
GETTING THE MOST OUT OF KEYS FOR KIDS



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



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

- 1) Read the Bible passages at the top of the page before you read the story. They'll help you understand how the story relates to God's truth in the Bible.
- 2) Each story ends with questions to help you apply God's Word to your life. Read them carefully, and think about your answers. What did you learn from the Bible verses and story? What do you think God is saying to you?
- 3) Each story includes a key verse. Read it a few times and see if you can memorize it, or write it down and put it somewhere you can see it. Then take God's Word with you as you go about your day!



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

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

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



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HAVE JESUS, WILL TRAVEL

The sick feeling in Micah's stomach got worse as the plane lifted off the ground and lurched into the air. Everything below him was the size of ants. Not only did he feel sick to his stomach, his chest felt tight too. Dad sat next to him and tried to smile encouragingly. It didn't help.

Since his parents' divorce he'd had to spend most of his time with Mom and went to visit Dad in the summer and over Christmas. Every time he left Mom, Micah felt scared. He wasn't afraid of his dad—he loved him—just scared of change. Of traveling to new places. Airports. Big cities. The sadness he felt from his parent's divorce was bad enough, but the fear that came with it made him feel like his life was out of control.

The plane leveled off, and Micah began to breathe a little easier. Dad reached over and gave him a hug. "Change is hard, isn't it? New things and places can be uncomfortable. But I know something that might help you." Dad pulled out his Bible. "This morning I read about Joshua leading the children of Israel into their new land. There were bad guys to fight, he'd never led anyone into battle before, and change was all around him. But God was with him and brought him through it all."

Dad squeezed Micah's arm. "I know your mom's and my divorce has been very difficult for you and how many changes you've had to go through. But I also know that because you trust in Jesus, God is with you and will never leave you. Wherever you go, He goes. God was with Joshua just like He promised, and He promises to be with you too. You don't have to be afraid."

After Micah listened to Dad read some verses from his Bible, he thought about it for a while. He liked the idea of never being alone. Someone would always be with him when new things happened or new people came into his life. And not just anyone, but someone who loved and cared about him. A trusted Friend—Jesus. Micah relaxed back into his seat and smiled. "You know, Dad, I think this is gonna be our best visit ever!" ♥ S. K. Fry



GOD IS WITH YOU | KEY VERSE: *Be strong and courageous...for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9 (NIV)*



Have you ever been afraid of change? Of being alone? God promises in His Word that He will always be with His children. Jesus gave His life to save you from sin and make you God's child, and He will be with you in hard times and give you strength and guidance. No matter what happens or where you go, He will always be with you.

ARE YOU READY FOR A GREAT SUMMER?

WORD WITH ZACH STARTS TODAY! START FILLING IN YOUR CALENDAR FOR A CHANCE TO WIN PRIZES. WORDWITHZACH.ORG

MANGO MESSSES

Alisha ran inside the house. “There’s a butterfly outside!” she exclaimed. “I got a picture on my phone. Do you want to see it?” she asked Devin, her older sister.

“Sure.” Devin inspected the photo. “That butterfly is beautiful,” she said as she cut into a mango.

Alisha frowned as juice hit her phone. “That mango juice is getting everywhere.”

Devin shrugged as a piece of mango flew across the kitchen. “I’m trying to keep it from splashing all over the place, but mangos are messy.”

Alisha sat down at the counter and watched her sister. “Why eat mangos then? If they’re messy, you could just not buy them.”

Devin popped a piece of mango into her mouth. “Because they taste really good, and I think it’s worth it.” She gave Alisha a smile. “It’s kind of like your school problem.”

Alisha blinked. “Your mango is like people being mean to me at school because I believe in Jesus?” she asked doubtfully.

“Kind of. Being a follower of Jesus can be messy. The Bible even tells us that—it says others might make fun of us or try to make life harder for us, like the kids at school who are mean to you. But you haven’t stopped trusting in Jesus, have you?”

Alisha looked shocked. “Why would I do that? He died for my sins so He could be with me all the time, and someday I’ll be able to spend forever in heaven with Him.”

Devin smiled. “See? Knowing Jesus is worth it. Just like the mangos.” She cut into a second mango.

Alisha ducked so no juice would hit her. “I don’t care how messy following Jesus is! Just like you don’t care how messy your mango is.” She thought about that for a moment. “I guess that makes sense. Kids at school make fun of me, but I know that Jesus loves me and died to save me, and that’s worth whatever mean stuff people say.” Alisha shrieked as a piece of mango hit her arm. “But those mangos are not worth it at all. I’m getting out of here!” ♥ Kimberly Brokish



HARDSHIPS COME WHEN WE FOLLOW CHRIST | KEY VERSE: *That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*
2 Corinthians 12:10 (NIV)



Has anyone ever been mean to you because you believe in Jesus?* Maybe they’ve called you names or said Jesus isn’t real. The Bible tells us that being Christians doesn’t protect us from all hardships—in fact, sometimes we will experience difficulties because we follow Jesus. But the Bible does tell us that Jesus will always love us and be with us. Take comfort in knowing that Jesus will be with you no matter what happens. He is worth any difficulties that come with following Him.

**If someone is being mean to you, talk to a trusted adult so they can help.*

NEW CREATION

Trey was excited because today Grandma was finally going to teach him how to make her famous molasses bread. As Dad dropped him off and waved goodbye, Trey could already taste the rich, fluffy bread and the salty crunch of toasted oats on top.

Grandma welcomed Trey with a hug and led him into the kitchen. They used sign language to communicate because Trey was deaf. Grandma signed “flour,” “molasses,” “yeast,” and “spoon.” Trey scurried around the kitchen to find the ingredients while Grandma started mixing.

As they added more and more ingredients, a dark and goeey dough formed. Grandma placed a towel over the dough bowl before gently setting it in a sunny part of the kitchen.

“Why doesn’t the dough look like bread yet?” Trey signed.

Grandma smiled. “The dough must rise before it goes in the oven.”

That made sense to Trey. After an hour and a half, they checked the dough. It was double the size and very poofy. Grandma punched down the dough before laying it on the pan and putting it in the oven.

Trey frowned. The dough still didn’t look like bread. It didn’t look tasty at all. Did Grandma forget something?

He asked her this, and she replied, “Just you wait and see.”

When Grandma took the tray out of the oven, Trey was nervous. But the bread looked perfect, smelled perfect, and tasted even better than perfect.

As they ate, Grandma said, “You know, making bread reminds me of what it’s like to become God’s new creation.”

Trey shrugged, confused. Grandma continued. “Before we put our trust in Jesus, we are like raw, scattered ingredients—we don’t have a purpose. We are controlled by our wrong desires and deserve death because of our sin. But Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross, and rose from the dead so we could have new life and live with Him forever. Jesus gives us a purpose—to love Him and others and become more like Him. Just like the dough needs the oven to become bread, we need Jesus to be saved from sin and be made new.”

Trey nodded eagerly and took Grandma’s hand to pray. Somehow this seemed even better than Grandma’s famous molasses bread. ♥ *Hannah Chung*



CHRIST ALONE MAKES US NEW | KEY VERSE: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.* 2 Corinthians 5:17



Have you ever baked something and wondered, “How do these random ingredients make something so delicious?” Without the oven, the dough would be raw and inedible. Similarly, we can only have true life by trusting in Jesus. When you trust Him to save you, God immediately makes you new! Trust in Jesus today and experience a new life of purpose. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 104.)

SHAPED LIKE CLAY



Tiago held a headless clay animal in his hand. “Mom!” he wailed. “I forgot to put my animal back in the container, and the clay got all hard and dry before I could finish, so now it doesn’t have a head!”

“I’m sorry, Tiago,” said Mom. “But it’s too late to do anything about it now. It’s time for bed.”

“But my animal project is due tomorrow, and now all this work was for nothing!” Tiago groaned as he dropped the animal onto his dresser and crawled into bed.

Mom glanced at the Bible on Tiago’s dresser. “Aren’t you going to read a few verses before you go to sleep?” she asked. “I thought you did that every night.”

Tiago shrugged. “I’ve been busy lately, and I don’t understand it very well anyway.” He pulled the covers up to his chin. “I think it’d be better to wait until I’m older so I can understand it.”

Mom picked up the animal Tiago had made. “Did you know that we’re a lot like clay?”

“We are?” asked Tiago.

Mom nodded. “The Bible compares us to clay that God shapes. When you shaped this, it took time, didn’t it? You kept working with it until it looked good. God does that with us. One way He does that is through His Word—the Bible. Even though you don’t understand everything, it helps you learn more about Jesus and what He did to save you. As you read and listen to God’s truth in the Bible, He works in your heart and helps you learn to trust and obey Him so He can shape your life into something beautiful.”

Tiago looked at the hardened clay his mom was holding. “He’ll probably do a better job shaping me than I did with that animal, huh?”

“Yes,” said Mom. “You can trust Him to shape you to be more like Jesus—and reading your Bible will help you understand more about what that looks like.” Mom set down the animal and picked up Tiago’s Bible. “So do you want to read a few verses now? You can let me know if you need help understanding them.”

“Okay,” said Tiago. “But don’t go far away. I’ll probably need help!” ♥ A.J. Schut



GOD SHAPES YOU THROUGH HIS WORD | KEY VERSE: *My word...will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire.* Isaiah 55:11



Does the Bible seem too hard for you to understand? Even though you don’t understand everything, it helps you learn more about who God is and what He’s done for you. So spend time reading it each day, and ask other Christians—like parents, teachers, or pastors—to explain some of the things you find difficult. God will use it to shape you into the person He wants you to be.

THE OCEAN

Carson loved visiting the aquarium. There was so much to see there, and he not only liked seeing the bigger fish but also the smaller ones and the other creatures that lived in the ocean. He could spend hours watching the tanks and all the different creatures that lived in them.

“Having fun?” Carson’s uncle Brett asked.

Carson’s younger cousins were running back and forth, shouting out the names of everything they saw, but Carson had chosen to stand and quietly observe the tank in front of him.

Carson nodded. “This is awesome.”

“It is. Just think about God’s creativity with all of this,” Uncle Brett said. “He could have made all the fish look alike, but instead they are different colors, shapes, and sizes.”

“Yet they all live together in the ocean.” Carson shook his head. “It’s amazing.”

They continued on in the aquarium for a while before taking a break for lunch. Carson was disappointed to leave. “There’s just so much to see. I want to make sure we get to all of it,” he said with a sigh as he followed his family away from the tanks.

“We’ll see more of it after lunch,” Uncle Brett said. “And since you’re so interested, maybe we’ll have to come back again. Or better yet, maybe you and I could go snorkeling one day.”

Carson’s eyes widened. “Really?”

Uncle Brett nodded. “I always love seeing more of God’s creation. The ocean is filled with even more amazing creatures than we can find here.”

“That would be so cool,” Carson said.

Uncle Brett nudged his shoulder. “The ocean and all that’s in it is pretty amazing, but one of God’s most special creations is right here.”

“Huh?” Carson glanced at him.

“You!” Uncle Brett said. “God created you and your cousins and me and all people with just as much care as He did all the creatures in the ocean. But He made us in His own image, and when we were separated from Him because of sin, Jesus died and rose again to save us and give us eternal life. I think that makes us pretty special, don’t you?”

“Yeah.” Carson smiled. “But I’d still love to go snorkeling in the ocean.” ♥

Bethany Acker



GOD CREATED THE OCEANS AND YOU | KEY VERSE: *There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number—living things both large and small.* Psalm 104:25 (NIV)



When you look at the ocean and all the creatures that live in it, does it amaze you? How does it feel to know God made all that and that He made you too? People are God’s most special creation, and He loves us so much He sent Jesus to die for us so we could live with Him forever. When you look at God’s amazing creation, remember how special you are to Him.

COLOR!



THE SUITCASE



Get in there!" said Finley, shoving her beach blanket into her suitcase.

"Are you still packing?" asked her older brother, Ian. "We're leaving in ten minutes! Here, let me help you." He jumped on the lid of the suitcase, holding it in place while Finley moved the zipper around the edges.

Dad appeared at the door. "I'll take your suitcase to the car," he said, picking it up. "Wow! Why is it so heavy?"

"Because she's taking half the things in her room!" said Ian.

"Well, they're important," Finley said. "I need my hat, my beach blanket, and three swimsuits in case I can't decide which one to wear. I need my sailboat to play with in the ocean, and I can't build sand castles without my pail and shovel. If it rains, I'll have my raincoat, my boots, and my umbrella. I also packed a puzzle, some games, and bedtime books. And my teddy bear in case I can't fall asleep."

"I think you should leave some things behind," said Dad.

"But what if I need something and don't have it?"

"Finley, I think something else might be weighing your suitcase down," said Dad. "Just like you packed too many things in your suitcase, you can also pack too many worries in your head—and they can make life very heavy."

"I thought I was just planning ahead for a good vacation," said Finley.

"It's good to be prepared, but there's a difference between planning ahead and trying to control anything that could happen. That's what worrying really is—being afraid of something you can't control. If you unpack your worries, your suitcase will probably be lighter too."

"But how do I unpack my worries?" asked Finley.

"By surrendering them to Jesus. He loves you so much He died for you, and He promises to take care of you. Instead of worrying about what might happen, you can have peace knowing He's in control. Let Him carry the weight of your worries." Dad unzipped Finley's suitcase. "Why don't we take a moment to pray about some of your worries now? Then we can lighten up that suitcase and start our vacation!" ♥ *Elena Dee*



GIVE YOUR WORRIES TO JESUS | KEY VERSE: *Give all your worries to him, because he cares for you.* 1 Peter 5:7 (ERV)



Do you feel heavy with worry? Are you afraid of things in your life you can't control? Worries can weigh you down like a heavy suitcase, but it doesn't have to be that way. Jesus wants to carry your worries for you. He died and rose again to save you, and He promises to provide you with everything you need. Pray about what's worrying you, and trust Him to take care of you and give you peace.

ON TRACK

Hudson was working on his electric train set when Dad joined him in the basement. “How’s the train project coming along?” he asked.

“Good!” said Hudson. “It’s almost ready to run.”

“All right!” said Dad. “And how was school today?”

Hudson frowned. “I got in trouble for coming in late from recess again, and Miss Cooley gave me extra math homework because I didn’t do the homework she assigned yesterday.” He sighed. “Everyone’s always on my case—I wish I could just do whatever I wanted, like you and Mom.”

“Hmm,” said Dad. “Well, Hudson, let’s see how your train runs.” He reached over and pressed the start button, and the train began moving.

“Wait! What are you doing? I don’t have all the tracks down yet!” exclaimed Hudson. “It’s gonna crash!” As he spoke, the train rounded the turn and rolled off the track, falling on its side. Hudson sighed. “I knew that would happen.”

“So the train needs the tracks,” said Dad. “Otherwise it doesn’t get where it’s supposed to go, right?”

Hudson nodded. “Yeah.”

“Well, God’s path for your life is like those tracks,” said Dad. “He sent Jesus to die for you so you could have a relationship with Him for all eternity, and He is patiently building your character and shaping you to be more like Jesus so others can see His love in you. He does that for each one of His children, but when we insist on doing things our own way and disobey the people He puts in our lives to help us learn, we get off track. When that happens, we need to ask Him to forgive us and set us right again.”

Dad picked up the train and set it back on the track. “It may seem like Mom and I can do whatever we want because we’re adults, but that’s not true. We’re just farther down our life track than you are and have already learned many of the things God is still teaching you—like responsibility. But we still need His guidance and forgiveness just as much as you do.”

“Okay, Dad,” Hudson said as he put another piece of the track in place. “I’ll trust God to help me stay on track.” ♥ *Michael R. Chapman*



TRUST GOD’S PATH FOR YOUR LIFE | KEY VERSE: *That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. Colossians 1:10*



Do you get tired of people telling you what to do? Do you ever wish you could do whatever you wanted? Remember that God has placed people in your life to teach you what He wants you to learn. As you get older, you’ll have more freedom in making choices, but you’ll have more responsibilities too. That’s why you need to depend on God to help you stay on track. Trust Him to lead you along life’s path in the way He wants you to go.

WILDFLOWERS AFTER WILDFIRES

Wow, look at all the flowers!" Kayla stared in awe at the field of flowers. Her family was hiking in Waterton Lakes National Park. To their left was a stunning lake surrounded by mountains and to their right was a forest filled with beautiful pinkish-purple flowers. The trees were all blackened and bare, so the true beauty came from the flowers and the backdrop of mountains.

"These flowers are called fireweed," Mom said. "They're called that because they grow after a fire."

"Is that why all the trees are burnt?" Kayla asked. "Because of a fire?"

"Yes," Dad replied. "Several years ago there was a huge wildfire here. It burned all the trees and plants. Until the rest of the plants grow back, all that's here is the fireweed. The roots of fireweed can survive extremely hot temperatures, so it is one of the first plants to sprout up. The fire can even help it grow."

"It's so beautiful how these flowers can grow even after the devastation of a fire," Kayla said.

"I think it's a beautiful example of how God works to bring good things out of bad things," Mom said thoughtfully. "Sometimes He allows bad things to happen in our lives so He can use them for good."

"Yeah, the fire must've been terrible, but God was nourishing little roots of beauty even then," Kayla said.

Mom nodded. "That's so true. Sometimes we can see how God is working in our lives, but often we won't see it right away. When this wildfire was raging through the park, I'm sure people worried that a lot of the park's natural beauty would be destroyed. But after the wildfire died down, these wildflowers sprouted up! And the park is still beautiful, even though there's not as many trees as before. In the same way, God can use our hard times to help us grow in our faith, which is a beautiful thing."

"That also reminds me of Jesus's sacrifice," Dad said. "It must've seemed like a terrible thing to Jesus's disciples for Him to be crucified. But God planned it for good—it was the only way we could be saved from sin and have eternal life with Him."

Kayla smiled. "I'm so thankful God causes beauty to flourish even after hard times." ♥ Elizabeth Cooper



GOD BRINGS GOOD THINGS OUT OF BAD THINGS | KEY VERSE: *We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.* Romans 8:28 (CSB)



Do you have a hard time seeing beauty in your life when things are hard? Sometimes it can take a while to see God bring good things out of bad things, and sometimes we won't see how God was working in our lives until we get to heaven. But because of Jesus's sacrifice, we have the hope of an eternal future with God and can trust Him to use even bad things that happen in our lives for good.

GOING BACK IN TIME

Your mom's calling you for lunch?" Josie asked in surprise as she talked on the phone with her cousin Olive. "You mean you haven't eaten lunch yet? It's almost two in the afternoon! We ate a long time ago."

"Well, it's only noon here in Colorado, remember?" Olive replied. "We're in different time zones."

"Oh, that's right!" said Josie. "Well, I'd better go anyway—have a nice lunch."

The girls said goodbye, and Josie hung up. Then she wandered out to the backyard where her dad was working.

"Josie, I need you to walk down to Tess's house and pick up your sister," Dad said as he poured fertilizer out of a bag. "It's time for her to come home, and I'm busy with this."

"Why can't she just walk home?" asked Josie.

"She's too young to walk that far by herself," said Dad. "I'm covered in fertilizer, so I need you to go get her."

"No, I don't want to!" said Josie. "I'm sick of always doing everything for her. She's so annoying!" Josie turned and hurried toward the house.

When Josie found herself sitting alone in her room a few minutes later, she wished she had obeyed her father, but it was too late now. She knew she deserved to be punished.

When Dad came to Josie's room, she looked up sadly. "I wish we were in Colorado," she said. "It's two hours earlier there—just a little after twelve o'clock instead of two o'clock—so the time I got into trouble hasn't happened there yet. When it got to be two o'clock, I would obey you instead of talking back. I wish I hadn't done that."

"Things that have happened can't be made to unhappen," Dad said. "We can't go back in time—and even if we could, we'd still sin and make mistakes. But we can be forgiven for the wrong we've done. You don't need to move to another time zone for that. When you confess your sin to Jesus, He'll forgive you—and I will too."

Josie jumped up. "I'm sorry, Dad!" she said. "I really am!"

Dad smiled. "Good," he said as Josie gave him a hug. "Then you can go get your sister so I can finish with the fertilizer."

Josie sighed. "Okay, Dad," she said. "I will." ♥ Nance E. Keyes



GOD FORGIVES | KEY VERSE: *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* 1 John 1:9



Have you ever wished you could go back and undo something you've done? You can't do that, but because Jesus paid for your sins on the cross, you can be forgiven. If what you did hurt other people, do your best to make things right with them. Let them know you're sorry, and accept the consequences of your sin. Most importantly, confess your sin to Jesus. He will forgive you and give you a clean start.

FISHING LURES

I can't believe it! Andrew says he's a Christian, but I saw him looking at a bad website on his tablet today," Zane told his dad. "He must be really weak to look at that kind of stuff."

"So looking at websites like that doesn't appeal to you at all?" Dad asked.

"No way!" said Zane. "I don't have any problem staying away from that junk."

"I'm glad," Dad said as he put fishing rods into the trunk of the car. "Did you pack the trout flies?"

"Trout flies? I thought we were fishing for northern pike. You won't hook one of them with a trout fly!"

Dad grinned. "I can see you know a lot about fishing bait." He shut the trunk door. "So, what kind of bait do you need to look out for?"

"Me?" asked Zane.

Dad nodded. "Just like different fish are caught with different lures, different people are tempted to sin by different things. As you pointed out, Andrew is tempted by things he shouldn't look at online. So what are you tempted by?"

"Um..." Zane hesitated. "I don't know."

"Well, let's see. Why were you grounded last week?" asked Dad.

Zane's face grew warm. "I got upset at Macie and smashed one of her toys on the floor."

"And you got in trouble last month for pushing down a boy at school," said Dad. "So you have to watch out for a different lure than Andrew does—you're often tempted to hurt others when you feel angry."

Zane sighed. "I guess Andrew and I are a lot alike."

"You and Andrew and every other Christian," said Dad. "We all struggle with sin, but we're not all tempted by the same things. So instead of judging other Christians when they're tempted by certain sins, we need to encourage them and remind them that Jesus has freed us from sin. And if they do give in, we need to show them grace—just like Jesus does for us."

Zane nodded. "I'll do that next time I see Andrew looking at things he shouldn't—and ask him to do the same for me when I get angry."

"Good idea." Dad opened the car door. "Okay, jump in. Let's go get 'em!" ♥

Karen Ditthardt



CHRISTIANS STRUGGLE WITH DIFFERENT SINS | KEY VERSE: *Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.* James 1:14 (NIV)



What sins do you struggle with? You may not struggle with the same things your friends do, but all Christians struggle with temptation at times. Jesus tells us not to point a finger at others while ignoring our own shortcomings. Instead, we need to remind other Christians who they are in Jesus when they're tempted to sin—and be on the lookout for the things that tempt us.

GOD'S GIFTS



Cassie sat on the beach with her seagull in a cage at her side. She looked up at her mother, who was standing beside her. "I'm not sure I can let Howard go, Mom," she said. "He's just about the only friend I've got!" She sighed. "Some kids at school say I'm dumb because I have to go to special classes." Cassie looked down. "Why can't I be smart like other kids?"

Mom sat down and put her arm around Cassie. "You're very smart, honey. That word doesn't mean the same thing to everyone. Besides, our value isn't based on what we can do—it's based on who we are in Jesus and what He did for us on the cross. But He did also make each one of us special and give us our own gifts and talents."

Cassie wiped her eyes. "I don't have any gifts."

"Oh, but you do, Cassie!" Mom said. "I believe you have the wonderful gift of being able to help others."

"I do?" Cassie asked, wide-eyed.

Mom nodded. "You're very helpful to lots of people. When Grandma broke her hip, you went to her house almost every day to help out. You always remember to pray for kids at school who are sick—and look at Howard." Cassie looked down at the seagull. "Howard was badly injured when you found him," continued Mom, "and with help from the wildlife refuge, you nursed him back to health." Mom smiled. "The workers at the refuge said you have such a natural way of handling him that he's even become your friend. You've done such a good job, and now he's ready to be released. You're helpful in many ways."

Cassie shrugged. "Anyone would do those things."

Mom shook her head. "I wish that were true, but not everyone is that sensitive to the needs of others."

Cassie looked at Howard. "Well, Howard, how would you like your freedom?" She stood up and opened the cage, and the bird was soon in the air. He floundered a bit, then squawked what must have been a thank you and sailed out over the water. Cassie smiled. She would miss her little friend, but she was eager to see where she could use her special way with animals next. ♥ A.J. Schut



GOD GIVES GIFTS TO EVERYONE | KEY VERSE: *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church...gifts.* 1 Corinthians 12:27-28 (NIV)



Do you realize that everyone—including you—has special gifts from God? Maybe you think other kids are gifted because they get better grades or have greater athletic ability than you. But you're gifted too—God may have just given you different gifts than He gave those kids, like perhaps being friendly and encouraging others. Be thankful for the gifts God has given you and use them to help others.

ONLY A MIST

Jade stretched and yawned. Then she jumped down from her place on the top bunk and hurried to get dressed.

“Let’s go, troops!” yelled a cheery voice from outside. “We have many miles to cover on our morning hike.”

“How can Ella be so cheerful at seven o’clock in the morning?” asked Hayley, one of Jade’s cabinmates.

“I don’t know,” Jade answered, “but I like it. Her cheerfulness rubs off on me. Let’s go.”

Jade and Hayley joined the other campers as they gathered in front of the dining hall. “Good morning!” said Ella, their camp counselor. “Are you ready for our adventure? We’ll fix breakfast a little way down the trail.”

A few minutes later, they were off. “Make sure you stay on the trail,” Ella told the group. “There was a heavy mist last night, and everything is damp. The grass is pretty wet, and your feet will be too if you walk on it.”

“It’s not misty now,” said Hayley. “Isn’t it funny how mist just disappears?”

