

THE GIFT
FAMILY DEVOTIONS FROM THE HEARTLAND

Tom Barnes

Melissa Lycan

Even within the Christian community the number of broken families is increasing. Why? Well, one reason is because of the absence of family devotions. I fully agree with the old saying: “A family that prays together stays together.” Of course, prayer is just one aspect of family devotion. Thus, it is better to say, “A family that does devotions together stays together.” But parents may ask: How do we have devotions with our family? Thankfully, Melissa and Tom have produced together a well-written volume that helps us have gospel-driven devotions in our home. Parents should be grateful to Melissa and Tom for *The Gift: Family Devotions from the Heartland*. If you are looking for a God-exalting, Christ-centered, Spirit-filled, and practical book on family devotion, you have already found one. I highly commend it!

—Brian G. Najapfour, co-editor of *Taking Hold of God: Reformed and Puritan Perspectives on Prayer*

My children love stories and are always begging my husband and me to tell them a story. Stories are such wonderful tools to use to implant biblical wisdom in our children and to teach them about God’s character. This devotional book is a wonderful practical help as you flesh out the mandate in Deuteronomy 6:7 of teaching your children God’s Word throughout casual, everyday life.

--Karen Abels, High School Math Teacher, Guam

Tom and Melissa have truly provided families a tremendous gift in this devotional book, using fascinating and practical stories to communicate deep Biblical truths as well as providing thought provoking questions for discussion. Parents will find this resource incredibly helpful in their desire to instill the gospel more deeply in the hearts of their children. I highly recommend *The Gift!*

Alan Kraft, Lead Pastor of Christ Community Church in Greeley, Colorado and author of *Good News For Those Trying Harder*.

I [am] impressed with the full format and teachability of each devotional and I think the activities are genius! ...I can’t wait until our young family is able to enjoy these stories, create memories with these activities, and see God grow us all in Him through this resource! Thank you for your obvious effort for the sake of His glory.

F.G. Homsher, Assistant Pastor for Pastoral Care, Harvest Baptist Church, Guam

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To Blaire, that you may grow to
understand the deep truth of the gospel,
accept the ultimate gift, your Savior,
and
obey him with your hands, feet, mouth, and mind
for your joy and his glory.

Melissa

To the congregation of the Minden Evangelical Free Church, a people whom I do not deserve to shepherd
and with whom I love living out the truths of this book!

Tom

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INTRODUCTION

When the Apostle Paul was in Athens, he mentioned that he found “an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god’” as he was passing by their “objects of worship” (Acts 17:23). The King James Version translates “objects of worship” as “devotions”. It is this translation that stands behind the use of this word to describe “external worship...[or the] performance of religious duties” and then, as a result and more precisely applied to the Christian faith: “yielding of the heart and affections to God, with reverence, faith and piety, in religious duties, particularly in prayer and meditation.”¹ In other words, this word “devotions” is often used by Christians to refer to that time set aside daily to spend with God in prayer and taking in the Bible through reading, study, meditation, and memorization.

To have devotions with our families is a discipline strongly commended from clear biblical teaching (Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4). It is part of discipling our children, which is a very important way we fulfill our ultimate life purpose of glorifying God (Matthew 28:18-20; John 15:1-17; 1 Corinthians 10:23-33). Yet a question arises for most of us: How do we have devotions with our family? This book is designed as a tool to help. Since it is written to be used primarily with children between six and eleven years old and since it will take only between one and a half and three months to complete, it is not the only guide you will ever need. However, it is designed to set a strong gospel-centered biblical foundation for children at this important time of life.

Each reading begins with a passage of Scripture to read out loud, since the heart of your family worship time or devotions should be Bible reading and discussion. Behind the Scripture reading you will also find a question or questions referenced from the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*.² This is a very helpful and rich tool to use with your children as you train them in the Scriptures. These references will help you interact with well over half of the entire catechism as you go through this book. If you are interested in using a Baptist version of the catechism that retains the all-important first question of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, follows the same order, and the same number of questions, see *An Evangelical Catechism* on the Articles page, under Resources at mindenefc.org.

¹ Noah Webster, Webster’s Dictionary (1828 edition).

² Available at reformed.org/documents/WSC.html.

Next, you will find a story or an explanation of the Scripture passage just read, along with a note to parents, discussion questions, a suggestion for prayer together, and an activity that helps children remember and apply the lesson. Many of the notes to parents include key Bible passages for the subject discussed. It is strongly encouraged that you choose one of these passages to memorize with your family. There is a list of suggested Bible memory passages in Appendix One. There is also an index at the end of the book to help you locate devotions about specific topics or those tied to special days throughout the year (such as Christmas, Easter, Independence Day, President’s Day, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Reformation Day, and Labor Day).

Each entry is designed such that you can complete it in one sitting (roughly 20-30 minutes for most) or you can divide it into two family devotion times together. If you divide it into two, the best way is to read the Scripture, lesson, questions, and to pray together as one devotion. Then in your next time together, give a brief reminder of what you read last time, go over the catechism questions together, read one of the key passages from the note to parents, work on memorization, and then do the activity. If you have older children, you might include them by having them read the Scripture and the catechism question, along with the Bible passages that go with each catechism question. They can also help with the discussion time. You might also alternate devotions for your older children along with these to keep both ages engaged.³

Though we have not supplied suggested songs for each entry, we would encourage you to have a hymnal or song book available so you can sing praises to God together as a family.

What kinds of devotions will you find? In Chapter One there are devotional stories about a family by the last name of Miller who lives on a farm. It is this chapter that gives the inspiration for the book’s title. Here we learn that the gospel of Jesus Christ stands behind all our Christian living, it is the “hub in the wheel of truth,” the “A to Z of our faith.”⁴ This leads us to see that our children must be reached and changed at the level of their heart (thus, these are devotions from the heartland). We also learn in this first

³ For what to do with older children, see *Family Devotions*, under **Parenting** on the Resources/Articles page at mindenefc.org. Also, of help for older children are the materials under **Discipleship** on that same page.

⁴ Tullian Tchividjian, in his July 17, 2010 blog, citing Tim Keller.

chapter that what makes the gospel such good news is the ultimate gift we get in the gospel is God himself.⁵ This Christ-centered, God-exalting gospel provides the foundation for the rest of the book.

In Chapter Two you will find devotional stories about an imaginary kingdom where animals talk. Though there is more symbolism than in the first chapter, this format deals with some subjects better (for example, God as a benevolent king). Children are also fascinated with these stories.

Finally, in Chapter Three you will find devotions straight from the Scriptures. Here, there are no devotional stories. Instead, you will find a brief explanation, one designed for young children, that will help them understand the Scripture narrative for the day.

This book is written for the purpose of carrying out the admonition found in Psalm 78:4: “We will...tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.” We both have a passion for this kind of teaching in our own family. I (Tom) for years have sought to pass along the gospel and the truth of God’s Word to my three children (including Melissa). And I (Melissa), as a new mom, am excited about doing this in our family. It is our prayer that this book will be used by God through you to help pass on to your children what you have learned and to bring up your children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

Melissa Lycan

Tom Barnes

⁵ We are indebted to John Piper, God Is The Gospel (Crossway, 2006), for this insight.

CHAPTER ONE

THE MILLER FAMILY

"The Gift"

Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-7; 1 Peter 3:18 (WSC #1)

"It's here! It's here!" Nine year old Annie Miller was shouting at the top of her lungs and jumping up and down as the delivery driver bounded out of his truck parked in the Millers' driveway to make his way to the door with the package in hand. For nine long months she had worked, saved, and waited to purchase an i-Pad and now she had it.

It all started when she approached her mom and dad about wanting one for her birthday. They told her there was no way they could make that kind of purchase as a birthday present; she would have to earn the money and buy it herself. There was; however, one thing they would do for her birthday. They would get her bicycle repaired; the one she had wrecked the previous summer and had been unable to ride since then. They explained to her how that Mark and Linda Fischer, neighbors who owned horses, were looking for someone to help with chores. Annie could ride her bike there each afternoon so she could earn the money she needed for her purchase. Things went forward smoothly. Then came the fateful day in her Physical Education class when she suffered a severely twisted ankle while playing soccer. She ended up in Dr. Aiken's office and had to be on crutches for two weeks. It was a full month until she could begin working again.

But she had recovered and eventually saved the money she needed. And, of course, that is what brought about the happy delivery day for her!

No one was surprised that Annie was so excited that afternoon as she learned how to use her i-Pad. But no one in the family was prepared for what she said that night at supper. "So, Annie, what do you think about your i-Pad?" Randy Miller, her dad, asked. "I love it, Dad! It is so much fun. But there is something I need to tell you and mom." "What is it, honey?" her mom, Lisa Miller, asked. "Well, as much as I love having the i-Pad, I have to admit that the best thing about this whole last nine months is just knowing that I have learned how to work hard, to save, and I've seen how much other people care for me. That makes it more special!"

After her parents looked at each other with a surprised smile, Dad replied, "Annie you have not only learned an important lesson about hard work, saving, and how much others care, but you have provided a

great example for us of what makes the gospel so great. “What do you mean, Dad?” 15 year old Alex Miller asked. “Well, stop and think about it,” said the elder Miller. “There were a lot of wonderful things that Annie experienced throughout all these months. She got her bicycle back, the Fischers gave her a job, she earned a lot of money, Dr. Aiken helped her with her ankle, the delivery man brought her package, and Annie has been able to enjoy her reward of the i-Pad. Yet, what has made all these things so great is her satisfaction and joy she has in the greater gift she has received.”

Randy Miller continued, “This is like the ultimate gift we receive in salvation, the one that makes all the other gifts we have so good.” “I don’t understand what you mean, Dad,” Annie piped in. “Well, stop and think about it. We have a lot of wonderful things through salvation: Jesus Christ died for us, His work is applied to us through God bringing about faith in us, the righteousness of Jesus Christ is credited to us, we are forgiven of our sins, we are adopted into God’s family, the Holy Spirit works in us to make us more like Jesus Christ, God works in us to keep us saved, and in the future we will have the joy of being in heaven. Yet, all of these are such good news because they enable us to have God, to enjoy Him, to know Him, to see Him, to be with Him. This is what makes the gospel such good news!”

“How do we know this?” Alex asked. “Well, first of all,” Mr. Miller explained, Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4...here, let me look it up...here it is, 2 Corinthians 4:6: *For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*” After pausing, the dad explained, “I remember when Pastor Zack preached on this one Sunday, he brought out how that ‘the light of the knowledge of the glory of God’ is equivalent to ‘the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ’ in verse 4. In other words, when God turns on the ‘light bulb of our heart’ so we can understand the good news of the glory of Christ and His saving work, what we end up ultimately seeing is the glory of God. He also said this is the fullness of joy and eternal pleasures we have in God’s presence in heaven (Psalm 16:11). It is also why Peter teaches us that the work of Christ is so glorious, it is because it brings us to God (1 Peter 3:18).”

“Wow, I never really thought about it that way, Dad,” Annie said. “It really is similar to what I learned the last nine months!” “Yes,” Lisa Miller chimed in, “And to understand that God is the ultimate gift, the ultimate good in the gospel, helps us to keep in mind that what our life is all about is getting to know God

and to enjoy Him more. It is why Jesus Christ taught us eternal life is about knowing God (John 17:3). It helps explain why we want to read our Bibles, grow, become more holy, and why the gift of our salvation is so much greater than anything else the world has to offer us.”

“It’s just like what I did in saving for the i-Pad,” Annie explained, “I was willing to give up a lot for the ultimate gift. We should be willing to give up a lot for the ultimate gift of seeing and enjoying God!”

Note To Parents: We must grasp the gospel (the good news of what Jesus Christ has done and is doing to save us) before we can put in proper perspective the ethical directives of the Bible. This is why the first three devotions address how the gospel impacts us. We must also understand how God-centered the gospel is before we can properly understand it. Read Matthew 5:8 and Psalm 27:4 to your children.

“Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.” (Mt. 5:8) “One thing I have asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and inquire in his temple.” (Ps. 27:4)

Then, ask them the following questions:

1. Jesus promises us the reward of seeing God someday. Why do you believe this will be so wonderful?
2. Can you think of a gift you received that made you very happy? What was it? How do God’s gifts to us increase our love for Him?

Prayer: Lord God, in the same way you spoke light out of darkness, you have spoken into the hearts of your people to give the light of the knowledge of your glory in the face of Jesus Christ! Thank you for sending your Son to save sinners! Thank you for waking up your people that we can know, love, and serve you! Help us know you more and see more of your beauty every day.

Activity: Have each family member write down on a piece of paper their favorite gift from God (examples: Forgiveness of sin, eternal life, righteousness, holiness, peace, etc.). Then, take all these and place them in a box that is wrapped with gift wrapping paper and a bow. Cut a slit in the box so that more pieces of paper can be placed into the box as you read through this book. As each person places their piece

of paper in the box, have them thank God for His gifts to us. At the end of the activity make sure you give thanks to God that He is our greatest gift. Keep this gift box. You will use it many other times throughout this book.

"Washed And Equipped"

Read Romans 8:1-17 (WSC #'s 29-31, 82)

"I can't believe how much your pitching has improved in just one week of practice, Alex!" Randy Miller patted his son on the back, as he praised him.

"Well, using the right ball, glove, and applying Coach Chris' tips has been pretty helpful," Alex admitted as he brushed off his cleats before loading into his dad's pickup truck.

Alex, now a freshman, was on the town's Legion Baseball team. Coach Chris came to Little League games in the spring to scout out the boys and invite some to join his prestigious team. The coach's motto was, "equipping and training". He didn't make parents buy the equipment; rather, he provided each player with a pristine baseball bat, comfortable glove, and the sharpest uniform. In addition, he mandated training six days a week. This was a huge commitment, but it really paid off for the boys. Their team had been undefeated throughout the state for five years, which was the beginning of Coach Chris's program. Something truly special about Coach Chris' team was the attitude and teamwork of the boys. They were not competitive with each other. Instead, they encouraged one another and constantly provided support. They all took their position on the team extremely seriously.

Randy and Alex pulled up to their small country home. As both men walked inside, they smelled a delicious dinner cooking. Lisa, Alex's mom, greeted both men, one with a kiss, the other with a hug.

"Dinner will be ready in about twenty minutes. That should be just enough time for my *fragrant* baseball player to clean up!"

"Are you saying, 'I stink', mom?" Alex teased.

"Well, I was trying to be a little less blunt, but yes, you are quite stinky! Go ahead and throw your uniform in the washer with your special detergent. And, please don't leave your cleats indoors. They need some fresh air."

"Okay, mom," Alex ran up the stairs, skipping every other one.

Twenty minutes later, Randy knocked on his son's door. He peeked inside to find his son lying on his bed, tossing a scuffed baseball into his raggedy mitt, which he used in Little League. In addition, he noticed Alex wearing his old jersey. Puzzled, Randy asked, "Son, what are you doing with this old stuff?"

Caught off guard, Alex replied, “Oh, I didn’t see you come in, dad. Um, I guess I was just reminiscing. I was trying to remember what it was like to be in Little League.”

“Why, Alex? You know what an honor it is to be part of Coach Chris’ team. He’s given you a much better uniform than this one. And he’s equipped you with the tools to become a better baseball player. Why would you want to remember your Little League days when you are in the midst of a fantastic baseball team?”

“Sometimes it just seems like a lot of work to be part of Coach Chris’ team. I mean, the uniforms have to be spotless...”

“Yes, son, but he gave you a special detergent that keeps it spotless. It takes virtually no work on your part other than pouring and pressing, ‘Start’,” Randy reminded him with a grin.

“Well, I also really miss Jay. You know he’s my best friend, and I miss playing with him. He just doesn’t take baseball as seriously as I do. I mean, my new team is great. They’re really encouraging. I have fun with them. But, Jay’s my best bud.”

“I understand, son. But, you know, you could introduce Jay to Coach Chris. Maybe if you show Jay what your new team is like, he’ll be interested in joining. You know that Coach Chris would be willing to invite him to join the team. Jay just needs to be willing to hang up that old, dirty Little League uniform.”

“Yeah, that’s a good idea. Maybe I will,” Alex tossed the stained ball into his mitt one more time.

“Wow, compare that mitt to your new one from Coach Chris. See the difference! It’s so much thinner and stiffer, and it’s much harder to catch a ball with it. I’m surprised you even kept it.”

“Yeah, the mitt from Coach Chris is pretty much perfect for catching balls. He definitely knows how to equip his players! Maybe I should get rid of this mitt. Why would I ever want to use it when I have this one at my fingertips, literally!” Alex reached into his bag for his shiny new Legion mitt.

“Hey,” Randy interjected. “Now, we better wander downstairs and see if the ladies have left us any grub.”

Note to Parents: Remind your children that when they accept Christ, or join His team, He equips them and us with every resource we need to serve Him! He doesn’t just hand us a “To-Do” list of moral responsibilities. Instead, he clothes us with His righteousness and gives us the presence of the Holy Spirit. Memorize this verse as a family:

Galatians 2:20: I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

(Look up other other passages relating to Christ's power in us. Titus 3:5-6 is a good one.). Also, write down Galatians 2:20 on a piece of paper and place it in your gift box you made during the first devotion. Give thanks to God that he works in us and purifies us that we can see him and be with him for eternity.

Prayer: (Taken from Colossians 1:11-14) Father God, Strengthen us with all power, according to your glorious might, for all endurance, patience, and joy. Teach us to give thanks to you. Thank you for qualifying us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. We praise you for transferring to us the kingdom of your beloved Son, in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins.

Activity:

(Complete this activity with mom or dad's permission and supervision) Take a pair of brand new, white socks. Wear them outside in order to dirty them. Walk in mud or grass; stain them! With the help of a parent, bleach them in the washer machine. Compare the bright white socks to the stained ones. Discuss these questions:

1. If you had a stained sock and a white sock in your drawer, which would you wear?
2. Would you really stain your socks on purpose?
3. Which sock represents us before Christ entered our life?
4. Which socks represents us after Christ entered our life?
5. Who/what makes us bleached and white?

"The Amazing Change"

Read Romans 6:1-11 (WSC #'s 35-36)

“Dad, isn’t it cool that the newspaper did a story on our cousin, Nick?” He’s pretty much famous now!”
 “Well, Alex, you do have to admit that his life is pretty amazing.” “Hey, Dad, could you read the newspaper article to us, please?” asked seven year old Austin. “I want to hear it again!” “Sure, son. I can do that.” Randy Miller began to read and this is what his family heard.

Nick Miller was an unusual freshman at his school. Living outside a small Nebraska town, it was not common to find students who cared little for the Nebraska Cornhusker football team. Yet, Nick was such a young man. A decent student who weighed 110 pounds soaking wet and who was not involved in any extra-curricular activities, there was little to distinguish this farmer’s son.

If there was anything that made Nick stand out at all, it was his desire to go to college. Yet, he was wise enough to know his family did not have the money to pay for it and there didn’t seem to be anything he could do that would earn a scholarship. That is why the coming of Haggai Newman (nicknamed simply Hagggy) into the family’s life was a turning point for the Nelsons.

Hagggy, a researcher at a university in a neighboring state had developed a program which friends of the Millers read about on-line. He had a grant to put the program into practice and was looking for some youth who would participate with him.

Nick Miller would never forget the day that Dr. Newman first came to their house. “You see, Nick, I have developed a nutritional supplement which will do two things for you. First, it will enable you to build muscle and strength in a healthy way. Second, it will give you the desire to work out and play football.” “But why would I want to do that? I don’t even like football!” the freshman exclaimed. “Oh, but you do want to go to college and you do need a scholarship, don’t you?” Hagggy asked. “Well, yes, I do, but I just don’t see how this will help,” the young man retorted.

“Let me explain,” continued the professor as he removed his glasses and put them on the Nelsons’ coffee table. “I can guarantee you that with my supplement and the tested training regiment I have developed, I can not only make you a star high school football player, but I can form you into such a good player that

you will receive a football scholarship at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. You simply need to do two things: take the supplement and allow me to train you.”

Little did the Millers know that Dr. Newman was not only a world-renowned researcher, he also was very accomplished in persuasive speech. His finely honed skills had assured a positive response in the house that day six years ago. Now, fast forward to the present...

As Nick put on his pads in the Husker locker room before the first game of the season, the very first game he would start as the tight end, the muscular 195 pound sophomore could only laugh to himself about what had transpired. He had agreed to Haggy’s supplement and training regiment. At every step along the way, Dr. Newman was there to encourage, guide, keep him going, and to make sure that he was able to succeed. Of course, he still had to go into the weight room, he had to sign up for the high school football team, he had to practice, and he had to go out on the field and play so he could achieve the ultimate prize. But all along the way he knew this would not have been possible had Haggai Newman not transformed him, trained him, and put him in the game.

In some ways, the whole thing seemed absurd. Six years ago he did not even like football. Few in his school even knew who he was. Yet, during his red-shirt freshman year he had become the talk of the town. He now loved football and it had certainly opened up doors for him that would otherwise have been impossible. He had worked hard and faced many difficult days along the way in his transformation. Yet, he also knew that through it all he was carried along by Haggy. It was a strange combination. But, oh, how it would be worth it all when he ran out of that tunnel and onto the field for the first time as a starter!

Note To Parents: No illustration can perfectly convey the work of the Spirit in the Christian that Jesus Christ has made certain through His saving work. Yet, this analogy does help us grasp some key truths. The death of Christ and his resurrection opens the way for the Spirit of God to be poured out upon us and he transforms us from the inside out—giving us the desire to get in the game of living for God’s glory and training us to that very end. Though he empowers, changes, and trains all along the way, we must also use the other resources given to us (The Word, prayer, the Church) to grow and we must also go out on the field and “play the game” in his power. This is the thrust of Romans 6:1-11. Read Galatians 5:22-23 and Titus 3:5-6 also with your family. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

“He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.” (Titus 3:5-6) Ask your children these questions:

1. What changes has God brought into our lives through Jesus Christ?
2. What do we learn from today’s devotion about how we change and grow as Christians?

Activity: Read Matthew 7:7-11 as a family. Then read Luke 11:9-13. Explain that sometimes Jesus taught the same (or similar) material on different occasions, emphasizing slightly different points. Compare Matthew 7:11 with Luke 11:13. Ask: What is different in these two verses? Help your children see that the greatest of the “good things” the Father gives is his Holy Spirit to change us and to pour out God’s love into our hearts (Rom. 5:5). Write down “Holy Spirit” on a piece of paper, put it in the gift box and give thanks to God that he has given us his Spirit so that we may have his good gifts, the best of which is him!

"OUR FOCUS"

Read 1 Samuel 17 (WSC #10)

Austin Miller was not one who cried a lot. He would certainly not let anyone see him shed tears at school. But in his bedroom by himself it couldn't be helped this afternoon. He kept thinking about all the things that had happened the last few weeks in second grade. He was not doing as well on some of his work as his two best friends: Jaydon Fowler and Connor Bailey. They got 100's and 98's and 95's on almost all that they did. Austin hardly ever did that well on his homework. He did okay, but he was the first one in his family to do just okay. You see, not only were his best friends star students, but so were his older brother and sister: Alex (who was 15) and Annie (who was 9). Austin felt like something must be wrong with him. He must be the only one in the world not always to have the good grades or the *Fantastic Work* written with fancy stickers attached to the top of his assignments.

So, here he was sprawled across his bed, ignoring his football, baseball, and basketball posters on the wall. His back was heaving up and down as he sobbed.

No one would have noticed his despair had it not been for his mom who had come upstairs to bring some of his laundry into his room. Since his door was closed, she knocked before entering. Austin quickly wiped his eyes and nose and tried to act like nothing was wrong as he said, "come in." But as soon as his mom heard the cracks in his voice she knew that all was not well in the life of her youngest child. "What's the matter?" Lisa Miller asked with concern filling her voice. "Oh, nothing, mom," came back the reply. "You've been crying," commented his mom as she put the laundry on his dresser and sat down by him on the bed while placing her arm around him. At this, Austin couldn't keep pretending like all was well and the tears flooded out of his eyes again. It was only after the initial rush of crying let up that mom asked him again, "Honey, what's wrong?"

"Oh, mom, I'm so stupid! You and dad made good grades in school, Alex and Annie make good grades in school, and so does everybody else in my class except me. I just wish I could be as good as everyone else!" With this the sobbing erupted once again. Austin buried his head in his mom's shoulder as she wrapped him in a tight hug. "Austin," she said, "let me share some things with you...."

Note To Parents: Ask your children this question: What do you think that Mrs. Miller should say to Austin? Give them some time to think about the answer. After they've had time to give as many answers as they can, take them to the following Bible passages and see if they can come up with how these could help:

1. Psalm 139: 13-14a: For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

God designed Austin from before his conception. Austin and each of us can praise God for the way He has made us.
2. I Corinthians 12:4,5,6,22,27: "Now there are varieties of gifts...there are varieties of service...it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone...On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.... Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."
 - a. God has made each one of us different. Each of us has different things we are good at.
 - b. Even though we are different, we all have a place to fill in the body of Christ.
3. Think again about our Bible passage, 1 Samuel 17. Austin is handling his situation much like David's brothers handled the threat of Goliath. They focused on what they could not do, rather than on what God could do. David, on the other hand, focused upon what God could do (his greatness) and not on what he could not do. Austin's problem was that he had placed too much emphasis upon his own abilities or lack of abilities. He also had placed too much emphasis upon his own wrong view of himself, rather than upon God's view. God's view of all his people is that he has saved us, he has given Christ in our behalf, and if he was willing to do that, he will be willing to give to us all things we truly need (Romans 8:32). This includes the gifts we need to know and serve him. Yet, we are in need of his help at all times. To be skillful in life (the Bible calls this "wisdom") we must trust God in all things. This is what honors him!
4. We must also remember what we have learned in the first three devotions. It is only by Jesus Christ and His Spirit in us that we can focus upon God and not upon self (Galatians 2:20).

