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A STRONG HAND

READ: JOHN 10:14-15, 27-30; ROMANS 8:38-39

Want this quarter, Madison? You can have it if you can get it.” Madison’s older brother Tobias held out his hand, palm up, with a quarter in it.

Madison hesitated, knowing how her big brother loved to tease, but Tobias just stood smiling at her. She walked slowly toward him. When she was close, she made a sudden, quick lunge for his hand. But just as quickly, Tobias’s fist closed over the quarter, and the battle was on.

There was a lot of laughing and squealing as Madison tried to open Tobias’s fist. “I got two fingers up,” she panted in glee. “I’m gonna get it!” But a moment later, Tobias’s fingers were down again. The quarter was as secure as ever.

“Okay, you two,” their mom said at last. “I don’t think you’re going to get that quarter, Madison. And Tobias—you shouldn’t be teasing your sister.”

“Teasing her?” Tobias slapped his forehead in mock dismay. “I’m not teasing her. I’m just teaching her an important lesson like any good brother would do.”

“Oh yeah?” said Madison. “What lesson would that be?”

“Well, you know the verse we talked about in church last week—the one about nobody being able to snatch us out of God’s hand?” Tobias grinned. “I just gave you a demonstration of what a safe place a hand can be.”

“Hey, not bad!” said Mom. “Tobias is a lot stronger than you are, Madison, and God is much stronger than anybody or anything. You couldn’t force Tobias’s hand open, although there are lots of people who could. But nobody—not even Satan—is strong enough to open God’s hand.” She smiled at Tobias. “That was a great illustration of how those who belong to Jesus are safe and secure in God’s hand.”

Tobias grinned at his sister. “And to show you what a good brother I am—here!” He started to toss the quarter to Madison, but stopped. “No. Wait a minute. Giving you the quarter would ruin my illustration of how safe you are in God’s hand—because Jesus won’t ever give you away.” He paused. “But...” He took a bill from his pocket. “Here’s a dollar instead.”

“All right!” said Madison. “That’s even better!” ♥ HAZEL W. MARETT

GOD HOLDS YOU SECURELY

KEY VERSE: MY FATHER, WHO HAS GIVEN THEM [BELIEVERS] TO ME [JESUS], IS GREATER THAN ALL; AND NO ONE IS ABLE TO SNATCH THEM OUT OF MY FATHER’S HAND. JOHN 10:29

Aren’t you glad God holds His children securely? You may get discouraged about things that happen, but Jesus loves you and holds on to you. He won’t ever let you go. You are His. When you do something wrong or go through hard times, Satan may tell you God doesn’t love you anymore, but that’s not true. God loves you, and if you know Jesus as your Savior, you’re His forever. He will always keep you safely in His hand.

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TRAMPLED FLOWERS

READ: 1 JOHN 3:18; 4:19

Oh no!” Mrs. Patterson yelled as a couple of dogs plowed right through her flower garden.

Leah was waiting for the school bus and saw the whole thing. She felt so sad for Mrs. Patterson, her elderly, widowed neighbor.

On the ride to school, Leah sat with her best friend, Kate, and told her what had happened. “Those dogs ran through Mrs. Patterson’s garden and trampled her beautiful flowers!”

“How frustrating!” said Kate. “Poor Mrs. Patterson. We should do something to help.”

Leah nodded. “Like our teacher at church said last week, because Jesus loved us first, we ought to love others. His love can shine through our acts of kindness. I think Mrs. Patterson needs someone to remind her of God’s love right now!”

Together, Kate and Leah conceived a plan to spend some of their allowance money on new flowers for Mrs. Patterson’s garden.

On Saturday morning, Leah’s mom took them to the garden center. “Look at these pretty purple flowers,” Leah said.

“I found some pretty flowers too,” Kate replied.

They shopped at the garden center for nearly an hour, making sure they picked out just the right flowers.

After lunch, they loaded up Leah’s wagon with the flowers and headed over to Mrs. Patterson’s house. When Leah and Kate knocked, Mrs. Patterson opened the door, a look of surprise on her face.

“We wanted to bring you some new flowers for your flower garden,” Kate said.

Leah nodded. “We saw the dogs run through your flowers earlier this week.”

Mrs. Patterson came out onto the front porch. “They are beautiful!” she said.

“Thank you. That was so thoughtful of you both. Would you like to help me plant them?”

Leah and Kate looked at each other with smiles on their faces. “Yes!” they replied.

Mrs. Patterson and the girls worked in the garden for a couple of hours, and soon the flower garden was beautiful again. “Thank you for helping me today,” Mrs. Patterson said as she gave the girls a hug. “You girls will never know how much it meant to me.”

Later, as Leah’s mom drove Kate home, she said, “I think you both shared the love of Jesus today through your actions.”

Leah and Kate smiled and said, “Because He loved us first!” ♥ LISA FULLER

JESUS’S LOVE SHINES THROUGH KIND ACTIONS

KEY VERSE: IN THE SAME WAY, LET YOUR GOOD DEEDS SHINE OUT FOR ALL TO SEE, SO THAT EVERYONE WILL PRAISE YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER. MATTHEW 5:16 (NLT)

What is something kind someone has done for you? Jesus loves us so much that He came to live with us, died on the cross, rose again, and promised to come back to make all things new. As Christians, when we do acts of kindness for our neighbors, Jesus’s love shines through us. Today, find a small act of kindness to show Jesus’s great love!

JOHNNY HURRICANE

READ: PSALM 84:11; JOHN 16:33; 1 CORINTHIANS 3:10-11

CRASH! “Sorry!” Johnny said. *SMASH...SPLASH!* “Oops, sorry again!” Amanda grinned at her mom. “Sounds like Johnny’s home.”

“I’m okay,” Johnny said when Mom and Amanda found him standing in a watery mess. “I broke two flower vases.”

As the three of them cleaned up the mess, Johnny said, “At school the kids call me Johnny Hurricane. Something always tips over or gets broken when I’m around. I’m telling you, I’ve got bad luck. It follows me everywhere!”

“There’s no such thing as bad luck,” Amanda said.

Johnny wrung water from a towel. “I think you’re wrong. At school we learned about the Leaning Tower of Pisa. It was built to be a cathedral bell tower. They had great builders, but the tower started leaning after it was finished.” Johnny shrugged. “See? Bad luck.”

“It’s not bad luck that it leans,” Mom said. “There’s a reason. When they built the tower, the foundation was laid on soft, marshy ground which couldn’t support all that weight—so it leans. The builders should have known, but they were in too much of a hurry to build it.”

“Oh,” Johnny said. “So it wasn’t bad luck—it was the foundation.”

Mom filled the dustpan with broken glass. “Exactly right. Sometimes bad things happen—or go wrong when we aren’t careful. But instead of calling it bad luck, we need to do what those builders failed to do and look at our foundation.”

“How do we do that?” asked Johnny.

“We need to remember who our foundation is—Jesus. He died and rose again to save us from the worst thing that could ever happen—being separated from God forever because of our sin—and He is in control of everything. Even when He allows bad things to happen—things much worse than breaking a vase—we have hope because our lives are built on Him, not luck.”

Johnny smiled. “So no more blaming things on bad luck.” He grabbed the broom. “And I’ve decided to be more careful and slow down. I’m starting tomorrow!”

As he spun around to run the broom back to the closet, the broom handle bumped the lamp. Amanda caught it just before it toppled off the table.

“Hey, Johnny Hurricane.” Mom gave him a hug. “How about you start right now? ♥

MATT SHOEMAKER

JESUS IS IN CONTROL

KEY VERSE: FOR NO ONE CAN LAY ANY FOUNDATION OTHER THAN THE ONE WE ALREADY HAVE—JESUS CHRIST. 1 CORINTHIANS 3:11 (NLT)

When things go wrong, do you blame it on bad luck? Luck—good or bad—is not a good foundation to build your life on. Let Jesus be your foundation. He has control over everything that happens, and He died for your sins so you could have eternal life with Him. Because we’re imperfect people who live in a broken world, bad things still happen, but you can stand firm in the hope of Jesus.

GATEWAY TO FREEDOM

READ: MATTHEW 11:28-30; JOHN 6:37-40

The wind lashed at Sam's hair, and salt water splashed on his face as the boat approached Liberty Island in New York Harbor. "Look! There she is," Sam said, pointing to the Statue of Liberty. He stood at the rail as they got closer.

"I've heard this area called the Gateway to Freedom," Grandma said as the boat docked. "Isn't the Statue of Liberty beautiful?"

"My grandparents certainly thought so," said Grandpa. "I remember them telling me what it was like to come to America from the Netherlands. They said the Statue of Liberty was the first sight to welcome them to a new land."

"I'll bet they were glad to get here," said Sam.

Grandpa nodded. "Yes, they were. They were also glad when they became citizens of this country a few years later."

"Do you know the poem written on a plaque at the base of the statue?" Sam asked. "Mrs. Croy had our class memorize part of it. It says, 'Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.'" Sam looked up at the top of the statue. "Mrs. Croy says there are still lots of people from other countries who come here looking for peace and freedom."

"Yes," said Grandpa as they left the boat. "Since so many people want to come to America, our government puts a limit on how many are allowed in. The door is no longer open to everyone."

"I know," said Sam. "Mrs. Croy told us criminals aren't accepted. And she said there's a limit to the number of people that can come each year from any one region."

"I'm reminded of another gateway to freedom—one that is open to all who come," said Grandpa. "Jesus invites everyone to come to Him. Those who trust Him as their Savior are granted freedom from sin and Satan's power and can rest in God's peace as they walk with Him each day."

"And we're granted citizenship in heaven," added Grandma.