“Yeah—like a vapor,” said Jade. “I learned a verse at church that says life is a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”

“That’s right,” said Ella. “I know that verse too. It tells us how short life is—like a mist. And what did the mist do while it was here?”

“It made things wet,” Hayley replied. “It soaked the grass so much that we don’t want to walk on it.”

Ella nodded. “Right. And in a way, we soak our environment too. For example, do you know anyone who soaks you with joy?”

Jade spoke up quickly. “You do! You always soak me with your cheerfulness, Ella. You make me feel happy.”

Ella was surprised. “Why, thank you! But you know, the only reason I’m able to do that is because Jesus fills me with joy. Our lives may be short, but Jesus gives us the ability to soak other people’s lives with His love. When we trust in Him, He fills our short lives on this earth with great purpose—the purpose of helping others know He loves them and offers them eternal life with Him.” ♥ *Kathy A. Brand*



SHARE JESUS’S LOVE WITH OTHERS | KEY VERSE: *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.* John 13:34 (NIV)



What do you soak those around you with? Our time on earth may be short, but with Jesus, you can make a big difference in other people’s lives. When you trust in Him, He fills you with His love and joy so you can point others to Him. Even though life is short, trust Jesus to help you become more like Him so He can use your life for His great purpose.



ACTIVITY

Bingo Board of Love

In today's story we learned that Jesus fills us with love and joy so that we can share His love with others. But what might that look like in our everyday lives?

This bingo board has some examples of actions you can take to show God's love to those around you. Put it on your fridge or somewhere where you'll remember to look at it. Cross off the FREE SPACE in the center and see if you can get five in a row! (Bonus: See if you can cross off the whole board by the time you finish the devotional book.)

Ask someone in your family if you can help them	Get someone to laugh if they're having a rough day	Make something and give it to someone	Pray for a stranger	Tell your teacher they're doing a great job
Pray for a family member	Mail a postcard to someone	Help make a meal for your family or friends	Donate an old toy to a charity	Tell someone about Jesus
Hold the door open for the person behind you	Hang out with someone new	FREE SPACE Remember that Jesus loves you	Write a nice card to an elderly family member	Forgive someone who hurt you
Donate outgrown clothes	Pick up litter to make the space cleaner for others	Pray for a friend	Smile at people as they pass by	Ask someone how they're doing
Help your family with household chores	Memorize John 13:34	Encourage someone who is struggling	Call someone you haven't talked to in a while	Pick up after someone else



WHEN GOD SAYS NO

Gunner ran to the garage when he heard his parents drive in. “Is Grandpa okay?” he asked anxiously as they got out of the car.

Dad put his hand on Gunner’s shoulder. “Your grandfather isn’t suffering anymore,” he said quietly. “He died this afternoon—he’s in heaven now.”

Gunner swallowed hard, forcing back tears that choked his throat. He walked away while Dad was still talking.

In his room, Gunner thought about all the things he and Grandpa had planned to do. “It’s not fair!” he muttered. He looked up as Dad came in. “I don’t get it,” Gunner said. “I prayed all day for Grandpa. God can do anything, can’t He? So why didn’t He heal Grandpa?”

“Sometimes God’s answer to what we ask is no,” Dad said gently. “I don’t know why He didn’t heal Grandpa, but I know Jesus promises to be with us in our pain and sadness. Grandpa is in heaven with Him now, and someday we’ll see him again.”

Gunner turned away. He wasn’t ready to give up his grandfather. “But I wanted Grandpa to stay here with us.”

Dad sat down beside him. “When you ask Mom and me for something we don’t think is good for you, we tell you no. You don’t like it when we say no. You might be upset about it—maybe even angry sometimes. But you know we love you and want what’s best for you, right?” Gunner nodded. “We talk about what’s happening and how all of us feel, and we go on loving each other,” continued Dad. “We’re a family even though we disagree. Well, that’s how it is with God too. When we don’t get what we ask Him for, we’re unhappy and sometimes get angry with Him. It’s okay to tell Him how we feel, but we need to remember that God loves us so much He sent His Son to die for us. He wants what’s best for us—and for Grandpa.”

“But I’m going to miss Grandpa so much,” Gunner said, resting his face against his dad’s shoulder.

“Me too,” Dad said. “We can cry together.” Gunner slipped his arm around his dad and hung on tight. “But let’s thank Jesus that Grandpa is with Him now,” said Dad. “And let’s trust Him even though we’re hurting.” ♥ *Janet Boulter*



TRUST JESUS WHEN YOU’RE HURTING | KEY VERSE: *As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways.* Isaiah 55:9



Has someone you love died? Is someone sick? Tell Jesus about your hurts and fears. You may not always understand why He allows certain things to happen, but He will always be there with you and help you through times of pain and sorrow. Remember that He is good and that He loves and cares for you, even when you don’t understand.

WHAT YOU'RE WORTH

Sold!" proclaimed the fast-talking auctioneer, and Logan grinned at his mother. He found auctions fun and interesting, so he hadn't minded when she wanted to stop and see what was happening at this antique auction. "Another broken piece of junk sold to the highest bidder," Logan murmured, stifling a laugh. He liked to tease his mom about liking antiques.

Mom smiled and nudged him with her elbow. "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," she told him. Logan shrugged and continued sitting on his hands as the auctioneer began selling an autographed baseball. Logan had learned to avoid lifting his hand during the bidding. Earlier he had started to scratch his head and the auctioneer thought he was bidding on the item being auctioned.

As they drove home after the auction, Logan asked his mom why people were so willing to spend their money on other people's junk. "I can't believe how much they'll pay for that stuff," he said. "I thought a few things they sold at the auction were cool, but people paid less for them than for stuff I wouldn't want if it were given to me! Who decides how much those things are worth?"

"The condition of the piece is important," said Mom, "and whether the item is rare or not is also a factor. But the bottom line is...well, how much someone is willing to pay for it. That's really what determines how much an item is worth."

Logan thought for a moment. "That's kinda like something we talked about in my class at church last week," he said. "Our teacher explained that God sent His Son to die for us—Jesus paid for our sins with His own life. I guess that makes us worth a lot!"


"I like that, Logan," Mom said. "I think you got a lot from that auction—even though you didn't buy anything."


Logan had one more question. "Um, Mom, what did I almost buy today when I scratched my head?"

"An old record player," Mom replied.

"Oh." Logan paused. "What's a record player?" ♥ *Mike Dize*



 **YOU'RE WORTH WHAT JESUS PAID FOR YOU** | KEY VERSE: *You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.* 1 Corinthians 6:20

 Do you know how much you're worth? Because of what Jesus did for you, you're worth a lot—He paid a huge price for you! He gave His life to pay the price of your sin. Have you responded to that great love? Have you trusted Him as your Savior? If not, trust in Him today! (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.)

LIKE A FATHER

Good job!” Dad shouted to Ellery. He was holding on to her by a towel looped under her armpits as she practiced riding her two-wheel bike. Her tongue stuck out of her mouth in deep concentration as she tried to maintain her balance even with Dad’s support.

“Whoa!” she exclaimed, her eyes going wide. She started wobbling, but Dad held her upright as the bike went down to the ground. He hauled Ellery to her feet and smiled down at her. Ellery looked up at Dad and asked, “Again?”

Ellery practiced her biking skills for a while longer before they returned to the campsite just in time to grill some burgers over the fire. Meredith, her older sister, and Mom were just finishing up their quiet time when they arrived. Dad helped Ellery assemble her dinner just the way she liked it—two slices of cheese, three squirts of mustard, and four pickles.

“I read something interesting in my Bible today,” Meredith said as Ellery dove into her food.

Ellery made a strange gurgling sound that resembled the words, “What, what?” “Manners,” both Mom and Dad said in unison.

Meredith looked at her sister and shook her head before continuing. “I read that God is our Father. I think it’s cool there are so many different words in the Bible that describe who God is.”

“Do you know why God calls Himself our Father?” Mom asked.

“Because He made us!” Ellery jumped in, now having swallowed her delicious bite.


“You’re right,” Dad said. “And when we trust in Jesus, we become part of God’s family. The Bible also describes what kind of Father God is. He teaches us, encourages us, and is always with us.”

“Like how you helped me on my bike today!”

“Or how you helped me with my jump shot in basketball,” Meredith added.

Dad smiled at them. “Yes, but us human dads aren’t perfect. My dad hurt me a lot when I was younger, and I know I’m not perfect and have messed up too. But God never does that. He is the perfect Father.”

“He’s even better than you?” Ellery asked.

“Even better than you can imagine,” Dad responded as Ellery leaned her head against his arm.  *Zoe Brickner*



GOD IS OUR FATHER | KEY VERSE: *See what great love the Father has given us that we should be called God’s children. 1 John 3:1 (CSB)*



Do you have a loving dad in your life? If so, Father’s Day is the perfect time to thank God for that wonderful blessing—and tell your dad you’re thankful for him too! If you don’t have a dad in your life, or your relationship with him is difficult, know that God sees you and loves you more than you could ever know. Unlike human dads, God is a perfect Father. He cherishes you and will be with you always.

SPECIAL FRUIT SALAD

Mom, can we have fruit salad for lunch?" asked Brynlee. "Good idea," said Mom. "You can help me make it. We have lots of different kinds of fruit we can use today." As they began putting the fruit together, Mom had an idea. "Maybe we can put nine different kinds of fruit in our salad and pretend we're putting in the fruit of the Spirit," she said. "We learned about them in church last week, remember?"

"Yeah," said Brynlee. "I'll name them as we put them in." She put orange pieces into a big bowl. "I'll call these love," she said. Then she opened a can and added pineapple chunks. "These will be joy. What else do we have?"

"I have some fresh peach wedges ready," said Mom. "And here's a cantaloupe we can cut up."

Brynlee put in the peaches, calling them peace. She decided on patience for the cantaloupe. "The apples will be kindness, and the pears will be goodness," she said. "I'll slice some bananas and call them faithfulness."

"Okay, and you can add some of these grapes," said Mom. Brynlee called the grapes gentleness.

"We still need a fruit for self-control," said Brynlee. "But we don't have anything else, do we?"

Mom shook her head. "No, I don't think so," she said. "Unless..." She opened a cupboard door. "How about some dried cranberries?"

"All right!" said Brynlee. "Now we have something for each fruit of the Spirit."

"Good," said Mom. "You did a great job remembering them. You got them all!"


At lunchtime, everyone enjoyed the salad. "Good to the last bite," said Dad, popping the last piece of pineapple into his mouth.


"And now our fruit of the Spirit is all gone," said Brynlee.

"I hope not!" said Mom. "Spiritual fruit will always be a part of our lives as Christians. As we rely on the Holy Spirit to fill us with love and become more like Jesus, others will be able to see the fruit of God's love in us."

Dad nodded. "I pray that the fruit God produces in our lives will show people we belong to Him." ♥ *Linda Weddle*



 **DISPLAY THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT** | KEY VERSE: *The fruit that the Spirit produces in a person's life is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Galatians 5:22-23 (ERV)*

 Can others see the fruit of the Spirit in your life? People aren't able to see when you've had apples or peaches or other kinds of fruit for lunch, but the fruit of the Spirit should be visible in the life of every Christian. Are you letting others see the fruit of the love God has planted in your heart? Trust Him to help you let your words and actions show others you know Jesus.



TENT PEGS

Ryan helped his dad straighten the canvas of the tent that lay on the ground. “I love camping,” he said. “Sleeping in a tent is so cool!”

Dad smiled. “I think so too. Okay, help me get the pegs through these tent loops. We’ll pound the pegs in about halfway at first and then secure them when they’re all in place.”

Dad took one of the pegs and stuck it through a loop on the side of the tent. Ryan pounded it with the hammer. As Dad continued putting each peg in place, Ryan pounded it down. Then they put the poles together and raised the tent. “I can’t wait to go inside and get my sleeping bag rolled out!” said Ryan.

“Well, don’t try going in yet,” said Dad. “It could collapse on you. We need to pound the pegs deeper into the ground first, remember?”

Ryan nodded, and they got to work. When the tent was finally secured, they put their sleeping bags inside. Then they grabbed their fishing poles and headed for the river.

Around midnight, Ryan woke to the sound of distant thunder. He saw that Dad was awake too. “Our tent won’t blow down, will it?” Ryan asked.

“Oh, I don’t think so,” said Dad. “The wind is pretty gusty, but I don’t think it will get strong enough tonight to blow the tent away. The pegs will hold it in place.”

He was right. The wind soon died down and the storm passed, and Ryan and Dad went back to sleep.

“I’m glad we pounded those tent pegs in good and tight,” said Ryan as they enjoyed a campfire breakfast the next morning.

“Me too,” said Dad. “They kept our tent in place during the storm.” He smiled at Ryan. “Do you know who holds us steady through the storms of life?”

“Jesus does,” said Ryan. “If the wind got strong enough, the tent pegs might have let go, but nothing could ever make Jesus let go of us, could it?”

“No way,” said Dad. “He died for our sins and rose again so we could spend eternity with Him. No matter how many difficult things come into our lives, we can always count on Jesus to hold us steady and help us through them.” ♥

Pauline Youd



JESUS WILL ALWAYS HELP YOU | KEY VERSE: *For God has said, “I will never fail you. I will never abandon you.”* Hebrews 13:5 (NLT)



Has your life been shaken up by something difficult—divorce, a death in the family, crime, or the loss of a friend? Things like that can sometimes make life seem very dark and stormy. That’s when you need to remember that Jesus is still with you. He loves you and promises to help you through all of life’s storms. No matter what difficult circumstances you face, He will never let you go.

SECURITY BLANKET

Mae, I'd like you to put Miles down for his nap today," said Mom. "I need to make an important phone call."

"Okay," said Mae, smiling at her little brother. "Nap time!" she announced to the energetic little boy. Laughing, Miles toddled away, wanting his sister to chase him. Mae caught him quickly. "Sleepy time, buddy," she said, taking him to his crib. She hoisted him over the side and laid him down. Little Miles scrambled around on the mattress, ignoring soft toys and stuffed animals. He settled down when Mae patted his back for a few moments. "Sweet dreams," she whispered, backing out of the room.

Just as she was about to shut the door, Miles started crying. "Blankie!" he sobbed. "Blankie!" He pulled himself up and began to shake the railing.

Mae frowned. Where did he leave his blanket? She checked the TV room. She dug through the toy box. She searched the hall closet. She looked under the dining room table and on the chair seats. Finally, she found the blanket in a lower cupboard in the kitchen.

As soon as Mae handed Miles his blanket, he stopped crying. He clutched the blanket in his arms and dropped to the mattress. After a few shaky breaths, he smiled contentedly at Mae. "Sweet dreams," she said again as she left.

"Miles had to have his 'blankie' before he'd go to sleep," Mae told her mother later. "Good thing I found it or he never would have settled down."

"That blanket is his security," said Mom. "I guess we all need security—even grown-ups! We need to feel comfortable and cared for and safe. What's your security, Mae?"

"My security?" asked Mae in surprise. She shrugged. "You, I guess. I know you're here to help me if I need you." She grinned. "You're my 'blankie.' What's yours?"

"Well, we all find some security in family and friends, but a Christian's real security is in Jesus and His love and forgiveness. He cares for us, and He's always available. He saved us and promises to do what's best for us, even when we go through difficult times."

Mae nodded thoughtfully. "He's better than a blanket any day." ♥
Mary M. Ihlenfeldt



JESUS IS ALWAYS WITH YOU | KEY VERSE: *I [Jesus] am with you always, even to the end of the age.* Matthew 28:20



What's your security? People look for security in lots of places—money, possessions, government, and the people in their lives. But none of those things can provide real security—even the people who love you can't be with you all the time and make mistakes. Only Jesus can bring real security. He cares for you and will always be with you. Depend on Him.

RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB



Dad, my glasses broke!" Levi said. "Let me see," said Dad. "It looks like a screw needs tightening. I think I can fix them."

"I wish I could get new glasses like Justin's," Levi said. "The ones he got are really cool. He's always getting new things, and kids crowd around him to see his new stuff. With glasses like that, I'd be important like Justin."

"Well, let's see what we can do with these," said Dad. He set Levi's glasses on his workbench and reached for his toolbox. "For a job this important, I'll use my best tools." Dad lifted out a tray of screwdrivers, all of them in good condition. Dad was a carpenter, and he took good care of his tools. He pushed the tray toward Levi. "Which one should we use?"

Levi looked through the tray of short, long, wide, and narrow screwdrivers. None of them was the right size for the tiny screw. "None of these will work," he said.

"Are you sure?" asked Dad. "These are my very best tools."

"But they aren't the right ones for the job," said Levi.

"You're right." Dad pulled a tiny screwdriver out of a drawer and used it to tighten the small screw. "You know, getting new stuff to make us feel important is like using the wrong tool for the job. New stuff gets old and breaks, or someone else gets something better or more exciting than what we have. We might even find that other people just think our stuff is important and not us."

"So if getting new stuff is the wrong way to feel important, what's the right tool we should use?" asked Levi.

"The only way to truly feel loved and important is by receiving Jesus's gift of eternal life and embracing our identity in Him. He died and rose again to make us God's children, and that's a gift that will never break or wear out. Nothing will ever come along that's better. We're always loved and important to Him."

Dad handed Levi the repaired glasses, and Levi put them on. "Thanks, Dad," he said. "I can see much better now—and I see I'm important to Jesus. No new stuff needed." ♥ Heidi J. Schmidt



YOU ARE IMPORTANT TO JESUS | KEY VERSE: *Everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.* Philippians 3:8 (NLT)



Do you wish you had cool stuff so other people would notice you or like you more? Having something that others want may make us feel important for a time, but that feeling only lasts until something new comes along. You don't need anything new to get God's attention. Being His child makes you important to Him, and His love and acceptance of you will last forever.



MOM NEEDS HER COFFEE

Need you to move a little faster, Lincoln. What's taking you so long? This morning could not be going any worse, and you're not helping things at all."

Lincoln blinked back tears as his mom snapped at him for being too slow heading out to the van. One of his shoes had been hard to get on, so he was dragging his foot a bit, waiting until he was seated to fix it.

"I can't believe I overslept," Mom muttered to herself as they got into the van. "Today of all days, when I have a meeting with my boss..."

Lincoln got settled in the van and worked on adjusting his shoe. He had it fixed by the time his mom dropped him off at his grandma's house.

A few hours later, Mom returned to pick him up. "I'm sorry I was a little grumpy this morning, Lincoln." She held up a cup of an iced brown liquid. "I needed my morning coffee. I really can't go without that."

Lincoln sighed. "You needed it, Mom?"

"Yes. You know me and coffee; I can't function without it."

Lincoln followed his mom out to the van. "I thought the only thing we were supposed to need was Jesus."

"Hmm." Mom settled into the driver's seat. "Well, technically, He is all we need," she said. "But we have some earthly needs too."

Lincoln frowned. "Like coffee?"

Mom backed out of the driveway and started through town. She was quiet for a few minutes before she glanced back at Lincoln. "Okay, that's not a good excuse," she said. "I'm not a baby, crying because I need my milk at the start of the day. More importantly, Jesus gives me the power to love others the way He does. I should be able to be a loving and kind person without coffee. I'm sorry."

"I forgive you," Lincoln said. "And I'm sorry you overslept this morning."

"Everything worked out in the end," Mom said. "Right now I just need God's grace, huh? I need Him to forgive me for letting my bad morning and lack of coffee affect my attitude and lead to a case of the grumpies taking over." ♥

Emily Acker



LET JESUS BE ALL YOU NEED | KEY VERSE: *And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 4:19 (NIV)



What do you need each day in order to be kind and loving? Do you ever find yourself treating others badly because you're hungry, haven't slept well, or just want more time to yourself? Things like eating and sleeping well are important, but your greatest need of all is for Jesus. Trust Him to forgive your wrongs, meet your daily needs, and give you the power to show His love to others—even when you're tired or hungry.

FRUITS OF LABOR

Yum, your mangoes are the best, Nenek!” Eyes sparkling, Kira chewed the scrumptious mangoes her Indonesian grandmother had just peeled for her.

“You mean Kakek’s mangoes,” Nenek said, chuckling. “Your grandfather was the one who bought and planted the seeds in our backyard. The tree grew and grew, but no mangoes. Kakek persisted and kept fertilizing it though. It was only after his death that fruit buds bloomed. Too bad he never saw the fruits of his labor.”

Kira’s eyes dimmed as she thought of her grandfather, who died two years ago. “I miss Kakek.”

“Do you remember how he often took you to church?” said Nenek. “Even when his health started failing, he loved to take you and talk about what you learned afterward.”

Kira nodded. “I remember he took me to church two weeks before he was hospitalized. I didn’t want to go then—I was tired from a basketball tournament on Saturday night, which we lost. But on Sunday morning, Kakek showed up with a huge smile and convinced me to go.”

“I remember you were really down that night,” Nenek said. “You and your team worked so hard for that tournament.”

“Yeah—I thought of quitting basketball then. But then Kakek took me to church, and the sermon was on the parable of the bags of gold. Two of the servants were faithful with what God gave them and were able to make it grow. After church, Kakek said the parable was about using whatever God has given us—including our talents—to help more people know about Jesus. He told me about the time he lost a tennis match but kept on practicing and eventually won a game. He said his faith in Jesus kept him going and that he was trusting God to help him use his gifts however He wanted him to. It made me realize how much I needed Jesus. I asked Kakek to pray with me, and I became a Christian that day.” Kira’s face brightened. “I’m so glad I had him in my life, Nenek.” She wrapped her arms around her grandmother.

Nenek planted a kiss on Kira’s forehead. “So in the end, Kakek did see the fruits of his labor—not the mangoes, but you putting your faith in Jesus.” ♥ *Ruth Setyadi*



BE FAITHFUL AND PERSISTENT | KEY VERSE: *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.* Galatians 6:9 (NIV)



Have you ever worked at something but failed to see results? Perhaps it was a hard subject at school or a sport. Maybe you prayed for a family member or friend to trust in Jesus, but they continue to reject Him. Don’t give up. Be faithful and persistent in the things God has put on your heart to do, and trust Him with the fruits of your labor—whether you see them or not.



RUNNING ROUGH

What's wrong with the car, Daddy?" asked five-year-old Lydia as the family drove to their country home after a church service in the village. "It's jerking."

"It's sure running rough," said Dad. "It's been doing that lately, but it's never been this bad before."

"Are we going to make it home?" Lydia peered through the window at the trees lining the steep drop at the side of the road.

"Sure, we'll make it," said Lydia's older brother, Barrett. "We always do."

The car slowly climbed a long, steep hill. Dad pushed the accelerator pedal to the floor, but the car refused to speed up. Dad frowned. "I must say, I'm annoyed with myself for not checking this out sooner," he said. "I should have taken the car to the mechanic when I first noticed it wasn't running smoothly."

"I think it's getting worse," said Barrett. He wasn't so sure they'd make it home after all.

Mom sighed. "Well, at least we're close enough to home that we can walk the rest of the way if we have to, but we'd have a long uphill hike."

"I guess the car needs regular checkups just like we do," said Barrett. "Like Pastor Kim said in his sermon this morning—have a checkup every day, and if you see a trouble spot, take care of the problem before it gets worse."

"Our car needs a checkup every day?" Lydia asked, puzzled.

Barrett laughed. "No, we do! As we pray, read the Bible, and go to church, we need to be on the lookout for any trouble spots of sin that God may be pointing out to us. If we see any, we need to confess them to Him right away. Jesus will forgive us and help us fix them so we can run smoothly again."

To the relief of the whole family, the car kept going and they finally reached their driveway. "Well," said Dad, "I hope you'll remember this lesson about doing regular checkups in your life, because I don't intend to let this car teach us that lesson again. Tomorrow it goes to the mechanic to be fixed!" ♥ *Emilia D. Nichols*



EXAMINE YOUR LIFE DAILY | KEY VERSE: *Search me, O God...see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*
Psalm 139:23-24



Do you do regular checkups in your life? Do you spend time with the Lord in prayer, in His Word, and at church? When you do that, you may see trouble spots of sin in your life that don't match up to how He wants you to live. If so, confess them to Jesus and ask for forgiveness. Trust Him to help you turn away from sin. Then keep doing checkups to make sure you're living in a way that shows others His love.

WATERPARKS AND HOPE

"It's such a nice day," Adrianna said. "Look at the sunshine, Mom! Nate, don't you wish we could go to the waterpark today?"

Nate looked at his little sister. "It would be fun, but I'm sure Mom and Dad have other plans for the day."

"I'm not sure what our plans are," Mom said, taking a sip from her mug of coffee. "And it does look like a nice day."

"Can I ask Daddy if we can go to the waterpark?" Adrianna asked, carrying her cereal bowl to the sink.

"You can ask," Mom said. "I'm not sure what he's thinking for today though."

"Yay!" Adrianna skipped out of the kitchen. "The waterpark! The waterpark!" she sang.

Mom smiled at Nate. "She's sure abounding in hope, huh?"

"What?" Nate's forehead wrinkled. "What do you mean?"

"In the Bible, the apostle Paul writes to the church in Rome encouraging them to abound in hope," Mom said. "To abound in hope means to be filled with it."

"What kind of hope?" Nate asked. "Hope in what?"

"Hope in God," Mom said. "Paul reminds them that those who trust Jesus as their Savior have peace and joy and can be filled with hope because of His promises. It's a little like how Adrianna has hope your dad will say yes to a waterpark trip—she knows he loves her and enjoys doing good things for her."

"And we can have hope God will do good things for us?" Nate asked.

Mom nodded. "That doesn't mean He'll give us everything we ask for, but we can abound in hope knowing that He saved us, gave us His Spirit to be with us, and promises to do good things in our lives."

"Do you think Dad will say yes to the waterpark?" asked Nate.

Before Mom had a chance to respond, Adrianna bounded back into the room. "We're going to the waterpark!" she shouted.

