco.

"No," said Grandpa. "The match I'm talking about is much bigger than a basketball game. The Bible tells us about a battle being fought to win the world! Satan wants the hearts and minds of everyone, and sometimes it seems like he might be winning. Then the pressure for us to give up and desert our team—God's team—can be pretty great, especially when it seems like everyone is against us."

"But we already know how the battle will end, don't we?" said Marco.

Grandpa nodded. "We know Jesus is going to win that battle, because He already defeated Satan when He died on the cross and rose again to save us. When it's over, those who belong to Jesus will celebrate the victory with Him. That's one victory celebration you don't want to miss." ♥ HEATHER TEKAVEC

JESUS WILL BE THE FINAL VICTOR OVER SATAN

KEY VERSE: THANKS BE TO GOD, WHO GIVES US THE VICTORY THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. 1 CORINTHIANS 15:57

Does it ever seem like the whole world is against you because you're a Christian? Do you wonder whether it's really worth the effort to follow Jesus? If you know Jesus as your Savior, be confident that you're on the winning team. Be faithful as you trust and obey Him, even when it's not easy. He's already defeated Satan, and when the final battle is won, you'll enjoy the rewards of His victory.



NOT ALONE

READ: MATTHEW 18:1-3; MARK 10:13-16

I wish Mom wouldn't leave me home alone when she goes out at night, thought Ivy as she huddled under the ragged sheet on her bed. She felt her stomach rumble. Her mother had told her to find herself something to eat, but there hadn't been much in the cupboard other than a few crackers and peanut butter. Ivy hugged Ruffles, her teddy bear, close. "I'm so glad I got you back," she whispered. Ruffles was very old and worn, and Ivy's mother had tossed him into the trash. Just in time, Ivy had seen him there and rescued him.

Ivy sighed. *I wish every day were Wednesday,* she thought. That was when Mrs. Adams came to the community center after school and taught a children's Bible club. "I love to hear about Jesus. He cares about everybody, even little kids and sick people," Ivy murmured as she remembered the Bible story Mrs. Adams had told the week before.

"A man came to Jesus with a terrible disease—leprosy. It was a very contagious disease, and those who had it were covered with ugly sores, so lepers were sent to live alone outside the city," Mrs. Adams had explained. "No one wanted to come near them or touch them. But Jesus loved the sick man, and He reached out, touched the leper, and healed him. Jesus loves you that much too. He came to our broken world to save us and give us a new life with Him, and He promises to be with us in our troubles."

Ivy looked at her teddy bear. *Mom thought Ruffles was ugly because he's old and his stuffing is leaking out, so she threw him away,* she thought. A tear slipped down her cheek. *Sometimes I wonder if she thinks I'm ugly too. Sometimes she acts like she doesn't even want me.* Ivy thought again of the story of the leper, and another one Mrs. Adams had told about Jesus inviting little children to come to him when others tried to shoo them away.

"Thank You for loving me, Jesus," whispered Ivy. "Thank You for being with me all the time, even when I don't feel you there. I'm so glad I'm never really alone."

Ivy's lips curved up in a smile as she hugged Ruffles closer to her, and soon she fell asleep. ♥ CAROLYN E. YOST

JESUS LOVES YOU

KEY VERSE: [JESUS SAID], "LET THE CHILDREN COME TO ME. DON'T STOP THEM! FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD BELONGS TO THOSE WHO ARE LIKE THESE CHILDREN." MARK 10:14 (NLT)

Are there things in your life that make you sad? Do you feel alone—as though no one cares about you? Jesus cares. He left heaven and came to earth to rescue you. He understands everything you're going through, and He promises to stay with you no matter what. You don't ever need to be alone. Trust Him as your Savior today. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 102.) Then tell a trusted adult how you feel so they can help.

RUBBED THE WRONG WAY

READ: PSALM 32:1-5

A cat's loud meow came from the living room—again and again. “Ava,” called Mom, “what are you doing to Luna?” Not waiting for an answer, she left her work in the office and went to investigate. “Why did Luna yowl like that?” she asked as she walked into the room.

“I was just petting her,” said Ava. “When Luna turned around to face the other way, I didn’t change the direction I was stroking her, so I was rubbing her fur opposite from the way it naturally lays.” Ava grinned. “That made it all stand up. I thought it was funny, but Luna didn’t like it!”

“I’m sure she didn’t!” said Mom. “It must feel uncomfortable for a cat to have its fur rubbed the wrong way. Don’t do that anymore.”

When Ava returned home from school the next day, she didn’t look happy. “How was your day?” asked Mom.

Ava avoided her mom’s eyes. “Fine.”

“Really?” asked Mom. “It doesn’t seem like it was fine.”

Ava looked at her mom, then burst into tears. “Oh, Mom! I cheated on a test. There were some really hard questions, and since I sit in the back corner, I was able to pull some of my notes out of my bag without anyone noticing. But now I feel awful!”

Mom gave Ava a hug. “And do you know why you feel that way?”

Ava sniffled. “Because I know it was wrong?”

Mom nodded. “Remember how Luna hated having her fur rubbed the wrong way? When we sin, it’s as if our fur is being rubbed the wrong way. That’s because sin goes against who we are as Christians. Jesus freed us from sin, so it’s the opposite of how we should be living our lives as God’s children. That’s why it makes you feel uncomfortable and guilty, and you don’t feel right again until you confess your sin to Jesus. When you do, He will forgive you.”

“I guess I need to do that now,” Ava said, wiping her eyes. She sighed. “I’ll have to tell Mrs. Naveen I cheated too, won’t I?”

Mom nodded. “I’ll call her tonight, and then you can talk to her tomorrow.”

“Okay.” Ava smiled at her mom. “I feel better already.” ♥ DEBORAH S. MARETT

CONFESS SIN

KEY VERSE: PEOPLE WHO CONCEAL THEIR SINS WILL NOT PROSPER, BUT IF THEY CONFESS AND TURN FROM THEM, THEY WILL RECEIVE MERCY. PROVERBS 28:13 (NLT)

Do you feel uncomfortable about something you’ve done? When you feel guilty because you know you’ve done wrong, think of it as having your fur rubbed the wrong way. Sin goes against who you are as God’s child. But you don’t need to continue feeling guilty and uncomfortable. Confess what you’ve done to Jesus, and He will forgive you.

THE SAFE

READ: PROVERBS 2:1-8

Uncle Frank is Dad’s uncle, right?” asked Ben as his mom unlocked the safe in Uncle Frank’s house and took a stack of yellowed papers from it.

“That’s right,” said Mom. She set aside one paper. “This has information the hospital needs for Uncle Frank’s records.” She put the other papers back in the safe and locked it. Then they left and went to the hospital.

While Mom took care of business in the hospital office, Ben went down the hall to Uncle Frank’s room. “Hi, Uncle Frank,” he said.

The elderly man raised his head from the pillow. “Uhhh,” he muttered, peering closely at Ben. “Oh,” he said after a moment. “It’s little Jimmy.”

Ben shook his head. “No, I’m Ben. Jim is my dad. He’s grown up now.” Uncle Frank looked puzzled and didn’t say anything. Not knowing what else to do, Ben took the bulletin he’d gotten at church that morning from his pocket and held it out. “Um...would you like to look at our church bulletin?”

Uncle Frank took the bulletin and held it close to his face. He began to read the verse printed at the top. “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High”—he put the paper down and closed his eyes—“will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.” When Mom came into the room a little later, Uncle Frank had just finished reciting all of Psalm 91.

“Uncle Frank didn’t remember me. He thought I was Dad,” Ben said on the way home. “But he recited a whole chapter of the Bible! How could he remember all that when he didn’t even know me?”

“Old age often robs people of memory, but many elderly people can recall hymns and verses long after they forget almost everything else,” said Mom. “When you memorize God’s Word, you store it in your heart, and it’s available when you need it.”

“Like Uncle Frank’s papers were stored in the safe in his house?” asked Ben.

Mom smiled. “Something like that, only better. A safe in a house can be broken into, but treasures hidden in your heart can never be stolen from you. They’re always there to remind you that, no matter what happens to you, God’s promises are true and Jesus is always with you.” ♥ BARBARA J. WESTBERG



MEMORIZE BIBLE VERSES

KEY VERSE: I HAVE HIDDEN YOUR WORD IN MY HEART. PSALM 119:11 (NIV)

Are you storing treasure in your heart? You can store up great riches by memorizing God’s Word. Think of each Bible verse you learn as a valuable treasure hidden in your heart. Even when you grow old, it will still be there to remind you of Jesus’s love for you and give you comfort and encouragement. Learn today’s Key Verse as a reminder of the importance of knowing God’s Word.

HEY ZACH!

TOPIC: THE TEN COMMANDMENTS



Hey, kids! I'm Zach, host of the *Keys for Kids* radio program. Today I want to talk to you about the Ten Commandments. They are a list of commands God gave the Israelites to obey as part of His promise to make them His special people. Can you name all Ten Commandments? (Give it a try and then look at the list below to see how many you got.) It's hard to remember them all, isn't it? It can be hard to obey them too. That's what the Israelites discovered when they tried to follow God's law. They sinned by breaking the rules He had given them. They often wanted to live their own way instead of God's way.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

- 1) WORSHIP ONLY GOD
- 2) DO NOT CREATE IDOLS OR IMAGES TO WORSHIP
- 3) USE GOD'S NAME RESPECTFULLY
- 4) KEEP THE SABBATH DAY SPECIAL
- 5) HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER
- 6) DO NOT MURDER
- 7) BE LOYAL IN MARRIAGE
- 8) DO NOT STEAL
- 9) DO NOT MAKE FALSE ACCUSATIONS
- 10) DO NOT WISH OTHER PEOPLE'S THINGS WERE YOURS

Like the Israelites, we often want to live our own way too. You've probably broken some of the Ten Commandments yourself, haven't you? We're all guilty of breaking God's law. That's why God sent us His Son, Jesus. He died for our sins on the cross and rose again to save us. When we trust in Him, He forgives our sin and gives us the Holy Spirit, who helps us obey Him. Even though we're not perfect and still do things that are wrong, we can rest in God's promise that we are His children and He will never leave us.



ZACH

Be sure to send me a question on our next topic. You'll get a prize for sending in your question, and you may even see it in the next issue of *Keys for Kids!* Go to KeysForKids.org/HeyZach

And don't forget—**WORD with Zach** starts on June 1. Sign up at WORDwithZach.org so you can track your progress and win prizes!

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



So how should we approach the Ten Commandments as God's children?

The Ten Commandments show us that God's will for us is to love Him and others. Trust Him to fill your heart with His love so others can see it in all you do.

Over the next ten days, we're going to be reading stories on each of the Ten Commandments. Before we get started, answer the following questions.

Look at the list of the Ten Commandments again on the opposite page. Which ones do you struggle with the most? Write them down here. Then ask Jesus to forgive you and trust Him to help you obey His commands. _____

The first and second commandments stress the importance of worshiping God alone. That means your relationship with Him should come before everything else. Is there anything in your life that could be an idol—something that you treat as more important than knowing, loving, and trusting Jesus? _____

The first four commandments focus on our relationship with God, and the last six commandments focus on our relationships with others. When we have a relationship with Jesus, He helps us love others the way He does. Have you ever hurt someone because you broke one of the six commandments that tell us how to treat others? Has someone else hurt you? Talk to Jesus about it here, and if you hurt someone, ask Him to show you how you can make it right with that person.



TOP PRIORITY

READ: EXODUS 20:3; MATTHEW 22:35-38



Hey, Mom, I'm going over to Robby's to shoot some hoops," called Vincent as he bounded down the porch steps.

"Hold on, young man," said Mom. "I have some questions for you."

"Okay, but make it quick. The guys are waiting," Vincent said as he dribbled up and down the sidewalk.

"For starters, could you please hold that ball still for just a minute?" asked Mom. "Have you finished the chore list I gave you this morning?"

Vincent twirled the ball on his index finger. "Um, most of it."

"Did you do your Bible reading today?"

"Aww, Mom. Can't I just play ball with my friends for a while? I'll do that later."

"I know you think you'll get to it later, but from what I've seen lately, all you think about is basketball. You're either playing it, reading about it, or watching it."

"I think about other things," Vincent retorted. "You make it sound like I worship basketball."

"That's an interesting way to word it," Mom said. "Worship can be defined as excessive admiration for someone or something. And basketball seems to be all you care about."

Vincent stopped twirling the ball. "I guess that does sound bad."

"Playing basketball isn't bad. In fact, I'm glad you've found a sport you really enjoy. However, when it becomes the top priority above everything else, that's not good. The Bible warns us about how easily we can make gods out of things we love instead of worshiping the one true God, who gives us those good things. The first of the Ten Commandments says, 'You shall have no other gods before me.' That means Jesus should be your top priority. He's the one who saved you from sin and gave you eternal life. Basketball may bring you temporary happiness, but only Jesus can give you joy that lasts forever."

Vincent looked down at his basketball. He knew his mom was right. He had let basketball become more important than anything else. "I guess you're right," he said. "But it's hard. I want to follow Jesus, but I love playing basketball too."

Mom smiled. "You can follow Jesus *and* love basketball, Vincent. You just need to keep your priorities straight. Enjoy basketball as a gift from Him—but not at the expense of everything else." ♥ KENDRA ANGLE

PUT JESUS FIRST

KEY VERSE: SEEK FIRST [GOD'S] KINGDOM AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND ALL THESE THINGS WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU AS WELL. MATTHEW 6:33 (NIV)

What's your top priority? It's easy to let sports, hobbies, or even friends become the most important thing in your life. Those are all things God gave us to enjoy, but none of them should become more important than Him. Jesus loves you, and He knows nothing can fulfill you apart from Him. Enjoy the gifts He's given you, but worship Him alone.

GOD'S IMAGE

READ: GENESIS 1:26-27; EXODUS 20:4

Grandma, what does ‘graven image’ mean?” Sapphire asked as she paged through her grandmother’s Bible. “One of the Ten Commandments says not to make any graven images. I’ve read that verse before, but I don’t think my Bible says it like that.”

“A graven image is a statue or other physical likeness that people make out of something like gold, silver, or stone to worship,” said Grandma. “They were very common in the nations around Israel during Bible times, and many people in some parts of the world have them today.”

“So it’s an idol,” said Sapphire.

“Yes, it often refers to the image of a false god that doesn’t exist. But God was also forbidding the Israelites to make images of Him, because no human-made image could ever portray God as He truly is.”

“People don’t do that in our time, do they?” asked Sapphire. “I haven’t seen any images of God like that.”

“Well, maybe not physical images,” said Grandma. “But it’s possible to get a false image of God stuck in our heads.”

“Like what?” asked Sapphire.

“Well, for example, it’s possible to make an image of God in our minds that looks a lot like us. We often feel more comfortable with people who look, act, and think like us, and we might wrongly think God is more comfortable with people like us too. But God made people of every race, culture, and language in His image, and He loves them all the same.” Grandma smiled at Sapphire. “In fact, that’s one reason why God forbids graven images of Himself—because if we want to see what His image looks like, all we need to do is look around! Every single person on earth bears His image in their intellect, creativity, and free will, to name a few things. But there’s one person who shows us God’s image more than any other. Do you know who that is?”

Sapphire grinned. “I’m guessing it’s Jesus?”