Sam nodded, then pointed toward a tour group. "Let's go!" he said. "A tour is starting, and I want to see that plaque with the poem." ♥ JAN L. HANSEN



YOU CAN BE A CITIZEN OF HEAVEN

KEY VERSE: OUR CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN, AND WE EAGERLY WAIT FOR A SAVIOR FROM THERE, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. PHILIPPIANS 3:20 (CSB)

Is your citizenship in heaven? Have you come to Jesus, trusting Him to save you from sin and give you eternal life? God's offer is open to everyone, and there's no limit to the number of people He will accept. No one has done anything that cannot be forgiven. Come to Jesus today, and He will welcome you into His kingdom. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 102.)

TOOLS AND TALENTS

READ: ROMANS 12:6-13

Did you know that Charlotte refused to join our choir?” Maya asked her friend Braelyn. The girls were talking about their youth group as they baked cookies at Maya’s house. “Isn’t that terrible?” said Maya as she rolled out a section of cookie dough. “We need all the kids.”

Braelyn sighed. “I know. Kaori isn’t joining either—she says she’s not musical.”

Maya shook her head. “It’s too bad when people don’t want to do things for the Lord.” As she rummaged through a drawer, her mom came into the room. “Mom, did you move the cookie cutters?” Maya asked.

“No,” said Mom. She found a cheese cutter and held it out. “Use this.”

Absentmindedly, Maya took it and walked to the table. Then she looked down. “Mom! You can’t cut out cookies with a cheese cutter!”

Mom acted surprised. “Well, here, then.” She handed Braelyn a pair of scissors. “Or you could use Dad’s razor.”

As Braelyn held the scissors uncertainly, Maya frowned. “Mom, what are you talking about? You know we need the cookie cutters!”

Mom smiled. “I’m just trying to show you something. In a way, these tools all have the same job—they cut. And yet their jobs are all different. Each is a good tool for its own particular purpose.” Mom handed the cookie cutters to Maya. “Christians are something like that. In a way we all have the same task—to share the love of Jesus and point others to Him. But that doesn’t mean we all have to do exactly the same thing. Each of us can serve in a different way.”

Maya bit her lip. “I guess you heard us talking, didn’t you?”

Mom nodded. “Kaori’s mom told me Kaori has a hearing problem. Because of that, she has trouble learning music. But I saw some posters she helped design for her mom’s Bible study, and they were excellent! Maybe she’d like to help make posters for your choir concert. As for Charlotte, she seems to have a gift for making new kids feel welcome.”

“So we all have different talents so we can do different things?” asked Braelyn.

Mom nodded. “So instead of criticizing, let’s encourage everyone to serve Jesus in their own way.” ♥ HAZEL W. MARETT

GOD GIVES A VARIETY OF TALENTS

KEY VERSE: IN HIS GRACE, GOD HAS GIVEN US DIFFERENT GIFTS FOR DOING CERTAIN THINGS WELL. ROMANS 12:6 (NLT)

Do you think everyone should serve Jesus the way you do? Remember that God has given different talents to different people. All Christians should serve the Lord, but they may not all do it your way. That’s okay!

God has given each person their own gifts to use in serving Him and showing others His love. Let Him be the one to decide what each person should do.



UNCLE JEFF'S LEG

READ: PSALM 55:1-2; JAMES 5:13-16

Uncle Jeff is finally out of the hospital,” Mom told Nathan as they were setting the table. “Isn’t that great? Aunt Kate’s going to bring him here for something to eat before he goes home.”

Nathan’s stomach churned. He bit his lip and shrugged. Uncle Jeff had been in a serious accident. He remembered Mom’s face pale with worry when they’d heard the news. Everyone had prayed for Uncle Jeff, but part of his leg had to be amputated. Soon he would be fitted with an artificial one.

Sadness welled up inside Nathan, then anger. *Why didn’t God save Uncle Jeff’s leg?* he wondered. *Is it my fault? Maybe I didn’t pray the right way or hard enough.*

The door sprang open as his aunt and uncle arrived. Uncle Jeff limped across the room on his crutches and sat down at the table.

During dinner, Nathan could hardly eat anything. He tried to smile as everyone chatted away. His uncle winked at him, and then the hot tears fell.

“What’s wrong?” Uncle Jeff asked, concerned.

“Oh, Uncle Jeff,” said Nathan, rushing over to sit near him. “Please forgive me. It’s not fair. I prayed for you—everyone at church did—but you still lost part of your leg.” Nathan wiped tears from his eyes. “My prayers weren’t answered. God didn’t listen. I should have prayed harder!”

Uncle Jeff squeezed his hand. “Oh, Nathan, God always hears your prayers—and those prayers were answered in a wonderful way. You think your prayers haven’t been heard because I now need a prosthetic leg, but they were. I’m blessed! I almost died, but God saved me, and now I have a new start. It will take lots of physical therapy to learn to walk with my new leg, but it won’t stop me from doing the things I love.” He smiled at Nathan. “I know it won’t be easy, but Jesus will help me through it. And even though I lost part of my leg, it won’t be this way forever. I’ll get my leg back when Jesus returns and gives me my resurrection body!”

Smiling through his tears, Nathan hugged his precious uncle. *Thank You, Jesus, for listening after all,* he prayed silently. Then he returned to his seat, ready to eat some delicious food for this special celebration. ♥ CINDY LEE

GOD HEARS OUR PRAYERS

KEY VERSE: AND WE ARE CONFIDENT THAT HE HEARS US WHENEVER WE ASK FOR ANYTHING THAT PLEASES HIM. 1 JOHN 5:14 (NLT)

Are you worried about someone who is sick? Do you wonder if God hears your prayers for that person? Remember that Jesus loves us so much He died and rose again so we could have eternal life with Him. He loves you and understands what you’re going through. Even when He doesn’t answer our prayers the way we expect, He hears us and promises to be with us. Keep praying and trust in Him.



WHAT'S THAT SMELL?

READ: 2 CORINTHIANS 2:14-16

Miguel was excited. Jake was coming over! The boys were friends from church and sat together for school lunches, but today was the first time Jake was coming over to his house.

When the doorbell rang, Miguel's mom opened the door just before Miguel got there.

"What's that smell?" asked Jake, wrinkling his nose.

"Well, hello to you too," chuckled Miguel's mom.

"It's pork tacos," said Miguel, edging in front of his mom. "The meat is kinda stinky while it cooks, but it's delicious when it's done. The recipe is a family secret."

"I've never had pork tacos," said Jake. "My dad always makes hamburger tacos. But if you say they're good, I'll try them."

At dinner, after the boys ate four tacos each, Miguel's mom asked them about school.

"It was okay," said Miguel. "But some kids at lunch asked whether Jake and I had seen this one movie, then called us babies when we said our parents didn't let us watch stuff like that."

"Yeah," said Jake, "Then they made fun of how we pray before eating. They said we should pray our parents would let us grow up."

"You know how you thought the pork tacos were stinky earlier?" asked Miguel's mom. "The Bible says that to the rest of the world, Christians are stinky too. As Jesus works in our hearts and helps us show others He's changed us, we smell good to God, but the world wrinkles its nose at us. It's the same smell, but some people don't like it. Because you boys have tasted God's goodness, you know the smell of obeying your parents and thanking God for what He's given you is a good thing—kind of like how pork tacos went from stinky earlier to being pretty tasty, right?"

"That reminds me," said Jake. "Can I get the recipe for my dad?"

"Sorry," said Miguel's mom. "Family secret. But we'd love to invite you both over next time we have them."

"And hopefully he won't ask 'What's that smell?' when he comes in," teased Miguel.

"Sorry," said Jake. "I didn't like the smell at first, but now it's gonna make my mouth water because I know how good pork tacos taste!" ♥ JOSH MOSEY

LET GOD'S GOODNESS FILL YOUR LIFE

KEY VERSE: FOR WE ARE TO GOD THE PLEASING AROMA OF CHRIST AMONG THOSE WHO ARE BEING SAVED AND THOSE WHO ARE PERISHING.

2 CORINTHIANS 2:15 (NIV)

Do you ever feel like people treat you differently because you're a Christian? The Bible says God is using us to share the good news of Jesus with the world. As we walk with Him each day, our lives are filled with the scent of His goodness and love. But we often don't smell good to the world around us. Even if people hold their noses because you trust and follow Jesus, don't be afraid to let others know you belong to Him.

THE LITTLE THINGS

READ: COLOSSIANS 3:17, 22-24

I wish I could do more to help at vacation Bible school,” Amina said as she left the church with her mother. “Today I only helped with little things—like showing some kids where they had to go and picking up paper after the kids were gone.” Amina sighed. “How old do I have to be before I can do something to really help—something important, like teaching?”

“Amina, what you do now helps so much!” said Mom, who was the VBS director. But Amina wasn’t convinced.

That evening, Mom handed Amina a card. “This is from me,” she said.

Amina smiled when she saw the words THANK YOU in big letters on the front of the card. She opened it and looked at the message inside. It was as follows: thankyouaminaforyourhelpatvbsthelittlethingsyoudoreallyareimportantandim-proudyouaremydaughteriloveyouverymuch

Amina laughed. “This is a puzzle, right?” she asked as she tried to read it.

“No—it’s a message I want to share with you,” said Mom.

Amina frowned. “But you didn’t put periods and commas or any punctuation in your message, and you didn’t put capital letters on any of the words. You didn’t even put spaces between words!”

Mom shrugged. “So? Spaces and punctuation are such little things. They don’t really matter, do they?”

“Of course they do! They’re important even though they’re little. Without them, it’s...well, it’s really hard to read!”

Mom’s eyes twinkled as she nodded. “Spaces and punctuation marks are little things, but they’re really important—and so are the things we do to serve the Lord. Even when a task we’re given seems small, Jesus uses our faithful work to help people know He loves them. Christians must work together to share the message that Jesus died and rose again to save us, but that message would be hard to read without the little things, wouldn’t it?” Mom smiled at Amina. “Any time you think the little things you do at VBS aren’t important, remember this card and the little things that were missing in it.”