Mom grinned. "Your sister's hope did not disappoint," she told Nate. "Just like God does not disappoint us when we hope in Him."

"The waterpark—yay!" Nate pumped a fist in the air. "And a God we can hope in." He glanced at his mom. "I'm happy for that too." ♥ *Emily Acker*



HAVE HOPE IN GOD | KEY VERSE: *Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.* Romans 15:13



Have you ever hoped for something? Did it work out the way you wanted, or were you disappointed? The Bible says that if you trust in Jesus, you can abound in hope knowing that He will never let you down. He saved you from sin and gave you eternal life, and He promises to always be with you. Let the joy, peace, and hope of knowing Him fill your life as you trust Him to do good things.

IN QUEBEC

I can't even understand what they're saying," Ezra said as he and his family entered the church building. His family's car had broken down just over the Canadian border, so they now had to go to church at a place in Quebec, Canada, that his dad had heard about. Everything about the church seemed different to Ezra—the language most of all.

When everyone started singing hymns, Ezra's dad passed him a book that said *Cantiques* on the front. "It's a hymnbook," Dad said. He flipped to the correct page and pointed to a line of words in the song. Ezra tried to follow along with the French song, but none of the words made any sense to him.

Later, after church was over, Ezra noticed someone waving to him as he and his family left. He waved back, and his dad asked, "Who's that?"

"Oh, that's Jacque," Ezra explained. "I met him in Sunday school. He helped me understand the French on the papers the teacher handed out whenever there wasn't English underneath it."

"I see," his dad said. "I suppose it was a bit confusing for you in the church service and in Sunday school."

"You can say that again," Ezra replied.

"Going to church in a different country is an interesting experience, isn't it?" said Dad. "Though it can be confusing when things are different from what we're used to or we don't understand what's being said, it's good for us to worship God with Christians from other places in the world. We're all part of God's church and are brothers and sisters in Christ, who saved us by dying for our sins. We worship God in the same way, just in different places and languages." Dad smiled. "In fact, the apostle John wrote in the book of Revelation that there will one day be countless people of every nation, tribe, and language worshiping Jesus in heaven."

"Including people from Quebec who speak French?" Ezra asked.

"That's right." Dad turned to see Jacque and his family leaving. "By the way, *au revoir* means 'goodbye' in French."

"*Au revoir*, Jacque!" Ezra called.

"*Au revoir*, Ezra!" Jacque called back. "I hope to see you again!" ♥ *Ethan Terry*



CHRISTIANS LIVE AROUND THE WORLD | KEY VERSE: *I saw a vast*

crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb.

Revelation 7:9 (NLT)



Have you ever attended a church in a different country or where a different language was spoken? Church is not simply a building—God's church is made up of everyone who trusts in Jesus, and He saves people from all over the world. Though we worship Jesus in different places and languages, we are all part of God's family, and one day we will worship Him together in heaven.

INCREDIBLE SAGUAROS (PART 1)

Rylee leaned back to see the top of the huge saguaro cactus next to her. Its spiny arms reached out and up toward the sky. “With so many big arms, this thing should be holding something. Try sitting on one of its arms, Easton,” Rylee said with a grin.

“No way!” said Easton. “I’m not sitting on those prickly things!”

“Those arms,” said Dad, “are holding what is probably the most valuable thing in the entire region.”

“And I know what it is,” Easton said. “Water! Cactus plants can live in the dry, hot desert by storing water inside their trunk and arms.”

“That can’t be right,” said Rylee, looking around at the sand and rocks. They extended as far as she could see. “There’s no water here!”

“Easton is right,” said Dad. “Cactus roots don’t go very deep into the earth. Instead, they go down only about three feet and then spread out about a hundred feet in all directions. The spread-out roots draw in every drop of rain, sending it to a hidden storage area in the arms and trunk of the cactus. That inner water supply is what keeps this cactus alive and growing. These big fellas can soak up as much as two hundred gallons of water—enough to last them a whole year!”

“Yeah, that’s why they’re pleated like an accordion,” Easton said, eager to show his knowledge. “The pleats expand as the spongy material inside absorbs water.”

“That’s incredible!” said Rylee. “Well, Mr. Cactus, I can see you’re a pretty smart guy!”

Dad smiled. “One with a good lesson for us about the importance of storing things.”

“About storing water?” asked Easton. “I don’t really mind carrying a water bottle—and I like the size of my arms the way they are!”

Dad laughed. “I wasn’t thinking of your arms, Easton. Let’s try your heart! I hope both of you will store God’s Word in your heart and mind. Then when things get difficult, you can draw from those words of hope, comfort, and guidance. Knowing God’s Word helps us remember what Jesus has done for us and that He’s always with us. Like water in a dry desert, it will nourish you and help you grow in your relationship with Him.” ♥ *Trudy Vander Veen*



SOAK UP GOD’S WORD | KEY VERSE: *Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.* Psalm 119:11



Have you been growing spiritually? Are you storing God’s Word in your heart by reading the Bible and memorizing verses? Storing God’s Word in your heart will help you understand how much Jesus loves you and who you are in Him. Read and study it so He can use it to guide you in your life, comfort you in hard times, and remind you of His promises.

INCREDIBLE SAGUAROS (PART 2)

Look!" said Rylee, stepping back from the huge saguaro cactus. "There's something in that hole!"

Dad and Easton came over to see. Sure enough, a pair of blinking yellow eyes peered back at them from a hole in the trunk of the cactus.

"I think it's a screech owl," said Easton. "We learned that woodpeckers peck holes into cactuses when they make their nests. Then after they leave, other birds move into the empty holes and live there."

Dad nodded. "Each time the cactus skin is broken—like when a woodpecker makes a hole—a thick gluey liquid seeps out and forms a waterproof pouch. The liquid hardens, kind of like a scab, to make the pouch permanent. Inside the hole it's cooler in the day and warmer at night, so it makes an ideal home for desert birds."

Rylee saw big and little holes in the arms of one of the cactuses—they were everywhere. "This saguaro is like a high-rise apartment building!" she said with a laugh. "What a crowded place to live."

Easton grinned. "Just like our house."

Rylee nodded thoughtfully. Grandma had recently moved into their house, and Julia, a single mom who went to their church, was going to be living with them for a while with her two-year-old son, Wilder.

Rylee remembered the discussion they'd had about Julia and Wilder coming. "You're kidding!" Rylee had said. "Where are they going to sleep?"

"Well, they will need to move into your room, and you'll have to share a room with Easton." Dad patted Rylee's hand when he saw the look on her face. "It's only for a while until Julia can get back on her feet. We'll all have to make some sacrifices, but that's often necessary when we're called to love others like Jesus, who sacrificed everything for us. Pray about it, will you?"

Rylee had tried, but she hadn't felt comfortable praying. She knew she was being selfish. But now Rylee looked at the big saguaro that offered a home to any creature who needed it, even if it meant having holes pecked into its walls. *I won't complain, she thought. Even if Wilder pounds holes into our walls too—and knowing him, I'm sure he will!* ♥ Trudy Vander Veen



MAKE SACRIFICES FOR OTHERS | KEY VERSE: *No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.* 1 Corinthians 10:24 (NIV)



Are you willing to give up some of your comforts or conveniences to help others? Try to put yourself in their shoes and consider how you might feel if you needed help and no one was willing to give it. When we needed to be rescued from sin, Jesus sacrificed His life to save us. Trust Him to help you love others the way He does and be willing to make sacrifices for them.



DO YOU BELONG?

Max opened his car window and smelled pine trees. Mom and Dad sang their old camp song about a cowboy and his one-eyed horse. Max usually sang along. But today the lyrics caught in his throat.

Mom and Dad's stories of camp made Max feel like he knew the place even though he'd never been there. He couldn't wait to come to Bible camp. But now as camp came into view, he wasn't so sure.

"It's too bad the other boys from church couldn't come with you," Mom said.

Dad parked the car and patted Max on the shoulder. "You're going to love it here!" Max felt funny inside as he watched Mom and Dad drive away.

Max met his counselor, who showed him around his cabin. "Okay, Mike, here's your bunk."

He doesn't even know my name, Max thought. Nobody here does. I don't belong here.

The counselor shouted, "Campers! Time to meet out by the lake. Bring your Bibles. Move out!"

In the noisy crowd, everyone seemed to be with friends. No one spoke to Max.

At the beach, the camp director blew a whistle and shouted, "Bibles up! First one who turns to Isaiah 43:1, whistle the cowboy song!" A moment later Max and most of the other boys started whistling. The director pointed to Max. "Read the last part of verse one."

Max read, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine."

The director nodded at Max and said, "Even though I don't know this camper's name, God does. And God knows each of your names. He knows all about you because He made you. He sent His Son, Jesus, to save you. This is the theme verse for camp this week, so we're going to memorize it and talk about it every day. It shows that God loves you and wants you to belong to Him."

Max prayed silently, "God, I know I belong to You—thank you for saving me and always being with me. Please help me feel like I belong here too."

On the way back to the cabin, a boy walked up to Max. "You must be new here," he said. "I'm Oliver."

Max smiled and said, "My name is Max." ♥ *Laura Roesler*



GOD KNOWS YOU AND WANTS YOU | KEY VERSE: *Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine. Isaiah 43:1 (CSB)*



Do you ever feel like an outsider and that people around you don't really know you? No one knows you better than God. He made you and wants to have a relationship with you because He loves you. Whenever you feel like you don't belong, remember that God wants you to belong to Him. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.) Trust Him to be with you when you feel alone and afraid.

IT'S A BIRD, IT'S A PLANE!

Annie leaned her forehead against the cool windowpane of the airport in Sicily. She sighed as she watched yet another large airplane taxi down the runway and fly off into the big blue sky. Her family had been detoured on the way back to the States from Africa where they were missionaries, and it felt like they had been stuck in the airport for weeks instead of days.

“Vroom, vroom!” Her younger brother, Bryce, flew past her with his arms extended and accidentally bumped her elbow.

“Knock it off, Bryce!” Annie said irritably.

“Hey, what’s the problem?” Dad asked, coming over.

Annie sighed again. “It feels like we’ve been at the airport *forever* and God has forgotten about us!”

Dad nodded thoughtfully. “I know it feels that way right now, but God is working out just the right flight for us to get on.” He looked out the airport window as another plane took off. “Did you know the Bible talks about wings?”

Bryce stopped making airplane noises and looked at Dad. “Like airplane wings?”

Dad smiled. “These are a different type of wings. Do you remember the story in the Bible about the people of Israel getting ready to go into the land God had promised them? They had waited a very long time—longer than we’ve waited here! God reminded them of how He had taken care of them before, just like an eagle takes care of its young by carrying them on its wings. And God will always take care of us too. Jesus died and rose from the dead to make us God’s children, and He won’t ever forget about us. He promises to help us in every situation.”

“Wow. I never thought of it like that before,” Annie said.

“Me neither,” said Bryce.

“Speaking of wings,” Dad said, “I think I’ll go make another phone call and see if we’ll be able to get on one of those airplanes today.”

As he walked away, Bryce got a silly look on his face. “Hey, Annie, what do you think the eagle said to Dad when the phone rang?”

Annie shrugged. “I don’t know. What?”

“Wing, wing!”

Bryce and Annie’s laughter echoed in the airport as they relaxed, knowing both their dad and their heavenly Father were taking care of them. ♥ *Kelly Hope*



GOD TAKES CARE OF YOU | KEY VERSE: *You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Exodus 19:4 (NIV)*



Have you ever been stuck in a hard situation and wondered if God had forgotten about you? It may feel like that sometimes, but He promises to care for you and work things out for the best. The next time you hear the sound of an airplane or see a bird flying in the sky, remember that God sent His own Son to save you and promises to always take care of you.



HEAVY LOAD

Julian cheered in excitement at the tractor pulling contest. One of the contestants—a friend of Julian’s family—revved the engine as his tractor strained to pull the heavy load. It inched along, then gathered speed to the finish line. “He made it!” Julian shouted, and he clapped along with others in the crowd.

“The next load he has to pull will be heavier,” Grandpa said.

The driver revved the engine again, and it moved slowly forward. The load behind the groaning tractor was dragged at a snail’s pace to the finish line. Julian shot up from his seat and cheered.

He grew anxious as he watched the workers add more weights to the next load. The driver powered up the engine, but nothing happened. Again the engine roared, but the load didn’t budge. The driver hunched over the wheel as if to coax the tractor into one last try before time was up. Julian felt like he was in the contest himself, and he yelled encouragement as the tractor began to inch forward. Slowly, slowly it went, until at last it reached the finish line. It had moved a heavier load than any other tractor. The crowd went wild.

Over hot dogs and pop, Grandpa and Julian talked about the contest. “It made me think about the struggles we have in life,” said Grandpa. “Sometimes our loads are almost too heavy for us to pull.”

Julian nodded, thinking about the hard time he had in reading class at school. He just couldn’t read as well as the other kids. After getting his last report card, Julian had gone to his room and cried.

Grandpa smiled at him. “Way back when I was your age, I found out that Jesus wants to help us pull heavy loads—the hardships we face in life. So I ask Him to help me whenever I feel like things are just too much. The problems don’t always disappear, but they seem lighter when I remember that Jesus, who took the burden of my sin by dying on the cross, wants to help me with any struggles that are weighing me down.”

Julian smiled back at Grandpa, knowing what he had to do. He would talk to Jesus about his struggle to read. He needed help with his heavy load. ♥

Carolyn E. Yost



JESUS LIGHTENS LOADS | KEY VERSE: *Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.* 1 Peter 5:7 (NLT)



Does something in your life seem too heavy to bear? Talk to Jesus about it. He wants to help you with your troubles. Maybe He’ll take the burden away—but maybe not. Perhaps He’ll simply comfort you and make your burden easier to bear as you trust Him with it. Whenever you feel overwhelmed, ask Him for help and trust that He’ll lighten your load.

HIDDEN FRUIT

The sun was just poking its head over the treetops when Savannah and her mother left for a walk in the woods near their new home. “I didn’t understand what Dad read in the Bible this morning,” Savannah said. “Why can’t we just skip the parts of the Bible that don’t seem to say anything important?”

Mom was about to reply when Savannah spotted some interesting bushes along the path. “Look, Mom. Those are some kind of berry bushes, aren’t they?”

Mom stopped and peered at the bushes. “I think they might be, but I don’t see any fruit on them.”

Savannah reached out and lifted some of the leaves. “Here! Underneath the leaves.”

“You’re right!” said Mom. “Those are wild blackberries! They’d taste great on our cereal—or just as a snack. How about running back to the house and getting a bucket so we can pick some?”

Savannah eagerly ran home and returned with a pail, and she and Mom began to gather the ripe, luscious fruit. “I’m glad your sharp eyes noticed these,” said Mom. “I saw the green leaves, but I didn’t see what was hidden underneath them.” She dumped a handful of berries into the bucket. “Maybe that’s the answer to the question you asked a while ago.”

“You mean about skipping parts of the Bible?” asked Savannah.

Mom nodded. “When we read the Bible, we don’t always understand every important truth right away—just like I didn’t spot those berries. But when we take time to think about what a verse or passage says, it can help us see how it fits into God’s story of how He continues to love us even though we sin. Everything in the Bible points to God’s gift of Jesus, who became human and died and rose again to save us. Every passage can teach us something about Jesus and our need for Him. That’s why we read all the parts of the Bible.”

“When we get back home, maybe I should read that Bible passage from this morning again,” said Savannah.

“Why don’t we read it together?” suggested Mom. “We can eat fruit from this bucket while we look for spiritual fruit in the Bible!” ♥ *Judith K. Boogaart*



LEARN FROM ALL OF THE BIBLE | KEY VERSE: *All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives.* 2 Timothy 3:16 (NLT)



Are some parts of the Bible hard for you to understand? The Bible is full of poems, stories, and events that all reveal God’s faithful love. Each one is important, but some can be difficult to understand on our own. That’s why it’s important to study the Bible with other Christians and depend on God for help. When you come across something that’s confusing, ask God to give you understanding, and ask a trusted adult to help you too.

DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT

Mom, I'm really worried about Charlotte," Anna said as she sat down at the table. Charlotte and Anna were best friends and did everything together.

"What's going on?" Mom asked as she added ingredients into the mixer.

"Well, she's been having a lot of headaches lately. I'm worried there might be something seriously wrong with her. What if she has cancer or something?"

Mom plopped a scoop of raw cookie dough onto a tray. "It sounds like you've been doing a lot of worrying about this."

"It's all I can think about, Mom! I'm just so afraid something bad is going to happen to Charlotte. I can't imagine life without her."

Mom brought the tray of cookie dough to the table and sat down. "Have you prayed about it?" she asked.

"Um, well—no," Anna said.

Mom sighed. "Well, I've been pretty worried too lately. Tomorrow is your school bake sale, and I'm worried these cookies won't get baked in time!"

Anna glanced at the clock. "Mom, you have plenty of time. They don't take that long to bake—just put them in the oven."

"I guess I could, but I'd rather just sit here and worry about it," Mom said.

Anna gave her mom a puzzled look. "Mom, you're being silly!"

Mom smiled. "You're right, it's silly to sit here and worry when there's something I could do about the problem. But you're doing the same thing. You're not helping your friend at all by worrying about her. You can help by doing something about it and praying for her."

Anna knew her mom was right, and the two took a moment to pray for Charlotte. Then Anna helped bake the cookies and bag them up for the sale.

The next day Anna came home smiling. "Mom, guess what! Charlotte's mom took her to the doctor yesterday, and it turns out she's been having headaches because she needs glasses—not because she's dying from some disease."

Mom smiled. "So all that worrying for nothing?"

Anna nodded. "You were right, Mom. I should have done something about it and prayed for her in the first place." ♥ *Melissa Yeagle*



PRAY ABOUT YOUR WORRIES | KEY VERSE: *Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.* Philippians 4:6 (NLT)



When you or someone you know has a problem, do you worry about it? Why not do something about it instead—pray! God is in control of everything, and He loves you so much He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for you. You can bring all your worries and concerns to Him. He'll always do what's best and be with you through everything.

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

KEEP READING AND FILLING IN YOUR CALENDAR FOR
A CHANCE TO WIN PRIZES. WORDWITHZACH.ORG

DOUBTING WAVES

I'm not sure I can catch this wave," Caleb yelled to his uncle as the ocean waves roared. The wind was getting stronger, and it was hard to hear. Dark clouds rolled in from above, blocking the sunshine. Caleb gripped the edges of his surfboard. This surfing lesson wasn't going well. He wanted to do what his uncle taught him and stand up on his board and ride the wave, but it seemed impossible. "Uncle Luke, I've slipped three times, and my arms are exhausted from paddling! I don't think I'm strong enough."

Uncle Luke swam over to Caleb. "Let's take a break, and then I'll help you. I know it's scary, but trust me—I've been surfing a long time and know what I'm doing. Can you do that?"

Caleb nodded. They bobbed on their boards for a minute before Uncle Luke continued. "You know, Caleb, life is hard sometimes, just like surfing. When scary doubts build up, or the winds blow and it's hard to hear God's voice, we can share our fears with Jesus. He wants us to have faith in Him instead of ourselves. He is perfect, and we can always trust Him because He gave His life to save us and promises He will never leave us."


"Thanks for the reminder, Uncle Luke," Caleb replied with a smile. "Sometimes life makes me feel even weaker and more exhausted than surfing does!"


"We all feel that way sometimes," Uncle Luke said. "But when we look to Jesus to help us through hard times in life, the Holy Spirit strengthens us. Just like when I push you into the waves, hold onto your surfboard and look up, not down. Okay, ready to paddle?"

"Yeah!" Caleb replied. This time, he trusted his uncle's advice and focused on that instead of his doubts. He paddled hard and slowly stood up in the air. He caught a wave!

Caleb popped out of the water with a smile, "Hey, Uncle Luke! Thanks for reminding me that I don't have to doubt. When I'm afraid, I can trust in Jesus." ♥
Grace Thomas



 **HAVE FAITH IN JESUS** | KEY VERSE: *But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.* James 1:6

 Do you trust in God when life gets rough? Or does your heart constantly change like the waves of the sea? You may feel discouraged when faced with a challenging situation, and that's okay. Remember, Jesus understands what you're going through and promises to be with you wherever you go. You don't have to be afraid or doubt in the rocky waves of life. Look to Jesus for the help and strength you need.

SPARKLING CLEAN

Rosita wiped sweat from her forehead, then got back to scrubbing the pot in the sink. She was working as hard as she could to clean the kitchen before Mom got home. They'd had a fight that morning, and Rosita was sorry for the things she'd said. She sighed and scrubbed harder. *I want this kitchen sparkling clean when Mom gets home from work, she thought. That'll make up for it.*

She glanced into the living room where her little brother was watching cartoons. "Hugo, bring your plate and cup here so I can wash them. And I just mopped the floor, so be careful!"

But Hugo wasn't careful. He ran in and slipped when his socks hit the wet floor. His plastic dishes went flying into the air as he went sprawling across the kitchen, milk and crumbs raining down on top of him.

Rosita gasped. "Hugo!"

Just then the door opened and Mom walked in. "Wow," she said. "What a mess."

Rosita covered her face with her soapy hands and burst into tears. Mom and Hugo stared at her for a moment before Mom sent him upstairs to wash the milk out of his hair. "Rosita, what's wrong?" Mom asked.

"I—I've been working hard to clean the kitchen all afternoon. I wanted everything to be sparkling clean when you got here because I felt bad about what I said this morning. I wanted to make things right."

"Oh, honey." Mom gave her a hug. "You don't have to clean the kitchen to make things right with me. You're my daughter—I love you, and I'll always forgive you. But I know the feeling. In fact, I used to try to do the same thing with God. I thought I could make up for my wrongs by doing something right. But it wasn't enough."

"Because the only way to make things right with God is through Jesus, right?"

"You got it," said Mom. "When we trust Him to save us, He forgives our sins and makes us sparkling clean."

Rosita nodded. "I'm sorry for what I said this morning, Mom. Will you forgive me?"

"Of course." Mom grabbed a mop from the closet. "And now I'm going to make this kitchen sparkling clean!" ♥ Courtney Lasater



ONLY JESUS MAKES THINGS RIGHT | KEY VERSE: *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* 1 John 1:9



Are you working hard to make things right with God? Are you trying to do good things so He'll forgive you for the bad things you've done? No matter what you do, it won't make up for your sin. Only Jesus can make you right with God. He died and rose again so you could be forgiven and have all your sins washed away. Confess your sin and trust in Him, and He will forgive you. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.)

WHERE'S THE PARADE?

Mom, I see the parade! It's coming!" Millie squealed with excitement and grabbed hold of her little brother's hand. "James, get ready, because they're going to throw candy right at us and we can put it in our bags, okay?"

James nodded and grinned. Millie looked down the street and hopped up and down in anticipation.

"Just be patient, honey," Mom called from her lawn chair. "It will be here soon."

Millie craned her neck to see down the street. The parade was still far away, but she could make out flags, cars, floats, and even a fire truck. She could faintly hear a drum and knew the band was marching her way.

Suddenly, she gave a little shriek of dismay. "It turned! They're going down a different street. They're not coming here!"

"What?" Dad jumped up and looked down the street, and Millie noticed everyone else getting up and looking around in confusion. "Come on, Millie!" Dad scooped up James, and they ran to the next block just as the parade arrived.

Millie forgot about all the confusion until they walked home afterward. "Mom, why didn't the parade go by where we were sitting at first? Were we in the wrong place?"

Mom laughed. "No, we were on the right street. I think the person at the front of the parade got a little confused and made a wrong turn. Good thing we caught up and didn't miss anything, right?"

"Right!" said Millie. "It was so much fun, and I got lots of candy!"

"You know, wrong turns like that can happen in our lives," Dad said. "The people in the parade all trusted that the person in front would go the right way, but they didn't. We can go the wrong way too by following people—like leaders or friends at school—because what they're doing *seems* right but isn't."

Mom nodded. "There's only one Person who can lead us the right way. Do you know who that is?"

"Jesus!" Millie and James both shouted.

"Right," said Mom. "When we know Him as our Savior, He forgives our wrong turns in life and makes us able to love others the way He does. We need to follow Him as He leads us in His example of love." ♥ *Robyn Mulder*



FOLLOW JESUS, NOT PEOPLE | KEY VERSE: *Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children.* Ephesians 5:1 (NIV)



Who do you follow? Friends? Celebrities? Influencers? Looking to other people as examples of how to live will only lead you in the wrong direction, because they are sinners just like you. Only Jesus is perfect. He died and rose again to save you from sin and give you eternal life, and He will lead you in loving others the way He does. Follow His example and trust God to help you be more like Him each day.



THE MIME

After Baker and his mom got off the Ferris wheel, they joined a group of people crowding around a man with a painted face acting out various skits. Baker laughed with the crowd as the man pretended to be learning to ride a bike. But he wondered why the man didn't say anything. "Mom, why doesn't he talk?"

"Because he's a mime," Mom replied. "They never talk, but you can tell by their actions what they're doing."

Next, the mime pretended to wash a window. He acted as though he bumped his head on the pretend ladder. Later, he appeared to be eating an ice cream cone—and shot the crowd a look of dismay when the ice cream fell off. The crowd laughed and applauded as he acted out one scenario after another. The show ended with the mime making a sad face and waving goodbye to the crowd.

Baker turned to his mom. "Wow! He never said a thing, but I could figure out everything he was doing."

"Actions say a lot," said Mom. "Do you remember the story in the Bible about the Good Samaritan?"

"Sure," said Baker. "It's a story Jesus told about a man who needed help on the side of the road. Two people went by without helping him, and then a Samaritan came along and did all he could to help him."

"Right," said Mom. "And if the two people who had passed by earlier had said they cared about that man, would you have believed them?" Baker shook his head. "Jesus told that story to show how we should love others," Mom continued. "Saying you care about someone isn't enough—you also need to show them you care through your actions."