Prayer: God, thank you for making us just the way you did. Thank you for the gifts and talents you have given us. Thank you for saving us so we can be made into people who honor you. Help us not to trust in

our own abilities or in what we can and cannot do when facing situations in life. Help us to trust you always and remember that you can do all things.

Activity: Act out the story of David and Goliath as a family. Afterward, write down on a piece of paper and place in your gift box how much you thank God as a family that in Jesus Christ he has given to us the gift of himself and we can trust in him and come to him at all times.

"GIVE THANKS"

Read Romans 1:1-15, focusing mainly on v. 8 (WSC #46)

"But mom!" Annie argued, "Ashley Bergman's parents bought those soccer shoes for her. And lots of other girls on my team have them. I'm probably the only one who doesn't have them." "Honey, we have been over and over this a hundred times. Your dad and I have told you that we will help you get them, but you have to save and buy them mostly on your own. We simply can't afford to buy shoes that costs that much."

This was not the first time that the just-turned-fourth grader, Annie Miller, and her mom had argued this week. Today it was over soccer shoes. Yesterday it had been a new pair of gym shoes like McKenzie Finley had brought to their Physical Education class. The day before it had been a new outfit she had seen at Gap Kids. It seemed that Annie had picked up a bad case of feeling sorry for herself because she didn't have just everything she wanted, nor everything that other kids had. It wasn't that Annie and her parents were poor. They lived in a nice house, had plenty of clothes, ate good food, drove a nice car, and had whatever they needed. They just didn't have money to buy absolutely anything they wanted.

As Annie and Lisa Miller finished their little conversation, it was time for breakfast. Before they ate, Annie's dad, Randy, prayed and thanked God for their breakfast. He also prayed for Chandra Majumbar of India, a boy whom the family sponsored through **World Relief**. Mr. Miller prayed that God would watch over Chandra, that he would convert him and his family, that he would provide enough food for him and his family, and that God would provide needed medicine and clothes. As the prayer ended and mom began passing out the oatmeal, sugar, and the milk, Annie was silent. She was thinking about the prayer and how thankful her mom and dad seemed to be for what God had provided. She also began thinking about how little their friend in India had--especially compared to her. She began to feel bad for the discontentment she's been displaying the last few days.

If you were Annie's friend and you noticed that she was kind of down at school that day and she told you what had happened at her house that morning, what would you say to her? What do you think Annie should learn from this? What should we learn?

Note To Parents: Discuss with your children the importance of thanking God for what we have or don't have. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:18: "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." Our Bible Passage for this devotion shows that it was only with the help of Jesus Christ that Paul was able to give thanks properly for the Romans (look at Romans 1:8). Discuss with your children how we must trust in Christ's power in us (Galatians 2:20) to be truly thankful people. Read Psalm 147. What things can we find in this psalm for which we can thank God?

Prayer: God, teach us to be thankful to you for all that you give us and even for what we don't have. We thank you for our family, our home, our health, our clothes, our friends, our things we do well, for the things that you allow to happen that teach us and help us grow. We especially thank you that you love us and sent your son, Jesus Christ, to die for us so we can be changed and can be with you in heaven.

Activity: Since Thanksgiving is a time when we often thank God for what we have, sit down with your children and have them draw a picture of a turkey and place feathers on it. Each feather should have something written on it for which they are thankful. Once they are done, hang their pictures up somewhere as a reminder to be thankful, then write on pieces of paper the same things they wrote down in the feathers, put the papers in the gift box and give thanks to God for all he does in us that we can have him as our greatest gift.

"THE GOOD FARMER"

Read Luke 10:25-37 (WSC #92)

Randy Miller had decided that in all his 37 years he had not heard so much crazy talk as what he was now witnessing in the *Road Stop* cafe where he often came for coffee. Most of the other farmers and retired men who came into the small restaurant to visit and catch up on all the news of the day were up in arms. It all started when the conversation turned to the new meat-packing plant which had moved into Cartersville, the county seat 30 miles away. In the eyes of the men assembled around their coffee cups it was good that the plant was providing jobs for people in the area. But it was bad, so they thought, that many people from Mexico had moved into the town to work also. "Those Mexicans," as they were often called, "are nothing but trouble," chided Jaydon Mosier, the owner of the hardware in town. "Why, there's no way that I'd want to go to Cartersville at night," piped up Connor Bridges, a mechanic who ran a garage next to the *Road Stop* cafe. "Crime has gone up 100% since those people moved into the area. It's just not safe to be out anymore!" "I sure hope that none of their kind move up here, we don't want 'em around us!" Alex Bowman angrily spouted. Randy didn't really hear what else was said as he sat turning his cup in his hands. All the noise seemed to melt together to form a chorus of anger and hatred. It was clear that these people did not want those who are different living around them.

Randy knew that in his heart he had some less-than-loving thoughts about some of the Hispanic people he had seen while shopping at stores in the county seat. They looked different, they talked different, they sometimes smelled different, their cars were often different, and he could not dismiss the truth that more bad things were happening in the town and the police were busier since the plant opened. Yet, he knew in his heart that this kind of hatred he heard in the café was wrong.

One of the things making this so hard was that his hired man on the farm, Harold Brill, had recently quit. Randy knew that he could not finish harvest and keep up with his chores through the winter without hiring someone else. He had met a Hispanic man in Cartersville the other day who had lost his job at the plant. He had experience doing farm work and because he had five children, he could desperately use the job that Randy needed filled. Randy was now struggling with what he should do. He knew if he hired Juan Gomez other people in town would be mad at him, since it would mean that Juan and his family would move onto

Randy's farm. Yet, he also remembered Pastor Zack Turner's sermon last week out of Luke 10 and how the "Good Samaritan" in Jesus' parable had helped the Jewish man, even though Jews and Samaritans, two different races, often hated each other. Jesus had told the story to teach what it means to love other people—even those who are not like us or who may not love us back. Randy knew from this that God would not be pleased with him, if he did not give the job to Juan just because he was different.

That night at supper he told his family about the problem and about how he was having a hard time knowing what to do. Should Randy do the easiest thing and not give the job to Juan so that people in town will not get mad at him? Or like the "Good Samaritan" in Jesus' story, should he be a "Good Farmer" and help Juan?

Note To Parents: Ask your children: If you were Randy's children (Alex, Annie, Austin) what would you tell your dad to do? Think about the parable of the *Good Samaritan* in Luke 10:25-37. Do you think that other kids at school might give you a hard time if you reached out to a student that was different? How would you handle this? How would you feel if you were Juan's kids and people didn't like you just because of the color of your skin or how you talked? Emphasize to your children that God loves all kinds of people no matter what race they are (Rev.5:9) and he wants us to do the same. We should not dislike other people just because they are different. We must also remember that Christ is both our model (Matthew 10:8; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Ephesians 5:1-2; Philippians 2:5-11) and our motor (our power, Galatians 2:20) for loving others when it is difficult.

Prayer: God, help us to love other people, even if they are different. We also want to thank you for not making all of us the same. Help us also be part of your work of reaching those from every tribe, tongue, nation, and people for your glory (Isaiah 25:3; Habakkuk 2:14; Revelation 5:9-10).

Activity: Have each member draw and color a family portrait. Compare the pictures and see how many things you can find that are different. If you have more than one child, have them compare with each other. Point out that the differences do not make one picture better than the other. They are only different. This is

the same as the different people God has made. If you have an older child, you might want to have him draw the pictures of the family for each child and then the children can color them. Once your pictures are done, have each family member write on a piece of paper how diversity among people helps us appreciate the diversity of the persons within the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and it also gives us the privilege of putting God's grace on display to others, showing them our unifying, life-changing, love-producing God is our greatest treasure.

"A LIFESAVER"

Read Ephesians 2:1-10 (WSC #'s 85-87)

Lisa Miller, 36 year old farmer's wife and mom, stood in the front of her church with her arms around her husband and their daughter Annie. All three of them were crying and other people in the church were beginning to make their way up to the trio. The stream of fellow church people (most of whom were family and neighbors and friends) all had smiles mixed with tears. What in the world led to such a scene? The best way for you to find out is to let Mrs. Miller herself tell you. You will have to excuse her, though, if she begins crying before the story is finished. She is very happy right now.

Well, I guess in order to tell you what has just happened, I need to tell you about our daughter Annie. You see, Annie is nine years old. From the time that she was born her dad (Randy is his name--that's him hugging Annie over by the steps leading up to the platform at the front of the church) and I have wanted Annie to love Jesus and receive Him as her savior. Yet, she never seemed to be interested. We never thought too much about it when she was younger. But when she was 8 she had told us she hated church. It just broke our hearts.

It seemed that she was different than our oldest child (Alex who is 15). Even before he received Christ as his savior, he had not put up such a fuss about going to church. Annie seemed to try every excuse in the book to get out of going: her stomach hurt; she had the sniffles; or sometimes on Sunday nights she wanted to watch a favorite T.V. show. It wasn't the church attendance as much as her lack of interest in Jesus Christ that troubled us. We also were concerned by her quick temper and grumpiness.

Well, at the beginning of this week our church had a special speaker come in from a Christian college in our state. His name is G.T. Chesterfield. I guess he is a former professor there and now mostly what he does is travel around and preach in churches. This week he has been talking about what it means to be a Christian and what will happen to a person after they die, if they do not receive Jesus as their savior. He said that they will be in hell, not be in heaven with Jesus Christ (as John 14:3 says).

I could tell last night that what he was saying was making Annie think. After we came home from the service, she did not make her usual comments about how boring it was or that she was sure glad to be home. She was very quiet and went up to her room. Then tonight she actually wanted to come to church.

Randy and I couldn't believe it! I could tell that she was really listening to all that Mr. Chesterfield was saying. He preached on Ephesians 2:8-9: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast." (NIV) He explained that the only way we can be forgiven of what we have done wrong and know that we will be with Jesus in heaven is to repent of our sin and receive him as our savior.

Mr. Chesterfield explained that receiving Jesus means that we are sorry for our sins and we believe that only Jesus' dying for sinners like us on the cross can make us a Christian. When we decide we want to believe in what Jesus has done, be forgiven, and when we want to do the things that Jesus wants us to do, this is what it means to receive Jesus. We become a new person.

After he was done preaching Annie went up to Mr. Chesterfield and was sobbing terribly. I was crying too because... (she cries)... I knew...(sniffle, sniffle)...that she wanted to follow Christ and I was so happy. (She begins crying again) Annie said that all she could think about were the bad things that she had done, that she had not loved Jesus, and the worst thing is that that she would not be with him if she died. Now she says that she feels like someone threw her a lifejacket when she was drowning--she has been saved!

So, that is why Annie and her family are all crying at the front of the church and why everyone is so happy. I hope that those of you listening to this story have received Jesus as your savior. If you haven't done so, you need to repent and believe on Jesus Christ as your savior.

Note To Parents: Talk to your children about the need to receive Jesus Christ as savior. See Appendix 2 for help in explaining the gospel. Do not push them if they are not ready. But do pray for them that God would help them understand what it means to be a Christian. Pray also that God would give you the wisdom to be able to explain salvation to them. When they are ready to receive Jesus it often helps for them to pray as a way of confessing before God Jesus is Lord and their risen savior (Rom. 10:9). This prayer does not save them, but it does often help focus their faith. You might pray the following with them:

God, I am sorry for all the bad things I have done. I want to follow you and I want to do the things that you want me to do. I know that the only way this can happen and I can go to heaven is if I trust in you, your life, your death upon the cross and your resurrection, and your ability to

save and change me. Help me truly to trust in Jesus as my savior, make me a new person, and help me to obey you. Thank you for hearing my prayer. Amen.

You should continue to pray as a parent that they would understand what salvation is, they would truly repent, and trust Jesus Christ, and that you would see the fruit of a changed life in them. As parents we must not seek to assure our children of salvation, if they have made a profession of faith. This can come only from the Holy Spirit as he bears witness with our children that they have been converted and are truly following Jesus Christ in faith-fueled obedience (Matthew 7:21-27; 12:50; John 3:36; 5:24; Romans 8:12-17).

Prayer: God help us know if we have never received Jesus as our savior. Help us see how important this is. If we have received Jesus, help us tell other people about Jesus so that they can receive Him too.

Activity: Purchase some candy lifesavers. Each saved family member will suck on a lifesaver as he/she shares how and when Jesus became his/her “lifesaver” and Savior. This not only helps them see the importance of receiving Christ, but it also can help them understand what it means to do so. After you share, write on a piece of paper John 14:3, place it and a lifesaver in the gift box, and give thanks to God that he saved you so you can have the greatest gift of all—being with your savior for eternity!

"DOWN TO EARTH"

Read Philippians 2:5-11 (WSC #'s 22-23)

"Lisa, that was good supper." Martha Gomez' English was spoken with a very heavy Hispanic accent and was at times hard-to-understand, but it was improving. "Thank you, Martha. I have to say, though, it was not near as delicious as the enchiladas you fixed for us last month. Randy says he's still sweating from your spicy sauce!" Martha began to laugh, "I'm sorry his mouth is soft." "Oh, come on now," Randy began to defend himself (with a smile on his face), "I don't need both of you women ganging up on me. Lisa usually does a good enough job picking on me by herself. Hey Juan, you better get over here and help me out with these women!" Juan makes his way back from the bathroom off of the kitchen to the dining room. He smiles, and holds up his hands, "I not get involved, boss. You have to get out of dis one by yourself!" "Well," Randy began, "at least get back over here to the table and get the subject changed. The kids have been dying to hear your story ever since I told them a little of it after you began working for me."

Juan Gomez came to work for Randy Miller on his farm just a couple of months ago. He and his wife Martha have five children (Ricardo: 11, Cristina: 10, Elizabeth: 9, Andres: 7, and Zulema: 4). Even though Juan really needed the job and Randy really needed the help, many people in the area were angry at Randy and his family for hiring the "different" family. All that happened brought the two families closer together.

"Oh, I can't tell it." Juan shyly responded. "Sure you can," Randy encouraged him. "Tell them about what happened to you when you were young and how you ended up coming to the United States."

All the kids and parents took seats around the table or comfortably on the floor. Juan cleared his throat and began. "When I was young my family lived in Reynosa, Mexico and we were very poor. There were eight children in our family and my father worked at a large factory which had been started by an American. He made many metal things: key rings, bottle openers, and things like this. But he did not make much money. When I was about fifteen I met the man who owned the factory. He had flown in to see how things were going. For some reason he took a liking to me. The next time he came back to

Reynosa he looked me up. Each time he would visit, I would talk to him. When I was seventeen he asked me, 'How would you like to learn to fly an airplane?' I didn't know what to say at first. When he asked me again I knew that he was serious. He wanted to help me come to the United States and take flying lessons and then I could be a pilot for him and some of the people who worked with him. They were one short. You can't imagine how excited I was. It seemed that possibly I might be able to get a good job and make more of a living than what I would've working at the factory.

"So, two months before I turned eighteen I moved to Edinburg, Texas and began taking lessons. Five months after I finished the lessons and began flying for Mr. Gish, my father died of a heart attack. There was no one else in the family who was able to take care of the family, so I had a hard decision to make. If I kept my job, my family may not make it--even though I made good money and could send some to them. You see, my mom was very sick and someone needed to be there to care for her and help with the children. Yet, if I left the job, I would be leaving what may be my only hope to get out of the poverty we were in. I thought many times to myself: How can I leave my pilot job and go back to the factory and to my family? Yet, I knew that is what I must do because I loved them very much.

"So, I told Mr. Gish that I must go back to Reynosa. He was sorry to see me go, but he understood. He hired me back at the old factory. That is much of my story. My mom died in a couple of years; I met Martha, we started our family, and now I have come back to the United States. I hope to become a pilot again someday. Maybe now that I have a job with Randy I can."

"Wow, Mr. Gomez, that's a great story," seven year old Austin Miller said. "That reminds me of what my Sunday School teacher, Mrs. Smock, told us this past Sunday. She told us how much Jesus gave up and left behind when he left heaven to become a baby on the earth. He was God and very powerful and could do anything! But then he humbled himself and became man because he knew we needed him and because he loved us." "You're right, Austin," Lisa Miller said. "That is what Christmas is all about. Jesus, for a while, humbled himself and became poor so that we could be made rich through all he did for us. That reminds us we should be thankful for him!"

Note To Parents: Read 2 Corinthians 8:9 to your children: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” Ask your children:

1. What do you think some of the things were that the Son of God had before he became man? (John 1:1-14; Colossians 1:15-20)
2. How did things change when he became man? (Philippians 2:6-8) Note that the Son of God gave up none of his divine attributes when he became man. His humbling of himself consisted of his become a man and, in his human nature, experiencing the difficulties, limitations, and temptations of men.
3. Why did he do this? (Rev. 1:5-6)
4. How should we respond to this? (Rev. 5:9-14)

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for all the ways you humbled yourself when you came to earth. Thank you for loving me so much that you would do that and you would go through a lot of bad things so that I could be your saved, so that I could be forgiven of my sins, and so that I can be in heaven with you someday.

Activity: This is called a "Coin Hunt". Hide coins around your house (or even outside if weather permits). Have children find them just like an Easter egg hunt. When they are all done, help them count their money. Allow them to keep it, but ask them: What are some things you would like to spend your money on? Explain to them that these are things they would be willing to give up their riches for (like Jesus did for us) and that Jesus wanted to give up riches even more for us than we do for the things we like. Ask them if they would be willing to give some of their money to Jesus because He had done so much for them. Then help them remember to put whatever part of it they want to in the Sunday School or church offering next week.

"A CHRISTMAS LETTER"

Read Hebrews 1:1-14 (WSC # 24)

The second that Randy Miller finished praying, all the kids at the table started grabbing dishes and bowls. You would have thought that they believed they only had about 10 seconds to get some food on the table before it was all taken away or that they hadn't eaten in two weeks. "Pass the bread, please, Annie." "May I have the spaghetti Mom?" "Hurry up with the sauce!" "Would you pass the parmesan cheese please, Dad?" "Can I have Pepsi instead of milk Mom?" "Hey, Austin, don't take all day with the salad." *Clank, bang, chatter, clatter, thump.* It was noisy as the family of five sat around the supper table along with 15 year old Alex's friend, Jay Penner. Jay, who was in Alex's class at school, had become friends with the older Miller son because they played football and basketball together. He was a nice guy. One of the things that set him and his family apart from the Millers was that they did not go to church and didn't really believe that much in God.

When all the bowls had been passed around and everyone had food on their plates and had settled down to eat, Alex addressed his dad, "Hey, Dad, Jay and I got into a pretty awesome discussion today at lunch." "Oh really, what about?" asked the father. "Well, I said something about God helping me on my English test this morning and Jay here said to me, 'How do you know God helped you? We don't even know what God is like, if there even is a god. Maybe He's some monster.'" "Oh come on Alex," jumped in Jay, "I didn't say that. I just said maybe God isn't really all that great. Maybe he doesn't love us--after all we never really see him--how do we know what he's like?"

Jay half expected someone to get mad at him for even saying something like this, because he knew that all the Millers were, as he put it, "very religious people." But, to his surprise, no one did. In fact, Randy's response caught him by surprise. "That's a great question, Jay. You're right that we have not seen God. In fact, the Bible even says that no one has really seen God. But there is a very helpful way that we can know what he is like." "How's that?" asked the puzzled young teen. "Let me explain with a little story," said the dad as he set his bread down, wiped off his mouth and took a drink of water.

Randy began: "Last week we sent out family Christmas letters to all of our family and friends. Many of these people we have not seen this past year and some we haven't seen for a couple of years. As much as

we would like to visit many of them or call them on the phone, it seems like we just don't get it done very often. So, every December we send out these letters telling about each person in our family. We tell them about how the kids are doing in school, what's going on around the farm, where we've been on vacation, and things like that. We also always include a family picture. We feel like this letter helps people to know about us and to keep updated with how we are changing. In some ways, it lets them know all over again who we are."

"Yeah, I know what you're talking about, Randy," responded Jay with a baffled look. "But I don't see what this has to do with God."

"Well, let me explain," Randy said. "The Bible says that God has spoken to us in many different ways throughout history. He's given dreams and visions to prophets, he's performed miracles, he's given commandments. In other words, he has sent us lots of letters or little notes, we might call them, in the Bible. These let us know what God is like. But, the Bible also tells us that God has spoken to each one of us through an even greater way: In His Son, Jesus Christ. You see, Jay, just like our family Christmas letters tell people who we are and remind them of what we are like and just like you know a lot about our family and me just from getting to know Alex, in the same way one of the best ways that God could tell us about who he is was by giving us the Bible and sending his Son to show us what he is like. If you want to know what God is like, just look at what Jesus was like, because he is God."

"Yeah, Jay," Lisa (Randy's wife) chimed in; "that's part of what Christmas is all about. When you celebrate it in a couple of weeks and receive gifts, what you are really celebrating is that God sent his Son to be among us. Part of what that means is that we can see first-hand what God is like by looking at Jesus. He is God's greatest Christmas letter to us."

"I guess I see what you're saying, but this is kinda new to me," Jay said. "That's okay," Randy encouraged him. "Just think about it."

"Hey, could somebody quit talking and pass me some more spaghetti and sauce?" Austin asked. "I'm starving over here!" With this wisecrack, everyone started laughing at the seven year old who had spaghetti sauce on his mouth and the front of his shirt. And Annie passed him the bowl.

Note To Parents: Explain to your children that Jesus helps us to know what God is like: He loves people just like us, he wants us to trust in him, he wants us to do what he commands, he is strong and can do many powerful things. He also wants to change and forgive sinners, also giving them eternal life.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for sending Jesus into the world so that we can know you, so that we can be with you in heaven, and so that we can know what you are like. Thank you that you love us and have taught us in the Bible and through Jesus how you want us to live.

Activity: Write or e-mail a letter to a friend or a family member telling them what God is like. You might even want to look in the Bible books which tell about Jesus the most (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). Find places where it tells what he is like and put these things in the letter. For kids who can write and read you can let them write their own letter. You might need to coach them on what kinds of things to include. For the child who can't read and write you can ask them questions about what Jesus is like or read to them and see if you can help them give a few answers which can be added to a letter. Younger children could also draw and color pictures on the letter.

"THE NEED FOR A ROAD MAP"

Read 2 Timothy 2:14-19; 3:14-17 (WSC #'s 2-3, 89-90)

It was Monday morning and Annie Miller was riding with her mom (Lisa) to do some last minute Christmas shopping. The nine year old had been looking forward to this day for a couple of weeks. Friday had been her last day of school before Christmas vacation. Her mom had said that they could go into Cartersville and see if there were any sales.

"So what did your class talk about in Sunday School yesterday?" Lisa asked her daughter. "Oh Mr. Harney (Scott Harney was the teacher for the 4-5 graders) talked about how much God wants us to read the Bible and how important it is we listen. Mom, he told a pretty cool story about going to King's Castle Amusement Park to help us understand what he was saying. Do you want me to tell you the story?" "Sure," replied Mrs. Miller. "It sounds like something you would've enjoyed, especially since we plan on taking a trip to King's Castle this summer."

"Well," Annie began, "Mr. Harney wanted us to pretend that our family was taking a trip to King's Castle. On the day that we were to leave we were supposed to imagine that we all got in the car to go and dad had the address of where the amusement park was. But, as we left home and got out on the road we didn't have a map, we didn't have any directions how to get to King's Castle, dad didn't pay any attention to the road signs, and we didn't pay any attention to whether or not we had enough gas to get there. He then asked the class, 'How many of you think that you would get to King's Castle?' We all answered that we didn't think we'd get there. He asked us why we thought that. Madison Holmes told him that we wouldn't make it because we would probably take a wrong turn and end up out in some corn field. We all laughed.

Mr. Harney then told us that when we don't read the Bible it's like not reading a road map and road signs when we are on a trip. We all have certain things that we would like to have or be when we grow up (like being a husband or wife; having kids; honoring God; and being happy). That's kind of like knowing where we want to end up: just like we knew in the story that we wanted to get to King's Castle. But, if we don't listen to how God wants us to think, how he wants us to treat other people, how he wants us to love him, how to love and forgive other people, then we are probably not going to honor him or be too happy. It would be just like going on a trip and not paying attention to a map or directions. He told us that the Bible

is God's map for teaching us what to do. And, since God made us and the world, he knows what things we should do that will help us find the greatest joy."

Annie stopped talking for a few seconds and then said, "that's the whole story and what we talked about." "So," Mrs. Miller responded, "what do you think you should do with what you learned?" "I don't know," said Annie. Mrs. Miller smiled at this typical response as she turned into the mall's parking lot.