Amina grinned and looked at the card again. “Okay,” she said. “Tomorrow I’ll do whatever you need me to at vacation Bible school.” ♥ SARA L. NELSON

LITTLE THINGS ARE IMPORTANT

KEY VERSE: IF YOU ARE FAITHFUL IN LITTLE THINGS,
YOU WILL BE FAITHFUL IN LARGE ONES. LUKE 16:10 (NLT)

Do you sometimes feel as though the jobs you do aren’t important? No matter how big or little a job seems, Jesus promises to use your work for good and to bring people to Him. Remember that He’s the one you’re serving, and be faithful in the tasks you’re given at home, school, and church. Trust Him to use your work to share His message of love with others.

THE WAITING GAME

READ: JAMES 1:2-7

It was Mia and Mom's day to visit Grandpa, but Mom wouldn't stop talking on the phone. "We're going to be late!" Mia said.

Mom put her hand over the phone. "Let's play the waiting game."

Mia groaned. The waiting game wasn't a game at all. It was just something Mom said to remind her to have patience. Mia paced the room, but Mom kept talking.

"I don't want to play the waiting game," Mia mumbled. She would have to go to Grandpa's on her own. With her new bike, she could get there in just a few minutes.

She slipped out through the back door and hopped on her bike. Which way did Grandpa live? She made her best guess and pedaled down the sidewalk.

After a while, Mia saw a bright yellow house. That didn't seem right. Maybe he lived the other way. Mia stopped riding and put her head in her hands. "I should've waited for Mom!"

"Mia!"

Mia dropped her bike and ran into Mom's arms, her cheeks wet with tears. "I'm sorry! I didn't want to play the waiting game, but I know I shouldn't have left like that!"

Mom rubbed Mia's back, then pulled away to look her in the eye. "Mia, do you have faith in me?"

Mia wiped her tears. "What do you mean?"

"Do you trust that I love you and that I'll follow through with my promises?" Mia nodded. "Good," Mom said. "Because it's true. It's not always easy to have faith when the wait gets hard, but sometimes we have to wait anyway. And that helps us grow to be more patient and trusting."

Mia nodded slowly. "Like how we have to trust God, even when we get impatient?"

"Exactly. Even though it's hard to wait, we can trust God because He always keeps His promises." Mom took Mia's hand, grabbed her bike, and headed back for the house.

Mia frowned. "Aren't we going to Grandpa's house?"

"Not today. You made a not-so-good choice to run away, so we can't go today," Mom said. "But for tomorrow, Grandpa and I have something exciting planned. Do you trust us?"

Mia took a big breath, preparing herself to play the waiting game again. "Yes. I trust you." ♥ BECCA WIERWILLE

HAVE FAITH AND WAIT ON GOD

KEY VERSE: BUT LET PATIENCE HAVE ITS PERFECT WORK, THAT YOU MAY BE PERFECT AND COMPLETE, LACKING NOTHING. JAMES 1:4

Have you ever had to wait a long time? Sometimes your family or friends might ask you to wait, and sometimes God asks us to wait too. Waiting can be hard, but we can trust Him to keep His promises. He loves us so much He sent Jesus to die for us, and He promises to do what's best for us. He also promises that, as He teaches us to be patient and trust Him, He will help us grow.

SPIRITUAL MILK

READ: 2 TIMOTHY 3:14-17

“What are your thoughts on these verses, Tevin?” asked Dad. “What?” Tevin looked up with a blank expression. They were having devotions in the living room, and Tevin saw the others were watching him, waiting for an answer. “Umm...sorry, I guess I missed the last part.”

“Did you hear any of what I just read?” Dad asked.

Tevin tried to recall even a little of what his dad had read. He shook his head. “I was watching the puppies.” Their dog and her six little pups were in a box next to the couch. Tevin leaned down and picked up the smallest one. “Rusty still won’t eat,” he said, stroking the puppy’s fur.

Dad frowned. “I guess we should have left the dogs on the back porch. Leave them alone now, and after devotions we’ll see if we can get Rusty to drink from a bottle or lick a little milk from your finger.”

“He can have a piece of my candy,” Tevin’s little sister Aurora offered as Tevin put Rusty down.

“No, honey,” said Mom. “I think milk is what he needs right now.”

Dad nodded. “We all start out with milk, and later on we need to have other foods.” He paused. “I’m thinking of two very different kinds of food. Can you guess what they are?”

“Milk and meat,” Tevin guessed.

“Yeah. Ice cream and hamburgers!” said Aurora.

Dad laughed. “I’m thinking of some that are even more different than those two. Those are foods for our physical health, but we also need food for our spiritual health.” Dad held up his Bible. “This is our source for spiritual food. It tells us about Jesus and what He did to save us. As we read it and take what it says to heart, God uses it to help us grow in our faith. The truth of His Word helps us stay strong and healthy spiritually.”

Tevin was sure Dad was talking to him. “I’ll listen better,” he promised.

Dad nodded and opened the Bible. He read a few verses again. “Hey, I know these verses!” said Tevin. “Pastor Kent talked about them at church last week.” He looked at Rusty, and his eyes lit up. “Look! Rusty is eating now!”

“Not just Rusty,” said Dad. “You’re both eating now!” ♥ HEATHER M. TEKAVEC

FEED ON GOD’S WORD

KEY VERSE: LIKE NEWBORN INFANTS, DESIRE THE PURE MILK OF THE WORD, SO THAT BY IT YOU MAY GROW UP INTO YOUR SALVATION. 1 PETER 2:2 (CSB)

Are you enjoying the milk of God’s Word? Do you take time each day to read something from your Bible and learn more about Jesus? Do you apply what you’ve learned to your life? God gave us the Bible so we could know the truth of who He is and what He’s done for us. He uses it to help us know Jesus better and grow in our faith. Don’t starve spiritually—read it!

WHOSE PLANS?

READ: JAMES 4:13-17

Dad gently shook Mateo's shoulder. "Time to go," Dad whispered. "Fishing is best in the early morning, you know." Mateo groaned but rolled out of bed, and soon he and Dad were pushing off in a rowboat.

The sky was growing lighter, but a heavy mist hung over the still waters of the lake. Mateo yawned. "We can't even see where we're going," he complained.

"What happened to all the enthusiasm you had yesterday?" asked Dad. "I heard you tell your friends you were going to catch the most fish."

Mateo sat up straighter. "Yeah, and I will," he declared. "You'll see."

Dad was the first to reel in a good-sized bass, and then he caught several others. Mateo snagged a small sunfish—so small he had to throw it back into the water. Soon the sun came out and the mist disappeared.

After several hours, Mateo was discouraged. "I'm ready to quit," he grumbled. "I need to warm up before my baseball game today. I'm gonna knock the ball right out of the park!"

"I wouldn't want to miss that," said Dad with a smile. "But you'd better be careful about what you say. Not long ago you were going to catch the most fish. Now you're going to be the best ball player. It's a little embarrassing to boast like that and then come up empty-handed, isn't it?"

"I guess," said Mateo, glancing at the few small fish he had caught. He grinned. "Maybe I should say I'm going to strike out every time I'm up to bat."

Dad laughed. "Oh, I wouldn't go that far. Seriously, though, the Bible warns against boasting about our plans. We can't be sure what will happen tomorrow—or even today. Life is like the mist that was over the lake early this morning."

"It sure didn't last long, did it?" said Mateo.

"No, it didn't, and our lives on this earth don't last long either. The only thing that lasts is eternal life with Jesus. That's why we need to trust Him. We don't know what tomorrow will bring, but we do know Jesus will be with us no matter what happens." ♥

BRENDA DECKER



TRUST GOD AS YOU MAKE PLANS

KEY VERSE: WHAT YOU SHOULD SAY IS, "IF THE LORD WANTS US TO, WE WILL LIVE AND DO THIS OR THAT." JAMES 4:15 (NLT)

Do you already have plans for today? For tomorrow? For next week? It's good to think about upcoming events and opportunities, but as you make plans, remember that God is in control of all that happens. Your plans will come to pass only as He allows. Keep that in mind, and trust Him when things don't go the way you planned, knowing He will be with you no matter what happens.

DOWN THE DRAIN

READ: ISAIAH 64:6; 1 PETER 1:18-19; REVELATION 1:4-6

Want to go swimming now, Lana?” Megan asked after lunch. Her cousin had come to spend the week with her.

“You girls can swim after you help with the dishes,” said Megan’s mom. “It won’t take you long. Just rinse them and put them in the dishwasher. Then wipe the counters and table and clean the sink, and you can be on your way.”

“Okay,” said Megan, taking plates to the sink. “Gross!” she exclaimed as she set them down. “There’s soggy lettuce and potato peelings in the sink. Yuck!”

“Yeah, and there are noodles and bits of hamburger too!” said Lana.

“Moom,” Megan groaned, “will you please clean the sink for us?”

Mom laughed. “I meant to rinse that stuff down before we ate, but I obviously forgot. I’ll do it now and let the garbage disposal take care of it.”

“Thanks,” said Lana. “Nothing’s worse than garbage in the sink!”

“Not true,” Mom said with a smirk. “Sin is much worse!”

“Uh-oh!” Megan grinned. “While we wait, we’re going to get a sermon!”

Mom laughed. “Yep,” she said. “You say you can’t stand looking at the sink until the garbage has been washed away. Well, sin is so bad, God can’t stand to look at it. It had to be washed away by the blood of Jesus.”

“Even being really good and trying hard not to do any bad stuff doesn’t make us good enough for God, does it?” Lana asked.