“Right!” said Grandma. “Jesus shows us exactly what God is like because He *is* God. In Him we see God’s character and His great love for all people. We worship Jesus, who became one of us and is always with those who trust in Him. That’s better than anything you can carve out of stone.” ♥ COURTNEY LASATER

JESUS SHOWS US WHO GOD IS

KEY VERSE: FOR IN CHRIST LIVES ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD
IN A HUMAN BODY. COLOSSIANS 2:9 (NLT)

Do you want to know what God is like? His image can’t be captured in wood or stone because His greatness is beyond our imagining. His likeness can be seen in the people around you, because He created all people in His image. But to get a full picture of what God is like, look to Jesus, who is revealed to us in God’s Word, the Bible. He is God in human form, and He is always with us.

A SPECIAL NAME

READ: EXODUS 20:7; PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11



Peggy sat on the porch step as tears trickled down her cheeks. “What’s the matter, honey?” Mom asked as she sat down beside her.

“The Holden brothers started calling me names again. I was just walking past their house on my way to Jamie’s and they started saying, ‘There goes Miss Piggy.’ They always make fun of my name when they see me. I’m Miss Piggy or Piggy Peggy or Peg Leg the Pirate to them.”

“I know that must hurt a lot,” said Mom. “You know your name is extra special because you were named after your grandmother Peggy. She was such a kind, godly woman, and every time I say your name, it reminds me of her. It’s sad those boys want to make fun of such a beautiful name.”

Peggy sniffled. “Sometimes I wish I had a different name.”

“Our names are important to us,” Mom agreed. “When people make fun of our name or use it in a rude way, it can make us feel angry and upset. God knows how you feel, Peggy.”

“He does?” said Peggy.

Mom nodded. “People use His name in disrespectful ways all the time. When they use the name of God or Jesus in a flippant way when they’re surprised or upset, they aren’t showing the proper honor His name deserves.”

“What’s flippant?” asked Peggy.

“Flippant means not showing a respectful attitude. One of the Ten Commandments says, ‘You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.’ And then in the New Testament, Paul reminds us that one day, everyone will bow at the name of Jesus because His name is above all other names.”

“I guess God does understand how I feel when the boys make fun of my name. I really don’t want to change my name. I just want them to stop making fun of it.”

“I do too,” said Mom. “I think I’d better give Mrs. Holden a call. But remember, your name is special no matter what people say, and you have another name that’s even more special.”

“I do?” asked Peggy. “What name is that?”

“*Christian*,” said Mom. “It’s a name that means you belong to Jesus and have His goodness and love in your heart. When you show His love to others—even when they’re mean to you—you’re honoring His name.” ♥ KENDRA ANGLE

HONOR GOD'S NAME

KEY VERSE: THEREFORE GOD EXALTED HIM [JESUS] TO THE HIGHEST PLACE AND GAVE HIM THE NAME THAT IS ABOVE EVERY NAME. PHILIPPIANS 2:9 (NIV)

Have you heard God’s name used in a way that was disrespectful? Maybe you’ve even used it that way yourself. The Bible is very clear that God and His name deserve our respect. After He died and rose again to save us, Jesus was given the highest place of honor, and one day every person on earth will bow at His name. Respect His name when you speak it and also in the way you live as a Christian.

THE SABBATH DAY

READ: EXODUS 20:8; MARK 2:27-3:6



Charlotte's family had just finished Sunday dinner at Grandma's. "Charlotte, would you help me with the dishes, please?" asked Grandma, handing Charlotte a dish towel. "I'll wash, you dry! Now, what did you learn in Sunday school today?"

"We've been learning about the Ten Commandments, and today was about keeping the Sabbath day holy. Some kids started arguing about what you should or shouldn't do on Sunday. Heather said her family doesn't do any work or chores around the house, but Jason said his dad takes Sunday to do odd jobs he hasn't had time to do during the week. I was a little confused about it all. What do you think, Grandma?"

Grandma thought for a moment. "That can be a touchy subject for believers. In fact, people were disagreeing about the Sabbath in Jesus's day. One Sabbath day, Jesus and His disciples were picking some heads of grain because they were hungry. The Pharisees, who had set up strict rules about what you could and couldn't do on the Sabbath, accused Him of breaking the law because He was doing work by picking grain. Another time those same Pharisees were upset that Jesus healed a crippled man on the Sabbath."

"You mean Jesus got in trouble?" Charlotte asked in surprise.

"With the Pharisees, yes! They were more focused on following rules than following Jesus." Grandma rinsed a soapy dish and handed it to Charlotte. "I think God intended the Sabbath to be a time of rest and refreshment from our daily work and routines," Grandma said. "It refreshes us to remember what Jesus did to save us and to worship Him with other Christians. But the Sabbath can look different for different people. Our family likes to spend time doing things together. Some people enjoy hobbies on Sunday, while others just like to take a nap!"

"Like Grandpa!" Charlotte laughed. "A couple of Sundays ago, Dad helped our neighbor fix his flat tire. Do you think that was okay?"

"That sounds like Jesus! The Bible tells us Jesus healed people on the Sabbath. He was more concerned about loving others than following the list of rules made by the religious leaders of the day. I think your dad showed Jesus's love to your neighbor and that was his way of keeping the Sabbath holy." ♥ KENDRA ANGLE

HONOR JESUS ON THE SABBATH

KEY VERSE: THEN [JESUS] SAID TO THEM, "THE SABBATH WAS MADE FOR MAN, NOT MAN FOR THE SABBATH." MARK 2:27 (NIV)

Does your family take a break from the normal routine of work and school on Sundays? Keeping the Sabbath day holy means taking time to honor Jesus by going to church, relaxing with your family, and even helping others. We can rest because we don't have to do anything to earn God's favor—Jesus earned it for us! God made the Sabbath day for our benefit, and each family has a different way of keeping it special.

WHY CAN'T I?

READ: EXODUS 20:12; EPHESIANS 6:1-4



But, Dad, why can't I?" asked Ella when her dad insisted she turn off a TV show she wanted to watch.

Her brother Jonah looked up. "Yeah. I heard that's a good show."

"I don't think it's a good thing for either of you to watch," said Dad.

Ella collapsed on the couch. "It's not fair! All the rules we have just make my life completely unbearable!" She had a tendency to be a bit dramatic.

As the kids and their dad ran some errands the next day, they drove past their church. "Look!" Jonah pointed to small trees that had just been added along the edge of the property. "Dad, why did they tie those little trees down like that?"

Ella giggled. "Do they think they might try to run away?"

"Remember when we visited Nana and Papa last summer and took a walk through the woods behind their house?" Dad asked.

"Sure. Jonah and I both beat you when we raced to that crooked tree near the stream!" said Ella.

"That's okay, Dad. Everybody gets a little slow in their old age," Jonah teased.

Dad laughed. "Well, one of you mentioned that the tree was crooked and leaning over a lot."

"I named it the Snake Tree," Jonah said.

"It was probably damaged in a storm years ago when it was about the size of those new trees at the church," Dad said. "The grounds keepers at church staked those young trees to hold them in place and help them grow straight and tall in spite of storms and winds." He grinned at the kids. "That's kind of like what parents do."

"You mean..." Ella hesitated. "Like you giving us rules to follow and being careful about what we watch?"

Dad nodded. "The Bible tells parents to bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord. It's my job to love you and help you grow in a way that reflects how Jesus loves you and helps you grow—and that means doing what I think is best for you and disciplining you when you do wrong. I want to help you grow strong in your faith in Him."

Ella sighed. "I know. And even though I don't always like your rules, I'll obey them, because the Bible tells children to honor and obey their parents!" ♥

MIKE A. DIZE

HONOR AND OBEY PARENTS

KEY VERSE: CHILDREN, OBEY YOUR PARENTS IN ALL THINGS, FOR THIS IS WELL PLEASING TO THE LORD. COLOSSIANS 3:20

Do you appreciate your parents? You may not like their rules or enjoy being disciplined when you break them, but remember that God put them in your life because He loves you. Their job is to point you to Jesus and help you grow strong in Him. Thank God for them, and obey your heavenly Father's command to honor and obey your parents.



A HATEFUL HEART

READ: EXODUS 20:13; MATTHEW 5:21-24

EDITOR'S NOTE: THIS STORY ADDRESSES MURDER AND
MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN.

Oscar was putting the finishing touches on the longest mini race car track ever built in his bedroom when his mom called down the hall. “Oscar! It’s time to go visit your dad!”

Oscar sighed and trudged into the kitchen. “Can’t you go without me, Mom? You could drop me off at Milo’s.”

“Oscar...” Mom sighed and set down her purse. “You never want to go visit your dad. Why is that?”

Oscar felt tears coming to his eyes, and he wiped at them angrily. “I...I just...” Suddenly the words just burst out. “I hate him!”

Mom looked a little startled, but her voice remained calm. “You hate him?”

“Yes, because he murdered someone!” Oscar was almost shouting. “He murdered someone and he deserves to be in prison and I hate going there and I hate him for doing this to us!”

Mom let out a long breath. “I understand how hard this is for you, Oscar. It’s hard for me too. If I didn’t have Jesus helping me through this, I don’t know what I’d do.” She looked at Oscar. “Did you know Jesus talks about murder in the Bible?”

“I know one of the Ten Commandments forbids murder,” Oscar said.

“Yes, but did you know Jesus said hating another person was a form of murder?”

Oscar felt his cheeks flush. “He did?”

Mom nodded. “Every human life is precious to God. He created each person in His image, and He loves us all so much that Jesus died on the cross to save us. Jesus compared hate to murder because both go against Him, our Creator and Savior.”

“I guess that means I committed murder in my heart by hating Dad,” Oscar said quietly.

Mom put an arm around him. “We’ve all sinned against God, Oscar, but the good news is that Jesus forgives. Talk to Him about how you feel, and trust Him to replace your hate and bitterness with His love.”

Oscar nodded. “Mom? I changed my mind—I want to go visit Dad. I think he’d like to hear about the race car track I’m building.” ♥ COURTNEY LASATER

DON'T HATE OTHERS

KEY VERSE: ANYONE WHO HATES ANOTHER BROTHER OR SISTER IS REALLY
A MURDERER AT HEART. 1 JOHN 3:15 (NLT)

Are you harboring hatred in your heart? By comparing hate to murder in the Bible, Jesus makes it clear that hating someone is a very serious sin. He tells us to love one another because He created us and loves us so much He died to take the punishment for our wrongs. Confess your hateful feelings to Him, and trust Him to replace them with His life-giving love.

FAMILY LOYALTY

READ: EPHESIANS 5:22-28



Caleb and Jake Parker were cousins who lived across the country from each other. When they got together, they had a lot of fun, but that didn't happen too often. This summer, however, Caleb was staying with Jake for an entire month while his mom had knee surgery.

"You boys are so much alike," Mr. Parker remarked as he drove them to Wacky Wednesdays, the summer kids' club at church. "You like the same things and you look enough alike to be brothers."

"Except Caleb's a Pirates fan and I'm a Dodgers fan." Jake laughed. "He's dreading the game on Saturday even though we're sitting right behind home plate because he knows we're gonna win." Jake poked his cousin. "You could become a Dodgers fan just for the summer."

Caleb looked horrified. "No way! I'm a Pirates fan forever and ever." The boys had been debating about their teams since the day Caleb arrived.

Mr. Parker turned onto the highway. "Are you boys still learning about the Ten Commandments at Wacky Wednesdays?"

"Yeah," Jake said. "Today we'll be talking about the seventh commandment."

"It has something to do with adults...ery or something like that," said Caleb. "I don't understand what that word means."

"Adultery," Mr. Parker corrected. "That verse is talking to husbands and wives. God is telling them to be loyal to each other. Do you boys know what loyalty is?"

"Sort of," the boys both answered, but they didn't sound too sure.

Mr. Parker smiled. "Actually, you guys just showed me loyalty—Caleb, you are loyal to the Pirates, and Jake, you are loyal to the Dodgers. No one could talk either one of you out of being loyal to your own team. And that's the way I feel about your mom, Jake. No one could talk me out of loving her. I am loyal to her. That's what that commandment is saying husbands and wives should do—be loyal to one another so their marriage will reflect the love and faithfulness Jesus shows all of us."

"Thanks, Dad. You're a good explainer. Now I understand what loyalty is."

"Right," said Caleb, "Go Pirates!"

"No," Jake said. "Go Dodgers!" ♥ LINDA WEDDLE

BE LOYAL TO YOUR FAMILY

KEY VERSE: YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY. EXODUS 20:14

Who are you loyal to? Your soccer team? Your school? Your friends? The Lord tells husbands and wives to be loyal to each other. Jesus loves us and promises to always be faithful to us, and He tells husbands and wives to demonstrate that same kind of faithfulness in marriage. Even though you're young, you can trust Jesus to help you be faithful like Him throughout your life.

WORD WITH ZACH IS ONLY ONE WEEK AWAY!

WIN PRIZES FOR READING YOUR BIBLE AND KEYS FOR KIDS THIS SUMMER.

SIGN UP AT WWW.WORDWITHZACH.ORG

EDDIE'S RAINCOAT

READ: EXODUS 20:15; MATTHEW 5:38-42

Eddie wanted to play in the rain, but his raincoat was too small. If only he had his big brother's cool camouflage raincoat. That would solve his problem.

Eddie poked his head into Dylan's room. "Dylan? Can I wear your raincoat?"

Dylan didn't answer. He was still asleep. What if Eddie took Dylan's raincoat as his own? Dylan needed a new one anyway. It wasn't stealing if Eddie asked first, right?

"Can I *have* your raincoat?" Eddie asked. He took Dylan's snoring as a yes. He grabbed the raincoat and scurried out to the backyard. Eddie splashed in every mud puddle. He didn't hear the door open a few minutes later.

"That's my raincoat!"

Eddie felt sick to his stomach. "You gave it to me!"

"No, you stole it!"

Eddie stepped back and tripped. The raincoat made a ripping sound as Eddie fell down. Dylan ran inside. Before Eddie could stand, Dylan and Mom were at the door. "Eddie, please come here," Mom said. Eddie trudged over. The tear in the coat went all the way down the side. "Why did you steal Dylan's coat?"

Eddie shook his head. "I didn't!"

"Yes, he did!" Dylan said.

Mom shushed Dylan. "Eddie, you acted like it was yours. Isn't that stealing?" Eddie hung his head. "Do you know what Jesus says about stealing?" asked Mom.

"It's bad? I know one of the Ten Commandments says not to steal."

Mom nodded. "Instead of stealing, Jesus tells us to give. He even says that if someone wants to take your shirt, you should give them your coat too. He gave His own life to save us, even though we didn't deserve it, and He tells us to give to others in the same way. Stealing is the opposite of what we're called to do as His followers."

Eddie handed the raincoat back to Dylan. "I'm sorry I took this."

Dylan shook his head. "You keep it. It's ripped now anyway."

No one kept the camouflage raincoat. Eddie went back to his small coat, and Dylan got a new one. But after that morning, Eddie started giving things to Dylan, and Dylan started giving things to Eddie. One thing Eddie knew for sure was he wouldn't be stealing any more raincoats. He wanted to give like Jesus. ♥

BECCA WIERWILLE

GIVE, DON'T STEAL

KEY VERSE: IF YOU ARE A THIEF, QUIT STEALING. INSTEAD, USE YOUR HANDS FOR GOOD HARD WORK, AND THEN GIVE GENEROUSLY TO OTHERS IN NEED.
EPHESIANS 4:28 (NLT)

Have you ever taken something that didn't belong to you? How did you feel about it afterward? Sometimes we think stealing something we really want will make us happy, but true joy doesn't come from things. Joy comes from Jesus, who gave His life for us and who teaches us to show others His kindness, generosity, and love.