Baker's eyes widened. "So the Good Samaritan was really a mime?"

Mom laughed. "Well, I'm sure he didn't paint his face and perform funny skits, but he did communicate his love for others through his actions. Jesus did that too by taking the punishment for our sins on the cross so we could be saved. His sacrifice showed that His words of love for us were true. Let's let others know we care about them through both our words and our actions." ♥ *Annette S. Bury*



ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDLY | KEY VERSE: *Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.* 1 John 3:18 (NIV)



How do you let others know you care about them? It's good to tell people you care, but it's not enough. In Jesus's parable, the Good Samaritan showed how much he cared by going to great lengths to help the injured man. Now that's loud love! That's the kind of love Jesus showed us when He died for our sins. What can you do to turn up the volume and show others you care?

THE ARROWHEAD

Alfie hoisted himself up onto a ledge of crumbling granite and collapsed on a small patch of mossy grass. “That was quite a climb!” he said as he rubbed his aching legs. “Aren’t you tired, Uncle Don? We’ve hiked a long way.”

“We’ll catch our breath for a few minutes before we head back,” said Uncle Don. He took off his backpack and set it down.

Alfie picked up some stones. “Look at this!” he said. Uncle Don knelt beside him, and they looked at the stone Alfie held in his hand. It was shaped like a triangle and came to an unmistakable point. “It’s a real arrowhead, isn’t it?” said Alfie.

“Sure looks like it to me,” said Uncle Don.

Alfie brushed the dirt and dust from the stone and held it up so that the light glinted off its edges.

“You know,” said Uncle Don, “the man who made that arrowhead carefully chiseled it, and he knew just how he wanted to use it.”

Alfie looked at his uncle. “He would have used it for hunting, wouldn’t he?”

Uncle Don nodded. “I imagine so. He would have had a specific purpose for that arrowhead, and I’m quite sure it accomplished its purpose. He probably used it to get food for his family.” Uncle Don smiled. “Can you think of any lesson we can learn from that?”

“Hmm—shoot straight when you hunt?” Alfie said with a grin. “Though that’s probably not the kind of lesson you’re talking about.”

Uncle Don laughed. “You’re right. I think this arrowhead should remind us that someone made us for a special purpose.”

“Yep,” said Alfie. “God did!”

“That’s right,” said Uncle Don. “You’re far more important than a simple arrowhead, Alfie, and God has a wonderful plan for your life. He created you with loving care, and He sent His Son to save you from sin and give you eternal life. He’s using all your life experiences to shape you to be more like Jesus so you can serve Him the way He wants you to. Whenever you look at your arrowhead, remember that God has a purpose for your life and will be there to guide you every step of the way.”

Alfie put the arrowhead in his pocket. “I will.” ♥ *Christi B. Kehn*



GOD HAS A PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE | KEY VERSE: “*For I know the plans I have for you,*” declares the LORD, “*plans...to give you hope and a future.*”
Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)



Did you know that God has a special plan for your life? God made you and sent His Son, Jesus, to save you from sin, and He has plans for you. Talk with Him every day and ask Him for guidance. Read the Bible to learn more about Him and how He wants you to live. Stop and thank Him for something wonderful in your life. Trust Him to shape you into the person He wants you to be.

WE ARE SHEEP (PART 1)

Chloe gasped as the car rounded the mountain road and the French Alps were fully displayed. “I’ve never seen anything so majestic!”

Dad parked the car next to a rustic cabin. The cabin door opened and a man with dark curly hair and a beard exited with arms outstretched. “John! Come and hug your old friend!”

Chloe hung back, watching the happy reunion until the men turned to her. “Chloe, meet my old college friend, Jules! The last time we got together you were just a baby.”

“You can call me Uncle Jules if you wish, Chloe. My, you are growing up quickly!”

“Do we really get to stay a whole week and help you care for your sheep? Dad says you have over a thousand! I read that shepherding is a difficult job. What’s your favorite part about it?”

Jules threw up his hands and laughed. “Whoa! I’m not used to all these questions. The sheep aren’t nearly as chatty.” Jules winked at Chloe. “I’m happy to tell you all about it over a nice cup of coffee.”


The next morning, Chloe was bundled and ready for a day of shepherding. After a few hours, she collapsed on the ground dramatically. “How do you not get bored, Uncle Jules?”

Jules chuckled. “It takes a certain type of personality to do this day after day, but I actually enjoy all this stillness. I have plenty of time to memorize God’s Word out here and reflect on His goodness.”

“Kind of like David did,” said Chloe. “He was a shepherd too. Didn’t he write that famous psalm about sheep?”

Jules nodded. “Psalm Twenty-Three.”

“David compares us to sheep in the psalm,” Dad pointed out. “And the Lord is our shepherd. When we had wandered away and were lost in sin, Jesus gave His life to save us, and He promises to guide us and take care of us.”

Jules pulled a small, worn Bible out of his coat pocket and opened it to Psalm 23. Chloe read it aloud through verse three. “Today we are living out this psalm!” she said. “This morning you put salt out so the sheep could follow the route you wanted them to take. Just like you lead them on safe terrain, God guides us on the right paths.”  Savannah Coleman



JESUS IS OUR GOOD SHEPHERD | KEY VERSE: *He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake.* Psalm 23:3 (NIV)



Have you ever thought about how much we are like sheep? Just like sheep, we want to go our own way and are prone to getting lost. We need a shepherd to keep us on the right path, and that shepherd is Jesus. He took the punishment for our sins to make us His sheep, and He guides us and provides for us. When we spend time in His presence, He refreshes our souls. How will you choose to follow the Good Shepherd today?

COLOR!



WE ARE SHEEP (PART 2)

Evening descended swiftly on the French Alps. Chloe snuggled closer to her dad as the two of them and her dad's friend Jules huddled around a fire for warmth. "Another good thing about being a sheep is all that wool to keep you warm," Chloe said.

Jules nodded. "It's almost time to put them in their pen for the night. If I wait until it gets too dark, the wolves come out."

Chloe's eyes widened. "Have you ever had to fight a wolf, Uncle Jules?"

He nodded solemnly. "Fortunately, I was able to save the lamb. The sheep know they are safe when they stay close to me, just like we are safe with Jesus, our shepherd."

"That doesn't mean bad things won't happen to us," Dad interjected. "Everyone goes through darkness and tough times. But our Good Shepherd promises to be with us through every dark valley we encounter."

"So we don't need to fear, just like David wrote in Psalm Twenty-Three," Chloe said softly. "Uncle Jules, what about the verse where David talks about God anointing his head with oil? What does that have to do with sheep?"

Jules grinned. "Do you think Chloe can handle this, John?"

"It's kind of gross, Chloe," Dad warned.

"I can handle it!"

"We have different medicine now, but back in David's day, shepherds used to pour oil over the sheep's heads to protect them from bugs," said Jules.

"That's not so gross—kind of like giving pets flea medicine."

"But these kinds of bugs would eventually make their way into the sheep's brains and destroy them."

"Ewww!" Chloe shuddered. "Good thing they have a shepherd to protect every part of them—even their brains."

"God does the same thing for us," Jules noted. "When we listen to the truth of His Word, it transforms and renews our minds and helps keep us from fixating on what might harm us. Instead of worry, we can feel His peace. That's why reading and memorizing God's Word is important."

Chloe gazed at the sheep thoughtfully. "Uncle Jules, I've learned a lot this week. One thing's for sure—I'm going to listen to my Good Shepherd." ♥

Savannah Coleman



LISTEN TO YOUR GOOD SHEPHERD | KEY VERSE: *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me.* John 10:27 (NIV)



Do you follow Jesus as your shepherd? Jesus says He is the gate for the sheep—trusting Him to save you through His sacrifice on the cross is the only way to have eternal, abundant life. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.) As His sheep, we need to listen to Him. He speaks to us through His Word, the Bible. Listen to your Good Shepherd so He can fill your thoughts with His peace.

OLD FIONA

There goes Old Faithful!" Corbin said as they watched hot water burst from the ground and shoot high into the air. He and his sister Fiona were showing their aunt a video Corbin had made on their vacation to Yellowstone National Park. "The park ranger said the rock deep underground is so hot it heats the spring water," said Corbin.

"And then it reaches its boiling point and boils up and shoots out of the ground," added Fiona.

After their aunt had left, Fiona and Corbin got out a game. "You lose!" Corbin said after they played a little while. "You're not allowed to make that move!"

"I am too!" said Fiona. But Corbin wouldn't agree, and the two started arguing. Finally, Fiona pushed back her chair. "You make me so mad!"

"What did I do?" Corbin asked.

"Tons of things!" Fiona's voice grew louder. "You cheat, you used my bike without asking, you embarrassed me in front of my friends, and you spilled juice on my homework. I hate you!" She ran to her bedroom and slammed the door. Then she opened it and slammed it again.

Corbin followed Mom to Fiona's room. "You know we don't slam doors," Mom said. "And that angry outburst was not pretty."

"Yeah," said Corbin. "You erupted with more force than Old Faithful." He grinned. "Hey, I know! I'll call you Old Fiona."

"Corbin, go to your room," said Mom. "I'll talk to you later." When he had left, she turned back to Fiona. "Corbin does have a point."

"But he's mean!" said Fiona. "He'd make anybody mad!"

"We all have feelings of anger at times," said Mom. "We need to deal with them, not just let them build up and burst out. One way to deal with your anger is to talk to the person who made you angry and explain what's bothering you. Don't store up angry feelings and grudges. Make an effort to make peace and be friends."

"I don't think Corbin would listen, so why even bother?" asked Fiona.

"Give him a chance," said Mom. "And be willing to forgive. Remember that Jesus has forgiven you for all your wrongs and will help you forgive and love others. A loving relationship with anyone is always worth the effort." ♥ Nance E. Keyes



DON'T STORE UP ANGRY FEELINGS | KEY VERSE: "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.

Ephesians 4:26 (NIV)



What do you do with your anger? Do you keep it inside and let it build up into bitterness and resentment? Does it erupt in angry words and hurtful actions? Don't let it do that! Talk with the person who made you angry, and if necessary, tell an adult how you feel. Then trust God to help you deal with your anger and be willing to forgive.

HELPING FIND THE LOST

Mom, have you seen my other tennis shoe?" Piper ran from room to room with only one shoe on, desperately looking for the other one. She was supposed to be leaving to spend the night at her friend Aryanna's house.

"No, but I can help you look. Do you remember where you saw it last?" Mom asked.

Piper shook her head, and the two frantically looked for the missing shoe. They looked under beds, in the closet, in the bathroom, and even in Piper's brother's room.

"Are you sure you didn't pack it with your overnight things?" Mom asked.

Piper was about to say she would never do anything silly like that, but she knew Mom would just make her look anyway, so she began pulling out everything from her bag. The last thing she pulled out was her missing shoe. "Oops—here it is!" Piper said, a little embarrassed. "Well, I'm glad it's been found."

"Remember I'm going to pick you up for church tomorrow," Mom said as they got in the car. "Did you invite Aryanna to come?" Piper shook her head. "Did you know that the Bible talks about Jesus wanting us to help Him find what's lost?" Mom asked.

Piper shot her mom a puzzled look. "What could Jesus have lost that He would need our help finding? He's God's Son. He knows everything!"

"The Bible says Jesus wants us to help bring lost sinners to Him. We can do that by praying for them and sharing how He's changed our lives—and even by inviting them to church." Mom turned to look at Piper. "Do you remember how happy and relieved you felt when you found your missing shoe?" Piper nodded. "Well," said Mom, "the Bible says all of heaven rejoices when one sinner is saved. That's how happy God is when one lost person is found. And even though God is the only one who can change a person's heart, He wants us to play a part by praying for others and pointing them to Him so we can rejoice with Him when they're found."

"Okay, Mom. I'll see if Aryanna wants to come to church with us tomorrow," Piper said as they pulled into Aryanna's driveway. "And I'll pray for her too." ♥
Melissa Yeagle



POINT OTHERS TO JESUS | KEY VERSE: *There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.* Luke 15:10



Do you know people who don't know Jesus? We can't change people's hearts, but we can play a role in bringing others to Jesus by praying for them, telling them what He did for us on the cross, and inviting them to learn more about Him. Trust God to help you point others to Jesus, and when one of them is found, you can rejoice with all of heaven!

AN IMPORTANT POSITION

I want to play first base this year, and Coach Nichols won't let me!" said Quincy. "He says I'll help the team more if I play right field." He frowned. "The guys have a saying about right field. They say, 'right field equals left out,' because the ball never gets hit to that side of the outfield."

"Now, hold on! That's just not true!" said Dad. "A good right fielder often makes important plays—and I know you'll be a good one." But nothing Dad said could convince Quincy that right field was a good position for him.

The next day, Quincy helped his father plant geraniums in the front yard. "Maybe we could get some of those bushes with white flowers we saw when we hiked up Mount Major," said Quincy. "They'd look nice here with the geraniums."

Dad shook his head. "Those plants grow well in higher elevations, but I don't think they'd do well down here. God didn't intend for all plants to thrive in the same location. Each species has its own spot in the plant kingdom. That principle applies to people too. God has blessed every one of us with the talents we need to do the best job in the special spot He's put us in."

Dad smiled at Quincy. "For example, God gave you one of the strongest throwing arms on your baseball team. That's important for a right fielder, so give it a chance. Perhaps God has a special lesson He wants you to learn by playing right field on your ball team."


"What lesson could there be in that?" asked Quincy.

"Maybe God wants you to see that every person on a team is important," said Dad. "That's true for baseball, and it's also true for another team you're on—Jesus's team of all those who trust in Him. God gave every Christian an important part to play in caring for other members of Christ's team and sharing His love with those who don't know Him. Without each person's important role, the whole team suffers—just like your baseball team won't do as well if you refuse to play right field."

Quincy sighed. "Okay," he said after a moment. "Right field, here I come!" ♥
Linda M. Magoon



 **EACH TEAM MEMBER IS IMPORTANT** | KEY VERSE: *Those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.* 1 Corinthians 12:22

 Do you get upset when you don't get the position you want—whether it's on a sports team or within Christ's team of believers? Jesus gave you the gifts and abilities He did so you could fill an important role and serve Him with other Christians. So no matter where He places you, be a team player and use your gifts to help the body of Christ share His love with the world.



GET ME OFF THIS THING!

Oh no! No, no, no! Get me off this thing! Mom, make them stop!” Carrie squirmed nervously as the seat she was strapped into began to rise higher and higher into the air.

Mom laughed and grabbed Carrie’s hand. “Sorry, honey, but I think it’s too late to get off now. Believe me, you’re going to love it! It’s just a little scary right now.”

Carrie continued to whimper as the ride climbed higher, and she gave a little shriek as the seats bumped into place high up in the air.

“It’s okay,” Mom reassured her. “I’m right here with you. You’re going to be fine.”

“Okay,” Carrie said, squeezing Mom’s hand tight. She looked down at the park below them. “Hey, Mom, it’s actually kind of cool to see everything from up here. I can see—AAAAHHHH!” Carrie screamed as the ride suddenly dropped.

Mom screamed too, and then they were both laughing as the ride bounced back up and down a few more times before finally settling back down on the ground.

“Mom, that was so much fun! Can we go on it again?”

Mom laughed. “Are you sure? I thought you wanted to get off before.”

“Oh. Yeah, well, I did, but I just held on to your hand and tried not to be scared, and it was still pretty scary at first, but then it was really fun!” Carrie took a deep breath and grinned. “I want to go again.”

As they waited in line, Mom said, “You know, Carrie, this ride made me think of you being nervous about starting a new school in a few weeks. It can help remind you that you don’t have to be afraid when you’re facing something scary in life. Jesus is right there with you, and it’s like He’s holding your hand. You don’t have to be afraid—and you might even find out that whatever you’re afraid of is really a great thing for you.”

Carrie nodded thoughtfully. “I’ll try to remember that, Mom.” She started walking as the attendant motioned them forward. “I know Jesus is with me, but will you still hold my hand during the ride?”

“Sure, honey. No problem.” Mom laughed and gave Carrie’s hand a quick squeeze. ♥ *Robyn Mulder*



JESUS IS ALWAYS WITH YOU | KEY VERSE: *Be strong and courageous.*

Do not be afraid or terrified...for the LORD your God goes with you.

Deuteronomy 31:6 (NIV)



Are you facing something scary in your life right now—something much bigger than a ride at an amusement park? No matter what it is you’re facing, Jesus is right there with you. He loves you so much He gave His life for you, and He promises to always be with those who trust in Him. He’ll be there to help you and comfort you, and He will never leave you.

NEW LIFE MUSHROOMS

Evan and James were hunting for wild edible mushrooms with their family. “Got one!” Evan yelled.

“Wow, that one’s a whopper!” James said.

“Just make sure you know it’s the right type,” Dad warned. “You know the rule: One hundred percent sure, then take the treasure.”

They mushroom-hunted for a couple hours, driven by the hope of mushroom soup. “My mouth is already watering for mom’s delicious soup!” Evan said.

“Yeah!” James replied. “Mom is probably the best cook in town!”

“I don’t know about that,” Mom said. “There are lots of good cooks out there.”

“Well, you’re still a really good cook!” Evan and James said in unison, making the whole family laugh.

After heading home, the two boys stood outside the kitchen, breathing in the wonderful smells. When the soup was done, the boys raced to be the first to the table. After giving thanks, they gulped it down.

“This soup could be called new life soup,” Dad said. “The mushrooms in it grow on dead wood. Though the tree has died, the mushrooms come alive by feeding on the nutrients in the wood. They’re an example of death leading to new life.”

“Wow!” Evan said. “I didn’t know that mushrooms grow on dead things.”

“I know of something else that has new life too,” Mom said. “Can you guys guess what it is?”

“A caterpillar turning into a butterfly?” James guessed.

“Snakes getting new skin?” Evan added.

“Good guesses, but I was thinking of something else,” Mom replied. “Me!”

“You?” James asked. “How do you have new life?”

“You two can have it too!” said Mom. “It comes from Jesus, our Savior. The Bible says every one of us is a sinner. When we confess our sins and trust Jesus to save us, our old, sinful self dies, and He gives us new life with Him!”

“Wow!” James said. “That’s even cooler than mushrooms growing on dead logs.”

“Yeah,” Evan agreed. “I want to ask Jesus to give me new life right now!”

“Me too!” James said.

Mom smiled at them and said, “Let’s read some verses together and pray.” ♥

Elijah Goll



JESUS GIVES US NEW LIFE | KEY VERSE: *Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!*
2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT)



Are you excited when you fix a broken toy? Are you happy when you make an old thing new again? Let God make you new too! Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead to give us new life. When we trust Him as our Savior, He frees us from sin and gives us a new life with Him. Begin your new life today by trusting in Him! (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 104.)

HOMESICK FOR HEAVEN

Kenzie snapped one last picture of the Eiffel Tower. “It’s so beautiful against the sunset!” She sighed. “I can’t believe this is our last night here.”

“I know,” Mom said. “Though I’m actually excited to be going home.”

“But this has been the best vacation ever,” said Kenzie’s sister, Aubrey. “I’m going to miss Paris.”

“All right, everyone,” Dad said. “It’s getting late. We’d better head back to the hotel to eat our last dinner here in France.”

Kenzie turned to follow him and accidentally bumped into a man with a touring cap and backpack. “Oh, I’m so sorry!” she said. The man glanced at her, said something in French, and moved past them. Kenzie giggled quietly. “You know what I’m looking forward to about going home? Being able to speak the language. I can’t understand what French people say—and they can’t understand me!”

“Yeah,” Aubrey said. “We really don’t fit in here, do we?”

“I’m looking forward to sleeping in my own bed again,” Mom said.

“And not living out of a suitcase anymore,” Dad chimed in.

“Sounds like we all agree,” said Aubrey. “Paris is great, but it’s not home.”


When they reached their hotel, they got a table at the restaurant downstairs. “You know what?” Dad said. “Our conversation earlier reminded me of something. Just like we’re visitors here in France, the Bible says that Christians are visitors in the world. Our real citizenship is in heaven, not here on earth.”

“That makes sense,” Aubrey said.

“We don’t always fit in here on earth because we’re living for a different world,” Dad went on. “We have different values and priorities because we’re citizens of God’s kingdom.”

“And someday He’ll bring us there, right?” asked Kenzie.

Dad nodded. “When Jesus returns and makes everything new, we’ll live with Him in His heavenly kingdom forever. But we’re also living as citizens of His kingdom now. Jesus saved us from sin and made us His people so we can experience the joy of knowing Him and let others know they can have an eternal home with Him too.”

Kenzie nodded. “I’m excited to go home to America, but I’m even more excited for my eternal home!”  *Lucy Alessio*



CHRISTIANS ARE CITIZENS OF HEAVEN | KEY VERSE: *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.* Philippians 3:20 (NIV)



Do you ever feel like you don’t fit in here in this world? Do you find the things that other people think are most important are not what bring joy and meaning to your life? The Bible tells us that, as Christians, we’re just travelers here on earth. Our citizenship—our true home—is with Jesus. Don’t be afraid to live differently in this world, knowing that heaven is where you truly belong.

TICK TALK



Be sure you check your arms and legs for ticks!" Jay's mother called as he ran into the house. It was tick season, and the insects thrived in the woods where Jay played with friends. He obediently rolled up his sleeves, and sure enough, a tiny black bug had attached itself to his skin.

"Ugh. Got one, Mom. Can you take it off with your tweezers?" He went into the kitchen, and his mother pulled out a special tick removal tool from one of the drawers.

"Ticks glue themselves to your skin and burrow in," she said. "That's why it's important not to try to brush them off."

Jay nodded. "If the head stays in, it can give you Lyme disease, right? Like our neighbor has."

"Yes, though not all ticks carry Lyme disease. But any tick that's not fully removed can cause an infection, so we don't want to take any chances."

Jay's mom carefully removed the tick, then dropped it into a cup of rubbing alcohol. She smiled at Jay. "You know, sin can be like a tick sometimes—like when a bad habit attaches itself to us and burrows in. The longer it's there, the easier it can be to ignore—but like not properly removing a tick, ignoring sin is dangerous!"

"Because it's infecting us?" asked Jay.

"Sin doesn't make us sick the way a tick can," said Mom. "We won't get Lyme disease. But it can weaken our sense of right and wrong and make us lose our appetite for doing things that show others the love of Jesus. That's why the Bible warns us about letting sin infect our minds and hearts."

"Too bad there's no such thing as sin tick removers!" Jay grinned, and his mother laughed.

"We have something even better!" Mom replied. "We have Jesus, who sacrificed His life to free us from sin. When we go to Him for help and confess our wrongs, He will forgive us and help us replace bad habits with good ones. The best thing we can do is faithfully check our attitude each day. If we ask Him to remove anything in our lives that shouldn't be there, He will!" ♥ *Deborah Meroff*



DON'T IGNORE SIN | KEY VERSE: *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.* Romans 6:12 (NIV)



Have you let sinful habits attach themselves to you? Like a tick imbedded in your skin, they are harmful and need to be removed right away. Check yourself daily, and when you notice a sinful habit in your life, confess it to Jesus. He paid a lot to save you from sin, and He promises to forgive you and help you live in a way that shows you belong to Him.



HEY ZACH!



Hey, kids! I'm Zach, host of the *Keys for Kids* radio program. Have you ever read a Bible story and stumbled over a name that was hard to pronounce?

Maybe a name like Methuselah or Nebuchadnezzar made you stop and think, "Why are Bible names so tricky?" Well, that's because in Bible times, names weren't just sounds people liked—they had meaning!

Take Jesus, for example. His name comes from the Hebrew name Yeshua, which means "the Lord saves." That's perfect, because Jesus came to save us from sin!

Or what about Moses? His name means "drawn out" because he was pulled out of the Nile River as a baby. But later, God used him to draw out the Israelites from slavery in Egypt! Then there's Peter. His name means "rock," and Jesus said Peter would be like a strong rock, helping to build the early church.

Even names that seem ordinary have a story. Samuel was given a name that means "heard by God" because his mother, Hannah, prayed for a child—and God listened! Naomi, the name of Ruth's mother-in-law, means "pleasant," but when Naomi was sad, she wanted to be called Mara, which means "bitter."

So, does your name have a special meaning? Maybe you were named after a family member or a famous person your parents looked up to. But no matter what your name means, you are special to God—so much so that He knows your name and calls you by it, just like He said to the Israelites in Isaiah 43:1.

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

And don't forget—WORD with Zach goes through August 31. Sign up at WORDwithZach.org for a chance to win prizes!



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

What's in a Name?

The names below are from the Bible. Unscramble them, then match each name to the Bible passage that talks about that person.

- | | | | |
|------------|--------------|--------------------|----------|
| 1. RAHAS | <u>Sarah</u> | "Princess" | <u>e</u> |
| 2. AISCA | _____ | "One who laughs" | _____ |
| 3. ZOAB | _____ | "Strength" | _____ |
| 4. LIADEN | _____ | "God is my judge" | _____ |
| 5. JAELIH | _____ | "My God is Yahweh" | _____ |
| 6. PHESTEN | _____ | "Crown" | _____ |

- Daniel 6:10-23
- Acts 7:59-60; James 1:12
- 1 Kings 18:36-39
- Genesis 18:13-14; 21:3
- Genesis 17:15-16
- Ruth 2:11-12



Bonus Challenge:

Do you know the meaning of your name?
Look it up and write it here:

Answer key: 1. e (Sarah) 2. d (Isaac) 3. f (Boaz) 4. a (Daniel) 5. c (Elijah) 6. b (Stephen)

EXPRESS YOURSELF

HEY ZACH!
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GOD'S ZOO

Why does she get to ride when I have to walk?" Caden whined. "It's not fair!" "Your sister is only two; her legs aren't as long or as strong as yours," Mom replied, parking the stroller in front of the two-toed sloth exhibit.