Mom shook her head. “Any good deeds we do won’t make up for the wrong things we’ve done. In fact, the Bible says that when we try to make ourselves good through our own efforts, the good things we do are like filthy rags in God’s sight. The only way to have our sin washed away is to trust in Jesus.” Mom turned on the faucet. “Just like I was willing to wash this stuff down the drain with water, Jesus willingly shed His blood when He died on the cross to wash away our sin. We need Him to clean us. Then we’ll be good in God’s eyes and able to share His goodness with those around us through our actions.”

Lana smiled. “I’m glad Jesus washed away the garbage of my sin when I trusted in Him.”

Megan nodded. “Me too!” ♥ SARA L. NELSON

GOD HATES SIN

KEY VERSE: YOUR [GOD’S] EYES ARE TOO PURE TO LOOK ON EVIL;
YOU CANNOT TOLERATE WRONGDOING. HABAKKUK 1:13 (NIV)

Do you think you’re pretty good? By human standards, you may be very good. But the fact is that by God’s standards, you are sinful. God hates sin, but He loves you and has made a way for your sin to be washed away. Trust Jesus to cleanse you from sin, and He will make you good in God’s eyes. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 102.)

THE MESSY PAGE

READ: 2 CORINTHIANS 6:3-7

Oh no! This birthday card I'm making for Grandma is all messy," Cyra wailed. "I made a mistake, so I erased a few lines and did them over. I tried to erase carefully, but the page still looks messy."

"Well, the mailman will be here soon," said Mom, glancing out the window. "If you want to send that today, you'll probably have to leave it the way it is. I think Grandma will understand." So Cyra reluctantly sealed the envelope and hurried to put it in the mailbox.

That afternoon, Cyra looked glum when she came in from playing outside. "Is something wrong, honey?" Mom asked.

"I don't think Jane likes me anymore," replied Cyra in a trembling voice. "She doesn't want to play with me—I can tell. I don't blame her. I'm sure it's because I got mad and said some mean things to her a couple weeks ago."

"Did you apologize and tell her you were sorry?" Mom asked. Cyra nodded. "And what did she say?" asked Mom.

"She said she forgave me." A tear rolled down Cyra's cheek. "I asked God to forgive me too. He did, didn't He?"

"Yes, He forgave you," said Mom. "I believe Jane did too, but it may take time before she trusts you again." Mom put an arm around Cyra. "What happened when you made a card for Grandma this morning?"

Cyra wrinkled her brow. "I made a mistake and erased part of it."

"And how did the page look after you erased those lines?"

"It...it looked a little messy," answered Cyra.

"Yes, and life is something like that," Mom told her. "In a way, we're writing pages in our lives, and sometimes we mess up. When we confess our wrongs to Jesus, He graciously forgives us completely. But if our sin hurt someone, it may take time for them to trust us again. To them, that page of our lives may not seem quite the same. When we wrong someone, it often leaves a mark." Mom gave Cyra a hug. "Remember that Jesus has forgiven your sin, and be patient with Jane. Show her that you can be trusted."

Cyra sighed. "Okay. I'll show her I want to start over on a fresh page and be a better friend." ♥ HAZEL W. MARETT

HURTS TAKE TIME TO HEAL

KEY VERSE: AN OFFENDED FRIEND IS HARDER TO WIN BACK
THAN A FORTIFIED CITY. PROVERBS 18:19 (NLT)

Have you messed up a page of your life? Confess your sin to Jesus, and also ask anyone you've wronged to forgive you. As far as God is concerned, that sin is totally blotted out. Trust Him to help you live so that the words of today's Bible reading will be true of you also. Be patient with anyone you've offended, remembering that even when others are willing to forgive you, it may take time before they fully trust you again.

REPLACING YOUR OLD WAYS

READ: ROMANS 12:1-3; EPHESIANS 4:22-24

Meteors incoming!” the girl in the space helmet shouted to her brother from the treehouse. “Let’s vaporize them!”

Both kids raised their toy ray guns and fired at the sky. “Pew! Pew! Pew!”

Watching the grainy video from the sofa, Olivia laughed and nudged her mother. “Mom, is that really you and Uncle Joe? You used to be so...fun!”

“We were kids once too, just like you!” Mom smiled. “I’m so glad Grandpa converted our old videos to DVD so we can watch them.”

Young Mom and Joe vanished, and an aerial shot of a football stadium appeared. An announcer shouted, “Polytechnic wins! The crowd goes wild!”

Olivia stared in puzzlement. “What’s this? Was Uncle Joe in that football game?”

Mom chuckled and stopped the video. “No, Grandpa recorded that game from TV. After he watched the tape, he rewound it, put it in his camcorder, and filmed Joe and me. There was a little bit of the game left at the end.”

“If he didn’t need the game anymore, why didn’t he just delete it?”

“Oh, a VHS tape isn’t like the disc in our DVR. You can’t just press a button and delete something. All you can do is record something else in its place.” Mom set down the remote. “It’s kind of like what God does with us.”

“What do you mean?” asked Olivia.

“When you trusted in Jesus, He made you a new person and gave you His Holy Spirit, who is working to make you more like Him. Little by little, God works to record over your ways with His ways. But your old self still wants to control you.”

“So even though we belong to Jesus, we still sin?”

“Yes. That’s why the Bible tells us to take off our old selves and put on our new selves. When we remember that Jesus made us new people, it helps us turn from our old, selfish ways.”

“It’s too bad we can’t delete our sinfulness,” said Olivia.

“I know. But one day, when Jesus returns to make everything new, He will.” Mom stuck out her thumb and forefinger like a ray gun. “In the meantime, we could pretend to vaporize it!”

“That sounds like fun!” Leaping from the sofa, Olivia raised her own finger gun. “Pew! Pew!” ♥ JOHN LEATHERMAN

REPLACE THE OLD WITH THE NEW

KEY VERSE: TAKE OFF YOUR FORMER WAY OF LIFE...AND [PUT] ON THE NEW SELF, THE ONE CREATED ACCORDING TO GOD’S LIKENESS IN RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PURITY OF THE TRUTH. EPHESIANS 4:22-24 (CSB)

Do you wonder why Christians still do wrong things? When we trust in Jesus, we are immediately saved from the punishment we deserve for sinning and given eternal life, but the transformation of our lives on earth has just begun. Even though we still sin, the Holy Spirit is working to replace our old, sinful ways with God’s ways. Trust Him to help you put on your new self so others can see His love and kindness in you.

LITTLE DOUGHNUT HOLES

READ: ROMANS 13:8-10; EPHESIANS 4:28

Where did Mom go?" asked Sarah. She looked all around as she and Eli made their way past the booths at the craft fair.

"She stopped at a booth back there," Eli answered. "She said we could go on. She'll find us."

The two continued down the midway of the fairgrounds. "Mmmm. Do you smell what I smell?" Eli asked after they walked a short distance.

"Smells like a bakery," Sarah replied. "And there it is!" They walked up to the booth where a variety of delicious-looking baked goods were on display.

"Look at all those doughnuts, Sarah," said Eli. "And all those doughnut holes. I sure would like to have one!"

"But we already spent all our money, remember?" Sarah reminded her brother.

"Yeah, but the clerk's busy with those people over there," said Eli. "We could just help ourselves. They won't miss one or two little doughnut holes."

"Eli! Don't you dare take any!" said Sarah. "That would be stealing."

"But who would know?" asked Eli. "I'm sure they didn't count every single doughnut hole. They'd never miss 'em."

"Maybe not," Sarah replied, "but it would still hurt the bakery owners who are trying to make a living from selling their baked goods. Don't you remember what Pastor Olson said in his sermon last week? He said stealing goes against how we're called to love others as Christians. Jesus loved us so much He gave His life for us, and we need to show that same kind of love to others. Stealing is acting out of selfishness instead of love—no matter how big or small the thing is."

"Oh, so you *were* listening in church last week," Eli said with a grin. "When I saw those doughnut holes sitting there, I thought it'd be a good way to make sure."

Sarah looked at her brother. "Eli! You never intended to take any at all! You were just teasing, weren't you? It would have served you right if I had reached out and taken a couple. Then what would you have done?"

Eli laughed. "I wouldn't have let you. But let's go find Mom. Maybe she'll let us have a little more money so we can buy a doughnut hole or two." ♥ BRENDA DECKER



DON'T STEAL

KEY VERSE: A NEW COMMAND I [JESUS] GIVE YOU: LOVE ONE ANOTHER. AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, SO YOU MUST LOVE ONE ANOTHER. JOHN 13:34 (NIV)

Are you tempted to steal little things because you think no one will know? Or because they seem too small to really matter to anybody? They matter to God, because people matter to Him—you and everyone else. Jesus loved us all so much He sacrificed His life to save us! Taking things that belong to others because you want them goes against the life He's called you to as a Christian. Instead, live out the kind of love Jesus has for us—in both big ways and small ones.

MINE!

READ: JOHN 1:1-4; ACTS 17:28; HEBREWS 1:10

Maddie loved volunteering at the church nursery. She grinned as the toddlers served play food to her and the preschool teacher, Mrs. Anderson. “Mine!” yelled Max, grabbing a plastic cupcake from Stella.

Stella wasn’t giving up so easily. She grabbed the cupcake back, also yelling, “Mine!”

Maddie handed Max another cupcake. “Now you both have one.”

After church, Maddie told her parents about Stella and Max. “They must have said the word *mine* fifty times. They both wanted to keep all the toys for themselves!”

“That sounds like most of the world,” said Dad.

“What do you mean?” asked Maddie.

Her dad explained. “God created the world and everything in it. It all belongs to Him, yet we try to hold tightly to our things, our money, even our talents, as if those things were really ours to keep. Just like those two-year-olds.”

Maddie thought for a moment. “At school we talked about settlers taking land from Native Americans.”

“That’s one example,” agreed her dad. “All through history people have acted with a ‘mine’ attitude.”

“Mrs. Sellers asked me to sing in the junior choir, but I wouldn’t since none of my friends would be there, even though I like to sing and they needed more people,” admitted Maddie. “I guess that was selfish.”