A FALSE ACCUSATION

READ: EXODUS 20:16; COLOSSIANS 3:9-10



Jack and Ryan sat on the couch with their tablet, watching a video about how to get through a maze on their favorite app. Mom walked into the room behind them just in time to hear Ryan say, “Thanks for not telling Mom I was the one that broke the lamp in my room, Jack. Blaming it on Jodi was a good idea.”

“Whatever, no problem,” Jack said as he shushed Ryan to be quiet.

Mom walked around the couch and slowly took the tablet from the twins.

“Mom!” they both exclaimed. “We’re going to miss the maze trick!”

“I think you two are missing something way more important than that,” Mom said. The two boys’ eyes became as wide as saucers as they realized she’d heard what they said about breaking the lamp.

“I was going to tell you...” “He made me promise not to tell!” they both said at the same time.

“You both lied to me,” said Mom. “When you’re about to get in trouble, lying and blaming someone else can sometimes feel like it’s the best and easiest solution. That’s why God made an entire commandment about this one thing—He called it false testimony.” Mom held up the tablet. “Do you believe the guy in the video you were watching?” she asked.

“Yes,” the boys said in unison.

“What would happen if you tried his trick in your game and it didn’t help you get through?” asked Mom.

“I wouldn’t watch that channel anymore,” said Jack. “And I’d get advice from someone else.”

“The same thing happens to us when we make false accusations,” said Mom. “When we lie and say others did things they didn’t do, we hurt people, and they stop trusting us. Those are not the kind of relationships Jesus wants us to create. He’s working in our hearts so we can show others what He’s like—and He’s always truthful and trustworthy. He was even willing to sacrifice Himself so we could be saved. But when you lied, you were only thinking of yourselves, not your sister.”

Ryan looked at his brother. “Jack, we better go find Jodi and make this right.” ♥

MANDA VAN KALSBECK

DON'T MAKE FALSE ACCUSATIONS

KEY VERSE: DO NOT LIE TO EACH OTHER, SINCE YOU HAVE TAKEN OFF YOUR OLD SELF...AND HAVE PUT ON THE NEW SELF, WHICH IS BEING RENEWED IN KNOWLEDGE IN THE IMAGE OF ITS CREATOR. COLOSSIANS 3:9-10 (NIV)

Do you ever lie to get yourself out of trouble? Have you blamed someone else for something you did? Lying and blaming others can sometimes seem like the easiest solution, but it just makes things worse. It can destroy relationships and the trust others have in you. Don't make false accusations to get yourself out of trouble. Instead, remember that Jesus will help you be loving and trustworthy like He is and tell the truth.

BE HAPPY

READ: EXODUS 20:17; PHILIPPIANS 4:11-13; 1 TIMOTHY 6:6-8

You can open your eyes now!” Liam’s mom and dad were grinning big-time as they pointed to his gift. “Happy birthday, Liam!”

Liam swallowed hard when he saw what was parked in the garage with a big red bow. He had been hinting that he wanted an electric scooter for months, hoping for a supercharged model like the one his best friend Jacob got for Christmas. This was not that. The scooter in front of him was much smaller and didn’t have folding handlebars like Jacob’s.

“Thank you.” Liam tried to sound enthusiastic, but he really wasn’t feeling it.

“Take it around the block,” said Dad. “It can go up to seven miles per hour!”

Whoopee, thought Liam. *Jacob’s can go up to fifteen miles per hour, and it has cruise control and fatter tires.*

Liam rode the scooter around the block, but he didn’t really enjoy it. He was too busy thinking about how much nicer Jacob’s scooter was.

That night, Liam’s mom came to his room to say good night. “Liam, do you remember the verse Pastor Joe talked about last week?”

“I remember he played that song that says ‘Be happy,’” Liam answered.

“That’s right. The verse was Philippians 4:11, where Paul talks about being content in all circumstances. We can be happy with whatever we have because we have Jesus in our lives. It’s easy for us to look around and wish we had things other people do, but the Bible warns us against doing that—the tenth commandment even tells us not to covet, which means yearning to have something that belongs to someone else. In Jesus we have salvation from sin, eternal life, and the joy and peace that come from Him always being with us, and He promises to give us everything we need. That is more than enough.”

Liam thought for a moment. “I guess I really don’t need to go faster than seven miles an hour, do I? And who uses cruise control on a scooter anyway?”

His mom smiled. “I agree one hundred percent!”

“My scooter is actually pretty awesome.” Liam smiled at his mom. “Thank you for getting it for me.”

“I’m so glad you like it.” Mom leaned over and kissed him on the forehead. “Happy birthday, Liam. Sleep well.” ♥ BONNIE CARR

BE CONTENT IN JESUS

KEY VERSE: BE SATISFIED WITH WHAT YOU HAVE. FOR GOD HAS SAID, “I WILL NEVER FAIL YOU. I WILL NEVER ABANDON YOU.” HEBREWS 13:5 (NLT)

Are you happy with what you have? Or are you constantly wishing you had the new phone, tablet, or other gadget someone else does? God warns us against coveting, or wanting what someone else has for ourselves, because He knows whatever it is won’t satisfy us. Only Jesus can satisfy our souls. Unlike any material item, the joy and satisfaction Jesus brings us last forever! Be content in Him.

HEAR THAT BIRD

READ: ROMANS 10:12-17

Do you hear that bird?” Levi asked in sign language as he and Hudson walked through the park.

Hudson gave his brother a confused look. “I don’t hear any bird,” he signed back, “and you don’t either. You’re deaf.”

Levi grinned. “He’s in those trees.” Levi pointed to a group of pine trees. “I saw him a minute ago. He’s called an ovenbird, and his song sounds like someone saying ‘teacher.’”

Hudson looked at Levi in amazement. “How do you know so much about birds? You’re deaf and have to read lips and watch me sign words, yet you can tell me about bird songs!”

“Well, I’ve always liked birds, so I read books about them and study their pictures,” Levi explained. “I memorize their colors and shapes and their flight characteristics. You know—whether they flap their wings a lot or soar up high or fly in a swooping pattern. Stuff like that.” Levi grinned at his brother. “Mom says I study to make up for not being able to hear. She calls it compensation.”

Hudson laughed. “I guess so!” He noticed a sad look come across Levi’s face. “What’s wrong?”

Levi sighed. “Sometimes I think you’re really the one who’s deaf.”

Hudson frowned. “What do you mean by that? I can hear just fine.”

“Well, even though I can’t hear with my physical ears, it’s not true that I can’t hear anything,” answered Levi. “I can hear spiritually.”

“What does that mean?” Hudson asked.

Levi’s hands flew in response. “When I went to camp with Boyd last summer, I learned that kind of hearing comes through the Bible, which tells us the good news of Jesus and how He died and rose again to save us. So I started reading the Bible and going to church with Boyd’s family to learn more, and a few months ago I trusted Jesus as my Savior. But whenever I try to talk to you about Jesus, you don’t want to listen. You can’t seem to hear the message I heard at camp.”

Hudson’s hands were still as he thought about what Levi had said. Finally, he signed, “Maybe I’ll go to church with you and Boyd this week. I’ll listen, but if I don’t understand stuff, you’ll have to explain it and tell me more.” ♥ LINDA WEDDLE

HEAR THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS

KEY VERSE: FAITH COMES FROM HEARING THE GOOD NEWS. AND PEOPLE HEAR THE GOOD NEWS WHEN SOMEONE TELLS THEM ABOUT CHRIST.

ROMANS 10:17 (ERV)

Do you hear what God is saying to you? His message of salvation—the good news that we can be saved from sin and have eternal life—is in the Bible, and it’s important that you hear it. Will you listen? Don’t ignore God’s message. Trust Jesus as your Savior. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 102.)

COLOR!

Hear the good news of Jesus



Add musical notes from
this singing bird!

Faith comes from hearing the Good News.
And people hear the Good News when someone
tells them about Christ.

Romans 10:17 (ERV)

NO MISTAKES

READ: 2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17; 2 PETER 1:16-21

“Look, Mom,” said Kinsley after reading a story to her little brothers one day. “This book says ponies are baby horses. I thought baby horses were called foals.”

“You’re right. People often refer to baby horses as ponies, but that’s actually not correct. Even when they’re fully grown, ponies are smaller than regular horses.”

“So the author of this book made a mistake,” said Kinsley.

“I guess so,” replied Mom. “And you caught it. Good for you!” She smiled at Kinsley. “I’m glad you’re thinking about what you read and not assuming that whatever is in print is correct. Just because something is in a book doesn’t mean it’s true. People make mistakes—in books as well as in other things.”

Mom held up a piece of paper. “I printed a recipe I found online that I want to try. Want to help me make cookies?”

Kinsley agreed and eagerly helped get all the ingredients together. She and Mom followed the directions carefully. “They look so yummy,” Kinsley said as she took the first sheet of cookies from the oven.

Mom and Kinsley each took one of the freshly baked cookies, but when they bit into them, they both frowned. “I don’t think these taste quite right,” Kinsley murmured. “Do you?”

“No. I think there’s too much salt in them,” Mom said. “I thought it seemed like a lot when I measured it out, but I assumed the recipe must be right.” She grinned. “Our conversation just a little while ago should have made me more cautious.”

“So things on the internet can be wrong too, just like things written in books,” observed Kinsley.

“They sure can!” said Mom. “People are imperfect, so anything written by a person could be wrong. There’s only one book you never have to question.”

“I know what that is!” Kinsley said. “The Bible.”

Mom nodded. “The people who wrote it were directed by the Holy Spirit, so every word comes from God. It tells us about the one person who is perfect—Jesus, who is God and who became human to save us. The Bible is His story, and it has no mistakes.” ♥ KAREN E. COGAN

THE BIBLE IS NEVER WRONG

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

Do you believe everything you read? Remember, people aren’t perfect, and they can make mistakes. Just because something has been published in a book or posted online does not mean it’s true. But there is one book you can trust fully—the Bible. It’s the Word of God, and it’s never wrong. It tells us the truth of Jesus, and it helps us know if anything else we’re told is right or wrong.

TODAY IS MEMORIAL DAY.

TAKE A MOMENT TO REMEMBER THOSE WHO HAVE GIVEN THEIR LIVES
IN SERVICE TO THEIR COUNTRY.

TELLTALE MIRROR

READ: JAMES 1:21-25

Sometimes it almost seems like Miss Norton knows everything I do,” Arthur said on the way home from church. “She looked straight at me after reading a Bible verse that mentioned lying and...” Arthur decided it’d be best not to go on and quickly changed the subject. “Look at Darci’s face.”

Mom laughed. “What have you been eating, Darci?” She handed the little girl a mirror from her purse.

“We had ‘freshments in Sunday school,” Darci said, looking in the mirror and rubbing at her mouth.

When they gathered for lunch a little later, Arthur grinned at his sister. “There’s still chocolate on your mouth, Darci,” he told her.

Darci jumped up. “I forgot,” she said, and she hurried off to wash her face.

Arthur laughed. “How could she forget to wash that off after seeing herself in your mirror? I wouldn’t forget.”

“Don’t be so sure, Arthur,” said Mom. “I think we all sometimes forget how we look. I’m often surprised when I see myself in the mirror of God’s Word.”

“The mirror of God’s Word?” Arthur repeated. “What does that mean?”

“When we read the Bible, we often get a glimpse of how we look in God’s sight,” said Mom. “We see things we should—or should not—be doing.”

Arthur looked at the table, remembering the verses his teacher had read.

“If we see our faults and ignore them, we’re like Darci,” Dad said. “It doesn’t do any good to look in the mirror—in our case, the mirror of God’s Word—and see our faults if we don’t do something about them.”

“What should we do?” Arthur asked.

Dad smiled. “The Bible shows us our need for Jesus. It tells us how He died and rose again to save us from sin because we could never save ourselves. Through Him, we have forgiveness from sin and the power to turn from it and do what’s right.”

Mom nodded. “When God’s Word shows us something we’ve done wrong, we need to remember that we belong to Jesus and confess our sin to Him. He will forgive us and help us change.”

Just then, Darci returned to the table. “My face is all clean now.”

“Good,” Dad said. “Let’s thank God for our food and then we’ll eat.” ♥

BARBARA J. WESTBERG

GOD’S WORD REVEALS SIN

KEY VERSE: THE WORD OF GOD IS ALIVE AND ACTIVE. SHARPER THAN ANY DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD...IT JUDGES THE THOUGHTS AND ATTITUDES OF THE HEART. HEBREWS 4:12 (NIV)

What do you see when you look in the mirror of God’s Word? If you see sin in your life, don’t forget it or try to hide it. God already knows all about it. Confess your sin to Jesus and ask Him to forgive you. Then trust Him to help you make the changes that are needed. He will help you turn from your sinful ways and do what’s right.

A BRIDGE TO THE GOSPEL

READ: 1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-23

Guinevere watched as Audra walked to a quiet corner of the playground with a book. Audra sat down and started reading. *She really hasn't made any friends since she moved here*, Guinevere thought. *Maybe she'd come to Bible club with me. Our teacher said we should share Jesus with others, and I could do that by inviting her to church.*

Guinevere approached Audra hesitantly. "Hey, Audra," she said, "I go to Bible club on Tuesdays after school. Want to come with me tomorrow?"

"No, I don't think so," Audra replied. She closed her book, got up, and walked away. Disappointed, Guinevere shrugged and went to play kickball with the other kids. *Well, I tried*, she thought.

The next Sunday, there was a missionary speaker at Guinevere's church. "When we first went to Africa," said Mr. James, "the people in our village weren't at all interested in hearing the good news of Jesus. As you know, we established a hospital in that area, and it has been a wonderful bridge to the gospel. After several people were treated at the hospital, they and their families were ready to hear about Jesus and how He died and rose again so He could have a relationship with them."

A light seemed to go on in Guinevere's mind. *Maybe I need to make friends with Audra before I can share Jesus with her*, she thought. *I need to show her I care about her before she'll listen to what I have to say about Jesus or go to church with me. If I show her what Jesus is like, maybe then she'll want to hear more about Him.*

The next day at recess, Guinevere smiled at Audra. "Why don't you come play ball with the rest of us, Audra?" Guinevere suggested. Audra hesitated. "Come on," Guinevere said. "We'll have fun." So Audra joined in the game.

A couple of days later, Guinevere made another suggestion. "My family is going to the zoo on Saturday," she told Audra. "My parents said I could ask you to come with us."

Audra looked pleased. "Sounds like fun," she said. "I'll ask my mom."

"Great!" Guinevere grinned. "C'mon. Let's go play kickball." ♥

ESTHER M. BAILEY

REACH OTHERS WITH FRIENDSHIP

KEY VERSE: I HAVE BECOME ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE SO THAT BY ALL POSSIBLE MEANS I MIGHT SAVE SOME. 1 CORINTHIANS 9:22 (NIV)

Do kids resist your efforts to tell them about Jesus? Can you think of a way to build a bridge to the gospel? Perhaps you could take a gift to somebody who is sick. Or help someone with homework. Maybe you know a kid who just needs a friend. Jesus wants to have a relationship with each of us because He cares about us. Build a bridge to that good news by showing others you care about them too.