Caden continued to pout. "Emma gets all the attention too! You treat her better than you treat me. You must love her more!"

"Caden, that's not true!" Mom sounded hurt. "You know I love you and your brothers and sister with all my heart."

"Then why don't you treat us the same?"

Mom pointed to the exhibit. "Do you see the zookeeper feeding the sloth?" Caden nodded. "What's she feeding it?" asked Mom.

"Looks like fruit."

Mom nodded. "What did the zookeeper at the penguin exhibit feed the penguins?"

"Fish, right?"

"That's right. What would happen if this zookeeper tried to feed fish to the sloth?"

"Mom, sloths don't eat fish. They live in trees!" Caden laughed.

"Right again." Mom smiled. "Different animals eat different foods and live in different habitats because they have different needs. Good zookeepers treat all the animals differently *because* they care for all of them."

Caden glanced at his little sister, who had fallen asleep. "Emma and I aren't different kinds of animals."

"No," Mom replied, "but you are different people, and sometimes you have different needs. Emma needs help with things like holding her cup and turning a doorknob, but sometimes you need help with things like math homework and piano practice."

Mom, Caden, and his brothers watched in fascination as the sloth munched languidly on an apple slice. "I think God is kind of like a zookeeper," Mom said. "He knows exactly what each of His children needs. We may not always get what we ask for when we pray, but He always provides for our needs. He provided for our greatest need of all by sending Jesus to save us from sin, and we can trust Him to provide for each of our specific needs too."

"Hey! Give that back!" Caden's brother snatched the cap off his head and ran off with it, causing Emma to start crying.

"Sometimes I feel like a zookeeper too," Mom mused as the family moved on to the next exhibit.  Suzanne Felton



GOD GIVES US WHAT WE NEED | KEY VERSE: *And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 4:19 (NIV)



Do you think it's unfair when you're treated differently than your brothers, sisters, or classmates? Adults who care about you know that different people often have different needs, and it's *because* they love you that they treat you differently. God knows us and loves us more than anyone else. Even when He answers His children's prayers differently, He always gives us what we need.

COLOR!



TWO-STRIKE HITTER

When Maggie stepped into the batter's box, she already had two strikes. One more would put her on the bench. She glanced at the stands. Her foster mom wasn't there. Maggie sighed. Her team chanted, "Two-strike hitter, don't be a quitter!" The pitch came in fast, and Maggie connected, sending the softball past the outfield.

Softball took her mind off everything. When she got back home, her social worker was out front holding a bag with all Maggie's belongings. *Oh no, I forgot! I'm moving today.* She forced her feet to keep walking. Ever since Dad died, it was one foster home after another.

After several months in her new house, Maggie saw a Bible lying open on her foster mom's desk. The words "I love the Lord because He hears my voice" jumped out at Maggie. "He doesn't hear my voice," she said out loud.

Alice, Maggie's foster mom, came in and asked, "Who doesn't hear you, honey?" "Jesus doesn't. When Mom left, Dad told me to pray. When Dad got sick, I prayed. Now they're both gone."

Alice put a soft hand on Maggie's shoulder. "You play softball—I did too. Do you ever cheer, 'Two-strike hitter...'"

"Don't be a quitter!" Maggie answered. "I'm a quitter at asking God for anything."

Alice tapped the Bible. "Look at this psalm—Psalm 116. This man had pain and death all around him. He said he was brought low, but God heard him. Think—when your mom left, who was still with you?"

"Dad." Maggie paused. "And Jesus. And when Dad was sick, he told me that because Jesus died for me, I could trust Him even in hard times."

Alice nodded. "Psalm 27 says that even if your mother and father are gone, the Lord will care for you. The Lord is taking care of you, Maggie. He sent you here, and we love you. We prayed for you before you came—and we're praying for your mom too. We don't know what she'll do. But we know what Jesus will do."

"He'll hear my voice?"

"Yes, He always hears you. Praying gives you a deeper friendship with God. When it comes to prayer, be that two-strike hitter, Maggie."

Maggie grinned. "I won't be a quitter." ♥ *Laura Roesler*



THE LORD HEARS YOU | KEY VERSE: *Because he bends down to listen, I will pray as long as I have breath!* Psalm 116:2 (NLT)



Do you ever feel like you're striking out with God when you pray? Don't give up. Even when it seems like God isn't listening, He hears your prayers. He cares about your tears and your worries. He wants to hear what you have to say. Even if other people leave you, Jesus never will. He died and rose again so you could have a relationship with Him forever. Keep praying—He's listening.

THE COMPOST OF LIFE

Sofia, chore time! Today we're going to—what's wrong?" Aunt Lori set down the buckets she was holding and gently put her hands on Sofia's shoulders. "Aren't you having a nice time on the farm?"

Sofia tried to smile. "I just wish Mom and Dad were here with me." Her throat felt tight. She buried her face in her aunt's denim shirt, trying to control her tears.

"Oh, honey. I'm so sorry." Aunt Lori hugged her niece tight, remembering when her own parents separated many years before.

"Why did God let this happen to me if He's supposed to be good? I don't see anything good in my parents getting a divorce!" Sofia said fiercely.

Aunt Lori was silent as she brushed Sofia's hair. After a moment, she said, "Let's go empty the compost."

As they emptied the buckets into the compost bin, Sofia grimaced at the smell of the decomposing fruits and vegetables. "Gross," she muttered. Then they walked to the garden to do some weeding.

"The plants are gorgeous," Sofia observed. "How do you keep them so healthy?"

"I put compost on them. But those haven't been getting much," Aunt Lori said, nodding to some rows of sadder-looking plants. "Let's put some compost on them now."

As they worked, Aunt Lori said, "You know, Sofi, I think we're like these plants, and the difficulties we face are like compost."

"How?" Sofia asked, puzzled.

"Well, God can use the hard things in our lives to help us trust Him more and grow in our faith. He promises to use everything for good. Jesus's death on the cross was horrible, yet that's how God did the greatest good of all and saved us from our sins. And He can bring good from bad things that happen. God hates divorce—it's not good. My parents' divorce was awful, but it helped me see God as my perfect, loving Father. By His grace, I'm not a withered, dying plant because I know He is always with me, giving me strength." Aunt Lori smiled.

Sofia had never thought about life that way. She did want to be vibrant and strong like the healthy-looking plants. She would think hard about what Aunt Lori had said. ♥ *Rachel Avallone*



GOD USES EVERYTHING FOR OUR GOOD | KEY VERSE: *We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* Romans 8:28 (NIV)



Have you gone through uncomfortable or painful things in your life? It's natural to become upset and ask God, "Why is this happening to me?" Even though bad things happen, we know God is good. He promises to be with us through the hard things, and He is always at work in our lives. When difficult things happen, trust that God will use them for good.



NIGHTMARES

Lara ran so hard it hurt. She glanced over her shoulder. The lion was still chasing her and getting closer. Suddenly, she tripped and fell flat on her face! A huge roar echoed, and she could almost feel the lion's hot breath on her neck. She screamed—then woke up in her own bed. All the covers were kicked off, and her forehead was sweaty.

Lara lay still, trying to calm her beating heart and go back to sleep. But every time she closed her eyes, she saw the lion chasing her. Finally, she got out of bed and tiptoed to her mom's room. "Mom," she whispered, "I had another nightmare, and I'm afraid to go to sleep." Mom got up, and together they went back to Lara's room.

"I know the dream wasn't real, Mom, but it was so scary!" Lara said after Mom tucked her back in bed. "How can I get it out of my mind?"

Mom switched on the lamp and got Lara's Bible out of a drawer. "God's Word can help with your nightmares," she said as she turned the pages. "The book of Psalms is a good place to find verses of comfort when we feel afraid. Let's read Psalm 118:6. Here, read it out loud for me."

Taking the Bible, Lara read, "The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?" She gave her mother a little smile. "The last part could say, 'What can mere nightmares do to me?' Is it okay to read it like that?"

Mom nodded. "That will remind you that your nightmares can't hurt you, and that Jesus is always there to comfort you."

Lara put a bookmark between the pages to save the place. "I'll read this whenever I have a nightmare. Then I won't have to get up and find you."

"Great idea," said Mom, returning the Bible to the drawer. "It's short, and you could even memorize it. That way you can repeat it to yourself whenever something scares you." She smiled. "But you can still come and get me if you feel afraid."

After Mom kissed her goodnight, Lara snuggled down deep into the covers and whispered, "The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid." ♥ Faith Alessio



GOD IS WITH YOU | KEY VERSE: *In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety.* Psalm 4:8 (NIV)



Do you have nightmares or find it hard to go to sleep? Remember that if you know Jesus as your Savior, He is with you all the time. Like King David in today's Bible reading, you can meditate—or think—about God when you're awake at night. If you think about the presence and power of God, your fears will look much smaller. You can have peace knowing He is with you.

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU STIR UP

Just do it," coaxed Henry. "She'll never know it was you." Henry was trying to get his classmate Niam to put a whoopee cushion on their teacher's chair. "Come on, it will be hilarious!"

"Okay," said Niam. But when Mrs. Mills sat down and her face turned red, it didn't seem so funny after all.

Later that day, Henry talked some classmates into putting petroleum jelly on all the door knobs in the classroom. But when Mrs. Mills couldn't open the door for recess, she frowned and announced they would be staying inside.

At the end of the day, Henry was instructed to go to the principal's office instead of the bus line. When he arrived, both of his parents were there. They didn't look happy.

No one spoke on the drive home. When they pulled into the driveway, Dad turned off the engine and told Henry to go get a can of white paint. Henry didn't know what Dad was up to, but he did as he was told.

"Let's open this up and see how much we have," said Dad. They pried off the rusty lid and peered inside. It looked okay. "We have to stir it," said Dad. "It's been sitting a while."

As Henry stirred vigorously, chunks of old, rubbery paint and rust began dotting the surface. The harder he stirred, the worse it got. "All this stirring is making it worse!" Henry exclaimed.

"When you stir old paint, it loosens all the impurities in the can," Dad explained. "Kind of like how you've been stirring things up at school."

Henry stopped stirring the paint and sighed. "I was just trying to have some fun."

"Yes, but at the expense of others. When you ask your classmates to do things that embarrass or hurt others, you're encouraging them to sin. The Bible tells us to stir up love and good works, but you can't do that by only thinking of yourself—just like you can't stir up good paint from this old can. You need to depend on Jesus to help you stir up love and encourage others to do good things instead."

"I guess you're right." Henry took the stirring stick out of the can. "I'll be more careful about what I stir up." ♥ *Laura Kuehn*



ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO DO GOOD | KEY VERSE: *And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works.* Hebrews 10:24



Do you like to stir things up? There's nothing wrong with having fun, but it can't be at the cost of upsetting a friend or teacher or getting other people in trouble. If you're someone who can talk others into doing things, use that gift for good! Encourage those around you to honor God and others through love and good deeds.

THIS OLD PLANET

Journey and Elise ran to the garage where their dad was working. “Mom says we’re going to have a picnic at the park!” said Journey. “Can we go soon?”

“We want to have time to play on the swings before we eat!” added Elise.

“Okay,” said Dad. “But before we go, I need to wash the car.”

“Why bother?” asked Elise. “It’s old.”

“You’re right. It is old,” Dad replied. “But it’s the only car we have—and God calls us to take care of everything we’ve been given. You can help. Then it will get done quicker.”

The girls reluctantly got busy. Journey mixed soap into a bucket of water while Elise got out sponges and Dad pulled out the hose. They washed and polished the car until it shone brightly. “There!” Dad said. “It looks almost as good as new.”

Soon they were on their way. At the park, Dad pushed Journey and Elise on the swings, and the girls also had fun on the slides and other playground equipment. Then Mom called for them to come and eat.

“It’s so beautiful here,” Mom said as they ate. “The trees and sky and flowers are so pretty.”

When they had finished eating, Journey and Elise carried the trash to a garbage can. “Thanks, girls,” Dad said when they got back. “Though I see some of the stuff fell on the ground when you were walking over and you left it. That’s no way to treat this old planet! Go back and pick it up.”

“Old planet?” asked Journey.

Dad nodded. “Just like our old car, this old planet is the only one we have to live on, and God wants us to take good care of it. This may be an old planet, but it’s also a wonderful, amazing, beautiful planet—and Jesus promises to make it new again one day when He comes back to get rid of sin forever and restore all creation to the way He intended it to be. Until then, we need to be good stewards and take care of the planet He created for us.”

“Okay, Dad,” Elise said, and the girls hurried back to pick up their trash. ♥

Daryl B. Knauer



TAKE CARE OF GOD’S EARTH | KEY VERSE: *The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.* Psalm 24:1 (NIV)



Do you do all you can to take care of this old planet? God gave you this beautiful world to be your earthly home, and He wants you to do your part in keeping it that way. Caring for things in nature, recycling, and putting trash in garbage cans are all ways you can help take care of the earth. Think of some other simple things you can do to help keep God’s creation clean and beautiful.



ALL THINGS ARE PAWSIBLE

Mom," said Noah, "Rexy had an accident on the welcome mat again." Mom made her way to the front door and rubbed her forehead. "I don't know what to do with that dog. He chews up everything in the house. He barks at the garbage truck. He digs under the fence. He's out of control. I don't think anyone can tame that tiny Chihuahua. Would one of you boys please take Rexy for a walk?"

"It's Noah's turn." Micah tossed the leash to his brother.

"My turn? I just gave him a bath last night!"

"That wasn't a bath. You just sprayed some of Dad's cologne on him!"

"Well, you should use some of that cologne because you smell worse than the dog!"

Mom sighed. "Don't you boys ever get tired of arguing? I think Rexy acts so crazy because he's watching how you two act."

"Oh, come on, Mom. We don't bark at the mailman," Noah said.

"Yeah," said Micah, "and it's not like we punch each other or anything."

"You punch each other with words. The way you talk to each other is just as out of control as Rexy. The Bible says people are able to tame all kinds of animals, but no one can tame the tongue."

"So if the Bible is saying we have a better chance of taming Rexy than controlling what we say, why even try?" asked Noah.

"Because taming our tongues is important," said Mom. "They may be small things, but they can cause huge destruction."

Micah laughed. "That sounds a lot like Rexy!"

"The Bible also says that the words we speak come from our hearts," Mom continued. "If we need to change our words, it means our hearts need to change. And we can't change them ourselves."

Noah thought about that. "You mean Jesus has to help us, right?"

"Right," said Mom. "Only He can change your heart and help you love others the way He does. Taming the tongue is only possible with Him." Mom walked over to the puddle on the welcome mat and sighed. "At this point, I think God's the only one who can change Rexy as well."

Micah smiled. "Well, the Bible does say that with God, all things are pawsible!" ♥
Jared Hottenstein



JESUS CHANGES HEARTS | KEY VERSE: *Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.* James 3:10 (NIV)



Have you ever been hurt by someone's words? Have you ever hurt someone by what you said to them? Words are powerful things, and it's important to use them to build others up, not tear them down. The next time you want to say something hurtful, remember how much Jesus loves that person. Then trust Him to change your heart and help you love them too.



THE BOTTOMLESS CUP

When Emma came into the living room, tears were falling from Mom's eyes onto her lap. Dad sat next to her with a hand on her shoulder. "It's Grandma," he told Emma. "She died in the hospital this morning."

Emma stared out the window. With Grandma gone, who'd come visit every month? Who'd cook her favorite foods, or go on bike rides and picnics with her?

A few days later Mom, Dad, and Emma made the long drive to the funeral. Emma tried to listen during the service. The pastor said, "Ephesians 2:6-7 tells us that God raises us up with Jesus—He gives us spiritual life as well as the promise of physical resurrection when He comes again—so that we will forever show 'the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.'"

After the service Mom didn't seem as sad while she visited with her sisters. Emma felt like something was missing, and her heart ached.

On their drive home, they stopped at a restaurant. Emma saw something strange on the menu. She asked, "What do they mean by 'bottomless cup of coffee?' That sounds messy."

Dad laughed a little, and even Mom smiled. "That means they'll keep filling your cup as long as you want more coffee," Dad explained.

Mom added, "It's like when Jesus fed the five thousand. He fed people until they were full. Then He gave even more. There's no end to how much He gives us and does for us."

Dad said, "It's that way for your grandma now. God will spend all eternity showing kindness to her in heaven."

"But what about us, Dad? I don't feel full. I feel kind of empty."

"We lost a great treasure in Grandma, and that can make us feel poor instead of rich. But God will never run out of mercy and kindness. He's rich in both of those—and generous."

Mom nodded. "God gave us the greatest treasure of all when He gave His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross to save us so we could be with Him now and forever. Jesus promises to be with us when we feel sad and give us comfort and peace."

Emma smiled. "It's like a bottomless cup of His love." ♥ *Laura Roesler*



GOD'S MERCY AND KINDNESS ARE ENDLESS | KEY VERSE: *The same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. Romans 10:12*



Do you miss someone who was dear to you? The word *dear* means valuable, such as treasure or riches. When you lose someone, it can make you feel poor instead of rich. But God is rich in mercy. He knows how to care for those who are dear to us, and He knows how to comfort us whenever we miss them. Trust Him to show you the riches of His kindness and mercy as you grieve.

LIKE A BADGER (PART 1)

“What are you reading about?” asked Anna as she peered over her brother’s shoulder to see what was on his computer screen. “Oh, look at that little animal! He’s so cute!”

“Stop saying everything is cute!” said Milo. “That’s a badger, and badgers are interesting, not cute!”

Anna sniffed. “Well, I think that badger is cute. What do you find so interesting about it?”

“Well, this article says that when badgers make their homes underground, they dig dens that are interconnected by a whole maze of burrows and passages. I think that’s pretty cool!”

“That is cool,” said Anna. “That means they can visit each other without having to go above ground.”

Milo nodded. “And it says badgers are nocturnal animals, which means—”

“I know what it means,” said Anna. “It means they’re awake at night and sleep during the day.”

“Right. And listen to this. ‘If a badger is away from home at daybreak, he may stay and rest with another badger family for a while before heading back to his own den.’ They must be hospitable animals.”

“Hospitable? What does that mean?” asked Anna.

“You know—making guests feel comfortable and at home,” said Milo.

“Oh! Like how we took care of the missionaries who stayed with us last month.” Anna laughed. “Maybe the traveling badgers are missionary badgers!”

“Listen to this,” said Milo. “Badgers sometimes even allow a fox to stay in their den!”

“Hmm,” said Anna. “I can’t think of anything to compare that to!”

“I can,” said Milo. “It might be like inviting someone you don’t know very well to come over and play—like those new kids who just moved in down the street.” Milo glanced out the window thoughtfully. “In my class at church, we talked about how being kind and welcoming to others shows them Jesus’s love. He welcomed us into His family when we were outsiders, and He wants us to welcome others and help them feel at home. We even learned a verse that says to practice hospitality.”

“Let’s ask Mom if we can invite the new kids over,” said Anna. She grinned and pointed toward the TV room. “I’m sure we can make them feel at home in our den!” ♥ *Tanya Ferdinandus*



PRACTICE HOSPITALITY | KEY VERSE: *Always be eager to practice hospitality.* Romans 12:13 (NLT)



Are you hospitable? Do you make others feel welcome—whether they’re your friends or someone you don’t know well? The Bible tells Christians to be hospitable and welcoming to others—even those we don’t know—because Jesus welcomed us when we didn’t know Him. Share His love with others by making everyone feel welcome at your home, school, church, or wherever you are.

LIKE A BADGER (PART 2)

I heard the kids' choir at church is holding auditions next week," Mom said as Milo set the table for dinner. "Why don't you try out? I know how much you love to sing, and they could sure use you."

Milo shrugged. "I'm sure those kids are way better than me, so why bother? I'll just stick to singing in the shower."

"I found out more about badgers!" Anna announced when they sat down to dinner. "Have you ever heard of a honey badger?"

"No, but I'm guessing it's called a honey badger because it likes honey," said Milo.

"Right!" said Anna. "The honey badger has a bird friend called a honeyguide. When the honeyguide finds a beehive full of honey, it leads the way to it. Then the honey badger uses its claws to break open the hive and eat the honey."

"Does the honeyguide get some of the honey too?" asked Milo. Anna shook her head. "Well, that doesn't seem fair!" said Milo. "The honey badger should share the honey."

"But the honeyguide doesn't want the honey," said Anna. "It wants the beeswax and the bees' eggs and larvae in the honeycomb, and that's what the honey badger leaves behind."

"Interesting," said Dad. "So each one helps the other, and by helping each other they both benefit."

"You know, we're supposed to do the same thing as Christians," said Mom. "Just like the bird is able to locate honey and the honey badger has claws to open the hive, God has blessed us with different talents and abilities. He wants us to use them to help others and point them to Jesus. When we keep our gifts to ourselves instead of sharing them with others, everyone misses out—both us and the people who would have benefited from them."

Milo sighed. "You're talking about me trying out for the kids' choir, aren't you?" He put down his fork. "Okay, maybe I'll give it a try—I wouldn't want to keep a gift God gave me all to myself when I could use it to help others. I might make new friends and learn more about music too. That sounds better than just singing in the shower!" ♥ *Tanya Ferdinandusz*



USE YOUR GIFTS TO HELP OTHERS | 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)



What special talents, skills, or abilities has God given you? Are you using them to help others and point them to Jesus—or are you keeping them all to yourself? God gave you those gifts so you could use them to bless others—and they have gifts that you'll benefit from too! Share your gifts so they can help others and bring glory to God.

GROWING LIGHT

The girls in Cabin 9 were walking down the path to the campfire at Bible camp when Gabby pointed up at the sky. “Look at the moon tonight! Yesterday there was no moonlight at all in the sky, but today there is a bright sliver of light.”

Her counselor, Jami, nodded. “It has started to reflect the sun’s light, and tomorrow it will reflect more light and keep growing until it’s a full moon.”

They reached the campfire and found their seats. They sang silly songs and laughed as they roasted marshmallows, then listened as the camp director told them about Jesus.

A warm feeling filled Gabby as she listened to the director speak. She suddenly knew that she wanted to trust in Jesus. She moved a little closer to Jami and asked her to pray with her to ask Jesus to forgive her for her sins. Jami gave her a hug as they knelt down to pray.

Later that night, as they walked back to the cabin, Jami smiled and pointed up at the moon. “Gabby, now that you trust in Jesus, your faith is like that moon. Just as the moon reflects the sun’s light, our lives reflect the love of Jesus. Yesterday, like the moon, you had no light, but today God’s love and goodness have started to shine through you.”

Gabby stared up at the moon. “I’m so excited to have Jesus in my life, but what do I do when I get home?” she asked.

“As you grow in your relationship with Jesus, His light will grow inside you,” said Jami. “Just as a crescent moon grows into a bright full moon, you’ll begin to reflect Him more and more. When you get home, keep getting to know Jesus better and learning more about Him. Go to church and spend time with other Christians, and read your Bible and pray every day. As your faith and understanding grow, you’ll become more like Jesus and reflect more of His light, just like that moon.”

Gabby pondered Jami’s words. “Wow,” she said. “I can’t wait to get to know Jesus even better! And now that I know Him, I know He’ll be with me and help me shine every day.” ♥ *Bethany Den Boer*



KEEP GROWING IN YOUR FAITH | KEY VERSE: *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 3:18*



Have you recently decided to trust in Jesus? Do you wonder what you’re supposed to do now? Now that your sins are forgiven and you belong to Jesus, He will make His light inside you grow. As you grow in your relationship with Him, He will help you follow Him in all you do, and others will be able to see His light shining in your life.

SIN SLIVERS

Ouch!” cried Wren as she climbed into the tree house her dad was building. Dad stopped hammering and raised his brow. “I hurt my finger,” Wren said.

“Let me take a look.” Dad put his hammer down and studied her finger. “You’ve got a sliver, but don’t worry, I’m an expert sliver remover! Just as soon as I’m finished here, I’ll take it out.”

Wren squirmed. “It’s okay. It’s not that big. I’ll just leave it.”

“Not a good idea,” said Dad, digging through his toolbox. He frowned. “That’s strange. My tape measure isn’t in here. Well, I can work without it for now.”

“Tape measure?” Wren asked, suddenly feeling guilty. And as the afternoon wore on, she felt more and more guilty. She knew what had happened to the tape measure.

“Dad, this sliver really hurts,” Wren said that evening. “I think I need help from an expert sliver remover after all.”

“Oh, that’s right—I forgot about your sliver!” Dad got out the tweezers. “Slivers don’t go away on their own.” Wren winced as he pricked her skin. “There,” Dad said. “It’s out.”

Wren looked at the tiny fleck Dad was holding. “I can’t believe something that small could hurt so bad,” she said.

“This little sliver reminds me of what we call ‘little’ sins,” said Dad. “We think they don’t really amount to much and shouldn’t hurt anybody. But if we’re sensitive to how Jesus wants us to love others, they cause us grief until we confess them and get them removed. We could call them sin slivers.”

Wren sighed. “Dad, I...” She hesitated. “I need another sliver removed—a sin sliver that’s been bothering me all day. I took your tape measure. I know I’m not supposed to go in your toolbox, but I used it to take measurements for a treasure map, and then I lost it in the woods. I’m sorry. I should have told you right away.”

“So that’s where it went!” said Dad. “Well, I’ll have to get another tape measure, but at least I won’t be hunting for that one anymore. I’m glad you told me, and I forgive you. Even better—Jesus promises to forgive the sins we confess too.” ♥ *Jody Hedlund*



ALL SIN HURTS YOU—CONFESS IT | 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)



Is there a nagging sin you need to confess? Maybe you fibbed to your parents or bent the rules to win a game. It may not have seemed like a big deal at the time, but any sin, no matter how big or small it seems, hurts both you and others. Don’t wait any longer. Confess your sin to Jesus and to anyone else you’ve sinned against and ask for forgiveness.