Note To Parents: Ask your children: So what do you think Annie should do with what she learned at Sunday School? What do you think you should do? Why is it important to read the Bible? Help your children with ways that they can read the Bible. You might need to sit down with them and help or suggest a book of the Bible for them to read on their own. If they can't read well yet, you might read the Bible to them and/or a good children's Bible story book with them each day.

Prayer: God, thank you for teaching us how we can be in heaven and how we can live good lives that glorify you in this world. Help us to read and listen to your Bible and to obey it.

Activity: Have your children pick out a favorite place they have visited or one they would like to visit. Look it up on an on-line map and direction program. Print out the results and look at it with your children. (If you prefer to use a paper map or an atlas, you can) Talk about the importance of following all the directions to get to your destination. Help them see it is the same with the Bible for how we live. Once you are done, fold up the directions, put them in the gift box, and give thanks to God that his grace gives us the desire and understanding needed to read the Bible and obey it. Also give thanks that in the Bible God reveals to us the directions for knowing and enjoying him (Pss. 73:25-26; John 14:15; 15:5-15; 17:3; Rom. 10:17).

"THE TELEPHONE CALL"

Read Isaiah 46:9-11; Matthew 19:16-26 (WSC #98)

Riiiiing, Riiiiing sounded the Miller's telephone in the kitchen. "I've got it," shouted Annie, "It's probably Madi!" "No!" bellowed Austin. The brother and sister collided with each other before getting to the phone and each shoved the other so they could be first. But before either one picked up the receiver, their mom had answered it in her bedroom. Both children went back into the living room where they were watching a movie on T.V. with their dad and older brother. It didn't take long for them to forget the call as they were again glued to the screen.

It was about 5 minutes later that Lisa Miller hung up the phone and came into the living room in tears. "What's the matter?" Her husband Randy asked with concern in his voice, looking up from the set. Between her tears and sniffles, Mrs. Miller managed to get out, "That was mom and dad on the phone...." She began to cry again. "Oh no, what's wrong now?" Alex questioned. Both Annie and Austin got up off the floor and went toward their mom with a mixed look of concern and fear.

Everyone was worried because four weeks ago Grandma Dee (that's what the kids called their 63 yr. old Grandma--Dee Chambers) had gone to the doctor. For some time she hadn't been feeling well and Grandpa Richard (Richard Chambers) had finally talked her into going into the clinic. What was found out through that visit and a couple of visits to the hospital was that Grandma Dee had cancer. There was a big tumor growing inside her. The whole family was concerned because they were afraid she might die. Now they were standing in the living room looking at Lisa Miller with tears in her eyes and thinking the worst. They were afraid that Grandma Dee's visit to the doctor earlier in the day had brought some kind of bad news that the cancer was spreading and she was getting worse. Oh, how they did not want to lose Grandma Dee!

"Well," Lisa Miller sniffled, "Mom said that the doctor took x-rays today..." "and?" Randy finally asked when she didn't finish. "...And the doctor said that the tumor is no longer there. She told me that the doctor said there was absolutely no explanation for it not being there and he couldn't understand it. But, she was *lucky* (she said this with emphasis) and mom should just be glad she no longer has cancer!" "Wooh, Yeeess!" Austin and Annie said together. "That's great!" Randy said as he put his arms around his wife

and kissed her.

"But mom, how could it just disappear?" Annie asked. "Honey, it was God. He took the cancer away from Grandma." "Yeah," her dad jumped in, "God is able to do all things. There is nothing that he desires to do and that is not contrary to his character that he cannot do. It doesn't matter whether it is sickness, problems at school, or needing a sea parted like the Israelites did in the Old Testament, God can do it."

"But, if God can do all things, Dad, Why didn't He help Grandpa Miller?" "Because, Austin, God does not always choose to heal in this life, even though we know that he is able. But we do know that because of his love and power he does what is best, even if we don't always understand it."

"Can we call Grandma Dee up and talk to her, mom?" Annie asked. "You sure can." Annie went over to the phone and dialed the number that she knew by heart. *Riiiiing, Riiiiing.*

Note To Parents: Read the following scriptures to your children which teach about God being all powerful. Genesis 17:1: "When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless.'" Matthew 19:26: "But Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'"

Ask your children: Why is it important to us that God is so powerful? Possible answers: We can trust in Him. We should remember that if God is so strong and powerful we should listen to Him and do what He teaches us. It increases our joy in knowing and having him.

Prayer: God, we think that it is awesome that you can do all things and are so powerful. Help us to remember that this should cause us to trust in you and want to obey you. Thank you also that you have graciously given us yourself and we will have you, the mighty God, and your steadfast love for eternity (Ps. 103:8-10).

Activity: This activity is called a *Trust Fall*. Have 2 people stand facing each other behind a child who is standing and looking away from them. Have the child fall backward without looking. The two people will catch him. This helps teach the child to trust in someone else. If there is more than one child, make sure

each gets a turn. Also, it is better to have adults or older children do the catching. After each gets a turn, talk about how this is like trusting in God and how God is so much stronger than the people who did the catching in this *Trust Fall*. Then ask: What are some things that we are experiencing right now in which we need to trust in God who is very strong?

"FISH AND MONKEYS"

Read Genesis 1 (WSC #9)

(Pre-story note to parents: If you have some toy trains around the house, it might help the telling of the story to have them nearby. But it is not necessary)

"Austin, you have to quit being so loud and rocking the boat if you want to catch any fish!" exclaimed Grandpa Richard. "You're gonna have 'em all swimming away faster than we can shake a stick at 'em. Then we won't have any for supper tonight." "Sorry Grandpa," Austin responded, but he didn't seem to get the message because he was right back to "messing around" five minutes later.

Austin and Annie Miller had spent the night with their Grandma and Grandpa Chambers. Now on this beautiful September Saturday afternoon they were out in Richard Chamber's fishing boat trying to keep seven year old Austin from chasing away their supper with his noise and they were also just enjoying being together.

"Grandpa," Annie said. "Yes, Annie." "Do you think that we came from monkeys?" The retired hardware owner let out a little chuckle. "Why do you ask that? Austin isn't acting that badly this afternoon is he?" Grandpa laughed now. "No," Annie responded while cracking a small grin and playfully poking her brother in the back. "Mr. McDonald, my teacher, was talking about where people come from in our Science lesson yesterday. He said that millions of years ago, before there was a world, there was some gas and particles just kinda floating in space and something happened so that there was an explosion and out of that the world formed. And then there were these little living things that formed into bigger living things and pretty soon there were fish and other smaller animals and those animals changed over many, many years so that they could be stronger and formed larger animals like monkeys and apes. And then some of these changed into people. Mr. McDonald said that we are just smarter forms of animals. Do you believe that, Grandpa?"

Grandpa Chambers pondered his granddaughter's question before responding, "Well, I can see Mr. McDonald has been at it again. I remember having a talk with your brother Alex about this same topic when he was back in fourth grade. Annie and Austin, you see that train bridge and track over yonder?" He

pointed across the pond to where there was a track. He continued, "Many times you've been here with me and seen a train go by, haven't you?" Both kids shook their heads yes. "Well suppose we came out here to the pond one day and there was already a train going by on the tracks. Let's say you saw one of those flat train cars carrying a truck trailer on it." Grandpa paused and then asked: "What is pulling that train car along?" The two kids thought about it for a minute. Then Annie said with a questioning voice, "the car in front of it?" "Exactly," said Grandpa Richard. "So, if I then said to you, 'That tells us what is making that train car go over the tracks' I'd be right?" Neither child answered. "But suppose," the wise older man went on, "I asked you, 'What is making that car (the one which is pulling the first car we saw)--what is making that train car move along the track?' You'd probably say the train car in front of it. Now I could keep asking you these questions about all the cars in the train and you could say the same thing: each car is pulling the car behind it and that is how each is moving along the track. Now let's just pretend that we can't see the front of the train. All we can see is a long line of trains pulling each other along. What has to be at the front of that train making all the other cars go?" Again each child looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders. Finally, Austin realized the answer his grandfather wanted and excitedly said, "an engine!" "Exactly, Austin."

"But, what does that have to do with evolution or how the world got here?" Annie pondered. "Well, Annie, just like any train has to have a beginning, it has to have a source of power or an engine which can move all the train cars down the track, in the same way, the world had to have a beginning --something or someone who has always been, is smart enough, and strong enough to have made the world. You see, your teacher Mr. McDonald is a nice man, but he does not realize that all he is trying to tell you by teaching of gas and particles exploding and animals changing is just like our saying that train cars are just pulled along the track by the car in front of it and that car by the one in front of it and so on. But he never gets back to the beginning to talk about what has caused everything else to go. Mr. McDonald has forgotten that even if there were gas and particles that exploded and formed the world, we then have to ask, 'but where did they come from?' 'Who or what put them there?' It's just like needing to ask 'but what is pulling all the train cars along.'"

"Oh, I think I get it, Grandpa," Annie responded. "Something had to be there always (a beginning) so

that it (or he) could make everything else in the beginning." "Yes, that's it, hon! Very good!" Mr. Chambers said as he reached over and hugged his granddaughter.

"You see, it's even more important we realize the Bible teaches us that God made the world and all that is in it. And he also made us. And we could not come from animals, because God made us special--we are different than animals because God made us like himself in ways that animals are not like him. That's why God has told us it is okay to kill and eat fish and other animals. But it's not okay to murder people."

"Well, at least most of us didn't come from animals." Austin piped up. "I'm not so sure about Annie. I think she might be part monkey." "Why you little..." Annie started to say before Grandpa interrupted. "Now kids. Come on, let's get back to our fishing or Grandma may have to thaw out some liver for our supper tonight." "Eww..... gross!" the two young fishermen exclaimed as they promptly cast their lines back into the water.

Note To Parents: Read the following Bible verses again to your children: Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Genesis 1:26-27: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' [27] So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Genesis 1:31: "And God saw everything that he made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day." Ask your children, why is it important for us to know that God created the world? (Give them time to respond). Possible answers: It is important because we are reminded that there is a God and we need to listen to him (there is right and wrong in the world). Also, if God created us and everything else in the world, he should know best how we should live. If God created us in his image and we are special over animals, we should treat other people as if they are special (for example, we shouldn't kill them without just cause). And we should take care of the world, because it is important to God. We should be thankful for God making all the wonderful things he has.

Prayer: God, thank you for making the world. Thank you for the different animals, for the sky, for the oceans, for the rivers, the streams, the lakes, and the mountains. Thank you for all the different plants, trees, and flowers. Thank you also for the food you cause to grow for us to eat and the rain that helps it all grow. Thank you also that you, the awe-inspiring creator, sent your Son to save us, that we might be brought to you!

Activity:

Option 1: Make a creation-day-train to go along with the above story. Have children draw a train with seven cars and an engine. (*If you have younger boys, use a real train set with cars!*) Have the first car represent the first day of creation, have the second car represent the second, and so on through car #7. Look at Genesis 1:1-2:3 for the different days of creation. When they are done, talk about what was created on each day and how that God started and made all this--He's the *engine* for the world. When you are done, place the trains in the gift box and explain to your children that the knowledge of God as the almighty creator increases our joy in knowing we will be with him forever.

Option 2: Next time your family visits the zoo, make it a "Creation Scavenger Hunt" day. If possible, plan your trip so some of the trip will be in the day and some will be in the night. Before leaving, review the creation account and write out a list of each of the seven days with what God created each day. See who can identify all of God's creation first! Put one of the completed scavenger hunts in the gift box.

"CAMPFIRE TALK"

Read Isaiah 64:4; Matthew 7:7-11 (WSC #'s 101-102)

It was the perfect way to end a great day in the wilderness. It was the first day of church camp for Annie Miller and her friend Madi Taylor. The camp was about three hours from home, so they had started at 6:00 that morning to make it there by the 9:00 registration. The rest of the day had been spent meeting new people. They had a new friend by the name of Hannah Lewis who was in their tent. They also had been horseback riding and swimming. And one of the boys' campsites had attacked them with water balloons after supper. Most of the girls acted like they were mad, but inside they thought it was fun and were planning a way to get them back (in fun of course). Now, they were finishing off everything with a campfire. They had roasted marshmallows, sang some songs, and had a short devotional from their camp counselor, Tricia Blackmore. Now, the group of about 20 girls was sitting around talking and laughing about the day.

Madi decided that this was a great time to ask Tricia a question that she had been wanting to pose to someone for a couple of weeks. As girls were starting to move away from the fire and others were messing around, Madi went up to her camp counselor. She waited while the 20 year old college student finished telling two other girls where the showers were located. "Tricia," Madi began. "May I ask you a question?" "Sure, Madi. What can I help you with?" Madi explained, "Back in the spring our Sunday school teacher, Mr. Harney, showed us a verse in the Bible." Madi took her Bible and turned to it. "Here it is, Matthew 21:22. It says, "And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith." Tricia looked at the younger girl almost as if she knew what Madi was about to ask. "Yes, Madi, that's what it says. Did you pray for something and not get it?" "Yeah," she answered. "I prayed and believed real hard, but it never came. What did I do wrong?"

The counselor stood with her hands in her pockets for a few seconds and then finally responded. "Tell me what you prayed for." "Well, Tricia, I have always wanted to go to King's Castle Amusement Park, but my parents never wanted to go. My mom and dad are divorced. Dad never has time to come and do it and mom says that we don't have the money. I just thought that if I believed hard enough and prayed, God would either give my mom the money or have my dad come and do it. Now it's been almost three months,

the summer is over, and I still haven't gone. Why didn't God answer my prayer?" Madi let out this last question with frustration in her voice as she came up on her tip toes, lifted up her arms and let them fall to slap the sides of her legs.

"Maybe God has answered your prayer," Tricia answered. Madi quickly retorted, "What do you mean? We still haven't gone." "Here, Madi, let me see your Bible." She took the Bible and motioned for the younger girl to come back to the campfire and sit on a log in the circle where they had been singing earlier. "Here's what I mean. God doesn't always answer our prayers with a *yes*. Sometimes He answers them with a *wait awhile* and sometimes with a *no*. Here somewhere in Luke...(Tricia holds the Bible toward the light of the fire so she can see and pages through the book of Luke)...yeah, here it is--Luke 18:1. It says this, "And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart." He then told 'em a story about this woman who came to a man for help and he wouldn't help her. Finally, she kept coming and he gave in and did what she wanted. You see, Madi, sometimes God does the same with us. It's not because he doesn't want to help us, but he may think it's best for us to wait awhile before he answers us with a *yes*. Maybe, He knows that there is some reason you shouldn't go to the amusement park this summer and it would be better another time. Or maybe he just wants you to grow and learn patience. Do you see what I mean?" "I think so," said the nine year old girl. "But what about the *no* part you were talking about?"

"Okay, here it is...(once again Tricia held the Bible toward the fire)...2 Corinthians 12:8-9. Paul was talking about an illness he had and then he wrote, "Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." In other words, God said *no*. Maybe there is a reason that God doesn't think this is best for you, Madi. I don't think you should quit praying or believing that God can answer this prayer. He may just want you to learn patience and to trust in him. But, if he doesn't choose to say *yes*, you need also to trust him that he knows what is best for you. Does that make sense?" "Yeah, Tricia. But it's still really hard to wait or to take "no" for an answer." "I understand," the counselor told her, "but the good news is that God's grace is sufficient for you, so he'll help you be patient. If you have any more questions or just need

to talk to someone, you know where to find me." "Thanks Tricia." And with that Madi took her Bible and ran off toward her tent.

Note To Parents: Tell your children that you want to read another verse to them. I John 5:14: "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us." Ask the children: What does this teach us about prayer? Answer: That God answers prayers with a *yes* only if they are for things that he thinks are best for us and what he wants.

Prayer: God, teach us how to pray. Help us to be patient when we ask you for things. Help us learn from the Bible the things that you think are good and important so that our prayers can be for those things which you want for us. Help us to trust your infinite wisdom above our limited knowledge. Help us also to learn that the greatest gift you give to us in prayer is you (Mt. 7:11; Lk. 11:13; Eph. 2:18). Thank you for the gift of prayer!

Activity: Make a prayer list with your children. Put down people for whom they want to pray and things that are important to them. Begin praying with them every day about these needs during family devotions and keep track of how God answers the prayers. As you pray with them make sure to do more than just ask for things. Praise God, thank him for things he has done for you, confess sins, and also pray according to the kinds of things the Bible teaches us to pray (examples: Mt. 6:9-13; Eph. 1:15-23; 6:18-19; Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:3, 9-14; 2 Thes. 2:11-12). A good guide for prayer is A.C.T.S.: Adoration (praise); Confession of sin; Thanksgiving; and Supplication (bringing to God your needs and those of others).

"THE STORY OF THE CIRCLE S"

Read Philippians 2:5-11 (WSC #'s 27-28)

It was the Friday before Easter Sunday and Austin Miller was excited. His mom didn't have to work hard to get him out of bed as she often does when sending him off to his second grade class. This morning he'd gotten up on his own because he didn't have school, so he was going to ride in the tractor with his dad while he planted corn. Austin always loved this because he enjoyed learning about all the equipment and just being with his dad.

By 11:30 in the morning the dad and son had talked about everything from corn to school to sports. Austin had quieted down now and just sat in the cab as he heard the hum of the powerful tractor engine. He finally broke the silence: "Hey, dad," Austin began. "Yeah, son?" Mr. Miller turned his gaze from the corn fields to his son. "Last week Pastor Turner was talking about Jesus dying for us on the cross and he said he'd be talking this Sunday about Jesus coming back to life. That reminded me of the story of 'The Circle S Ranch' you told us a few months ago. Could you tell me that story again?" "Well," Randy Miller responded as he looked down at his watch, "I suppose we have just enough time before we have to stop and go in for dinner." So, as the elder Miller returned his eyes to the soil of his field and his mind to the business of planting, he also told this story...

"Theo Kurry was the largest rancher in his part of Texas. His ranch was so large that it would take most of the morning to get from one side of it to the other. Because it was so big he needed to have some good, reliable hired men helping him with his cattle. After all, he might go weeks at a time without seeing some of them. But occasionally he would have trouble with some of his men. And, that is where we begin our story.

"You see, Andy Thropes had come to the *Circle S* ranch looking for a job a few months back. He seemed to be a rough character, but since Theo was short on help, he decided to give him a shot and see how he worked out. But the easy-to-get-along-with boss had just found out that Andy wasn't working out very well at all. He was working with a group of hired men over on the far western side of the ranch and it seemed that some cattle were missing and that some of the men had been causing trouble for businesses

which were in a small town that bordered the *Circle S*.

“To take care of the problem Theo decided to send his son Jesse over to calm things down a bit and see what was going on. He told his son that by no means did he want any trouble when the son dealt with the men. Jesse had been back on the ranch about three weeks now. He had gone away to college and when his studies were completed he decided that ranching was still what he wanted to do. So, Jesse returned home. He was a very athletic, intelligent young man whose interests not only included cattle, but most sports--especially karate--a sport in which Jesse did very well.

“The heir of the *Circle S*, having promised his dad that he'd handle things in a peaceful way, headed west. Since he knew that there might be a lot of work to do in rounding up some cattle and making repairs in the small town, he put on old clothes and hopped into his beat-up 12 year old pickup truck instead of the brand new one which he had just bought last week. With his old jeans, worn boots, faded sweat-stained cowboy hat, and rusting truck Jesse did not look like the son of the wealthiest rancher in those parts.

“We shouldn't be surprised that when the peacemaker drove up to the motel where the men were staying, they didn't recognize Jesse (most of them had never met him), nor did they believe that he was Theo's son. Since he had promised his dad that he would approach this in a peaceful way, he pretty much let his guard down when walking up to the men and he paid the price. Once he allowed them to gang up on him, there was little the black-belt fighter could do. They hit and kicked him until police officers, who had been called by another person staying in the motel, arrived.

“Andy and his rowdy friends ended up in jail for a couple of days--in no way sorry about what they had done. And Jesse ended up in the hospital for three days. The hired men laughed about Jesse when they recovered from their hangover. "Imagine," one of them laughingly said, "that guy actually claimed to be Kurry's son. What a joke!" "Yeah," another piped up, "I heard that Kurry's real son is a pretty bad guy to mess with--one of those karate types. This guy was nothing." "And did you see the clothes and that truck he was driving?" Thropes sarcastically questioned. "Why, he was no more Kurry's son than I'm the president of the United States!" They all laughed. "I doubt if his real son would be in the hospital bed right now with broken ribs!" And so their mockery continued.

“One week later the men were back on their job and Jesse Kurry was released from the hospital. When

he returned home and told his dad what had happened, the usually patient, kind man was angry. Once again he decided to send his son back to the small town, but now Jesse had the authority to do whatever it took to find out from the men what had happened. That was his main job. He brought several other hired men with him to work the cattle and take care of repairs in town. For that reason, Jesse came in his new truck, dressed in his regular clothes, and ready for action, if the need arose.

“After the hired men began working on repairs, Jesse drove over to the motel. This time the figure which met the men seemed stronger. They knew it was the same man, but he was different. This man perhaps could be the son of Theo Kurry. Whoever he was, he was either incredibly brave or stupid for showing up again. Andy and his four friends decided that they would teach this young guy another lesson. But this time Jesse Kurry was ready for them. They were no match for his karate, speed, and skills. There were witnesses around who told the police when they arrived that Jesse did what he had to in order to defend himself. The five troublemakers were hauled off to jail, where they would remain for some time--especially once it was found out that they had stolen and sold some of Theo's cattle.

“This time none of the men were laughing at Jesse Kurry. Though they thought that they had taken care of him when they put him in the hospital, he had gotten right back up and come back to show them who he really was. You might say that he not only got to the bottom of the problem, but he also proved to the men that he really was Theo Kurry's son--a fact that they would always remember whenever they heard about Jesse helping manage the *Circle S*.”

Randy Miller finished telling this story to his son, whose attention was glued to every word he said. "So, Austin, that is a story that helps us understand what happened when Jesus died for us and then was raised from the dead. We need to head to the house, so maybe we can talk about what this teaches us about Jesus while we eat."

Note To Parents: Talk to your children about how the story teaches us that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, humbled himself by becoming a man, suffered, was crucified, died, and the third day he rose from the dead. His resurrection shows he defeated sin and death for us and also showed he is the Savior, not a criminal who died a death for his own crimes.

Prayer: God, thank you for sending Jesus to die for us. Thank you also that he was raised from the dead to show the world that he really was your son and also to help us be raised from the dead some day. Most of all, we thank you that Jesus Christ lived for us, died for us, and was raised from the dead for us that he might bring us to you and that we might with our savior forever (John 14:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 3:18).

Activity: Play a game with your children based upon the story Randy Miller told his son. If you have more than one child, they can play against each other. If you only have one to play, you can either have them race against the clock or see if they can get so many correct to win. Here are the questions:

1. Who in the story was supposed to be like God the Father?
 - a. Andy Thropes.
 - b. One of the hired men.
 - c. Theo Kurry.

*c is correct.
2. Which man in the story was supposed to be like people in the world who need God's help to be forgiven and be his friend?
 - a. Andy Thropes.
 - b. Theo Kurry.
 - c. Jesse Kurry.

*a is correct.
3. Which man in the story was supposed to be like Jesus who came into the world to save people from their sins so they can go to heaven and also to help them be his friends?
 - a. One of the hired men.
 - b. Theo Kurry.
 - c. Jesse Kurry.

*c is correct.
4. Andy Thropes and his friends had gotten in trouble by stealing some cattle and causing trouble in the

little town by the *Circle S*. In what way are all people in trouble and in need God's help?

*Answer: We have done things God doesn't want us to do (we've sinned) and we will go to hell, unless we have God's help (Romans 3:23; 6:23).

5. Theo Kurry sent his son to help solve the problems of the hired men. When Jesus came into the world, what did he do to help with our sin problem?

*Answer: He died on the cross to take the punishment for our sins so we would not have to (1 Peter 3:18).

6. If Andy Thropes and his men would have accepted Jesse's help, everything would have been okay and Theo would have forgiven them. What must we do to have God's help?

*We must receive Jesus as savior (John 1:12).

7. The first time that Jesse went to the town to help he went in an old pickup truck and in old clothes. The men didn't think he was Theo's son. In what way was Jesus like this when he came into the world?

*Answer: Because he was born to a man who was not rich and because he did not come in a great way (like a king), people didn't think he could be God's son and the savior (Isaiah 53:1-5; Luke 2:7).

8. When Jesse was beaten up and went into the hospital Andy Thropes and his friends were sure that he could not be Theo's son. This, they didn't think, could happen to Theo's real son. When Jesus died on the cross, people didn't think he could really be God's son and savior. Why?

*Answer: Because they didn't think that God's son and the savior would die--especially on a cross (1 Cor.1:23).

9. When Jesse returned to the town the second time and showed that he had recovered and he beat up Andy and his friends, he not only finished dealing with the problem, he also showed them he really was Theo's son. How did Jesus' resurrection do the same thing?