ARE YOU READY? WORD WITH ZACH STARTS TODAY!

START FILLING IN YOUR CALENDAR FOR SOME PRIZES.
IT'S GONNA BE A GREAT SUMMER! WORDWITHZACH.ORG

THE EARLY BIRD—OR WORM?

READ: MARK 10:35-45

“Get the bathroom first!” yelled Ezra. He rushed past Rachel and scurried into the bathroom. “The early bird gets the worm!” he said with a laugh. Rachel made a face at him, but he had already slammed the door shut.

At breakfast, Ezra grabbed the cornflakes. “Me first!” he said, shaking the crispy, crunchy cereal into his bowl.

After they had eaten, Dad brought out a box. “I found this in the attic and thought you two might like it—it’s a magic trick set I had as a kid.”

“Cool!” exclaimed Ezra as they eagerly dumped the contents on the kitchen table. He opened a book that explained how to do the tricks. “I get to try one first!”

“You always do things first,” said Rachel. “I want to be first for once.”

“Nope! I called it first,” said Ezra. “The early bird gets the worm, you know.”

“You said that at least twice already this morning,” grumbled Rachel. “Where does that expression come from anyway?”

“That’s easy,” said Ezra. “The first bird who comes to the yard in the morning gets the worm for his breakfast, right? By the time the rest come, the worms might be all gone. That’s why being first is best.”

Dad scratched his chin. “How do you know you’re the bird and not the worm?”

Ezra stopped turning pages in the magic trick book. “Huh?”

“Think about the early worm—the first one out of the ground,” said Dad. “Being first didn’t work out so well for him, did it?”

Rachel laughed. “The early bird ate him up. How about that, Ezra? If you’re always first, you might be like the early worm instead of the early bird!”

Dad grinned. “Thinking about it that way turns that expression on its head, doesn’t it? It reminds me of another way that kind of thinking got turned upside down.”

“What’s that?” asked Ezra.

“When Jesus became human and died for our sins, He sacrificed Himself for us even though He is God. And He tells us to treat others the same way by putting them before ourselves.”

Ezra was quiet a moment, then he slowly slid the book over to his sister. “Here, Rachel,” he said. “You can be first to try a magic trick.” ♥ TANYA FERDINANDUSZ

PUT OTHERS BEFORE YOURSELF

KEY VERSE: WHOEVER OF YOU DESIRES TO BE FIRST SHALL BE SLAVE OF ALL.
MARK 10:44

Do you always want to be first in anything you do? Do you shove your way in front of kids so you’ll be first in line, first outside at recess, or first to grab a ball? Since Jesus is God, He could have been first in every way, yet He chose to be a servant so we could be saved. Next time you want to be first, remember that His way is best and trust Him to help you serve others and put them first.

THE FAWN

READ: PSALM 56:3; MATTHEW 10:29-31

Molly, come quietly and look out the window,” Mom called. Out the dining room window, Molly and her mom watched as a mother deer placed her fawn in some tall grass. “The fawn will stay there all day until his mother comes to get him this evening,” Mom said.

“He looks so sweet! Can we go out and see him?” asked Molly.

Mom shook her head. “We need to stay away so the mama deer won’t be afraid to come back.”

Molly peeked out the window several times during the day, checking on the fawn. Finally, around dusk, she saw the mother deer walking into the woods with her baby.

When Molly went to bed, she thought about the fawn and how safe and secure he seemed. He didn’t seem scared or worried. He trusted his mama and knew she would be back for him. *I wish I could be that brave*, Molly thought, glancing over at her nightlight. *But I’m afraid of a lot of things—especially the dark.*

Each morning when Molly got up, she would check for the fawn and his mother, but they didn’t come back. Molly was a little disappointed she didn’t see the fawn anymore, but she was glad he was now big enough to look for food with his mother.

At dinner one night, Molly mentioned how brave the fawn had seemed. “I wish I could be that brave too,” she said. “But I’m just so afraid of the dark.”

“You know, Molly,” said Mom, “Jesus tells us in the Bible that God knows and cares when a small sparrow falls to the ground. He then says, ‘So don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.’ God is our heavenly Father who loves us and cares for us, and He wants us to trust Him, just like the little fawn trusted his mom. Even when scary things happen, He is with us. Let’s pray and thank God that we can trust Him when we feel afraid.” Molly nodded and bowed her head.

When she turned out the lights that night, Molly remembered her heavenly Father was taking care of her, just like the mama deer looked after her fawn. She didn’t need to be afraid. ♥ LISA FULLER

TRUST GOD WHEN YOU FEEL AFRAID

KEY VERSE: YOU WILL KEEP IN PERFECT PEACE ALL WHO TRUST IN YOU, ALL WHOSE THOUGHTS ARE FIXED ON YOU! TRUST IN THE LORD ALWAYS, FOR THE LORD GOD IS THE ETERNAL ROCK. ISAIAH 26:3-4 (NLT)

When was the last time you were afraid? What did you do? Psalm 56:3 reminds us to put our trust in God when we feel afraid. Isaiah 26:4 tells us that God is our eternal Rock—trustworthy, unchanging, faithful, powerful, and always present. So the next time you feel afraid, remember to trust in the eternal Rock and rest in His peace and protection.

COLOR!

Trust God when you feel afraid



Add more grass and draw flowers.

You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you,
all whose thoughts are fixed on you!

Trust in the Lord always,
for the Lord God is the eternal Rock.

Isaiah 26:3-4 (NLT)

ONLY JOKING

READ: EPHESIANS 5:1-4, 8

“What’s wrong, Simon?” asked Micah as the boys walked home from school. “I don’t want to talk about it,” said Simon with a scowl. “You’ll just laugh.” “No, I won’t. We’re friends. Come on, Simon. Tell me what’s bothering you.” “Well...” Simon took a deep breath. “Some of the guys found out my middle name is Thomas, which means my first two initials are S and T—ST. Since that’s the abbreviation for *Saint* and my last name is Bernard, they all started calling me Saint Bernard—like I was one of those great big Saint Bernard dogs! They barked at me and everything.”

Micah tried not to grin. “Don’t let it bother you—they’ll get over it.” As he thought about it, however, he couldn’t resist making a joke. “Wait till I tell everyone I walk the dog home from school every day!”

Simon looked at Micah in disbelief. “You said you wouldn’t laugh, and I trusted you!” he said angrily, and he began running home.

“Hey, I was only joking!” Micah called after him. “You know I won’t really tell them that!” But Simon was gone.

For several days, Simon refused to walk home with Micah or even talk to him. *He’s just being stubborn*, thought Micah, but it really bothered him.

One morning as Micah read the Bible passage that went along with the lesson in his devotional book, he came to these verses: “Like a maniac shooting flaming arrows of death is one who deceives their neighbor and says, ‘I was only joking!’”

Uh-oh, thought Micah. *That sounds like the way I treated Simon.* He sighed. *I really hurt his feelings by making that joke, especially since I told him he could trust me.* He turned to a passage in Ephesians he had read a few days before. *These verses say to follow Jesus’s example and love others because He loved us so much He sacrificed Himself to save us. But I wasn’t very loving toward Simon. I’ve got to ask him to forgive me.* So Micah went downstairs, ate a hasty breakfast, and grabbed his books.

“What’s the big hurry?” asked his mom as he dashed past her.

“God reminded me I have something important to do,” said Micah. “I’ll explain later.” And he ran all the way to Simon’s house. ♥ SARA L. NELSON

DON'T HURT OTHERS BY TEASING

KEY VERSE: LIKE A MANIAC SHOOTING FLAMING ARROWS OF DEATH IS ONE WHO DECEIVES THEIR NEIGHBOR AND SAYS, “I WAS ONLY JOKING!”
PROVERBS 26:18-19 (NIV)

Do you sometimes tease kids about things that bother them? When you’re tempted to tease, remember today’s Key Verse. Making jokes is not okay when it hurts someone. The Bible says to imitate Jesus, who loves us so much He died for our sins. Trust Him to help you be kind, caring, and trustworthy like He is, and if you’ve hurt someone by teasing them, apologize and ask them to forgive you.

GOD'S GOOD PLAN

READ: ROMANS 8:18-25; 1 THESSALONIANS 5:9-11

On Saturday afternoon, twin sisters Becca and Annie headed for the park. It was Annie's favorite place to go on a sunny day. At the top of a hill, Becca tightened her grip on the handlebars of Annie's wheelchair. If she let go, Annie would go speeding down the sidewalk and land in the busy road below.

When they reached the bottom, they crossed the road at the stoplight. Inside the park, Becca pushed Annie along the pathway to the lake, where Becca's two friends were waiting for them. Both girls gave Annie a big hug. Becca and her classmates had a lot to talk about. They tossed bread to the ducks and practiced chin-ups on the playground equipment. Annie couldn't join in, but she smiled big, and Becca knew she liked watching them goof around.

When they got home, Mom put Annie on her bed to stretch her legs. "Let's have some lemonade and gingersnaps," she said when she returned to the kitchen.

"Yes, please!" Becca got out some gingersnaps and put them on a plate. "Mom, why did God make Annie so she couldn't play and talk? It isn't fair!"

Her mom sat down. "You're right. It isn't fair. But, until Jesus returns, this is a broken world. Often we can't change the bad things that happen, as much as we might want to. But God is always good and just, and He is working out His plan to fix our broken world through His Son, Jesus. We have to trust His plan."

Becca hung her head. "But we're twins, and she can't do things I can. I hate that."

"I know," said Mom. "One day, Jesus will make Annie be able to speak and walk. Until then, He will continue to love her and take care of her. One way He does that is through the family He's given her who love her and help her through her difficulties. He gave her you so you could grow up alongside her and help put a smile on her face—and so she could put a smile on yours."

Becca thought for a moment. "You know, Mom, I think Annie helps us as much as we help her!"

Mom gave her a big hug. "That's God's plan!" ♥ BONNIE CARR

TRUST GOD'S PLAN

KEY VERSE: WE HAVE SUFFERINGS NOW, BUT THESE ARE NOTHING COMPARED TO THE GREAT GLORY THAT WILL BE GIVEN TO US. ROMANS 8:18 (ERV)

Do you wonder why bad things happen to people? Why some people are blind or deaf, or unable to walk or talk? God created a perfect world, but it became broken because of sin. Jesus died to pay for our sins, and when He returns, He will restore the earth to what He created it to be and give Christians perfect bodies. Until then, He wants us to love and help each other. Trust Him to carry out His good plan.

NO JERKING!

READ: JAMES 3:3-10

Don't jerk the reins like that!" Peyton snapped. "How often do I have to tell you?"

Her younger cousin Lexi shifted in the saddle. "Sorry," she murmured.

Peyton frowned. "See that you remember after this."

"Come here for a minute, Peyton," called Mom, who was watching.

"Right now? I'm in the middle of helping Lexi learn to ride," said Peyton. But at Mom's insistence, she walked over to the fence.

"I think you need to take some of your own advice," Mom said.

"My advice? You mean about not jerking on the bit too hard?" asked Peyton, puzzled. "I'm not even riding! Lexi says she wants to learn, and I'm doing my best to teach her. I told her over and over not to jerk at Shadow's mouth, but she just doesn't get it!"

"Perhaps not, but the Bible reminds us that words work much like the bit in a horse's mouth. Bits are small, but it takes only a little pressure on them to make the horse turn."

"That's why it makes me so mad when Lexi jerks on Shadow's mouth," replied Peyton. "It hurts him."

"That's just the point, Peyton. You're using words the way Lexi is using the bit."

Peyton hesitated, remembering the harsh way she scolded Lexi. "You're saying my words hurt Lexi," she said slowly.

Mom nodded. "Our words can often seem like small things to us, but they can have a big impact on others. That's why we need to remember Jesus gives us the power to control our tongues and trust Him to help us speak in a loving way."

Peyton sighed. "Okay. I'll do that. No more jerking." She turned and ran back to Lexi and Shadow. "Okay, Lexi, ride along the fence and pull the reins gently to turn Shadow."

Lexi nodded and followed her instructions. "Did I do it wrong again?" she asked anxiously when she got back.

"Well, you're still holding the reins a little too tight. You only need a little pressure to get Shadow to go where you want him to," Peyton explained. "Try it again, okay?" After several tries, Lexi made the turns without yanking Shadow's mouth. "All right!" Peyton beamed at her cousin. "Way to go, Lexi!" ♥ LEAH GOOD

USE WORDS WISELY

KEY VERSE: LET THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDITATION OF MY HEART BE ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR SIGHT, O LORD, MY STRENGTH AND MY REDEEMER.
PSALM 19:14

Do you sometimes struggle to use words that help rather than hurt? As today's Bible reading points out, the tongue is small but powerful. The old saying "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" is not true. Trust Jesus to help you use words that encourage people and show them His love. Make today's Key Verse your prayer.

REAL DARKNESS

READ: JOHN 3:16-21

How was this cave discovered?” Ryan’s dad asked the tour guide as they took an elevator into the depths of Jewel Cave near Custer, South Dakota.

“It’s an interesting story,” replied the guide. “In 1900, two prospectors heard wind rushing through a hole in the rocks. When they enlarged the hole, they found a cave full of sparkling crystals. The Jewel Cave National Monument was established in 1908 to protect this beautiful cave.”

The elevator stopped, and they stepped out. Following a paved, lighted pathway, they climbed up and down more than seven hundred steps. Ryan was fascinated with the colorful rock crystals hanging like giant icicles. Away from the light, deep darkness enveloped the caverns. “With over two hundred miles already mapped, Jewel Cave is one of the longest caves in the world, and more has yet to be explored,” the guide said as the tour group stopped in one of the chambers. “In a minute, I’m going to turn off the lights, and you’ll see what real darkness is like.”

Oh, great! Ryan thought with a frown. *You always hear about tour guides doing that—like we’ve never been in the dark before.* But when the lights went out, Ryan gasped. *Whoa, this really is dark,* he thought. He couldn’t see his fingers, even though he put them right in front of his eyes. It was much darker than the darkest night Ryan had ever experienced. At home during the night, he could at least see some shadows. “I can almost feel the darkness here,” he whispered to his dad.

“Now I’m going to leave you in the dark while I take a coffee break,” the guide said.

Everyone laughed at the joke, including Ryan, but he felt a little shiver go up his back at the thought of being left in such darkness. Suddenly he remembered his teacher at church telling the class that Jesus died and rose again to rescue people lost in the darkness of sin.

Wow, thought Ryan when the guide turned the lights back on. *I’m glad our guide was just joking about leaving us in this dark cave, but being in the darkness of sin is no joke. I was in a place a lot darker than this before I knew Jesus. I’m so glad He came to rescue me!* ♥ LINDA WEDDLE

JESUS IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

KEY VERSE: [JESUS] SAID, “I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

WHOEVER FOLLOWS ME WILL NEVER LIVE IN DARKNESS.

THEY WILL HAVE THE LIGHT THAT GIVES LIFE.” JOHN 8:12 (ERV)

Are you lost in darkness—the darkness of sin? There’s only one way out of that darkness. The Bible calls Jesus the light of the world. He’s the only one who can save you from sin and lead you from darkness to light. Trust Him to rescue you from the darkness of sin and give you His life-giving light. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 102.)

TIME WELL SPENT

READ: LUKE 17:11-19

Wow!" Roman exclaimed as he unwrapped a video game he got for his birthday. "I've been wanting this!" He'd also gotten many other things, including a baseball cap, money from his grandparents, a sweatshirt, and a jacket. "This was my best birthday ever!"