IN GOD'S HANDS



Nico grinned as his sister lay back on her inflatable raft. “I’m going to pop your float,” he told her. “You’ll sink.”

Maya smiled, unfazed. “My life jacket will hold me up.”

“What if I take the life jacket?” Nico asked.

Maya shrugged. “It still won’t matter. This is the shallow end, and the water only reaches up to my waist.”

“Well then, maybe I’ll just pick you up and dunk you under,” said Nico.

Maya grinned and pointed to Mom sitting at the side of the pool. “With Mom there, I’ll be just fine.”

A while later, Mom’s phone rang. “Time to go inside, kids,” she said after she hung up. “I need to go pick Dad up from work. He just called to say he feels really sick, so I’m going to take him to the emergency room.”

Maya and Nico gave each other worried looks. “Okay, Mom,” Nico said.

Mom was gone quite a while, and when she returned home, Dad wasn’t with her. “What’s wrong with Dad?” asked Maya anxiously.

“We don’t know for sure yet, but they admitted him as a patient at the hospital,” replied Mom. “Hopefully it’s nothing serious.”

Nico felt nervous too. “What if it is really serious?” he asked. “Aren’t you scared, Mom?”

“Of course I am,” said Mom. “But I’m thankful to know that God is in control and no matter what happens, Dad—and each of us—will be okay because we’re in God’s hands. We’ll pray for Dad, and we need to trust God to take care of him.”

“But what if something’s really wrong with Dad?” asked Nico. “How could that ever be okay?”

“Earlier today I heard you teasing your sister in the pool,” Mom told him. “But Maya knew that no matter what you did, she’d be okay because I was there and would take care of her. Well, we can have absolute confidence that no matter what happens, we’ll be okay because Jesus died and rose again to save us and give us eternal life. He will always be with us and take care of us—even if the worst were to happen. We’re safe in His hands.” ♥ *Nance E. Keyes*



TRUST JESUS TO CARE FOR YOU | KEY VERSE: *Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.* Psalm 56:3



Has something happened that makes you feel sad or scared? Is someone you love sick? Has a parent lost a job? Did your parents get divorced?

Whatever your troubles are, Jesus knows all about them. He loves you so much that He gave His life to save you, and He’s right there with you. Trust Him to watch over you, no matter what happens.

IT'S THE LAW

Graham set a large birthday present on his knees and shut the car door. Mom fastened her seat belt and turned to Graham. “You don’t have your seat belt on.”

“I can’t reach it while I’m holding this present,” said Graham. “It’s only two blocks to Cameron’s house, so I don’t need it anyway.”

“Oh yes, you do! A lot of accidents happen close to home, and a seat belt could save your life. Here, let me help you.” Mom reached over and buckled his seat belt. “There. Now we can go.” She started the car. “Seat belts were put in cars to protect us. And don’t forget—the law says we have to use them.”

“The law,” repeated Graham. “That sounds like something we talked about in church—God’s law. God gave us rules like the Ten Commandments to protect us and help us live good lives, but no one could obey them, so that’s why Jesus had to die for us. Or something like that—I didn’t understand all of it.”

Just then a ball bounced into the street in front of them. Mom hit the brakes and the car screeched to a stop—inches away from a little boy who had dashed after the ball. Graham lurched forward, but his seat belt tightened, holding him back. The little boy grabbed the ball and ran back into his yard.

“If you hadn’t made me wear my seat belt, I would have smashed right into the dashboard!” said Graham.

Mom nodded and started driving again. “Good thing you obeyed the law and had your seat belt on. But were you able to buckle it yourself?”

“No,” said Graham. “I was holding Cameron’s present, so you had to buckle it for me.”

“And that’s what Jesus does for us,” said Mom. “Sin is like that present you’re holding—it makes us unable to obey God’s law. None of us is good enough to have eternal life with God. That’s why Jesus had to pay for our sin on the cross. When we trust in Him, He buckles His goodness around us like a seat belt and saves us!”

“Oh—I get it now!” Graham smiled. “Thanks for buckling my seat belt, Mom—you saved me! And I’m thankful Jesus saved me too.” ♥ *Eunice C. Matchett*



JESUS SAVES LIVES | KEY VERSE: *Adam did not obey God, and many people become sinners through him. Christ obeyed God and makes many people right with Himself.* Romans 5:19 (NLV)



Do you always wear your seat belt? Seat belts save lives—that’s why a lot of places have laws that require you to use them. Jesus saves lives too. Because of sin, none of us can obey God’s law, so Jesus lived a perfect life and died to take our punishment. Trust Him to save you and give you His goodness so you can live with Him forever. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 104.)



CHRISTMAS EVERY DAY

Visit our store and enjoy Christmas every day of the year!” Georgia read the billboard out loud as she and her family traveled home from a weeklong vacation. “Cool!” she said. “That’s in the town at the next exit, isn’t it? Can we stop at that store?”

Dad shrugged. “Why not? We could use a break from driving. Watch for signs so we’ll know where to turn.”

They found the store, and everyone smiled when they heard “Jingle Bells” playing over the loudspeaker as they walked in. The store was filled with all kinds of Christmas decorations—ornaments, trees, twinkling lights, and wreaths. In one corner, a woman was handing out decorated Christmas cookies.

As Georgia and her parents ate their cookies, they wandered over to a large manger scene. The animals looked so real, Georgia could almost imagine she was in Bethlehem. As she thought about the events of that night long ago, she imagined Mary putting baby Jesus in a manger with all the sounds and smells of animals around them. She thought about the angels singing, the shepherds running to the stable to see Jesus, and the wise men traveling from far away to worship the new King.

“Come on, Georgia,” said Mom, interrupting her daydreams. “Time to be on our way.”

Georgia continued thinking about the manger scene on the drive home. “I wish we could celebrate Christmas all year long like they do at that store,” she said.

“We can!” said Dad. “What is Christmas, Georgia?”

“It’s the time when we remember Jesus being born,” Georgia replied.

“Exactly!” said Dad. “The night God sent His Son to earth as one of us so He could save us from sin. Don’t you think that’s something we should celebrate all year long?”

“Well, sure,” said Georgia. “We should thank God every day for sending Jesus, shouldn’t we?” She grinned. “So can we put up the Christmas tree when we get home?”

Mom laughed and shook her head. “We’ll save that for December,” she said. “We can remember God’s gift of Jesus and the meaning of Christmas without the tree.” ♥ *Linda Weddle*



THINK OF GOD’S GIFT ALL YEAR LONG | KEY VERSE: *Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!* 2 Corinthians 9:15



Are you thankful every day for God’s amazing gift? He sent His Son, Jesus, to earth as a human being to take the punishment for your sin so you could have eternal life with Him. There’s no better gift than that! Don’t wait until December to thank God for His great gift. Jesus is the reason to celebrate Christmas all year long!



LEFT BEHIND

Evelyn peeked through the blinds of her bedroom window at the *SOLD!* sign on her front lawn. She turned back to the sea of boxes surrounding her as a tear slipped from her eye and landed with a wet splat on the cardboard.

I can't decide if I want my butterfly pillow at Mom's apartment or Dad's house, she thought. With a big sigh, she threw it into the box marked *Mom* along with some other toys and books.

Evelyn's mom knocked on her door. "Evelyn, is everything okay in there? You need to be finished packing by lunchtime."

When Evelyn didn't answer, Mom opened the door and found her silently crying over the open box. "What is it?" Mom asked, wrapping her tightly in a hug.

"I can't decide if I want my butterfly pillow at your apartment or Dad's house. I need it to fall asleep," Evelyn said, wiping her eyes. "Why do we have to sell our house and move into two separate places? I want my pillow with me every night! And I want you and Dad with me every night too."

"I'm so sorry our divorce has hurt you so badly, Evelyn," Mom said, rubbing her arm. "We both love you very much, even when we're not with you. And the good news is you can take your pillow to Dad's house and then bring it back to my apartment. Your pillow can go everywhere with you. You never have to leave it behind." Mom picked up Evelyn's Bible from the open cardboard box. "Just like God promised us in the Bible that He would never leave us. When you trusted in Jesus, God gave you the Holy Spirit to help you, comfort you, and guide you. He is always with you, Evelyn, even when Dad and I are not."

Mom gently placed Evelyn's butterfly pillow and Bible into her backpack. "How about we keep these two special things in your bag so they're easy to take back and forth between my apartment and Dad's house?"

Evelyn glanced out the window again at the sign in her yard. "Okay," she said. "I guess I can give it a try." ♥ *Nicole Kraayenbrink*



GOD WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU | KEY VERSE: *The LORD your God is the one who will go with you; he will not leave you or abandon you.*
Deuteronomy 31:6 (CSB)



Have you experienced the pain and feelings of abandonment that divorce brings? Maybe your own parents are divorced, or an aunt and uncle, or perhaps a friend's mom and dad. Even when it feels like someone in your life has left you behind, remember that God will never leave you. He cares about you and will always be with you wherever you are.

A NIGHT WALK

WHOO, WHOO, WHOOOO!" Kaylee heard the soft hoot of an owl floating through the still night air as she and her dad walked along a narrow path on their way to see the moon rise over the lake. *An owl!* she thought. She shined her flashlight toward the treetops, hoping to get a glimpse of the bird, but she couldn't see anything. As she looked straight up and searched the branches, her foot caught on a root sticking up from the path, and she fell down hard.

"Kaylee, are you all right?" Dad hurried to help her up. "What happened?"

"I tripped on a root," said Kaylee, getting up and brushing herself off. "I was pointing my flashlight up at the trees to see if I could find the owl. I guess I should have kept my light on the path."

"Yeah, I guess so," said Dad with a smile. They continued their walk and soon reached the beach. The lake was calm and glassy, and a beautiful silver path led to the moon hanging low over the dark water. They stood and enjoyed the scene in silence for a while. "Well, we'd better head back," Dad finally said. "Be sure to keep your light on the path this time."

"I will!" Kaylee assured him. "I've learned my lesson. That owl can hoot all he wants—I'm gonna watch where I'm going!"

"I've been thinking about a verse in Psalms—one that says God's Word is a light for our path," Dad said as they started back. "If we forget to shine the light of God's Word on our lives, it can cause us to trip and fall in our walk with Jesus."

"That would be worse than the fall I took, wouldn't it?" said Kaylee.

Dad nodded. "Jesus is our light in this dark world—He saved us and promises us eternal life with Him. That's why we need to let His truth light our way and guide us in how we live. And when we trip and fall into sin, the Bible says Jesus will always forgive us when we confess our wrongs."

Kaylee smiled. "I'll listen to what God says in the Bible so His light will shine on my path—just like this flashlight!" ♥ *Judith K. Boogaart*



LET GOD'S TRUTH LIGHT YOUR WAY | KEY VERSE: *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.* Psalm 119:105



Do you take time to read your Bible? Do you listen when others teach about it and ask them to explain things you don't understand? As you study God's Word in your walk with Jesus, it will remind you that you belong to Him and show you how He wants you to turn from sin and love others. Keep reading and listening to what He says in the Bible so His light can shine on the path of your life.

IT'S THE LAST MONTH OF WORD WITH ZACH!

KEEP FILLING IN YOUR CALENDAR FOR A CHANCE TO WIN PRIZES.

WORDWITHZACH.ORG

WAITING

It felt like forever before it was Daisy's turn to ride the swinging ship. She watched the line slowly move forward each time a new group got on the ride. Finally, it was her turn!

"Ready?" Dad grinned.

"More than ready!" Daisy hurried to find a seat.

The ride was just as fun as she expected, and she screamed each time it went down. Her stomach flip-flopped a little, but she still loved it.

"Can we go again?" Daisy asked as soon as they were finished.

Dad pointed toward the line. "It's still long."

"I don't mind," Daisy said. Now that she knew how fun the ride was, she could wait forever.

"You're sure you wouldn't rather ride something else?" Dad asked, pointing toward a shorter line. Daisy quickly shook her head. Dad smiled and led her to the end of the long line. "Some things are worth waiting for, huh?"

"Yeah," Daisy said.

Dad put his hand on her shoulder. "As you get older, you'll realize other things are worth waiting for too. Sometimes we have to be patient to get something good."

"Like a ride on a swinging ship?" Daisy asked.

"And things even better than that," Dad said as they slowly moved forward in line. "God has good plans for you, Daisy. He loves you so much He sent Jesus to save you from sin and give you eternal life! You can trust Him to bring good things into your life at the right time. Be patient as you wait for Him to show you what they are."

"What kind of things?" asked Daisy.

"Well, for example, it took a while for me to figure out God was calling me to be a pastor. Waiting for Him to lead me where He wanted me to go wasn't easy, but it helped me grow in my relationship with Jesus." Dad smiled. "You can trust God to lead you in what's best for your life too."

Daisy nodded. The line didn't seem so bad when her dad was talking, and she knew how much fun she was going to have at the end. She was glad she could trust God to help her be patient and wait for the good things He had planned for her too. ♥ *Bethany Acker*



WAIT PATIENTLY FOR GOD'S PLAN | KEY VERSE: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)



Do you ever get impatient? Think of something you know is worth waiting for—like a fun ride or cookies baking in the oven. The good things God has planned for you are worth the wait too. He loves you so much that Jesus died and rose again to save you, and He has good plans for you. Be patient as you wait for Him to show them to you.

BECOMING FRIENDS

Luke sat in the pew and stared off into space as his parents talked to some friends nearby. His stomach growled loudly, and he hoped his family would leave soon.

“What are you doing sitting here by yourself?”

Luke looked up as Mr. Bryant sat down in the pew in front of him. “Nothing,” Luke said with a smile. He liked talking to Mr. Bryant.

“Why don’t you go talk to someone?” Mr. Bryant asked.

Luke shrugged. “I don’t have any friends here,” he said.

“What do you mean you don’t have friends?” Mr. Bryant looked around the church. “I bet the kids over there are your age.” He pointed to someone up front. “And I know he’s your age!”

Luke looked and saw that Mr. Bryant was pointing to his grandson standing by the piano. “It’s just—it’s hard to know what to say to other kids,” he told Mr. Bryant. “I don’t mind being by myself.”

Mr. Bryant cleared his throat. “Remember when you first started coming to church here with your family? I totally ignored you, and that’s how we became friends, right?”

Luke laughed. “No! You were one of the first people to say hello, and we talk all the time now.”

Mr. Bryant nodded and leaned his arm on top of the pew. “Listen, Luke. You want friends, don’t you?” Luke nodded. “Well,” Mr. Bryant said, “to have friends, you have to be friendly and take an interest in others. You have to go right up and introduce yourself, like I did when I first met you.”

“But it’s hard,” Luke said.

“So’s math,” said Mr. Bryant with a grin. “But you don’t have to do it on your own. Jesus is the greatest Friend there is—He became one of us and died to save us so we could be His friends forever! With His help, I think you’ll make one of those friends the Bible talks about—one that sticks closer than a brother.”

Luke thought about that and smiled. “I guess that’d be cool.”

Mr. Bryant leaned over and gave Luke a friendly slap on the shoulder. “Now you’re talking.” He looked at his watch and got up. “See you later, Luke.” He jerked his thumb toward his grandson. “Now go say hello.” ♥ *Katlyn Traxler*



BE A FRIEND | KEY VERSE: *A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*

Proverbs 18:24



Do you need a friend? Trying to make friends can be scary, but it gets easier the more you practice. Trust Jesus to help you be the kind of friend He is—one who cares about others and takes an interest in their lives. Ask Him to give you the courage to reach out to those around you and be friendly. Just saying hello to someone new could be the beginning of a lifelong friendship.

MIDDLE SCHOOL BLUES

It's hard to believe you're already old enough to be in middle school this year, Mateo," Mom said as they drove home after shopping for school clothes.

"Don't remind me," Mateo said miserably. "I wish I could stay at my old school forever."

"Why?" asked Mom.

"Last year there weren't any older kids to pick on us," replied Mateo. "I liked being one of the oldest kids in the school."

"Sounds like you have the middle school blues before you even get there," said Mom.

"Well, this year my class will be the youngest, so we'll have to deal with all the older kids," said Mateo.

Mom pointed to a little girl on a tricycle crossing the street with her mother. "Remember your tricycle?" she asked. "Why don't you ride it anymore?"

"Ride my tricycle?" asked Mateo in surprise. "That would look weird!" He grinned at the thought. "I'm too big to ride that thing now."

"Remember how you prayed every night for weeks that you could take the training wheels off your first two-wheel bike?" Mom asked as the traffic light turned green and they went through the busy intersection.

Mateo laughed. "I remember that. I didn't want to be a baby forever."

"It seems like you do now," said Mom. "At least when it comes to school."

Mateo frowned. "School is different."

"Somewhat different," Mom said as they turned into their driveway. "But in a way, going from your tricycle to a bike with training wheels to a bike without them is a lot like going from elementary to middle school to high school."

Mateo sighed. "I guess."

"And whenever you fell off your tricycle or bike, Dad and I were there to help," Mom reminded him. "We're still here to help you—we'll support you and pray for you every day. And you should pray too! Give your worries to Jesus, and trust Him to help you deal with new situations. Even though middle school seems scary, He promises to be with you and use this new phase of your life to help you grow in your relationship with Him. Trust Him to help you one day at a time, and enjoy today!" ♥ *Ruth McQuilkin*



GIVE WORRIES TO JESUS AND ENJOY TODAY | KEY VERSE: *Do not worry about tomorrow.* Matthew 6:34



Do you worry about going to a new school or moving to a new place? Do you wonder how things will turn out even further down the road—like finding a job or getting married? It's good to pray about future events in your life, but don't worry about them. Trust Jesus to guide you through the years ahead and help you through whatever changes you face. Then enjoy life with Him today!

STORMS OF LIFE

Javier looked out the window. Rain rattled on the roof, and thunder jolted his eardrums. “Why is it so loud, Mom?” he asked.

“The storm is getting closer,” replied Mom. “The reporter on TV said the basement is the safest place in storms like this, so let’s go.” Mom handed Javier a jug of water and a couple of flashlights. “You can carry these,” she said. “I’ll grab some snacks and our emergency pack.”

They hurried down the stairs and huddled in a corner of the basement as the wind shook the house. “The wind is so strong,” said Javier nervously.

“Yes,” said Mom, “but we’re sheltered from it. And we have snacks and lights and other supplies to keep us comfortable.” She handed him a granola bar.

“Thanks—peanut butter’s my favorite!” Javier bit into the bar and chewed thoughtfully. “It’s good to be prepared for storms like this, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it is,” said Mom. “Did you know God wants us to also prepare for storms that may come along in life?”

“So we’ll be ready for whatever happens to us?” asked Javier.

“Exactly. Can you think of ways we can be ready for whatever happens in our lives here on earth?”

“Well, we believed what the weather reporter said and came to the basement, and we also need to believe what God says and trust Jesus to save us from sin,” said Javier.

“Good,” said Mom. “That’s most important. What else?”

“We brought lights,” said Javier. “And the Bible is called a light, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” said Mom. “It shows us our need for Jesus and the sacrifice He made to save us, and it shines on our lives so we can follow the path God wants for us as His children. Any more ideas?”

“Uh...we brought food and water,” said Javier. “Is that like the Bible too?”

Mom nodded. “As we get to know Jesus through what He says in the Bible, He will nourish us spiritually and remind us to trust Him for strength when life brings hard times.”

Javier sat up straight. “Hey, Mom, it’s not blowing so hard anymore! Shouldn’t we pray and thank God for protecting us?”

“You bet!” said Mom, and together they bowed their heads.  *Jaclyn S. Miller*



PREPARE FOR LIFE’S STORMS | KEY VERSE: *Using the Scriptures, those who serve God will be prepared and will have everything they need to do every good work.* 2 Timothy 3:17 (ERV)



Are you prepared for life’s storms? Everyone experiences hard times in their lives, but you can be ready for them before they come. Do you trust in Jesus? That’s most important. Jesus promises to always be with those who trust in Him and give us strength in tough times. Talk to Him and let Him encourage you and guide you through the light of His Word. When you face hard times, trust Him to help you weather the storm.

TOWERING FEARS

Mr. Robinson asked me to give my testimony at our youth group meeting Sunday night," Olivia told her mother as they walked along a path in the woods. "I'm going to tell him I just can't do it! I'm too scared!" She pointed toward a nearby hill. "There's the old fire lookout tower, Mom. Looks like somebody's on duty there today. Do you think they'll let us climb it? I've never done that."

"Let's check it out," said Mom.

When they walked over to the tower, Olivia hesitated. "I don't know," she said as she looked up at flight after flight of stairs leading to the top of the tower. "It looks scary! I don't really like being up so high."

"I'll be behind you to make sure you don't fall," Mom assured her. So after they got permission, Olivia and her mother began climbing.

The higher they climbed, the scarier it seemed, but Olivia could feel her mom's presence right behind her. And when they finally reached the top, Olivia was amazed as she looked out over the forest. Brilliant colors from the setting sun clung to clouds on the horizon. It made a spectacular canopy over the trees and hills below. "Wow, this is awesome!" said Olivia.

"Was it worth being scared?" Mom asked.

"It sure was," said Olivia. "Besides, even though I was scared, I knew you were with me."

"You know," said Mom, "if you let fear keep you from giving your testimony, you might miss something as awesome as this view."

"What do you mean?" asked Olivia.

"It's awesome to see what God does when we share how He's working in our lives with others," replied Mom.

"But what if I get so scared I can't even talk?" asked Olivia.

"I'm not saying you'll breeze right through it, but just like I was with you and ready to help you on these stairs, God will be with you and help you speak about Jesus and how He's changed your life. Even if you mess up, He'll be there to support you and use what you say to bless others."

Olivia hesitated, then nodded. "Okay," she said. "Even though it's scary, I'll trust God to help me." ♥ *Katherine R. Adams*



DON'T BE AFRAID TO SERVE GOD | KEY VERSE: *For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.*

2 Timothy 1:7 (NLT)



Is there something you believe God wants you to do? Someone you should reach out to or talk to about Jesus? If you feel afraid, remember that God will be with you and help you. He is working in your life so that you can point others to Jesus and help them know He loves them and gave His life to save them. Trust Him to help you serve Him and share His love with others in spite of your fear.

DAD'S ROUTINE

Malachi waited in the hallway, tapping his foot on the floor. "Almost time..." He didn't have to wait long. The door to his dad's office opened, and his dad appeared with his glasses pushed up on the top of his head. "Hi, bud," Dad said.

Malachi grinned and started for the kitchen. He knew his dad would follow him.

An hour later, Malachi positioned himself in the hallway again. This time his dad wouldn't just be getting water but also a snack. He was hoping he might share.

"Have you been standing out here all morning?" Dad asked as he stepped out of his office.

Malachi shook his head with a grin. "What are you having today? Yogurt? A granola bar?"

Dad gave him a sheepish smile. "How did you know I was feeling ready for a snack?"

Malachi shrugged. Ever since his dad started working from home, he'd been paying attention and learning his routine.

Malachi told his grandma about it that evening when she came to the house so his dad could go to a meeting. "I've memorized it all. He does everything at a certain time, even going outside to get a little fresh air."

Grandma smiled. "It shows you care a lot about him for you to memorize his routine so you can see him when he takes little breaks from his work."

Malachi nodded slowly. It did show that, didn't it? He wanted all the time he could get with his dad.

Malachi frowned. "No one cares enough to memorize *my* routine. I don't think Dad even knows what time I get up."

"Your dad might not, but someone does," Grandma said, scooping a homemade brownie onto a plate. "In Psalm 139, we read that God knows every move we make. Not only did He love us enough to send Jesus to save us from sin, but He cares about us enough to pay attention to our daily routines."

"Really?" Malachi asked. "Well, that's cool."

Grandma nodded. "Your dad loves and cares about you too, Malachi. If you're feeling lonely, maybe you should talk to him about spending more time together. But when your dad can't be with you, remember that God is. He knows everything about you and cares about your life. You can always talk to Him." ♥

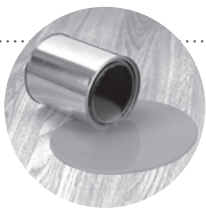
Emily Acker



GOD CARES ABOUT YOU | KEY VERSE: *Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy.* Psalm 33:18



Do you ever feel like no one really cares about you or pays a lot of attention to the things you do? If so, talk to a trusted adult about it so they can help. But know that God cares about you. He knows every detail of your life and wants to hear about everything you're going through. When it feels like no one cares, tell Him how you feel and trust Him to help you.



THE BIG STAIN

Landon's eyes widened in horror as his elbow knocked a bottle of paint off the table and it toppled to the floor. Blue paint spread in a growing blob across the kitchen. Landon jumped off his chair and quickly picked up the paint bottle. *What am I going to do?* he wondered. *I've got to clean this up before Grandpa and Grandma see it.*

Landon rushed into the laundry room and grabbed some rags, then ran back to the kitchen and used them to soak up the paint on the floor. A large stain remained behind, so he got a bucket of soapy water and began scrubbing the paint spot. *This isn't going to work!* Landon thought frantically. He ran to the sink and began washing his hands. *I can't get the paint off my hands either!* He knew he would have to tell his grandparents what had happened.

Grandpa frowned when he came in and saw the stain. "Well, I'm glad the floor isn't carpeted!" he said. "I have some special cleaner in the garage, and I think it will work on this." Grandpa went to get the cleaner, and soon all trace of the paint was gone.

"You know, Landon," said Grandpa as they washed their hands with the same cleaner they had used on the floor, "maybe we can both learn a good lesson from what just happened."

Landon looked up at him. "Not to fool around with paint in the kitchen, right?"

Grandpa smiled. "Well, yes, but I was thinking of an even more important lesson. You couldn't wash the paint stains away by yourself, could you?" Landon shook his head. "The Bible tells us we're all stained by sin, and no matter how hard we try, we can't clean it away ourselves," Grandpa said as he picked up a towel and dried his hands. "But when Jesus died and rose again, He made it possible for our sins to be washed away."