*Answer: It proved who he was (Acts 2:36; Phil.2:6-11; Hebrews 1:6); completed his salvation work (1 Corinthians 15:17); and made it possible for us to be resurrected someday (1 Corinthians 15:20-24).

10. Because Andy Thropes and his friends didn't welcome Jesse, they ended up in jail--not forgiven by Theo Kurry. What happens to those who do not receive Jesus?

*Answer: They will be in hell (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; Revelation 20:14-15).

"ALL AROUND ME"

Read Psalms 91:1-2; 139:1-24 (WSC #4)

"Today will be partly cloudy with a slight chance of drizzle turning to snow later on this afternoon. The high temperature will be around 35 with the low reaching into the lower 20's. The record high for this date was set back in...." Austin Miller didn't really hear any more of the radio announcer's weather report. He had heard as much as he needed. He was glad that the weather was a little better than what his mom and dad had said it might be. When he had gone to bed the night before, he had thought that his first day of elementary basketball practice would be canceled. Since they only play five games and just practice three times, he didn't want to miss any. He had been looking forward to this all year.

So, he hopped out of bed on this Saturday morning at an unusually early 7:15. Normally, he would still be sound asleep then. But now, he was shutting off his alarm (which had been set to his favorite station) and started getting dressed. He had set his basketball shoes, shorts, shirt, and sweats out last night because he was so excited.

The eager seven year old was the first one to the breakfast table. He even had it set when his mom and dad came downstairs. They were shocked. After his dad had the Bible reading and prayer, they ate some cereal and then Austin and his dad got in the pickup truck and took off for school.

As they pulled onto the road the older Randy Miller noticed that it was beginning to drizzle. He didn't think anything about it as he and his son talked about basketball. "So, Austin, what position do you think you'll be playing?" "Probably either center or strong forward." "Strong forward?" the dad asked and slightly laughed. "Where did you learn about strong forwards?" "Oh come on dad, all the guys know about that." "Well," Randy began, "you should be a good center or strong forward, but with your height..." He never got the next words out. Austin yelled, "Dad, watch out!" Just about that time Randy saw that a car coming from the other direction had gone into a skid because the drizzle was unexpectedly freezing on the road. He tried to avoid the sliding car, but he couldn't. It hit their truck just behind where Randy Miller was sitting and knocked their truck off the road.

When the truck stopped Randy anxiously asked his son, "are you all right, Austin?" "Yeah, I think so,

Dad. My knee and eye hurt. But I think that's it." "I think my arm might be broken, son. I can't move it very well and there's quite a bit of pain." Just then, the driver of the other car came running to the two Miller men. His car ended up in the other ditch, but he was okay. You could tell he was worried about the Randy and Austin, who were still in the truck. "Are you okay?" he frantically yelled. "Yeah, we're okay!" Randy said. "I think my arm's broken, but my son is fine, except for some bumps and bruises." "Man, I'm so sorry. I just lost control of my car. I didn't mean to hurt you." "I know you didn't, son. Maybe you had better call for some help." "I'll get my cell phone out of the car and call the police and an ambulance," the young man responded. "Okay," Mr. Miller said with a grimace and then a slight smile. "We won't be going anywhere."

The ambulance and a police officer arrived at the accident about the same time, within 15 minutes of the young driver's phone call. As the emergency medical technicians were tending to and loading Randy and Austin in the ambulance, the officer was also getting the story of what happened. The comment from the officer that they remember is, "From the looks of those skid marks and your truck, you guys are lucky that you were not killed. I don't know how you came out of this as well as you did!"

Both the father and son were taken to the hospital and checked over by a doctor. Randy did have a broken arm, as well as some bad bruises. Austin just had some bruises which were going to be sore for a while. Lisa, Randy's wife, picked them up and took them home. On the way, Austin asked his dad, "Dad?" "Yes, Austin." "Do you think that we were lucky today?" "No, I don't. I think God took care of us. He is the one that kept us from getting hurt any worse or being killed." "Does that mean that he never lets Christians get killed?" "Oh no, son. There are plenty of times when Christians get hurt, have bad things happen, or are even killed. But we always know that God is with us no matter where we are. No matter where we go we can't get away from him. And that means that he can take care of us and we don't need to be afraid." "But how can God be everywhere all at the same time?" Austin inquired. "I don't know," came his dad's reply. "I just know that he's powerful enough and great enough to be everywhere with us and he teaches us that in the Bible." "I'm glad he was with us today, dad." "Me, too, Austin; me too!"

Note To Parents: Ask your children: What does this story teach us about God? Answer: That he is

present everywhere and therefore we don't need to be afraid. Recall your reading in Psalm 139. This psalm teaches that God is present everywhere and an implication is that we need not be afraid (Hebrews 13:5).

The primary implication in this psalm is something else. Ask your children: Why else is it important that God is present with us always: Answers: Because he knows all we do and therefore we should obey him (as taught in this psalm) and also he can help us tell other people about Jesus and minister to them (Matthew 28:20).

Prayer: God help us to remember that no matter where we are at, you are there. May we not be afraid and may we also trust you so we can obey you, because we know we can't hide actions or thoughts from you, nor can we obey you on our own. Help us also to love others and tell them about you. Thank you for being with us no matter where we are in the world!

Activity: Play hide-and-seek with your children. Afterward, let them know that even though it may have been hard at times to find you, it is never hard to find God. He is always with us. When you are done, have your children write down on a piece of paper their favorite reason God is with them, then place them in the gift box. Give thanks to God that he has given us the gift of himself through Jesus Christ, which makes his presence with us such a gift.

"NO BATTERY, NO GO!"

Read Galatians 5:16-26 (WSC #'s 29-31)

Annie and Austin Miller were pretty much like every nine and seven year old kid when it came to sitting in a church service. Even though both knew that church is important, they still struggled to sit still and listen. It always helped, though, when Pastor Zack Turner told a story. This was something that often held the attention of both children. Last Sunday morning he told a story that particularly fascinated them because it was about when he and his wife, Sue, got married. Pastor and Mrs. Turner had been at the church as long as Annie and Austin could remember. They thought it was fun to hear about when these two got married. Here was Pastor Turner's story and what it taught those at church that morning.

"When Sue and I got married," began the pastor as he introduced the sermon, "we had an unusual experience. You see, we had both just graduated from college three days before our wedding. We decided that the best thing for us to do was get married near where we had gone to school since we had so many friends who would still be in town. It was a fairly large wedding and we opened gifts after the ceremony. By the time we got done and ready to leave it was almost 8:30 at night. We had to travel from Chicago through northern Indiana and up into Michigan where some friends of my family had a cabin we were using for our honeymoon. So, we were in a hurry to get away.

"But, as we got out to our car, we had a surprise waiting for us. I had just bought a brand new car with some inheritance from my grandfather. I certainly didn't expect to have any trouble with it starting. But that's exactly what happened: I turned the key in the ignition two or three times and it didn't even make a sound. I opened the hood to look at the engine and what I found was that everything was fine, except where the battery was supposed to be. There was nothing there! All that was there was a note that said, 'Look in the closet behind the platform in the church where the choir robes are.' It was signed, *T.S & J.F.* Tom Sullivan and Jim Freerksen are two of my closest friends from college who also liked to play practical jokes. Needless to say, they had taken my battery. So, Sue and I went into the church and through the auditorium to the choir robe closet, fully expecting to find the car battery. Instead, what we found was another note. It read: 'Sorry, no battery, no go. You'll have to look some more. Try in the men's restroom

by the church office.' It was signed *T.S. & J.F.* So I looked there and found another note on the mirror and it sent me somewhere else. After about three or four more of these notes, I finally found my battery in the church gymnasium--along with my two smiling college buddies. It's a good thing we were friends," Pastor Zack said smiling from the pulpit, "or I would have been just about ready to clasp my hands around their throats in frustration!"

"Now," the pastor continued, "I had a very nice car that, from the outside, looked like it could do everything it was made to do: Have the engine run, the wheels turn, windows go up and down, radio play, and, most importantly, to get us where we wanted to go. And, what's more, Sue and I wanted very badly to get to that cabin in Michigan. But you know what?" He paused for a few seconds. "None of that mattered because without the battery the car did not have the power to start and do the things it was made to do." Pastor Zack paused again and let that soak in. "We are like my car in many ways," the preacher went on. "Each one of us has everything, it seems, to do the things that God made us to do. We have arms to serve God, feet to carry his message to other people, mouths to share his Word, minds to think, a will to decide that we want to serve and love God and to love others. But there is a problem. Unless we have the power to help us do all those things we will never be able to do them. We need a battery and that battery is God's Holy Spirit. Without him, we are like a car that cannot run."

Pastor Turner went on to explain how that in order for a person to receive Jesus Christ as his savior, the Holy Spirit comes into that person. In fact, the Holy Spirit is the one who shows the person that he needs Jesus to save him in the first place. The Holy Spirit is the one who helps the person believe in Jesus. And then the Holy Spirit is the one who helps the Christian obey God. Without him, we just couldn't do anything God commanded. And what is more, Jesus Christ is the one who won the right through his death and resurrection for us to have the Holy Spirit! So, without Jesus Christ and his Spirit we can do nothing of eternal significance that glorifies God (John 15:5).

The youngest Millers couldn't wait to sit around the dinner table and share what they learned with their family. This Sunday, they would actually be able to answer Dad's weekly question, "What did you learn from the sermon today?"

Note To Parents: Share with your children the following facts about the Holy Spirit. You might also have them look up each of the passages and read them, if they are old enough to read.

1. Who the Holy Spirit is: He is God; the third person of the trinity. Acts 5:3-4. Mat.28:19.
2. The Holy Spirit is the one who shows people they sin. John 16:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:19.
3. The Holy Spirit is the one who shows people that they need Christ and helps them believe in him.
1 Corinthians 2:14; Titus 3:5; John 3:5-8.
4. If a person has received Jesus Christ as savior, he has the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:9.
5. The Holy Spirit helps Christians obey God and live as a Christian should. Ephesians 5:18; Galatians 5:22-23. Read Galatians 5:22-23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”
6. We have the Holy Spirit poured out on us because of Jesus Christ’s saving work. Titus 3:5-6

Prayer: God, help us to listen to your Holy Spirit and allow him to lead us in doing the things you want us to do. When he reminds us that something is wrong, help us not to ignore him. Thank you that you have worked things out where you can always be with us and help us. Help us remember that we cannot love you, serve you, or honor you apart from the gracious help of your Spirit in us.

Activity: Take your children out to your car or truck. Open the hood and show them your battery. If you want, explain to them how the battery works. Also, unhook the cables and try to start the car. Then reattach them and start it. Remind them that the Holy Spirit gives us the power to be a Christian and without him we couldn't do anything God wants of us. Once you are done, have your children write down their favorite discovery about the Holy Spirit on a piece of paper, then put the papers in the gift box and give thanks to God that he has given us his Spirit that we might know and serve him in this life and eternity.

"JUST A BOOK?"

Read John 10:31-39 (focus: verse 35); Titus 1:2; 2 Peter 1:20-21 (WSC #'s 2-3)

"Alex, I'd like for you to share with the rest of the family what happened at school today," said Randy Miller to his fifteen year old son. "I think they'd like to hear it." Once a week the Miller family had what they called family night. Unless something really big was going on at school, they all had to be home. No one could watch television or play Wii, and everyone had to complete their homework before dinner. At family meetings they got the chance to talk about things that might be bothering them or things that they wanted to do together as a family. Mr. and Mrs. Miller also discussed the family rules. Sometimes they talked about how well the children were doing things and sometimes they had to talk about things that needed to be done better. At each meeting, they spent time in prayer and often played some games afterward. They could also share if something special or exciting had happened to one of them. Just today Alex had an unusual experience that his dad wanted him to recount to the rest of the family.

"Well, I was in Mr. Wells' literature class and...." "What's literature class?" Austin interrupted. "I'm trying to tell the story, Austin. Don't interrupt!" "I just wanted to know what it is," the seven year old muttered under his breath. "Alex is right, Austin. You shouldn't interrupt," said Mrs. Miller. "Literature class," she went on to explain, "is when students read books and stories and talk about what they mean and how the authors wrote them." "Anyway, as I was saying," Alex began again, "I was in Mr. Wells' Literature class and we have been reading parts of the Bible lately. Mr. Wells thinks that the Bible is just fictitious literature." Austin's hand shot up in the air. When Alex shot him an annoyed look, Austin replied, "Hey, I didn't want to interrupt! But, what's 'fictitious'?" "That means not true, Austin. May I continue now?" "Sure, just hold off on the big language!" Austin requested. Alex took a breath and returned to his story, "Anyway, today we were going over the story of Jonah and the big fish. Mr. Wells said that this was an example of how the Bible is not true. It just tells stories which teach principles, like a fable or legend. He said that even if there was a man named Jonah, he couldn't have been swallowed by a big fish, stay in there three days, and then be spit up and live. It is not true, it is just a story."

"As the class talked about it," Alex kept telling what had happened, "there were a lot of kids who

agreed with him. But I also knew that there were a few who didn't. I finally raised my hand. When he called on me I asked if he would turn to Matthew 12:40 and read it. He did, out loud. "...Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish," is what it says. "So?" he asked me. I then asked him who said this? After looking at the verses for a few minutes he finally stated, 'Jesus.' I think he saw my point, because he went on to something else."

"What was your point? Annie asked. "My point was that if Jesus said what is in Matthew 12:40, then he believed that the account of Jonah in the Bible is true. I also stayed back with three other students and we talked to Mr. Wells after class about how Jesus believed the Bible was true and how it teaches that all which it says is true."

"Do you kids have any other questions?" Austin raised his hand as if he did. "Yes Austin," responded Mr. Miller. "Dad, may I have a snack?" "You may while we're playing a game later. But that wasn't the kind of questions I was talking about. Do you have any more questions about what happened with Alex?" No one did. "Well, Alex, your mom and I are very thankful to God that you stood up for what you believed and also that you did it in a very loving way. Thanks for talking to Mr. Wells and not treating him unkindly for what he said. Perhaps, your life and what you have said might help him receive Christ as his savior someday." Alex was somewhat embarrassed and nodded his head to acknowledge his dad's comments. "Why is it important that we know and believe that God gave us the Bible through those whom he had write it? Why is it important that it's true?" Mr. Miller asked his kids.

Note To Parents: Ask your children: If you were the Miller children, how would you answer these questions? Some possible answers: We can trust what it says; we should listen to what it says because it is true; we should read it and share it with others because it teaches us about what God is like and how to be forgiven of our sins and go to heaven--we can believe all this.

Prayer: God, thank you for the Bible and its true teachings to us. Thank you that you teach us in it how we can know you and also you show us in it the good news of how Jesus Christ saves us and empowers us to

love and serve you. Help us to learn and obey what you say to us in it.

Activity: Your children have just learned that the Bible is true and this means that it is important and we should obey what it teaches. Help your child draw a picture of an open Bible. On one side of the Bible, write some of the things the Bible teaches they should do. On the other side of the Bible, write some of the things it teaches about God . They can draw and color some pictures to go along with what they write. Once they are finished, put them in the gift box. Give thanks to God that through the Bible he has shown us himself and given himself to us.

"MISSING THE TARGET"

Read Ephesians 6:1-3 (WSC #'s 12-14, 16, 63-66)

Randy and Lisa Miller had to go into Cartersville to meet with the man who does their taxes. So, they had instructed Austin that morning to come straight home from school and do his chores. They also reminded him that he was not to have any friends over to the house while they were gone--especially since Alex (his older brother) would still be at basketball practice and Annie (his older sister) would be at piano lessons. They told him goodbye and said that they should be home by 4:30.

After school Austin got off the school bus and went into the house. He got some milk and cookies, changed his clothes, and went out to get his work done. It was only about twenty minutes later, though, that his best friends, Jaydon Fowler and Connor Bailey, came riding up on their bikes. "Hey, Austin, let's play!" Jaydon shouted as they rode up the Miller's lane. "Yeah, get your bike and we'll go riding around," Connor added. "I can't, guys," Austin grudgingly replied. "I've got to stick around 'cause my parents are gone. But you guys can stay here, if you want." Austin knew that he shouldn't have said that, but it would be a lot more fun to have Jaydon and Connor around than it would to be by himself and do chores.

"Hey, let's get your basketball out and play some," Jaydon stated. Both Jaydon and Connor loved the portable basketball goal that Mr. Miller had set up by their driveway. What was so cool about it was that he had lowered it to nine feet, so the seven year olds could more easily get the ball to the rim. By 4:00 Annie had gotten home and the boys had grown tired of basketball. They went into the Miller's garage to look around. "Hey, Austin," Connor shouted as he saw the dart board over on the far wall. "Let's play some darts." As he was saying this, Annie was heading outside. "Austin, you know that mom and dad don't want you playing darts unless someone is out here with you." After she left, Austin told the two friends, "I don't see what it could hurt. We'll play for a few minutes and then you guys better leave before my parents get home."

Everything was fine for the first two rounds. But on Connor's third turn he threw the dart wide to the right and it struck a can of black spray paint sitting on the shelf. The can began spraying paint all over the wall and ceiling. A couple of minutes later Connor and Jaydon were fleeing the crime scene, riding down

the lane on their bikes as fast as they could go and Austin was standing in the garage looking at the wall and ceiling, not able to believe what he saw! It looked like someone had come into the Millers' garage and painted a wild-looking black eight-point buck on their white paint. What was he going to do?

Well, Austin didn't have long to worry about what would happen. Ten minutes later his mom and dad drove up and discovered the new paint job in the garage. They told Austin they were upset and disappointed with him for disobeying them. His discipline was that he had to call Jaydon and Connor's parents and tell them what happened, he couldn't watch television or have his friends over for two weeks, and he had to pay for the paint to cover up the new design in the garage. His dad also sat him down and talked to him about how important it is to obey his parents. This is something that God wants him to do. He told Austin that he and his friends not only missed the dart board target, he also missed God's target of obeying his mom and dad. And this can often lead to trouble.

Note To Parents: Ask your children: According to Ephesians 6:1-3, why is it important to obey parents?

Answers: Because it is what God wants, especially of those who love him--and if we love him, we will want to please him; and also because most of the time things will go better in your life and you will avoid some problems like Austin had. Also ask them, Why do you think God gives us parents and wants us to obey them? Answer: Parents are God's helpers to lead and teach their children what God wants them to do and also what he is like. Finally, ask your children, how can we obey when it is hard? Ephesians 6:1 tells us to obey our parents "in the Lord," which means "by the Lord". It is by his strength we can obey.

Prayer: God, thank you for our parents and for the help they give us. Thank you that they can teach us how you want us to live. Help us to think well of them and what they say and to obey them. Help us also to do the same with all adults whom you have given to help us, such as teachers.

Activity: Sit down and write out with your children reasons why each of you are thankful for your parents. This could include things they have done for you (or continue to do) and how they have helped you. (Your children are writing this about you and you are writing these about your parents.) Then, for added fun, see

if you can take these things and make up a little song. A suggestion: Use the tune of "Jesus Loves Me" and substitute your words. Kids will enjoy playing around with this. When you are done you and the kids might even want to sing the song for their Grandparents, letting them know that the song is written both about you and them.

YOUR LIST:

YOUR SONG:

"WHAT IS A FAMILY?"

Read Genesis 2:18-25 (WSC #'s 34, 70-72)

"That's it, I'm out of cards!" shouted Annie Miller happily. "You little rascal," began her Grandpa Richard Chambers who was sitting across the table. "That's the third game in a row you've won. I'm not gonna ever play Uno with you again!" he said teasingly. "Well, I just know how to win, Grandpa," she responded. "Can we play again?" her brother Austin asked. "I want to win a game." "Honey, I want to take a break," Grandma Chambers broke into the conversation. "How about some hot chocolate?" Everyone responded with a "yes". "I'll help you, mom," Lisa Miller said as she and Grandma went into the kitchen. "Well, I wonder how your dad and Alex are getting along with that new little calf?" he asked the two children who had remained at the table. "I hope they don't have to call in the vet on the first calf of the season." "When mom called over to the house a little while ago, Alex said that Dad was havin' trouble," Lisa informed them.

As all three were gathering up the Uno cards and began putting them back into the box, Annie spoke up, "Grandpa, we were looking for something to watch on T.V. last week--I think it was Valentine's day--and one of the programs had two women getting married to each other. Do you think that's right?" Grandpa Chambers did not hesitate to shoot the question back at his granddaughter, "What do you think?" "I don't know. I have seen on the news though that some places have said that two women can marry each other or two men can marry each other." "But that doesn't make it right does it?" Grandpa asked. Both kids sat and shrugged their shoulders. Finally Annie looked up, "I heard some older kids talkin' about it at school the other day and they said that we should accept people like that--they are families just like we are."

Grandpa Chambers sat for a few seconds and said nothing, but both children could tell that he was thinking about what to say. Finally, he broke the silence. "Do you kids remember that old wood splitter that I put together behind the barn?" "Sure, Grandpa," came Austin's reply. "That's the one you put together from a bunch of old tractor and truck parts around the farm." "Do you kids remember when your dad was here one day and he was trying to use it and couldn't figure it out?" "Yeah," Austin laughed. "He

was pretty upset because he couldn't figure it out. He called it a contraption!" Both kids laughed as they remembered the funny sight of their dad (usually pretty good with machinery) trying to figure out the homemade machine. "Why do you think I was able to run the wood splitter better than your dad?"

"Because you made it, Grandpa," Annie blurted out after thinking about it for a few seconds. "You know how everything works and what to do to get it going and working. Dad didn't know all that until you taught him."

"That's right, Annie," Grandpa said with a smile on his face. "And that's just the way it is with God and families. You see, God made the world and he made families. So, he ought to know more than anyone else about what a family is and how a family can work the best. When people try to figure it out on their own, they're like your dad with the wood splitter. Because they didn't make the family, it's hard for them to know how it works the best. But God made the family--that's what Genesis tells us. And ideally, he wants a family to be a man and woman living together who are married. And if he blesses them with children, he wants those children to live with, to be loved by, and to be raised and taught by their parents. At least that's what we learn in Deuteronomy 6 and Ephesians 6."

"But," Annie interrupted, "there are kids in my class at school whose parents are divorced and one girl had her dad die last year because of cancer. Aren't they families?" "Sure they are, honey. The ideal for a family in God's eyes is for parents and children to be together. But sometimes one or both parents die. So kids live with one parent or they may even live with Grandparents or someone else. Sometimes children live with adopted parents or with foster parents. Those are still families. The thing that we need to remember is that God has taught us the best way to live (just like I know the best way to run the wood splitter since I made it). We need to listen to him, whether it is a family with two parents and children who have been born to them or something else. But, people should not go against what God teaches. God doesn't want parents to get divorced, Jesus said in Matthew 19. And, as the Bible teaches us in Genesis 19 and Romans 1 people are not to marry people of the same sex. That is sin. So, two women who live together or a man and woman who live together without being married, are not real families in God's eyes, since that is not what he has taught us."

"But what do we do about families which are divorced or where the man and woman are not married,

Grandpa?" asked the nine year old girl. "We love them, Annie, but that doesn't mean that we have to accept divorce as if it's no big deal or have to accept people living together without being married or anything else which God says is wrong. We want to love them and particularly with divorce realize that sometimes it happens and their lives have to go on and we want to help them. But we must never think that means divorce is the answer for problems in marriage or that it's okay for people to live together without being married. Do you see what I'm saying?" "Yeah, I think so, Grandpa." "Good, let's go out in the kitchen and see if that hot chocolate is ready." "I like your thinking, Grandpa," Austin said as he jumped up from the table and ran to where his mom and Grandma were pouring the hot liquid into the mugs.

Note To Parents: Read some of the passages of the Bible which Grandpa Chambers spoke of when explaining the family to the children. Genesis 1:27-28: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. [28] And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Matthew 19:5-6, 9: "and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.'? [6] So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.... And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery." Romans 1:26-27: "For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; [27] and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error."

Prayer: God, thank you for our family. Help us to remember that if we get married when we are older, you want us to marry Christians and to stay together for life. Help us to love people who have not listened to your teachings about the family, but also to remember that does not mean we have to think what they have done is right. Help us remember that not listening to you will make us get hurt.

Activity:

1. Parents, read out loud Ephesians 5:21-6:4 to your children. See if you and they can find out what God teaches in this passage that each family member is to do. Write down what is said for each family member and talk about what each instruction implies for your family. Once you are done with this, place the paper in the gift box and give thanks to God he gives us the power to obey these commands and thank him he has adopted us into his family so we can enjoy him.
2. Invite a friend from school, who lives in a divorced family or a homosexual family, to your church's children's program or to a Sunday morning service. Help them understand in a loving way what it means to be part of God's family.

"SHAMROCKS AND SNAKES"

Read Matthew 28:19-20 (WSC #'s 20-21)

Ian Crossley was a pastor in England. He, his wife, Cindy, and their two sons had come to the United States to visit Cindy's parents and also to speak in some churches. Ian himself was from England, so everyone in the church where the Randy Miller family attended enjoyed hearing Ian speak. Annie and Austin both enjoyed hearing not only his accent, but also the story he told during the sermon.