"Here's one more package for you," said Mom as she handed Roman a small box. "Another one?" Roman was surprised. Quickly he ripped the paper off. "A box of stationery? For me?" He frowned. "This looks like something for a girl!"

"It's a box of thank-you notes," said Mom. "Before you do anything else, you need to sit down and write thank-you notes to Grandma and Grandpa Jackson for the money they sent and to Grandma Peters for the sweatshirt."

"Not right now, Mom," Roman said. "I want to play my new video game. I'll write the notes later. I promise."

"I know you intend to, but I also know how easy it is to keep putting it off," said Mom. "Everyone who gave you a gift spent time and money to show you they love you—time and money they could have used some other way. Now you need to take some time to sit down and write a short note to thank them."

Roman grumbled, but got busy and started writing. Twenty minutes later the notes were finished, and Roman spent the rest of the day enjoying his gifts.

At dinnertime, the family gathered for prayer. "Roman got some very nice gifts today," said Dad, "and every day the Lord gives gifts to all of us. Too often, we're so busy enjoying them that we forget to tell Him thank you."

"I was in a hurry to enjoy my gifts too," Roman said. "I wanted to wait to write thank-you notes, but Mom wouldn't let me."

Mom chuckled. "Writing those notes didn't take long, did it? And it was time well spent. Now you don't have to remember to do it later."

"You know what I'm going to start doing?" Roman said. "I'm going to start saying thank-you prayers to Jesus before I ask Him for anything. I don't want to forget to thank Him for all He's done for me. I'm going to start right now!" ♥

BARBARA J. WESTBERG

TAKE TIME TO SAY THANKS

KEY VERSE: IT IS GOOD TO GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD,
AND TO SING PRAISES TO YOUR NAME, O MOST HIGH. PSALM 92:1

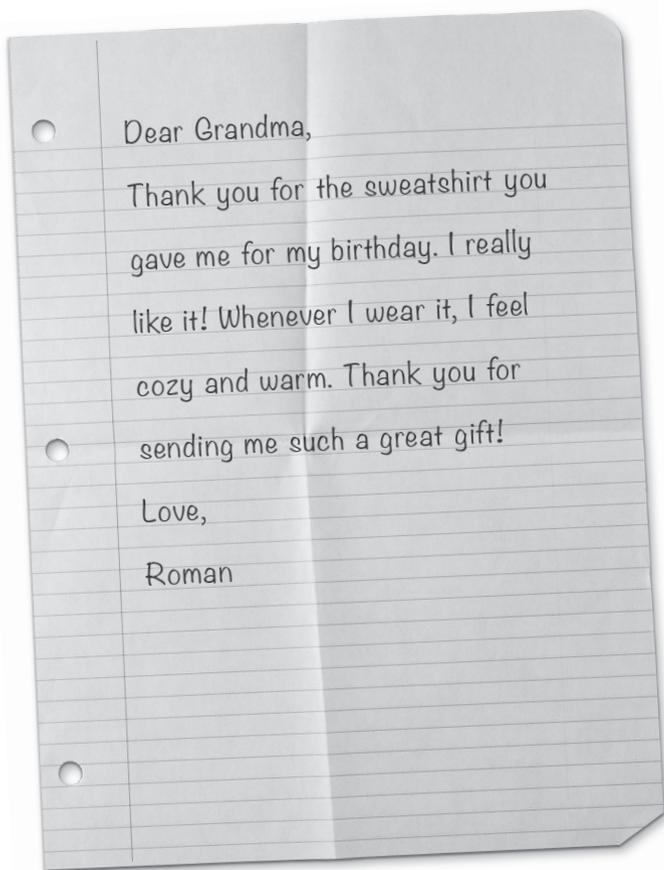
Do you say thank you to people who have been good to you? How about Jesus? Do you thank Him for all He's done for you? He died for your sins, made you God's child, and provides for you each day. In today's Bible reading, Jesus healed ten lepers, but only one returned to say thank you. Don't be like the nine who showed a lack of gratitude. Take time today and every day to offer thanks to Jesus.



ACTIVITY

Take Time to Say Thanks

Has someone given you a gift recently? Have you taken time to thank them? Writing a thank-you note (or even a thank-you email or text) is a great way to let someone know you appreciate their gift. Here's an example of what Roman might have written in one of his thank-you notes in today's story:



Now it's your turn! Write a note to someone who's given you a gift and thank them for it. Mention why you like it or how you use it. They'll love to hear from you and know you appreciate their gift!

Jesus loves to hear that we appreciate His gifts too—have you thanked Him lately? Think of some things He's given you that you're thankful for. Then write Him a thank-you note. Write those things down on a piece of paper and then decorate it with crayons or stickers. Hang it on the fridge or put it in your Bible as a reminder to take time to say thank you for all He's done for you.

DELICIOUS GOODNESS

READ: GENESIS 1:29-31; PSALM 34:8-10

Ouch! Mom, that's too tight." Renee pulled away from her mother. "I'm sorry, Renee. But if your ponytail isn't tight, it might not stay in. You don't want it in your face, do you?"

Renee sighed as she let her mom finish doing her hair. "Why are we going to Aunt Rose's house today?"

"Because your aunt asked if we would like to help her in her garden. I thought it might be fun for you. Now let's get going before we're late."

Much to Renee's surprise, her aunt's garden was a lot of fun. Aunt Rose taught her how to pick green beans and raspberries. Renee also got to see all the other things her aunt was growing that were not being picked today: melons, sweet corn, carrots, and more produce.

When Renee's mom left to go pick up a pizza for dinner, Renee stayed to help her aunt prepare the green beans.

"It's very easy to snap green beans," Aunt Rose told her. "It just requires a little bit of time. See, you take one of the green beans and snap off one end, then the other." She demonstrated. "Now you try."

Renee snapped a bean like she had been shown. "Just like this?"

Aunt Rose smiled. "Exactly like that! After we snap them all, we'll cook them and eat them with our pizza and fruit. Well, if there's any fruit left."

Renee blushed as she put a raspberry in her mouth. "Sorry. It's just all so good!"

"It is, isn't it? It's a great reminder of God's goodness."

"God's goodness? What does His goodness have to do with fruit?"

"God shows us goodness in many ways. One of those ways is by providing food for us. That's why I like to pray before I eat—to thank God for His goodness in providing me with food. It helps me remember all the other ways He shows His goodness and provides for us—like sending His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins and give us eternal life."

Renee glanced at the bowl of fruit sitting beside her. "I hadn't thought about that." She popped another raspberry into her mouth. "He must show extra goodness to us by making the food taste so good!" ♥ KIMBERLY BROKISH

GOD SHOWS GOODNESS BY PROVIDING FOR US

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 ever helped with a garden? It's amazing to see God's goodness in how He provides for us. He made the soil so we could grow plants in it and have food. How else does God provide for us? In His goodness, He gives us food, water, and shelter. He also provides salvation to us through Jesus, who died and rose again to save us from sin. Next time you eat, remember to thank God for His goodness.

NOT ASHAMED

READ: MARK 8:34-38; HEBREWS 12:1-3

Hey, Jude!” Rowan called as he rode by on his bike. “Where were you this morning? I came by your house to see if you wanted to shoot hoops at the park, but you weren’t home.”

“Oh, um...I was out,” Jude mumbled. He didn’t want to tell Rowan he’d been attending vacation Bible school at his church. Jude enjoyed it, but he wasn’t sure Rowan would understand and thought he might laugh at him.

“Are you free tomorrow?” Rowan asked. “My mom said she’d take us to the beach.”

“Well, um...I’m gonna be busy again tomorrow,” Jude stammered. Vacation Bible school lasted all week, and Jude would be going each day.

“Okay. Wednesday then?” asked Rowan.

“Well...uhhh...” Jude coughed. “I’m...I’m busy all week.”

Rowan frowned. “Every day? No one goes out that much! How can you be so busy?”

Again Jude hesitated. He could imagine Rowan’s response to the news that he’d be going to church every day. Then Jude thought of something. *Here I am going to a summer program at church that’s meant to help us reach out to kids who don’t know Jesus, but I don’t even have enough nerve to admit to one of my best friends that I’m going to church!* Jude knew something was wrong with that picture. *Jesus was willing to suffer and die on the cross for me, he thought, but I won’t even risk being laughed at for Him?* Jude took a deep breath. He knew what he had to do.

“Rowan,” he began, “we’re, uh...we’re having vacation Bible school at my church this week. That’s why I’m busy.”

Rowan stared at him. “You’re going to school...at church...during summer vacation?” He frowned. “And you don’t mind?”

“No—I like it!” Jude replied. “It’s not like normal school. We play games and sing songs and hear stories about Jesus from the Bible. I think you might like it too. How about it? Want to come with me tomorrow?”

“Well...” Rowan shrugged. “Sure, why not. I’ll check with my mom to see if she’s okay with it.”

“Great!” Jude grinned. “I really hope you can come.” ♥ LINDA WEDDLE

TELL OTHERS ABOUT JESUS

KEY VERSE: I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THIS GOOD NEWS ABOUT CHRIST. IT IS THE POWER OF GOD AT WORK, SAVING EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES. ROMANS 1:16 (NLT)

Do your friends know you go to church? Do you tell them about Jesus? Or are you afraid to let them know what you believe? Jesus willingly went to the cross to take the punishment for our sins so we could have eternal life with Him. People need to know the good news of Jesus so they can be saved. Don’t be ashamed to talk about Him. Look for opportunities to tell your friends about your relationship with Jesus.

IMAGINE THAT

READ: MATTHEW 25:14-29

Archer wiped his hands on his shorts. Ladies and gentlemen, the bases are loaded. He gripped his bat tightly, pretending he was in the middle of a ball game. It's up to Archer to bring in the runners to win the game. He took a practice swing.

"Archer!" His mother's voice interrupted his thoughts. "Time to read a little."

Archer groaned. It was summer, but Archer's teacher had suggested he read a little each day. "He has an amazing imagination," she had said, "but he prefers to imagine stories and doesn't seem to want to read them. He needs to improve his reading skills."

Archer went inside and sat down with a book, but he didn't read. He watched a fly climb up a wall. *The climber struggled up the mountainside...* he thought, watching the fly.

"Hey, Mom," Archer called after a minute, "I should really go clean my room."

"No, Archer, you need to do your reading," Mom replied.

"I'm a hostage here," Archer muttered as he turned back to the book. His imagination took over again. Forced to sit still for hours, the brave hostage stared into the stony darkness.

Archer sighed and read two lines. Then... "I'll take out the trash," he told his mom. "Or wash dishes for you."

"Archer..." Mom sat down next to him. "You always loved stories, so I don't know why you never want to read them."

"If I knew how to write them, I'd have the people in them do lots of exciting things," Archer said.

"I'm sure you would. Your imagination is so great. God has given you that talent."

"You mean my imagination is a talent?" Archer asked in surprise. "You think it would help me write good stories?" He paused. "That would be cool!"

Mom nodded. "God has given each of us gifts. We can use them to point others to His goodness and the love and forgiveness He shows us through Jesus. Writing stories is one way you could share the imagination God's given you with others, but you need to develop your gift in order to do that—and the more you read, the more you'll learn how to write your own stories."

Archer grinned at his mother. "Okay. I'll try reading this again." ♥ NANCY G. HILL

DEVELOP YOUR TALENTS

KEY VERSE: DO NOT NEGLECT THE GIFT THAT IS IN YOU. 1 TIMOTHY 4:14

What are you good at? Everyone has things they love to do or have a natural gift for. Your talent could be writing, helping other people, singing, teaching, or many other things. God gave you those gifts so you could use them to point others to Him. Think about what your talents might be—it might help to ask a parent or other adult what they think—and then develop your gifts and use them for God's glory.

TREASURES IN HEAVEN

READ: MATTHEW 6:19-21

“Look at these pretty stones!” called Myah. She and her parents were visiting a park, and she had run ahead down the path. After Mom and Dad admired the rocks Myah had picked up, she slipped them into her pocket.

“Hold on,” Mom said. “I’m afraid you can’t keep those.”

Myah frowned. “Why not?”

“We’re in a national park, and there are signs warning people that it’s illegal to take anything from this property,” Dad explained. “You can take pictures of the rocks, but you have to leave them here.”

“But I want to make drawings of them for my art class project,” said Myah. “Can’t I take a few home? They’re just rocks!”

Mom shook her head. “Sorry, honey, but that’s the way it has to be.”

With a sigh, Myah took the rocks from her pocket and tossed them down.

For family devotions that evening, Dad turned to the book of Matthew. “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,” he read. “But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” Dad smiled at Myah. “These verses make me think of the rocks you collected this morning. Would you have picked them up if you had read the signs?”

“Of course not,” Myah answered. “If I’d known I couldn’t keep them, I wouldn’t have wasted my time collecting them.”

“I’m afraid many of us do the same thing you did,” Dad said. “We collect money and possessions—all kinds of things—on earth, and we ignore God.”

“What do you mean?” asked Myah.

“The Bible teaches that Jesus will come back one day and make everything new. It tells us to prepare and be ready and even tells us some signs to look for,” explained Dad. “Yet we show a love for this world by spending a lot of time and energy collecting things.”

“Like rocks,” said Myah.

Dad nodded. “When Jesus returns, the things we’ve collected will be of no use to us. Knowing Jesus and loving Him is what really matters. That’s what the Bible is talking about when it tells us to store up treasure in heaven. Earthly things won’t last, but life with Jesus lasts forever! Our focus should be on the treasure we have in Him.” ♥ HEATHER TEKAVEC

EARTHLY THINGS DON'T LAST

KEY VERSE: WE BROUGHT NOTHING INTO THE WORLD,
AND WE CAN TAKE NOTHING OUT OF IT. 1 TIMOTHY 6:7 (NIV)

Do you dream about things you want? A new bike? Brand-name shoes or clothes? Sports equipment? Do you spend lots of time collecting things? It’s okay to enjoy things, but don’t become attached to things on earth. Money, possessions, popularity, success—none of those things will matter when Jesus returns and makes all things new. Store up treasure that lasts by focusing your heart on Him and the love He has for you.

THE BOREDOM CURE

READ: MATTHEW 25:34-40

It is so hot!" Paige muttered to herself as she sat on the porch swing. "And there's nothing to do." She closed her eyes and let the swing rock slowly back and forth. Just then, she heard tires whirring and opened her eyes to see her neighbor riding by on his bicycle at top speed. "Hey, Aaron," she called to her friend's back. "What's going on? Is there something happening?"

Aaron slammed on his brakes and turned around. "Nothing's happening. I've just got a lot to do today."

"I sure don't," Paige grumbled. "I'm so bored! There isn't anything to do around here."

"Nothing to do?" said Aaron. "Well, you can help me! I'm on my way to mow Mr. Norton's lawn and trim the bushes. Want to come along and help?"

"Sure." Paige stood up. "How much will we get paid?"

"Nothing." Aaron grinned. "I'm doing it for fun."

"For fun?" Paige slapped her forehead. "You're mowing someone's lawn for fun? Does Mr. Norton have a riding mower or something?"

Aaron shook his head. "No. I'm doing it because I want to help him since he had surgery recently and can't do it himself. Besides, in church we learned that Jesus said we're really serving Him when we do something for someone else. He uses our actions to help others see who He is—the King who became a servant and died on the cross to save us." Aaron grinned. "I decided to spend some time this summer working for Jesus."