“And I still have my old bike, even though I won that new one in the drawing at school,” said Maddie’s brother, Alden. “My teacher told me where I could donate my old one so a kid without a bike could have one, but I decided I wanted both bikes in case one broke. I was only thinking about myself.”

“Those are both good examples of holding on to our blessings instead of sharing them with others,” Mom said. “But, if we listen to the Holy Spirit, we can learn to be less selfish and more like Jesus, who was willing to give up everything when He became human and died for our sins. Everything we have was given to us by Him.”

“So,” Maddie said, “when I put some of my allowance in the collection plate at church, I’m really giving God His own money back?”

Dad nodded. “That’s right, because everything belongs to Him!” ♥ BONNIE CARR

ALL THINGS BELONG TO GOD

KEY VERSE: CHRIST MADE EVERYTHING IN THE HEAVENS AND ON THE EARTH... EVERYTHING WAS MADE BY HIM AND FOR HIM. COLOSSIANS 1:16 (NLV)

Do you sometimes really want something, even when you have what you need? Do you have a hard time giving up what you feel is yours to keep? These are natural feelings, and God wants us to have the things we need and some of the things we want. But remember everything you have comes from Jesus, who gave His life for you. Trust Him to help you share the blessings He gives you with others.

TOWERS AND TURRETS

READ: NAHUM 1:7

Charlie and Katie gasped as they caught their first glimpse of the magnificent stone castle that stood in front of them. They were spending the summer with their grandparents in England while their dad was in the hospital having surgery.

“Whoa! The castle’s bigger than I imagined,” said Charlie.

“There’s water all around it!” squealed five-year-old Katie, scrunching up her nose. “How are we going to get in?”

“Across that wooden bridge over there,” said Grandpa. “Come on, let’s get marching!”

“The water surrounding the castle is called the moat,” explained Grandma.

“Moats made it extra tricky for enemy soldiers to break in, especially on horseback. Can you see the drawbridge? It could be raised up to stop unwanted intruders from crossing the moat.”

“So cool!” Charlie exclaimed.

Inside the castle, a tour guide led them up a worn stone staircase that spiraled round and round, right to the top. “I’m getting dizzy!” said Katie.

Grandpa gripped the handrail and pulled a silly face. “Me too!”

“Hey, look at those weird little windows,” said Charlie. “They’re just tiny slits!”

“Perfect for firing an arrow out,” said the guide. “Virtually impossible to fire one back in!”

At the top of the steps was the castle keep, a small inner tower. The guide explained that it was the highest and safest place in the castle.

“I hope Daddy’s safe in the hospital,” said Katie suddenly as they walked out onto one of the turrets. “I miss him!”

“Me too,” said Charlie. “I wish he could see this place!”

Grandma reached out and hugged them both close. “Do you know what? Your dad is in the safest place he can be.”

“Do you mean the hospital?” asked Charlie.

“Nope!” said Grandma. “Much safer than that. He’s in God’s great, big arms. The Bible describes God as a mighty fortress; a strong, tall tower that we can run to any time we feel afraid. Jesus saved us from sin, and He promises to be with us when we face scary times.”

“That’s so true!” agreed Grandpa. “Let’s pray for your dad right now—right at the top of this castle tower. Jesus is just like the castle keep. He’s the strongest and safest place we could ever be!” ♥ ANGELA JELF

FIND REFUGE IN JESUS

KEY VERSE: THE NAME OF THE LORD IS A STRONG TOWER;
THE RIGHTEOUS RUN TO IT AND ARE SAFE. PROVERBS 18:10

Have you ever felt worried and afraid? Maybe you’ve seen the news and felt anxious, or perhaps you’re concerned about someone you love. Jesus doesn’t want us to worry. He tells us to run to Him with all our troubles. He is a strong, safe fortress whenever we feel afraid. Take your worries to Him and He will surround you with His loving arms.

COLOR!

Find refuge in Jesus



Design a flag
for this castle.

The name of the Lord is a strong tower;
the righteous run to it and are safe.

Proverbs 18:10

THE WRONG BULBS

READ: EPHESIANS 2:1-5; 1 JOHN 5:11-13

Ariana pointed to a picture of flowers in the seed catalog. “Mommy, can we get seeds for these?” the little girl asked.

Her mom looked at the picture. “Those are tulips, and they grow from bulbs, not seeds. But yes, we can plant some tulip bulbs.”

“Yay!” Ariana smiled and clapped her little hands.

A few days later, Ariana showed her mother a spot near the back fence. “I planted bulbs here,” she said. “Mr. Jenkins next door was throwing them away.”

“Really?” asked Mom. “Are they tulip bulbs?” Ariana just shrugged in response.

Every day, Ariana checked to see if the flowers were coming up. When the dirt became dry, she carefully watered it. After a couple of weeks, Ariana stood looking at the bare spot on the ground. “Nothing’s growing,” she said sadly.

“Maybe they’re planted too deep. Let’s see if they’ve started sprouting at all.” Mom took a trowel and dug into the dirt. To her amazement, she uncovered two Christmas tree light bulbs. “Are these the bulbs you planted?” Mom asked. Ariana nodded. “Oh, honey!” Mom gave her a hug. “These are light bulbs, not flower bulbs. There’s no life in them, so they will never sprout. I’ll tell you what—we’ll go buy some flower bulbs, and you can try again.”

That evening, Ariana proudly showed her dad where she planted the new bulbs. “The lady at the store said these will really grow, Daddy.”

Dad smiled. “Where there’s life, there’s growth.” Ariana nodded and ran off to play.

“Hey! Our teacher at church said the same thing you just did,” said Emilio, Ariana’s brother, who had joined them. “He said Christians are alive in Christ—alive spiritually—and that He makes us grow in our faith.”

“That’s right,” said Dad. “We can’t expect to grow when there’s no life there. That’s why we need Jesus. Without Him, we are dead in sin—as dead as those light bulbs Ariana planted. They could do nothing to make themselves grow, and we can’t give ourselves spiritual life, no matter how hard we work trying to do good things. Only Jesus can give us life.”

Emilio nodded. “And He helps us bloom and grow!” ♥ HAZEL W. MARETT

JESUS GIVES LIFE

KEY VERSE: EVEN THOUGH WE WERE DEAD BECAUSE OF OUR SINS, [GOD] GAVE US LIFE WHEN HE RAISED CHRIST FROM THE DEAD. EPHESIANS 2:5 (NLT)

Which kind of bulb are you like—a dead light bulb or a live flower bulb? You may do your best to be good, but the Bible says that without Jesus you are spiritually dead, no matter how many good deeds you do. You receive His life when you trust Him as your Savior. Will you do that today? (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 102.) Then you’ll be made alive, and like a flower bulb, you can grow.

NO MORE SLIVERS

READ: HEBREWS 12:5-11

Ouch!” exclaimed Carter as he jumped off the porch swing. The rough wood had given him a sliver in his finger.

He found his mom in the kitchen. “I was coming to look for you,” she said. “I was just informed that you’ve been teasing Hunter Zhang and calling him names. Is that true?”

“I...uh...Ethan and James started it,” murmured Carter. He held up his finger. “Look, Mom. I got this from the porch swing. It hurts!”

“We’d better get that sliver out.” Mom got a pair of tweezers. “Don’t you think the injury you gave Hunter hurts even more than your finger does?” she asked as she gently worked on the sliver.

“I just teased him a little. I didn’t hurt him!” Carter objected.

“Yes, you did,” said Mom. “Your words and actions hurt him. It’s like you gave him a different kind of sliver.”

Mom succeeded in removing the tiny piece of wood from Carter’s finger. She held it up in triumph.

“All right! Thanks!” Carter said. He started for the door.

“Hold on a minute,” said Mom. “The rough wood on that swing needs sanding so it won’t give anyone else a sliver, and we need to do something to help you avoid giving any more slivers to others. Your dad and I have talked with you about this problem before, and this time we’ll have to do a little sanding on your actions. That means losing TV privileges for a few days.”

“But, Mom!” Carter looked at his feet. “I’ll tell Hunter I’m sorry. Isn’t that enough?”

“That will help,” said Mom. “But being sorry wasn’t enough to help your finger, was it? If the finger started to fester, it would hurt much worse, and if your teasing festers in Hunter’s mind and life, it will hurt him really bad.” She put a hand on Carter’s shoulder. “I know being disciplined isn’t fun, but I’m doing it because I love you. The Bible says God disciplines His children out of love too. He’s working in our lives to make us more like Jesus, and sometimes that requires correcting us so we’ll think about our actions and how they affect others.”

Carter sighed. “Okay,” he said quietly. “I know how much slivers hurt, so I definitely don’t want to give them to anyone else.” ♥HAZEL W. MARETT

GOD DISCIPLINES HIS CHILDREN

KEY VERSE: NO DISCIPLINE IS ENJOYABLE WHILE IT IS HAPPENING—IT’S PAINFUL! BUT AFTERWARD THERE WILL BE A PEACEFUL HARVEST OF RIGHT LIVING FOR THOSE WHO ARE TRAINED IN THIS WAY. HEBREWS 12:11 (NLT)

Do you have rough edges that give slivers to other people? Do you say unkind things? Refuse to share? Snub others? Perhaps your parents or other adults are working to help sand down those rough edges. Even though discipline isn’t fun, remember that God often uses parents and others in His own correction. He disciplines us because He loves us, and as He works in our lives, He helps us show others the love of Jesus.

TIME TO GROW

READ: PHILIPPIANS 1:6; 2:12-16

“I still can’t get it!” Kylie exclaimed as she jumped into her mom’s car. She’d just finished another rehearsal for a dance performance that would take place later that month.

“What’s wrong?” Mom asked as she pulled into traffic and headed home.