"Many of you know," Mr. Crossley began, "that today is St. Patrick's day. People throughout the United States and also Ireland celebrate this day because it was on March 17 that a man by the name of Patrick died. Many people focus on some of the legends about his life. For example, some say that he chased away all the snakes from Ireland by beating on a drum. Others claim that he used shamrocks to teach people about the trinity of God and that's why it became so popular in Ireland. And now, today it is common to have parades in his honor and to share the stories about him. But many of you may not know the true story behind Patrick. Since it is a story which speaks of missions, since Patrick was originally from my home country of England, and since today is St. Patrick's day, I thought it would be good to learn about this man who lived 1600 years ago."

"Patrick," Ian went on, "was born around 389 A.D. in England. His dad was a deacon in the church and a local government leader. He often went to hear his dad preach to people. When he was sixteen years old his village was attacked by a group of Irish soldiers. They took him captive and made him go back with them to Ireland. For six hard years he was a slave in this new land and was forced to work as a shepherd. Many days he had too little to eat or to wear to keep him warm. He finally escaped and made it onto a ship which got him back to England. Before making it home, he was taken captive again for a short time. When this happened, he almost starved to death. But, it was also during this time that Patrick received Jesus Christ as his savior. Patrick began to believe that God wanted him to go back to Ireland and tell those people about God. Though he had little education and also problems which made it hard for him to learn, he went back to tell them about Jesus. Though many of the people who lived in that land did not like

Patrick because he loved Jesus, he served there for over 30 years. Patrick helped build over 300 churches in Ireland and to train many other missionaries to go to other countries."

Ian completed his story about Patrick and then he said: "I'd like for us to talk about what we can learn from this missionary to Ireland."

Note To Parents: Ask your children: What do you think we can learn from Patrick? Answer: How God can take care of us when bad things happen and also how that God wants us to tell other people about Jesus.

Prayer: God, help us to tell other people about Jesus. Help us also know how to pray for and to help missionaries who travel to other countries to tell people about Jesus.

Activity: Have your children draw a picture of a shamrock. Then think of three different things you can do to tell other people about Jesus and write one on each of the leaves. Try to include at least one thing you can do to help a missionary. Examples of things to write: Invite a friend to church. Pray for a missionary. Write a missionary. Send money to a missionary or inner-city mission.

"PUMPKINS AND SAINTS"

Read Hebrews 12:1-2 (WSC #'s 32-33)

"Grandpa Richard, Grandpa Richard! Are you out here?" "I sure am Austin, come join me. I was just sharpenin' some of the blades off our lawn mowers and gettin' 'em ready for next year. Boy, I'm sure glad we don't have to mow the grass anymore. I was gettin' tired of that. So, what are you up to, Austin?"

"Oh, I just rode my bicycle down, Grandpa, because I didn't have anything else to do." Mr. Chambers studied his grandson's face, "You look a little down, Austin. What's the matter?"

"Oh, mom's being totally unfair," the seven year old began in a frustrated voice. "Ahh, I see," said the grandfather as he put the blade down and turned off his grinder to give his full attention to Austin. "Why do you say that?" "Well, Grandpa, she won't let me dress up like a dead man for Halloween. Connor Bailey, Jaydon Fowler, and I were all gonna dress up like we were dead people who had come back to life. We were gonna get some of that stuff you put on your skin to make it look real pale and then some of that stuff that looks like blood and some real scary masks. We were goin' out trick-or-treatin' and were gonna scare some of the girls." "So, your mom is saying you can go trick-or-treatin', but you just can't dress up like that. Is that what you're saying?" "Yeah," the seven year old responded in a huff. "I don't think it's fair. Connor and Jaydon get to dress up like that. Their parents don't care," he complained. "Well, why do you think your mom won't let you dress up like a dead man?" "She says that it's okay to go out and get candy, but 'we don't want to make Satan and his demons look good by making light of bad things he does or by making some evil things look good', or something like that," Austin held up his first two fingers of each hand as air quotes while he recounted his mom's explanation.

"Austin, sit over here by me," Richard Chambers said as he pulled up a little bench and sat down in his garage. "Let me tell you a story. A long time ago in the lands now known as Ireland and England people used to have a holiday on October 31 which they thought of as the end of their year. November 1 was like New Year's Day for them. They believed that with the end or death of the year the god of death allowed the souls of the dead to return to their earthly homes for the evening. So they honored this god of death on

that night. It was in later years that some people in these same lands who had become Christians decided that they still wanted to celebrate this night, but in a different way. Instead of celebrating death and the god of death, they decided to be thankful to God on November 1 for Christians who had already died, but who had been very helpful to them or other people. They called November 1 *All Saints Day*. The service they had on the night before (October 31--the day of Halloween now) was called Allhallowmas. As a result, that night came to be known as Allhallow eve (or e'en) or just Halloween. But as years went by, Austin, even though the Christian name *Halloween* was kept, some of the old things crept back in--celebrating death, the dead, and ghosts and witches. And now in modern times Halloween has become a very important time for witches and those who worship Satan instead of God. So, you see, Austin, your mom doesn't want you or Annie to be pulled into any of that bad stuff or to make it look like it is fine or harmless, when Satan can hurt us very badly."

"What you should do, son, is be thankful to God around October 31 and November 1 for some of the Christians who have now died, but helped us and many others: People such as Paul, Peter, and John. We can also be thankful for people such as Martin Luther whom God used to help tell many people about Jesus and stop listening to preachers who weren't telling them the truth. In fact we call the time that Martin Luther lived the Reformation and we celebrate it on October 31--the same day as Halloween. It might be fun to dress up like him or like Bible characters. But even if you don't choose to do that, Austin, I think that you're mom's right--you should dress up like good characters and not bad or evil ones."

"Well, I guess I'll have to think about this Grandpa." "I tell you what, Austin. Let's go inside and get some cookies and milk. I happen to know that Grandma bought some Oreos at the store this afternoon. It's a lot easier to think while eatin' those." "Okay," agreed Austin.

Note To Parents: Read Ephesians 4:27: "And give no opportunity to the devil." Also read Exodus 22:18: "You shall not permit a sorceress to live."

Prayer: God, help us not to do anything which would make evil look good or which would make us think that the devil cannot hurt us. Thank you also for many Christians who have already died but who have

helped out a lot of people.

Activity: See if you can find out some information about Martin Luther--either at the library, in an encyclopedia, or online. Dress up like people of that day and act out some of his life--especially that part which started the Reformation. Explain to your children that Martin Luther helped the Church rediscover the teaching of justification by grace alone through faith alone. This is why questions #'s 32-33 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism go with this devotional reading.

Embracing the Thorns

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (WSC #'s 7, 8, 11)

“Wow, great throw, grandson! You’ve developed quite the arm since last summer!”

“Thanks, Grandpa! I guess all these summers of you working with me have finally paid off. I think I might make the varsity boys’ baseball team this year. I thought for sure I was going to make it last year. It was pretty unfair and dumb that I had to spend another year on junior varsity. If I wouldn’t have tripped down those stairs and sprained my wrist, I know for sure I would have made varsity. I really got set back with that sprain. All my friends got to move up, while I had to play with junior high babies. What a wasted year!”

Grandpa Miller held the ball rather than returning the throw. “You know, Alex, God doesn’t waste our time. Sometimes he makes us wait for things we want to teach us a lesson. Sometimes he allows certain setbacks for our good. God’s a master at throwing curveballs; we just need to learn to catch them!”

Alex held out his glove to catch his grandpa’s curveball, “Thanks for the analogy, Grandpa. But I know God didn’t allow me to sprain my wrist because then I wasn’t able to glorify him. He wants me to use my talents; He doesn’t want to hinder my talents. I wasn’t able to glorify God at all last year.”

“Ahh, grandson, that’s where you are wrong in your theology! Any circumstance that happens to us must first be filtered through our heavenly Father. According to David in Psalm 139:16, God has ordained all of our days before one of them even happens! And if you weren’t able to glorify God, that was a result of your own heart, not God hindering your talents. You know, Paul could identify with physical frustrations. He complained of a thorn in his flesh and prayed that God would take it from him. God told him, ‘No.’ He also told Paul, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ (2 Cor. 12:9) So, Paul was able to rejoice in his suffering because he knew that God’s power was present in the midst of his suffering.”

“That’s easy for you to say, Grandpa. I bet you never had to miss out on varsity baseball!” Alex complained as he pitched another fast one to his grandpa.

Alex was sitting next to his Grandpa Miller's hospital bed as he recalled this conversation with his grandpa about five months earlier. About three weeks after that sunny, summer day, Alex's grandpa was diagnosed with terminal stomach cancer. The doctor informed the family that Mr. Miller had about six months left to live. Today, Alex thought his Grandpa Miller looked like he was in a lot of pain. His body was thinner, his eyes were bloodshot, and head was virtually bald. Alex wiped away tears as he thought about the fact that he would not be able to play catch with his favorite baseball coach anymore.

Grandpa Miller stirred from his nap.

"Hey, grandson! Why the tears?"

"Oh, hey, grandpa! I didn't mean to wake you," Alex tried to clear his voice and hide his tears. "I was just thinking that this isn't fair at all. I can't believe God is allowing this to happen to you! What is He thinking? You've served him your whole life, and you've always tried to be so healthy. He shouldn't be letting you die of cancer!" Alex gave up trying to hold back his tears.

"Well, Alex, I can't pretend to claim that I know what God is thinking. But, I do know a few truths about God. He knows everything, he has a perfect plan, and he has the ability to carry out that plan. Remember that Psalm I shared with you last summer? God's ordained all my days! He knows what he's doing, Alex. I can rejoice just like Paul could; I know God's power is made perfect in my weakness! My earthly body is growing old and sick, but God has the power to give me a new body in heaven. My joy is in God's plan, not earthly setbacks. Can you understand that, grandson?"

Alex nodded his head. "Yeah, but it's hard, Grandpa. I understand it, but it's hard to accept His will sometimes," Alex said amidst some sniffles.

"I know, son. It's okay to be a little sad. But don't let your sadness get in the way of the joy you can have in Christ. When you get to heaven, we can play baseball on God's team. I'm sure that's way better than any varsity team!"

Note to Parents:

Study these passages on God's sovereignty and discuss them with your children.

1. Psalm 139: 16, "Your eyes saw my unformed body, All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." (NLT)

Discuss: God has planned all of our days and events before they ever happen. Though God does not initiate or cause evil, he does allow us to go through difficult circumstances. He is not surprised when a loved one gets cancer or dies. Everything that happens to us is filtered through his wisdom, love, and sovereignty.

2. Romans 8:28, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

Discuss: This verse has been misinterpreted by some. Some people think “good” is synonymous with “whatever we want”. God works all things together for our good; sometimes this “good” seems bad or hard at first. But, God in his providence is working all events in our life to bring us good and bring him glory. *Ask: How can a death of a loved one be “good”? Answer: If the loved one is a believer, he or she might have more opportunities to share the gospel with people around them. Also, the funeral can be a celebration of a godly life and an anticipation of an eternity with our Creator.* Note also that “good” is defined in Romans 8:29 as being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

3. 2 Corinthians 13:9a, “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’”

Discuss: God will always provide enough grace for anything that he sends our way. If he allows a trial in our life, he will provide a way to bear it. When we are weak, he is strong!

Prayer:

Dear God,

We acknowledge that you are in control of every day! You plan out everything that happens in the world, and everything you do is filtered through your love. Thank you that we can trust you for enough grace for each of our days. Thank you for giving us strength for the hard and bad days. We pray for people in our life who are sick or who have cancer. Help them to depend on your strength and grace. We look forward to the day when we get to be with you!

Activity:

Try to contact a believer in your church who has or had cancer. Ask if you can interview this person. As a family write some interview questions that focus on how this person trusted God with his/her trial of

cancer. Ask him/her how God's strength has been increased in their weakness. Also, ask if he/she has had more opportunities to share the gospel since finding out about his/her cancer. Finally, draw a picture for your Christian friend to thank him/her for the interview.

MORE THAN SINGING

Read Psalm 95; Romans 12:1-2 (WSC #'s 45-48)

“Annie! I need you to set the table, please!” Lisa Miller called upstairs to her 9 year old daughter, Annie.” A couple seconds later, the 4th grader bounded down the stairs.

“Mom, it’s only 5:20! Why are we eating so early?” the youngster inquired.

“I have worship team practice at 6:30, so I’ll need some extra time to make it to church on time.”

About five minutes later, Lisa’s husband, Randy, and two sons, Austin and Alex, joined Lisa and Annie at the table. Each member eagerly topped their pasta with fresh spaghetti sauce and parmesan cheese.

Austin saturated his spaghetti in parmesan, which warranted a couple reprimands.

“Man, Austin! Would you like a little spaghetti with your cheese?” Alex, the oldest Miller teased.

“Austin, you forgot a thank you helping of salad,” Lisa reminded him.

“Oh, Mom, I didn’t forget. I just think I might be too full for salad, and I don’t want to stuff myself like a glutton,” the youngster explained.

“Nice try, bud. But your mom’s right, you need some salad,” Randy ordered. With a frown on his face, Austin put a fistful of salad on his plate.

“Honey, why are we eating so early? I mean, I’m not complaining! I was starving! But, usually we eat around six,” Randy asked as he twirled his pasta around his fork.

“I have worship team practice at 6:30, so I wanted to make sure I had enough time to make it into town,” she explained again.

“Oh, that’s right. I forgot. How’s your food, Miss Annie?” the father asked his daughter.

“Pretty good,” she said as she sadly looked down at her red stained plate.

“Is something bothering you, sweetie?” Lisa asked.

“Well, you have such a pretty, voice, Mom. It’s easy for you to worship God. But I’m not a very good singer, so I can’t worship God on Sundays very well,” Annie confessed.

Her parents exchanged looks as if to say, “Which one of us gets to explain this one?”

“Well, Annie, worship isn’t just about singing on Sundays,” Randy began. “Worship is all about God. It’s about telling him how wonderful and amazing he is. In fact, the word worship means, “God’s worth”. So, worship isn’t really about our talents or abilities at all. It’s not about singing pretty or saying nice lyrics from a song. Worship is about expressing God’s worth.”

Annie looked confused. “Well, then why do we just have a worship service on Sunday? And why have I only heard of worship songs? That’s seems to me like the only way to worship God.”

Lisa answered this objection, “It’s important for the body of believers to worship God together. Remember, ‘Where two or more gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst’, but we can certainly worship God all the time! In fact, God commands that we worship him. But you need to realize there’s a difference between worshipping God and praising God. Praising God means responding to the great things He’s done in our lives. Worshipping God means that we adore God and tell him how wonderful he is. Some songs are praise songs, while other songs are worship songs.”

Annie’s dad answered the second part of her question, “Sweetie, there are many ways you can worship God. You could write him a poem, paint him a picture, create a drama, play an instrument, dance for Him. Or you can worship him by thinking about his attributes.”

Austin gave a sly smile, “What about playing Wii? Can you play Wii to worship God?” he asked hopefully.

The other four Millers laughed. “Well, son, I think the Wii would distract you from your focus on God. Remember, worship is about putting our entire attention on how magnificent he is. I’m not sure the Wii is going to help you accomplish that,” Randy answered through his grin.

“Mrs. Brown said I’m a natural poet,” Annie began, “So, do you think I could write a poem to worship God?”

“Absolutely, sweetie! In fact, maybe I can even talk to Pastor Zack and see if you could read your poem during our worship service. I think it might encourage other children to think about creative ways to worship God,” Lisa suggested.

Annie’s eyes lit up, “Wow, that would be so cool! May I please be excused?”

Both parents looked shocked, “Don’t you want some frozen yogurt for dessert? It’s homemade peach, your favorite!” Lisa said.

“No, thanks, Mom. I want to get started on my poem!” she said as she cleared her plates from the dinner table.

Lisa looked at the Miller men, “Well, boys, do you think you can handle dishes? I guess the Miller women both have appointments to worship God!”

“Sure, honey, maybe we can think of some creative ways to worship the Lord while we do dishes,” Randy suggested.

“I thought playing the Wii was creative,” Austin mumbled under his breath

Note to Parents:

Studying and meditating upon the names of God can be helpful for leading us to worship God. Study these passages on the names of God and discuss how each name of God represents his worth:

1. Revelation 1:8, “I am the **Alpha and the Omega**,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the **Almighty**.”
2. Isaiah 9:6, “For to us a child is born to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called **Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace**.”
3. Genesis 17:1, “When Abram was ninety-nine, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am **God Almighty (El Shaddai)**...”
4. Exodus 6:3, “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the **LORD (Yahweh)** I did not make myself known to them.”
5. Romans 8:15, “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry "**Abba!** Father!"

Prayer:

Dear God,

You are so powerful! Nothing is too difficult for you. You can part amazing waters, you can make the sun stand still, you can make the blind see, you can even raise the dead! Lord, you have always existed, you were not born and you will never die because you are eternal and everlasting! You are a King who never sleeps; you never stop loving or caring or governing. You are magnificent!

Activity:*Option 1:*

Have each of your children write a letter to God that worships him. While writing, they are not allowed to use pronouns referring to themselves: I, my, me, our, we, etc. This can be challenging for children because so much of their world revolved around themselves. It might be helpful to start each sentence with, ‘God, You are....’. When they are done, place the paper in the gift box and give thanks to God that he has revealed himself to us through his names.

Option 2:

Print off the lyrics to some of your family’s favorite Christian songs. As a family, evaluate the lyrics and determine if each song is a worship song (one directional- describes God’s worth) or a praise song (thanking God for his work in our lives). When you are done, sing one of your favorite songs to the Lord in praise or worship of him.

Option 3:

Write each of the above names of God on a slip of paper. Have each member of the family choose one name and write a short prayer of worship to God using that name. Put these prayers in the gift box as a reminder of the precious gift God is as he’s manifested in each of his names.

CHAPTER TWO

THE KINGDOM OF THURRHEMA

"BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US"

Read Psalm 145:1-8; Romans 5:1-11 (WSC #'s 43-44)

Avalon dashed from her front door and ran as fast as she could down the lane in front of her house. If someone would have been sitting on her front porch in the land of Thurrhema, they would have thought that a big juicy mouse or perhaps a bird was in sight, one big enough for supper. Yet this was not the case. What she did see was her husband, Bendigo, slowly hobbling toward her with a crutch under one arm and a back paw bandaged.

"Oh, Bendigo, Bendigo," the gray cat meowed. "You're home!" The black male cat only placed his free arm around his wife and purred, while using his final strength to hobble up the steps of their small cottage. He finally said, "Oh, Avalon, I'm so glad to see you and to be home." "I'm so glad to have you home," was her reply. "What happened to you?" she asked as she surveyed his broken whiskers and scraped paws. "Well," he began, "it's a long story...."

Now before we listen to Bendigo's tale, we must let you know a little of the history of the kingdom of Thurrhema.

It all started about six months ago when this young couple decided to move into the kingdom of Thurrhema because an evil pack of wild dogs had been raiding some of the isolated country houses in their community. Many crops had been stolen, houses had been burned, and some of the cats had been brutally injured. When the dogs hit just down the road from Bendigo's and Avalon's home, they knew it was time to flee. So, they packed up their things, sold their place and moved to this land that was praised by many travelers.

Thurrhema was ruled by a very merciful, yet powerful, lion king by the name of Melek. Melek was the kind of lion whom, if you knew him as friend, you enjoyed his presence. Yet, if you were his enemy, you feared his wrath. Every citizen of Thurrhema loved their great leader. Avalon and Bendigo moved into their new home and lived peacefully for a couple of months. But then one day the dogs struck a farm on the outskirts of the kingdom. Then they burned down blacksmith Peter's stable. And they broke into the market and stole all sorts of food. They were also terrorizing travelers along the roadways.

Due to the dogs' awful crime, Melek finally called a meeting of all his citizens. He told them that because he loved them and because they were his people, he wanted to take care of them and protect them. He had offered protection for his kingdom before by himself. Most of the animals there, in fact, had entered the kingdom because of the protection or the kindness that Melek had shown them. Many of them had been saved at one time or another by the brave lion. Yet, as the king went on to explain, he now desired their help. He wanted to form an army to go out and fight against the wild packs and defend their land. Many of the male animals volunteered immediately. And thus began the adventure which had led to Bendigo's injuries. This brings us back to our reunited feline couple.

Bendigo told his wife, "Well, we were in a pretty bad battle with the dogs over in the valley of Eminence. Things were rather bleak. Then all of a sudden, Melek appeared up on top of a knoll with a great roar. It inspired us so much because we knew the king's son, Christoff, had been killed while he saved the lives of many soldiers. We all fought with greater fervor. We began to gain the victory, but before it was over one of the dogs bit my back leg. I immediately drew my sword to his heart in self defense."

"Oh, honey, you're such a hero!" Avalon praised. "Not really. I was glad to do whatever I had to, not only to protect our home and our land, but also to honor King Melek. He has done so much for us and the whole kingdom of Thurrhema. He even was willing to sacrifice his son for us. How could I do anything less than love him and give him my best? I am proud to serve him the rest of my life!" The feline soldier wiped a tear from his wife's eye. "Well, enough of war and battles," he transitioned the subject, "I'm starving." Avalon smiled, "I will prepare a nice welcome- home- supper for you. You can relax. It will just take me a minute to bake the fish and pour the milk."

Note To Parents: Explain to your children that this story helps us learn that God has done a lot for us in sending his son to die for us and has taken care of us. Because he has done so much and has loved us, we

should love him and serve him. One of the chief ways we serve God is by loving others. Therefore, we read, "We love because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

Prayer: God, help us to love you, to serve you, to obey you in all we do. We want to do this because you have loved us so much and done so much for us. Help us show how great you are in all our thoughts and actions.

Activity: As a family, think of a ministry that you can do together because you love God. Some ideas might be: 1) Write some missionaries regularly; 2) Support a missionary or a child through an organization like *Food For The Hungry*; 3) Visit a nursing home every month; 4) Adopt an elderly person in your community, visit them regularly and make some cookies for them. 5) Befriend an unbelieving neighbor and tell them about the good news of Jesus Christ. You might even think of some other things. Once you have come up with your ideas, plan when you will begin to implement them.

"THE GOOD KING"

Read Romans 1:18-32 (WSC #84)

It was a very sunny warm summer afternoon. Rachel, the niece of the cats, Bendigo and Avalon, sat in the back of her uncle and aunt's wagon and looked out over the grassy meadows as they made their way along the bumpy road behind their Shetland pony, Hank. The usually playful cat was pretty quiet as she felt the warmth of the September sun and heard the birds singing in the trees. Her uncle and aunt noticed that she was quieter and calmer than normal. They were somewhat surprised after what they all had just seen in town. The whole village and much of the surrounding farm animals had turned out for the trial and sentencing of a criminal. They figured she would be full of a hundred questions. They didn't realize that the wheels were turning between those fuzzy pointed ears.

"Uncle Bendigo," she finally broke the silence, "I thought you said that King Melek was a good, kind, king." "He is, Rache (which was what he often called his favorite niece). Why do you ask?" "Well, I was just wondering how he could have been so cruel to that beaver this afternoon...what was his name?"

"Randal," responded the older cat as he spurred Hank on with the reins. "Yeah, how could the king be good if he's making Randal spend the next five years in prison?"

"Well, Rache, Randal has done some things the last few months that were very bad. First of all, he has been stealing firewood from some of the dogs down near Edgewood. Many of those dogs have young pups to care for and keep warm through the long cold winter. If their firewood is stolen, it might cause them to run out before the spring gets here and that could be dangerous! He's also stolen some corn out of nearby fields. And that's not to mention all the dams he's built which have flooded out some of his neighbors--and all because he was mad at them! No, honey, King Melek cannot let behavior like that go unpunished.

What would you feel like if someone came to your mom and dad's place and stole your firewood so you would be cold this winter or took some of your milk so that your saucers would be empty for breakfast the next morning? "Why (Rachel begins to get a little angry)...why, I wouldn't like that at all!" Uncle Bendigo continued, "You see, if Randal is not punished, then he might go on hurting others and that wouldn't be fair to them. And it might even encourage every sort of thug or criminal to take whatever they wanted. What

kind of kingdom would Thurrhema end up being then?" "I guess it would be a pretty bad place to live," the young cat answered.

"You see, Rache, if King Melek did not punish wrong, then actually he would be a pretty cruel and bad king because the whole kingdom would be a bad place to live. We can be thankful that, because Melek is a loving and good king, he sets forth rules for us and does not let animals break those without being punished." "I see what your saying, Uncle Bendigo," the calico nodded her head in agreement.

"We're almost home, Rachel," Avalon began. "Would you like to make some cookies before supper?" "That would be great Aunt Avalon!" As she said this she bounded out of the wagon and started for the house which was now in sight. "I'll beat Hank back to the house and get out the ingredients for the cookies!" "Now that's our little Rachel," Avalon laughed. "Indeed it is, indeed it is," smiled Bendigo. "Come on Hank, gitty up, boy!"

Note To Parents: This story helps children learn that it is because God is a good and holy God that he teaches us how to live and how not to live and often disciplines us. This is also the reason why those who do not receive Jesus will be in hell, not in heaven. Talk to your children about this and read Matthew 25:41: "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" Even though those who are in Jesus Christ do not face the ultimate judgment of God for sin since our Savior bore our punishment for us, God does discipline us for sin. Consider Hebrews 12:5-6: "And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. [6] For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.'"