Landon dried his clean hands too. "I needed you to use your special cleaner on the floor and on my hands," he said. "And I need Jesus to clean my heart, right?"

Grandpa smiled and put his hand on Landon's shoulder. "That's exactly right." ♥
Richard S. Maffeo



JESUS CLEANS SIN AWAY | KEY VERSE: *Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.* Psalm 51:7



Have your sins been washed away? You can't clean your heart by being good or doing good things. It won't work. You need someone to clean it for you—Jesus Christ. He is the only one who can make your heart clean and free from the guilt of sin. Ask Him to clean your heart today. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.)

DAILY CLEANSE

Robin knelt at the foot of her bed and bowed her head to pray. It was hard to focus with her little sister, Jenny, screaming in the bathroom.

"No! I don't want to brush my teeth!" Jenny cried.

Mom poked her head into Robin's room, a tired smile on her face. "Robin, could Jenny and I pray with you? Maybe we can pray that Jenny will want to brush her teeth."

Robin nodded, and her sister raced into the room and sat beside her, suddenly an angel. "Dear Jesus," Robin said. "Thank You for helping me with my math homework and healing Grandma from her fall. Please bless all my friends and family. Help us have a good night's sleep. Amen."

"Amen!" Jenny exclaimed.

"Robin, did you forget something?" Mom asked.

"Oh, right. Jesus, please help Jenny brush her teeth without complaining. Amen."

Mom smiled. "Just one more thing. Do you remember how Jesus taught us how to pray? In addition to thanking God and bringing our needs to Him, we also need to confess our sins."

Robin sighed. "I just don't see the point in asking Jesus to forgive my sins every single day. I'll still make mistakes tomorrow."

"Admitting our wrongs is about more than preventing future mistakes," Mom replied.

Jenny tugged on Mom's sleeve. "Bedtime?"

Robin laughed. "Nice try, Jenny. But you have to brush your teeth."

"Why does she need to brush her teeth?" Mom asked Robin.

"Because her teeth are dirty and she might get cavities if she waits too long to clean them."

"But her teeth will be dirty again tomorrow," Mom said. "And every day after that. Maybe the whole thing is pointless."

"It's still healthier to brush her teeth daily," Robin said. Then she laughed. "You're not talking about brushing teeth, are you?"

"You caught me," Mom said. "Confessing our sins reminds us of our need for Jesus and helps us appreciate what He did to save us. Prayer is meant to bring us closer to Jesus in this way."

Robin turned to Jenny. "If I confess my sins to Jesus, will you finally brush your teeth?"

Jenny sighed dramatically. "Okay, fine." ♥ *Hannah Chung*



CONFESS YOUR SINS DAILY | KEY VERSE: *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* 1 John 1:9



Have you ever wondered why you should confess your sins to Jesus and ask for His forgiveness when you pray? Confessing means to recognize an action or attitude as sin and trust God for forgiveness, knowing that it is because of Jesus's sacrifice on the cross that we will be forgiven. Take a moment to confess any sins, trusting that God will forgive you each and every time.

CHAMELEON FRIENDS

Have you ever heard people use colors to describe their feelings?” Miss Iverson asked her class.

Carter waved his hand to make sure she saw it. “Like green with envy?”

“How about purple with rage?” Mei said. “Or blue—like when they’re sad.”

“All good examples,” Miss Iverson said. “Now, people don’t actually change color, but some animals do. A chameleon, for example, can quickly change its skin color in response to light, temperature, or other things in its environment. Other animals change color to blend in with their surroundings. They do that to defend themselves against enemies.”

That evening, Carter told his dad about his day. “People use different colors to describe how they feel, but some animals really do change their color. Isn’t that cool?”

“Sure is,” said Dad. “Sounds like you had a good day.”

“Pretty good,” replied Carter, but then he frowned. “Hari and I always play together at recess time, but today he acted like he didn’t even know me! He was playing basketball with a bunch of guys when I came up, and he didn’t invite me to play with them or even speak to me. I think he wanted them to think he was cool.” Carter paused. “Hari was a chameleon friend today!”

“That’s a good way to describe people who change their behavior toward others depending on the situation,” said Dad. “But I don’t think Hari is the only one who does that. Have you ever done something like that, Carter?”

“Well...maybe.” Carter thought of how he treated his little sister differently when his friends came over. “Yeah. I’m not always nice to Layla in front of my friends because I want her to leave us alone.”

“Do you remember the verse you learned at church last week?” Dad asked.

Carter nodded. “Proverbs 17:17. It says friends should love each other at all times. That kind of friend wouldn’t be like a chameleon.”

“No,” said Dad. “That verse describes the kind of friend Jesus is. He shows His love for us all the time, and He wants us to do the same. Trust Him to help you be consistent, loving friend—even when others aren’t.”

“Okay.” Carter sighed. “I’ll remember that when I see Hari tomorrow.” ♥

Donna Huisjen



BE A CONSISTENT FRIEND | KEY VERSE: *A friend loves at all times.*

Proverbs 17:17



Have you ever had a chameleon friend? Have you been one yourself? It hurts when a friend changes the way they treat you based on where they are or who they’re with. The Bible says a true friend loves at all times.

That’s how Jesus loves us, and He wants us to love others the same way.

Be a consistent friend and treat others in the same loving way all the time.

GOD'S MASTERPIECE



"I don't get it, Grandpa." Malik scratched his head as he looked at the painting. "What is it?"

"Well, the title is *Three Musicians*. Try squinting your eyes and tilting your head."

"I think I see a clarinet and a guitar, but the musicians look a little creepy."

"That's the beauty of art," said Grandpa. "Everyone sees something different."

Malik and his grandparents were spending the afternoon at an art museum. Malik had never seen so many paintings and sculptures. Hundreds of pieces of artwork hung on walls that stretched on for what seemed like miles.

"Which painting is your favorite, Malik?" Grandma asked.

"I'm not sure, Grammy. Some of these paintings look like they were painted by a three-year-old. Other paintings look way better than anything I could paint. If I had to pick my favorite, it might be *Three Musicians*. I like that you have to think about what you're looking at. How much do you think a painting like that costs?"

Grandma shrugged. Grandpa scratched his chin. "I'm sure that painting costs millions of dollars."

"Millions of dollars!" Malik couldn't believe it. "It doesn't look that valuable."

Grandpa smiled. "It's not valuable because of how it looks. It's valuable because of who made it. *Three Musicians* was painted by Pablo Picasso, one of the greatest artists of all time. Many people consider it to be one of his masterpieces."

Grandma put her arm around Malik. "Every time I come here I can't help but think that none of these masterpieces compare to God's masterpieces."

"God's masterpieces?" asked Malik. "Where are God's masterpieces?"

Grandma smiled. "Take a look in the mirror."

"Me?" Malik asked.

"You got it. The Bible says God made all of us in His image. We're God's masterpieces. Our value doesn't come from how we look, but from who made us."

"That's right," Grandpa chimed in. "The Bible also says God paid a high price for us. He sent His Son to die on the cross to save us from sin. Jesus paid for us with His life so we could belong to Him."

Malik took out his phone and snapped a picture of himself with his grandparents. Grandma looked at it and smiled. "Now that's a masterpiece!" ♥ Jared Hottenstein



YOU ARE GOD'S MASTERPIECE | KEY VERSE: *God paid a very high price to make you his. So honor God with your body.* 1 Corinthians 6:20 (ERV)



Have you ever looked in the mirror and seen something you didn't like? Maybe you think your nose is too big or your hair is too curly. The next time you find something about your body you wish you could change, remember that God made you, and He doesn't make mistakes. He made you in His image, and Jesus paid for you with His life. That determines your value—not what you look like.



USE THE ENTRANCE

Ryan lay flat on his back in the cool green grass, watching the fluffy clouds floating across the sky above him. When he glanced over at the tall trellis covered with Grandma’s rambling roses, he noticed it almost reached the small balcony with the slider door that led to the guest bedroom. Ryan scrambled to his feet and darted toward the house. *I bet I can climb up to my room*, he thought. He put his foot on a low trellis slat, pushed away a few roses, and began to climb. He stretched his arms, caught the balcony railing, and swung himself up. But before he could crawl over the railing, his foot slipped. He screamed, and the big pink roses zipped by as he fell to the ground.

“Ryan, can you open your eyes?” asked a faraway voice. “Can you hear me?”

Ryan blinked and slowly sat up. “What happened?” he asked.

“You had a bad fall,” said Grandpa. “We need to take you to the emergency room to make sure you don’t have a concussion.”

After returning from the hospital with a clean bill of health, Ryan felt embarrassed about what he had done. “I wanted to climb onto the balcony to get into my room,” he said. “I thought it would be more fun than just walking in through the door, but it wasn’t fun at all!”

After dinner, Grandpa read from the book of John. “Your experience today reminded me of these verses,” he said. “They say Jesus is the door to eternal life. We may think we can get to heaven by going to church, helping neighbors, giving money to charity, taking care of animals—doing all sorts of good things. But just like you couldn’t get into your bedroom by climbing the rose trellis, none of us can get into heaven by doing good things.”

“Right,” said Grandma. “We can only get into heaven through Jesus. He is the door. Only He can save us from sin and give us eternal life.”

Ryan nodded. “I didn’t use the door when I tried to get into my room today, and that was a disaster. I’m glad I’m going through the door to heaven by trusting in Jesus!” ♥ Lois A. Teufel



JESUS IS THE DOOR TO HEAVEN | KEY VERSE: *I am the Door. Anyone who goes in through Me will be saved from the punishment of sin.*
John 10:9 (NLV)



Did you know that Jesus is the door—the only way—to heaven? Or are you trying to get there some other way? There is nothing you can do to work your way to heaven. You must simply come through the door. Jesus loves you so much He died to save you from sin so you could spend eternity with Him. Trust Him as your Savior today. (See “Have You Heard the Good News?” on page 104.)

THE ONE WHO MADE THE OCEAN

You can't trust anyone." Emma sighed as she walked along the beach with her aunt. "He promised to love my mom forever. And now what? He's going to leave me and Mom and never see us again?"

"I'm sorry," her aunt said. "I wish things had worked out better."

"He promised he was going to be like a dad to me," Emma said.

"You and your mom have both been hurt twice now," her aunt said. "It's terrible, and I'm sorry." She bent to pick up a shell. "I don't know what it's like to have a dad or stepdad leave me, but I know that breakups are difficult. They make it hard to trust."

"I'm never trusting anyone again. Everyone lies. No one stays with you." Emma's eyes filled with tears. "How do I even know you'll stay? How do I trust God anymore?" She kicked at the sand. "You know what? I don't."

"Emma." Her aunt dropped the shell and put her arms around her. "Sweetheart..."

"I wanted him to stick around!" Emma cried. "Mom was happy when he was with us."

They stood there together, Emma crying and her aunt trying to comfort her, until a loud seagull got their attention and they pulled apart.

Emma wiped her eyes. "I don't know if I can trust God anymore."

Her aunt pointed to the water. "Who made that?"

"God," Emma said. "He made the whole world."

"Right," her aunt said. "There's a verse in Psalms that says God made the sea and goes on to say that He is always going to be faithful. Faithful...it's what a couple promises to be when they get married. But people mess up. God doesn't ever mess up—He will always be there for you."

"It's hard to believe that," Emma said.

"I know. But the One who made you and sent His Son to die for you is not going to abandon you. He loves you too much to do that."

Emma bent down and picked up a smooth stone. "I think I'll keep this to remember what you said—to remember that the God who made the ocean is always going to be faithful." ♥ *Emily Acker*



GOD IS ALWAYS FAITHFUL | KEY VERSE: *He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—he remains faithful forever.*
Psalm 146:6 (NIV)



Have the actions of humans such as your parents, teachers, or friends ever caused you to question God? Even if a parent or friend abandons you, God is still going to be with you, no matter what. God created you and loves you, and Jesus died and rose again to save you and give you eternal life with Him. You can trust Him to always be faithful.

AWESOME WISDOM

The Reed family was seated around their picnic table playing a board game when Eliana looked up. “Oh no!” she wailed. “Not again!”

Parker groaned. Arthur, their collie, was almost totally covered with cockleburrs. “I’m guessing you just had to go chase after a squirrel,” said Parker. “Or was it a rabbit this time?”

Eliana sighed. “Dad, why did God create cocklebur plants?”

“Well, I don’t know for sure,” said Dad. “But I once heard of another dog that was covered with cockleburrs many years ago. While his owner was picking them off, he noticed the small hooks on the burs and how they clung to each other. That gave him an idea that eventually earned him quite a bit of money.” Dad grinned at Eliana. “What holds the strap in place across the top of your sandals?”

Eliana pulled one strap loose. “It’s called Velcro.”

Dad nodded. “The man who invented it got the idea from those cockleburrs. He’s just one of many people who have studied things in nature and then used what they learned to invent or improve things we use in everyday life. God’s wisdom has been discovered in hundreds of the things He created.”

Parker slapped at a mosquito. “I’m pretty sure no one has found any use for mosquitoes though,” he said.

“Actually, scientists have been studying mosquitoes,” said Mom. “They’ve used what they’ve learned from them to make hypodermic needles less painful.”

“Wow, that’s great! I hate getting shots,” said Parker. “And I thought the only good mosquito was a dead one!”

“All of creation shows us that we have an awesome God,” Dad said. “Even things like cockleburrs and mosquitoes. Those things reflect God’s wisdom too, even if we don’t recognize it at first.”

“It’s crazy to me that God gave mosquitoes and cockleburrs a purpose,” Eliana said.

“It’s the same with things in our lives,” Mom said. “We can always trust God’s wisdom, even with things we don’t understand. He created us and sent Jesus to save us because He has a purpose for us. Even when things happen that don’t make sense to us, we can trust Him.” She looked at Arthur. “All right, let’s get all those burs out of Arthur’s coat before they get tangled in even worse!” ♥

Vera M. Hutchcroft



YOU HAVE AN AWESOME GOD | KEY VERSE: *O LORD, how many are Your works! You made them all in wisdom. The earth is full of what You have made.* Psalm 104:24 (NLV)



Do you sometimes wonder why God created things that seem bad? He has a purpose for everything, even when we can’t see what it is. Jesus’s death on the cross seemed awful at first, but it led to the biggest miracle ever—His resurrection! Because of this, we can pray that when we don’t understand God would help us find peace in His wisdom.

MAKING SACRIFICES

As Dr. Jensen talked about his work as a missionary, Nolan wondered what it would be like to move to a different country to serve God. Dr. Jensen described it as God giving him such a deep love for the people in that country that he had to move there, but Nolan doubted he'd ever be able to make such a big sacrifice, even if God wanted him to.



Nolan listened intently as Dr. Jensen told a story about fixing a truck with the help of his sixteen-year-old son, Joel. "We didn't have the right tools, and Joel came up with one crazy idea after another. Just when we were about to give up, the engine roared to life! We praised God right then and there."

On the way home from church, Nolan brought up the truck story. "It's too bad they don't have better tools to work with, isn't it?" He grinned at his dad. "You should have been there, Dad. You have tools to fix just about anything!"

Over the next few days, Nolan often thought about Dr. Jensen's lack of tools. The more he thought about it, the more he wanted to do something to help. *I have some money saved up I could use, he thought. But then I won't have money for a new bike.*

Nolan tried to forget it, but he couldn't, so he decided to talk to his dad about it. "Dad, do you think God wants me to buy tools for the missionaries with my bike money? Could I get what they need with the amount I have?"

"That's a great idea, Nolan. I can get tools at discount prices." Dad beamed. "I think the Holy Spirit is helping you love others like Jesus by putting their needs before your own desires."

Nolan nodded. "Getting a new bike can wait." As he spoke, Nolan realized he was ready to make a sacrifice to help the missionaries. *It's not as big as moving to a foreign country, he thought. But I think I'm beginning to understand how God can make you care about someone enough that you're willing to make sacrifices for them. It's like what Jesus did on the cross for me!* He smiled at his dad. "Let's go pick out some tools!" ♥ Esther M. Bailey



MAKE SACRIFICES FOR OTHERS | KEY VERSE: *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.* 1 John 3:16 (NIV)



Do you know anyone who's made a big sacrifice to serve God? Have you ever made a sacrifice to help someone? Jesus loves us so much that He sacrificed His life for us. When we trust in Him, we have the Holy Spirit within us to help us make sacrifices for others out of love. Whether big or small, the sacrifices you make for others show them the love of Jesus.

WHAT'S RUNNING THROUGH YOUR HEAD?

Turn on the radio, Dad," Kaelyn called from the back of the minivan.

"Yeah," said Brenner. "It's boring back here. We've been driving forever!"

Dad glanced at the twins in the rearview mirror. "Sorry, guys," he said. "I hate to ruin your fun, but I don't like your music."

Brenner snorted. "What fun? We're on a three-hour car trip in the middle of nowhere!"

"Hey, Brenner," whispered Kaelyn. "We can be our own radio." Brenner nodded, and Kaelyn launched into the latest hit. "Hey, you, standing under the lights; come on, we can dance all night..."

Brenner joined in the chorus. "Ooooh, it's a party..."

"No thanks," said Dad.

"Okay, how about this?" said Kaelyn. "Money, honey, it's the thing..."

"Fancy cars and diamond rings," sang Brenner.

"Do you two have all the popular songs memorized?" asked Dad.

"Yeah," said Kaelyn. "They run through my head practically all day long."

Dad looked back at the twins. "That reminds me of something I read in the Bible this morning. The apostle Paul tells Timothy how important it is for children to study and memorize the Word of God so you understand all that Jesus has done for you and deepen your faith in Him."

"We study the Bible in church," said Brenner.

"And during family devotions," added Kaelyn.

Dad grinned. "Okay, smarty-pants, how about a quiz? Finish this verse: 'Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and...'"

Kaelyn shot a look at Brenner, and Brenner shrugged.

"Try this one," said Dad. "'God is our refuge and strength, a...'"

Brenner grimaced. "It looks like we've got some work to do."

"Reading the Bible and memorizing verses is a great way to keep God's truth and promises in our thoughts and help us remember who we are in Jesus," said Dad.

"Yeah," said Kaelyn. "And it'd give me a break from all those pop songs!"

Dad smiled. "I know just the verse to start with. 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.'"

Kaelyn and Brenner laughed. "Dad!"  Jennifer Dillard



MEMORIZE GOD'S WORD | KEY VERSE: *You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 3:15 (NLT)*



Have you memorized the lyrics to your favorite song? How about a Bible verse? A memorized Bible verse can remind you that Jesus loves you and is always there to help you. Try memorizing an inspiring Bible verse. When it pops into your head at school, in the car, or during soccer practice, notice how that reminder of Christ's love improves your whole day.

WORDS ON FIRE

Hey, Dad, do you know what Elise told me?" asked Tenley.

Dad put down the book he was reading and smiled. Tenley loved to tell him everything that was going on with her friends at school—even when they were on vacation.

"Elise says Aria's dad was arrested and taken to the police station," Tenley went on. "He was driving under the influence—that means he was drunk—and he crashed into another car. Elise says he gets drunk every weekend, and he—"

"Hold on a minute, Tenley," said Dad. "How do you know what Elise said is true? And even if it is, should you repeat it? You could hurt Aria's father badly by saying things like that about him. And I'm sure it would hurt Aria to know you're telling people about her family's problems."

"Well, I—" Tenley suddenly stood up and pointed to a nearby campsite. "Dad, look! Over there! Those leaves are on fire!"

Dad and Tenley raced over to the campsite, grabbing a couple of wet towels from the line as they went. A hot log had rolled out of an unattended fire, and dry leaves had started to burn. Tenley and Dad stomped and beat the spreading flames until they had the fire out.

"That was a close one!" Dad said.

"Yeah," said Tenley. "I wonder where the people are who started the fire."

As they walked back to their own campsite, Dad said, "You know, Tenley, Mom and I love that you like to share ideas and experiences. But when you share information that's harmful, it's called gossip. God says the tongue is like a fire, and you saw how fast fire can get out of control. That can happen with words too. What you say can be exaggerated, and it can spread rapidly and hurt others—like Aria and her dad."

Tenley nodded. "I'm sorry, Dad. I'll be more careful about repeating things I hear."

"Good," said Dad. "The best way to do that is to trust God to help you speak about others in a loving way. God loves us all so much that He sent Jesus to die for us so we could have eternal life with Him. Trust Him to help you show His love through your words." ♥ *Judith K. Boogaart*



DON'T REPEAT HURTFUL WORDS | KEY VERSE: *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs.* Ephesians 4:29 (NIV)



Do you speak words that are on fire? Could they get out of control and spread rapidly, causing people to get hurt? If you hear gossip that could burn someone, put it out! Don't repeat information that may not be true or could embarrass or hurt others. Trust God to help you use the words you say to show love and support for others—even when they're not there to hear them.

UNDESERVED GIFT

Tinkling bells chimed invitingly as the ice cream truck turned onto Cali's street. Ice cream was one of her favorite treats, but it was just before lunchtime, so she was sure her grandma wouldn't let her have anything now. *But I can still have a little fun with the ice cream truck driver*, Cali thought. She yelled loudly to get his attention as he drove by, then ducked behind a bush. The truck stopped, and the man got out expecting to sell something, but no one came to buy. Cali snickered to herself when she saw his puzzled face.

"That was unkind," said Grandma, and Cali jumped in surprise. She had no idea Grandma was watching and had come out. "It was wrong for you to stop that man and make him think he was going to earn some money. Now come with me. You need to apologize." Grandma led the way to the truck, which had not yet moved on.

Under Grandma's watchful eye, Cali told the driver she was sorry for playing a trick on him. Then Grandma bought an ice cream bar for each of them.

Cali felt ashamed when her grandmother held out the treat. "No thanks, Grandma."

"But I bought this for you," said Grandma.

Cali looked at the ground. "I don't deserve it after what I did."

"That's true," said Grandma. "But I want you to have it anyway—it's a gift from me." She continued to hold out the ice cream bar.

Reluctantly, Cali took the treat and began to eat. It tasted so good and was very refreshing on such a hot day! "Thank you, Grandma," she said.

Grandma smiled. "You're glad you accepted my gift, aren't you?"

Cali nodded. "I am, even though I don't deserve it."

"We don't deserve God's love and forgiveness either," said Grandma. "But He offers it to us as a gift—a gift we need to accept. Jesus died on the cross to save us from sin so we could be forgiven and have eternal life with Him. But we can't enjoy that gift until we accept it."

"Just like this ice cream," said Cali. "I've accepted God's gift, Grandma. I know Jesus has saved me and given me eternal life." ♥ *Nance E. Keyes*



ACCEPT GOD'S GIFT | KEY VERSE: *The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Romans 6:23



Do you trust Jesus as your Savior? Have you accepted His gift of eternal life? God offers it to everyone, but it has to be received to be enjoyed. You don't deserve it—no one does. But don't push it away! Jesus loves you so much that He sacrificed His life to pay for your sins. Accept the undeserved but wonderful gift He offers. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.)

COLOR!



EVERYWHERE ALL THE TIME

Can I have one of your French fries?" Gavin asked his sister as he snatched one from her plate.

"Hey, no! You have your own!" Hailey protested. She put her arm around her plate to defend her food.

"But you got the crispier ones!" Gavin held up one of his flimsy French fries.

"Our oven hasn't been cooking evenly. Here, Gavin, I got a few more crispy ones," Mom said and scraped some of her fries onto Gavin's plate.

"I thought that since we rented this place it meant the landlord had to fix things like that," Gavin said as he ate another fry.


"He does, but he also prioritizes repairs," Mom explained. "He oversees more than twenty apartments and does most of the repairs himself. Our oven not working is not as important as someone's broken heater, so we have to wait until the landlord has time to fix it." Mom got up and put her plate in the sink. She returned with her Bible and took the church prayer list out. Every night they prayed for the people and things on the list together.

"God has a lot more people to take care of than our landlord. Is that why we sometimes have to wait for our prayers to be answered?" Hailey asked.

"No, that's not why," Mom replied. "Unlike our landlord, God is able to immediately do anything we ask. But He doesn't always answer our prayers right away because His plan is often different from what we think is best. That doesn't mean He doesn't hear our prayers. God sees and hears everything because He's omnipresent."

"Omni-what?" Gavin asked with a puzzled look.

"Omnipresent," Mom repeated. "It means He's everywhere all the time. Millions of people could pray at the same time, and God would hear them all. But even though He's everywhere, God is present with Christians in a special way. The Bible calls Jesus 'Immanuel,' which means 'God with us.' When we put our faith in Jesus, God gives us the Holy Spirit, who will never leave us. Even though God doesn't always answer our prayers right away or how we want, He promises to be with us through everything."

"I'm thankful God is always with us to help us," Gavin said. "Let's pray that He'll help our landlord fix our oven soon!"  Melissa Yeagle



GOD IS WITH US | KEY VERSE: *The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth.* Psalm 145:18



Have you ever wondered how God hears everyone's prayers all over the world? God isn't limited to being in one place at one time like we are. He is present everywhere all the time, so He sees, hears, and knows everything. And if you know Jesus as your Savior, you always have God's presence with you through the Holy Spirit. God hears your prayers, and even if you have to wait for an answer, He is with you.

NERVE MEDICINE

More than an hour after Amelia had gone to bed at her grandparents' home, she still had not fallen asleep. She tried everything she could think of to relax her mind, but nothing worked. Finally, she slipped out of bed and went to find Grandma.

"Grandma, I saw an ad on TV about sleeping pills," said Amelia. "Do you have any? Can I have some?"

"I don't have any—and I don't think it would be good for you to take anything like that anyway, Amelia," said Grandma.

Amelia sighed. She thought Grandma might say something like that. "But I just can't get to sleep," she said.

"You're probably worried about the divorce hearings tomorrow, aren't you?" asked Grandma, giving Amelia a hug.