Kylie sighed heavily. “We’ve been practicing this routine for two weeks, but there’s still a tricky step sequence I fumble every time.” Kylie watched trees go past her window. “Maybe I’ll never get it.”

“Learning new things takes time. I know you’re working hard,” Mom replied as they continued traveling down the road. A minute later, she asked, “See that house over there?”

“What house? Oh, the one that’s still being built. Mom, it’s not really a house yet. It’s a bunch of wood and bricks—just materials,” Kylie answered.

Mom slowed the car so they could gaze at the construction site a bit longer. “It’s a work in progress, yes. But it takes time to build a house—to make something good and important. If we rush, we might not get the results we want,” Mom explained.

“Are you really talking about my routine, Mom? Not just the house?” Kylie asked, grinning.

“That’s right. I’ve watched you learn difficult dances. Give yourself time, keep practicing, and I’m confident you’ll learn it.”

Mom steered into the driveway. As they walked in the door, Kylie headed to the kitchen to help with dinner.

“Being patient with building something meaningful isn’t just for houses and dance steps,” Mom said as she took out a pan. “It’s also something God tells us to do as we grow in Christ.”

“What do you mean?” asked Kylie.

“When we put our faith in Jesus to receive forgiveness and begin a relationship with Him, His Spirit starts working in us, making us more like Jesus.”

Kylie placed napkins on the table. “That takes time, right?”

“Yep,” Mom said. “God doesn’t rush in doing His good work in our lives. He has a purpose for us, and He’s willing to take His time to accomplish it.”

“That house we saw and my dance routine—they’re not finished yet. But they’re on their way,” Kylie mused.

“Just like God’s children,” Mom finished. ♥ ALLISON WILSON LEE

BE PATIENT AS YOU GROW

KEY VERSE: [BE] CONFIDENT OF THIS, THAT HE WHO BEGAN A GOOD WORK IN YOU WILL CARRY IT ON TO COMPLETION UNTIL THE DAY OF CHRIST JESUS.
PHILIPPIANS 1:6 (NIV)

Do you sometimes get frustrated at not learning a new skill quickly? Do you feel discouraged when you make the same mistakes over and over? Remember that you are still growing and God is faithfully at work in you. He never gets in a hurry! God shows us patience as we grow, and in His power, we can be patient with ourselves too.

ASK, THEN ACT

READ: NEHEMIAH 4:6-15

Guess what? After class today, Logan trusted Jesus as his Savior!” Rayden excitedly told his family on the way home from church.

“That’s great!” Dad exclaimed.

“Wonderful!” added Mom enthusiastically. “Your prayers have been answered.”

But Rayden’s sister Esme frowned. “Why doesn’t God answer my prayers too?” she asked. “I pray for my friend Nisha, but I’m not sure it does any good.”

“Don’t be discouraged,” said Dad. “Sometimes it takes a long time for a person to come to Christ.”

“Yeah. I talked to Logan about my faith and answered questions he had about Jesus for more than a year before he wanted to come to church to learn more,” Rayden reminded her.

Mom turned to Esme. “What kind of response do you get from Nisha when you talk to her about Jesus?” she asked.

“I don’t know. I . . . I haven’t really said much to her about Him,” Esme admitted.

“Have you invited her to church or your Wednesday night Bible club?” Dad asked.

“Well, no,” said Esme. “But I let her know I go. And I pray for her all the time!”

“Praying for her is very important,” said Dad. “God is the only one who can change people’s hearts, after all, not us. But He often uses us to help people learn about Jesus and bring them to Him. That means we need to be ready to do our part in helping someone know Jesus.”

“That’s right,” said Mom. “Remember the Bible story of Nehemiah and the people of Israel building a wall around Jerusalem? When they heard their enemies were coming, they prayed—but they didn’t just pray. They also prepared to fight. It’s important to pray for Nisha, but there may be something else the Lord wants you to do in addition to praying.”

Esme was silent for a while. When they arrived home, she jumped out of the car. “I want to text Nisha and invite her to come to Bible club on Wednesday. We’re having a game night, and I think it would help me talk to her about Jesus.”

Dad nodded. “Let’s pray that Nisha will come—not only to church, but also to know Jesus as her Savior.” ♥HAZEL W. MARETT

PRAY AND BE READY TO ACT

KEY VERSE: WE PRAYED TO OUR GOD. AND WE PUT GUARDS ON THE WALLS TO WATCH DAY AND NIGHT SO THAT WE COULD BE READY TO MEET THEM.
NEHEMIAH 4:9 (ERV)

Are you praying for something—for someone’s salvation, for money you need, or for better grades? Jesus tells us to bring all our concerns to Him, so keep praying! But also be ready to do something He wants you to do in that situation, such as talking to somebody about Jesus, mowing a lawn, or studying hard. Pray, and then be ready to act as you trust Him to answer your prayer.

A NAME TO REMEMBER

READ: GENESIS 17:1-8

“Can you pronounce your name for me, please?” the teacher asked. Hania felt her cheeks burn. It was her first day at a new school, and it was hard enough being the new girl without having to constantly pronounce her name. “Um...” she stammered. “It’s Hon-ya Jack-yoo-bow-skee.”

“Thank you. Everyone, this is Hania. Please make her feel welcome today.”

When Hania came home that evening, her mom was in the kitchen preparing dinner. “How’s your new school?” Mom asked.

Hania sighed. “Fine. It’s just that everyone I met had to ask me to pronounce my name. I wish I had a normal name like everyone else.”

“I understand that,” Mom said. “But names are very special things. We shouldn’t change them lightly.”

“Special how?” Hania asked.

“Well,” her mom said, “did you know that in the Bible, God gave Abraham his name as a reminder?” Hania shook her head. “At first, his name was just Abram,” Mom told her. “But God promised him he would be the father of many nations. As a reminder of that promise, God changed Abram’s name to Abraham, which means ‘Father of a Multitude.’ Years later, even though Abraham and Sarah were old, they had a baby named Isaac. God fulfilled His promise to Abraham, and through Abraham’s line of descendants, He fulfilled another promise—when Jesus was born, He fulfilled God’s promise to send a Savior for the whole world.”

Mom smiled at Hania. “Your name is a reminder too. When your great-great-grandparents moved here from Poland, they didn’t have much money, they didn’t know much English, and they were very scared. But they were brave and hardworking, and they believed Jesus’s promise that He would always be with them. And do you know what your great-great-grandmother’s name was?”

“Hania?”

“Yep,” Mom said. “She was the first Hania Jakubowski. We named you after her as a reminder of where our family came from.”

Hania couldn’t imagine how scary it must have been to move to a new country. If her great-great-grandmother could do that, then she could at least get used to her new school—and she knew Jesus promised to be with her too. “Well,” she said. “Maybe Hania Jakubowski isn’t such a bad name after all.” ♥ KRISTIN BEAVEN

REMEMBER GOD’S PROMISES

KEY VERSE: NO LONGER SHALL YOUR NAME BE CALLED ABRAM, BUT YOUR NAME SHALL BE ABRAHAM; FOR I HAVE MADE YOU A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS. GENESIS 17:5

Does your name have a special meaning? Maybe your parents named you after someone as a reminder of what that person meant to them. God gave some people in the Bible special names to remind them of His promises—promises that also apply to you! When you face difficult times, remember that Jesus knows you by name and promises to always be with you.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS

READ: JOHN 15:9-14, 17

Go away, Gabriel!” yelled Kayla as her little brother rode his bicycle through the chalk pictures she and her friend Aria were drawing on the sidewalk in front of their apartment. Gabriel laughed and zoomed down the street.

“He’s such a pest, isn’t he?” Aria said. Kayla nodded as she colored over the marks the tires had made. Aria made a face. “What a horrible kid!”

“Gabriel isn’t all that bad,” said Kayla.

“He is too. He should be grounded for life or something!” grumbled Aria.

Kayla quickly came to the defense of her brother. “Gabriel just likes to goof around. He’s a good kid most of the time.”

“I can’t stand him,” Aria replied. “Oh, look, here he comes. If he bothers us again, I’ll—” She was interrupted when...*CRASH!* The front tire of Gabriel’s bike caught in a piece of loose cement, and the bike flipped over on its side. Gabriel fell with it, his foot tangled in the spokes. He started to cry.

“Serves him right,” said Aria. “Crybaby!”

“Aria!” exclaimed Kayla. “Gabriel is hurt.”

“Too bad!” Aria turned to go. “I’m leaving!”

“Come on, Gabriel,” said Kayla, and she helped her brother into the building as Aria stormed off.

“Aria’s mean!” Kayla fumed as Mom washed and bandaged Gabriel’s scrapes.

“You often criticize Gabriel yourself,” said Mom, “so I’m a bit surprised you stood up for him now.”

Kayla shrugged. “He’s family—he’s my brother,” she said. “I love him.”

“Good. I’m glad you defended him,” said Mom. “But remember that you and Aria are both Christians, so that makes her your sister. You’re both part of God’s family.”

“Does that mean I have to love her like I do Gabriel?” Kayla asked.

Mom nodded. “It doesn’t mean you have to listen to her criticize your brother,” she said. “But it does mean you should be patient and forgive her like Jesus forgave you. The Bible says love covers a multitude of sins. Jesus loves Aria and forgives her when she does things that are wrong, just like He loves and forgives you. He’ll help you love and forgive her too.”

“Well...” Kayla hesitated. “Okay,” she said. “I guess I do love Aria too.” ♥

HAZEL W. MARETT

LOVE ALL MEMBERS OF GOD’S FAMILY

KEY VERSE: ABOVE ALL, LOVE EACH OTHER DEEPLY,
BECAUSE LOVE COVERS OVER A MULTITUDE OF SINS. 1 PETER 4:8 (NIV)

Do you love all of God’s family—your brothers and sisters in Christ? The Bible says love covers a multitude of sins. Jesus invites you to trust in Him and let His perfect love and sacrifice cover all the wrong you have done. He also tells us to love others as He does. Do you do that? Are you willing to overlook differences of opinion? To forgive when you feel hurt? Trust Jesus to help you love others the way He loves you.