Prayer: God, thank you for teaching us how we should live and for not allowing people to get away with whatever they want to do. By this we know that you love the world, you want to take care of us, and you want what is best for us. Help us to know you as savior so that we can obey you.

Activity: Make a poster of “Household Rules”. As a family, brainstorm rules that are needed in a home. Try to consolidate ideas into ten rules. Then make a poster of “Consequences” that correspond to each rule. As a family, discuss why each rule is necessary for the home to function, and then discuss why consequences are important to enforce each rule.

Make some cookies together with your children. Set aside some dough (enough to make one cookie for each child) out of the whole batch and leave one or two ingredients out of those cookies (example: leave out sugar and chocolate chips). When the cookies are done, have each child eat one of the cookies missing the ingredients and one that has everything in it. Ask them which they like the best. Explain that the recipe helps make better cookies. This is like God's teachings in the Bible. If we follow them, it will be better for us in the long run. If not, then it only brings trouble.

"COMING FOR THE SICK"

Read John 1:1-18 (WSC #22)

It was pretty safe to say that Dr. Barry Piler was *as busy as a beaver*, for Dr. Piler was a beaver. Though he was a little chubby, this did not slow down the physician as he scurried around the small building used for a hospital in Thurrhema. The building which usually held no more than 4-5 patients at a time was overflowing with six times that amount. The busy beaver, who had given up dam building a few years ago to devote himself to helping animals-in-need, visited bed after bed. He was trying to help all the dogs, cats, lions, birds, deer, squirrels, and other animals who lay dying and in great pain. Over fifty citizens had died in the last 1 1/2 weeks and it seemed that there was little hope of losing any less the next 1 1/2 weeks--that is until three days ago.

What happened then was not only the first sign of hope for the weary doctor and his exhausted nurses, but it was so shocking that people in Thurrhema were certain never to forget it for the rest of their furry little lives.

You see, the story began two weeks earlier when a young dog by the name of Lance came into the hospital with a terrible fever and four swollen legs. In addition, nausea prohibited him from keeping food down. His parents had to carry him in to see Dr. Piler. Despite Dr. Piler's aggressive efforts, the helpless puppy died after three days in the hospital. By then there were ten more patients in the hospital with the same problems and it just kept getting worse and worse. By the end of the week, all of those working in the hospital knew that a terrible plague (a sickness) had erupted in the kingdom. Even some of the nurses in the hospital had gotten sick and died. The doctor was exhausted and felt like he was losing the battle. Adults and little ones alike all over town could be heard crying uncontrollably through windows because parents, sons, daughters, aunts, uncles, grand-parents, and friends had perished. One little kitten by the name of Timmy had lost his whole family.

Dr. Piler knew that somehow someone needed to get to the land of Stauros to retrieve the only medicine that could cure the terrible disease. But who could go? To get there, someone very strong, very quick and very brave would have to travel through the dangerous valley of Thanatos. This treacherous valley was famous for its vicious and mean Grizzly bears, so someone would have to brave these monsters in order to

retrieve the medicine for the hospital. Any animal who had attempted this quest had failed to make it out alive.

Just when Dr. Piler had about lost all hope, into the hospital walked King Melek, the brave, strong, and kind Lord of Thurrhema. When the lion walked into the building with his majestic mane and long tail, all the animals gasped. "What's he doing?" Peter the blacksmith asked. "I don't know," chimed in Gene the owner of the dry goods store next door. "I've never known a king to risk his life by entering a place full of disease and death." "What if he gets sick and dies?" Peter shot back.

"Doctor, what can I do to help?" asked Melek in his strong voice. "Your Highness, there is nothing you can do. Please leave before you get sick and die. Our kingdom could not bear that," pleaded the tired beaver as he pointed toward the door. King Melek made no motion to leave, "I love all these who are suffering. I want to do something. I have heard that there is some medicine in Stauros that can cure the plague. I'm going to fetch it for you and your patients." "But, your Majesty, there is not time. Stauros is two weeks journey. By then it would be too late," Dr. Piler explained. "The journey won't be as long if I travel through Thanatos. I could be back in three days." "But King Melek, you cannot go through there. The bears have never let travelers pass without tearing them to shreds!" the beaver reminded him. King Melek showed no fear as he responded to the worried beaver, "Dr. Piler, you forget my speed and strength. I believe I can make it. In fact, I shall be off at once. I will see you in three days."

For the next three days everyone in Thurrhema was full of despair. Not only was a plague threatening to wipe out their kingdom, but now they may have lost their king. Cats were losing their kittens. Puppies were losing their parents. Birds, squirrels, rabbits, and deer were dying one by one. Dr. Piler felt guilty for letting King Melek walk into the valley of death, Thanatos.

True to his word, three days later, townsfolk spotted the golden mane of their king blowing in the wind as he ran into Thurrhemea, medicine bag strapped to his back. You can imagine the excitement when they saw King Melek swiftly running to the hospital! He had made it!

Finally, there was hope for Dr. Piler and his patients as he, the few nurses who were left, and King Melek went from bed to bed administering the remedy and comforting the sick. The rumor down at the town cafe was that King Melek would stay at the hospital throughout the night to relieve the doctor and to

make sure that all were getting better. It was also rumored that generations to come would remember the time when the great lion risked his life by coming to the sick, retrieving their medicine, and caring for them. No one had ever heard of such steadfast and sacrificial love in a King!

Note To Parents: Explain to your children that this story helps us understand what Jesus did when he was born in Bethlehem the first Christmas morning. Because people were sick with sin and needed help, he came (even though it would mean going through some hard things--such as becoming a man, being poor, being made fun of by people, dying on the cross and being in the grave for three days). Read Mark 2:17: "When Jesus heard this, he told them, 'Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough.'" (NLT) He was willing to come where people needed help. Read: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)

You might ask the following questions:

1. What did Jesus do that saves us from our sins?
2. Why did Jesus come and face scary things to save us?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for being born. I know that it was because you loved me and to save me from my sins. I also know that you had to humble yourself and face a lot of scary things. I love you so much because you have done this for me!

Activity: Make a Life-of-Jesus Frieze (sounds like "freeze"). A frieze is a series of pictures that tell a continuous story. Take several pieces of paper for each child. On each piece of paper have them draw a different picture of the life of Jesus from the time he left heaven to the time he went back. The following pictures may be included: 1. Jesus as a king (2 Cor.8:9). 2. Jesus as a baby (Luke 2:7). 3. Jesus working as a carpenter with Joseph (Mark 6:3). 4. Jesus teaching his disciples (Matthew 5:1-2). 5. Jesus healing someone who is sick (Matthew 8:1-4). (You can include any other events from Jesus life such as calming the storm or feeding the 5,000) 6. Jesus on the cross (John 19:17-37). 7. Jesus going back to heaven (Acts

1:9). 8. Jesus as king again in heaven (Philippians 2:9; Hebrews 1:3-4). Tape the pictures together in order. This may take a couple of nights to complete. If you want to complete it in one night, then just do pictures #'s 1, 2, 4, 6, & 8. Once you are done, give thanks to God he sent his son to save us so we could love and enjoy God, our greatest gift. If you want, you can write this prayer out and place it in the gift box.

"I DON'T WANT TO"

Read Deuteronomy 5:28-33; 10:12-22 (WSC #'s 3, 39)

ATTENTION, ATTENTION!

For the betterment of our great kingdom and in order to take care of the needs of the poor among us, as well as the repair of roads and supply of the army of Thurrhema, our great Melek, the ancient and wise Lion, has henceforth declared that all citizens of Thurrhema will pay a small tax upon the monies they do make. This tax will begin the first of this January.

Furry citizens were crowded outside the General Store of Thurrhema reading this new poster. The decision to begin charging people a tax (a small payment to the government) was a hard one for the kind-hearted king Melek. He had not wanted to put a burden upon those in Thurrhema, yet he knew that there were some things which needed to be done that they just couldn't afford. The poor needed help, roads needed fixed, and supplies were needed for the army so that they could continue to protect all the animals in Thurrhema. Most of the citizens of the kingdom who knew about the tax and who knew Melek realized that he had acted in wisdom and for their own good. Yet, there were a few who did not agree and did not want to pay any tax.

Such was the blacksmith, Peter. Peter was a very strong hardworking bull dog. Whenever a horse needed to be shod or a wagon wheel needed fixing, everyone knew that Peter would do a fine job. The blacksmith's problem, though, was that he had a bad temper. On the morning that the poster was put up Peter was stomping up and down main street, growling and complaining to all who would listen (and even to some who didn't want to listen).

"What's wrong, Peter?" questioned Gene, the quiet and kind collie, as he opened up his general store. "Rrrrrrr," growled Peter. "I'm not going to pay the king this money. He doesn't need to charge us taxes!" "But Peter," Gene replied, "The king and his other leaders have spent a lot of time talking this over and looking at how to raise money to help the poor and fix roads and buy supplies for the army to defend us. They've decided this is best for all of us." "Well, it's not best for me!" the bulldog yelled. "I work hard for

my money and I'm not going to give it to other people! I won't have enough for myself!" Gene, while standing up on his hind legs, crossed his hairy front legs and paws, looked up in the air, rolled his eyes, and asked, "Peter, who began this kingdom?" "King Melek," the bulldog answered with a puzzled look. "But what does that have to do with anything, Gene?" "Well, if you can cool off and listen to me, I'll explain." The blacksmith didn't say anything, but settled back and listened to the store owner.

"You know," the collie began again, "Melek has been here longer than anyone. He's the one who not only began this kingdom, but the one who brought us here and the one who has set up its laws for our own good. He's the one who taught us how to live. This is his kingdom and he has proven himself to be wise and to lead us in a way that is best for all. Not everyone was excited when he started an army, but we wouldn't be here today if he hadn't. Many people were frustrated when he challenged all of us to learn how to use our weapons to defend our families and to build protective fence around our city and the country homes. Yet these have saved many lives. He often does not have us do what is easiest or what each of us thinks is best for ourselves. But his decisions and commands always end up being for our own good. So, Peter, don't you think that these taxes are for our own good?" the collie questioned the bulldog with a stern look. "I don't know," mumbled the blacksmith. "Come on, Peter, you're being stubborn. I've been concerned about you for sometime now. All you have done lately is complain and say that you don't want to do anything the king or his leaders ask of us. I think that is dangerous when King Melek is the one who knows best how we should live in Thurrhema. Don't you?" "I don't know," responded Peter. "Just go home and think about it," Gene advised. "Just think about it."

Note To Parents: Ask your children: What might happen to the animals of Thurrhema if they do not pay taxes? Do you think the taxes are for their own good? Then discuss with them: God is the one who has made our world and us. He is the one, like Melek in the story, who knows best how we should live. This is why he has given us his commandments and teachings in the Bible. Can you think of some things God wants us to do (or not do) which are for our own good? Are these sometimes hard? Remind children that we need to remember it is always best for us to listen to and obey our wise and loving God. Read Proverbs 3:5-7: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. [6] In all your

ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. [7] Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn away from evil.”

These verses just read speak to us about the need to listen to God and trust in him. The next verse reminds us that if we try to do things on our own or in our own way, it can hurt us. Proverbs 14:12: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”

Make sure that children understand that ultimately we want to obey God because we love him and enjoy him and want to please him. However, it is significant that obeying God is also the best way for us to live.

Prayer: God, help us to always listen to you, even when your teachings are difficult. Help us to remember that your teachings always tell us about the best way to live.

Activity: Play *Simon Says* with your children. Then when you are finished, remind them that this is how we need to listen to God. If *God says* (if he teaches us something), we need to listen and do it.

"BRIDGE OUT!"

Read Psalm 119:1-16 (WSC #2)

The whole kingdom of Thurrhema was shocked by the morning headline: **Café Couple Killed**. Max, a German Shepherd dog and his wife Hope, a yellow Labrador, had plunged into the James river ravine in their buggy and died! This couple had just sent off their youngest puppy to school and they were looking forward to running their cafe in town and also doing some of the things that they had always wanted to do together, but never had the time. One of those things was travel. So, one day they got their horse and buggy out, left the cafe in the hands of some of their trustworthy help, and took off through the country side.

It was a beautiful spring day. The birds were singing, the sky was a wonderful blue with hardly a cloud in it, and the fresh scent of spring was in the air. Both Max and Hope lifted their noses in the air and smelled the delightful aromas that they had missed over the long winter months. They thought to themselves, "What a day to be out and taking a ride!"

They decided to go west out of town and through the winding roads which led to the James River ravine. Just pass the gully there were some of the most beautiful rolling hills in the land. They had always enjoyed seeing these hills--especially this time of year as trees were turning green and flowers were clothed in summer colors.

What the couple didn't realize, though was that the king, Melek, had commissioned a herd of elephants and a construction crew of beavers to work together to replace the bridge going over the river. The bridge had seen a lot of use over the years and the king was concerned for the safety of those traveling the road. So, with the last of the cold winter days in the past, they had torn down the bridge and put signs up all along the road saying, **Caution! Bridge Out!** and **Stop! Dangerous Construction!** But Max and his wife Hope didn't pay any attention to the signs. They just kept right on with their ride. What's more, the Thurrhema newspaper had carried a story telling about the bridge and its repair and cautioning people not to go down that road. But, poor Max and Hope rarely read the paper. They felt they were just too busy.

So, on they traveled, through the winding roads. It may have not ended in disaster for the couple if the road leading to the ravine was straight and flat or if the road descended down a hill overlooking the bridge.

But that was not the case. The road led up to the bridge and wound through some trees until you traveled up over a hill and then you were right at the bridge. By the time they came up over the hill (and they always like to have the horse gallop at this point) it was too late to stop. Poor Max and Hope dove right over the cliff deep into the ravine. If only they would have read and obeyed!

Note To Parents: Read Joshua 1:8: “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”

Explain to your children that God wants us to read his Bible each day, learn what it says, and obey it. If we don't, we are like Max and Hope in the story: We will eventually get hurt.

Prayer: God, thank you that you've given us your teachings in the Bible. Thank you that you've warned not to do things that will hurt us and you have taught us the things which will make us happy. Help us to learn what the Bible teaches and obey it.

Activity: Take a piece of paper and draw a straight race track on it. Have as many lanes as you have children. In each lane draw equally-sized squares. Then make a starting line at one end and a finish line at the other. Use a penny or even very small toy people for the game pieces. Each child gets a penny or person. Put them on the start. Then ask questions from the verses they have been working on to memorize. Each correct answer allows a child to move a square. The object is to see who can get to the finish line first. For younger children (or even those struggling with memorization) you might want to help them along with the verses some. Keep in mind that the object is not to discourage a child, but to help them work on memorization and hiding God's Word in their hearts in a fun way. If you have only one child, let them play against you.

"YOU SHOULD MEET TOGETHER"

Read Hebrews 10:19-25 (WSC #'s 88, 100)

Melek, the Lion King of Thurrhema, had a problem. He had sensed for some time that the animals in his kingdom needed a boost of hope and joy. Most of them were buried in their work, trying to keep food on the table for their families. Each day was a struggle just to survive the many wild animals who tried to invade their homes and gardens. As Melek sat around the table in his palace along with his governors from all the districts of the kingdom, he sensed a gloomy mood. Melek looked into the faces of the many lions, dogs, beavers, and other animals with which he had labored for so many years.

"My friends," he began in his deep voice. "Many of us have been concerned for some time that the citizens of Thurrhema are drowning under the heavy load of survival. We need to help them. I'm asking you now to provide ideas of ways we might aid our citizens." "Your majesty," Frank, the lion, began. "I think that it would be helpful if we got the people of the kingdom together sometimes." "I agree," chimed in Ian, an Irish Setter, "Many of our subjects could be encouraged by gathering together and lifting each other up from their hardships." "Not only that, Sire, but I sense as I travel around that the people would be uplifted by the presence of their king," offered Scott, another lion, who sat at the large oak table. "What exactly do you mean, Scott?" the king asked. "I think you need to be present at the meetings. You know it always lifts up the citizenry to be with you." "That's so true," Frank agreed. "Not only that, but I have noticed that many of our citizens need some guidance and teaching in how to raise their little ones and how to get along with their neighbors. We should also provide some teaching and training at our meetings."

"Well, these are excellent ideas!" King Melek said excitedly. "I will have our heralds blow their trumpets every first day of the week to assemble the people in our kingdom meeting rooms." He paused and thought to himself with his paw on his chin. Then he began once more--excited again. "We will give opportunity to encourage one another, to teach the citizens better skills for getting along in the kingdom and we will rejoice together over all the wonderful things that have happened in our kingdom. Because we live so spread apart, we don't always hear the good news from our neighbors." "There is one other thing," Phil, a shy beaver, added. "What is it Phil?" the king questioned. Phil quietly continued, "The inhabitants

of the kingdom need to be occasionally reminded of how your son, Christoff, died to save the kingdom. This is something that always brings out the best in us and offers us hope." Each furry governor nodded his head in agreement. "All in favor of having weekly assemblies to encourage and help our great land, let it be known with the Thurrhema roar," the king instructed. "Roarrrrrrrrrr!" boomed the unanimous response of all.

Upon the first day of the next week, the king's heralds went throughout the land blowing their trumpets and calling the people to assemble together. At first it seemed strange and new to all the animals. Many of them had never sat down and had a meal together before those meetings started. Now they did it almost every week. They sang together, they learned, and they encouraged one another. Most importantly, they rejoiced in the story of the king's son, Christoff, and how he saved Thurrhema. And of course, they were all greatly uplifted by being in the presence of the king. When the king's first order went through the land, "Let it be heard that all citizenry and their family ought to meet together and encourage one another," the animals were a little skeptical. However, after months of assembling together, the animals were waking up and gathering together hours before the herald could even be heard throughout Thurrhema! They joyfully anticipated these weekly meetings.

Note To Parents: Explain to your children that this story shows us how coming together with the church can help us and be an enjoyable time. It also shows us that God has made us part of the church because he loves us. When we come together as the church it should also be out of our love for God and that we enjoy praising him (Ps. 26:8; 84:10; 122:1). Explain also that God has given us great resources to grow through the Church as we see in WSC #88.

Prayer: God, thank you for our church. We thank you that we can learn from the Bible, encourage each other, and praise you for all the great things you do for us. Help us never stop coming together as the church and help us to love you and each other more because we meet together.

Activity: Have your children draw a picture of a church building and then see how many things they can write down in the picture that they are thankful for when they come together with other Christians to learn from the Bible, pray, serve, and worship. You can help younger ones with the writing, if they need it. They can color the church building after they are done. Post the picture on the fridge and briefly discuss it before you leave for church services. Make sure they understand that the church is not the building, but the people. Also explain what a gift it is to be able to pray for and with other Christians, which is why WSC #100 is included with this devotional reading.

"LOVING A PUP"

Read Titus 2:1-10, emphasis on verse 4 (WSC #34)

Toby was a rambunctious little bulldog pup. He and his friends, Ronnie and Sammy (Sammy was also his cousin), loved to run through the woods behind Toby's house chasing birds, barking, and sniffing around every inch. Lanie, Toby's mom, had told him that he was to come right home from school, because she, Toby and Henry (Toby's dad) needed to go into town and have uncle Peter fix a wheel for them at his blacksmith shop. But when school let out, Toby, Ronnie, and Sammy took off through the fields and pastures like they hadn't been outside for years. These pups didn't like being cooped up in a schoolhouse learning about numbers, reading, and writing. They thought it all was a waste of time when there were birds to chase and trees and streams where they could play.

"Come on, guys," shouted Sammy as they came bounding out the front door of the school. "Last one to the Walker woods is a cat!" "Or worse yet, Ronnie piped up, "a poodle!" "Bluuuuuuuh, ruff, ruff, ruff, ruff," they barked. For nearly two hours the pups jumped in the stream, ran along the bank, and rolled in the dirt. They were having the time of their lives. All of a sudden, Toby remembered his mom's specific instructions. "Hey, Sammy and Ronnie!" Toby yelled. "I was supposed to go home right after school. When class was over I didn't think it would hurt just to come out here for a little while. It's been two hours. I'm going to be in big trouble when I get home!" "Uh oh," replied Sammy. Uncle Henry and Aunt Lanie sure are going be mad. You are going be in big trouble!" "Oh man, I know," Toby replied as his ears hunkered down in shame. "I guess I better get home and face my mom. See you guys later," Toby said as he started running home.

Lanie couldn't decide if she should be worried or upset. She hoped that nothing was wrong with Toby. The possibility that something could have happened to him is what made her want to be worried. Yet, if he was just out playing and forgot to come home like he was supposed to do, she would be upset. She had wanted to go into town with Henry so she could do some needed shopping for the house. This was her only chance of the week to do it and now she had to stay home in case Toby returned. Henry had gone without her since the wheel had to get fixed that day.

Two hours after he was supposed to get home, the panting pup burst in the house with his tongue hanging out. "Hi... huh, huh, huh, huh...mom...huh, huh, huh...I'm sorry I'm late...huh, huh, huh...I was out playing with Ronnie and Sammy." "Toby, what did I tell you this morning before you went to school?" Lanie questioned sternly. "To, huh, huh...come right home after school let out," he answered. "And you didn't do that, did you son?" "No," the guilty pup admitted. He was catching his breath now, but he still felt badly because he knew what was coming. He could read the disappointment on his mom's face. "I really needed to go to town today to get some things at the store. And I couldn't go because I had to wait for you. You were not very considerate toward me, were you?" Toby's short tail was drooping and so was his head. He just managed to look up a little and get out an ashamed, "No."

As if on cue, Toby's dad came in and Lanie filled him in on where Toby had been. "Son, you were not only very inconsiderate of us, but you disobeyed us. This behavior is unacceptable. If you don't listen, you might get hurt someday. And if you just go out and do whatever you please, you'll cause all sorts of problems. You need to listen and hear what we tell you and teach you. Your punishment will be that you are grounded for the rest of the month. No playing with Sammy and Ronnie until you have served your punishment. You'll have to come home right after school everyday." "But, dad...," Toby started to say in protest. "Don't 'but, Dad me,' Toby. You knew what you were supposed to do after school and you chose not to obey. You're the one who made a disobedient choice. And now, you must accept the consequence."

"May I ask you a question though?" the sad bull dog requested. "Sure, Toby." "How can you play with me outside one day and do fun things with me and tell me you love me and then the next day punish me by grounding me for a month?" "Toby, I can play with you one day and punish you the next day because I love you. It's because your mom and I love you that she cooks for you and cleans and holds you when you're sick. It's because I love you that we go fishing together and play outside and wrestle on the floor. But it's also because we love you that we have you do chores, clean your room, do your homework, and discipline you when you haven't obeyed. You see, son, we love you so much that we not only want you to have fun, we also want you to learn and grow up to be the best bulldog you can be as you serve king Melek in Thurrhema. If we didn't love you, then we wouldn't care enough to discipline, because we don't like doing it. It would be easier for now, if we didn't, because we know it's not pleasant for you. But we know

we need to do it. Do you understand, son?"

Note To Parents: Ask your children: do you understand what Henry is telling his pup? The Bible says that parents are to love their children Matthew 22:39 reads, "Love your neighbor as yourself," which would include children. Colossians 3:21 adds: "Fathers, don't aggravate your children. If you do, they will become discouraged and quit trying." (NLT). What are some of the ways that parents love their children?

Answers:

1. Take care of them. 1 Timothy 5:8.
2. Teach them about God. Deuteronomy 6:7-9; Ephesians 6:4.
3. Discipline them when they are disobedient. Proverbs 13:24; 19:18.

Prayer: God, thank you for my parents and for their love and discipline. Thank you also that you teach me through my parents how you have adopted us into your family and how you love us as our heavenly Father. Help me to obey my parents. Help me also to be a good parent when I grow up and to teach my children about you.

Activity: Parents sit down with your children and tell them that you love them. Help them draw a picture that illustrates how discipline is an act of love. Title the picture, "A Parent's Love". Divide the paper in half. Tell your child to draw a picture of them playing with you on half the page. Then on the other half, draw a picture of a punishment. This picture illustrates how a parent must play and punish to love. Once you are done, place this picture in the gift box and give thanks to God that he has given adults to us to help us learn about the very best good news in all the world—we can know him through Jesus Christ.

"GOVERNMENT RULERS"

Read Romans 13:1-4 (WSC #64)

"Hey George," Bendigo yelled. "Could you bring some more nails from the wagon? I'm about out and I need one more in this post." "Yeah, sure thing. Is there anything else you need?" asked the short dachshund dog who had been the neighbor to Bendigo and Avalon for several years now. "No, I can't think of anything," the large black cat responded. "Unless, it would be a short nap, some nice cool water, and a tuna sandwich," Bendigo joked. "I don't know about the tuna sandwich, Bendigo, but I could go for a rest and some water. Why don't we rest after we get this post done?" "Sounds good to me," the cat meowed.

After they got the wire nailed to that post, they both went over by the shade of their wagon and sat down to rest. "Hey, what's all the uproar been about over in your region?" Bendigo asked of George as they drank some water. Though they were neighbors, each lived on the outer edge of his own region in Thurrhema. "Ah, it's that crazy governor, Leslie," the dachshund growled. He wants every adult male to serve five hours a week helping to keep the governor's palace and parks clean. I think it's just another one of his crazy and selfish ideas. That lion wants us to be his servants and doesn't really care about what we want. And I'm not going to do it!" On the last word George was so upset that he stood up on his short legs and half said it and half barked it.