Amelia nodded. She felt better just having Grandma close. "It makes me nervous," she said, wishing she could tell Grandma exactly how she felt. But Amelia couldn't put her emotions into words. "I'm afraid of what will happen."

"It's been bothering me too," Grandma told her. "We need to keep on praying for your mom and dad." Grandma was silent for a moment, and Amelia guessed their feelings were almost the same.

"Sleeping pills might make our bodies go to sleep, but I think there's an even better medicine for our nerves." Grandma picked up her Bible and opened it. "I'll read one of my favorite passages to you. It's in Philippians, and I think it will help both of us."

As Grandma read out loud, Amelia noticed the Bible verses encouraged her to pray about everything. "Amelia, as your Savior, Jesus promises to be with you in every situation," Grandma said when she finished reading. "He wants you to trust Him with the things you're worried about so you can feel His peace—no matter what happens."

Grandma prayed and asked God to quiet their nerves and give them rest. She also prayed for Amelia's parents.

"I think I can go to sleep now," Amelia said as she hugged Grandma. "Thanks for reading those Bible verses to me. That was good nerve medicine."

Amelia settled back into bed, and even though she was still nervous, she felt better knowing Jesus promised to be with her and give her peace. ♥ *Esther M. Bailey*



JESUS BRINGS YOU PEACE | KEY VERSE: *The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:7*



Has something been making you nervous recently? The next time you feel troubled, tell Jesus what's bothering you. Read some Bible verses that remind you He loves you and is always with you. He gave His life to save you, and you can trust Him to be with you through everything. Ask Him for peace despite the difficulties. If you're still nervous, talk to a trusted adult about your worries too.

SAND AND SEASHELLS



Aunt Vivian, will you help me carry these shells? There are so many I want to take home!" The beauty of the seashells scattered on the beach captivated Gatlin. He had already filled his hands with shells of many colors.

Aunt Vivian laughed. "Gatlin, why don't you pick your favorite shells to take home? We can't carry them all."

After Gatlin and his aunt strolled back to their beach towels, he dumped the shells in a pile. Together they began sorting out the most interesting ones.

"Thanks for taking me on my first trip to the beach, Aunt Vivian," Gatlin said.

Aunt Vivian nodded. "This has been such a fun day. I love being out in God's wonderful creation."

"I just wish I could take all these shells home. I didn't know there would be so many!" Gatlin exclaimed.

"As many shells as there are, there's even more sand. And the Bible tells us God's thoughts toward His children outnumber even the grains of sand," Aunt Vivian added.

"Wow." Gatlin paused in sifting through the seashells. "God must think about us a lot."

"He sure does. Jesus even told His followers that God knows the number of hairs on our heads!"

Gatlin looked out toward the waves and the sun setting over the water. "God must really love us," he pondered. "I know Jesus came to save us, but I didn't know He pays that much attention to me."

"He does, Gatlin," Aunt Vivian answered. "God cares about every single person in this world. He sees everyone and knows their hearts. And as Christians who trust in Jesus, we can have peace knowing that God is always with us and that we matter to Him." She paused then picked up a peach-colored shell shaped like a heart. "Look at this one!"

"Oh!" Gatlin grinned. "I think I'll keep this one to remember that God knows me and loves me."

"Good." Aunt Vivian smiled. Then she jumped up from the sandy towel and said, "Race you to the water for one last swim!" ♥ Allison Wilson Lee



YOU MATTER TO GOD | KEY VERSE: *How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them!* Psalm 139:17 (NIV)



Have you ever wondered if you matter to God? The Bible says you matter to Him so much that He knows the number of hairs on your head. His thoughts about you outnumber the grains of sand on a beach. He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for your sins so you could be His child forever. That's how much He loves you! When you feel small or unimportant, remember how much God cares for you and thank Him for His love for you.

NEVER TRULY ALONE

Nick, can you come up here and hold this for me?" Mr. Manning asked. Nick's heart beat faster as he walked to the front of the classroom. He got nervous any time he had to be in front of others.

With shaking hands, Nick took the poster his teacher asked him to hold. A minute later, he was sitting on the floor with his teacher in front of him.

"Just breathe," Mr. Manning said.

Nick did as he was told and eventually calmed down. When he looked around, he found the classroom empty. "Wait...where did everyone go?"

"They went out to recess," Mr. Manning said. "You can go too."

Nick frowned. Everyone had abandoned him, even his friends.

"Hey, are you okay?" A voice came from behind Nick as he headed for the door.

Nick turned and saw Alex, a kid he barely knew, using his hands to move his wheelchair up to him. "Why aren't you at recess?"

Alex shrugged. "I wanted to make sure you were okay."

"I thought everyone just went out and left me." Nick sighed. "Thanks for caring."

At church that evening, Pastor John talked about the apostle Paul. "In the book of Second Timothy, Paul writes about a time when everyone abandoned him but God," Pastor John said. "Have you ever felt like that? All alone? Sometimes we don't even feel God with us."

Nick thought of how he'd felt at school that day. He had felt completely alone. He hadn't seen Alex in the corner of the room, and he had felt abandoned.

"God is always there," Pastor John said. "Whether we feel His presence or not, He is always with us."

Nick looked at the stained glass window, the one that showed Jesus hanging out with a group of children. *Are you always there, God?* he wondered. *Even when it feels like everyone has abandoned me?*

"God never abandons us," Pastor John said, as if reading Nick's thoughts. "Jesus died for our sins and rose again so we would never be separated from Him. Even if everyone else abandons us, God is with us and will help us with every problem we face. He also places caring people in our lives—sometimes ones we don't expect—to remind us we're not alone." ♥ *Emily Acker*



GOD NEVER ABANDONS YOU | KEY VERSE: *The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.* Deuteronomy 31:8 (NIV)



Are there times when you feel alone? Does it ever seem like everyone else has left you behind or doesn't have time for you? God is there for you, no matter what. Jesus gave His life to save you, and He won't ever abandon you. He cares about what you're going through and often shows that care through people He's put in your life. Trust Him to be with you and help you through everything you face.

ONLY GOD CAN DO THAT!

Look, Levi, I'm making a snowman!" cried Claire, rolling a white blob of playdough into a ball.

But her brother didn't seem to be listening. Levi was concentrating. He had spent the last ten minutes sculpting the face of a lion out of some yellow playdough. Claire had to admit, Levi's lion was pretty good. He had used a plastic knife to carve out the lion's features, and now he was working on a fiery mane.

"Looks like you guys are having fun!" said Mom, pausing at the table to view their creations. "I like your snowman, Claire! And that lion's beginning to look quite lifelike, Levi. I love the way you've twisted all those strands together to make his mane. You're both so creative!"

"Creative?" asked Claire. "I thought only God created things."

"Well, the Bible says God made people in His own image," said Mom, taking a seat at the table. "That's why we enjoy being creative. Some people like to paint. Some people like to bake. But while humans can only create things using materials that already exist, God created the universe out of *nothing*."

"Nothing?" asked Claire. "How can you make something out of nothing?" She waved her hands around as though trying to shape a creature out of thin air. "It's impossible!"

Mom laughed. "God created light just by speaking! And Psalm 33 tells us He created the heavenly hosts—all the stars in the sky—by the breath of His mouth."

Claire gasped. "Wow! That's amazing!"

"But when He created Adam," Mom continued, "God fashioned him with His own hands from the dust of the earth and breathed life into his nose."

Levi finally spoke. "Whoa! This lion I've been sculpting is just a model. It will never live or move. But God made a real man!"

"That's right," said Mom. "Only God can do that! And only God can give people new life. The Bible explains that because Adam and Eve disobeyed God, humans are born spiritually dead because of sin. But when we trust Jesus to save us from sin, it's as though God breathes new, eternal life into an old pile of dust. Jesus makes us alive all over again!"

Claire and Levi looked at each other and smiled. "That's so awesome!" ♥

Angela Jelf



ONLY GOD CAN CREATE LIFE | KEY VERSE: *Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.* Genesis 2:7 (NIV)



Do you enjoy being creative? Do you like drawing or writing stories? Or perhaps you enjoy building things or making up games. God made us to be creative, but He is the ultimate Creator because He made the universe out of nothing! And He breathes new spiritual life into those who trust in Jesus. Have you received Jesus and the new life He brings? (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.)

IN THE GARDEN

This is the prettiest flower garden I've ever seen!" said Nia.

Grandma looked up from her weeding. "I enjoy it too. When it's nice outside, I spend time almost every day watering, weeding, or transplanting something. It's a lot of work, but worth it." She smiled as she pulled a weed out of the dirt. "It reminds me of my life as a Christian."

"It does?" asked Nia. "Why?"

"Well, for one thing, weeds in my life can grow as quickly as weeds in my flower bed," replied Grandma.

"Weeds in your life?" asked Nia. "You mean things like problems? Like when people are nasty or you get sick or somebody you love dies?"

"Yes," said Grandma. "We experience all kinds of difficult and painful situations, and if we're not careful, they can cause us to become angry, bitter, and unforgiving. Those attitudes are like weeds with very long roots. The weeds in my garden would take over if I let them, and the weeds in my life would too."

"So how do you get rid of them?" asked Nia.

"Well, I like to think of the time I spend with Jesus as His weeding and watering time for my life," replied Grandma. "Praying, reading my Bible, going to church—those are all ways to learn more about Jesus and what He wants for me."

"I try to pray and read my Bible and listen in church," said Nia. "But sometimes it's hard."

Grandma nodded. "Sometimes I don't feel like working in my garden," she said. "But then I remember how important it is for my flowers and do it anyway, and once I get my hands in the dirt, I often find it to be a pure joy."

"So can you make flowers grow in your life by doing those things like you do in your garden?" asked Nia.

"Well, God makes the flowers grow, not me—in both my garden and my life," said Grandma. "But I can give the flowers in my life—the Bible calls them the fruit of the Spirit—a good place to grow by spending time with Jesus so I have the strength to handle any weedy situations that come along. It's well worth the effort." ♥ *Rosalie J. Currier*



SPEND TIME WITH JESUS | KEY VERSE: *That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. Colossians 1:10*



Are there weedy problems in your life? Don't let them take root and produce sinful actions or unloving attitudes. Jesus wants your life to be like a beautiful garden that produces the fruit of the Spirit. Spend time with Him so He can refresh your soul. Talk to Him about your problems, and let Him encourage you by reading His Word and spending time with other Christians.



OTTERS AND BEAVER DAMS

"I'm ahead of you, Mom!" Kenzie called as she paddled down the river in her kayak.

"Kenzie, stop and look ahead of you!" Mom called back.

Kenzie slowed down her kayak, noticing a bunch of branches ahead of her on the water. "What are those?"

Mom moved her kayak beside Kenzie's. "I think it's a beaver dam. Let's sit here for a little bit and see if anything comes out."

"Okay," Kenzie replied. She kept her eyes on the dam as she took a sip of her water.

A couple minutes later, Kenzie noticed some movement. "Look, Mom."

"It's an otter," Mom whispered as the pair watched the tiny animal. "Otters sometimes take over abandoned beaver dams."

"It's so cute." Kenzie smiled as the otter dove into the water and swam away.

"God's creation is beautiful," Mom agreed. "I love kayaking. It gives us a chance to admire all the wonderful things God has created."

"We learned about that in Sunday school yesterday!" Kenzie exclaimed. "In Psalms, there's a verse that says the earth is full of the creatures God made."

Mom nodded. "Another verse in Psalms says, 'Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.'" She smiled as she looked at the beaver dam. "Both verses are great reminders that God made so many things for us, and we should take the time to admire them. One way to praise God is by admiring His creation."

"A lot of verses in Psalms tell us to praise God, don't they?" said Kenzie.

"Yes," Mom replied. "We have so many reasons to praise God. Not only did He create the earth and all the creatures in it, He created us in His own image and sent Jesus to save us from sin and give us a relationship with Him that lasts forever. He has done so much for us, and He wants us to praise Him and enjoy the good things He's given us."

Kenzie grabbed her paddle. "Let's praise Him right now by admiring His creation as we race on this nice water He made for us!" she called as she began to paddle down the river. ♥ *Kimberly Brokish*



PRaise GOD FOR HIS CREATION | KEY VERSE: *Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.* Psalm 150:6 (NIV)



Do you take time to admire God's creation? Maybe you take walks, play in the yard, or look through the windows of your bedroom. He has made so many things for us to admire and enjoy. We can see God's power in creation and praise Him for all the things He made and for the love He has for us. What is your favorite thing that God created?

DARK GLASSES

We had so much fun!" Summer said when she got home after spending the afternoon at the beach with a friend. She plopped down in a chair and looked around the room. "Why is it so dark in here?" she wanted to know.

Her brother laughed. "Because you're still wearing your sunglasses," he told her. Summer laughed too and removed the glasses.

Dad smiled. "I just thought of something, Summer." He reached for a Bible and opened it. "Put those glasses back on and come here a minute. I'd like you to read a verse for me." Dad pointed to the verse he wanted her to read.

Summer looked at the Bible. "You mean with my glasses on?" she asked, and Dad nodded.

Summer held the Bible a little closer. The print wasn't very clear, but she managed to read it. "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." Summer stopped reading and grinned at her dad. "Seeing through dark glass describes me—it's like me reading through sunglasses."

"It describes all of us," said Dad. "For example, it can be hard for us to see why certain things happen in our lives. When your cousin Payson died last year, we were very upset—and even angry—weren't we?"

A sad look crossed Summer's face, and she nodded her head.

"We all had questions," said Dad. "We wanted to know why it happened, right?"

Again, Summer nodded. She still wondered.

"In this life, we see the things that happen as if we were wearing dark glasses," Dad continued. "Many things are unclear, and we wonder why God allows them to happen. But when we see Jesus face-to-face, we won't have questions like that anymore. We'll truly understand that His will is perfect and everything happens according to His plan. For now, we just need to remember that Jesus knows our pain because He suffered and died to save us and trust Him to work everything out for good."

Summer took her sunglasses off and looked at them. "I don't understand why God let Payson die, but I'm glad Jesus knows how we feel and is helping us through it." ♥ *Richard S. Maffeo*



TRUST JESUS IN HARD TIMES | KEY VERSE: *For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.* 1 Corinthians 13:12 (KJV)



Do you find it hard to trust God when you can't see how things are going to end or why certain things happen? Jesus knows how you feel, and He promises to help you through any situation you face. You can trust Him to be with you and work everything out for good, even when you don't understand.

WINDOW SHOPPING



As Jesse and his dad walked through the mall, Jesse talked about how he and some kids from church had collected cans from people around the neighborhood for a fundraising project. “When I knocked on Mr. Martin’s door, he wouldn’t give me any cans to take back to church. He said he didn’t even believe I was a Christian!”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” said Dad. “That was an unkind thing for him to say. Have you said or done anything that would make him feel that way?”

“I don’t think so,” Jesse answered. But then he remembered something. *Maybe Mr. Martin knows I’m the one who knocked a ball through his window*, he thought. *I was going to tell him, but the other guys said I shouldn’t. They said he’d never know who did it.* “Nothing much, anyway,” Jesse added when he noticed Dad frowning at him.

Just then they arrived at a sporting goods store. Jesse pointed to a football displayed in the window. “Look! There’s the ball I want. Can we go in and see how much it costs?”

“How do you know they sell that kind of football here?” Dad asked.

Jesse gave his dad a questioning look. “How do I know? It’s in the window! Everybody knows the stuff you see in the window is sold in the store.”

Dad nodded. “It makes sense that what we see out here is what we believe we’ll find inside. That’s how it is with people too. What they see in our actions is what they believe we’re like inside. So for someone to believe we’re Christian, they need to believe we belong to Christ—that’s where the word *Christian* comes from. They need to see the love He has put in our hearts flow out through our actions. And when we fail to show His love and do something hurtful, we need to admit our mistake and try to make things right.” Dad headed for the store’s entrance. “Well, let’s go inside and see if you can afford that ball.”

Jesse hesitated. “Dad, wait!” he said. Then he told him about the broken window. “I’m not going to buy a football now,” Jesse said. “I need to use my money to pay Mr. Martin for that window.” ♥ *Mary Rose Pearson*



LET JESUS BE SEEN IN YOU | KEY VERSE: *[Jesus] gave his life to free us from every kind of sin...and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds.* Titus 2:14 (NLT)



Do your actions show people that you belong to Jesus? Are the things you’ve said and done today things that show the love that Jesus has put in your heart? What you display on the outside should show what’s on the inside—that Jesus is in your life. Show people that you belong to Jesus by treating others the way He would.

NEW AGAIN

Cassian pointed to a row of cars on display at the automobile museum. “Don’t these old cars look funny, Grandpa?”

Grandpa smiled. “Well, they look a bit funny to us now, but they were pretty fancy in their day.” He pointed to one of the cars. “My grandfather drove a car like that when he was a young man. It came in any color you wanted, as long as what you wanted was black.”

Cassian laughed. “Did you get to ride around in it when you were a kid?”

“No,” said Grandpa. “It was long gone by then. I just saw it in a picture.”

“Some of these old cars look brand new!” Cassian said, peering through the window of one of them. “This one doesn’t look like it’s ever been out on the road.”

“Oh, but it has,” said Grandpa. “It’s very old and must have traveled many miles, but it’s been restored.”

“Restored?” asked Cassian. “That means it’s been fixed up so it looks just like it did when it was new, right?”

Grandpa nodded. “Worn-out parts have been replaced, and the car’s been repainted with shiny new paint. It’s just like it’s brand new again.” He stooped down to get a closer look at the car’s shiny wheels. “It’s kind of like what Jesus does for us when we confess our sins to Him. He forgives us and makes us clean again. The Bible says He restores our souls. It’s like He refreshes us and makes us brand new.”

“When an old car is restored, it must look way different than it did when it was worn out,” said Cassian. “But Jesus doesn’t make us look different.”

“Well, I’m not so sure about that,” said Grandpa. “He changes our spirit and soul and attitude, and I think that can make us look different too. We’re able to have a better outlook on life and care deeply for others because we know our sins have been forgiven and we belong to Him. And that often puts a smile on our faces instead of a scowl. Don’t you think?”

Cassian thought about it. “Yeah,” he said. “I guess so!” ♥ *Sam L. Sullivan*



GOD FORGIVES SIN AND RESTORES US | KEY VERSE: *He [God] restores my soul.* Psalm 23:3



Are you feeling worn out by sin in your life? Do you need to be restored? Even though Jesus saves us and makes us new people the moment we put our faith in Him, we need His ongoing forgiveness and restoration in our lives. When you confess your wrongs to Jesus, He will restore you and leave you feeling brand new! When you feel refreshed and clean again, let it show so others can see what Jesus has done for you.

HOSPITAL STAY

Marilyn gazed at her dad as he dozed in the hospital bed. She hated the atrocious yellow hospital gown and the tubes that went into his chest. He was supposed to be strong, but here he just looked tired and weary.

“How much longer will he be here?” Marilyn asked Mom hesitantly. She desperately wanted Dad home.

A deep sigh came from her mom. She rubbed her forehead. “I don’t know, honey. The doctor is unsure.”

Marilyn bit her lip. “Doesn’t God want Dad to be healed?”

Mom took Marilyn’s hand in her own, and Marilyn leaned into the warm touch in the otherwise cold and bare room. “God loves us and your dad so much, Marilyn—more than we could ever comprehend. He doesn’t want us to be sick or suffer. God is good, and He hates our pain, but He allows it in our lives for reasons we don’t fully understand.”

“I hate it too.” Marilyn glanced at Dad again as he slept.

Mom squeezed her hand. “Every day I ask God, ‘Why is there sickness?’” Marilyn felt assured knowing Mom asked the same big questions she did. “The world isn’t supposed to be this way,” Mom said. “Even though we humans messed it up with our sin, God is at work every single day to make it whole again. That work is called restoration.”

“And He’s doing this now?”

Mom nodded. “It started in the first book of the Bible when God promised to bless His people and guide them when they were lost. Then Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again so our relationship with God could be restored. Jesus also healed and fed people, giving us a glimpse of God’s plan for eternal restoration. Today I see His restoration in the gifts He’s given people and the ways they use them to help others—like the doctors caring for your dad. And one day, God promises to bring complete and total restoration. There will be no more sickness and no more death forever.”

Dad stirred in his bed as Marilyn asked, “But what about today?”

“Today I hold on to that hope knowing that God is with me, you, and Dad,” Mom said.

Marilyn smiled at Dad as he slowly opened his eyes. *Hope*. For now, that was enough. ♥ Zoe Brickner



GOD WILL RESTORE THE WORLD | KEY VERSE: *So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* 2 Corinthians 4:18 (NIV)



Have you or anyone you know ever stayed in the hospital or suffered from a sickness or disease? Have you asked God why there’s such brokenness on our planet? Take heart. He sees your pain and holds you close. He has been faithful in the past and will one day fulfill His promise to completely heal and restore all that is broken. Then there will be no more sickness, pain, or death.

FORGIVING ONCE AGAIN

It was starting to rain. Daisy hated being out in the rain.

But she had gotten into a big fight with her older sister before heading outside to walk the dog. They had yelled at each other and called each other names, and she wasn't ready to go back to the house and face her. Daisy didn't know what she was going to say when she did.

So she kept walking down the sidewalk. Her dog, Oscar, was getting wet too, but he didn't seem to mind.

The further she got from home, the heavier the rain came down. Daisy was getting soaked now and wondered if it had been a good idea to stay out so long. What if she got sick? She'd better turn around and go home.

Daisy tugged on Oscar's leash and got him to jog with her back to the house.

"Where were you?" her sister Violet asked as soon as she stepped through the door.

Was her sister still angry with her? Daisy bit her bottom lip. "We were walking."

"You're soaking wet." Violet frowned. "Go take a bath and warm up. I'll deal with Oscar."

Daisy handed her the dog's leash and hurried to do as she was told.

After a nice warm shower, Daisy dressed in some dry clothes and made her way to the kitchen, where she could hear her sister moving about.

"Here." Violet set a steaming mug in front of her. "I made you hot chocolate."


"Thanks." Daisy put her hands around the mug but didn't sip yet. "You're not mad anymore?"

"No." Violet sighed. "I'm sorry. We always fight, and then when something happens like you go wandering out in the rain, I regret everything I said."

"I regret everything I said too," Daisy said. "I hate fighting with you."

Violet nodded. "At least we can say we're sorry and forgive each other. And God forgives us too."

"No matter how many times we fight," Daisy said.

"Or what we do." Violet smiled. "We can always forgive each other and count on God's forgiveness so that we can start over again."  *Bethany Acker*



FORGIVE AGAIN AND AGAIN | KEY VERSE: *For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*
Matthew 6:14 (NIV)



Do you often get into fights with your siblings or friends? Do you sometimes worry that things have gone too far? Or do you always come back and forgive each other, time after time? God forgives us again and again for the wrong things we do, and that's how He wants us to forgive others. When you say unkind things to others, tell them you're sorry, and trust God to help you forgive them for the hurtful words they said to you.



EXTRAORDINARY TEA

Aunt Jan was brewing herbal tea when Leah was dropped off for a visit one Sunday afternoon. Leah happily sat down in the homey kitchen and sniffed the air. “Mmm, it smells good in here!”

“Orange blossom tea—my favorite,” said Aunt Jan with a smile. She pointed to a cake on the counter. “Help yourself.”

Leah got a plate from the cupboard and cut a slice of cake. Aunt Jan raised her brows. “Why so quiet today?” she asked. “You usually talk my ears off!”

Leah laughed. “I was just thinking,” she said.

“Well then, why not let me think with you?” said Aunt Jan. “What are we thinking about?”

“The lesson we had in Sunday school today was about growing in the Lord,” Leah said. “Our teacher said we need to grow as Christians in order to become like Jesus, but I’m confused. Didn’t He change us when we put our faith in Him? I guess I don’t quite get it.”

“You’re right, Leah,” said Aunt Jan. “Jesus did change us when we trusted Him to save us from sin—we changed from being dead in sin to alive in Christ. But it takes time to grow in our relationship with Him and become more like Him.” She took a sip of tea, then looked down at her cup. “It’s a lot like tea,” she said.

“Tea?” Leah asked.

“Yes, tea,” said Aunt Jan. “The moment a tea bag is put into hot water, it’s no longer water—it’s tea. That’s like what happens to us the moment Jesus comes into our lives. But even though Jesus saves us from sin in an instant, it takes longer for us to learn to live out His truth and love in different areas of our lives and become more like Him—just like tea grows stronger the longer the tea bag is in it. The more we learn about Jesus and depend on Him to work in our hearts, the more we grow in our relationship with Him and become more like Him.”

Leah grinned. “Thanks, Aunt Jan. I think I get it now!” ♥ *Cindy Van Schalkwyk*



GROW TO BE MORE LIKE JESUS | KEY VERSE: *Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 3:18*



Are you growing in your relationship with Jesus? Do you spend time praying to Him and reading His Word, the Bible? Do you go to church to learn more about Him and spend time with other Christians who can encourage and support you in your faith? As you grow in your relationship with Jesus, you’ll become more like Him as He teaches you to trust Him and show His love to others.

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PRAYER POWER

Please pray for my friend who is struggling in school and choosing the wrong friends.

–Leah

I lost my dad a few months ago—please pray for me and my family.

–Kezia

Please pray for my friend who is struggling with a lot of issues and family problems.

–Sam

Please pray for my family and the challenges we're facing.

–Heather

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GOD MADE YOU AND LOVES YOU

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THE BIBLE SAYS: *So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.* Genesis 1:27 (NLT)



THE PROBLEM OF SIN

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



THE BIBLE SAYS: *Everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.* Romans 3:23 (NLT)



GOD’S PERFECT PLAN

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



THE BIBLE SAYS: *God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him would not be lost but have eternal life.* John 3:16 (ERV)



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU?

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



ARE YOU READY TO TRUST IN JESUS?

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



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