MARY'S DISCIPLE

READ: LUKE 9:23-26; JOHN 10:14-15

Mary had a little lamb, little lamb, little lamb..." Brielle stopped singing as she entered the kitchen. "Hi, Mom. I'm going to do my devotions now before I go over to Ayla's house to play."

"Sounds good," said Mom.

Brielle resumed her song as she went to her room and got out her Bible and devotional book. "It followed her to school one day, school one day, school one day..." Then there was silence as Brielle settled down and began to read.

Soon the song began again. "It made the children laugh and play, laugh and play, laugh and play..." In the kitchen, Mom smiled as the singing got louder. A minute later, Brielle stood in the doorway. "I'm all done, Mom." Brielle grinned. "Mary had a good disciple, didn't she?"

Mom raised her brows. "A good what?"

"A good disciple. The Bible story I read today was about Jesus's twelve disciples. My devotional book says a disciple is a follower—and Mary's lamb followed her wherever she went," Brielle explained. "The lamb was a good disciple."

Mom laughed. "I guess you're right. Like the song says, the lamb was so eager to be with Mary that it even followed her to school."

Brielle nodded. "We should follow Jesus like that, shouldn't we? Even if kids at school think we're weird."

"You're right about that," said Mom. "All of us who know Jesus—whether we're kids or adults—must follow Him. Others may laugh at us, but Jesus was laughed at too when He suffered and died for our sins. He was willing to make that sacrifice so we could be saved and have eternal life, so we should be willing to make sacrifices for Him. We should do what He wants us to do no matter what other people think."

Brielle nodded thoughtfully. "The Bible says Jesus is the Good Shepherd and we are His sheep, doesn't it? So I guess Mary's lamb is a good example of how we should live as Jesus's disciples!"

"That's right," said Mom. "Jesus loves us and promises to take care of us, just like Mary took care of her lamb. That's why we can trust and follow Him." ♥

HAZEL W. MARETT

BE A FOLLOWER OF JESUS

KEY VERSE: [JESUS SAID,] "WHOEVER WANTS TO BE MY DISCIPLE MUST DENY THEMSELVES AND TAKE UP THEIR CROSS DAILY AND FOLLOW ME."
LUKE 9:23 (NIV)

Are you a follower of Jesus? Have you trusted Him to save you from sin? Then you are His disciple. He's teaching you to trust Him in every situation, to obey His commands, and to love others the way He does. There will be times when others laugh at you because you trust in Jesus, but He will never leave you. He is the Good Shepherd who loves and cares for His sheep. Follow Him.

THE CYCLING TRIP

READ: EPHESIANS 1:18-21

Whew! I'm so hot!" Matt groaned as he slowly cycled up a hill. Sweat ran down his face and his legs were aching.

A few feet ahead, Dad turned around and grinned. "You're doing great! Just over this hill is a café. We'll stop for ice cream."

Before Matt could answer, a motorbike cruised around the corner and zipped past the two cyclists. It was gone in a flash. "Wow! What I wouldn't give to have a motor on my bike right now!" puffed Matt enviously.

"Me too!" his dad called back to him.

They finally made it up the hill and arrived at the café. The motorbike was parked outside. Matt stopped to admire it. "It sure is a beauty," he said.

"It is," Dad agreed, "but let's go inside and get that ice cream."

That evening, Dad opened his Bible for devotions. "We're up to Ephesians chapter six tonight," he said. He started reading, then stopped after reading verse ten. He read it again slowly. "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." Dad looked up. "This verse reminds me of something that happened today. Remember when we were going up that steep hill and that motorbike zipped by?"

Matt rolled his eyes. "Sure I do! Man, was I jealous! But what's that got to do with this verse?"

"Well, what's the difference between the way you use a standard bike and a motorbike?" Dad asked.

"That's easy," said Matt. "You need a lot of energy and strength to ride a standard bike. But a motorbike's engine has all the power and energy you need. You just ride." He paused. "The power of His might," he murmured. "Is that verse saying that God gives us power—like a motorbike's engine does?"

Dad nodded. "Christians often spend a lot of time struggling to do things on our own, but we don't have to! We have the power of the Holy Spirit, who helps us turn from sin and follow His will for our lives. Instead of trying to do things in our own strength, we need to rely on Him."

"I think I get it," said Matt. "If we trust God to help us, we can do whatever He tells us to do." He grinned. "Then we'll be riding, not just cycling!" ♥ EMILY LAURIDSEN



TRUST GOD FOR HELP

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

Do you get stressed and worried about your troubles? Are you frustrated when you feel like you should do something but don't really know how to go about it? When God puts it on your heart to do something, don't struggle to handle it on your own. Trust Him to help you. Through the Holy Spirit, you have the power to do all God wants you to do.

THE THANK-YOU WALK

READ: COLOSSIANS 2:6-7; 3:17

Grandma,” Zemirah sobbed, her brown eyes glistening with tears. “I miss Mom.” “Oh, sweetheart,” Grandma soothed, hugging her. “I know it’s hard not being able to see your mom right now, but she’s at the hospital preparing for your new baby sister’s arrival. How about we make your favorite chocolate cookies and then we’ll have a thank-you walk?”

Zemirah nodded and dried her eyes, then followed Grandma to the kitchen to help her bake.

“Now, while we wait for them to cool, let’s go for our thank-you walk,” Grandma said after she placed the cookies on the cooling rack. She took a floral bag from a hook by the door on their way out.

“What’s a thank-you walk?” Zemirah asked as they strolled down to the beach. The waves lapped over the sand and the breeze tickled their skin.

“We walk and collect shells or pebbles for all the things we are thankful for. I’ll start.” Grandma scooped up a shell. “I’m glad I had the chance to love your grandpa for so many years and that he is with Jesus.”

Zemirah selected a shell. “I’m thankful for my cat, Fluffy.” She reached for another shell and added, “And for my family.”

Both of them continued picking up shells and dropping them into the bag. As Zemirah collected each one, she realized there were many blessings she was grateful for.

“I’m thankful for Grandma’s baking and that she takes me on walks to cheer me up,” Zemirah said, forgetting the worries churning inside her. Instead, she thought of everything that made her happy.

Soon the bag was bursting with shells. “Look how many we’ve collected!” exclaimed Zemirah. “I can’t believe it. Let’s make something in the sand.”

Grandma sat nearby on a rock while Zemirah laid out all the shells in the shape of a heart in the sand.

“Look, Grandma! I’ve made a heart with all the blessings we’ve been given. It’s a thank-you to God because He loves us so much and sent His Son, Jesus, to save us. Let’s take a photo to remember our special walk.”

Grandma took a picture with her phone, then Zemirah skipped back home alongside her, eager to enjoy the cookies they had baked. Having a baby sister was going to be fun! ♥ CINDY LEE

BE THANKFUL

KEY VERSE: IN EVERYTHING GIVE THANKS; FOR THIS IS THE WILL OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS FOR YOU. 1 THESSALONIANS 5:18

Do you complain when you face difficulties or changes in your life? Sometimes it’s easy to grumble and dwell on our problems, but even during trials, it’s important to praise God and be thankful. Jesus loves us and wants us to be filled with the joy of knowing Him, even during hard times. He has given us so many blessings. What things or people in your life are you grateful for?

WHERE'S LEILA?

READ: PSALM 139:7-12

Where's Leila?" called Claire in a singsong voice as she played with her baby sister. "Where is Leila hiding?"

Leila peeked through the chubby little fingers she was holding in front of her face. Suddenly she dropped her hand. "There she is!" exclaimed Claire. "There's Leila!"

The baby squealed in delight and promptly placed her fingers back over her eyes, ready to play the game again. Claire laughed too. "You really think you're hiding from me, don't you?" she said. "Babies are silly, aren't they, Mom?"

"It can seem that way," said Mom. "They don't yet understand that they can still be seen even when they cover their eyes and can't see anything else." Mom smiled at Claire. "However, when people your age or my age try to hide, that really is silly!"

"What people?" Claire asked. "You mean like those who try to hide from the police? Or kids who try to hide from their parents or each other? But they don't try to hide by covering their faces with their hands."

"We may not use the same method of hiding," said Mom, "but I was actually thinking of how we sometimes try to hide from God."

Claire frowned. "Nobody can hide from Him, right? He knows everything."

"Yes, He does, but we often seem to forget that. We'll do something wrong and seem to think nobody knows about it. Even Christians, who should know better, sometimes act as though they can hide what they've done—forgetting that God knows all about it."

"I know I've tried to do that myself," Claire admitted. She laughed when she saw Leila once again peeking through her fingers. "It's cute when a baby thinks she can hide, but it's not cute for us to think that way, is it?"

"No," said Mom. "Trying to hide only makes things worse. When we do something wrong, we need to be honest about it and confess it to Jesus. He died to take the punishment for our sin so we could have a relationship with Him, so there's no reason to hide. Instead, we need to ask Him for forgiveness."

Claire grinned as her baby sister's hands fell away from her face. "There's Leila!" Claire said, and they both erupted in giggles. ♥HAZEL W. MARETT

YOU CAN'T HIDE FROM GOD

KEY VERSE: "WHO CAN HIDE IN SECRET PLACES SO THAT I CANNOT SEE THEM?" DECLARES THE LORD. "DO NOT I FILL HEAVEN AND EARTH?" JEREMIAH 23:24 (NIV)

Do you think nobody knows you did something wrong? Broke that lamp? Told that lie? Snitched that cookie? God knows. You can't hide anything from Him. If you've done something wrong, confess it to Jesus, and He will forgive you. Then tell anyone else you've wronged and ask them for forgiveness too.