"But George," said Bendigo in his calming voice. "Haven't you been going to the area meetings each week and learning what King Melek wants us to do with our leaders?" "What do you mean?" asked the dog. "Well, I mean, he has taught us that he is the one who has decided that we would have governors and other leaders because that is the best way Thurrhema can be run. And he has said that we should respect them and obey them." "I know that, Bendigo!" George sharply replied. "But why would King Melek let such a bad governor like Leslie remain a leader? You know enough about him to know that he's a terrible lion. Your governor, Connor, is not much better. You surely don't agree with some of the crazy things he asks of your region, do you?" "No, I really don't," answered Bendigo, as he stretched his front paws. "But, I also remember what King Melek has taught us about our leaders and I want to do what he asks of us. I need to remember that though I may not like everything Connor does, he is the leader that Melek has set

over us. So, to respect him is also to respect Melek. You need to remember the same thing, George."

"Ah, I suppose you're right, Bendigo. But it's easier said than done!" Bendigo chuckled in agreement, "King Melek never has taught us it would be easy. But he has promised that anytime we need help he will be there for us." "Well, I suppose we should get back to this fence, Bendigo. Martha's gonna be wanting me home for supper in about an hour or so." "Meeoooww," came Bendigo's reply as he stretched and yawned. "I wish we could rest just a little longer," he said as he slowly made his way to the fence. "You cats never cease to amaze me. You could probably sleep all day." "Well," Bendigo smiled back at his friend and neighbor, "It's just a talent we have--just a talent."

Note To Parents: Explain to your children: This story teaches us that God wants us to respect and obey the leaders of government whom he has placed over us. This means not only the good ones, but also those who are hard to obey and respect. This is good to talk about on President's Day. When Paul wrote the letter to the Romans, the Roman government was not always the easiest to obey. But, Paul still taught them in Romans 13:1-4 we must obey our leaders. Paul also writes in 1 Timothy 2:1-2: "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, [2] for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way."

Ask your children: How can we respect our President and other leaders? Answer: Pray for them, don't say nasty things about them, and obey the laws they give us.

Ask them: Who are some other leaders we should respect? Help them name some of the leaders within your local and national government.

Prayer: Help the leaders of our country in the very hard job they have to do. Show them the importance of listening to what you have to say. Help them make decisions according to what you have taught, and may they lead us in a wise, loving, and just way.

Activity: Ask your children to list some of your state's and our country's leaders: governor, senators, president, etc. Print pictures of each leader, hang them on the fridge, and begin praying for them as a

family. Also help your children write a letter to each one to tell them that they have learned they need to respect them and they are praying for them. You can find addresses at the library or on the internet.

"WORK THE BEST YOU CAN"

Read Ephesians 6:5-9 (WSC #1)

"Avalon, honey, have you seen Rachel?" "No I haven't, dear. I know that she was here about five minutes ago when we were working down by the creek." "I can't figure out where she could be," said Avalon's worried husband, Bendigo, with a frown on his face. "Maybe I'll go over the hill in the back of the park and see if she could be there."

Bendigo, the large black cat, took off to find his niece. She had come to visit her aunt and uncle while they were all cleaning the Thurrhema park for King Melek. Melek had asked his citizens to pitch in and help make the park beautiful for some spring activities they were having. Since they began working a couple of hours earlier, it seemed that Avalon and Bendigo couldn't keep Rachel motivated to work. She would work for as long as they were watching her. But when they would turn their backs she would begin playing or would go off and rest under a tree somewhere.

"Raaa-chelllll, Raaa-chelll!" Bendigo yelled. He looked and looked and finally spotted her playing with another kitten in the woods at the back of the park. "Rache!" "Oh, hi, Uncle Bendigo. We were...just...uh...we were just...uh looking for some work to do back here," Rachel mumbled as she avoided eye contact with her uncle. "Rache, don't make matters worse by lying in addition to not working like we'd asked you to. Every time your aunt and I have turned our heads you have stopped working. You must think that the only time you have to work hard is when someone is watching you. Don't you realize that our great, honorable, and loving king has asked us to help him by making the park beautiful for the spring?" "Well, yeah, Uncle, but I just..." She paused. "Rach, after all King Melek has done for us, we should want to do our best for him--whether someone is watching or not. It is a great privilege to work for him and serve him. It doesn't matter whether he asks us to rake leaves, clean out the restrooms, clean stones from the stream, tend to flower beds, or be part of his board of governors, all jobs are important and should be done to bring honor to him. We should want to make him look good and do our best."

"Oh, I'm sorry Uncle Bendigo. You're right. I'm one of the few kittens my age who has gotten to help today. I should be happy about that. May I come and help you and Aunt Avalon?" "You sure can Rache. Come on with me."

Note To Parents: Explain to your children that this story teaches us how important work is to God. From the very beginning of time God commanded us to work as part of the way we are to love and serve him. Read Genesis 2:15: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.” Read Colossians 3:23: “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.” Read 1 Corinthians 10:31: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Also note that in the passage we read before the story (Ephesians 6:5-9), our work is tied to the gospel. We are to work as servants of Christ (i.e. knowing we have been changed by and belong to him) and also knowing we will be graciously rewarded for this by our Lord.

Prayer: God, you have given us all kinds of work to do. Thank you. Help us to do our work to please you and not just to please other people. Help us always do our best, to your best.

Activity: Have your children look for pictures of different jobs and workers in a magazine or on the internet. Try to come up with at least five. Once they have put the pictures on a piece of paper, discuss how each job is a way of serving God and others. Also, have them talk about why each job is important to God and should be important to them. Discuss how a Christian must trust Jesus Christ in each one of the jobs to glorify God in it. Finally, have them choose one job that they can currently do to glorify Christ and help them get started!

"POINTS OF VIEW"

Read Proverbs 13:13; Luke 1:1-4 (WSC's #89-90)

Bendigo was relaxing one evening after dinner with the *Thurrhema Tribune* in his paws. Today's headline was *Melek Saves the Day*. The King of Thurrhema had gone on a boat trip with a group of beavers, deer, and dogs who were going fishing. Unfortunately a great storm had brewed in the west and moved toward Gordon River, where the lion and beavers were fishing. The reporter, Clark, a rabbit, used vivid words to describe the terrifying experience on that boat. Bendigo read the account: *Enraged waves threatened to engulf the small whaler with the five men aboard. It rocked back and forth, at the complete mercy of the storm. Surprisingly, not all the passengers were afraid. "King Melek showed no fear! In fact, he was comforting us and assuring us that the storm would pass without harm!" This is a direct quote from Thad, a beaver on the fishing boat.*

"Wow! Did you hear about King Melek and those beavers who got caught in the storm?" Bendigo asked his wife, Avalon, who was sitting next to him watching the evening news on the K9 Network.

"What was that dear?" Avalon turned her eyes from the television to her husband.

"Oh, I was just reading in the *Thurrhema Tribune* about a storm that passed over the Gordon River while King Melek was out fishing with some beavers in town. But he completely kept his cool and helped calm their fears."

"That's interesting. The newscaster, Sylvia, was just talking about King Melek and his fishing trip. But all she mentioned was how he kept spotting the best places to cast their fishing nets and the beavers couldn't believe how many fish they caught! She didn't mention anything about the storm."

Just then, Rachel, Bendigo and Avalon's niece, barged inside the cottage. She had gone to have dinner with her friend, Toby, a bulldog in her class.

"Hi, Rache!" Avalon and Bendigo called at the same time.

"Hey! You'll never guess what Toby got to do yesterday!" Rachel blurted out excitedly.

“Oh, yeah? What did Toby get to do yesterday?” Aunt Avalon inquired, smiling at Rachel’s enthusiasm.

“He got to go fishing with King Melek! Can you believe it? And that’s not even the most shocking part!

Toby said that King Melek spent most of the fishing trip asking Toby questions about his likes, hobbies, friends, and family. In fact, Toby said the older dogs and beavers were a little jealous of the amount of time King Melek was spending with Toby. Toby said that King Melek is the most amazing animal he has every met! He said he’s not puffed up or stern like other kings, but that he’s really down to earth. He really cared about Toby.”

Bendigo and Avalon exchanged puzzled looks.

“Did Toby mention a storm?” Bendigo questioned.

“What about all the fish they caught?” Avalon wondered aloud.

Rachel looked confused, “Nope, he just talked about how amazing and caring King Melek is. Why? What are you talking about?”

“Well, I was just watching the news on the K9 Network, and the reporter was talking about King Melek’s amazing ability to predict the best spots to catch fish,” Avalon explained.

“And I was just reading an article in the *Thurrhema Tribune* about the fishing trip. The reporter was detailing an incredible storm that threatened the animals aboard. Apparently, King Melek was really calm and collected. He comforted all the animals aboard. I can’t believe Toby didn’t mention anything about the storm.”

“Well, Toby didn’t mention anything about catching fish or surviving a scary storm, so maybe those reporters just made that stuff up for the public,” Rachel said.

Her aunt was not so easily convinced. “Rachel, just because the three of us heard three different accounts about the same fishing trip doesn’t mean the accounts aren’t true. In fact, we know more about Toby’s trip with King Melek because we have heard three different perspectives about the same event. Apparently, Toby was really impacted by King Melek’s compassion and concern. But the K9 reporter wasn’t so interested in King Melek’s social skills. She was interested in his fishing abilities, so that’s what she decided to report. And the newspaper was impressed by King Melek’s calm in the storm, so that’s what they chose to report.”

“Your aunt’s right, Rachel, we have a better picture of what really happened yesterday because we listened to three different perspectives,” Bendigo agreed with his wife.

“Yeah, I get that,” Rachel said, “but I can’t believe Toby didn’t tell me about all the fish they caught!”

Note To Parents: Explain to your children that this story helps us understand how the four gospel accounts, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John relate to each other. While some people argue that they contradict each other, that is not the case. Each gospel comes from a different perspective of the same events: the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The four different points of view provide a more complete picture for us, its readers, of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Also, explain how our Scripture reading today (Luke 1:1-4) reminds us the Gospel writers wrote reliable historical accounts of the life of Jesus Christ.

Prayer: God, what a treasure your word is to us! Thank you for giving us four gospel accounts. One would have been enough, but we have a much better picture of the life of your son because we have four perspectives. Thank you for inspiring this word and giving it to us so that we can read it again and again. Please help us to understand the gospel more deeply every time we read your words. Help us to get to know your son better by reading about his life.

Activity:

Option 1 (for younger children)

Take a family night and go to a park. Tell each child that when you come home, you will share the highlight of the night with the rest of the family. Most likely, you will each highlight something different and unique to your impressions. Your daughter might point out that she liked being pushed on the swings, but your son liked riding his bike to the park. Both of these accounts are true; they do not contradict each other. Instead, the multiple accounts give a better picture of your time as a family at the park.

Option 2 (for older children)

As a family, pick a parable or miracle that occurs in all four gospels. Create a table to visualize the similarities and differences between the four accounts of the same story. For example, discuss the differences and similarities between three accounts of Jesus calming the storm.

Parable/Miracle: <i>Jesus calms the storm</i>				
Accounts				
Matthew <i>8:23-27</i>	Mark <i>4:35-41</i>	Luke <i>8:22-25</i>	John	All Four

CHAPTER THREE

BIBLE NARRATIVES

"INDEPENDENCE DAY"

Biblical Reference: Exodus 1-20; Read 2 Kings 17:6-8; Luke 9:31 (WSC #25)

The book of Exodus tells the story of God's people in the Old Testament--Israel--and how they became slaves to the country called Egypt and how God helped them become free.

Israel had been in Egypt for a long, long time and the king was being very mean to them. He made them work very hard as his slaves and he even killed some of them. He wouldn't let them go back to Israel, so God sent ten plagues on the country. God did things like turn their water into blood, sent so many frogs that they were filling up the houses, sent lots of locusts to eat the crops, made it dark for three straight days, and finally he killed all of the animals and children who were the oldest in their families. If a family killed a lamb and put its blood on their door like God commanded them, then their oldest animal or child wouldn't be killed. It wasn't until God killed the oldest animals and children that the king finally decided he would let Israel leave Egypt.

It was important to the people of Israel that they leave so that they could love and worship God like God wanted them to love him. So, they left. But, after they left, the king decided he was mad at them for leaving and wanted them to come back to be his slaves again. So he had his army chase the people of Israel. As Israel fled the evil Pharaoh, they came to the great Red Sea. They couldn't go around the water and they couldn't go back because the army was chasing them. They were trapped and afraid they were going to die. But God did something extraordinary! He parted the water so that a dry path of land formed for the people to walk through to the other side. When the army started to cross where the water was parted, God released the water so that it showered on top of them and they drowned.

God saved his people and set them free because he loved them so much. Then he taught them in the Ten Commandments and other laws he gave to Moses how he wanted them to live because he did love them and had been so kind to save them. He told them in Exodus 20:2: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

Note To Parents: Ask your children: Why did God say to Israel what he did in Exodus 20:2? Answer: He wanted them to love him by obeying what he was about to teach them and he was reminding them what he had done for them. Read Romans 6:17-18: “But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, [18] and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. “ Ask them: What does Paul say God has freed us from? Answer: From having to do things that are sinful and wrong. We can now serve and obey and love God. Explain also that in our Scripture reading for today (2 Kings 17:6-8; Luke 9:31) we learn that the exodus became a picture of God’s salvation of his people (in Luke 9:31 Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension are referred to literally as “his exodus”). Explain also to your children that July 4 is Independence Day (and what that means) and that when we receive and rest upon Jesus as our savior, that is our Independence Day.

Prayer: God, thank you for sending Jesus to die on the cross for us and to free us from our sins. Thank you that since we have received Jesus as savior, we have been freed from our slavery just like the people of Israel were freed from theirs. Thank you we now can know, love, enjoy, and serve you!

Activity:

Option 1: Take two square cake pans (or something similar) and fill them with water. Take some small toy animals and people and help your children recreate the crossing of the Red Sea. They can march the animals and people up to the pans, separate the pans, and then march them through the water as they retell the story of the Red Sea. Reiterate to them again how God miraculously saved them and gave them freedom and how He does the same for everyone who trusts Jesus Christ as their savior.

Option 2: If you live near a body of water (river, lake, ocean), visit the beach as a family. While playing in the sand, try to separate the water in half. Show your child how impossible this is even in a couple inches of water. Remind your child how amazing God is because he separated a huge amount of water and the land was not even damp; it was completely dry!

“STANDING STONES”

Biblical Reference: Joshua 4; Read this passage (WSC #'s 49-52)

Leah was helping her mom sent up their tent near some other families in their clan. The Israelites had just had an amazing day. They had rested last night on the other side of the Jordan River. They weren't sure how they would cross, but they knew God always kept his covenant, and he would provide a way. As they expected, he stirred up the river and parted it in half as soon as the priests' sandals touched the water. All of Israel was able to cross on dry ground. Leah had never witnessed such an amazing miracle! Now that they were safely on the other side, all 12 tribes were setting up tents to lodge for the evening. After a few minutes, she heard a familiar voice, the voice of Joshua, the man God had chosen to be their leader into the Promised Land. *(Leah and Joseph are fictitious characters, used in the telling of this true account)*

“Hear, oh Israel, the Lord has given me this command: ‘Take twelve men from the people, from each tribe a man, and take twelve stones from here out of the midst of the Jordan, from the very place where the priests' feet stood firmly, and bring them over with you and lay them down in the place where you lodge tonight. This may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’ then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever.’ Each tribe, send your men to the bank of the Jordan.”

Leah's father, Joseph, the representative of their tribe, Judah, stood up and walked toward the Jordan. He and eleven other Israelites scanned the shore and found twelve jagged, silvery stones. These were not little pebbles. They were large rocks that were difficult to carry!

All of Israel erupted into praise and hollering as the stones hit the ground. Every man, woman, and child was so thankful for God's amazing power.

Joshua allowed the praise to continue and then held up his hands to quiet the people, “Let all the peoples of the earth know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever!”

Leah's father smiled down at her, “My child, never forget this place, Gilgal. This stone is a reminder to you that our LORD is powerful and faithful. Always remember how he parted the Jordan River before your own brown eyes.”

“I’ll always remember the LORD’s power, father. I’ll always remember,” Leah said as she glanced down the line of the twelve standing stones.

Notes for Parents: The twelve memorial stones at Gilgal comprise the first of seven stone memorials mentioned throughout Joshua. Other stone memorial stories can be found in Joshua 7:5, 8:28-29, 8:30-32, 10:27, 22:34, and 24:26-27. All these monuments reminded Israel of God’s faithfulness, grace, and restoration so they could praise him for who he truly is and what he has done. God knows how easily we forget His amazing work and that we need reminding! This should motivate us to remember God’s faithfulness, grace, and restoration in our own lives lest we forget His mighty works in our home. We must also remember all that is written in the Old Testament was also written for those of us who live under the New Covenant (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11) and it served to teach us ahead of time about Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27; Acts 10:43; 1 Corinthians 10:4). As such, God wants us to remember how his faithfulness, grace, and mighty works have been continually shown to us through Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 11:24 teaches us that the Lord’s Supper is, in part, a memorial).

Prayer: Dear God, we praise you for your power over creation. How wonderful to picture your mighty finger dividing the waters of the Jordan River! With your hands holding back the water, you brought your people across on dry land. This was so easy for you! Father, forgive us for forgetting your faithfulness. We confess that so often we praise you one day and forget the next day. Lord, help us as a family, through your Spirit, to remember your presence in our home. As you answer our prayers with surpassing grace, keep us from forgetting. Set up a memorial in our home so that we might parade your miraculous deeds.

Activity: Create your own memorial of “standing stones” to remind your family of God’s faithfulness. As God performs amazing acts in your family (ie. new job, additional child, healing a sickness, saving a friend, etc), add an object to represent his faithfulness. For example, if you live near an ocean, collect “Standing Shells”. Use shells to represent God’s amazing faithfulness. If you live near mountains, collect “Standing Pinecones”. The visual collection will remind your family of God’s mighty power and faithfulness.

"GOD ANSWERS PRAYER"

Biblical Reference: 1 Samuel 1:1-2:1; Read this passage and John 15:7 (WSC #'s 99, 103-107)

There was once a man named Elkanah who had a wife named Hannah. They lived in a town called Ramah. Even though Hannah wanted to have children very badly, she had not been able to have any. This made her very sad. It was very important for women who lived during Hannah's time to have children. If they couldn't and they saw other women who could, it always made them feel like a failure.

Because Elkanah loved God very much, every year he traveled from his home town of Ramah up to a place called Shiloh. Shiloh had a special place for people to come and worship God. This special place was called the tabernacle. It was only about 15 miles away from Elkanah's home, but since they didn't have cars, trains, or airplanes and had to walk, it took Elkanah a long time to get to the tabernacle. Elkanah would tell God how thankful he was for all he had done for him and his family. One of the things that people would do in the time of the Old Testament to show God that they loved him, was to offer sacrifices at the tabernacle. Many times this would mean that they killed animals and cooked them. When the animals died this was a reminder that something or someone had to be punished for the sins that the people had done. (It also prepared people for the coming of Jesus Christ and his sacrificial death) It also reminded the people that they needed to be forgiven by God of their sins and also that they needed to thank God for his love. Whenever Elkanah went to Shiloh and offered sacrifices, he would give a good helping of meat to Hannah too because he loved her so much.

One time when Elkanah and Hannah went on their trip to Shiloh, Hannah became very sad and began praying to God. She prayed: "Lord of heaven's armies, see how bad I feel. Remember me! Don't forget me. If you will give me a son, I will give him back to you all his life." (1 Samuel 1:11) Hannah asked God to help her have a son. She promised to God that she would have this son serve God in a very special way all his life. While she was praying silently and moving her mouth, Eli, the priest (the person who helped with the sacrifices) saw her and thought something was wrong. He even thought that she might be drunk.

Hannah answered him, “Oh no, sir!” she replied. “I haven’t been drinking wine or anything stronger. But I am very discouraged, and I was pouring out my heart to the LORD. Don’t think I am a wicked woman! For I have been praying out of great anguish and sorrow.” (1 Samuel 1:15-16, NLT) Eli then told her that he hoped God would grant her request and give her a son.

Well, Hannah and Elkanah went back to their home and God answered Hannah's prayer with a "yes". God helped her to become pregnant and she had a son. She named him Samuel. When Samuel was old enough to eat food Hannah took him to Shiloh and she worshipped God and thanked him for answering her prayers and giving her a son. Here's what Hannah told Eli when she brought him to Shiloh: “Sir, do you remember me?” Hannah asked. “I am the woman who stood here several years ago praying to the LORD. I asked the LORD to give me this boy, and he has granted my request. Now I am giving him to the LORD, and he will belong to the LORD his whole life.” And they worshiped the LORD there. (1 Samuel 1:26-28)

Samuel lived in Shiloh and served God by helping at the tabernacle. He grew up to be a man who loved God and a very important person who helped God's people.

Note To Parents: Read again 1 Samuel 2:1: “And Hannah prayed and said, ‘My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in the Lord. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation.’”

Ask children: How is Jesus similar to the animals which were sacrificed in the Old Testament? Answer: The Israelites sacrificed animals to pay the price for their sins. Jesus was the final sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sins. Ask your children: What does the story of Hannah and Elkanah teach us about prayer? Answer: That God hears and answers our prayers. When God answers our prayers, what should we do? Answer: Thank him. Also, explain to your children that God’s gift of a son to Hannah helps

prepare people for the gift of another son, Jesus Christ. It is through him that we are able to come to God in prayer and have our prayers answered (Ephesians 2:18; Hebrews 4:14-16).

Prayer: God, thank you that you hear and answer our prayers. Help us always to remember to pray to you when we have needs. Help us also remember to pray to you when we just want to let you know how much we love you or how great you are. Help us also remember that we can come to you in prayer through Jesus Christ. *You can also write out your thanks to God and place it in the gift box and remind your children that the greatest gift in prayer is the fellowship we have with God.*

Activity: In this activity you will make a tube talker with your children. Take two cardboard inserts out of some gift wrapping paper and stick one of them about an inch into the end of the other. Then speak softly (perhaps even whisper) through one end while a child has his ear up to the other end. They will notice how clear they can hear you even when others standing nearby cannot. For fun you might even bend the tube talker around a corner so that you or a couple of children can talk to each other without seeing the other person. Emphasize that just as we can hear each other and answer one another through the tube talker, even when others can't hear, so God hears and answers our prayers when others may not hear us. If you don't have the wrapping paper rolls, some other ideas of what you could use would be paper towel and/or toilet paper rolls, rolled up poster board, or plastic pipe.

"BARNES AND GREED"

Biblical Reference: Luke 12:13-21; Read this (WSC #'s 79-81).

Long ago, a large crowd of people had gathered to hear Jesus teach. Someone who was among the crowd spoke up and said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." This man recognized that Jesus was a teacher and therefore thought that he would have the authority and desire to help him and his brother settle their difference (much like other teachers of the same time would have done). But Jesus didn't want to settle an issue where the real problem was why this man wanted the money, so he said that he wouldn't do it: "Who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" Jesus asked. He went on to tell the man, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Jesus must have known that this man wanted the property because he thought having more things is what would make him happy and would provide for all he needed. To show this man that it is not things that make us happy and not things that let us know we are taken care of, Jesus told him the following parable, a story that teaches a truth.

"The land of a rich man produced plentifully." Jesus is telling about a man who had lots of things--lots of crops which would give him enough to eat and money to buy what he needed--even more than what he needed. "And he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'"

This man thought that the way he could meet all his needs was to get lots of things. He could work hard, make a lot of money and he would never be in need. The problem was that he wanted the things more than he wanted God and he was trusting in things and not God. "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'" In Jesus' story the rich farmer dies before he gets to enjoy all the riches that he was counting on to make him happy. In this parable, Jesus is reminding the man to whom he was telling the story that the one who decides what happens in our life and how much or how little we will have is God. We should try to please him more

than getting things. What is more, things don't last, but the treasure of pleasing God and the reward we get of being with Him for eternity can never be taken away!

Jesus ends by saying, "So is the one who lays up treasures for himself and is not rich toward God."

It is far better to be rich toward God and merely just in this life.

Note To Parents: Ask your children these questions:

1. What was Jesus trying to teach the man and us by this story? Answer: That we should not think things will make us happy. Only God will. Nor should we trust in things or money to take care of us, instead of God. Loving him and serving him should be more important to us than getting things.
2. Why is it important that we not trust things instead of God? Answer: Because God doesn't want us to love anything or anyone else more than him (Exodus 20:3). If we trust in money or things to provide for us, instead of God, we are saying they are more important--like they are our god.

Prayer: God, thank you for the home we live in, our clothes, our car, our family, and our food. Help us to realize that you have provided all these things for us. We have not done it on our own. Help us to love you more than anything or anyone else.