Paige raised her eyebrows. But since she didn't have anything else to do, she asked her mom if she could go with Aaron. Paige also went with Aaron the next day—and the next too. Paige could hardly believe she actually enjoyed the time they spent working for Jesus.

"This really is more fun than sitting around doing nothing," she told Aaron as they cleaned her garage. "I can't wait to see Dad's face when he gets home and sees how nice and clean it is in here now." She grinned. "I was afraid there'd be nothing to do this summer, but you reminded me that we can always find some way to serve others and show them God's love."

Aaron nodded. "It's hard to be bored when you're serving Jesus!" ♥

BARBARA J. WESTBERG

SERVE JESUS BY HELPING OTHERS

KEY VERSE: THE KING WILL REPLY, "TRULY I TELL YOU, WHATEVER YOU DID FOR ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF MINE, YOU DID FOR ME." MATTHEW 25:40 (NIV)

Does "I'm bored" sound like your theme song? Could that be because you're too focused on yourself instead of others? Ask Jesus to show you how you can serve Him by helping others. He says that when you do something to help someone else, you're doing it for Him too. Beat boredom by finding ways to serve Jesus by helping others.

WHO NEEDS BROTHERS?

READ: 2 THESSALONIANS 1:3; HEBREWS 2:10-11; 13:1

Carley felt a sharp poke under the table. “Knock it off, Brooks!” she hissed, aiming a kick back at her brother. He scowled at her and then snuck a look at Dad, who was reading a Bible passage for family devotions.

“A friend loves at all times,” Dad read, “and a brother is born for adversity.” He looked up. “That is, for hard times,” he explained.

“You can say that again!” said Carley. “Brothers are good for nothing but giving you a hard time.”

“Hold it!” said Dad. “That’s not what the verse is saying. One translation of the Bible says, ‘A brother is born to help in time of need.’ It means times like...well, like the time you fell off the slide at school, Carley, and your brother ran and got a teacher and then stayed with you.”

“Yeah, Carley!” Brooks piped up, poking his sister again.

Mom turned to look at Brooks. “And remember what happened yesterday when you dropped your notebook? Who ran after all those papers that were blowing away down the street?” she asked, catching her son by surprise.

“Uh, well...Carley did,” Brooks replied. Then he quickly added, “But that verse isn’t talking about sisters.”

“Oh, I think it includes them,” said Dad. “The phrase ‘a brother is born for adversity’ means that God gave us siblings to be there to help us when trouble comes.”

Mom chimed in. “All brothers and sisters argue now and then, but you should learn to appreciate each other in spite of that. God wants brothers and sisters to love and support each other—in individual families and also in God’s family.”

Dad nodded. “The Bible says Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ. He made us all part of His family so we could love and care for one another and offer help in hard times.” Dad grinned. “So you two should love and help each other because you’re siblings in two families—ours and God’s.”

Brooks’ eyes twinkled. “Hey, Carley, I’m gonna have an awful hard time tonight getting all the trash out to the road so it will be ready for garbage pickup tomorrow!”

“Yes, you are!” said Carley. Then she grinned. “Okay. I’ll help you.” ♥

SARA L. NELSON

APPRECIATE YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS

KEY VERSE: A BROTHER [OR SISTER] IS BORN TO HELP IN TIME OF NEED.
PROVERBS 17:17 (NLT)

Do you appreciate your siblings? God gave them to you so you could love and care for each other and help one another through hard times. If you trust in Jesus and they do too, they’re also your brothers and sisters in Christ. Thank God for your brothers and sisters—both in your family and in His family. They’re an important part of your life.

THE PERFECT PEN PAL

READ: MATTHEW 5:13-16; 2 CORINTHIANS 3:1-6; 5:11-21

Rose squealed in excitement when her Mom handed her a letter. “It’s from my new pen pal!” Rose had been waiting for weeks to hear back from her pen pal. Her homeschool group had joined a pen pal service where they paired up kids from different states. “She’s from Ohio—that’s not too far from Michigan,” Rose noted as she ripped the envelope open.

Curling up on the couch, Rose poured over every word of the letter. “Mom, she’s the perfect pen pal! Her name is Lily—and get this, our birthdays are only one day apart! Lily even likes fashion, and I didn’t even tell her I do too! I can’t wait to send her some drawings of the outfits I’ve created.”

“Sounds like God matched you both up perfectly,” Mom responded with a smile.

When Rose placed her letter to Lily in the mailbox the following day, she was contemplative. “You know, Mom, I’ve been thinking about something. I learned so much about Lily from just one letter. In one of my devotions this week, I was reading about how we can be letters that people read in the way we live our lives. I wonder what people read when they look at my life.”

“That’s a tough thing to think about, but necessary,” Mom said as they turned to walk back home. “In the book of Second Corinthians, Paul was writing to the church in Corinth. He wanted to remind them of the new people they were in Christ. Remember how before Jesus came, there were all those rules of the old covenant the people were required to follow?”

“Yes, but when Jesus died on the cross and rose again, He changed everything,” Rose recalled. “He gives those who trust in Him His goodness and His Holy Spirit, who is always with us.”

Mom nodded. “Paul told the believers in Corinth that they were now able to show others a glimpse of the new covenant by the way they lived their lives. This better covenant wasn’t written on stone like the Ten Commandments, but written on their hearts.”

“Living letters!” Rose skipped down the dirt road. “I’m not perfect, but I know Jesus. I’m going to pray that when people look at my life, they will see Him.” ♥

SAVANNAH COLEMAN

BE A LIVING LETTER FOR JESUS

KEY VERSE: YOU SHOW THAT YOU ARE A LETTER FROM CHRIST...WRITTEN NOT WITH INK BUT WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE LIVING GOD, NOT ON TABLETS OF STONE BUT ON TABLETS OF HUMAN HEARTS. 2 CORINTHIANS 3:3 (NIV)

Do you have a pen pal you like to write to? If so, you know the excitement of getting a letter from them. Imagine how excited the recipients of Paul’s letters were! Paul reminded the followers of Christ in Corinth that their lives were like letters to those around them. Trust Jesus to help you live in a way so others will see His goodness shining through you. You are a living letter from Him.

NO DOUBT ABOUT IT

READ: 1 JOHN 5:9-13

Mom,” said Everest, “can I walk to the store with Mrs. Kopp? I can help carry her groceries home.” Mrs. Kopp was an elderly neighbor Everest often helped.

Mom laughed. “How kind of you,” she teased, knowing Mrs. Kopp usually treated Everest to an ice cream cone on the way to the store.

As Everest and Mrs. Kopp walked along, he chatted with her about his summer plans. “I hope you won’t be too busy for vacation Bible school,” said Mrs. Kopp, smiling at her young friend. “Tell me, Everest, are you a Christian?” she asked as they reached the ice cream shop.

Everest shrugged. “I sure hope so,” he replied. “I guess I am.” He chose a double-dip, chocolate-fudge ice cream cone. “Thank you, Mrs. Kopp.”

As they were leaving, Everest’s friend Kai came in. He grinned when he saw Everest’s cone. “So you got chocolate ice cream today, huh?”

To Everest’s surprise, Mrs. Kopp answered for him. “He sure hopes so.” Both boys gave her a strange look. “He guesses so, at any rate.” Kai shrugged and turned his attention to choosing a flavor.

“Why did you say that, Mrs. Kopp?” Everest asked as they left. He took a big lick of ice cream. “I have chocolate ice cream—no hoping or guessing about it.”

Mrs. Kopp chuckled. “That was pretty silly of me, wasn’t it? Almost as silly as you saying you hoped and guessed you were a Christian.” She paused while Everest thought about that.

“Everest,” Mrs. Kopp continued, “when you have something—like an ice cream cone or salvation in Jesus—you don’t need to hope or guess you have it. You either have it, or you don’t. The question is...do you believe Jesus is God’s Son and that He loves you and died and rose again to save you? Do you trust Him as your Savior?”

“Last summer I asked Him to forgive me and save me,” Everest answered thoughtfully. “But sometimes I feel like maybe I should do something more.”

“If you trust in Jesus, God has forgiven you and you have eternal life—no doubt about it,” Mrs. Kopp assured him. “God is faithful and His Word is true. Salvation doesn’t depend on how you feel or what you do, but on our Almighty God.” ♥

HAZEL W. MARETT

YOU CAN KNOW YOU’RE SAVED

KEY VERSE: WHOEVER HAS THE SON HAS LIFE; WHOEVER DOES NOT HAVE GOD’S SON DOES NOT HAVE LIFE. 1 JOHN 5:12 (NLT)

Do you ever have doubts about your salvation? Do you hope your sins have been forgiven? You can know for sure. It does not depend on your efforts or on how you feel. Jesus paid the price to save you. Trust Him as your Savior. God is faithful and will keep His promise to forgive. He will cleanse you from all your sin and give you eternal life. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 102.)

WINGS LIKE EAGLES

READ: ISAIAH 40:28-31

I'm tired from all this walking," Caleb groaned. He was hiking with his family in the mountains of British Columbia in Canada. "I'm ready for a break."

"Don't worry, we're almost at the lookout," Caleb's mom announced.

In a few minutes, the family reached a platform that looked out over the forested valley. "We can see everything from up here!" Dad exclaimed.

Suddenly Caleb spotted a group of huge birds with white heads perched in a pine tree. "Look!" Caleb shouted and pointed to the tree. "There are bald eagles in that tree! A whole family of them!"

"Those are impressive birds," his dad agreed.

Mom pointed to a sign on the railing of the platform. "There's a sign with facts about the eagles." She began to read aloud. "Did you know that when a bald eagle stretches out its wings, the distance from one wingtip to the other can be more than two meters wide? That's over seven feet!"

"Wow, that's huge!" Caleb grinned and stretched out his arms. "My wingspan isn't even close to that."

Mom continued reading the sign. "It says here that eagles can fly for hours without having to land and rest."

"That's crazy," Caleb said. "How can eagles fly for that long without getting tired?"

"The eagles don't just fly, they soar," Mom explained. "When they soar, they rely on the wind currents and let the wind carry them." She paused, thinking. "You know, it reminds me of one of my favorite Bible passages in Isaiah. It says that even young people get tired."

"Yeah, I definitely do!" Caleb agreed. "I'm tired after that long hike."

Mom continued, "But those who put their hope in Jesus and trust in Him will find strength in Him so they can soar like eagles without being tired."

"And that's more than just strength to go for a long walk," Dad added. "When we trust in Jesus and remember how He saved us from our sins and gave us a future with Him and eternal life, we have hope and strength to persevere through any challenge in life."

"Wow," Caleb said. "That's even better than being able to fly like eagles." ♥

ABBY CIONA

RELY ON GOD'S STRENGTH

KEY VERSE: BUT THOSE WHO HOPE IN THE LORD WILL RENEW THEIR STRENGTH. THEY WILL SOAR ON WINGS LIKE EAGLES; THEY WILL RUN AND NOT GROW WEARY, THEY WILL WALK AND NOT BE FAINT. ISAIAH 40:31 (NIV)

Do you ever feel tired or discouraged? When you feel down and weak, remember what Jesus has done for you—He died for our sins and rose to life again, defeating sin and death so we can live with Him forever. Jesus has overcome the world, and He will never leave us. Put your hope in Him, and rely on His strength to carry you through every challenge you face.

A HOPELESS CASE

READ: LUKE 19:1-10

Hey, guys, I, uh...I invited Hayden to join us," Ben told his friends as they set up tents to camp out in his backyard. "He said he'd think about it."

"You're kidding!" Liam paused to stare at Ben. "Why'd you do that? He always acts so tough!"

"And he uses bad language," said Elijah. "Why would you even want him to come?"

"Maybe if some of us are nice to him, he'll learn that God isn't just a swear word," said Ben. "Besides, it's not like we're perfect—we're all sinners, but Jesus saved us."

Liam shook his head. "Hayden is hopeless. He's not gonna change."

The boys had a great time that night eating hot dogs, chips, watermelon, and sleeping in their tents. But Hayden didn't come.

As the year passed, Ben continued to be friendly toward Hayden. "I finally got Hayden to come to vacation Bible school," Ben told his dad as they worked in the backyard the following summer. "But he still acts as tough as ever. The guys think he's hopeless. Are they right?"

Dad shook his head. "With Jesus, there is no such thing as hopeless. He's able to change anyone."

Ben pointed to a fairly large plant growing among the weeds near the fence. "Look, Dad. That looks like a watermelon vine." A minute later, he exclaimed, "It is! There's a tiny melon on it. It must have started growing from the seeds of that watermelon we ate when my friends and I camped out here last summer!"

As Ben spoke, someone called to him from the sidewalk. He looked up and saw Hayden standing there, so he walked over to chat.

"I was just wondering...um...that Bible story the teacher told us in VBS today—I didn't get some of it," Hayden said hesitantly. "Could you explain it to me some more?"

"Sure!" said Ben. "I'll get us some lemonade and we can talk on the porch."

After Hayden left, Ben excitedly told his dad about their conversation.

"It sounds like the seed of God's Word is finally taking root in Hayden's heart, just like that watermelon seed took root in our yard," Dad said with a smile. "It took a long time, but no one is hopeless as far as God is concerned." ♥ CAROLYN E. YOST

NO ONE IS HOPELESS

KEY VERSE: WITH GOD ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE. MARK 10:27

Do you know someone who seems to be a hopeless case—hopeless as far as ever coming to Jesus? Nothing is impossible with God. Keep praying for your unsaved friends. Invite them to church, talk about Jesus, and show His love in your words and actions. Jesus changed Zacchaeus's heart in today's Bible reading, and He changed your heart when you trusted in Him. He can change your friends' hearts too.

GOOD GIFTS

READ: PSALM 34:8-10; 84:11; JAMES 1:17

Cruising into the driveway on her bike, Zoey waved at her dad. “I love my new bike!” she exclaimed as she hopped off. “I never really thought I’d get such a great gift for my birthday!” She gave her dad a hug. “Dad, you’re the best! You knew just what I wanted. It’s even the perfect color!”

Dad chuckled. “I know how to take a hint. How many times did I hear you talk about the cool bike you found online? And aren’t you the one who left a picture of that very bike taped to my bathroom mirror? I believe you even circled the color you preferred.”

Zoey laughed. “I guess I was pretty obvious. I assumed you wouldn’t know what I wanted unless I told you. Besides, I figured it never hurts to ask.”

“Well, I’m glad I could give you what you asked for,” said Dad. “But what if you had asked for a new car? Do you think I’d have gotten that for you?”

“No way! I’m not even old enough to drive yet.”

“You’re right. I love you, Zoey, but I won’t always give you everything you ask for,” Dad said. “Neither will God. I know how disappointed you were when you weren’t chosen to be on the gymnastics team, especially since you had prayed about it.”

“I know, and I still don’t understand why God said no,” Zoey replied. “I really wanted that spot on the team.”

“Because I’m your father and I love you, I’ll only give you those gifts I believe are best for you,” Dad told her. “God—your heavenly Father—loves you and gives good gifts too. When He doesn’t answer your prayer exactly the way you ask Him to, it’s because He knows something else is better for you.”

“I guess I’m learning that,” Zoey sighed. “I sure have a lot to learn, don’t I?”