HIGHER WAYS

READ: ISAIAH 55:8-11

A cold wind whipped through the cemetery and stung Colin's face. He tried to listen as the minister read from the Bible. *I wonder if Grandpa is with Jesus in heaven*, he thought for the hundredth time in the last few days. On the way home, Colin finally asked the question that lay heavy on his heart. "Did Grandpa go to heaven, Dad?"

Dad looked somber. "We believe so. You probably remember that Grandpa didn't show much interest when I talked to him about Jesus." Colin felt empty inside when he heard this. "But Grandpa died on his knees beside his bed," Dad added. "He was apparently talking to God."

Mom spoke in a gentle voice. "Just the day before that, I spent some extra time praying he would trust Jesus as his Savior, and then I went to his room and told him again how he could have his sins forgiven and be saved. We can't be sure, but we believe Grandpa did put his trust in Jesus just before he died."

Colin felt a little better as he thought about that. Then with a sigh he said, "But I wish I knew for sure."

"I do too, Colin, but we have to leave Grandpa in God's hands now," said Dad. "We did all we could do. We told Grandpa many times how Jesus died and rose again to give us eternal life, and for years we prayed he would understand and accept God's gift of salvation. We were loving and kind to him, always hoping he would see the difference Jesus made in our lives and that he would want to know Him too."

"There are some things we'll never know while we're on this earth," said Mom. "But we told Grandpa what the Bible says, and God promises His Word will accomplish what He intends for it to do. He also says His ways are higher than ours, and He does all things right."

At home, Colin went to his room and rubbed his fingers over the worn leather of a baseball mitt Grandpa had given him. "Dear Lord," he prayed, "You know I loved Grandpa and want him to be in heaven with You. Thank You for loving him too, and for doing everything right." ♥ CAROLYN E. YOST



TRUST GOD'S WAY

KEY VERSE: SHALL NOT THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH DO RIGHT?
GENESIS 18:25

Are you wondering if someone you love went to heaven when they died? It always hurts when a loved one dies, but it's especially painful when you don't know if that person was saved and went to be with Jesus. If you're in that position, give your worries and heartache to God. Rest in the knowledge that His ways are higher than ours and that He will always do what's right.

SUNRISE CHAT

READ: EPHESIANS 4:22-24

Long road trips can be a blast, and this one was no exception. Emily, Cooper, and their mom were taking a trip from their home in California all the way up to Washington to visit their grandparents. The first quiet night of driving had passed, and Cooper and Emily woke up to a showstopping sunrise.

“Whoa!” Cooper exclaimed, taking in the beauty of the sky. “The clouds look exactly like someone painted them on a piece of paper.”

“Look, Mom.” Emily pointed out the window. “The sun is still rising, but only some of the clouds have changed colors.” Pink-and-orange-tinted clouds floated just below gray ones.

“You’re right!” Mom said. “Where the light of the sun hasn’t hit the clouds, they still look the same.” She passed each of the kids an apple, adding, “We’ll be stopping for breakfast soon.”

“Thanks!” Emily bit into her apple and looked out the window, pondering. “Hmm. Don’t you think we’re kind of like the clouds? Jesus shines His light into our hearts and changes them, and He helps us become more like Him.” She giggled. “I think I’m a pink cloud!”

“But sometimes we make ourselves look more like those gray clouds,” Cooper said. “We don’t always do things that reflect Jesus’s light so people can see how He’s changed us.”

Emily nodded, remembering how she and Cooper had argued the day before about who was going to sit in the front seat. The mean words she’d said to him danced around in her head.

“That’s something everyone has a hard time with, even parents,” Mom said, smiling. “Even though Jesus has changed us, we still sin and do things that are wrong sometimes. But when we admit our wrongs to Jesus, He forgives us and helps us act with love instead of selfishness.”

The kids were silent for a minute, then Cooper spoke up. “Sorry about fighting yesterday, Em,” he said sheepishly.

“That’s okay,” she responded quickly. “Me too.” She ate the last bite of her apple, then pointed out the window with a grin. “Pretty sure you’re that orange cloud over there!” ♥ SYDNEY APPERSON

REFLECT THE LIGHT OF JESUS

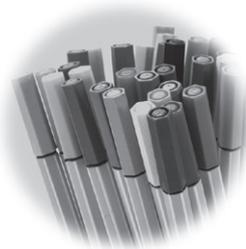
KEY VERSE: THEREFORE, IF ANYONE IS IN CHRIST, THE NEW CREATION HAS COME: THE OLD HAS GONE, THE NEW IS HERE! 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 (NIV)

Have you trusted Jesus as your Savior? If so, He has changed your heart and made you a new person! But sometimes our words and actions are reflections of what we want instead of what Jesus has done for us. When you do something that fails to show others the light and love of Jesus, confess it to Him, and tell anyone you’ve wronged you’re sorry too. Then trust Jesus to help you live in a way that allows people to see how He’s changed you.

OWNERSHIP

READ: 2 CORINTHIANS 5:14-15; GALATIANS 2:20; 1 PETER 1:18-19

It finally came!” Jack said, eagerly tearing open the package that had just arrived. “Here’s the special marker set I ordered. The markers come in lots of different colors, and look—there’s even a case with a handle so you can carry them around.” Jack held up the case of markers so his mom could see it. His little sister Teagan reached for it, but Jack pulled it back. “These markers cost me money,” he said. “Nobody gets to use them but me.”



“I can use them too!” Teagan insisted.

“No, you can’t,” said Jack. “These are mine, and they’re special. You have plenty of other markers you can use to draw pictures with. You can’t use these.”

Teagan pouted. “Can too,” she said. “Can’t I, Mommy?”

Mom shook her head. “Only if Jack says you can,” she said. “Jack paid for the markers, so he has the right to say if or when you can use them.”

“Hey, that’s like what we talked about in my class at church last week,” said Jack. “Mr. Wyatt said God bought us and we belong to Him.”

“How did God buy us?” Teagan asked. “Did we cost a lot?”

“Yes, we did,” Mom replied. “It cost Jack some money to buy that set of markers, but it cost Jesus His blood to purchase our salvation.” Mom smiled at Teagan. “God made you and loves you, but you do wrong things. You’ve sinned—all of us have—and sin separates us from God, because He is good and it goes against who He is. But God still loves you, and He paid a great price to buy you back. The sacrifice Jesus made when He shed His blood by dying on the cross paid the price of your sin so you could be forgiven and belong to God.”

“I gave up some of my own money to buy this,” said Jack, looking at the case of markers he was holding. “But God gave up His own Son to buy us!” Jack opened the case and put it on the table. “Here, Teagan,” he said. “Since I belong to God, I want to obey Him. And I think He’d want me to share these with you.” ♥

HAZEL W. MARETT

YOU BELONG TO GOD

KEY VERSE: YOU WERE BOUGHT, BUT NOT WITH THINGS THAT RUIN LIKE GOLD OR SILVER. YOU WERE BOUGHT WITH THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST’S DEATH. 1 PETER 1:18-19 (ERV)

Do you have something that you bought with your own money? If you paid for it, it’s yours, isn’t it? Well, did you know that Jesus paid the price to free you from sin? He loves you so much that He willingly shed His blood so you could have your wrongs forgiven. Have you trusted Him as your Savior? Trust in Him today, and you will belong to Him. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 102.)

A READY ANSWER

READ: ROMANS 5:1; COLOSSIANS 4:5-6; 1 PETER 3:15

Amy chatted with her friend Sara as Amy’s dad drove them to a youth banquet at church. It was a dress-up event, and both girls had new outfits for the occasion. “I’m so glad you could come with me tonight,” Amy told Sara. “You look so nice.”

“Thanks—and thanks for inviting me,” said Sara. “I’ve never been to an event at a church before. How come you go all the time?”

“Well, I go to worship God and learn more about Him.” Amy paused, then added, “I’m a Christian—I’ve trusted Jesus to save me, and I love Him.”

“What do you mean—you trusted Him to save you? Save you from what?” asked Sara.

“From sin. We’re all sinners—we’ve all done wrong things,” Amy explained. “But Jesus took the punishment for our sins by dying on the cross.”

Their conversation was interrupted when they arrived at church. The girls waved goodbye to Dad and turned to go up the church steps.

Amy glanced down at her feet and froze. “Sara,” she gasped, “I forgot my shoes! I’ve got my old bedroom slippers on! Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I never noticed,” Sara said. She laughed as she looked at Amy’s bare toes sticking out of fuzzy animal slippers. “They do look pretty funny with that outfit.”

“I’m not going in there like this!” said Amy. She introduced Sara to a friend, then made a quick phone call to her mom and waited at the church door for Dad to bring her good shoes.

“I thought you were wearing just the right shoes,” Dad said when he arrived.

Amy held up the slippers. “You like these silly things?”

Dad laughed. “Oh, I didn’t notice those, but I did notice that you were ready with an answer when Sara questioned you about your faith in Jesus. The Bible calls that having your feet ‘fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.’ In other words, we should always be ready to tell others about the peace and hope we have in Jesus. That’s so much more important than wearing dressy shoes with your new outfit.”

Dad gave Amy a hug. “Have fun tonight,” he said. “We’ll be praying for you and for Sara.”

“Thanks, Dad,” said Amy. “And thanks for bringing my shoes too.” ♥

HAZEL W. MARETT

BE READY TO SHARE YOUR FAITH

KEY VERSE: STAND FIRM...WITH YOUR FEET FITTED WITH THE READINESS THAT COMES FROM THE GOSPEL OF PEACE. EPHESIANS 6:14-15 (NIV)

Are you ready at any time to share your faith with others? That may mean talking to someone about Jesus. It may mean explaining what you believe or why you do—or don’t do—certain things. Always be prepared to let others know you belong to Jesus and have His peace in your heart—and that they can have it too.

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