Activity:

Option 1: Have your children make a frieze of the rich farmer story. A frieze is a number of pictures -- each one telling a different part of the story. They can then be taped together--similar to a comic strip-- and it will retell Luke 12:13-21.

Option 2: (for older children) Participate in a "family fast" to practice keeping God above our things. Each member needs to choose one thing that sometimes gets in the way of God: TV, internet, iPod/Pad, gaming systems, books, or toys. As a family, fast from that one thing for an entire week. At the end of your family fast, discuss how your focus on God was changed when you fasted from one thing in your life.

"A TIME FOR CHANGE"

Biblical Reference: Luke 19:1-10; Read this (WSC #35)

At the beginning of January many adults decide what things they want to change about themselves for the New Year. Some say that they are going to lose weight because they might think that they are fat. Others decide that they are going to exercise everyday--maybe they will walk or jog. Still other people might decide they will spend more time with their family or try to make more money. This is a good time to think about what needs to be changed because the old year has just ended and this causes people to think about things that they might have messed up on over the last 12 months. And it is also a good time to think about change because so much is changing: We have a new year, a new calendar; many have new toys or clothes from Christmas. And a lot of us just hope we can do some things better than we have over the past year. But how can we change the things that are really important? How can we be a better person or become a follower of Jesus? How can we begin to do the things that God wants us to do?

To answer that, let's look at a man in the Bible by the name of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was a man who lived in the town called Jericho. He had a lot of money. But he didn't get it the right way. You see, his job was to collect money from the people, money that was required by the government. Zacchaeus, however, took more money than he really should have. So, he became richer because he kept much of the extra for himself while many people became poorer. Do you think that was right?

Because Zacchaeus did this, many of the people thought he was a very bad and mean man. They never thought that he could love God or be a follower of Jesus.

One day Zacchaeus heard that Jesus was coming to Jericho and he wanted to see Jesus. Because he was a short man, he decided to climb up in a tree so that he could see over the crowd. When Jesus walked by Zacchaeus' tree, guess what happened? Jesus surprised Zacchaeus and all the people standing around him by stopping and talking to the mean man who had taken so much money from people. Do you think that some of the people who saw Jesus stop and talk to Zacchaeus thought that he should talk to this tax collector? Why? Those people thought that Zacchaeus would never go to the synagogue (like our church) or love God. They certainly never thought that he'd change! And they didn't expect that Jesus would have

anything to do with him. After all, wouldn't Jesus just want to spend time with the people who appeared to be good by going to the synagogue all the time and doing the right things?

But Jesus knew that Zacchaeus needed to change. He knew that this man who took people's money didn't love God and had done many bad things. So Jesus had him come out of the tree and went to Zacchaeus' house and spent time with him. Jesus changed his heart so that Zacchaeus received Jesus as his savior and became His friend. He changed Zacchaeus so that he no longer wanted to rob people of their money. He now wanted to give back the money he had stolen--in fact he was going to give more back than what he had stolen! He was no longer selfish and hateful, now he loved God and other people. Zacchaeus had really been changed!

Note To Parents: Ask your children these questions: What changed about Zacchaeus? How did he change? What does this teach us about how we can change things in this New Year or at any time? Did the changes by Zacchaeus make him a follower of Christ or did he change because he became a follower of Christ. Make sure that your children understand it was the latter. We can only change by Jesus Christ's work in us (Gal. 2:20).

Prayer: Dear God, we know we have done some bad things in this past year and have not always done what you wanted us to do. Help us trust in the grace of Jesus Christ and his Spirit working in us so we can make the needed changes.

Activity:

Option 1: Have your children find the words in this word search which tell them about some changes they might need to make this year. Circle them. Older children (jr. high on up) might want to look up passages of scripture which go along with each word or phrase. Discuss these possible changes with your children.

ZQCBEDKMNRBTSWEEFILGJPUGXYNBACQ
 CFDELLZQQIEERWIKMIRIQSIWORSHIPGOD
 PPOZABBIVVZUOSCFNISBNXITZAABLLIT
 LCRTYOXIHGDUYTRMINTZZTIOVEWKAIQE
 JFDGHHKKSBSPOUYRTBVEXAIIICUYNBWZL
 TYIOMBSHJEKNNREWWNPRAJIHPRAYQUIL
 ECRIVJSEEUHSQRBNJXTONIJUNOPEMNO
 SNISSEFNOCITFRMGFIOUTZIIRNVRETYUI
 HBNMOPEWQYUDIOBEYDODUICPVBNNZXO
 FORGIVEJHGMMNAIPOTAODIHZABCNBVII
 SUSEJEVIECERTYIJIEPAJDUODIUCBZCNBIIV
 YUIOEWQVBNZXCIURDJALOTIRVZBCNBZC
 SUSEJTUOBASDNEIRFLETTIOTICBNMEWQIU
 NVBFGHTRIWETYUIOQPNMBIHJMNBVRTY
 NBFVCREADTHEBIBLETUIPKLJHGBNMEQYT
 GBNMHJKLQWERTYUIHCRUHCOTOGBNMVC

Words and phrases in the word search: 1. Read the Bible. 2. Go to church. 3. Worship God. 4. Receive Jesus. 5. Confess sins. 6. Obey God. 7. Pray. 8. Tell Friends about Jesus.

Option 2: With the beginning of a New Year, it is an appropriate time to choose one unsaved friend or family member to diligently pray for. Let each family member state who they will pray for this year. Write the names on a slip of paper or in your family's prayer journal. When someone accepts Christ, add their name to your Gift Box.

"HE HAS RISEN FROM DEATH!"

Biblical Reference: Luke 24; Read this passage (WSC #38)

Jesus died on the cross on a Friday. Once he was dead, a friend and follower of Jesus, Joseph from Arimathea, took Jesus' body and placed it in a tomb he owned. It was like a cave cut in the side of a hill. Once Jesus' body had been prepared by wrapping it with spices and cloth (weighing probably 70 lbs. or more), a large stone was lodged in front of the opening by rolling it down a hill. Jewish temple police then sealed the stone around and placed an official wax seal on it. They did this because some of the religious leaders knew that Jesus had taught he would come back to life and they didn't want the disciples to come and steal his body to make it look like this happened. So, the seal was placed on the stone which let anyone know that they would be in big trouble, if they tried to move the stone. Also, these temple police were placed there to make sure no one could get close to the body (Matthew 27:62-66). After all this had been done, this is what happened on the next Sunday morning. Luke 24:1-12:

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared.

[2] And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, [3] but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. [4] While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. [5] And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? [6] He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, [7] that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." [8] And they remembered his words, [9] and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. [10] Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, [11] but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. [12] But Peter

rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

Note To Parents: Explain to your children that many people have not believed that Jesus was truly raised from death. They do not believe this can happen, so they have tried to explain what happened in other ways, such as the disciples stole his body or that Jesus really didn't die; instead he was unconscious when put in the tomb (like he was asleep) and then woke up and walked out himself.

Activity:

Option 1: Play *The Resurrection Game*. Choose someone (preferably a parent) to be the one asking the questions. Take turns answering. A right answer is worth one point (if you want to keep score). If you want to give hints on the answers, read the scripture passages listed and see if children can figure out the answers. Don't hesitate to give them more hints, if needed. The key is to help them learn the truth about the resurrection. It may help to act out each question with little toy people and by constructing a tomb (use an empty margarine dish, etc.) just so kids can visualize what is being said in the question.

1. Some people say that maybe Jesus' body was stolen from the tomb. Why was this not what happened?

Take turns--each answer is worth one point. Answers:

- a. The guards saw an angel at the tomb and knew that something special had happened. Matthew 28:2-4.
- b. The ones who first started spreading the rumor that his body had been stolen knew it had not. They made up the story, because they didn't want people to believe. Matthew 28:11-15.
- c. Jesus' followers were so afraid when he was arrested that they all ran away and some denied even knowing him. Mark 14:50; 66-72. They were not brave enough to try and get past the guards and steal his body.
- d. If his body had been stolen, the religious leaders would have eventually found out who did it because they would not want people believing Jesus was alive again.

- e. Because of the seal on the tomb, if the temple police messed up and let someone steal the body, they may have been put to death. They would have been guarding it very closely.
- f. All eleven of the remaining disciples (except for John) were killed because they preached about Jesus. If they had stolen his body and knew that all Jesus said about rising from death was a lie, they would not have been willing to die for preaching about Jesus.
2. Some people have said that Jesus' body was placed in one tomb on Friday and then his followers forgot which tomb he was in and they went to the wrong tomb on Sunday and said that he had risen from death. Why was this not what happened? *Take turns--each answer is worth one point.* Answers:
- a. The tomb belonged to Joseph from Arimathea. All people would have to do is go ask him where the body was. Matthew 27:57-61.
- b. Other followers or friends of Jesus were there when he was buried and would probably not forget where it was. The tomb would be very important to them. Matthew 27:61; Mark 15:47.
- c. If the followers of Jesus went to the wrong tomb, it would have been easy for religious leaders to show where Jesus was truly buried to prove that he was still dead.
3. Some people have said that Jesus' followers just made up the story of his being raised from death to encourage one another and make each other feel better. Why was this not what happened? *Take turns--each answer is worth one point.* Answers:
- a. Jesus was seen by over 500 people after he was raised and before he went back to heaven. Could 500 different people have made up the story? No. They all saw him. I Corinthians 15:1-6.
- b. Jesus' disciples saw him, ate with him, and touched him. Luke 24:36-43.
- c. If they had made up the story and wanted people to believe it, they would not have said that women were the first ones to see him alive. Most people did not think women could be trusted to tell what happened in a trial-type situation (as an eyewitness). Luke 24:4-8; Matthew 28:8-10.
4. Some people have said that Jesus didn't really die on the cross. Instead he went unconscious and then woke up in the cool tomb, got up, and walked out. *Take turns--each answer is worth one point.*
- Answers:
- a. It is said in John 19:34 that a soldier stuck a spear in Jesus side and out came blood mixed with

water. Some physicians have suggested that for this to happen, Jesus would have to be dead.

- b. The Romans were experts at crucifixion. They knew when people were dead or not. Also, the possibility of someone living through a crucifixion was almost none.
- c. Even if Jesus had not died on the cross, how could he have gotten out of the 70+lbs. of wrappings and spices, rolled the stone away and gotten out when he had lost so much blood and fluids from the resurrection and would have been weak? He could not have done this.

Parents you might also mention to your children that two other proofs for the resurrection of Jesus are that the disciples changed so powerfully after the resurrection (Compare Mark 14:50 and Acts 2-4); and believers began to worship on Sunday in celebration of Jesus' resurrection (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor.16:2).

Option 2: Recount the resurrection story as a news reporter. Use the accounts in Scripture as well as the answers from *The Resurrection Game* to report all the amazing details of Jesus' resurrection. Type, title, print and illustrate the article.

"WHO JESUS IS"

Biblical Reference: John 5:1-18; Read this (WSC #'s 6, 21)

One day Jesus went up to the city of Jerusalem to celebrate a special holiday. It was a time to worship God and many people who thought that was important went there. He went past a place where there was a small pool of water. It was called Bethesda and was north of the temple. Many sick people would come to the pool and try to get in it because they thought it could make them well. There may have been an underground spring that fed into the pool which would make the water sometimes move or bubble. These people, many of whom were blind, crippled, or paralyzed, thought that the water was being moved by God or one of his angels and that it might make them well.

When Jesus went by the pool he saw a man who had been sick for 38 years. He was waiting by the pool hoping to get in when the water moved, because that might make him better. He had a small mat under him. Jesus went up to the man and asked him, "Do you want to be healed?" The man went on to tell Jesus that there was no one to help him get into the water when it moves. This man didn't know who Jesus was or that he could make him well. All he could think of was that the water was his only chance to get better. Jesus didn't ask him if he had faith and he didn't even tell the man that he was Jesus. He just said, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." Immediately the man was well. He took his mat and began to walk.

There is only one in the entire world who could be powerful enough to make someone well by just speaking and that is God. God made the world just by what he said. Jesus, who is God, was able to take away this man's sickness by what he said.

The day that Jesus did this was a Saturday. Saturdays (called the Sabbath) in the Bible were days of rest. Many of the Jewish people had taken the day of rest so far that they didn't even think that a person should help out or do good for someone else. They also didn't even think that the man should be carrying his mat on this day, so they said, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed." He answered them by saying, "The man who healed me, that man said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'" This made the Jewish people curious, so they wanted to know who told him to carry his mat. They didn't even care

that the man was better. They were upset that someone had told him to break their laws. The man still didn't know who had made him better.

Later in the day Jesus found the man at the temple. He told him to stop sinning so that something worse than what he had experienced with the sickness would not come upon him. Jesus did not only care about this man's physical health, but he wanted him to love God and obey God so that worse things would not happen to him. The man found out that it was Jesus who had healed him. He went and told the Jewish people who had been upset with him earlier.

This made these Jewish people mad at Jesus and they wanted to hurt him. But Jesus said, "My Father is working until now, and I am working." This made them even angrier at Jesus because not only had he broken their law about the Sabbath day, but now he is saying that he is equal to God by saying he is God's son. John 5:18 reads: "This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."

Note To Parents: Ask your children these questions:

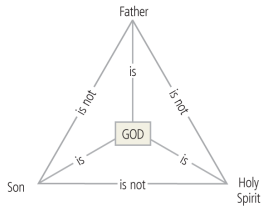
1. What do we learn about how to deal with our problems from Jesus being able to help this man?

Answer: That we should ask Jesus to help us and trust in him.

2. What does this story teach us about who Jesus is? Answer: That he is God's son and that means he is equal with God the Father.

Prayer: God help us to remember to turn to you when we have problems. Help us also to understand what it means that Jesus is your son.

Activity: To try and understand the trinity--that God consists of three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that these three are one God, the same in what they are and equal in their power and greatness, draw this diagram of the Trinity found in the ESV Study Bible:



Challenge your children to draw the diagram on their own. Then ask them to illustrate the diagram with simple pictures of how God works as the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the Father.

"JESUS ON THE CROSS"

Biblical Reference: John 19; Read this (WSC #'s 85-87)

Some of the religious leaders and other people among the Jews got so mad at Jesus that they wanted to kill him. Since they couldn't find out anything that Jesus had done wrong, they tried to make things up as they took him to appear before some of the government leaders. They took him to Pilate, the Roman governor, because he had the authority to say that Jesus should be killed. This was like a trial. They finally talked Pilate into allowing Jesus to be killed. The passage we read today explains what happened after this.

Note To Parents: Ask your children: Why did Jesus really die upon the cross? Was it just because these people were mad at him or was it for other reasons? Answer: It was for other reasons. God, because he loved the world, sent Jesus to die in place of those who would receive Jesus as savior so that they would not have to take the punishment for their sins themselves (Isaiah 53:5: John 3:16: 1 Peter 3:18). What does it mean to receive Jesus as savior? To answer this...

Activity: Parent(s): tell your children of when you received Jesus as your savior, as well as what it means to receive and rest upon Jesus Christ as Savior.

Prayer: God, thank you for sending your son to die for us. Help us to know whether or not we have received Jesus as our savior. Help us also to tell other people how they can receive Jesus.

"GOD'S HELPING SPIRITS"

Biblical Reference: Acts 12; Read this (WSC #11)

One time way back when Jesus' disciples were still alive and after Jesus had gone back to heaven, a king by the name of Herod decided that he wanted to hurt some of the people who followed Jesus. He killed one of the disciples named James. James was the brother of John -- the same John who was one of the disciples and the one who wrote the book of John in the Bible. Herod also had Peter arrested and they put him in jail. Herod didn't want Peter to escape so he had sixteen soldiers guarding him.

The night before Herod was going to bring Peter to trial--hoping to get him in trouble or maybe even kill him--Peter was sleeping between two soldiers and he was tied up with chains. There were also other soldiers guarding the door of the jail. During the night an angel came into the jail cell where Peter was. No one saw him come in, he was just there all of a sudden. He woke Peter up by tapping him on the side. Then he said, "Get up quickly." After saying this, the chains just fell off of Peter. Peter got dressed before the angel told him to follow him. They went past both of the guards at the door and it just opened by itself and they left the jail.

After this happened, Peter went to the home of Mary who was the mother of Mark (the one who wrote the book of Mark in the Bible). Many Christians were there praying. Peter knocked on the door and a servant girl by the name of Rhoda answered. When she saw who it was she was so excited that she forgot to let him in and ran to tell the others Peter was there. Many of them didn't believe her, but she kept on saying that he really was. Peter knocked on the door again and they finally let him inside. Everyone was excited to see him. Once he got them quieted down, he told them how God had rescued him from the jail by an angel. He then left the house.

The next day the soldiers were very upset because Peter had somehow escaped. They didn't have any idea how he got out or where he went. Herod was so mad because he thought the guards hadn't done their jobs that he ordered they be killed.

Note To Parents: Ask your children: How did Peter get out of the jail? Answer: God sent an angel to help him escape. Are there really such beings as angels? Answer: Yes, because the Bible says there are. What are angels? Answer: Read Hebrews 1:14 to see what angels are-- "Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?" Can God's angels help us? Answer: According to Hebrews 1:14 and the account of Peter in Acts, yes! Why is it important to know about angels? Answer: Because we know that God many times has angels to protect us and help us--even when we can't see them.

Prayer: God, thank you so much for loving us enough to always be with us and take care of us. Thank you also for sending your good angels to help us as you govern and preserve us.

Activity: Have your children draw a picture of what they believe angels might look like. Also have them look up Genesis 18:1-2; 19:1; and Luke 24:4. Ask them, what do angels often look like to people? Answer: As men, not as creatures with wings and halos.

APPENDIX ONE: SUGGESTED BIBLE MEMORY PASSAGES

Parents, there is a lot of Scripture to memorize here. Most likely your children will not be able to memorize these passages quickly enough to keep up with your reading of the book. That is not a problem. You want them to memorize in such a way they remember Scripture long-term. So, take your time. It is probably best to take only one or two passages a week. This means their memorization work will not match up with the devotional reading you are on. That is not a problem. The important thing is that they are consistently storing up God's Word in their hearts (Psalm 119:11). The following list (just like with the devotional readings throughout the book) is designed to be a very foundational list of Scriptures that will serve your children well in coming to know what we are to believe about God and how God calls us to live.⁶

Psalm 27:4; 2 Corinthians 4:6 ("The Gift")

Galatians 2:20 ("Washed And Equipped")

Romans 6:11; Titus 3:5-6 ("The Amazing Change")

Psalm 139:13-14a ("Our Focus")

1 Thessalonians 5:18 ("Give Thanks")

Ephesians 5:1-2 ("The Good Farmer")

Ephesians 2:8-9 ("A Lifesaver")

Philippians 2:5-8 ("Down To Earth")

Hebrews 1:1-3 ("A Christmas Letter")

2 Timothy 3:16-17 ("The Need For A Road Map")

Matthew 19:26 ("The Telephone Call")

Genesis 1:1 ("Fish And Monkeys")

Matthew 7:7-11 ("Campfire Talk")

⁶ For a guide on how best to memorize Scripture, see "Bible Intake," pages 4-6, in *Level Two Discipleship* under **Discipleship** on the Resources/Articles page at mindenecf.org.

1 Peter 3:18 (“The Story Of The Circle S”)
Hebrews 13:5-6 (“All Around Me”)
Galatians 5:22-23 (“No Battery, No Go!”)
2 Peter 1:20-21 (“Just A Book?”)
Ephesians 6:1 (“Missing The Target”)
Genesis 2:24 (“What Is A Family?”)
Matthew 28:19-20 (“Shamrocks And Snakes”)
Ephesians 4:27; Hebrews 12:1-2 (“Pumpkins And Saints”)
Romans 8:28 (“Embracing The Thorns”)
Romans 12:1-2 (“More Than Singing”)
1 John 4:19 (“Because He First Loved Us”)
Hebrews 12:5-6 (“The Good King”)
John 1:1, 14 (“Coming For The Sick”)
Proverbs 3:5-7 (“I Don’t Want To”)
Joshua 1:8 (“Bridge Out!”)
Hebrews 10:24-25 (“You Should Meet Together”)
Colossians 3:21 (“Loving A Pup”)
Romans 13:1 (“Government Rulers”)
Colossians 3:23 (“Work The Best You Can”)
Proverbs 13:13; Titus 1:2 (“Points Of View”)
Romans 6:17-18 (“Independence Day”)
Acts 10:43; Romans 15:4 (“Standing Stones”)
John 15:7 (“God Answers Prayer”)
Exodus 20:3 (“Barns And Greed”)
Luke 19:8-9 (“A Time For Change”)
Luke 24:5b-6 (“He Has Risen From Death!”)
John 5:17-18 (“Who Jesus Is”)

John 3:16 (“Jesus On The Cross”)

Hebrews 1:14 (“God’s Helping Spirits”)

APPENDIX TWO: EXPLAINING THE GOSPEL

Parents, the best way to impart the gospel to your children is to teach it to them over time so that, by the grace of God, they can come to understand and embrace it (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 16:14; 2 Timothy 2:24-26). The following five truths are meant to help you in this task. Please take your time in teaching these five truths to them. Even if you focus upon these truths over several family devotional times before going on to any other readings, that is fine. In fact, it is recommended. Also, if needed, come back to these truths again and again. Teach them to your children and bathe your children in prayer, asking the Lord to give them the gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) and that he would “grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 2:26).⁷

The best way to approach these truths is to read through them first yourself, make sure you understand them, then teach them to your children.⁸

1. God created us to honor Him and commands us to do the same.

The Bible makes it clear that in creation mankind was crowned with glory and honor (Ps. 8:5), which means that God made us to reflect His greatness (Isaiah 43:7). Through displaying His grace, love, and works in our lives, attention and worship are drawn to the Creator. Though we may think this ugly at first (God created to bring attention to Himself), on second thought we understand that anything else would have been evil. For example, think how wrong it would be to hide from sight a beautiful work of art (e.g. Michelangelo’s “Creation Of Adam” on the Sistine Chapel ceiling) or to keep from public knowledge Jonas Salk’s polio vaccine. Yet, such crimes would be nothing compared to hiding or distorting the glory of the source of all beauty and goodness in the world—God. This first truth highlights life’s purpose.

God commands us to honor Him through loving and delighting in Him. This was the Apostle Paul’s point when he wrote: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31) and this is accomplished when we are satisfied in God (Phil. 2:14-15; 4:11). It was

⁷ For one of the best tools available to help teach your children the gospel, see Helping Children To Understand The Gospel, available at childrendesiringgod.org.

the point of King David when he penned the lyric, “Delight yourself in the LORD” (Psalm 37:4). This was the point of the Apostle John when he reiterated Jesus’ words that doing the work of God demands “you believe in him whom he has sent.” (John 6:29) Since God is the source of all that is beautiful, good, and right, since He is worthy of our worship, love, and devotion, it makes sense that ultimately all God’s commands (love others as ourselves, tell the truth, honor your parents, practice sexual purity, etc.) are tied into this ultimate purpose.

2. We all fail to honor God as we should.

Romans 3:23 states this simply: “For all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory.” Earlier in that same book of the Bible we learn that mankind “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.” (Romans 1:23) In other words, mankind naturally worships everything other than God: himself, things he makes, sports, work, money, and on and on. We are a discontent people who live for self, ignore God, and hurt others along the way. This is what the Bible means by the word “sin”.

3. God’s judgment is upon mankind because of this sin.

“The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), which includes alienation from God (Isaiah 59:2; Romans 5:10; James 4:4) and becomes permanent if not dealt with before one leaves this world (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; Revelation 20:14-15). Additionally, this alienation from God takes man ever deeper and deeper into despair and pain. We were designed to know, love, and follow God, just like a refrigerator is designed to cool food. When a refrigerator is not plugged into its source of power, it cannot carry out its end. Likewise, when we are not plugged into our source (God), we cannot accomplish our purpose. And since this state arises from our unbelief and our rebellion against God, we rightly face the judgment of a God who will not allow the guilty to go unpunished (Exodus 34:6-7).

4. God sent His Son to save sinners from God’s judgment.

⁸ For more help on how to teach these five truths, see “CPR Evangelism,” pages 12-19, in *Level Two Discipleship* under **Discipleship** on the Resources/Articles page at mindenecf.org.

God exists in three persons--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—all of whom are ever distinct from each other, but also make up only one God. God the Father sent the Son to save people from sin (John 3:16; 1 Timothy 1:15). The Son became man (John 1:14) and died on the cross to pay the penalty for the sins of sinners (Romans 3:24-26; 8:1-4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24). He was raised from the dead to destroy the bondage of sin and death and also to demonstrate His crucifixion was a sacrifice for sin. (1 Corinthians 15) What is more, He accomplished this work that the barrier of sin might be removed between God and man (Ephesians 2:11-22), that man might be brought back to God (2 Cor. 5:18; 1 Peter 3:18), and that we might joyfully love God and magnify His greatness as was originally intended (Matthew 5:16; John 14:12-15; Ephesians 1:6; Titus 2:14).

5. We must repent and trust Jesus Christ as savior to be saved.

We are called to turn from the idea that we can save self and, with grief over and hatred of our sin against God, throw all our trust upon what Jesus Christ has done to save us (Acts 2:37; 16:31; Eph. 2:8-9).

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