“We all do,” said Dad. “I find it helps me to remember that God has already given us the best gift of all. Jesus died for us so we could become God’s children, and He wants us to bring our requests to Him in prayer. He may not answer them all the way we ask, but we can trust Him to do what’s best, because God loves to give His children good gifts!” ♥ BRENDA DECKER

GOD GIVES GOOD GIFTS

KEY VERSE: EVERY GOOD AND PERFECT GIFT IS FROM ABOVE, COMING DOWN FROM THE FATHER. JAMES 1:17 (CSB)

Do you sometimes wonder why God doesn’t give you what you ask for? When that happens, do you feel like you might as well not pray at all? Remember that God loves you and knows what’s best for you. He wants you to come to Him with your requests, but that doesn’t mean He’ll always give you what you want. Even when you don’t understand His reasons, trust Him. He loves to give good gifts!

COLOR!



**God
gives good
gifts**

Draw spokes on this bike.
What other items could you add?

Every good and perfect gift is from above,
coming down from the Father.

James 1:17 (CSB)

WHAT COMES OUT OF YOUR MOUTH

READ: PROVERBS 15:1-2; MATTHEW 15:10-11, 17-20

Tara and her friends, Maddie and Eve, sat at a wooden picnic table overlooking the sandy beach of Lake Monroe. The girls had been swimming for hours, and their stomachs were growling.

“I’m starving!” exclaimed Eve. She pulled a bag of chips, a ham sub, a slice of cake, and a soda out of her lunch bag.

“Me too!” Maddie had two bologna, mayo, and cheese sandwiches, a large bag of corn chips, and a candy bar. She was already sipping on a can of grape soda.

Tara placed her spinach and egg salad, whole wheat crackers, and an apple on the table. She had a bottle of water to drink.

“You’re eating junk food,” Tara told her friends. “You both should eat better and take care of your bodies like I do.”

Maddie and Eve both stopped eating mid-bite and stared at Tara. “What do you mean?” asked Eve.

Maddie looked angry. “She means we’re fat, not skinny Minnies like her.”

“That’s not what I meant!” Tara felt bad she had hurt her friends’ feelings. She tried to explain how she had been learning about nutrition, but Maddie and Eve wouldn’t listen.

On the way home, Tara told her mom what happened. “I just told them what they put in their bodies matters. Now they’re both mad!”

“I’m sure they’ll forgive you,” said Mom. “But you know, Tara, what goes into our bodies isn’t the most important thing.”

“It isn’t?” asked Tara. “What is?”

“The Bible tells us that the words that come out of our mouths are more important than anything that goes into our mouths. Words reflect what is in the heart.”

Tara wiped a tear from her cheek. “I guess my heart wasn’t being very loving, was it?”

Mom smiled. “We all need to think about how our words might affect others before we speak. Trust Jesus to help you do that. He’s put His love in your heart, and He will help you show that love to others through your words.”

Tara nodded. “From now on, I’ll be more careful about what comes out of my mouth than what goes in it.” ♥ BONNIE CARR

THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK

KEY VERSE: IT’S NOT WHAT GOES INTO THE MOUTH THAT DEFILES A PERSON, BUT WHAT COMES OUT OF THE MOUTH. MATTHEW 15:11 (CSB)

Do you ever speak without thinking first? Do you ever consider how your words might make others feel? We may not intend to hurt someone’s feelings, but if we aren’t paying attention to the words that come out of our mouths, those words can cause damage. Trust the Lord to help you guard your tongue and show others the love He’s put in your heart through your words.

THE OLD BRACELET

READ: EPHESIANS 4:22-24; COLOSSIANS 3:12-13

Cal, you've worn that WWJD bracelet for years and years, haven't you?" Everly asked her older brother, eyeing his bracelet with distaste.

"I got it the first year I went to camp," Cal replied. "It used to be blue with 'WWJD' spelled out in white letters. They told us that whenever we saw those letters we should ask ourselves, 'What would Jesus do?'"

"Well, if Jesus had that bracelet, I think He'd take it off," Everly said. "You know the whole WWJD trend is pretty much over now. Mom said when she was a kid they used to see those letters on all kinds of stuff. But you don't see them much anymore—if ever."

"I guess that's true," said Cal. "But wearing this has helped me. Sometimes just when I was getting ready to do something wrong, I'd see the bracelet and think, *No, Jesus wouldn't do that.*"

"That's good, but times change," said Everly. "I think it's time to get rid of that old thing."

Cal twisted the bracelet around his wrist. "These letters have always been a good reminder to do the right thing. But..." He grinned at his sister as he pulled off the old, faded bracelet. "There! Does that make you feel better?"

"Yes. Only..." Everly hesitated. "If it helped you so much, maybe you should keep wearing it after all."

Cal shook his head. "I really don't need to wear it anymore."

"Think so?" Everly laughed. "Well, if you start getting into trouble with it off, don't blame me!"

Cal smiled. "I won't, because I have something better to wear now—in fact, it's something I've had ever since I first trusted in Jesus at camp all those years ago. The bracelet just helped me remember. When I trusted Jesus as my Savior, He made me a new person, and He gave me the Holy Spirit, who is making me more like Him. Pastor Tim talked about the Bible verse that says to 'put on the new self,' remember? He said that means living in a way that reflects who I am in Jesus. I don't need a bracelet to do what's right because I have God's Spirit living inside of me."

Everly grinned. "I agree. The new self is much better than the old bracelet!" ♥

DALAN DECKER

LIVE IN A WAY THAT REFLECTS JESUS

KEY VERSE: PUT ON THE NEW SELF, CREATED TO BE LIKE GOD IN TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HOLINESS. EPHESIANS 4:24 (NIV)

Have you ever seen the letters WWJD printed on something? Those letters stand for "What would Jesus do?" It used to be trendy to have them on bracelets and other items, but like all trends, that one has faded away. However, if you know Jesus, you don't need a bracelet or anything else to help you act like Him because you have His Spirit inside you! Put on your new self and live in a way that reflects Him.

JUST OUTSIDE ELLA'S WINDOW

READ: MATTHEW 6:25-34

Ella stood absolutely still when she noticed a pair of robins surveying the crook of a branch in the maple tree outside her bedroom window. Over the next few days, she saw them come with twigs and bits of leaves they had gathered to make their nest. Ella giggled when one of them brought back a piece of ribbon it had found.

Each day, Ella observed the progress on the nest, and one morning she saw an egg in it. Soon four sky-blue eggs lay in the nest. When the tiny birds finally broke from their shells, Ella excitedly shared the news with her family. Six-year-old Noah seemed especially interested in watching the parent birds care for the babies.

One afternoon, lightning flashed and...*CRASH!* A terrible thunderstorm erupted. "I'm scared!" said Noah. "Do you think the baby birds are scared too?"

"Let's go check on them," said Ella, and they hurried to her room. Noah snuggled against her as they looked out and saw that the branch holding the nest was swaying back and forth.

"Look," said Ella, pointing to the nest. "See how that mother bird spreads her wings to protect her babies? She covers them so they won't get hurt. Isn't that cool? They trust her to keep them safe. I don't think they're afraid at all."

"I get scared sometimes," Noah said. "I'm afraid of the mean kids at school, and sometimes I'm afraid of the dark. Big dogs scare me too."

Ella nodded sympathetically. "Everyone's afraid of something. Sometimes I'm afraid of what others might think of me, or I worry about my grades." She smiled. "But do you know what God uses as an example of how He cares for us?" Noah shook his head. "I learned a verse about it," said Ella. "God says that like a mother bird's wings cover and protect her babies, He protects us. So we can trust Him. Okay?"

Noah smiled. "Okay."

Ella nodded as she herself suddenly realized the truth of God's Word. "God is with us, and no storm is stronger than His love for us. No matter what happens, we're safe in Jesus, who died to give us eternal life."

There was a flash of lightning and a clap of thunder, but Noah didn't even flinch. "Thank you, God, for taking care of us," he whispered. ♥ LINDA WEDDLE

GOD CARES FOR YOU

KEY VERSE: HE SHALL COVER YOU WITH HIS FEATHERS,
AND UNDER HIS WINGS YOU SHALL TAKE REFUGE. PSALM 91:4

Are you afraid of the dark? Of death? Or that somebody won't like you? The Bible often uses word pictures to illustrate God's truths. The way a mother bird protects her babies when danger threatens is a picture of how carefully and completely God watches over you in all of life's storms. Whenever you feel afraid, remember that Jesus is with you. Trust Him.

WATCH YOUR STEP!

READ: PSALM 27:11; PROVERBS 5:1-6; 7:24-27

Suzanna couldn't wait to visit her grandparents' farm. She looked forward to helping Grandpa with the animals and making pear cobbler and jam with Grandma. And at the end of each day, she and Grandma would enjoy a long walk in the shady pear orchard. Grandma always said, "Heaven must feel like a cool orchard on a hot summer afternoon."

On the day she arrived at the farm, Suzanna said, "Grandma, let's go walk through the pear trees."

"I'm sorry, honey, but I can't. I had knee surgery last month, remember? The orchard path is full of roots and ruts. If I fall or even stumble, the doctor said I could reinjure my knee and end up in a wheelchair."

"How about a short, slow walk?" Suzanna suggested. "I'll stay close."

"No, honey, it wouldn't be wise for me. You go ahead."

So Suzanna walked the orchard path alone, thinking about her grandmother's words.

After dinner, she asked, "Grandma, if something isn't wise, does that mean it's foolish?"

"Sometimes. But wise also means that you know what you should do, and you do it. My doctor told me that, to be safe, I must avoid uneven ground. So I know it's wise for me to stay off the orchard path."

"This morning I read a Bible verse about walking on an unstable path."

"Oh? Let's look at what you read," said Grandma, opening her Bible.

"It's in Proverbs 5," said Suzanna. "It starts by warning us not to be like the immoral woman, then it says, 'Lest you ponder her path of life—her ways are unstable.'"

Grandma nodded. "That verse tells us not to wander away to where we might stumble and fall into sin. That's why we need to be wise and listen to God. His Holy Spirit gives us wisdom and guides us in walking the right path."

"But what if we don't listen and go down the wrong path?" asked Suzanna.

"Then we should confess our wrongs to Jesus. Instead of stumbling our way through life, we can walk wisely because He's always there to forgive us and help us."

"I get it, Grandma. It's wise to stay away from the wrong path." Suzanna smiled.

"I'm glad you didn't let me talk you into taking foolish chances." ♥ TERESA AMBORD

WALK WISELY IN YOUR LIFE

KEY VERSE: I HAVE TAUGHT YOU IN THE WAY OF WISDOM;
I HAVE LED YOU IN RIGHT PATHS. PROVERBS 4:11

Have you ever wanted to do something unwise? We all have. It can be tempting to veer from the right path instead of doing what we know we should. That's why it's important to walk wisely and stay away from any stumbling blocks that lead to sin. If you know Jesus, all your wrongs have been forgiven, and you have His Spirit to guide you and give you wisdom. Trust Him to help you stay on the right path.

RECHARGED POWER

READ: PSALM 119:1-12

Do we have everything?" asked Dad as the family piled into the car to leave for their camping trip. "How about the flashlight? Did somebody pack it?"

"I did," said Kegan. "I took the one with rechargeable batteries."

"Great idea," said Dad. "All right—here we go!"

That evening after supper, Kegan pulled the flashlight out of his bag. "Let's go, Ryder," he called to his little brother. "Let's go see what's in the snack machine at the lodge. Okay, Dad?"

Dad nodded, so the boys took off, following the path through the trees. The flashlight beam flickered and grew dim. "Great," muttered Kegan. "Whoever used this flashlight last didn't recharge the batteries. It's almost out of power."

After getting a snack, Kegan switched the flashlight on. They started back to their campsite, but the light was too dim to be useful. Ryder hesitated. "I'm scared," he whimpered. "I don't like the dark. There could be a bear in the woods."

"Don't be ridiculous," said Kegan impatiently. "Come on. Let's go." He stalked off into the darkness.

"Wait for me!" Ryder's wails filled the night.

"Ryder, be quiet!" said Kegan as he hurried back to his brother. He grabbed Ryder's hand and pulled him along as they made their way back.

"What happened?" asked Dad, seeing that Ryder was afraid. "Didn't you use the flashlight?"

"Nobody recharged the batteries, and it gave out," Kegan grumbled. "And Ryder's a baby."

"I see," said Dad. He frowned. "I'm afraid the flashlight isn't the only thing that gave out. Your patience did too. I think you need to be recharged."

"Me?" asked Kegan. "What do you mean? How can I be recharged?"

"By remembering that Jesus gives you the power to be patient with others," said Dad. "One way to do that is by reading His Word, the Bible. It helps recharge us by reminding us we belong to Jesus and have His Holy Spirit inside us, helping us show others His love. Of course, since our flashlight doesn't work and our phones have limited power, we can't read the Bible tonight, so who can remember some verses?" Everyone started reciting verses they had memorized.

"I think we're feeling recharged now, don't you?" Mom said with a smile.

"Yep," said Ryder. Kegan nudged him and agreed. ♥ VIOLET E. NESDOLY

THE BIBLE HELPS RECHARGE YOU

KEY VERSE: YOUR WORD IS A LAMP TO MY FEET AND A LIGHT TO MY PATH.
PSALM 119:105

Do you recharge by reading God's Word? It tells us of Jesus's love for us and what He did to save us. He reminds us that He has given those who trust in Him the power to love others and do what's right. Let God's Word recharge you and be the light that guides you down the path of life as you walk with Jesus each day.

LEAPING LEMURS

READ: 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-27

Ana and her older cousin, Justine, were at the zoo for the day. “Look at the lemurs!” Ana pointed at a large forested enclosure where little animals with long striped tails hopped from branch to branch.

“Wow, that lemur is an acrobat!” Justine laughed. “God’s creation is amazing.”

“Yeah,” Ana agreed. “It’s so much fun to see all these different animals.”

“Those lemurs remind me of the talent show at your school last week,” Justine said. “Those girls who did gymnastics were amazing.”

Ana sighed. “I guess so.”

“What’s wrong? Didn’t you have fun seeing all those kids sharing their talents?”

“I just really wish I could have done something cool in the talent show.” Ana shrugged. “Those kids could play instruments and dance and do all these amazing things. I’m ordinary and boring.”

“But you created the talent show posters!” Justine exclaimed. “Those exciting posters were what made me want to watch the show.”

“Yeah, but it’s not the same!” Ana protested. “I just draw pictures. I’m not talented.”

Justine bit her lip, thinking. Then she asked, “Do you think that lemurs say to parrots, ‘I wish I could sing like you?’”

“No!” Ana exclaimed. “Lemurs are so cool! They’re good at leaping between trees.”

“And do you think the camels are jealous of the lemurs’ jumping skills?”

Ana laughed. “Of course not! Camels can survive for more than a week without water. That’s perfect for the desert where they live.”

“Right!” Justine nodded. “That’s because God custom-made camels to survive in the desert. Even though animals have different abilities from each other, God gave them those skills for their specific roles in His creation.”

Ana smiled. “I think I understand. You’re trying to show me that God made me good at drawing for His special purposes.”

“The Bible says that God made everyone wonderfully. He doesn’t make mistakes. So even though you might not be able to dance or sing, God made you good at drawing for a reason. Maybe that could be to draw pictures to encourage people and remind them of Jesus’s love. Everyone is important in God’s kingdom, and you can celebrate other people’s talents knowing that God made them one-of-a-kind.”

Ana smiled. “Maybe I’ll start by drawing some of the animals here.” ♥ **ABBY CIONA**

USE THE GIFTS GOD GAVE YOU

KEY VERSE: EACH OF YOU SHOULD USE WHATEVER GIFT YOU HAVE RECEIVED TO SERVE OTHERS, AS FAITHFUL STEWARDS OF GOD’S GRACE IN ITS VARIOUS FORMS. 1 PETER 4:10 (NIV)

Do you ever compare yourself to others or feel like you’re not talented enough? Just like God gave animals special abilities, God gives us unique gifts, skills, and interests so we can use them to show our love for Him and share Jesus’s love with others. Everyone is important in His kingdom, and because of that, we can celebrate each other’s talents!

THE COUNSELOR HUNT

READ: LUKE 15:1-7

Hey, where did Ellen go?” Josie looked around the dining hall. She and her fellow campers had just finished supper. “She was right here a minute ago.”

Bianca looked around too. “I don’t see her,” she said. “Actually, I don’t see any of the counselors! Where did everyone go?”

“Can I please have everyone’s attention!” The voice of Mr. Paul, the camp director, came over the loudspeaker. “Perhaps you’ve noticed that your counselors are missing. They’ve gone into hiding, and you have one hour to find them! Everyone is to meet outside the dining hall when I ring the bell.”

Bianca and Josie scrambled out of the dining hall with everyone else, eager to search through the bushes, under canoes, and behind the archery targets. But their excitement soon turned to frustration as other kids found their counselors, but there was still no sign of Ellen.

An hour later, Mr. Paul rang the bell, signaling the time for the kids and the counselors who had been found to report to the dining hall. None of the girls in Josie’s cabin had found Ellen.

Mr. Paul checked to make sure all the kids were back, and then he rang the bell a second time, signaling counselors who hadn’t been found to come out of hiding. Josie and Bianca were astonished to see Ellen pop out of a large cardboard box that was standing next to a dumpster outside the dining hall.

“We must have walked right past that box a dozen times,” Josie moaned. “I never thought someone might be hiding in there!”

When the girls in Josie’s cabin gathered for devotions that evening, Ellen talked about the counselor hunt. “Maybe you’ve been searching for God and it feels a lot like today’s counselor hunt,” she said. “Maybe you don’t even know where to look because everything seems hopeless. But you know what? God isn’t hiding. The Bible says Jesus has already come to find us! We’re the ones who were lost, not God. Jesus came to earth and died for our sins so we could stop hiding from Him and be forgiven. If you’ve been searching for God, He wants you to know that He came to find you. Put your trust in Jesus.” ♥ DEBORAH S. MARETT

JESUS CAME TO FIND YOU

KEY VERSE: FOR THE SON OF MAN [JESUS] CAME TO SEEK AND SAVE THOSE WHO ARE LOST. LUKE 19:10 (NLT)

Are you searching for God? Are you having a hard time finding Him in this crazy, sad world? You don’t need to search for Him any longer, because He came to this crazy, sad world to find you. He became human and died and rose again so you could be saved. Trust in Him today so you can have hope and be with Him forever. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 102.)

FEEDING THE BIRDS

READ: 1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-23

Grandma, why do you have so many different kinds of bird feeders?" Kenneth asked as he and his grandmother filled the bird feeders in her yard. "Wouldn't one be enough?"

"Well, Ken, if every bird were the same, one kind of bird feeder would be enough. But God, in His wisdom and creativity, made all kinds of birds for us to enjoy, and He created them with different needs and preferences. Finches, for instance, usually like to perch on bags filled with black thistle seed. Bluebirds like to feed from trays or dishes. And hummingbirds like the sweet sugar nectar we fill their feeders with."

"Wow," said Kenneth. "That's really cool!" He went to his school library the next day to check out some books on birds.

Later that week, Kenneth and his grandmother discussed the pastor's sermon on their way home from church. "What did he mean when he said we need to tailor the gospel to meet our neighbor's needs?" Kenneth asked.

"Well, remember when we were filling the bird feeders and talked about each bird's needs?" asked Grandma. "Sharing the gospel with our friends is a lot like feeding birds—you can't just throw out one kind of seed and assume that's what all of them can eat. Just like you need to learn how God created each bird and what they like to eat, you have to listen and learn what's important to your friends—such as what they like to do or what their fears and hurts are. Are all your friends the same?"

"No," Ken said. "Some do sports, and some like band or theater. Some have divorced parents, or someone in their family is really sick and in the hospital."

"Exactly," said Grandma. "You can share the good news of Jesus, which never changes, by taking an interest in the things your friends like or where they are hurting. Remember how Jesus often taught in parables? He shared God's truth through stories about farmers, housewives, and shepherds, because that was what people knew."

"I get it!" Kenneth said. "Tomorrow I'm going to tell my friend who's feeling lonely that Jesus wants to be his friend forever."

"Good for you, Ken! Now let's go fill some bird feeders." ♥ JONI SPEARS

SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS

KEY VERSE: I HAVE BECOME ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE SO THAT BY ALL POSSIBLE MEANS I MIGHT SAVE SOME. 1 CORINTHIANS 9:22 (NIV)

How can you share the gospel with your friends? Even though the good news of Jesus never changes, the way you share it might. Do you have a friend who likes sports? Tell them Jesus is the best coach they could ever have. Do you know someone who's going through a hard time? Let them know Jesus cares simply by listening to them and pointing them to the hope He offers. When you know what people need, you can share Jesus in a way that speaks to them.

FAINTING GOATS

READ: DEUTERONOMY 1:26-32

Kayla watched as her dad herded two baby goats into the family's goat pen. They looked so cute as they started eagerly exploring their new surroundings, curious about all the other goats in the pen.

"Can I go in and pet them, Dad?" asked Kayla.

"Sure!" Dad said. "Just be careful not to startle them. These goats are sometimes called fainting goats because—"

Before Dad could finish his explanation, their dog Buster bounded into the yard and started barking excitedly at the new arrivals. Immediately, the baby goats stiffened their legs and fell over.

"Oh no!" exclaimed Kayla. "I think something's wrong with the baby goats!"

"They're fine," Dad reassured her as he calmed down Buster. "I was just going to say that these are called fainting goats because when they get startled, their legs stiffen and they tumble over. They don't really faint. They actually have a medical condition that causes their muscles to stay tense longer than usual when they get scared. That's why they fall."

Kayla hurried into the pen to check on the babies. Soon they relaxed and were back on their feet, roaming around the pen as usual. Kayla started feeding them grain pellets from her hand. "I know exactly how they feel! I felt like fainting when I had to give my speech in front of my whole class last week. I was so scared!"

Dad smiled. "I know you were extremely nervous, but you didn't let fear paralyze you."

"I asked God to help me," said Kayla. "When it was time to give my speech, I took a deep breath and said a quick prayer. I felt more confident walking up front because I knew God was with me."

"There are a lot of verses in the Bible reminding us not to be afraid because God is with us," Dad said. "It's okay to feel nervous and scared sometimes, but we don't want to let that stop us from doing what we need to do. Jesus promises to always be with us, so we never have to face any situation alone. We can have courage because He is with us even when we feel scared."

Kayla grinned. "I'll remember that the next time I feel like a fainting goat!" ♥

KENDRA ANGLE

TRUST GOD WHEN YOU'RE AFRAID

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

Have you ever felt so afraid about a situation that you thought you couldn't go through with it? Maybe it was giving a speech, taking a test, going to a new school, or going to the doctor. God promises to be with us through every hard time. When you feel overwhelmed, remember that He has given you His Spirit, who is always with you. Trust Him for help and courage when you feel afraid.

COLOR!

Trust God when you're afraid



Draw straw near the goats.
What else could be in the goat pen?

For God has not given us a spirit of fear,
but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

2 Timothy 1:7

A DIFFERENT VIEWPOINT

READ: PROVERBS 17:17; COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

Look there behind you, Mom,” said Evie as she and her mother picked raspberries. “Down low. There are some berries you missed.”

“Oh, I see them,” said Mom. “They’re nice ones.” She bent to pick the berries.

“There are more in the bush behind those,” Evie told her.

Mom looked toward the berries Evie was pointing out, but she shook her head. “No, those aren’t ripe enough yet—but I see some hiding in the center of the bush you just finished.”

Evie laughed as she turned to pick the berries Mom saw. “I guess we should pick each other’s bushes.” After a moment, she said, “Remember when Nayori and her mom used to come and pick raspberries with us?”

“Yes.” Mom sighed. “How is Nayori doing since her parents got divorced?”

Evie frowned. “Not too good. She’s always whining and saying she’d rather live with her mom than with her dad. I can’t see why. After all, this way she’s still in the same house and the same school—and her friends are all here.”

“I guess it all depends on your viewpoint,” Mom replied. “It’s like these berries—we miss some ripe ones and think others are ready when they’re not. It depends on what direction we see them from. We need to remember that people see things in life in different ways too.”

Evie nodded slowly. “I guess so.”

“You see Nayori’s problems from a distance,” Mom said. “From your viewpoint, there are good reasons for her to live with her dad. But don’t forget that she can see things you can’t see. From her viewpoint, being with her mom may outweigh other things. I’m sure Nayori misses her a lot.”

“Yeah, I think she does,” Evie replied. “Nayori used to say she could tell her mom anything.”

“I think she needs understanding more than she needs criticism,” Mom said. “Perhaps Jesus can use you to help her through this. He understands exactly what she’s going through, and He’ll help you be a good friend and show her His love and compassion.”

Evie nodded thoughtfully. “I’ll try to see the situation more from her viewpoint. Maybe...oops!” She pointed to a bush Mom had finished. “You missed some more, Mom,” she said with a grin. ♥ AGNES LIVEZEY

BE KIND AND UNDERSTANDING

KEY VERSE: GIVE TO YOUR SERVANT AN UNDERSTANDING HEART. 1 KINGS 3:9

Do you get annoyed when your friends talk about their troubles? Do you feel like things aren’t as bad as they make them out to be? Remember that you’re seeing their situation from a different viewpoint. Even if you don’t understand everything they’re going through, Jesus does, and He’ll help you be kind and understanding like He is. Trust Him to help you show compassion and offer encouragement to friends who are struggling.

LIGHT OF THE FIREFLIES

READ: MATTHEW 5:14-16

Megan and Thomas and their family had gathered at the home of friends from church to celebrate the beginning of summer vacation. There was a cookout, games, and so much food.

“Kids! It’s almost time for the fireflies to appear!” Megan’s dad called out. Each person grabbed a jar with holes poked in the lid for catching fireflies. They planned to release them not long after catching them. As it grew dark, the kids began hunting for fireflies along the edges of the yard.

“There! I saw a flash!” One by one, the kids began catching fireflies. They held up their jars and marveled at how amazing it was that these tiny insects could emit such a bright light.

“Dad, how do the fireflies glow like that?” Thomas asked.

“The light you see is called bioluminescence,” his dad replied. “Some living organisms use it to communicate various messages to one another.” He smiled at the kids. “In a way, Christians are like fireflies. Can you think of why?”

Megan and Thomas and their friends puzzled over that until Megan said, “Is it because we have a light inside us too? If Jesus is the light of the world, and He lives inside us, then we can shine with His light!”

“Right!” Dad replied. “Think of songs we sing at church, like ‘This Little Light of Mine’ and ‘Shine, Jesus, Shine.’ Those songs help remind us that just like these fireflies, we shine with Jesus’s light when we draw people to Him and show them His love.”

“But how do we actually do that?” Thomas asked.

“Well, remember when your friend was sad, and you just sat with him? Or Megan, when that new girl came to your school, and you invited her to sit with you and your friends? That was showing Jesus’s love and concern for them. It was letting Jesus’s light and love shine through you!”

Megan nodded. “And when we started volunteering at the refugee ministry, or when you and Mom went on that mission trip last year, that was letting Jesus’s light shine too!”

“That’s exactly right, Megan,” Dad replied. “Let’s start thinking of other ways each of us can let Jesus’s light shine through us!” ♥ JONI SPEARS

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

KEY VERSE: [JESUS] SAID, “I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. WHOEVER FOLLOWS ME WILL NEVER WALK IN DARKNESS, BUT WILL HAVE THE LIGHT OF LIFE.”

JOHN 8:12 (NIV)

Have you ever been camping and used a flashlight or lantern to guide you at night? Perhaps you’re a little scared of the dark and your mom or dad puts on a nightlight for you. Think of how comforting that light is. As a Christian, you can be that kind of light for someone else. If you know Jesus, His light shines within you. Share it with others by pointing them to Jesus and showing them His love.

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 trust in Jesus by believing He died and rose from the dead to save you from sin, God forgives your sin and gives you a new life as His child that lasts forever. Your grateful response to His wonderful gift is making Jesus the center of your life instead of yourself.

ARE YOU READY TO TRUST IN JESUS?

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



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

PRAYER POWER



Please pray for my dad as he mourns the loss of his mom and uncle.

–Kelly

My family is looking for a place to move because it's not very good where we live. We want to move but we don't want to move anywhere unless we know it's the will of God.

–Violet

My dad is really sick in the hospital, and I need prayer God will help him get better.

–Rachael

I was planning to have surgery on my neck. But with Covid and all this my parents and doctors stopped planning. Last week I got a message from the doctor. They are planning now. I hope the surgery will work. Please pray I won't have any pain anymore. Thanks for praying for me.

–Constanze

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

ENCOURAGEMENTS, TESTIMONIES, PRAYER REQUESTS

Send us your prayer requests.

Send mail to: Keys for Kids Ministries, 2060 43rd Street SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49508 **Or visit:** keysforkids.org/Contact-Us

THE HUMBLE BUMBLEBEE

CREATURE FEATURE: BUMBLEBEE



Spring is here! The warm breezes of spring come with longer days, flowers of every color, and the constant hum of bees. In gardens, orchards, farms, and meadows, these colorful insects are hard at work gathering pollen and drinking nectar.

As bees search for food, a yellow powder called pollen clings to their bodies and gets moved from one plant to another. Pollination from bees enables fruit, vegetables, and other plants to grow. Without pollination, many agricultural plants would cease to exist—plants we depend on for food!



**Bees are necessary
for our survival**

But not all bees are found everywhere or pollinate every type of flower. Out of twenty thousand bee species, only the fuzzy, stout-bodied bumblebees thrive where honeybees can't survive. Bumblebees' densely hairy bodies and their ability to shiver and raise their body temperature help them keep warm in cooler climates. Their long tongues lap up nectar in tubelike flowers that honeybees can't reach, and some crops can only be pollinated by bumblebees.

Centuries ago, bumblebees were called *humble* bees. Watch these striped insects move from one stem of lavender to another and you'll see the name fits. They move in a slow, humble manner, as if they're letting other bees go first before they decide where to land. They ignore humans and won't sting them unless they feel threatened. Unlike honeybees, who store honey to feed very large colonies of larvae, bumblebees don't produce much honey and live in groups of about fifty bees. Only the queen survives through the winter.

What if bumblebees thought they were inferior to honeybees because they didn't produce as much honey, or were too hairy, round, or weak? Sounds silly, right? The world needs all kinds of bees. God made all kinds of people too, including you! And like a humble bumblebee, you can serve Him in your own special way.

Jesus told the disciples that "whoever humbles himself...is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:4). When you hear a bumblebee buzz, remember that Jesus Himself, Creator and King of the whole world, humbled Himself when He became human and died on the cross to save us. Be humble like Him. ♥ SONJA ANDERSON